

Exploring Teacher Participation in Mindfulness Interventions and the Subsequent
Implementation of Mindfulness in the Elementary Classroom

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Abstract

This research investigates the experiences of Ontario elementary teachers who participate in mindfulness interventions in their personal life and how they integrate mindfulness in their classrooms. Specifically, this research explores teacher's perceptions of the relationship between mindfulness practices and wellbeing and how the participation in mindfulness interventions translate into teaching practices to support classroom climate and student-teacher relationships for the purpose of increasing awareness of mindfulness interventions supporting teacher wellbeing and burnout. This small-scale qualitative research study was conducted using a phenomenological approach, using face-to-face semi-structured interviews, to explore the experiences of teachers who practice mindfulness in their personal life and gather their beliefs on how mindfulness influences their teaching practice. After a thorough analysis of transcribed and coded data, findings reveal that there is a positive relationship between mindfulness and wellbeing as it relates to personal identifications with the practice and expectations as a teacher. In addition, integrating mindfulness interventions into teaching practices correlates with meaningful student-teacher relationships and a positive classroom climate, which supports thoughtful teaching and learning experiences. While these findings reveal the impactful role mindfulness has in education to support teachers and their practice, future research is required to enforce mainstream professional development opportunities to support teacher's wellbeing in the workplace, in addition to support the effective integration of mindfulness in the classroom to support student wellbeing too.

Keywords: mindfulness, wellbeing, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships

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Exploring Teacher Participation in Mindfulness Interventions and the Subsequent Implementation of Mindfulness in the Elementary Classroom

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Context

This research aims to explore the experiences of teacher's participation in mindfulness practices in their personal lives and the subsequent integration of mindfulness in their teaching practice. This is due to the rise of conversation in contemporary society indicating that teachers are experiencing an overwhelming amount of burnout, classified as emotional exhaustion due to a depletion of emotional energy (Evers, Gerrichhauzen & Tomic, 2000, p. 6), as they balance their wellbeing and face social and emotional challenges that come with being an educator (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 492). Conversely, as investigations into teacher burnout become prominent, increasing awareness is placed on the use of "mindfulness" interventions to support wellbeing (Mendelson et al., 2013, p. 278), classified as a person's self image of capabilities, confidence, and emotions (Engels, Aelterman, Petegem, & Schepens, 2004, p. 129).

While there is no firm conceptualization of "mindfulness," there remain two competing understandings of the practice. One understanding is rooted in spirituality, Buddhism or Hinduism, and the other in psychology. It is not surprising that these are in tension with one another within the field of education, especially concerning private or Catholic school systems in Ontario where practices rooted in "differing" spiritualities bring controversy. Moreover, for the purpose of this research, mindfulness is conceptualized through psychological perspectives to keep a general lens on how mindfulness interventions can impact teachers of any background or school system. In this case, Bishop et al. (2004) assert mindfulness is the self-regulation of

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attention in the present moment, characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance (as cited in Felver et al., 2016, p. 34). Concerning education, participating in mindfulness can take the form of breathing techniques, meditation, yoga, body scans, or even through music (Routhier-Martin, Roberts, & Blanch, 2017, pp. 171-2). Ultimately, participating in mindfulness as a teacher supports regulated attention and understanding which aids in maintaining “composure, compassion, and sensitivity to children’s needs and interests while supporting and building the resilience required to maintain well-being in a highly stressful work environment” (Jennings, 2015, p. 23). Thus, this context reveals the need for further exploration of teacher’s experiences in practicing mindfulness and how it impacts their teaching.

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of teachers who participate in mindfulness practices and how their participation in these interventions shapes their teaching practice. While interested in the impact mindfulness has on wellbeing, this research also aims to understand how integrating mindfulness in the classroom impacts classroom climate and student-teacher relationships. Essentially, this qualitative research supports the gap in research addressing teacher’s experiences of practicing mindfulness and the relationship this has in primary/junior classrooms in urban schools. Thus, this research is important for educators and administrators in considering professional development opportunities to support wellbeing, burnout, and the implementation of mindfulness practices in classrooms.

As I conduct this research, I carry an awareness of my position as a teacher candidate, which frequently hears about the stress, emotional impact, and overall burnout teacher’s

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experience. While I remain passionate about understanding the impact mindfulness has on coping with workplace stress, I am also passionate about this research to gain personal and professional knowledge that can support how I engage with and support students. Also, through familial relationships, I have seen how mindfulness practices have been an effective tool in conquering anxiety. Therefore, I intend to explore teacher's experiences with mindfulness to understand the influence on wellbeing and teaching practices before I commit to adhering to them myself.

1.3 Research Questions

Following the examination of current research related to the impact of mindfulness in the teaching profession, it is necessary to conduct further research to support the lack of research in Canada on the relationship between personal practices of mindfulness, teacher wellbeing, and urbanized primary/junior classrooms. Therefore, the following research question frames my investigation: What are the experiences of Ontario elementary teachers who participate in mindfulness interventions in their personal life and how do they integrate mindfulness in their classroom?

To investigate this question, this study is designed to collect data from primary/junior teachers. While participant criteria will be made clear later on, the subsidiary questions that frame this study include:

1. What are teacher perceptions of the relationship between mindfulness practices and wellbeing?
2. How does participation in mindfulness interventions translate into teaching practices to support classroom climate?

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3. To what extent do teachers believe the implementation of mindfulness practices in the classroom relates to student-teacher relationships?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To explore the relationship of mindfulness in teacher's personal lives and the integration of mindfulness in their classrooms, it is important to examine prominent themes in literature to assist in understanding the background of this topic.

2.1 Mindfulness and the Workplace

As previously mentioned, mindfulness practices aid in maintaining healthy wellbeing in an era where workplaces are placing higher demands on individuals. This is evident as mindfulness focuses the individual's attention to "recognize and accept inner thoughts and feelings" (Schaufenbuel, 2014, p. 3). This process enables individuals to learn to identify emotional triggers of their stress reactions and formulate non-reactive coping strategies when stress arises, (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). Despite mindfulness being used as a tool for emotional and behaviour disorders, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) strategies were originally developed for managing chronic pain (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 230-1). This demonstrates the power of mindfulness in overcoming stress on the body, which supports the notion of mindfulness supporting burnout. Moreover, while workplaces are emphasizing the importance of wellbeing through wellness programs and strategies, workplaces need to increase their adaptability in supporting work-based stress as individuals claim they have no time (Vich, 2015, p. 35). This makes clear the need for professional development opportunities rooted in mindfulness for teachers to support their wellbeing.

Alternatively, while varying studies support the notion of mindfulness supporting

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wellbeing and burnout (Taylor & Millier, 2014, p. 123), Schaufenbuel (2014) identifies that many people may find it unpleasant to get in touch with their thoughts, even though “Practicing mindfulness can help individuals accept those inner thoughts and feelings and let them go, thereby lowering their stress and focusing their attention on the here and now” (p. 3). While some consider mindfulness practices challenging to engage in, it is important to recognize that different forms of mindfulness practices exist in which individuals can find one that suits their needs. In addition, from a neurological perspective, mindfulness proves to reduce cortisol levels in the brain, a hormone related to stress, which promotes focus, lowers blood pressure, and improves creativity and empathy (Schaufenbuel, 2014, p. 5). Together, these pieces of evidence can motivate teachers who might be skeptical of mindfulness practices.

2.2 Mindfulness Training Programs

It is evident that perceptions of the effectiveness of mindfulness may differ due to personal experiences. For instance, cognitive-behavioural psychologists suggest a positive correlation between mindfulness intervention training programs run by competent therapists and teacher outcomes (Brosan et al. 2007; Milne et al. 1999 in Ruijgrok-Lupton, Crane, and Dorjee, 2018, p.118). This suggests that those who learn mindfulness from a competent leader will be more confident in understanding and practicing mindfulness, compared to those who learn mindfulness through word of mouth. In relation, studies of the impact of MBSR strategies with teachers in relation to wellbeing and teaching (Ruijgrok- Lupton et al., 2018, p. 123) reveal greater awareness of thoughts, emotions, and actions; improved cognitive and emotional control; and increased prosocial behaviour (Holzel et al. 2011; Vago and Silbersweig 2012 in Cheek et al., 2017, p. 2564). This reveals positive outcomes for wellbeing due to reductions in perceived

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stress when a teacher engages in mindfulness-based programs.

In relation, Roeser et al. (2013) explain that mindfulness intervention programs for teachers are manageable, allow teachers to effectively manage stress, and better attend to the complexities of teaching and learning by developing self-regulatory tools (Roeser et al., 2013, p. 798, 802). This strengthens the correlation between practicing mindfulness as a teacher and the relationship this has on teaching practices. However, limited evidence supports the continued use of mindfulness practice after the completion of these programs.

In contrast, Rupprecht, Paulus, and Walach (2017) explain that teacher engagement in MBSR programs decreased significantly as educators claimed the course allowed them to discover the impact of their stressors early on and stated that they did not have time to complete the course (p. 577). While participants may or may not have continued implementing learned mindfulness interventions in their lives, they may have optimized their experience by dedicating the time to continue their training as Roeser et al. (2012) assert that the more training a teacher has, the better they can effectively support positive outcomes (p.171). Regardless, it is clear that MBSR programs can assist teachers in developing an awareness of coping strategies to maintain a positive wellbeing.

2.3 Mindfulness and Classroom Climate

Moreover, it is important to consider how a teacher's participation in mindfulness influences their classroom climate. La Paro & Pianta (2003) suggest classroom climate is characterized by levels of conflict and behaviour; expression of emotion, interest and focus; and responsiveness to content and peers (as cited in Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 492). Often, classroom climate contributes to teacher burnout due to increased stress, however in theory,

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when teachers practice mindfulness their emotion, stress, and self-regulation positively supports the climate of their classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 498). This is clear in mindfulness programs incorporating “specific strategies for improving classroom management, teacher-student relationships, and instructional strategies” (Roeser et al., 2012, p. 169). This makes clear that having the opportunity to engage in mindfulness training for teachers may be supportive of wellbeing in addition to benefiting how they manage their classroom, resulting in better outcomes for their students. For instance, mindfulness practices encourage educators to be self-reflective of their practice, privileges, and experiences in comparison to their students, who carry their own experiences to the classroom (Griggs & Tidwell, 2015, p. 90, 93).

Therefore, engaging with mindfulness allows an educator to be regularly conscious of thoughts, actions, and surroundings, and to operate with compassion and empathy (Griggs & Tidwell, 2015, p. 90). This is evident with a teacher who changed the way they approached their class by being present in accepting others and becoming more critical in taking the time to plan appropriately, acknowledging their student’s needs (Griggs & Tidwell, 2015, p. 99). While this is in tension with the elementary classroom experiences, as it occurred among a graduate study course, it nevertheless remains powerful. If elementary teachers have the same experience becoming self-reflective through mindfulness practices, they can better support young students in their class too.

In relation, using mindfulness interventions with young students may impact how students deal with stressors in their development into young adults. For example, in their 2017 qualitative study, Cheek et al. reveal that a classroom teacher used intuitive tools to select which type of meditation to use with students when they are behaving a certain way, knowing the benefit and

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purpose of each one (p. 2566). It is important to recognize that the students in this study felt compelled to use these practices in their lives afterward, which demonstrates the teacher, who was well trained in mindfulness, was competent in practicing mindfulness for the maintenance of wellbeing (Cheek et al., p. 2570, 2575). While unaware of the types of the specific practices this teacher committed to in their personal life, it is clear that their beliefs produced positive outcomes in the classroom climate and relationships.

2.4 Mindfulness and Student Relationships

The literature suggests that practicing mindfulness influences student-teacher dynamics. As previously mentioned, Griggs & Tidwell (2015) emphasize that self-reflection encourages teachers to acknowledge and examine their experiences and biases to effectively appreciate and understand the diverse experiences that students bring into the shared classroom (p. 88). This practice is also reflective of an empathic, compassionate teacher, which is essential in building relationships. Thus, educators who embed mindfulness in their teaching philosophy will establish stronger, personable relationships in the classroom as mindfulness causes educators to be more aware, present, and compassionate for the student's experience in school (Ruijgrok –Lupton et al., 2018, p. 117). For example, students who were immersed in a mindfully based classroom indicated stronger relationships with their teacher, less of a power-dynamic with their teacher, and carried learned mindfulness tactics to their personal lives (Cheek et al., 2017, p. 2575). This makes clear the importance of healthy student-teacher relationships as it translates into other school and personal experiences. For instance, positive student-teacher relationships are beneficial in learning to solve conflicts and forgive with compassion and respect (Roeser et al., 2012, p.167). Therefore, it is important to understand the importance of mindfulness practices as

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a teacher as despite assisting in maintaining a positive wellbeing, may cultivate rich student-teacher relationships and influence the overall classroom climate.

Consequently, these themes in literature make clear how mindfulness relates to teacher's wellbeing and their practice as a whole. However, despite this evidence, teacher's voices of their experience practicing mindfulness in their personal lives and subsequent integration of mindfulness in their teaching practice are missing. Therefore, this research will add to the body of knowledge that supports teacher's experiences in mindfulness for the sake of the development of professional development opportunities that support wellbeing and classroom practices.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This small-scale qualitative research study was conducted using a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of teachers who practice mindfulness in their personal life and gather their beliefs on how mindfulness influences their teaching practice. This study used face-to-face semi-structured interviews as this method for data collection "enables the voice of the participant to be heard" (Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2014, p. 93). The qualitative research design also supports a phenomenological approach to data collection as this allowed selected participants to describe their experiences to make meaning between mindfulness and their role as a teacher (Creswell, n.d, p. 136).

3.2 Sample Method

Due to the focus of this research, two participants were recruited using purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990 as cited in Maxwell, 2012, p. 235). Purposeful sampling is a non-probability strategy in which individuals are selected for inquiry due to the specific

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information they can provide (Maxwell, 2012, p. 235). This sampling was beneficial for the specific research focus on mindfulness and teacher practices. As well, purposeful sampling emphasized and allowed for an in-depth articulation of experiences that showcased diversity among participants and entry points for future research (Maxwell, 2012, p. 235).

3.3 Sample Criteria

To effectively explore the research questions that guide this research it is necessary to showcase the criteria for participants of this study.

Firstly, the participants had previous or current experience as a primary/junior OCT certified teacher in school boards located in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) for a minimum of 5 years. This ensured that participants had a valid teaching certification and that participants had experiences in urban settings in which experiences, resources, and opportunities may differ from rural settings. Also, this criterion allowed for the inclusion of teachers with a vast range of experiences to speak on that accounted for the possibility of mindfulness practices influencing their teaching practice *after* they started their career, which deepens the connection between mindfulness practices as a teacher.

Furthermore, participants had experience participating in mindfulness practices for at least 1 year. This criterion recognizes that mindfulness practices have only recently gained popularity as a strategy to support wellbeing and act as a coping mechanism for avoiding teacher burnout. As well, this ensured participants had experience in mindfulness practices for a sustained period to be able to speak on the impact mindfulness has on their wellbeing and teaching practice.

Lastly, selected participants had previous or current experience of integrating mindfulness practices into their classroom practices. This criterion brought together the two components of

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research; the impact of mindfulness practices on self, and the influence mindfulness has in being embedded in the classroom. In addition, this criterion allowed for the collection of experiences of mindfulness integration and provided the opportunity for teachers to ration why they embed specific mindfulness practices in their classroom and speak to how it shapes their classroom climate and relationship building. Lastly, this criterion supports the exploration of teacher's perceived benefits and limitations of mindfulness in education to gain a holistic view of the focus of the research.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

For this study, two sixty-minute semi-structured interviews with 22 questions were conducted over Google Hangouts with Participant 1, a former kindergarten teacher, and Participant 2, a junior level teacher, who met all sample criteria. Using semi-structured interviews allowed for exploring perceptions of participants in addition to opportunities to probe for further information or clarification (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 330). Further, the data was recorded using a secure Voice Memo application on a computer system to later be used to transcribe, code, analyze, and reflect on findings. In addition, written field notes were also made during interviews to capture non-verbal cues and emotions of the participants, along with key ideas that arise during the interview, that may go unseen during an audio recording (Denscombe, 2010, p. 187). These notes were also typed and used in the coding and analysis process.

3.5 Data Analysis

Following the collection of data, the audio files from both semi-structured interviews were transcribed using a Word Processing Software. The transcription of oral to written language is beneficial as it allows the researcher to review, reflect, and analyze data by recording common

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themes using coding (Kvale, 2008, p. 94). Qualitative coding enabled the researcher to assign “a word or short phrase” to a significant part of data, which aids in the process of analyzing data and collecting prominent themes to be interpreted and further analyzed (Saldaña, 2014, p. 6). Also, analytic memos were created to further reflect and ration the meaning of codes and to make note of patterns and connections between transcriptions (Saldaña, 2009, p. 32, 35). In addition, pseudonyms were given to both participants and all identifying information was coded and stored on a password-protected database to ensure security. Overall, these procedures ensured a holistic approach to understanding participant’s voices to ensure authentic connections between the collected data and overall research questions.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussion

Following the analysis of coded data in response to the research question dealing with teacher’s participation in mindfulness in their personal lives and how they integrate mindfulness in their classroom, two major themes arise: the personal identification and practice of mindfulness relating to wellbeing and a relationship between mindfulness and their teaching profession. The following discussion will present evidence that supports these themes and how this fits into the growing body of literature.

4.1 Mindfulness and Wellbeing

It is clear that the participant’s perceptions of mindfulness directly correlate to the response these practices have on their wellbeing. For instance, while both teachers identify different mindfulness practices that are embedded in their lifestyle, it is the effects that these practices have on their wellbeing that impact their continuous participation. This is evident as Participant 1 describes her experience participating in mindfulness:

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When you feel things, it connects at a deeper level, and so you can't really forget a feeling. And so I just keep coming back to it, especially when I know I need it, or just because I know it's beneficial for my wellbeing. It all comes back to wellbeing, I guess, taking care of yourself and your body, self-care, which no one does enough of.

This evidence, consistent with both teacher's discussion of how the deliberate participation of mindfulness practices such as breathwork, Yoga, or meditation, where you are dedicating time to practice awareness of the present moment through engaging with different senses, supports a connection between the mind and body which encompasses one's wellbeing. This supports Felver et al. (2016) as they identify that mindfulness is the self-regulation of attention in the present moment, characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance, as individuals are attempting to disregard anxiety-related qualities as their minds are focusing on appreciating the details of the present moment to guide their experiences (p. 34). This connection is made explicit as Participant 1 exemplifies an opportunity to engage in a mindfulness nature walk whereby she enjoys "getting outside and noticing colours changing or noticing smells in the air because sensory is really huge in terms of presence." Therefore, these findings indicate that deciding to practice mindfulness, which is mind-focused, has a direct relationship to the body as it purposefully engages awareness of the present moment, which engages senses such as sight and smell. By association, the connection between mind and body leads to feelings of calmness, focus, and a clear mind, as documented by both participants. However, it is equally important to explore reasoning for why participants are drawn to a practice that supports their wellbeing.

It is evident that mindfulness practices could benefit teacher wellbeing as they balance workplace and personal stress. While it is clear that mindfulness plays an effective role in

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maintaining a clear, focused, and present mindset, it also aids in teacher's managing varying expectations that are placed upon them. For example, Participant 2 makes clear that:

Teaching is a very stressful career because you're dealing with your class *and* dealing with the whole school. There are a lot of different personalities in the classroom, which could really test your patience and there's a lot of work that comes along with teaching. It's not just teaching and planning during the day, but it's everything that you take home, keeping parents in the loop, and extracurricular activities. So it just feels like the work never really ends.

This suggests that participants are faced with balancing personal expectations and goals they set for themselves in their personal and professional lives, amidst other expectations from their profession from students, their families, and administration itself. In contrast, Participant 1 emphasizes the severity of expectations teachers are faced with along with support from practicing mindfulness:

You're dealing with humans and vulnerable humans, as well as their parents, as well as the principal and the administration, so there's a lot of pressure from all sides. So as a whole, mindfulness practices help sort of manage the inner critic a bit and help get you more present and not be so hard on yourself.

Thus, these findings make clear the overwhelming expectations teachers face, which inevitably will take a toll on individual wellbeing and burnout if not deliberately making the time to take care of one's mind and body. These findings align with the study of Roeser et al. (2013) whereby a mindfulness intervention program for teachers allowed teachers to effectively manage stress on the job and better attend to the complexities of teaching and learning by developing self-regulatory tools (pp. 798, 802). Therefore, these findings are consistent as through

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mindfulness teachers recognize their stressors and manage a lifestyle that embeds mindfulness practices that support their wellbeing and their classroom too. Despite the focus on how mindfulness aids the role of the teacher, evidence indicates how these practices continue to support a positive classroom climate and student-teacher relationships.

4. 2 Mindfulness and the Teaching Profession

Moreover, the analysis of data reveals that integrating mindfulness interventions in the classroom benefits classroom climate. While Mendelson et al. (2013) make clear that educators who use mindfulness techniques in the classroom to assist in re-centering children's behaviour and assist in their self-regulation and achievement, (p. 278), participant's argue that whether mindfulness in the classroom is practiced in dedicated moments of practice such as through Daily Physical Activity (DPA), or used to guide classroom management, such as transitions or conflict management, these practices cultivate a shared, safe, and respectful learning community between students and teachers. This is because these practices emphasize the importance of mutual respect for wellbeing and valuing individual voices, which eliminates student-teacher power dynamics. For example, Participant 2 incorporates mindfulness interventions in their junior classroom explicitly through moments of practice *and* in providing resources and tools that encourage students to take initiative and use self-regulation tools to support their emotional wellbeing when necessary. In this instance, Participant 2 shares:

There's more community that's been brought in because of these mindfulness practices. Since students know that I practice mindfulness daily they feel more comfortable to come to speak to me when they have something going on. And with accessible resources and

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exposure, they know how to focus and calm down, and they have strategies to use when they feel like too much is going on that they practice at home too.

This showcases authentic relationships being built from shared vulnerable experiences between students and teachers. Ultimately, this classroom environment is built on respecting individual wellbeing by providing safe spaces for students to feel comfortable in recognizing and analyzing their feelings, through mindfulness, to practice appropriate coping mechanisms like asking for support. Inevitably, building meaningful classroom relationships creates a positive atmosphere for learning that supports the humanness of individuals engaging with their emotions and acknowledging diverse experiences that all individuals come from. In relation, Participant 1 shows the merit in sharing these vulnerable moments with their kindergarten students:

There's this vulnerable connection you share with your students when you do stuff like that [mindfulness, body awareness games] because connecting to the body feels very vulnerable. In saying that, I had one student who said he didn't want to close his eyes when we were doing meditation because it scared him. So it's important to be aware of those things, adapting everything and always trying to bring it back to a safe place.

Accommodating and offering multiple entry points for students to engage in mindfulness activities is consistent with Albrecht, Albrecht, and Cohen (2012) in that mainstream schools are actively implementing programs that recognize the importance of nurturing a child's social, emotional, mental, spiritual and cognitive wellbeing, (Garrison Institute Report, 2005; Tregenza, 2008; Yager, 2009 in Albrecht, Albrecht, and Cohen, 2012, p. 1). Through exposing students to different mindfulness practices and accommodating their needs, participants argue that embedding mindfulness into teaching practices fosters a greater classroom climate rooted in

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relationship values of safety, vulnerability, trust, and openness. These values ultimately aid in the classroom running effectively as individual's emotional wellbeing is taken into consideration and they feel respected and valued knowing their best interests are being looked out for, which also supports authentic learning experiences and relationships.

Therefore, integrating mindfulness in teaching practices moves beyond supporting classroom climate as personal relationships with students are deepened through sharing vulnerable experiences. For example, mindful practices encourage student's to identify and gain "awareness" of feelings and emotions students may be experiencing, such as increased heart rate. By using mindfulness exercises, individuals aim to become "present by connecting their minds to their bodies to relieve feelings of anxiousness. For instance, Participant 1 shares their experience in integrating "awareness games" into their kindergarten curriculum to teach learners about body awareness and coping strategies:

So it's kind of connecting to the feeling of stuff. "How do you feel before? How do you feel after?" And so when we do awareness games, we are calming our bodies down.

When kids get worked up, I always say "You're really worked up right now. What's happening in your body? Your heart's beating really fast, your blood is pumping really fast. Your face is getting really hot. Your neck and your body's getting really tight, and crunched up, is that good for your body? Do you think that it's good for your body? How can you bring it back? How can you come back to taking care of yourselves?"

Ultimately, integrating activities that create awareness of emotions, such as mindfulness interventions, supports student's emotional wellbeing, which is necessary for healthy relationships. This reflects Cheek et al.'s (2017) notion of teachers using intuitive tools to select

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which type of meditation to engage with the students when they are behaving a certain way, knowing the benefit and purpose of each one (p. 2566). In this case, the diversity of awareness games, alternatively known as mindfulness practices, can include guided meditation or body scans, as an example, and are implemented after thoughtful recognition and reflection of student's needs. For instance, if students are appearing anxious or excited, these tools can reenter student behaviour, which supports wellbeing and influences the classroom climate. This also supports exceptional learners, as Participant 1 discusses that using affirmations supports students who may be negative self-talkers. In contrast, Participant 2 shares that mindfulness techniques, such as taking a "pause" or deep breath to calm the body before reacting, supports their wellbeing and their role as a teacher with regard to challenging behaviour.

When I take a pause and deep breath I just have myself refocus and think what to do next.

If I become reactive the student will just shut down, because they need that moment to pause and cool off also. Kids these days have a lot of challenges, a lot of anxieties and worries that go beyond the classroom. So knowing that, and knowing the strategies that work for me, I can show them these strategies and they can see what works for them too.

This showcases the universality of integrating mindfulness into teaching practices as it provides a variety of tools that support teacher and student wellbeing. As well, this indicates how practicing mindfulness as an educator influences perception of student behaviour, acknowledging the anxieties and realities students face and aiming to support their wellbeing, for instance by taking a pause. By having mutual respect and awareness of the variety of emotions teachers and students are facing, authentic relationships are developed, which will only cultivate a positive learning environment. This enforces the literature that indicates educators who have

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experience in mindfulness will establish stronger, more personable relationships in the classroom as these instances allow educators to be more aware, present, and compassionate for the student's experience in school (Ruijgrok-Lupton, Crane, and Dorjee, 2018, p. 117). This comes through with how teachers perceive diverse student experiences and behaviours, but also influences the urgency to teach mindfulness as awareness and self-regulation tools for students at any age to support their wellbeing as they move through their career in education and beyond. Therefore, practicing mindfulness as a teacher not only influences personal wellbeing and experience in the teaching profession but also influences the perception of the importance of student wellbeing, which translates into positive student-teacher relationships and classroom climate.

Overall, these findings showcase two teacher's positive perceptions of mindfulness on their wellbeing and professional practice. These findings emphasize the unique relationship of how teacher's identify and practice mindfulness and the subsequent effects these practices have in managing inevitable expectations they face, in addition to supporting teaching practices concerning relationships and classroom climate. It is clear that practicing mindfulness supports the holistic wellbeing of a teacher, which promotes continuous engagement in mindfulness practices individually, and in their classroom. Ultimately, individuals must be exposed to this information for greater resources to be available to support teachers *and* students in an age where mental health is of its utmost importance.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This research investigated the experiences of Ontario elementary teachers who participate in mindfulness interventions in their personal life and how they integrate mindfulness in their classrooms. Specifically, this study framed its data collection into three categories: teacher

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perceptions of mindfulness practices relating to wellbeing, how participation in mindfulness interventions translate into teaching practices to support classroom climate, and beliefs of mindfulness practices relating to student-teacher relationships. Through the analysis of findings, it is clear that this evidence, grounded in Canadian experiences, supports the growing body of literature dealing with mindfulness practices relating to teacher wellbeing and teaching practices.

Implications

It is important to consider the implications of this research for teachers, administrators, and the greater field of mindfulness in education. Despite this paper defining mindfulness from a psychological perspective, both participants identify the practice of mindfulness being a personal belief. This means, each individual has a unique identification of the term, and while this could mean it could be a spiritual experience by means of connection to self, nature, or a greater purpose (Anderson, 2007, p. 14), it does not mean mindfulness practice influences spirituality. This suggests the practice of mindfulness is not practiced because of religious belief. Similarly, this study makes clear that teachers do not integrate mindfulness in the classroom due to spirituality with students, but to support their wellbeing through the learning of self-awareness. Essentially, both teachers recognize that each individual's journey and identification of mindfulness is unique in which case exposure to different practices explicitly and through classroom management strategies are beneficial. Regardless, pre-service teachers and educators are encouraged to understand how mindfulness in the classroom is acknowledged as a tool to foster resilient students by exposing students to coping strategies to aid in developing greater self-awareness, facing adversity and maintaining a healthy wellbeing.

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Furthermore, it is clear that mindfulness practices support teacher's wellbeing as they face burnout, but also in their teaching practice concerning student-teacher relationships and classroom climate. By integrating mindfulness in the classroom and sharing vulnerable experiences with students, for example in being open that you practice mindfulness as a teacher it shows students it is valuable to *try* to engage with the practice. In addition, being vulnerable with students shows support and safety of their emotional and physical wellbeing, which will inevitably deepen relationships with students. By association, this allows for a supportive classroom that welcomes diverse experiences brought in the classroom. Further, using a variety of different mindfulness tools to maintain composure, calmness, and productivity of teachers and students influences a positive classroom environment, which is worth the consideration in implementing new practices to support an inclusive classroom community. Therefore, it is clear that integrating mindfulness in the classroom can take a variety of forms that provides an opportunity for teachers to create deeper relationships with students by supporting their wellbeing. Inevitably, these relationships will influence a positive and supportive classroom climate. It is important for teachers to acknowledge these findings to recognize how mindfulness interventions have the potential to support their wellness along with their teaching practice.

Despite limited resources being offered from workplaces to support teacher's engagement in mindfulness interventions, the participants of this study make clear the importance to find resources of their own to support their engagement in mindfulness to both support their wellbeing and their teaching practice. Therefore, it is essential for administrators to consider the experiences and relationship between mindfulness and teacher's wellbeing and practice to further research, develop, and integrate resources to support teacher's wellbeing and student's wellbeing

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too. For example, through professional development that supports mindfulness practices for teachers and how to effectively integrate these practices in the classroom.

Limitations and Future Study

Due to research parameters, this is a small-scale research study in which limited categories of findings could be discussed in length and by association, these findings are not representative of all experiences of teacher's relationship with mindfulness. For example, due to the constraints of this study, the issue of mindfulness in Public and Separate school systems was left for further research. It is evident that there are discrepancies within practicing mindfulness in different school systems due to comfortability or misconceptions with integrating these practices in a school system rooted in religious beliefs that differ from the religious belief that is often associated with mindfulness. In this case, more research is necessary to effectively evaluate and speak to this topic.

In contrast, future study is also necessary for professional development opportunities made available and supported by school boards. For example, considering professional development specifically for teacher's wellbeing *and* in supporting teaching practices that integrate mindfulness in the classroom to support student wellbeing, again contrasting opportunities and limitations within Public versus Separate school boards. However, seeing the value of practicing mindfulness to support teachers in their role *and* how it can support student wellbeing should be an important consideration why these opportunities should be made available for teachers as it relates to supporting the primary members that make up the school board.

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Lastly, this research indicates a deep relationship between integrating mindfulness in the classroom to support student exceptionalities, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, in the classroom. As exceptionalities are increasingly present in the classroom, this is a prominent relationship that requires further investigation to understand how engagement in mindfulness can support wellbeing, engagement, and behaviour in the classroom. By extension, it would be beneficial to research student experiences of those who have participated in classrooms where their teachers have integrated mindfulness, and the extent they continued practicing mindfulness. Viewing this longitudinally would also benefit trauma-informed teaching practices and further professional development opportunities.

Concluding Thoughts

As previously stated, I set out to investigate the relationship between mindfulness, wellbeing, and teaching practices to gain personal and professional knowledge that can support my wellbeing and how I better support student wellbeing moving forward. By exploring teacher's experiences with mindfulness I have been able to effectively understand the influence of mindfulness on wellbeing and teaching practices, to which I feel motivated and comfortable to begin the practice more seriously in my everyday life. Further, I remain motivated to integrate mindfulness in my teaching practice when comfortable, knowing the range of mindfulness integrations and the rich relationship I can develop between my wellbeing, role as a teacher, and my students. Ultimately, this research supports my knowledge of how mindfulness can influence my wellbeing as I face career burnout, and how it can benefit my practice too.

Overall, this qualitative research study investigated the experiences of Ontario elementary teachers who participate in mindfulness interventions in their personal life and how they

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integrate mindfulness in their classrooms. Through semi-structured interviews with primary/junior teachers, this research identified positive perceptions of the relationship between mindfulness practices, wellbeing, and teaching practices to support classroom climate and student-teacher relationships. It is made clear that perceptions of mindfulness are unique to individual experiences and while mindfulness practices support healthy wellbeing, including how teachers manage personal and professional expectations, it encourages self-awareness and empathy toward themselves and their teaching practice. By integrating mindfulness in classrooms, through explicit activities or in classroom management strategies, it is clear that the shared experience of participating in mindfulness supports wellbeing, relationships, and classroom climate, which meaningfully integrates well with existing literature. While there remain areas that require further research, such as available professional development, especially among Public and Separate schools, student's perceptions of their experience in mindful classrooms, and how mindfulness supports exceptionalities, current research remains significant to the field of mindfulness in education in Canada. Consequently, I invite teachers to persevere in their journey to gain the appropriate support to practice mindfulness personally and in their classrooms, and to continue supporting the diverse experiences students bring into classrooms through participating in mindfulness together as it supports wellbeing and overcoming burnout for all.

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