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# A study of the evolution of mindfulness practice in an early childhood classroom

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A Study of the Evolution of Mindfulness Practice in an Early  
Childhood Classroom

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# A Study of the Evolution of Mindfulness Practice in an Early Childhood Classroom

By

Katherine Berninger

## Abstract

The following paper studies the use of mindfulness practice in a preschool classroom. Combining participant observation, personal journaling, and interviews with children, this study explores the relationship between the introduction of mindfulness practice, changes in classroom culture, and growth in emotional vocabulary. Implementing both kindness practices, and ongoing reflection on what it means to be kind this study questions the many factors that contribute to children's perceptions of and ability to understand and identify acts of kindness. This study posits the introduction of mindfulness practice as one method to create space for children to make sense of what kindness looks like and how it is expressed, and to increase their own capacity to treat themselves and others with kindness.

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## Research Rationale

My first introduction to the practice of mindfulness was during a meditation class in New York City. I was initially drawn to the idea of meditation as a way to manage the stress of my personal life, as well as a means to handle the anxieties that came along with beginning graduate school and the daily obstacles one may face while living in a large city. The practice of mindfulness resonated with me as it was a teaching that called upon looking within yourself to understand the plethora of emotions and feelings you may encounter on a given day. It stressed the importance of viewing the many thoughts and feelings human beings have non-judgmentally and with compassion.

How mindfulness affects the people who practice it has been deconstructed by Buddhist monks, educators, and other scholars all attempting to make sense of a teaching that can be difficult to define in a singular term. Susan Kaiser Greenland, author of *The Mindful Child*, defines the practice of mindfulness as bringing, “awareness to what happens in your mind and body (your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations)” (2010, p. 23). Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) defines it as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding experience” (2003, p. 145). Whatever one’s particular use of words to describe mindfulness practice, it is important to stress the fact that it is not a simple concentration on one object; rather it is an awareness of the constant flow of thoughts and feelings that arise within us on a given day (Brown, Marquis, & Guiffrida, 2013, p. 96). While mindfulness practice can mean the awareness of what is going on around you, it most often refers to the awareness of the “internal experience” (2013, p. 96.).

Taking into consideration all of the above definitions, my personal experience with mindfulness practice, and my work as a teacher, I am inclined to define the practice of mindfulness as a patient and accepting noticing of our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. This patient noticing empowers us with tools to be curious and thoughtful about what goes on in our minds, non-judgmentally and with compassion. The result is a mind that is more reflective and less reactive, thus leading to a more productive and peaceful classroom environment for teachers and students.

This definition drives my own practice and influences much of my thinking as I experience my first year of teaching. I find mindfulness practice to be most helpful when I am in a particularly stressful moment or when feeling sad or angry. When I apply the practice in these moments I step outside of myself and begin viewing my emotions with non-attachment. I ask myself questions such as “what is this feeling?” or “why am I feeling this way?” Asking these particular questions allows for me to create a space where I can practice the mindfulness concepts of compassion and non-judgement, enabling me to make better choices in how I would like to react.

This idea is epitomized in a quote by Austrian psychiatrist Victor Frankl: “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom” (Frankl, 1988). Mindfulness practice supports my efforts in bringing this concept to life. Whether in the classroom when it is a particularly hectic day or walking through a busy subway station, mindful awareness helps remedy my feelings of anxiety and the feeling of needing to escape the situation, giving me the opportunity to slow down and be more present. This “letting go” allows the negative emotions to dissipate allowing me to respond more effectively.

It isn't to say that I am always practicing mindfulness. In fact, there are many times I forget to practice, or know I should practice and find it much easier to be enveloped by the stress and anxiety that comes with life. However it is important to remember, as stressed by many practitioners of mindfulness practice, that mindful awareness is not something to be forced. Forcing yourself to be mindful or becoming frustrated because you haven't been mindful defeats its purpose. I find it is during these moments when meditation can be most helpful. Whether listening to soft music or nothing at all, meditation is a reminder that it is OK to slow down, and be still. Just like practicing mindfulness, meditation does not always come easy to me, yet when I make the time to focus on my breath and close my eyes, I notice a feeling of calm that was not there before. Whether this feeling lasts or not, it was there for a time, and that's a start.

As my teaching career and mindfulness practice coincided I began to wonder how mindfulness could be used to help children. Discovering that the field of research for the practice was growing, I became particularly intrigued considering I was a child who could have possibly benefited from mindfulness teachings. Growing up I was prone to depression and anxiety beginning at about the age of nine. I would come home from school with chronic migraines, and was in weekly therapy sessions while also taking antidepressants. As an adult practicing mindfulness I wondered if it would have been helpful to have someone ask me social-emotional questions such as "What are you feeling?" "Where do you feel those feelings?" "And why?" Was a major component of my childhood anxiety the fact that I was not able to identify and work through the feelings I had?

I also wondered what it would have been like if the adults in my life had told me that it was okay to be anxious and depressed. Would the ideas behind mindfulness have helped me in developing a compassionate, non-judgmental view of my emotions while making sense of why they were there? What would have happened if I stopped trying to rid myself of the negative emotions, and instead embraced them? Even though I was able to overcome the depression and anxiety of my younger years with the support of my family and by changing certain situational factors, I still wonder how mindfulness could have been beneficial.

Finding myself a first year teacher in a preschool classroom I was able to explore these questions in regards to practicing mindfulness with a specific group of five year old students. As the school year evolved I noticed a few children who were physically impulsive. They hit and kicked often to the point where they hurt the other child. All of the children were in the throes of admissions into private kindergartens which involved many school visits, and caused a substantial amount of stress and anxiety for parents and children alike.

Over time I began to notice that most of the children in my class lacked an extensive emotional vocabulary. When reading books about characters who were lonely, worried, or angry I would ask the children, "Have you ever been angry before?" or "Have you ever been lonely"? Some children stated that they had never felt those emotions before, which I found interesting since I had witnessed, first hand, many of the children exhibit feelings of anger in the classroom. For example, when another child pushed them on the playground or grabbed a toy without asking permission.



I began asking myself how mindfulness practice could be used in developing children's emotional vocabulary, allowing for them to better understand themselves, and their reactions to those emotions. It was around this time that the idea of kindness became a recurrent topic of discussion amongst the teachers and children of the classroom. In response to children hitting or shoving on the playground, calling out and not listening to each other during meetings, and being exclusive with friends, the question "Is that kind?" was being asked frequently. I wondered if asking this question was a way of teaching the mindfulness principle of self-awareness. What would happen if before children reacted they asked themselves the "kind" question in whatever form it may take? Would that be, in essence, practicing mindfulness, and did children have a full understanding of what it means to be kind?

In order to facilitate the class's general discussions about kindness I introduced a mindfulness exercise that was meant to promote kindness and awareness of the feelings that arise when one is kind. How would five-year-olds respond to this practice, and would they notice any changes in the classroom? Would they begin thinking more about being kind in their daily lives? Taking these inquiries into consideration my research question is: How can a mindfulness practice be used to promote a culture of kindness in the classroom?

### **Review of Literature**

Mindfulness, in its origins, is a traditional Buddhist teaching. Thich Nhat Hanh, a modern Buddhist monk, has written several books on the teachings of Buddhism and mindfulness practice in regards to how they relate to modern life. In *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* Hanh explains that mindfulness practice "accepts everything without

judging or reacting...mindfulness is remembering to come back to the present moment” (1998, p. 64). Mindfulness has evolved from a strictly Buddhist teaching to being utilized in western therapies around the world. Jack Kornfield, an author and Buddhist teacher explains, “since 1980 nearly a thousand scientific papers have documented the effectiveness of mindfulness, often studying Western trainings that are based on a Buddhist approach (2008, p, 99).

Kabat-Zinn, mentioned previously, is a pioneer in developing one of these aforementioned western trainings based on the Buddhist approach of mindfulness. A 2014 *Time Magazine* article discussed the fact that mindfulness, overtime, has become a practical tool utilized in psychology rather than a spiritual one: “Kabat-Zinn and other proponents are careful to avoid any talk of spirituality when espousing mindfulness. Instead, they advocate a commonsense approach” (Pickert, p. 43). This commonsense approach which focuses on bringing attention to the present moment is the basis for Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) founded at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1979. Being interviewed by *Mindful Magazine* Kabat-Zinn explained that he “hoped that by starting a stress-reduction clinic [based on mindfulness] we could document how these practices might have a profound effect on the health and well-being of individuals (2014, p. 36). Mindfulness practice was now being used as a means to combat a daily occurrence many people can relate to: stress. The program gave adults who practiced MBSR a learned skill that allowed them, “to better control their own reactive emotions, and therefore respond, when ready, in a more thoughtful, calm, and reasonable way” (Kaiser Greenland, 2010, p. 23).

Recognizing the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in treating stress for adults Susan Kaiser Greenland, who authored *The Mindful Child*, began to wonder if mindfulness teachings could be adapted to help children. In her book, Kaiser Greenland breaks down the teachings of mindfulness into the new “ABC’s: Attention, Balance, and Compassion”. She offers practical exercises and strategies that help children develop awareness, and attention which can lead to a healthier view of our emotions and ourselves. By practicing mindfulness, Kaiser Greenland states, “kids learn life skills that help them soothe and calm themselves, bring awareness to their inner and outer experience, and bring a reflective quality to their actions and relationships” (p. 12).

Whether mindfulness practice can be a tool to help children achieve these life skills has become the subject of several research studies increasing in number over the last decade. A study conducted by Semple, Lee, Rosa and Miller assessed the benefits of mindfulness for children ages 9-13. The researchers hypothesized that practicing mindfulness would help reduce anxiety, as well as attention and behavior problems. In their conclusion the authors stated, “The findings of this study show promise for the effectiveness of [mindfulness] and support the authors’ call for more research into mindfulness” (2009, p. 228). The Hawn Foundation, a program raising awareness of mindfulness in curriculum, found that mindfulness practice can improve a child’s self-regulation, reduce peer to peer conflict, and develop children’s social skills (The Hawn Foundation, 2011).

Whether these findings have been proven or not, the general consensus among many researchers of mindfulness in regards to children stresses the fact that there needs to be continued research into its benefits, including research into how these benefits may

be assessed. Mindfulness based cognitive therapy for children (MBCT-C) is an adaptation of Kabat-Zinn's original MBSR, and aims to adjust the formulas used by Kabat-Zinn in order to teach children the principles of mindfulness (Semple, Lee, & Rosa, 2010, p. 226). The Children and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM) is an assessment tool that was developed in hopes of creating a framework that is relevant to children using vocabulary they understand (Greco, 2011, p. 607). While it is progress in creating definitive standards in which we can assess the benefits of mindfulness for children, it has only been modified for children over the age of nine.

Beyond scientific studies, research on mindfulness practice and its possible benefits for children, there are several books that have been published that aim to offer practical strategies in helping children understand the concepts of mindfulness in a developmentally appropriate way. Susan Kaiser Greenland's *The Mindful Child* is one of those books, along with Thich Nhat Hanh's *Planting Seeds* (2011). The same author who began his writing career by laying out the basic principles of Buddhism wrote a practical guide in how to teach mindfulness to children. The introduction to the book states that, "mindfulness is a powerful tool to help children develop the skills to promote peace in themselves and the world around them (p. 12). Exercises such as mindful walking and eating, ringing a singing bowl, and shaking a jar full of glitter are discussed as ways to promote the teachings of mindfulness to children in a simple and accessible way.

Eline Snel's *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Children* lays out clear instructions in order to, "help your child deal with anxiety, improve concentration, and handle difficult emotions" (2013). Exercises such as "Your Personal Weather Report" (p. 54) use language children understand in order to make sense of their

emotions and how they may be feeling on a particular day. When a child compares their sullen mood to a cloudy day it requires them to look inward and pay attention to what is happening inside of themselves; a basic principle of both social-emotional learning programs and traditional mindfulness practice. What is useful about the exercises discussed in these books is that they are modifiable for children as young as age five.

While many of the books concerning mindfulness practice and children are targeted towards parents, teachers and educators are recognizing the benefits it may have in the classroom. *The Way of Mindful Education: Cultivating Well-Being in Teachers and Students* by Daniel Rechtschaffen and *Teach, Breathe, Learn* by Meena Srinivasan were both published in 2014 and explore the way mindfulness practice can be utilized in the classroom and the world of education. These books ask how we can teach children the awareness and attention that is required of them in order to succeed in school and the world. As a New York Times article published in 2007 pointed out, “Parents and teachers tell kids 100 times a day to pay attention...but we never teach them how” (Brown, para. 7). Many of these published works are hoping to offer solutions to solving that problem.

As mindfulness and its effects on children and adults becomes an increasing subject of conversation in the field of education, it is also important to note its role in neurological studies. In 2004 the National Academy of Sciences discovered that Buddhist monks who completed more than 10,000 hours of meditation, “had more functional connectivity than novice meditators...and more gamma wave activity, indicating higher levels of consciousness” (Pickert, 2014, p. 45). What does this mean if you’re not a Buddhist monk, however? Studies have still shown that, “meditators may have more capacity for working memory and decreases in mind-wandering” (p.45).

It is perhaps because of these positive effects that meditation remains one of the more widely discussed methods in regards to practicing mindfulness. Meditation is considered a “formal” mindfulness practice because it involves taking specific time out of one’s day to focus and set an intention of mindfulness. Sitting meditation typically involves concentrating your attention on a specific target such as your breath (Jennings, 2015, p. 3). I find meditation can be useful, because it is an easily adaptable practice that allows the target of focus to change based on specific needs. For example, meditation can be used as means to encourage compassion when an intention is set to focus on the well-being of yourself and others. This meditation is traditionally called a “loving kindness” meditation, and is based on the Buddhist teaching of metta. Metta is the Sanskrit word for kindness or friendliness, and meditation is often used to instill the ideas of compassion, and loving kindness that comprise the teaching. Whether we choose to focus our mind on our breath or metta, the way we think and concentrate on said thoughts may influence our brain development.

Dan Siegel, a clinical psychologist at UCLA, has written several books on the way mindfulness affects the brain. Published in 2007, Siegel’s *The Mindful Brain* aims to bring together two seemingly different fields of study: the research behind brain development, and the impact of a mindfulness practice on said development. Siegel explains that mindfulness has been shown to, “improve the capacity to regulate emotion, to combat emotional dysfunction, to improve patterns of thinking, and reduce negative mindsets.” These ideas coincide with other studies that explore the possibility that the structure of the brain is changed with continued mindfulness practice (Baime, 2011, p.

46). Neurobiologists are exploring the idea that in the way one's muscles change and grow with exercise, practicing mindfulness may affect the brain similarly.

As mentioned previously a prominent theme throughout mindfulness and meditation literature is loving kindness, and compassion for yourself and others. In the written works of the notable experts on mindfulness, kindness has been defined as, "non-judgmental and inclusive...kindness touches your heart, enabling you to grow, and learn to trust yourself and others" (Snel, 2013, p. 77). When people practice having a non-judgmental and kind outlook on their lives they become less reactive, and more compassionate (Nhat Hanh, 2011, p. 20). While much of the literature believes that compassion is our natural way of being (Kornfield, 2008, p. 23) there also needs to be a focus on developing our ability to be compassionate and kind, as much as developing one's academic development (Snel, 2013, p. 80). In a classroom setting, where competition can become reality at a young age, there seems to be a demand for incorporating loving kindness practices throughout the curriculum in order to encourage compassion towards others.

Kindness and compassion, or what can also be referred to as "prosocial skills" (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2014), are increasingly being seen as vital in promoting self-regulatory skills that lead to success in school and the real world. Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, and Davidson's study, conducted in 2014, focused on how a kindness curriculum centered around mindfulness might encourage the training of skills such as "empathy, gratitude, and sharing" (p.2). The study states, "Through the training of attention, the qualities of kindness and care towards oneself and others can be cultivated implicitly and explicitly" (p. 2). Ultimately, what the study concluded, was that while

there needs to be further research into the effects of loving kindness practices in the classroom, “training these skills and capacities early in life has important consequences throughout development” (p. 7).

What other research is indicating, according to Daniel Siegel and Tina Bryson’s book *The Whole Brain Child*, is that if children are taught these prosocial skills at an early age, their experiences can directly change the growth of the brain (2012, p.8). Five year olds were the focus of my study. Siegel explains that between the ages of four and five sharing and discussion of conflict should focus on the feelings of both children involved (p. 154). Siegel also explains that children at this age tend to not understand that feelings come and go, and through discussion adults can help children begin to understand what it feels like to be frustrated or lonely (p. 159). By building awareness of the emotions children may have, as well as the other children they interact with they are beginning to develop components to a mindful practice. Even at the age of five it can be expected for children to be able to begin to calm themselves down through taking deep breaths and imagining themselves in calmer environments (p. 160).

In Chip Wood’s *Yardsticks* the ability for a five year old to begin to have the developmental capabilities of a mindfulness practice can be seen in his or her increasing capacity for empathy when seeing a child who is hurt (2007, p. 58). As children progress through the age of five their ability to explain increases in correlation with their burgeoning language skills (p. 61). Practicing mindfulness and emphasizing awareness of one’s feelings and emotions becomes easier as children develop the language to describe said feelings. Wood stresses that through modeling and constant repetition children can develop these skills (p. 65). Taking this into account, as well as Siegel’s stance on



children's capacity for language, it could be thought that mindfulness practice can be taught to five year olds by encouraging the use of different vocabulary to express oneself as well as modeling positive social interactions.

Mindfulness practice may offer a way to expose children to these positive social interactions, building self-awareness that is intrinsic in developing prosocial skills. For the purposes of my study I have chosen to explore the use of mindfulness practice in promoting kindness and compassion. As described previously, the practice is an adaptation of the Buddhist tradition called "metta" which aims to "generate feelings of care for ourselves and others" (Jennings, 2015). As Patricia Jennings, author of *Mindfulness for Teachers* explains, "as we generate feelings of care and kindness, we feel a warmth and openness in our heart...after a while, the practice becomes easier, and more enjoyable and rewarding (2015, p. 115). Prosocial skills, mindfulness, and social-emotional learning go hand in hand as children who are taught mindfulness techniques can be, "less aggressive; less oppositional toward each other; more attentive in class; and report more positive emotions" (Lantieri, 2014). My study aims to explore what can happen when mindfulness practices are utilized in a classroom of five year olds in promoting compassion and kindness.

### **Methodology**

The system in which I introduced the practice of mindfulness to my classroom, and the thinking behind said implementation was a process that changed and evolved constantly. The classroom is part of a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool attracting a majority of its population from the surrounding Upper East Side neighborhood, and it is home to a head teacher, two assistant teachers (myself included), and twenty children: ten

boys and ten girls. A majority of the children have attended the school for at least three years, but this year marked a significant time of change as all of them were applying for admission into private kindergartens. The process, as I came to understand early on in the year, proved to be stressful and time consuming for parents and children.

As the children were entering this time of transition, I too was beginning a new chapter of my life as a first year teacher. Having read and studied about mindfulness and its implementation in early childhood classrooms, I was both apprehensive and excited to see how I could use the practice in this classroom. I decided that in beginning my study I would use my journal and daily observations of classroom life to develop a sense of how and when practicing mindfulness could be helpful. I wrote in my journal in early September, "Having now met the children I can begin to see how mindfulness may impact the classroom. Although, at the same time I've never done anything like this before so I have no idea" (Journal Entry, 9/20/14). This statement summed up my initial thinking as I felt a mindfulness practice could be helpful, yet in never practicing mindfulness with children I didn't know how, and was also unsure of my own capabilities in teaching the practice.

Despite my own apprehension I noticed several behaviors where I felt the practice could be helpful. One child in particular, who I will call Sam, exhibited trouble with impulse control early on in the year. At our initial meeting with Sam while on home visits he ran around his apartment running and jumping on the sofa, rarely stopping to catch his breath. A few weeks later I wrote that during outdoor time he was "screaming running around, and pushing children unprovoked" (Fieldnotes, 10/09/14). I also noted two months later, in December, that he punched a girl while waiting in line. He told a teacher,

“I punch because I don’t like the girls” (Fieldnotes, 12/12/14). I found these reactions to be interesting, albeit unsettling as it was a priority to keep children safe. I felt that mindfulness practice could be effective in helping Sam pause before reacting in the physical ways that he did. The practice could be useful in teaching the children to pay attention to the split second moment before they react, thus leading them to assess a situation before they hurt someone. Taking this into consideration I decided to introduce a singing bowl exercise to the class.

A singing bowl is a bell-like contraption that when rung emanates a loud, yet soothing sound. I chose to introduce the singing bowl because it was a practice with which I was familiar. The exercise asked children to close their eyes and listen quietly as the bell was rung. As the sound reverberated the children would listen, and once they could no longer hear any sound, they would raise their hand. In essence, the practice promoted the listening and awareness that mindfulness facilitated. In my journal I wrote of my experience introducing the singing bowl: “It’s really hard to ask a bunch of five year olds to listen, to sit still, and pay attention...I think I need to continue with the exercise and see where it goes, and see how it will evolve” (Journal Entry, 9/29/14). Having never done something like this before the children were antsy, and some were unsure about closing their eyes. I realized that asking children to close their eyes was a big deal. One child stated, “I can’t close my eyes,” (Fieldnotes, 9/29/14) and another asked, “Why do we have to close our eyes? Closing your eyes is for sleeping” (Fieldnotes, 10/16/14). In the future closing eyes was always an option.

Another aspect of the singing bowl exercise that I noticed was some children would raise their hands immediately after I rang the bell, not waiting till the sound

ceased. Understandably some children would raise their hands before others, but I wondered why some did it immediately. As time progressed children would point it to out, saying to the other children, “You’re supposed to wait until you can’t hear it anymore!” (Fieldnotes, 12/12/14). I could tell some of them were getting frustrated which I found interesting since the exercise was supposed to promote a sense of calm. It wasn’t until January that I was able to get a clear answer as to why some children raised their hand right after I rang the bell. A girl who I will call Sarah stated she raised her hand because the sound got lower right away (Fieldnotes, 1/15/15). This was how she understood the practice, and I wanted the children to recognize that her interpretation of the exercise was just as valid.

Over time the singing bowl would prove to be a valuable practice in that it was a flexible exercise that could be practiced during transitions, group meetings, or with smaller groups. During transitions to lunch or snack I would ring the bell, wait for the children to raise their hand, then gently pat them on the shoulder, letting them know to go wash their hands. In my journal I noted that these instances were “calm and quiet” (Journal Entry, 10/16/14). On days when I did not bring out the singing bowl, whether it was due to time constraints or other factors I noted that that there was a feeling of “stress or unsettled energy” (Journal Entry, 11/04/14).

As children became more familiar with the exercise I began to ask questions such as, “Where do you hear/feel the sound?” One boy who I will call Ben is prone to energetic outbursts even saying, “Sometimes I can’t control my body” (Fieldnotes, 10/03/14). When I asked the group where they felt the sound Ben said, “I feel it in my brain. I can still hear it. It’s like a vibration” (Fieldnotes, 12/05/14). Ben, who struggled

with sitting still much of the time was able to be calm long enough to feel the vibrations of the bell in his body. Another child said he felt it in his feet, and many other children nodded in agreement (Fieldnotes, 12/05/14).

It was during these brief moments when we listened to the sound of the singing bowl that I began to ask children about their breath. I would ask the children to put their hand on their stomachs, and inquire about how it felt. Children would say they felt their “tummy going up and down” or “in and out” (Fieldnotes, 10/24/14). On one particular day a child stated her breath felt like “a bouncing ball” (Fieldnotes, 11/03/14) while another child said, “I feel like it’s easier to breathe out” (Fieldnotes, 11/03/14). As the children became familiar with the exercise it was interesting to watch as each child responded in their own way. Some children would be fidgety while others who had been running around five minutes earlier were seen intently listening to the bell.

While I noticed children responding to the singing bowl I realized early on that it was not always the most effective practice. There were times when it was not practical to bring out the singing bowl or it simply was not within reach. Focusing on the breath, and paying attention to its movements became a convenient way to practice mindfulness in the moment. Recess became the most common time and place where breath work was used.

Susan Kaiser Greenland says, “Practicing mindful breathing, we feel what’s happening in our minds and bodies as we rest in the sensation of our breath” (2010, p. 70). Several children seemed to have a difficult time calming their bodies, and would occasionally resort to physical aggression when a situation was not going their way. In these instances I would have a child take a deep breath; asking them to pay special

attention to how it felt, breathing in through their nose, then out through their mouth. In these moments children seemed to settle down, if at least for a moment. When practicing mindful breathing with the kids at various intervals of the day I would try to focus on the idea, popularized by Victor Frankl, that there is always a split second moment before each reaction where anyone can choose how to react.

This idea motivated much of my thinking as I continued to encourage children to practice mindful breathing, especially during high energy moments where physical aggression was at its peak. One day in November I was sitting on the outdoor bench with Sam who had just kicked a child. This is the same child who had exhibited physical behavior very early on in the year. We sat together as he took some deep breaths, and I asked him what he felt like when he hits and kicks. Sam didn't respond, and I asked him if he felt angry or frustrated. He said yes, and I asked him where he felt the anger and frustration. Sam replied, "Inside". I proceeded to ask "Where inside?" and he pointed to his stomach saying that it felt good to kick another child (Fieldnotes, 11/20/14). My understanding of Sam up until this point was that he struggled in his ability to verbalize how he was feeling, so I was pleased that he was able to communicate this to me. I asked Sam if there was something we could do to help his feelings of anger and frustration go away without being physical. He shrugged his shoulders, and I gave him the suggestion of taking a deep breath.

I had similar conversations with several children, and it was interesting to see their interpretation of it as they went about their days. Sitting at the lunch table one day I overheard a girl say, "I'm feeling silly. I need to take a deep breath" (Fieldnotes; 12/09/14). Ben who once said he couldn't control his body at times declared over a very

rowdy group of children, “Everyone, let’s take a deep breath” (Fieldnotes, 11/10/14). Sitting on the rug working with Legos I observed an altercation between two children. One child who I will call David raised his fists high in the air, and then stopped very suddenly, and put his arms down. I approached David, and said I had noticed he was about to hit the other child, but didn’t. He looked at me, and matter-of-factly stated, “I was going to, and then realized I shouldn’t” (Fieldnotes, 01/16/15). And when having a discussion between Sam and a child he had hit, the other child looked at Sam and said, “Think about it before you do it” (Fieldnotes, 12/09/14). Matthew, a boy who is prone to hitting and kicking summed up the main idea behind mindful breathing when he said, “You just say to yourself, I’m not supposed to do it, and you take a deep breath” (Fieldnotes, 12/09/14).

Whether it was the practices of the singing bowl, mindful breathing, or general discussions teachers were having, at least some of the children were exhibiting a beginning level of mindfulness in the way they thought about their actions, and how stopping and taking a deep breath can help bring a sense of calm. It was also during these moments where I began to wonder about the children’s emotional vocabulary, and their ability to identify emotions. It was apparent, such as in my conversation with Sam that some children had difficulty labeling their emotions such as “angry” or “frustrated.” While reading the books *Angry Dragon* by Thierry Robberecht and *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes I asked children if they had ever been angry or worried before. All of them shook their heads, and said, “No.” I found this intriguing since I had witnessed many children, first hand, exhibiting angry behavior, and some children struggling with anxiety.

I had two thoughts about this realization: the first was that it was understandable that five-year-old children would be unable to identify many emotions considering their development, and the second was I wondered how mindfulness practice could be useful in expanding children's emotional vocabulary. In my understanding of mindfulness I have felt that a major component of being mindful is accepting, and then embracing the many emotions we may feel non-judgmentally and with compassion. How could these children accomplish this if they couldn't identify the feelings they had? How would being able to identify these feelings help them make sense of their invisible emotions?

Discussion of emotions and feelings was already happening when practicing mindful breathing, and children were exhibiting a natural curiosity about new words. During work time Ben and a few other children were having a conversation, and Ben asked, "Who's jealous of someone?" The other assistant teacher asked them what it meant to be jealous, and Ben explains, "It means you don't like somebody" (Fieldnotes, 11/20/14). While Ben's understanding of what it meant to be jealous was flawed, their conversation told me that some of the children were trying to process what many of these words meant. The idea of jealousy proved to be an interesting segue into what would become a major topic of conversation amongst the classroom: kindness.

Writing in my journal in early December I observed, "The kids have been really crazy lately. I've noticed a lot of rambunctious behavior: \_\_\_ jumping on friends on the rug. Children talking over one another at meeting, pushing unprovoked, not listening. Whether it's the holidays or school visits, I don't know, but there is an energy that is stressful" (Journal Entry, 12/08/14). The stressful energy, and behavior that teachers were observing prompted us to begin conversations on kindness, what it meant to be kind, and



what we could do to be kind. I had been continuing the singing bowl and mindful breathing practices during this time, and began to wonder how mindfulness practice could be used to facilitate the class's conversation on kindness. Teachers realized early on that children had a general understanding of what it means to be kind, and that they could identify a kind action. In some of our initial conversations children stated, "Kind means you help another person", and one boy expressed that when one person is kind it can spread: "They be kind to another, then they're kind to another, they're kind to another...spread out through the whole world" (Fieldnotes, 1/06/15). When sitting at closing circle and asking children to share any kind actions they witnessed, they eagerly told of children hugging each other when they were sad, or picking something up that fell on the floor. Teachers began to ask "Is this kind" encouraging children to think before they acted.

This thinking before acting was already a component of the mindfulness practices children were familiar with, and I found the question "Is this kind" to be a wonderful addition to the process. Asking themselves, "Is this kind?" required them to think before they reacted. I wondered if that in asking themselves this question they would develop their self-awareness, and awareness of others. However, their behavior as mentioned in my journal, was sometimes far from kind, and I wondered how their current circumstances of being in the throes of admissions to kindergarten, and the excitement of the holidays would affect them.

Writing in my journal around this time I contemplated how mindfulness, and its ability to create a sense of peace and calm, could promote a culture of kindness: "Feeling calm helps children make better choices, kindness thrives more in a peaceful

environment. No wonder these children are finding it so hard to be kind. There is stress in their lives from school visits, and the holidays are right around the corner (Journal Entry, 12/09/14). Going back to my thinking about identifying our emotions I pondered language's impact in developing kindness: "Being able to label and talk about our emotions allows for us to understand each other better-which results in more kindness (Journal Entry, 12/09/14).

Returning from Winter Break in early January, children were eager to get back into routines, and teachers resumed conversations about kindness. As I continued to think about mindfulness and the way it could facilitate discussions on kindness I introduced a mindfulness exercise which Kaiser Greenland calls "friendly wishes" (2010, p. 68). The exercise is a meditation that calls upon whoever is participating to visualize sending positive thoughts to themselves, than to others. My thinking when introducing the practice to the children was that it would be a way for children to recognize that being kind and wishing well for others not only feels good for others, but for ourselves, as well. Being able to sit or lie down, focus on our breaths, and then imagine sending happy thoughts to ourselves, friends, and grown-ups was something I felt they would be able to understand developmentally as they began to decenter.

I began the practice by having the children lie down, and imagine that they were in one of their favorite places. It could be any place they chose: a beach, their room, the classroom. Then I asked for them to visualize sending friendly wishes to themselves. These wishes included, "I wish to be safe," "I wish to be happy," and "I wish to be cozy." One girl spoke out loud, "I wish to eat all the candy." The meditation then continued in sending friendly wishes to someone in the room, then to someone who is not in the room,

i.e. a grandparent, parent, or friend, and finally back to yourself. Following these first attempts at friendly wishes I wrote how the meditation felt “sloppy” (Journal Entry, 02/11/15). Many children had difficulty laying down, and staying in their personal space. Other children had difficulty being quiet, and some didn’t lie down at all.

Attempting “friendly wishes” a second time I began the practice by discussing safe ways to lie down. Recognizing that perhaps lying down in a safe manner needed to be modeled the children and I discussed how and where we should lay down. One child suggested we should sit in “child’s pose” (Fieldnotes, 02/19/15), a Yoga position where you lay on the floor face down with your arms and legs tucked under your body. This proved to be a wonderful suggestion because it gave the children more physical space. Despite the initial suggestion of child’s pose the second attempt at friendly wishes felt more chaotic than the first. Children still struggled with laying down and being still. One boy very honestly proclaimed, “No one is lying down for friendly wishes because they think it’s boring” (Fieldnotes, 02/19/15).

It became apparent following this experience that I was going to have to modify the meditation in order to scaffold the experience for the children. While I appreciated the student’s proclamation that “friendly wishes” was boring I felt strongly that it could be beneficial if scaffolded for the children in the right way. I thought a lot about Lev Vygotsky’s “Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)” while pondering ways in which to adapt the mindfulness practice. Vygotsky’s ZPD is a concept that recognizes, “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development...under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978, p. 86). I asked myself what the children were capable of,

and what they needed help with. What could they accomplish if I did offer that help? This was a difficult question to answer because all the children were on such different spectrums of development. Some children were able to lay down and be still, while others had difficulty regulating themselves sitting on the rug. Some children were able to imagine sending friendly wishes, while others would talk to their friends or go sit on a stool.

After discussion with my co-teachers, we came to the understanding that the visualization and imagination required for the meditation in “friendly wishes” was too ambiguous for some of the children. I needed to remind myself that my main goal for introducing this mindfulness practice was to promote kindness in the classroom. If children began to dislike the practice like some had already verbalized, it would defeat the purpose of why I was introducing friendly wishes in the first place. Taking all of this into consideration I decided to modify “friendly wishes” where children sat around the rug instead of lying down. I found a small teddy bear a child could hold as they offered friendly wishes to someone in the class. Thus, I adapted the practice from a laying down, quiet exercise to a more interactive exchange where children could hold something concrete, and send friendly wishes directly to someone in the class. I also incorporated the singing bowl as a means to first bring the children together in a calm, relaxed manner; something I had neglected to do initially.

The result of this modification yielded a much more positive experience for teachers and children. While some children continued to have difficulty sitting still (which is always the case when coming to the rug for meeting) I felt there was a clearer message that was being sent from myself and from the children. We were able to talk

more about what a “friendly wish” could be, and some children exhibited a deep understanding of the practice. When given the teddy bear to hold the same boy who told me friendly wishes was boring said, “I wish for \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_ to be safe.” \_\_\_\_ stated, “I wish the whole class would be happy and nice,” while \_\_\_\_ said, “I wish everyone love”. Children also infused wishes with their own flair exhibited in \_\_\_\_’s friendly wish of, “I wish everyone to have kittens and unicorns.” Some of the boys sent wishes having to do with Minecraft, a popular video game (Fieldnotes, 03/03/15). I allowed the children to personalize their wishes in whatever way they chose as long as the wish was positive, and sent a message of kindness.

The process in which I finally came to practicing mindfulness with my class was and still is in a constant state of evolution. Laura M.W. Martin states, “In interaction with others, each person is being changed: they construct knowledge together (2000, p. 82). As the children developed and grew, and as I came to understand their needs more fully, my understanding of how mindfulness could benefit them shifted every time we interacted. I started my journey in a position of uncertainty in regards to how mindfulness practice could be useful, and have found myself going through many stages in order to come to this point. Whatever my methods and processes I have attempted to be flexible, and attuned to the children's specific needs while always asking myself what does and does not work. This ultimately leads to data which I can then analyze in order to continue to evolve the way I approach practicing mindfulness, and progress in constructing knowledge with my students.

### **Data Analysis**

My main sources of data were my fieldnotes and my journal in which I collected daily observations of classroom life, experiences of practicing mindfulness with the students, and general thoughts and feelings about the progress of my study. Looking back at the entries drove much of my work as I attempted to find patterns and themes that would help me make better choices in how to practice mindfulness with the children. This is what ultimately led me to focus on using mindfulness as a way to promote kindness in the classroom. I concluded my study with asking my students two formal interview questions that would help me better understand where their perception of kindness within the classroom stood since I began doing “friendly wishes”. Amongst the class, the general definition of kindness and understanding of being friendly was helping someone in need, sharing, and being conscious of other’s needs.

The main themes that arose amongst my fieldnotes were: children’s ability or inability to express themselves emotionally, and general observations of kindness or lack thereof amongst the students. The first theme was a pattern that arose naturally while the second was a theme I began to notice after teachers began discussions of kindness, and I began conducting the “friendly wishes” practice with the students. As mentioned previously in the methodology, my inquiry into how children were able to identify and make sense of their emotions stemmed from informal conversations I had with students, as well as observations in the way children used language, and how they were able to identify emotions when one arose, e.g. anger when a child took something from them, or frustration when they couldn’t put a puzzle together with ease.

The questions I asked the children in conclusion of my study were: “Does the classroom seem friendlier?” and “Do you think about being kind?” The wording of the questions changed slightly with each child, but the main point was always the same. First I wanted to assess what they thought about the environment of the classroom in terms of kindness, and then I wanted to inquire if they ever thought about kindness themselves. Was “friendly wishes” a mindfulness practice that could promote kindness amongst the classroom?

I interviewed most of the children during work time; a time of day where they are able to make their own choice about where they want to be in the room. I chose this time of day to do most of my interviewing because it is a relaxed period and children are generally in good spirits. What I found from the answers that children gave me was that there was beginning to be a shift in the way they thought about kindness, but the degree to which they thought about it was as varied as their personalities.

I was able to interview seventeen out of the twenty children in my class. When I asked “Does the classroom seem friendlier?” seven children said yes, eight children said no, and two children said they didn’t know. Thus, about half the children stated they had noticed more friendliness in the class, while the other half responded they had not seen a change. One child responded, “Yes, there’s a little more kind than we started school” (Fieldnotes, 03/06/15). Some of the children acknowledged that while there did seem to be a kinder environment in the classroom there was still room for improvement. One boy said he “kind of” thought the classroom was friendlier. He went on to say, “I don’t see everybody being kind. \_\_\_is bossy” (Fieldnotes, 03/09/15) One girl replied, “Yes and no. Because the girls are good and the boys are bad” (Fieldnotes, 03/09/15). Realizing I

approached two girls in the midst of an argument one of the girls said that she had noticed a kinder environment, “but \_\_\_ isn’t being friendly” (Fieldnotes, 03/09/15) It is important to note that I asked this same child the question once more and when she was not having an argument with her friend she proclaimed, “Yes!” (Fieldnotes, 3/12/15).

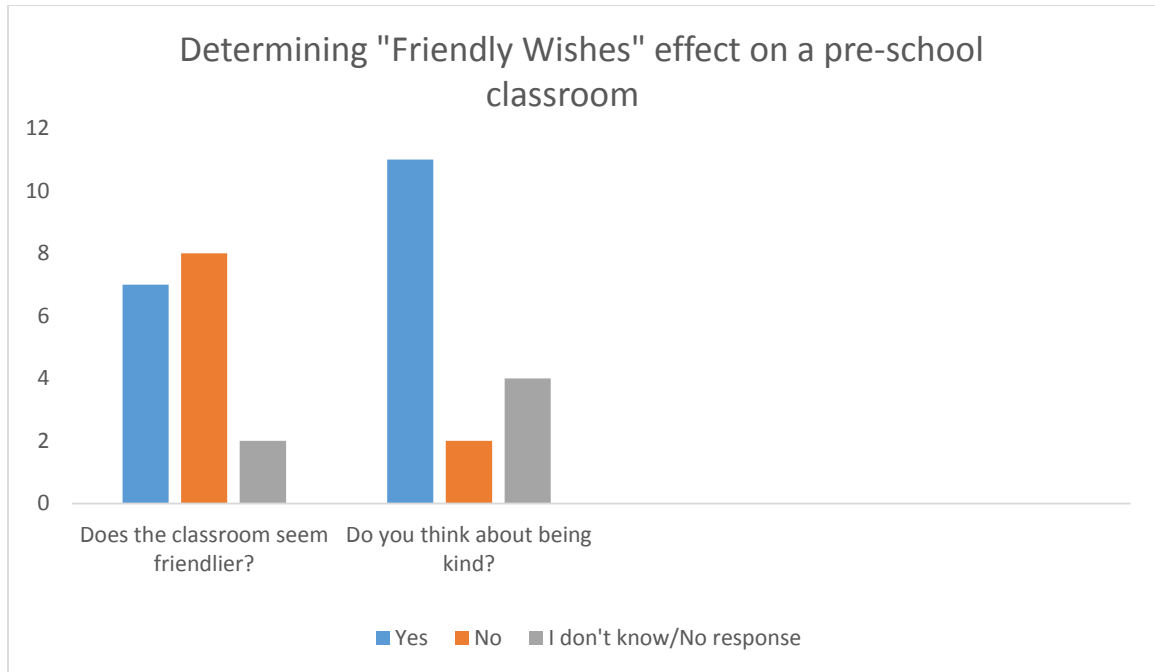
The responses I received from the question, “Do you think about being kind?” were slightly different and spoke to an interesting aspect of what it is like being a five year old. The first question I asked required the students to think outside of themselves, while the second required them to look within. Of the seventeen children, eleven said they did think about being kind, two said they did not, and four didn’t give me a response. Some children who replied “yes” described situations where they felt they had been kind. One child stated, “Yes. I did something kind on the roof. I asked \_\_\_ if he wanted a bike” (Fieldnotes, 03/06/15). One girl said, “Yes. I think about people’s feelings because I don’t want people to say I don’t want to be your friend” (Fieldnotes, 03/06/15). Two other children replied, “Yes,” explaining that, “I try to be a helper,” and, “I’m kind a lot every day” (Fieldnotes, 03/12/15).

While there were fewer children who replied they did not think about being kind, they had reasons behind their thinking. One boy explained, “Not really. Because every time people are chasing us, and I don’t really have time to think” (Fieldnotes, 03/12/15). One child initially responded that she did think about being kind, then recanted saying, “Actually \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ make me unkind” (Fieldnotes, 03/11/15). Whatever their answer, I was intrigued by the student’s reasoning and explanation of why they answered yes or no to both of my questions.



The lack of responses from some children could have been because of several reasons, and when I received hesitance from these children I didn't push the matter. My thinking behind why some of these children didn't give me a "yes" or "no" answer has several components. The first reason could be that they simply did not feel like responding. A second component could be because my wording of the question was too complicated or they didn't understand. A third could be that they didn't have an opinion either way, and thus gave no response. Whatever the reasoning for their lack of response, perhaps their lack of response was a response, and could speak to their unique development in terms of comprehending kindness, their perception of kindness, or simply their mood at the very moment I asked the question.

Taking into consideration the data collected from the first question, I thought that perhaps the second question would also result in divided answers. However, I was mistaken in that eleven students did express that they thought about being kind. Not only did they say they thought about being kind, but they gave examples of their kindness. So then, considering most of the students thought about being kind why did more students not respond that the overall classroom environment seemed friendlier? It would seem that there would be a correlation between one's thinking about being kind and the collective classroom seeming friendlier. Taking this into account I have come to several theories about why and how this may be possible amongst a classroom of five year olds.



In *Yardsticks* Chip Wood explains, “Five-year-olds are not selfish, but they are at the center of their own universe and often find it hard to see the world from any other point of view...they often have trouble expressing empathy if a conflict affects them directly...but if a classmate across the room is crying, a crowd of caring fives may gather” (2007, p.58). In my experience with five year olds I find this statement to be very true. The data from my questions may speak to this moment in a child’s life, for while most of the children were able to say “Yes. I am kind”, some could not yet see it among their classmates. The variations in the data may also speak to the different levels each child is in as he or she moves away from the more egocentric aspects of his or her development. Five-year-olds can be naturally caring, as seen daily in their concern for children who are upset, yet at the same time if a conflict involves them they may be unable to see both sides.

This dynamic is also revealed in the way children are motivated to be kind at this age. When one of the girls responded that she was kind in the way she thought about feelings because she didn't want people to not want to be her friend, she explained, in essence, a five year old's inner dialogue as they navigate the world of friendship. The children recognize that in order to have friends you need to be kind, but that kindness may stem from a more self-centered motivation at this age. However, they are beginning to show empathy and compassion, and an understanding that their actions affect others. This was evident in the child's response that they try to be a helper.

Friendship, the formation of friendships, and connecting with peers can be a large component of the preschool classroom, and can fuel a majority of the social-emotional development for my students. It was evident among the data that I collected from my interview questions that friendship played a large role in children making sense of whether or not someone was kind. In fact, it was both sides of the spectrum that influenced this dichotomy: children who were close could just as easily think another child was unkind based on their current situation. Just the same, children who rarely spent time together could easily single each other out for not being friendly.

This was most noticeable in my interview with two girls who were working at the writing and drawing table. It became apparent that I had entered a moment of animosity; over *what* I never quite gathered, but both girls were not pleased with each other. They made this clear when they both answered my question, "Does the classroom seem friendlier?" with a very blunt "Without \_\_\_ it would be kind" (Fieldnotes, 03/09/15). When I asked the same question of one of their classmates, he proclaimed that he had not noticed everyone being kind. In particular he said one boy "is bossy" (Fieldnotes,

03/09/15). These two boys are not generally seen interacting with each other so I found it intriguing that he had noticed this behavior, and that to him being bossy was considered an unfriendly behavior.

The issue of gender also revealed itself in some of the responses I received from the children. While I observe generally positive interactions amongst the girls and boys of the class, a divide has begun to surface as the year moves along. The boys will often sit with other boys on the rug, and will choose activities that involve building or construction during work time. Conversations of Minecraft, zombies, and Star Wars are frequently heard during arrival. The girls gather together in small groups talking about unicorns, bringing in small purses from home filled with trinkets. Sitting around the snack table there will usually involve some sort of commentary on the number of boys versus the number of girls who are sitting at the table. If there are three boys and two girls the boys have won. The opposite is also true with the girls declaring victory if there are more girls at a table.

As these differences amongst boys and girls arise it is not surprising that some of the children in my class would perceive the other half as either “bad” or “good”. Macoby and Jacklin (1987) suggest that this reasoning may be supported by the fact that boys can be more inclined to a physical, roughhousing behavior than girls. While this is a broad statement and certainly does not include all boys or all girls I have most definitely observed this behavior in some boys which then causes the girls to retreat or find another activity. Just the other day a game of playful chase among both genders became a source of hostility when the boys seemed to lack a boundary between harmless fun, and aggressive behavior. They began pulling on the girl’s clothes, and in some cases

wrestling them to the ground. One girl started to cry, while others could be heard loudly ordering the boys to “stop it!” (Fieldnotes, 03/13/15).

Whatever the reasoning or influence behind the student’s responses it is apparent that there are many factors at play for five year olds as they begin to make sense of the world, and their place in that world. Practicing “friendly wishes” and general discussions about being kind had created a space where I could talk to the students about kindness which resulted in roughly half of my class recognizing changes in the friendliness of the classroom. Reviewing the data from my interview questions and daily journal entries it is apparent that five year olds are complex and ever-changing. Their growth is influenced by a myriad of factors including, but not limited to: social-emotional development, understanding of gender and friendship, and ways in which the adults approach these matters. In this case introducing mindfulness practice, and the practice of “friendly wishes” aimed to promote their natural development in understanding kindness and compassion.

### **Research Findings**

Through this study I have come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complex and varied nature of a child’s development, in particular the development of five-year-olds and the way in which they navigate their worlds. At the beginning of my study I sought out to discover whether mindfulness practice could be utilized in my pre-school classroom. I did not know how, or in what way I would embark on said mission, but it was quickly revealed to me through my observations of the children’s behaviors and in conversations with my co-teachers. These particular children were in need of something that could alleviate the stress of going through admissions to kindergarten and

the daily obstacles they face as five-year-olds: making friends, learning to be in a school environment, and constructing knowledge of what it is like to be a child living in New York City. That something seemed to be a focus on kindness, what it means to be kind, how to be kind to each other, and to ourselves, and the benefits of nurturing a compassionate environment.

I've learned that mindful awareness when introduced to children can be beneficial, but that the way in which it is beneficial is dependent on the child's development. What is exciting about this understanding is that no matter where a child stands, in terms of their development, you can meet them where they are, modifying mindfulness practices to better suit them. Some children responded to the calming intentions of the singing bowl or utilized breathing exercises on their own. As seen in my data about half the children began to see a difference in the way the culture of the classroom was kinder, and more were thinking about the ways in which they were kind. These effects could be a combination of several factors, "friendly wishes" being one of them, but also general discussions about kindness, and encouraging the children to think about actions that were kind.

While I have garnered a deeper understanding of the way in which mindfulness practice can be utilized in a classroom, I am also left with a whole slew of new questions. In the attempt to answer questions I have uncovered more questions, and it seems natural to embrace the uncertainty. For as a teacher I feel that it is the journey in seeking out the answers that proves to be most valuable. By observing the children, reflecting on your own teaching practice, and asking how changes can be made to better suit the children we aim to stay in a position of constant wonder. Mindfulness practice aids in this process so

that we may be compassionate, patient, and non-judgmental of all that comes with being a teacher.

### **Implications for Further Research**

As mentioned previously, I feel that in asking questions I am left with even more questions, and in seeking out more answers I end my study assessing the ways in which further research is needed in terms of bringing mindfulness practice to the classroom. The main conclusion I have drawn from this study is that the discussion of kindness, compassion, and empathy in the classroom should be a vital component to any curriculum. The social-emotional development of children is just as important as the academic. It is particularly important in terms of the development of five year olds. What are the benefits of working with children five and under in nurturing their understanding of compassion and kindness at a young age? How would this affect their brain development, and what differences could be seen in children who are encouraged to think and contemplate kindness at a young age? Furthermore, how and in what ways could mindfulness practice be used to implement these discussions? Would an environment where mindfulness is practiced be more conducive to learning?

At the commencement of my study I noticed that many children lacked an extensive emotional vocabulary. There could be many reasons for this including the fact that they are five, particular aspects of their development that contributed to an inability to identify their emotions, or the adults in their life did not focus on the identification of their emotions. Whatever the cause I believe that there should be more research on the influence of identifying emotions, and general well-being. Is there a connection between

social-emotional health, and the self-awareness that leads to being able to identify emotions? And is there any link between this self-awareness, and the capacity to be kind?

While all of these implications focus on children, I also think it is important to continue research on the way mindfulness practice can be used for teachers. While there were many questions about how I could introduce mindfulness exercises to the children, it was never more transparent as I embarked on my first year of teaching that it was vital to have my own mindfulness practice. In fact, I may even argue that a teacher must have an established mindfulness practice of his or her own in order to introduce it to others. Thus, I believe a call for more research into the benefits of mindfulness practice for teachers is crucial. How can practicing mindfulness help alleviate certain stressors of a teacher's life? How would a teacher's personal practice effect the general atmosphere of a classroom? How would it effect the teacher/student relationship?

Further research could also be conducted on this particular study, and the way mindfulness practice can promote a culture of kindness. I began practicing "friendly wishes" with my students half way through the year. What results would I have seen if the exercise was part of the classroom routine from the beginning? What results will I see as I continue to use "friendly wishes" as a component to the class's kindness curriculum? As I become more comfortable with the principles of "metta" or "friendly wishes" how will that spill over into the children's experience? It seems the possibilities are endless, yet underneath the surface is a yearning to teach our children, not only the most important academics, but that human beings are interdependent on each other. An ability to express kindness and compassion, to see other points of view, and to wish happiness for others has power. This idea will fuel my teaching practice as I continue on this journey.



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### *Appendix A- Mindfulness Exercises*

Following are two of the mindfulness exercises mentioned in the study. I will describe them in the way that they were used with this particular class, but modifications and adaptations are encouraged in order to best use them with different students.

#### **Singing Bowl Exercise-Promotes attention and listening\***

1. Have the children sit in a relaxed position.
2. Invite them to close their eyes if they are so inclined and/or put their hand on their stomach.
3. Explain that you are going to ring or sound the bowl and to listen carefully.
4. When they can no longer hear the sound they should raise their hand.
5. During transitions I will gently pat their shoulder once they have raised their hand to signal they should line up or wash their hands for lunch.
6. If it is not a transition, once everyone has raised their hand you can ask questions such as, “Where did you hear the sound?” or “What does your breathing feel like?”
7. The singing bowl can also be used to signal students at the end of a period.

\*Adapted from singing bowl exercises described in Thich Nhat Hanh’s *Planting Seeds* and Susan Kaiser Greenland’s *The Mindful Child*.

#### **Friendly Wishes Meditation- Promotes awareness of kindness and compassion\***

1. Depending on the age of the class and space you can have students either sit in a circle or lay down.
2. Ask the children to imagine themselves in one of their favorite places: their room, the beach, the classroom, etc.
3. Ask the children to send “friendly wishes” to themselves: I wish to be happy, I wish to be safe, I wish to have fun.
4. Then ask the children to send “friendly wishes” to someone in the class: I wish for you to be peaceful, I wish for you to be healthy.
5. Next, ask the children to send friendly wishes to someone not in the room: their parents, a grandparent, a neighbor.
6. End the meditation asking the children to once again send wishes to themselves: I wish to be strong, I wish to be happy, etc.
7. For my class it was best when children took turns, and came up with wishes themselves, sending them directly to someone in the room.

\*Adapted from the “friendly wishes” exercise described in Susan Kaiser Greenland’s *The Mindful Child*.

## *Appendix B- Bibliography of Mindfulness Books*

Below are books that I found to be most helpful while conducting this study, along with picture books that are useful in facilitating discussions with children about mindfulness practice.

### **Books for Teachers and Parents**

Hanh, T.N (2011). *Planting seeds: Practicing mindfulness with children*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Publishing.

Greenland, S. K. (2010). *The mindful child*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Jennings, P. (2015). *Mindfulness for teachers: Simple skills for peace and productivity in the classroom*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Snel, E. (2013). *Sitting still like a frog: Mindfulness exercises for kids (and their parents)*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

### **General Mindfulness Books**

Brach, T. (2003). *Radical acceptance: Embracing your life with the heart of a buddha*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2006). *Coming to our senses: Healing ourselves and the world through mindfulness*.

Kornfield, J. (1993). *A path with heart: A guide through the perils and promises of spiritual life*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

Kornfield, J. (2008). *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of buddhist psychology*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.

### **Picture Books**

Henkes, K. (2000). *Wemberly worried*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.

Muth, J.J. (2002). *The three questions*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

Muth, J.J. (2005). *Zen shorts*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

Muth, J.J. (2008). *Zen ties*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

Robberecht, T. (2003). *Angry dragon*: New York, NY: Clarion Books.

### *Appendix C- Other Mindfulness Resources*

Below are general mindfulness resources that have provided me with inspiration and encouragement on a variety of mindfulness topics.

#### **Podcasts**

**Tara Brach-** Weekly meditations and discussions on various topics concerning mindfulness.

#### **Apps**

**Headspace-** A great app for beginner and advanced meditators. Guides you through ten minute daily meditations touching on specific mindfulness principles such as focus, attention, and being in the present moment.

#### **Audio CD**

**Mindfulness and the Brain-** Lecture and course series given by Jack Kornfield and Daniel Siegel who discuss the impact mindfulness practice has on the development of the brain.