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An Investigation into Middle-School Teacher's Experiences Using Mindfulness-Based

Practices in Their Classrooms

by

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Abstract

This paper explores the research questions, *What experiences do middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices have in their classrooms?* And, *What aspects of mindfulness practices do teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes in students in their classroom settings?* Five intermediate teachers from a school district in southern British Columbia who have implemented mindfulness programs and interventions in their classrooms were interviewed. Qualitative data was collected through interviews about how these participants implemented mindfulness-based programs, what was noticed or observed as students participated in these practices, and how the effectiveness of these practices in supporting students was perceived by participants. Based on data collection and content analysis, it became clear that participants saw students demonstrating more self-control, self-regulation, and were able to express and communicate their feelings in a more positive way, after they have been taught and regularly use mindfulness-based practices. All participants interviewed expressed the need for more resources and professional development in order to feel confident in using mindfulness practices in their classrooms. Clearly, educators observed their students benefiting from these practices and should be provided with more access to resources, in the same way they are with Mathematics and Language Arts. Further research in this area should be conducted with larger participant groups in order to generalize findings.

Keywords: mindfulness, mindfulness-based practices, self-regulation, British Columbia, anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, student outcomes

Acknowledgement

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

      This chapter begins by discussing the personal context that ultimately led to the development of a study on the experiences of educators who implement mindfulness-based practices in their classrooms. As I struggled to find a balance between an increase in connectedness, work expectations, and life expectations, I found mindfulness practices to be the relief I was looking for. Through these experiences, which I discuss and share throughout this paper, I began wondering how mindfulness could be used in schools and the impact it may have on students. After establishing personal context, this chapter examines how mindfulness-based practices are connected to mental health and how mental health initiatives are being developed across Canada. Connections between these mental health initiatives to mindfulness practices within the education system in British Columbia's schools and classrooms follow. The significance and purpose of the study and the value of mindfulness for students is highlighted. The chapter concludes with a statement of the research questions, a brief overview of the study, and definitions of important terms.

Personal Context

      In an increasingly connected world, teachers and their students are more and more exposed to mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and behaviour difficulties. Both teachers and students are at the beck and call of their devices, an email away from adding to their to-do lists, and social media notifications running rampant and demanding their attention. In this apocalyptic state of being, educators are faced with situations and experiences that, in many cases, are new to the field. Not only are adults fully connected, according to Influence Central's 2016 Digital Trends Study, the average age of children receiving their first phone is 10.3 years

old (Kids & Tech, n.d.). Additionally, 50% of children have social media accounts by age twelve (Kids & Tech, n.d.). In addition to the impacts of connectedness, individuals are faced with a variety of other demands or pressures, including family, sports, and social roles. Before this so-called 'electronic and social media' age, individuals had more time outside, with friends and family, and living in the moment. Individuals were less connected to technology, and more connected to each other. The current day to day life demands that teachers and students face cause both teachers and students to experience stress, anxiety, and other struggles that are a result of not being fully present in the moment and able to self-regulate.

As a young professional, I understood the anxiety and stress these connections created. Every time a notification would pop up on my phone, I felt a sense of responsibility to answer and reply. It got to the point where I was either always connected or always about to check my notifications. On top of this, the added stress of work, school, family, and social roles weighed heavily on my shoulders. These stressors became increasingly prevalent in my life, and I knew that I needed to find some sort of coping strategy to help me deal with them. I began searching for strategies that I could participate in on my own and on my own schedule. I tried the gym, sports, running. Unfortunately, nothing ever stuck, and I would find myself feeling more anxious and stressed. I continued feeling anxious and stressed until I discovered mindfulness. The first time I heard the term "mindfulness" was during a hot yoga session. The yoga instructor encouraged the class to be mindful of our surroundings and how we felt at that very moment. I had never taken the time to notice my feelings or sensations before and I was instantly intrigued. I began exploring mindfulness more. Reading books, using breathing exercises and meditation practices, and keeping a journal of how I felt from day to day. I started to notice that I was calmer in stressful situations at work and home. I was more present and began seeking out face-

to-face time with friends and family more, rather than just through messaging or phone calls. I was also more aware of situations that caused me anxiety or stress and began to learn how to calm myself and how to avoid these situations. For example, my anxiety and stress would peak during transition times in the classroom when students were loud, asking questions, and scattered everywhere looking for their supplies for the next subject. By using deep-breathing techniques, I was able to stand back, breathe, and just watch students as they went along with what they needed to do. I took in what was going on in the class, but by breathing through it, I no longer became anxious or stressed. I had realized that these were simply necessary moments that would end as quickly as they began. As I felt a greater awareness for my body and surroundings, I began wondering how this practice could be used in schools and the impact it may have on students.

Mindfulness and Mental Health

Mindfulness can be described as a way of, "calming the body and mind through breathing and movement and using insights from psychology to better regulate your emotions" (Kamenetz, 2016, para. 4). The concept of mindfulness is rooted in the ancient religious practices of Buddhism and Hinduism (Selva, 2017). However, as Stratton (2015) points out, the Western practice of mindfulness removes the Buddhist religious practices and teachings, and instead focuses on attention, self-esteem, and well-being. Thus, mindfulness becomes a secular practice that anyone can partake in, regardless of their religious or spiritual beliefs. Mindfulness is just one practice individuals can utilize to take care of and be more aware of their mental health and the struggles they may have with their own mental health.

Mindfulness in Canada

Recently, Canada wide initiatives to improve mental health of all Canadians have been growing. The Mental Health Commission of Canada (2017), released a strategic plan to be implemented from 2017 to 2022. Their mission is, "to raise awareness of the mental health and wellness needs of Canadians, and to catalyze collaborative solutions to mental health system challenges" (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2017, Who We Are, para. 1). As another nationwide initiative, Bell began a new conversation through the "Let's Talk" campaign, which began in 2010 (Bell Canada, 2018, Our Initiatives, para. 1). Since the initiation of the "Let's Talk" campaign, "millions of Canadians, including leading personalities, [have] engaged in an open discussion about mental illness, offering new ideas and hope for those who struggle, with numbers growing every year" (Bell Canada, 2018, Our Initiatives, para. 1). Due to these initiatives, companies and governments across Canada are working together to find ways to support the mental health and well-being of individuals.

Mindfulness in Schools

Recently, initiatives have been created in order to implement practices into schools in order to support the mental health and well-being of students. Mindfulness practices support these initiatives in terms of the benefits and outcomes of becoming more mindful and using mindfulness strategies. For example, British Columbia's new curriculum, which was released in 2017, highlights a "core competency" of *Mental Well-Being* from kindergarten through to grade twelve under the Physical and Health curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2017). As students get older, this competency becomes increasingly deeper in meaning and practice. In kindergarten, students are expected to, "identify and describe practices that promote mental well-being," and "identify and describe feelings and worries." While in grade six, for example,

students are expected to, "describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others" (BC Ministry of Education, 2017, Curriculum, para. 4). Teachers now have language in the curriculum to be able to support student mental health and well-being through interventions such as mindfulness-based practices.

Mindfulness in the Classroom

The case for implementing mindfulness practices in classrooms is a strong one. Not only do these practices support initiatives that are already in place, but they also support student well-being (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004; Joyce, Etty-Leal, Zazryn, & Hamilton, 2010). One study found that mindfulness practices improved individual's ability to cope with both normal amounts, and significant amounts of, daily life stresses (Grossman et al., 2004, p. 35). Through participating in mindfulness-based practices, both students and their teachers have the potential to become more aware and present in their day to day activities. In their study, Joyce et al. (2010), found teachers reported that the biggest barrier to a successful implementation of a mindfulness program was lack of time. For educators, this means mindfulness must be a commitment in their classroom. There needs to be regular use of the language, practices, and discussions. When implementing mindfulness practices in a classroom setting, teachers in one study reported that after a ten-week trial program, students could be described as "more relaxed, settled, and able to use breathing strategies regularly, that it was a good forum for personal reflection and focus, and increased willingness to take on new ideas" (Joyce et al., 2010, p. 22). It is important to note that the findings of being more relaxed, settled, and able to focus and self-reflect, are based on typical classrooms, without a focus placed on special education classrooms or students with a diagnosis of emotional or behaviour disorders, anxiety, stress, or learning disabilities. However, one study that did focus on adolescents with

learning disabilities, ADHD, and anxiety found that there were significant improvements in

oppositional defiant and conduct problems in students who participated in a mindfulness-based

intervention program (Haydicky, Wiener, Badali, Milligan, & Ducharme, 2012). This study, as

well as the study by Bogels, Hoogstad, van Dun, de Schutter, and Restifo, (2008) found that

there were, "reductions in externalizing behavior and social problems" in students who

participated in the intervention (Haydicky et al., 2012, p.160). From the above-mentioned

studies, results suggest that using mindfulness-based practices in the classroom is beneficial to

students' social, emotional, and academic well-being.

Significance and Purpose of the Study

If students are not mentally prepared to learn, they will not be able to retain information

presented to them (Pelco & Victor, 2007, p. 36). By using mindfulness practices in classrooms,

teachers are better able to care for their students' mental well-being by assisting them to become

more aware of their feelings and thoughts in the moment (Haydicky et al, 2012). Through this,

students can better manage and reduce issues such as anxiety, stress, and emotional/behaviour

difficulties. They are in control and able to self-regulate, rather than let what is around them

control them (Joyce et al., 2010, p. 22). Furthermore, students with added difficulties such as

ADHD, anxiety, stress, emotional/behaviour difficulties, and learning disabilities can benefit

even more from mindfulness-based practices (Haydicky et al, 2012). They are in some ways in

need of more, and different, strategies than their peers. Mindfulness practices may help these

individuals become more resilient, better able to focus, assist them in acknowledging what they

are feeling, and to develop a better understanding and acceptance of themselves (Haydicky et al,

2012). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of middle-school

teachers who use mindfulness practices in their classrooms, and to explore how mindfulness

practices may support students in their classrooms with emotional and behaviour difficulties, anxiety, and/or stress.

Since the research on mindfulness-based practice with school-aged children in classroom settings are relatively limited, there remains a need for further exploration in this area. Specifically, there seems to be fewer studies that target students in middle school grades. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find out about other teacher's perceived impact of the effectiveness on the programs with students in middle school. If middle-school teachers have similar experiences using mindfulness-based practices in their classrooms, and observe the same benefits primary teachers do, there may be a strong case for more middle-school teachers to implement these practices in their classrooms.

Research Questions

The main questions that were explored in this study were:

1. *What experiences do middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices have in their classrooms?*

2. *What aspects of mindfulness practices do teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes in students in their classroom settings?*

Overview of the Research Study

This study was completed through a qualitative research method, with characteristics of phenomenological and narrative designs. Through this theoretical frame work I hoped to gain insight into the experiences of teachers who implement mindfulness practices in their classrooms. In addition, I hoped to solidify my understanding of how they perceived the effectiveness of these practices in supporting students. Phenomenological and narrative designs

were used in order to begin to understand "how it was implemented" and "with what result" of

teachers implementing mindfulness within their classrooms (Yin, 2014, p.16). Five intermediate

teachers from a school district in southern British Columbia who have implemented mindfulness

programs and interventions in their classrooms were interviewed for this study. Qualitative data

was collected through interviews about how programs were implemented, what was noticed or

observed, and how the effectiveness of these practices in supporting students was perceived. This

study attempted to create knowledge based on individual experiences and observations. As such,

the knowledge created is seen through a constructivist and subjective lens. Given the

phenomenological and narrative nature of interviews and individual experiences, the strengths of

this study include a focus on high value participants who are "experts" in their field, a holistic

focus looking at the "big picture," which allowed me to examine overall experiences, and finally

a better understanding of complex behaviours and unique experiences provided by multiple

participants.

Definition of Critical Terms

       Mindfulness. In the interest of this study, mindfulness is defined as, "paying attention in

a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994,

p. 4). It is important to note that an individual can strengthen their own mindfulness through

specific practices and instruction. For example, and not limited to, deep breathing, awareness,

listening, and meditation (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

       Mindfulness practices. Mindfulness practices involve any practice that supports,

"learning to name thoughts, feelings, and body sensations; interpreting thoughts and feelings in

self and in others; using coping self-talk; recognizing self-defeating thinking; and under-

standing how thoughts and feelings affect interpersonal relationships" (Haydicky et al., 2012, p.

155). Some examples of mindfulness practices include meditation, visualizing, yoga movements, and deep breathing.

Stress and anxiety. In this study, the definition of stress was taken from the Oxford dictionary as, "a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances" (Oxford University Press, 2018). According to Merriam-Webster, anxiety is, "an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physical signs" (Merriam-Webster, 2018). In children, both stress and anxiety can be displayed as somatic symptoms such as abdominal pain or perspiration (Gates, Petterson, Wingrove, Miller, & Klink, 2016).

Emotional and behaviour disorders (EBD). EBD are behaviours and emotional responses that fall far from the considered norm and are persistent and severe (Ogundele, 2018). These behaviours and emotions affect a child's performance, own learning, or the learning of others (Ogundele, 2018). Some of the characteristics of EBD are, "disruptive, anti-social and aggressive behaviour, poor peer and family relationships, hyperactivity, attention, and concentration problems" (Silas, 2005, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, para. 4).

Summary

This chapter provided a brief overview of the current study and the rationale behind its significance and purpose. Beginning with an introduction to the personal context that set the foundation for exploring the topic of mindfulness and the ultimate interest in studying mindfulness in an educational setting. Next, the connection between mindfulness and mental health was established and mindfulness in Canada, schools, and classrooms was explored. Finally, the research questions driving this study were stated, an overview and the strengths of the study were given, and key terms were defined.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

A review of mindfulness from both a philosophical and educational perspective is important in developing an understanding of mindfulness-based practices in teaching, learning, and general educational settings. This literature review is divided into the following sections: statement of the problem, mindfulness lenses, mindfulness-based interventions, gaps in the research, and a final summary of mindfulness-based interventions. By reviewing the literature surrounding mindfulness and applying it the research conducted, this study explored the following questions:

1. What experiences do middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices have in their classrooms?

2. What aspects of mindfulness practices do teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes in students in their classroom settings?

Statement of the Problem

Individuals rush from one commitment to another, parents shuttle their children from activity to activity, and students flow from school to activity, over and over. Lives are becoming busier and busier. As a result of this fast-pace world we live in, the number of individuals that struggle with their mental health is rapidly increasing (Kirby, 2008). The mental health of both adults and children is put at risk as society becomes more connected to devices and the technology in our day to day lives. One study stated, "that children aged 8–18 spend an average of 7.5 hours daily in front of media and in a typical week only 6% of children age 9–13 play outside on their own" (Mccormick, 2017, p. 4). Mccormick (2017) further explained that, "children are spending more of their free time indoors with television, video games, and

computers" (p. 3). By spending more time connected to devices and less time connected to reality, children are becoming more and more detached from the present moment.

With growing concerns over the mental health of Canadian citizens, the Mental Health Commission of Canada put forth three strategic initiatives to increase awareness and support for those struggling. These three initiatives follow, "develop a national mental health strategy, conduct a 10-year anti-stigma campaign, and build a national knowledge-exchange centre" (Kirby, 2008, p. 1320). Mindfulness-based practices may in fact be one way for both adults and children to find and use strategies that allow them to be more present and engaged in the moment, thus increasing their overall mental health.

Mindfulness Lenses

Mindfulness, a mental state of consciousness, is a concept that can be traced back to having roots in ancient Buddhism and is practiced in order to gain an awareness of oneself and one's suffering, and how to alleviate it (Baer, 2010; Ergas, 2014; Olendzki, 2010). Unfortunately, complications in defining mindfulness may arise depending on the situation or setting that mindfulness is being defined. Mindfulness may be defined differently depending on whether the definition is through the lens of Buddhism, clinical settings, or education.

Buddhist lens. Based on the Buddhist perspective, mindfulness is defined as, "the moment-by-moment observing of the three characteristics, impermanence, suffering, and not-self, of the meditation object" (Grabovac, Lau, & Willett, 2011, p.4). The Buddhist definition focuses on the religious context for the basis of mindfulness practices and includes the pillar practice of contemplating the Four Foundations of mindfulness, which are mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and dhammas (or phenomena). Mindfulness of the body can be explained as:

By asking us to practice mindfulness of the body, the Buddha is reminding us to see "the

body in the body." By these words he means that we should recognize that the body is not

a solid unified thing, but rather a collection of parts. The nails, teeth, skin, bones, heart,

lungs, and all other parts—each is actually a small "body" that is located in the larger

entity that we call "the body." Traditionally, the human body is divided into thirty-two

parts, and we train ourselves to be mindful of each. Trying to be mindful of the entire

body is like trying to grab a heap of oranges. If we grab the whole heap at once, perhaps

we will end up with nothing! (Gunaratana, 2018, para 9)

Whereas, mindfulness of feelings can be described in the following way:

We regard feelings in a way to help us develop a simple nonjudgmental awareness of

what we are experiencing—seeing a particular feeling as one of many feelings, rather

than as *my* feeling or as part of me. As we watch each emotion or sensation as it arises,

remains present, and passes away, we observe that any feeling is impermanent. Since a

pleasant feeling does not last and an unpleasant feeling is often painful, we understand

that feelings are unsatisfactory. Seeing a feeling as an emotion or sensation rather than as

my feeling, we come to know that feelings are selfless. (Gunaratana, 2018, para 12)

The third foundation of mindfulness, mindfulness of the mind, is the act of

Paying attention to the way each thought arises, remains present, and passes away,

we learn to stop the runaway train of one unsatisfactory thought leading to another

and another and another. We gain a bit of detachment and understand that we are not

our thoughts. (Gunaratana, 2018, para 13)

The final foundation of mindfulness is the mindfulness of dhamma, or phenomena. This

is the realization that every individual is suffering from and, "subject to birth, growth, decay,

death, sickness, sorrow, lamentation, and defilement" (Gunaratana, 2018, para 14), and that the

only way to become free from these is to look inside oneself and to be mindful of one's own

experiences and interpretations of these experiences.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are key to truly understanding the Buddhist lens of

mindfulness, and for being able to become fully mindful in the Buddhist sense of the practice.

Clinical settings lens. Kabat-Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness through a clinical

perspective as, "paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and

nonjudgmentally" (p.4). While there are other clinical definitions of mindfulness, this is the most

widely used definition and found in most research. Therefore, Kabat-Zinn's (1994) definition

was chosen for this literature review.

Education lens. In terms of educational settings, and through the lens of classroom and

instruction purposes, the basic characteristics of mindfulness are to gain: a) a greater sensitivity

to our environment, b) new categories for structuring our perspectives, c) an openness to new

information, and d) an enhanced awareness of other's perspectives while problem solving

(Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). Langer and Moldoveanu's (2000) definition of mindfulness

differs from both Kabat-Zinn's (1994) and Grabovac et al.'s (2011) definitions in that it focuses

on the actual applications of mindfulness in the educational setting and what we would like to get

out of the practices.

Although these three definitions of mindfulness come from different settings and

contexts, there is a common theme that seems to agree that mindfulness is a way of focusing

one's attention. This is an important idea for educators because for children of any age to learn

and engage in class, they must be able to focus their attention on what they need to attend to

(Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005). Therefore, it is important to consider how teachers, and

individuals, can be trained to use mindfulness-based practices.

Mindfulness-Based Interventions

   Mindfulness-based interventions for adults. During the 1970s, mindfulness began to be

studied and used as a means of intervention in order to enhance the psychological wellness of

patients (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). It was during this time that Dr. Kabat-Zinn founded

The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of

Massachusetts (Keng et al., 2011). Kabat-Zinn developed the eight-week Mindfulness-Based

Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, consisting of, "intensive training in a combination of

mindfulness, cognitive behavioural, and self-regulation skills" in which, "participants learn to

mobilize their deep inner resources to facilitate learning, growth, healing, enhance self-care, and

make positive shifts in attitudes, behaviours, and relationships" (Mindfulness Institute, 2015,

Programs). Practices such as body scans, mindful yoga, and mindfulness meditations, which

focus on breathing, are all offered in this program (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). MBSR is currently

offered in clinics, hospitals, schools, workplaces, and universities to name a few (Kabat-Zinn,

2003). Along with MBSR, other mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) are also available to

adults seeking help, such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). These programs

seek to address and change the normal function of internalized events (feelings) and actions that

patients may be struggling with, thus decreasing their frequency and impact (Greco & Hayes,

2008). Mindfulness-based interventions are based on the belief that individuals can come to

recognize their feelings, the same way they recognize, observe, acknowledge, and react to

external objects (Baer, 2003). For example, individuals can learn to observe their feelings and

emotions the same way they would observe a flower. They do not need to react to either

experience, the feeling, or the flower; instead they learn how to acknowledge the experience and move forward (Baer, 2003).

Since the 1970s, research has taken place in order to examine the health and wellness benefits of mindfulness-based interventions for adults. For the purpose of this thesis, one recent review and two meta-analyses that exist and support the benefits of MBIs were examined. Keng et al. (2011) reviewed research from 1986 to 2010 that examined the relationships between psychological wellness and mindfulness. The research that this review found was organized into groups depending on the type of mindfulness-based intervention that was used. For example, MBSR and MBCT. This existing research determined that individuals who participated in MBIs showed an increase in adaptive psychological functioning, positive psychological health effects, increased well-being, a reduction in psychological symptoms and negative reactivity, and improved regulation of individual behaviour (Keng et al., 2011).

Researchers who took part in a meta-analysis assessed the impact of mindfulness on reducing stress, anxiety, and depression in working adults. Virgili (2015) examined 19 mindfulness-based interventions that involved a total of 1,139 participants. They found that participants in the programs showed reduced stress, anxiety, and depression, which participants were able to maintain until the five-week follow-up interview (Virgili, 2015). A second, larger, meta-analysis was conducted by Khoury et al. (2013) and assessed the effect of mindfulness on mental health issues. This meta-analysis examined 209 studies which involved 12,145 participants and found that mindfulness was an effective treatment for mental health problems.

The findings of the research review and both meta-analyses confirm that mindfulness-based interventions support and increase the psychological health, well-being, and mental health

of individuals that participate. In similarity to these studies, some researchers have examined

mindfulness-based interventions for children.

　　　　Mindfulness-based interventions for children. Increasingly since 2007, MBIs are being

developed and implemented for elementary and high school students worldwide (Chadwick &

Gelbar, 2016). For instance, MBI programs such as the *MindUP Curriculum: Brain-Focused*

Strategies for Learning and Living (The Hawn Foundation, 2016), and *Mindfulness-Based*

Cognitive Therapy for Children (MBCT-C; Semple, Lee, Rosa, & Miller, 2010) are becoming

more frequently used in school settings. The MBCT-C program is a twelve-week group

intervention that consists of weekly 90-minute sessions, that teach children ages nine to 12 years

ways to deal with anxious thoughts and feelings, develop resiliency, and self-regulation through

mindfulness practices (Semple et al., 2010). Both these programs, MindUP and MBCT-C,

explore mindfulness through brain-based education, stories, games, activities, breathing

exercises, mindful body scans, visualization activities, and writing/drawing exercises (The Hawn

Foundation, 2016; Semple et al., 2010). Four recent studies have examined the effects of MBIs

on children.

　　　　Impacts of MindUP curriculum. Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010), evaluated the

effectiveness of the MindUP program in a Canadian school. Participants, comprised of students

in grades four through seven, from six MindUP classrooms and six control classrooms,

completed pre- and post-test self-report measures. Results showed significant increase in

optimism and improvements for MindUP program students. Teachers also indicated that students

participating in the MindUP program demonstrated increased social and emotional competence,

such as self-regulation. A second study by Napoli et al. (2005), examined the effects of a six-

month MBI program with 225 children in grades one through three with high anxiety. Results

from this study showed a significant decrease in both anxiety and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (AD/HD) symptoms and an increase in the child's ability to stay focused and pay attention. This study demonstrated that the use of MBIs in a classroom setting may increase attention and reduce negative behaviours in students.

Impacts of MBCT-C programs. A study by Semple et al. (2010) evaluated the effectiveness of a MBCT-C program with 25 children ages nine through 13. Participants in this study, who completed the program, demonstrated a decrease in attention problems, as well as significant reductions in anxiety and behaviour problems in children who were suffering from clinical anxiety. The results demonstrated the effectiveness of the MBCT-C program interventions at targeting attention, anxiety, and behaviour problems in children.

Impacts of other MBI programs. Another study by Flook et al. (2010), evaluated the effects of an MBI program that was implemented in a school, with 64 participants, in grades two and three. The program was taught twice a week, for eight weeks, and in thirty-minute sessions. Results from both teacher and parent questionnaires demonstrated improvements in student executive function, self-regulation, and meta-cognition. These results were significantly higher in students with executive function difficulties and those with lower self-regulation.

Three pilot studies examined the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions for children and adolescents in an educational setting. The purpose of the study by Nadler, Cordy, Stengel, Segal, & Hayden, (2017) was to determine, "the influence of a brief mindfulness training session on young children's self-reported arousal" (p. 1089). To do this, researchers asked, "Do mindfulness practices in classroom environments increase calmness in school-aged children?" Pre- and post-self-report measures were given to participants, children ages seven to nine, who were assigned to alternating conditions. These measures were to determine how the

children felt both before and after the interventions. On day one a child would be in the mindfulness condition, then the next day they would be in the control condition. The main result of the study was that, children who participated in the mindfulness intervention showed a moderate increase in their post-self-reported calmness score.

Haydicky et al. (2012), sought to, "investigate the impact of a mindfulness intervention with youth with learning disabilities (LD) and co-occurring attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) or anxiety" (p. 151). It was hypothesized that participants with learning disabilities and AD/HD, enrolled in a martial arts mindfulness training program, would demonstrate significant improvements in executive functioning compared to a waitlist group. Participants, boys aged 12-18, who had been previously diagnosed with learning disabilities, and clients of a children's mental health center, were given multiple pre- and post-inventories and questionnaires. The results of this study were that participants demonstrated moderate reductions in oppositional behaviours, social problems, and anxiety. However, there were no improvements in executive functions. This study demonstrated that mindfulness training helped manage behaviour, and social, emotional difficulties in youth with learning disabilities and AD/HD. This finding can help teachers when planning mindfulness interventions for their own students because it highlights the need to be aware of the specific behaviours that teachers want to impact with specific interventions.

Researchers Joyce et al. (2010) sought to, "investigate whether a mindfulness program implemented by classroom teachers would be associated with improvements in measures of mental health status" (p.19). Results of this study were that mindfulness practices can influence emotional health among students 10-13, based on reported decreases in depression and anxiety.

This study demonstrates a need for a larger scale study to be done on the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in children.

Gaps in the Research

When considered together, the findings of the studies in this review of literature suggest that mindfulness-based programs for children and adolescents are feasible, successful, and beneficial to participants. These studies, however, have methodological issues such as small sample sizes, a reliance on self-reporting, the lack of a control group or randomization. These issues seem to prevent the findings from being able to be generalized to a larger population of children. Nevertheless, mindfulness-based programs have been found to have positive beneficial outcomes for school-aged children such as an increase in calmness, reductions in oppositional behaviours, social problems, depression, and anxiety (Haydicky et al., 2012; Joyce et al., 2010; Nadler et al., 2017). Since the research on mindfulness-based practice with school-aged children in classroom settings are relatively limited, there remains a need for further exploration in this area. Specifically, there seems to be fewer studies that target students in middle school grades. Thus, this research aims to find out about other teacher's perceived impact of the effectiveness on the programs with students in middle school.

Summary

Benefits for adults participating in MBIs include increased wellness, psychological, and health benefits, such as self-regulation, reduced stress, anxiety, and depression (Keng et al., 2011; Khoury et al., 2013; Virgili, 2013). Similar benefits can be examined in children who participate in MBIs as well. When used in a classroom setting, children are better able to learn as improvements in self-regulation, increased attention, improvements in executive functioning, and reduced symptoms of AD/HD and anxiety have all been observed (Flook et al., 2010; Napoli et

al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010). However, due to limitations in these studies, there are still gaps in

the knowledge and a need to further explore this topic. This chapter provided a literature review

that examined mindfulness from both a philosophical and educational perspective. Examining

the literature that supports mindfulness is important in developing an understanding of

mindfulness-based practices in teaching, learning, and general educational settings. The chapter

began by restating the key questions explored in this study followed by a statement of the

problem to reiterate the increasing importance Canadian society is placing on mental health

initiatives, detachment from the present moment, and the impact of connectedness. Next,

mindfulness was defined and examined through different lenses, such as a Buddhist lens, clinical

setting lens, and an educational lens. Furthermore, studies using different mindfulness-based

interventions (MBIs) on adults and children were explored and the impacts of such programs

were discussed. The gaps in the research and significance for further study on mindfulness

interventions for children in schools concludes the chapter.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Introduction

This chapter begins with an introduction to the design and rationale of this study, a qualitative research method, blending phenomenology and narrative inquiry. Through this method, participants were able to share their experiences using mindfulness-based practices in their classrooms. This chapter explores the criteria in which participants had to meet in order to be recruited through email and posters within the school district. The final section of this chapter describes the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data set. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the coding cycles and study limitations. The present study, using a qualitative research methodology, explored the following research questions:

1. What experiences do middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices have in their classrooms?

2. What aspects of mindfulness practices do teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes in students in their classroom settings?

Design and Rationale

This study used a qualitative research method, blending phenomenology and narrative inquiry, to explore the experiences of middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices in their classrooms, as well as inquiring into how these teachers perceived students to be impacted by the practices in their classrooms.

Qualitative research methods have traditionally been used to explore, explain, and describe certain phenomena as well as to create action and change (Koch & Gitchel, 2011). There is little research which seeks to determine the effectiveness of mindfulness-based programs on children in an educational setting, and even less research that explores the

experiences of the teachers who implement such programs. Qualitative studies can be useful

when exploring phenomenon about which little is known, as the goal is to understand how

individuals make sense of their world and their own experiences within that world (Strauss &

Corbin, 1994).

By answering the questions: ***What experiences do middle-school teachers who use***

mindfulness practices have in their classrooms? and ***What aspects of mindfulness practices do***

teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes

in students in their classroom settings?, this research allowed teachers to share their own

experiences and understandings of mindfulness-based programs. Thus, contributing to a growth

of knowledge in the area of mindfulness-based programs and educational settings.

This study drew on characteristics of phenomenological and narrative research designs.

In research, narrative design is an approach that relies on data collected from individuals and the

stories that they tell (Kock & Gitchel, 2011). These designs were chosen for this study because

of the idea that knowledge is subjective and that individuals create meaning through their own

lived experiences of phenomena (Koch & Gitchel, 2011). By using phenomenological and

narrative designs for this study, there was "extensive and prolonged engagement to identify

patterns and relationships among a small number of research participants," in order to understand

the experiences of teachers using mindfulness-based programs in their classrooms (Koch &

Gitchel, 2011, p. 161). A deeper understanding of experiences can develop through interviews as

a form of data collection. As stated by Koch and Gitchel (2011), "the interview is the primary

source of data collection, and interview questions are stated broadly without specific reference to

the literature" (Koch & Gitchel, 2011, p. 155). By analyzing and coding the interviews this way,

common themes and ideas were uncovered that gave insight into the experiences of middle

school teachers using mindfulness-based programs.

Furthermore, this qualitative research methodology was anchored in a constructivist and

subjective framework which was appropriate for this study because as a researcher, I wanted to

understand the meaning of experiences from the individuals who are involved (Merriam, 2002).

Guba and Lincoln (2005) described the epistemological assumptions of constructivism leading to

transactional, subjectivist, and co-created findings, in which researchers value the beliefs of

participants as unique and important in understanding the phenomena that is being studied.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

This study focused on ideal uses of mindfulness-based programs in classroom settings.

Participant eligibility was determined based on inclusionary criteria of:

1) Participants were current educators in a school district in southern British

Columbia working in a middle-school setting (grades six to eight);

2) Participants had implemented mindfulness-based programs or interventions in

their classrooms for a minimum of a one-year period;

3) Participants were willing and able to share their experiences and story through

interviews;

4) Participants had to be able to recall specific practices they used in the classroom

and taught their students, as well as examples that provided evidence of students

using these practices to self-regulate and improve their learning.

Participants for this study were recruited through a recruitment poster that was posted in a

school district in southern British Columbia, as well as through an email that was sent out to the

district employees.

Participants were all female and ranged from younger staff to older, some in their last couple of years before retirement. Two of the participants worked at the same school. One of these participants brought her knowledge of mindfulness-based practices from a previous school, while the other referred to observing this teacher multiple times in her interview. The study began with six participants, however only five completed the process. One left the study because of prior commitments.

The participants of this study were provided with an informed letter of consent that stated that their participation in this study was voluntary, that they had the ability to withdraw from the study at any time during or after the interview process, and that they had the right to pass on interview questions if they wished. The letter of consent ensured that the participants knew both the purpose and the content of the study, and that they were provided with researcher contact information in case they had any questions, comments, or concerns. Participants were also assured that they would be assigned pseudonyms and that these, as well as any other identifying information, would remain private. Confidentiality and respect for participants in the study were of high importance throughout the research period.

Due to the nature of researcher-participant relationships it was important for me, as the researcher, to consider representation and ethical issues that may arise. Through interviews and discussions, I was co-constructing knowledge with my participants. Therefore, I needed to be aware of how my bias affected the questions I asked and how I interpreted the answers. I dealt with these issues by representing my participants thoughtfully and respectfully such as using large block quotations with their own words, participants checking transcripts, as well as asking for their feedback on my own interpretations of their answers to ensure I understood clearly what they meant.

Ethical Considerations

   All interviews were confidentially conducted in order to protect the privacy of each participant. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time until the end of the study. Although unlikely that participants would experience mental distress based on the data collection method, there was a possibility that providing their own experiences and feelings during the interviews may cause one to feel some distress. To minimize these risks, participants were reminded that information provided should be done so voluntarily. Participants refrained from sharing information during the interview that would make them uncomfortable in any way. Participants were informed that they could discontinue their involvement at any time for any reason without consequence and could skip questions in the interview if they felt uncomfortable for any reason. Participants had the opportunity to read over their transcripts to determine authenticity. The use of large block quotations with their own words, participants checking transcripts, as well as asking for participant feedback on my own interpretations for clarification, ensured participants were represented with respect. Participants were not identified by name or place of work. Instead, a pseudonym was used. There was no known risk to loss of status, loss of reputation, or loss of professional/employment opportunities. There was the possibility that participants may have provided stories or examples that contained indirectly identifiable information. In order to mitigate this risk, participants were asked to use generalizations and not specific student examples. If a participant did provide anecdotes that contained indirectly identifiable information, the anecdote was not used in the data analysis to protect all individuals.

Data Collection

      Semi-structured interviews with five participants were conducted in order to collect data. These semi-structured interviews consisted of mainly open-ended questions or phenomena to be explored during the interview. In a semi-structured interview, the "exact wording and sequence of questions were determined in advance" and "all interviewees were asked the same basic questions in the same order" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013, p. 413). However, because it was important for the interview to flow like a conversation, as "less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90), additional questions were asked during the interviews to seek clarification. These face-to-face interviews took place outside of school hours and during mutually accepted times. These interviews were similar in style to a conversation that focused on the questions of the study and aimed to obtain insight and a special kind of knowledge about the participants' own experiences (DeMarrais, 2004; Dexter, 1970).

      Information gathered from interviews consisted of how teachers began using mindfulness-based programs in their classrooms, what practices they used, and how they perceive these practices to be impacting their classroom climate, overall engagement, and the impact on their own teaching experiences. Once interviews were completed, participants were thanked for their time and participation, and arrangements were made to follow-up in an email within a month to review their finalized transcript. To aid in data collection, organization, and analysis, interviews were recorded using a password protected phone, transcribed into an electronic document, and saved to a password-protected computer. As themes began to emerge and ideas began to be repeated it was no longer necessary to continue to conduct interviews to add to themes and ideas (Merriam, 2009), and therefore the data collection was completed. Once

interviews were transcribed, participants were followed-up with in order to seek clarification

before transcripts were finalized. After all participants accepted their transcripts, transcripts were

finalized and ready for coding and analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedures

The data set that was used in this study was created through the data collection which

consisted of transcribed interviews. Therefore, coding was used as a way of organizing,

identifying, and analyzing themes within the data that had been generated (Braun & Clarke,

2006). The use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions required "respondents to

answer the same questions, thus increasing comparability of responses" which then allowed the

researcher to "facilitate [the] organization and analysis of the data" (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 413).

The data was analyzed by me by hand using thematic analysis. Looking for themes that arise was

important to this study because, "theme captures something important about the data in relation

to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the

data set" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 10). Data was coded according to educator's experiences

using mindfulness-based practices in their classrooms, the practices they implement, and the

perceived benefits of these practices. The use of this qualitative data analysis method was chosen

in order to identify patterns and themes that arose in the interviews. It is important to note that

the results were analyzed without any preconceived themes in mind. Participant's responses were

analyzed respectfully in order to maintain the accuracy of their responses.

During the thematic analysis stage of my study, I became familiar with the data by

reading the interviews over multiple times and referring to my research questions to ensure that I

was analyzing the data with those questions in mind (Elos & Kyngas, 2008, p. 113). I then went

through two coding cycles in order to find, analyse, and interpret the themes that arose.

Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing data that has an, "aim to build a model to describe the phenomenon" (Elos & Kyngas, 2008, p.107) that occurs and presents itself in the common themes that arise once coding has been completed. According to Elos and Kyngas (2008), thematic analysis can be used with both qualitative and quantitative research (p. 113). In order to analyse and interpret the content of the interviews, I used two coding cycles. Coding allowed the data from the interviews to be, "segregated, grouped, regrouped, and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation" (Grbich, 2013, p. 21). Bernard (2006) states that the analysis in a research study, "is the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place" (p. 452). Thus, I was able to organize and group data that was coded similarly into different categories.

First coding cycle. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) recommend that you keep a copy of your research questions, key ideas, or main issues in front of you while you code in order to keep your attention focused on these important areas (p. 44). Therefore, before I began coding, I highlighted key words and phrases in my research questions to keep in mind as I was coding. These consisted of *experiences, aspects of mindfulness, impacts, anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes*. When coding the first data set, Saldana (2008) recommends, "circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes or passages that strike you – those "codable moments" worthy of attention" (p. 16). Based on this, I circled, underlined, and coloured information that seemed to answer my two research questions. I started by coding for positive and negative experiences. If a response was a positive experience, I would underline it and put a 'P' in the margin. Whereas if the response reflected a negative experience, I would circle it and put a 'N' in the margin. I soon began to realize that experiences do not need to be either positive or negative. For the experiences that were neither positive or

negative experiences, I called "other," and coded them as "O." I then went back and changed the coding for all the interviews to either positive, negative, or other for consistency. During this cycle I also coded statements that reflected aspects of mindfulness-based programs such as impact, anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes. These statements were boxed and coded with a "A." Once the interviews were coded this way, I was able to see themes begin to emerge. This allowed me to begin my second coding cycle.

   Second coding cycle. During the second coding cycle, I went back through the data and coded for the themes that had begun to emerge in the first cycle. I used seven different coloured markers to underline phrases that reflected common themes. For example, I used red to underline training experiences educators had, blue to underline the difficulties they had with implementation of mindfulness-based practices, yellow to underline curricular connections and student outcomes, purple to underline personal life connections, orange for whether or not participants recommended mindfulness-based practices, pink to underline what practices they used in their classrooms, and finally green to underline the perceived benefits of the practices they used. Through the two coding cycles I was able to determine key findings and themes that arose in the interviews. These findings and themes are discussed in detail in chapter four.

Limitations

   The limitations of this study consist of a small sample size with very little diversity among participants. Participants were all members of the same school district and worked at schools in relatively similar socio-economic areas. Due to these limitations, generalizations cannot be made from this research about effectiveness of mindfulness interventions on students in middle school. More research is needed with larger sample sizes to be able to generalize. However, the results and impacts of the findings of this study demonstrate a strong link between

student behaviour, ability to self-regulate, and academic focus when provided with mindfulness

strategies and ongoing practice in middle school classrooms.

Summary

This chapter began with an introduction to the design and rationale of this study, a

qualitative research method, blending phenomenology and narrative inquiry. These terms were

defined, and the research questions restated. The chapter explored participant selection criteria

and the recruitment process as well as ethical considerations. This chapter explained the data

collection method of semi-structured interviews, and the data analysis and interpretation process

of using thematic analysis and two coding cycles. Finally, limitations to the study are outlined

and a need for further research in the area of mindfulness interventions for middle school

students is presented.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

Introduction

The key purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings and themes that arose during the data analysis stage and to connect these findings to my research questions,

1. What experiences do middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices have in their classrooms?

2. What aspects of mindfulness practices do teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes in students in their classroom settings?

Connections between these findings and the current literature supporting mindfulness-based programs are made to support the participants' experiences with mindfulness-based practices with research. This chapter is arranged by the common themes that arose and is organized with these themes as headings.

Findings

The findings of this study are divided between the two driving research questions. Within each of these two questions, multiple themes arose which will be discussed in depth. While all experiences differed slightly, there were four common themes that were found in all interviews. The key themes from the semi-structured interviews to answer the question, *"What experiences do middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices have in their classrooms?"* were, training experiences, implementation difficulties, personal life connections, and recommendations. While the three themes that arose to answer the question, "*What aspects of mindfulness practices do teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes in students in their classroom settings?"* were, practices used, benefits of practices, and student outcomes and curricular connections.

Experiences

      Every educator that was interviewed for the purpose of this study had different experiences using mindfulness-based practices in their classrooms. Participant one, "Brenda," has been teaching for fifteen years but has only been using mindfulness-based practices for about three of those years. "Linda," has been teaching in the lower mainland of British Columbia for twenty-six years. She has only been using mindfulness-based practices for the last two years. Participant three, "Leslie," has been teaching for over ten years and has been teaching middle school grades for three of those ten years. She has been using mindfulness-based practices for over five years. While participant four, "Cheryl," is in her first five years as a teacher and has been using these practices for the past two or three years. Finally, participant five, "Anna," has been teaching for thirteen years and has used mindfulness-based practices in her class for the past three years. Although participant experiences using mindfulness differed between participants, their experiences when examined together and coded, created four common themes. Training experiences, implementation difficulties, personal life connections, and recommendations. These themes, when examined holistically help answer the research question, "*What experiences do middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices have in their classrooms?*"

      Experiences theme one: Training experiences. One common theme from the interviews was that participants had very little formal training on mindfulness and mindfulness-based practices. As a result, these educators were left to their own devices and were required to do their own research and teach themselves about the use of practices and mindfulness. For one, this resulted in frustration. One participant noted that, *"I've done my own personal research on MindUP, but I've never actually done any training with MindUP"* (Brenda, personal

correspondence, November 15, 2018). While another stated that, *"My colleagues at the school I*

was at educated me and they developed their own curriculum around it" (Cheryl, personal

correspondence, November 1, 2018).

Out of all five interviews, three participants attributed their training to collaboration and

observation of others using mindfulness-based practices, placing an importance of supporting

each other in their learning. Anna stated that:

To see the other teachers using these practices. The odd time being able to sneak into

their class and to be able to just watch a little bit just to get a sense of what it could

look like and how to go about it. Observation has been a really great model for this.

(Anna, personal correspondence, October 29, 2018)

Anna went on to explain how sometimes she became frustrated or overwhelmed with

what mindfulness-based practices to teach and how to teach them, stating,

I feel like these are the right practices to use, the curriculum says we need to teach

these things, but I have no clue where to start and what to do. It's frustrating

sometimes, to the point where I don't want to do it. (Anna, personal correspondence,

October 29, 2018)

Participants in this study were not alone in their need for more formal training on

mindfulness-based practices. One study in particular examined the impact formal courses on

mindfulness-based practices had on teachers. Stating that, "results suggest the course may be a

promising intervention, with participants showing significant reductions in psychological

symptoms and teacher burnout" (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013, p.1). Flook

et al. (2013), further explained that:

This pilot study indicates that mMBSR may be one intervention modality that has

potential for systematic implementation as a part of teachers' professional

development. Results suggest that tending to stress reduction translates into tangible

benefits for teachers' sense of well-being and effectiveness in the classroom, which

in turn are likely to have a positive impact on students' own well-being and learning,

for example, via the teacher-student relationship and classroom climate. Considering

that these changes were observed in teachers after a relatively brief period (8-weeks

of training), such training presents a cost-effective investment model for schools

given the costs associated with teacher burnout and consequent repercussions for

student academic performance. Policy decisions that take into consideration and

support programs designed to enhance teacher personal and professional well-being

have the potential to significantly improve educational practices. (p. 10)

   One way around the frustrations of implementing mindfulness-based practices, and the

stresses of general teaching, could potentially be formal training and courses. Anna never had

any formal training which could have been the reason for the frustration, however by

collaborating she was able to change the experience she had with mindfulness-based practices.

This participant also, "*purchased materials on the Zones of Regulation and a program for

Growth Mindset from Teachers Pay Teachers*" (Anna, personal correspondence, October 29,

2018) in order to further educate herself on practices she could use to support mindfulness in the

classroom. Another participant, Linda also noted that, "*I thought I could model what I thought

would be close to her format*" (Linda, personal correspondence, October 30, 2018), referring to

using practices in her classroom after observing another educator who uses mindfulness-based

practices at her school.

The participants that have had some mindfulness training never had explicit "mindfulness training." Their training consisted of sessions and seminars, such as yoga professional development sessions or training related to their spiritual beliefs. Participants took what they learnt at these sessions and combined the knowledge with other experiences in order to learn how to use mindfulness-based practices. For example, Linda explained that:

> *I went to a yoga pro-d day and it was a little different. It was more like yoga games and that we were more doing just breathing and simple yoga poses. So I had to put that together with what I observed from other teachers who do the poses. I think it would have been better if it was just about mindfulness and practices though.* (Linda, personal correspondence, October 30, 2018)

Results of the interviews showed that all participants either taught themselves about mindfulness-based practices through the purchase of materials online, observing colleagues, or by using what they learnt in related training and applying it to mindfulness-based practices in their classrooms. These experiences are similar to my own. At the time I was learning about mindfulness-based practices in the classroom, my school district was not offering professional development in the area. I had to seek out opportunities in other school districts, as well as search for resources that would suit the teaching of these practices to intermediate students. I searched online, at the local library, and read blogs from other teachers in order to begin knowing how to teach mindfulness. Weare (2014), reports that:

> There are many reasons why the development of mindfulness for teachers and school staff is a welcome move. Mindfulness has the capacity to improve staff occupational well-being and job satisfaction, improve performance, and reduce the wasted expenditure and human misery represented by the many days of stress related

sickness and attrition from the teaching profession. The evidence base for the

beneficial impact of mindfulness on the young is growing rapidly and students

clearly need teachers skilled in mindfulness to teach it. (p. 18)

Furthermore, in their study, Seney and Mishou (2018) explain that although, "there was a

lack of research on the effect of mindfulness training on teachers" (p. 157), one possible solution

is that, "since the training of teachers is a concern, thoughts turn to the possibility of teaching the

practice of mindfulness to teachers" (p.157). They hypothesize that if formal training is not

available, simply teaching teachers to be more mindful will translate to their students and

classroom environment.

In order to see the results of mindfulness-based practices fully, educators must be trained

to use these practices properly and to their full advantage. As Linda stated previously, "*I think it*

would have been better if it was just about mindfulness and practices though (Linda, personal

correspondence, October 30, 2018). Educators want to use these practices but are not fully

equipped. There is clearly a need being voiced by these teachers, asking for more specific

training.

Experiences theme two: Implementation difficulties. The second theme that emerged

from teacher interviews was the difficulty with implementing mindfulness-based practices in

their classrooms. This theme was common in four out of five interviews and can be summed up

by Anna,

The focus part of it. Kids aren't used to focusing on themselves, breathing, relaxing.

They're such social kids that there's a lot of that wanting to giggle and be by their

friends and poking each other and so it's a lot of training that this is about you and

you know you don't have the right to interfere with someone else's mindfulness.

(Anna, personal correspondence, October 29, 2018)

Another participant also explained how students question the need for these practices, stating that, "*they're like well why do we need to do it?*" (Cheryl, personal correspondence, November 1, 2018). This is consistent with the literature on mindfulness-based practices. Hanson-Peterson (n.d.) states that,

> Some common complaints of students about mindfulness is that their minds wander too much, or they cannot sit still and do nothing. Let your students know that mindfulness is a practice. Like any sort of training, there will be days that are easier and days that are harder, and that distractions are part of the process. Introduce the mindfulness concept of self-compassion – not judging ourselves on how good or bad we are going, but embracing who we are in that moment. Despite your best efforts to 'hook' your students, some still might not be motivated to engage with mindfulness. If this is the case, you may want to consider using a creative approach that links to prior learning. (para. 11)

In my own class, I found that there were always a couple students that could not take the practices seriously. However, with having conversations with them, I was able to find out that this was because they really did not understand what their mind was supposed to be doing, thus they were uncomfortable and acted out. I was able to use teaching about the brain and other strategies such as visualizations in order to engage these students and create a safe comfortable space for them to participate. The struggle to have students engage positively with mindfulness-based practices that participants experienced, is normal and consistent with the research. Yet

there are strategies, such as altering the way we introduce practices and making practices related to real life experiences that may aid in overcoming these struggles.

Linda and Brenda both had similar experiences in that they found the difficulties to be struggles they had with themselves. Linda stated that, "*My first challenge was kind of you know, what do I do with the kids?*" and that, "*At first I was a little nervous, but I thought I just want to try it and I just kind of persevered and I've kind of enjoyed it*" (Linda, personal correspondence, October 30, 2018). While Brenda has found juggling mindfulness-based practices with everything else that goes along with being a teacher difficult. She explained, "*I feel overwhelmed sometimes when I look at the curriculum and I look at the expectations that are given to me because I feel that I should be focusing more on the academics*" (Brenda, personal correspondence, November 15, 2018). This feeling of overwhelming curriculum expectations is noted in research as well. Jennings (2015) explains that, "most teacher training focuses primarily on content and pedagogy, overlooking the very real social, emotional, and cognitive demands of teaching itself" (para. 2). While Nadler et al. (2017), state, "in classrooms and other settings (e.g., after-school programs), time allocated to mindfulness practice is pitted against other important activities, such as formal classroom work and physical education" (p.1089).

Literature on mindfulness-based practices suggests that one possible way around feeling as if there needs to be more of a focus on academics, is to find curricular connections between practices and what you are already teaching. For example, Mendelson, Greenberg, Dariotis, Gould, Rhoades, and Leaf (2010) suggest incorporating mindfulness-based practices into existing physical education classes. While Wisner (2013), recommends health and career planning classes or character education programs.

While there are strategies to incorporate mindfulness-based practices into existing curriculum to save time, there is also research that states that by practicing mindfulness, teachers actually have more time in the day to teach because they are not constantly dealing with behavioural problems. One program found that mindfulness-based practices,

Improves attention, and improved attention means students are more able to focus on learning. They are more capable of taking in new information without being distracted by internal reactions or preconceived perspectives. It improves working memory, cognitive flexibility, reasoning, planning, goal directed behaviour and self-regulation. These skills are essential when it comes to learning new information. It reduces emotional reactivity, behavioural issues, anxiety, and depression. This means students have fewer potential obstacles standing in the way of their learning. (Smiling Mind, 2018, p.15)

If students are better able to focus, regulate their behaviour, and learn, teachers will ultimately have more teaching time during the day because they are not burdened with interruptions and dealing with behaviour issues.

Two participants also expressed that a difficulty they had was with the wording of some practices and what practices may mean to students or parents. One participant explained that, "*I don't want it to become like a mystical thing*" (Linda, personal correspondence, October 30, 2018), while another noted that "*We do yoga while we are breathing. So, for mindfulness we call it mindful movement*" (Anna, personal correspondence, October 29, 2018). This myth about mindfulness is a popular concern. Many individuals relate the term mindfulness to something spiritual or religious. Principal Doug Allen, of Grandview Heights, a K-9 school in Alberta, recently began using a school wide mindfulness-based program called, *The Mindful Schools*

program from California. In an interview with CBC, Allen stated "….at first (I was) hesitant to introduce the program because many people might think it's not a good use of school time." He says there are many misconceptions about the concept. "A lot of people think it's religious. It's not. They think it's flaky and hippy. It's not. It's modern psychology. It's mainstream now," he said. "It's being used by parliamentarians in London, by Google Corporation, it's being used by the military. It's used in health care, it's used in psychology. But people still have this funny idea about what mindfulness is" (Aldous, CBC News, 2014).

Kane (2017), explains that one way of dealing with this common myth is to direct both students and their parents to the research that does exist, show them the research that connects to the brain (p. 166).

While most of the participants struggled with the implementation of mindfulness-based practices, whether it was student struggles or struggles with themselves, it is important to note that one participant did not have any difficulties in implementation. Here, Leslie explains her experiences when asked whether she has had any difficulties implementing practices, "*None. None. Even the really bad behaviour ones. I don't want to say bad kids. But the ones that are very high energy. They also comply. It works for all levels of students*" (Leslie, personal correspondence, November 7, 2018). The reason for this experience could be that Leslie had been using these practices for the longest amount of time and began each lesson with how mindfulness connects to the brain so that students would understand on an anatomical level what was going on while they participated in the practices.

Experiences theme three: Personal life connections. The third recurring theme was personal life connections. Every participant stated that in one way or another, they all used mindfulness-based practices in their personal lives. Breathing strategies, meditation, and yoga

were the most popular practices that participants used. They also expressed the desire to use

these practices more than they already do in their lives outside of school. One participant reflects

saying, *"It [mindfulness] allows me to be able to slow down my mind and reflect on my actions"*

(Brenda, personal correspondence, November 15, 2018). While another participant states that,

"It [mindfulness] allows me to bring myself back into my center" (Leslie, personal

correspondence, November 7, 2018). Three of the participants reported that they only sometimes

go to yoga or participate in breathing exercises outside of school, and that they would like to do

more of it (Linda, Anna, & Cheryl, personal correspondence, November 2018). All participants'

experiences with mindfulness-based practices extend beyond the educational setting; it appears

that the more comfortable participants were with mindfulness in their daily lives, the more

comfortable they were with implementing these practices in their classrooms.

Anxiety, stress, inability to self-regulate, and unable to focus are all common comments

teachers have about their students. Now imagine, the individuals teaching these students-their

teachers- and the stress, anxiety, and pressure they must experience. Reasonably, one might

assume that the way they are feeling could potentially transfer to their students. The desire

participants had to use mindfulness-based practices in their personal life is supported by research

as Flook et al. (2013) point out, "mindfulness training acts as a buffer for teachers against the

impact of stress on cortisol change that may otherwise occur during the school year" (p.10) and

that mindfulness intervention adapted for educators "boosts aspects of teachers' mindfulness and

self-compassion, reduces psychological symptoms and burnout, increases effective teaching

behavior, and reduces attentional biases" (p. 9). Kane (2017) takes his belief one step further and

explicitly states that, "it is of critical importance that a teacher introducing mindfulness into

his/her classroom begins with a personal practice of mindfulness before engaging in teaching

mindfulness to students" (p. 165). It is reassuring that participants are using mindfulness-based practices outside of their teaching as a way of calming their own busy minds. Teachers may be further supported in their mindfulness journey if they created a group within their school that was able to come together and support one another.

      Experiences theme four: Recommendations. The final theme that was common throughout all five interviews was that when asked, participants each stated that they would recommend the use of mindfulness-based practices in classrooms. Linda replied to this question saying, "*Sure, I think it's a matter of comfort level and you know before I did this, I think I did other things that were good too. You just kind of pull from different areas*" (Linda, personal correspondence, October 30, 2018). She may have been more confident in recommending mindfulness-based practices if she had had more training as she notes later in the interview. When asked this same question, Leslie explained,

> *Yes. But you have to be willing to do it. You have to have the mindset to say every day I am going to do this. And not get lost and get off track and go "oh I feel beat up today," because that can happen to teachers, right? You have to be diligent I guess is the right word to use.* (Leslie, personal correspondence, November 7, 2018)

    The need for diligence and commitment comes from other participants who would recommend mindfulness-based practices as well. In her interview, when asked if she would recommend these practices, Cheryl states,

> *Most definitely. Honestly, I think I was very uncomfortable and unsure when I first started doing it because anything new feels uncomfortable. But then once you start, I feel like you can see those kids that are having a really tough time, they're the ones that even*

enjoy it the most. You just need to keep at it. (Cheryl, personal correspondence,

November 1, 2018).

Participants in this study all reported that they would recommend the use of mindfulness-based practices in their classrooms. However, it is important to note that some of them stated the importance of perseverance and committing to using the practices without giving up were important for the successful implementation. This is consistent with research as the mindfulness-based program, Mindworks (2019), explains that:

A good number of new meditators begin sitting with the hope that the holistic

benefits of meditation will make themselves [better] in a matter of days. They expect

meditation to act as a quick fix – like swallowing a pain relief tablet. It isn't a

reasonable expectation. Most genuine meditation teachers say that while a fortunate

few newbies experience benefits very quickly, for the rest of us, meditation has to be

practiced regularly over time before its beneficial effects can be appreciated. (para. 1)

If teachers are consistent and commit to using these practices, both themselves and their students will experience the benefits of mindfulness-based practices and be able to recommend the practices to others.

Aspects

In this section, the findings from the three themes to answer the question, "*What aspects of mindfulness practices do teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes in students in their classroom settings?*" were, practices used, benefits of practices, student outcomes and curricular connections. Each educator that was interviewed for this study used mindfulness-based practices in their classroom. Some of these

practices were similar and some were different. The aspects of these practices and the benefits

are discussed, as well as how these practices connect to student outcomes and curriculum.

Aspects theme one: Practices used in the classroom. Each participant used a

combination of breathing and movement practices in their classroom. Some participants also

reported that they combined these mindfulness-based practices with other practices such as

visualizations, yoga, and lessons from the MindUp program by Goldie Hawne, that educate

students about the different parts of the brain. Here, Linda described the practices she used daily

in her classroom,

> *We put soft music on, and we turn down one light and I just have the music playing*
>
> *as they come in from recess so not it's an audio cue. And I actually play the same*
>
> *song every time. So, they know to come in and sit down and they put one hand on*
>
> *their belly and they begin breathing slowly pushing the air out and feel it push out*
>
> *their belly button and then we do some stretching and a little bit of yoga.* (Linda,
>
> personal correspondence, October 30, 2018)

Linda further explains that she has not,

Done things like the chime where you listen until it's quiet. I'm kind of actually

steering clear, you know. I don't want it to become like a mystical thing. So, I just

talk about stretching and poses. I don't really talk about yoga either, just stretching.

Just because they're all coming from different experiences and just wanting to make

sure that they are all feeling that this is comfortable and safe. (Linda, personal

correspondence, October 30, 2018)

Anna shared the same sentiments about specific wording stating that, "*We do yoga while*

we are breathing. So, for mindfulness we call it mindful movement" (Anna, personal

correspondence, October 29, 2018). These feelings are not without reason. In 2016, Elsie Roy

Elementary School in Vancouver B.C., faced backlash for their mindfulness program from a

parent. The CBC reported, "a Vancouver man has launched a campaign to have mindfulness

sessions eliminated from his child's school," and he explained that, "I think there's components

to the mindfulness program that involve Buddhist meditation and guided meditation so in that

regard, legislated mindfulness is actually legislated meditation." He continued, "and legislated

meditation is not lawful in Canada" (CBC, 2016). However, Kane (2017) explains that,

> It is important to note, that there are three major evidence-based areas where students
>
> can benefit, namely cognitive outcomes, social–emotional skills, and well-being. The
>
> emphasis is on the secular application of mindfulness practices which leads to
>
> providing students with additional tools to assist in each of these three areas. Pointing
>
> parents in the direction of research such as this can allay concerns that parents may
>
> have in their students participating. (p. 166)

It is important for parents, but also for teachers, to be further educated about mindfulness-

based practices, this way any personal beliefs or myths they may have about mindfulness can be

addressed. With proper training, educators may not be uncomfortable using beneficial practices

such as the chime or yoga. The secular nature of mindfulness in western culture is an important

aspect for teachers and schools to share with students and families. There are many different

types of practices within mindfulness that do not rely on religious connections. Anna explained

the secular practices used in her classroom,

> *We'll just do different poses and I just encourage the kids to do visualizations. If*
>
> *we're doing like a tree pose to feel like your branches are stretching or feel like you*

are in the forest smelling nature. Trying to get that image in to kind of bring them

down. (Anna, personal correspondence, October 29, 2018)

One participant explained how she uses the chime and breathing, while incorporating

how these practices impact us,

I use the chime, the breathing, the talking about energy and how energy changes

from inside to outside. So, we talk about energy and what's the energy in the class. I

get them to be mindful of that. I use the parts of the brain that I teach at the

beginning of the year. So, I use the prefrontal cortex, the amygdala, and the

hippocampus. And so, they really tune in because it makes sense to them now, where

it's coming from. (Leslie, personal correspondence, November 7, 2018)

Another participant described using the parts of the brain in her teaching as well. Stating

that,

The kids do enjoy learning about the different parts and about what part of the brain

is responsible for. So once in a while they will throw back 'oh my amygdala is doing

this' so it's kind of a fun thing too for them to learn about. (Anna, personal

correspondence, October 29, 2018)

After sharing her sentiments about caution with the way practices are worded, Linda also

described some of the other practices used in her class,

We've been doing this figure eight [breathing]. And we've been doing the one also

where you breathe in and you'd go up and down your fingers, five fingers. Or we'll

do like follow your hands and breathe all the way in and come down and breathe all

the way out. (Linda, personal correspondence, October 30, 2018)

The practices each participant used in their class varies from class to class. Most use a combination of breathing practices such as five-finger breathing or figure eight breathing, and simple yoga poses, or mindful movement poses. Other practices included visualizations, learning about the parts of the brain, self-reflections, and the incorporation of music. The variation of practices that participants explained is consistent with current literature on mindfulness-based practices. In their meta-analysis, Zenner, Herrnleben, and Walach (2014) explained that, "most programs contain more than one component to facilitate mindfulness, with observation of breath as the traditional essential exercise, as well as psycho-education and group discussions" (p. 12). There is still very little research on what specific practices are the most beneficial for students. Especially since all students are different and may connect better with one practice over another. Therefore, it is important to teach a variety of different strategies to students to ensure that every student can relate to a practice.

Aspects theme two: Benefits observed in the classroom. The benefits of using mindfulness-based practices that participants observed in the classroom are that it allows for class-wide regrouping and that students become more self-aware, self-regulated, responsible for their choices, focused, reflective, and less anxious. One participant shared that, "*It's an easy regroup. It's an easy transition. It pulls the whole class together. It's not just targeting random students*" (Leslie, personal correspondence, November 7, 2018).

While another participant stated that,

It helps the kids be more aware and take more responsibility over the choices that

they are making because I think they understand that it is their decision to make, it's

not the teacher's choice. If you're choosing to do that, there's going to be a

consequence for that unmindful choice and they need to be okay with that and it just

helps them become a little bit more self-aware. (Cheryl, personal correspondence, November 1, 2018)

Linda noted that it, "*Helps them to be reflective of where they're at and recognize what strategies they need to use to become focused and ready to learn*" (Linda, personal correspondence, October 30, 2018).

Both Anna and Brenda made connections between the anxiety students experience and the benefits of these practices. Anna stated that,

Over the years seeing that more and more students are coming in being anxious and not knowing how to regulate themselves. Like they have more of a tendency to have outbursts and I wanted to find ways to help and give kids strategies to help calm themselves down. And I think it [mindfulness] gives strategies to kids who are attentional, or they couldn't even regulate themselves. (Anna, personal correspondence, October 29, 2018)

Brenda also shared that,

I think we're dealing with a group of students that have a lot of screen time, more than face time, as in empathy, connect, having relationships, face-to-face conversations and so I feel like overall there's an increase in anxiety, there's an increase in the inability to deal with their anger. Mindfulness gives students strategies for this. (Brenda, personal correspondence, November 15, 2018)

Overall, participants found that by using mindfulness-based practices in their classrooms they were able to regroup and transition their classrooms easier, students become more self-aware and regulated, more responsible for their choices, more focused and reflective, and finally less anxious. These findings are consistent with current research, such as in studies by Flook et

al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010. These studies all found that mindfulness-based

practices increase student learning such as overall marks and quality of assignments due to

increased self-regulation and attention, improvements in executive functioning, and by reducing

the symptoms of AD/HD.

　　　　Aspects theme three: Student outcomes and curricular connections. An important

theme that was present in all the interviews was how mindfulness-based practices did in fact

connect to the curriculum and impacted student outcomes. Participants claimed that in the BC

Curriculum,

>　*There's a really big importance on emotional and social intelligence and the*
>
>　*importance of having students enter into understanding and learning and the*
>
>　*curriculum with a calm mind and a still mind. I think that you're better prepared to*
>
>　*learn materials when you are mindful of your body and mindful of how you are as an*
>
>　*individual.* (Brenda, personal correspondence, November 15, 2018)

　When asked whether they see mindfulness-based practices connecting to the BC

Curriculum, one participant stated that it, "*actually ties in really nicely because one of the [core]*

competencies is looking at mindfulness and regulating" (Anna, personal correspondence,

October 29, 2018). While another participant explained that it allows students to be, "*Ready to*

learn," and that it "*Ties into the core competencies because it's the personal awareness*" (Linda,

personal correspondence, October 30, 2018).

　　　Not only can mindfulness be ingrained into the curriculum in areas such as physical

education classes and health and career planning classes or character education programs

(Mendelson et al.,2010; Wisner, 2013), but it assists students by allowing them to be ready and

prepared to learn. Students can engage in and understand the curriculum better and thus be more

successful. Haydicky et al. (2012), explained that mindfulness-based training in students helps

manage behaviour, and social, emotional difficulties in youth with learning disabilities and

AD/HD, thus increasing their ability to partake in curricular areas. While a study conducted by

Flook et al. (2010), showed that improvements in student executive function, self-regulation,

meta-cognition, and learning occurred after students participated in mindfulness-based practices.

Analysis

      Literature connections. When asked about their training experiences, participants

described the need to seek out their own training, combine different programs to find what

worked for them, observe other teachers, and alter training in other areas. No participant reported

having any formal mindfulness-based training. However, the importance of formal mindfulness-

based training cannot be ignored. Formal training can allow educators to be proactive rather than

reactive when engaging with students. Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Karazsia, and Singh (2013)

found that educators, "with the mindfulness training, there was none of this emphasis on specific

child behaviors. In contrast, they noticed that their responses arose from within, without thinking

and without advance planning" (p.225). This study further found that educators participating in

the study,

> Individually noted that training in mindfulness was not to enable them to better
>
> manage the children, but to produce changes in themselves that invariably affected
>
> those they interacted with on a daily basis, including but not limited to the children in
>
> their classroom. (Singh et. al., 2013, p.227)

     I began my own mindfulness journey without any proper training. I remember feeling as

if it was not working, I was doing it wrong, and questioned how I could teach students these

practices when I could not master them myself. However, through taking yoga classes,

participating in mindfulness-based professional development offered through school districts, and reading literature about mindfulness in schools, I was able to experience the benefits of mindfulness practices. I became more present in all aspects of my life. In my relationships with friends and family, in school, and most importantly as I was teaching my own class.

The benefits of properly training teachers extend much further than just within the walls of their classrooms. It has the potential to create a healthier and happier school community as well. As Van Doesum, Van Lange, and Van Lange (2013) explain, mindful students become socially mindful students, they're individuals who are able to, "safeguard other people's control over their own behavioral options in situations of interdependence" and individuals who are able to take on both "perspective taking and empathic concern for others" (p. 86).

Participants mentioned three main implementation problems: difficulties with students, difficulties with self, and concern over beliefs. It is important that difficulties with the meaning and belief are dealt with as soon as possible. Michele Kane (2017) points out that, "these myths need to be addressed with parents and with students before trying to implement any mindfulness practices no matter how slight" (p. 165). Kane further suggests that, "pointing parents in the direction of research can allay concerns that parents may have in their students participating" (p. 166). Participants in this study explained the difficulties they had when students chose not to participate or to distract others. Kane (2017) explained that in order to deal with such events, simply making a statement such as "some of us are choosing to engage in some deep breathing activities to become more centered and calmer in preparation for the art activities. Others are watching without disturbing" (p. 166) makes it okay for students who may not feel comfortable to sit out, but it also provides the expected behaviour of these students.

Participants explained that the use of mindfulness-based practices was not just beneficial for students who struggled with regulation or clearly needed these practices. They noted that the whole class benefits from the practices. This is consistent with the results of one study where "the results suggest that MBIs could help in creating a more stimulating and positive learning environment for students" (Malboeuf-Hurtubise, Lacourse, Taylor, Joussemet, & Amor, 2016, p.479).

Most participants explained that by implementing mindfulness-based practices in their classrooms, students became ready to learn more quickly and were able to access the curricular content with greater ease and with more success. This finding is supported by the previously mentioned study as well. Malboeuf-Hurtubise et. al. (2016) found that the use of mindfulness-based practices, "have provided students with a renewed openness and availability to learning" (p.479). The experience and quality themes uncovered during the interviews of this study are consistent with previous research in mindfulness-based interventions with children (Flook et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010). Based on the findings of this study, recommendations for future studies will be made in chapter five.

Summary

This chapter began with an introduction to the findings of this study. Findings and themes were separated and discussed by research question. The themes that arose from the first research question, ***"What experiences do middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices have in their classrooms?"*** were, training experiences, implementation difficulties, personal life connections, and recommendations. While the themes that were discussed that answered the second research question, ***"What aspects of mindfulness practices do teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes in students in their***

classroom settings?" were, practices used, benefits of practices, student outcomes and curricular

connections. Once all themes and findings were discussed in detail, the chapter concluded with

making connections between already existing research and the findings from participant

interviews.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Introduction

      This chapter provides a summary of five educator's experiences and perceptions of mindfulness-based practices in middle-school classes. First, the purpose of the study is restated, as it is important to relate the overall significance back to the research questions. After this, overall findings are restated, the value of the study is described, and recommendations for further research is presented.

Restating the Purpose of the Study

      This study aimed to explore the research questions, ***"What experiences do middle-school teachers who use mindfulness practices have in their classrooms?"*** and ***"What aspects of mindfulness practices do teachers perceive to be impacting anxiety, stress, behaviour difficulties, and student outcomes in students in their classroom settings?"*** through interviews of middle-school teachers in a school district in southern British Columbia.

      As students are more connected to devices, disconnected from the present moment, and detached from the present moment, they are becoming more anxious, less self-aware, and unable to regulate the big emotions and feelings they have. Mindfulness-based practices may be one way to help students with these struggles and increase their overall mental health.

      This research study explored the experiences middle-school educators had using mindfulness-based practices and examined how they perceived the practices to be affecting students in their classes. I hypothesized that middle-school teachers would have the same experiences and see the same benefits that educators of younger students had. As a result, I was able to support my hypothesis with their findings.

Restating the Findings of the Study

Participants in this study had very similar experiences as educators who use mindfulness-based practices with students in younger classes. Participants suggested the need for formal training because they lacked formal training; they were required to seek out their own training through observation and a combination of different resources. Participants, overall, struggled with certain aspects of implementation. For example, student behaviours during mindfulness practices and questioning the need to practice mindfulness. Participants all used mindfulness-based practices in their personal lives. And finally, participants all stated that they would recommend the use of mindfulness-based practices in all classrooms, no matter the age of the students.

The second interview question asked participants what aspects they believe to be impacting students. Participants explained mindfulness-based practices that they found to be successful in their classrooms. These included deep breathing exercises, yoga poses, calming music, and personal awareness. Participants explained how by using these practices, students were more self-regulated and self-reflective, they were more ready to learn and overall less anxious.

Conclusion: Value of the Study

The findings of this study are very similar to other research done on mindfulness-based practices in the classroom. As there continues to be gaps surrounding the use of these practices in middle-school classrooms, the potential benefits of this study are extensive. This study could support the need for better mindfulness training for teachers and schools, it has the potential to bring these practices to a broader range of students, and finally to increase the mental health of both students and educators.

Recommendations

The findings from this study demonstrate that middle-school teachers have similar experiences and witness the same positive benefits of mindfulness-based practices that research suggests other educators have as well. This study helped bridge the gap between mindfulness-based practices and middle-school teachers. However, further research with larger sample sizes are needed to make generalized conclusions for using mindfulness practices with middle-school students.

I recommend that school districts in BC push for better mindfulness training for their teachers while also providing parents and guardians with the appropriate information they need regarding the myths surrounding mindfulness practices. I further recommend that mindfulness-based practices are not used only in primary grades. Middle-school teachers who use these practices in their classrooms experience the same benefits as other educators. Therefore, these programs should be implemented school-wide, ensuring that students begin learning these strategies at a young age in order to be able to draw upon them more easily and more successfully as they get older and have more difficult life experiences. This study provides an example of the important impacts that teachers notice in middle-school students who are exposed to mindfulness interventions.

Summary

This chapter restated the purpose of this research study and examined the findings and value of the study. Recommendations were made to push for better mindfulness training for teachers in BC, and to implement more mindfulness-based programs in middle-school grades. If these recommendations were to be followed, school districts would be better supporting both their educators and students. All students, from the highest at-risk student to the lowest, will be

targeting their mental health needs, and therefore will be able to engage in the curriculum more

successfully. Mindfulness interventions can support all students.

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