

I BREATHE THE WORDS: CHILDHOOD MINDFULNESS IN DAILY LIFE, A
HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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by

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Approval of the Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy in Mind-Body Medicine

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Abstract

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Mindfulness, the intentional practice and result of paying attention, on purpose, to one's moment-by-moment experience, without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), is a promising adjunct intervention for children addressing a variety of academic, behavioral, psychological, and somatic challenges. This qualitative study explored the child's lived experience applying mindfulness skills to daily life to address a gap in the research, deepening a collective understanding of children's lived experiences practicing mindfulness. This study aimed to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the essence of this phenomenon through the text of many children's experiences. This work answered the research question, "What is the child's experience of using mindfulness in daily life?"

Hermeneutic phenomenology was the methodology for this work as it focused on the lived experience of children and the lens that my unique lived experience as a mindfulness educator and researcher offers. Thus, I hermeneutically analyzed 1,136 quotations from children found in my reflective teaching notes during 2014–2018, before this study's inception, in response to the question, "How did you use your mindfulness in the last week?"

This work offers a literature review that provides a foundational definition, an in-depth exploration of the components of mindfulness, the impact of mindfulness on the brain,

developmental theory, trauma and ACEs, mindfulness interventions that take place both in and out of school, the involvement of parents and teachers in students learning mindfulness, awareness and regulation practices, the impact of regular practice, participant benefit, and the impact of self-selective participation. Thematic analysis, largely informed by van Manen's (1990) work, brought to light findings relevant to these areas.

This study's findings established that children's experiences with mindfulness allowed them to stay with their experiences, navigate circumstances and relationships, regulate emotional overwhelm, enact confidence and care, and thrive and blossom during the particular parameters of childhood. This work offers these findings alongside a detailed discussion.

Mindfulness education for children benefits both children and the parents and teachers who nurture them. Findings from this work may offer support for social-emotional learning SEL work; implications for future research set these results in a context for the broader research community.

Dedication

First and foremost, I dedicate this dissertation to my mother. Thank you for giving me life, for raising me in your authenticity, and for teaching me to “climb every mountain” to reach my dreams. Thank you for raising me with an understanding of true giving and the impact we can have on the next generation. Without your unwavering support, I would not be penning these words, achieving this milestone, nor climbing this mountain.

To my dear Grandma, whose heart still beat when I was accepted into my Ph.D. program, who had the opportunity to see the smile of joy on my face, and who I held in my arms as I read articles during my first semester of this program. I recall how we laughed when you put on my master’s cap and gown for fun, and I recall how I held you as you slipped from this earth; I cross this milestone without you here, knowing how proud you would be.

To my late father. Thank you for sharing the breathing world with me for 208 days. The world went 13,601 days without a Dr. Terrizzi, and while I may not be a surgeon as you were, I stand in your legacy ready to use my newly acquired title to help people experience more well-being and live more vibrant lives.

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Lastly, I express deep and endless gratitude to the children who spoke the words that I recorded in my teaching notes over the years and to those who spoke words that are lost somewhere beyond memory. Teaching mindfulness to my students became more than a passion: it brought me back from the edge of burnout, added meaning to my days, and was a life raft in the often-turbulent waters I experienced as a school librarian. Finding the glimmering moment in challenging days kept me sane; teaching mindfulness supplied so many glimmering moments. Little did I know that my reflective notes would lead to this dissertation. While I am proud and grateful for this accomplishment, my heart is even warmer knowing that I contributed to these

children's experiences and that their words allowed me into their lifeworlds. Thank you for being willing to try out something new with me, and for honoring me with your experiences.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When I read a chapter book, I breathe the words.

—First Grader

Mindfulness is an increasingly popular behavioral and academic intervention (Zenner et al., 2014). Mindfulness, comprising any of a variety of practices, is the application of intentional, non-judgmental focus on any given moment of life (Perry-Parrish et al., 2016). Marlatt and Kristeller (1999) defined mindfulness as “bringing one’s complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis” (p. 68). While the concept is simple, in most cases, mindfulness requires significant practice to achieve fluency with the skills (Monshat et al., 2013). Learning mindfulness can increase awareness and curiosity directed either inwardly or outwardly while enhancing emotional regulation, attention regulation, discomfort tolerance, executive functioning, acceptance, and one’s capacity for coping (Dariotis et al., 2016; Moesgen et al., 2019; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016).

Scholarly attention to childhood mindfulness (which includes mindfulness as a phenomenon, mindfulness as a practice, teaching mindfulness, or a dedicated mindfulness curriculum or intervention) has also increased significantly in recent years. A quick search in ProQuest Central for the terms “child*” and “mindfulness” revealed 280 articles published in 2000 and 10,571 in the first 11 months of 2020. With the addition of the search term “school,” the current decade offers 42,098 published articles, compared to 6,877 in the preceding decade. Most of this research is quantitative, with little attention to the child’s experience practicing mindfulness. Further, most measures of childhood mindfulness focus on academics and behavior. My interest is in how the child applies mindfulness practice to daily life. Metaphorically, this is akin to exploring how a child reports using math in daily life, rather than looking at math test

scores, measures of participation during math class, or any of the variety of school-based measurements of school-taught subjects. Due to my interest in this phenomenon's experiential nature, this study uses a hermeneutic phenomenological lens to explore how the child uses mindfulness practices taught in school in the greater context of daily life, both in and out of the school setting. The next section covers the background of this area of focus.

Background

Mindfulness, classically defined by Kabat-Zinn (1994), is the intentional practice and result of paying attention, on purpose, to one's moment-by-moment experience, without judgment. The UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center defines mindfulness "as paying attention to present moment experiences with openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be with what is" (About MARC, n.d., para. 4). Langer (2014) defined mindfulness as an intentional mental state characterized by open receptivity that employs direct observation and can observe multiple perspectives.

The current body of literature on children's mindfulness use is largely quantitative. While these measurements are useful in certain contexts, qualitative research helps paint a broader and more comprehensive experiential picture of the practice and experience of the phenomenon. Further, most of the qualitative studies conducted to date focus on one or a few children, deeply exploring the individual experience. Both quantitative and qualitative research primarily focus on clinical populations or children with diagnoses. Additionally, when one looks at mindfulness research, it is critical to note that "mindfulness" is not one entity. Both existing and future studies may be so vastly different in terms of practice, application, and duration (daily and programmatically) that findings are not comparable.

This project's unique aim was to add to the research conversation by offering a qualitative exploration of *many* children's experiences across a wide array of identifying factors (age, gender, race, socioeconomic, ability), and to give voice to children's experiences. This research sought to fill the gap that is currently unexplored: How does a child articulate how they experience and apply mindfulness in daily life? and further: How do *many* children respond to this question?

Problem Statement

This research aimed to contribute the voice of children's lived experience using mindfulness to the growing and largely quantitative academic conversation about children's mindfulness practice. Words can portray a depth that numbers cannot. As noted earlier, qualitative data elicited from many voices are absent from the literature. Further, the bulk of studies conducted to this point focused on adult subjects, and it is unknown whether these results apply to children as well (Perry-Parrish et al., 2016), particularly in the areas of experience and utilization (Hutchinson et al., 2018). The literature reviewed for this study provides a foundational definition of mindfulness, an in-depth exploration of the components of mindfulness, the impact of mindfulness on the brain, developmental theory, trauma and ACEs, mindfulness interventions that take place both in and out of school, the involvement of parents and teachers in children learning mindfulness, awareness and regulation practices, the impact of regular mindfulness practice, participant benefit, and the impact of self-selective participation, all of which situate this work in various fields.

Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) noted, "one significant gap in the literature is the general omission of the child's voice in how they experience and benefit from mindfulness-based intervention" (p. 304), which can offer insight into how and why children use mindfulness

techniques in their daily lives. Cheek et al. (2017) supported this notion, stating that qualitative studies “could provide better understandings of students’ experiences of participating in [mindfulness training], as well as their perceptions of the impacts of classroom-based [mindfulness training]” (p. 2565). Cheek et al. (2017) further posited that “the inclusion of qualitative approaches may help to contextualize the findings of quantitative [mindfulness training] studies and improve our understanding of the mechanisms of action of these [mindfulness training] programs” (p. 2565).

Qualitative research offers researchers the opportunity to gain insight into the nuances present within quantitative discoveries (Hutchinson et al., 2018), to inform experiential significance with or without statistically significant results, and to help cultivate optimal programming (McCabe et al., 2017). The present study, purposely from a qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological standpoint, aimed to fill this gap in the literature and explore the essence of the phenomenon of the experience of elementary children using mindfulness in daily life through the sacred text of many children’s experiences and give voice to many young voices. The next section outlines the purpose of this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to utilize hermeneutic phenomenology to delve into the lived experience of the child applying mindfulness skills to daily life situations. This work sought to obtain an understanding of the meaning of the mindfulness practice for the children.

My research goal was to address a gap in the research, thereby deepening a collective understanding of children’s lived experiences participating in mindfulness practice. This aim was both personal and scholarly: it was personal insofar as this is a deep interest of mine, as I have

taught mindfulness to children for several years, and it was scholarly insofar as I aim to contribute qualitative, experiential insight to the body of extant research in the field of mindfulness for children.

This dissertation project sought to understand the child's lived experience practicing mindfulness during daily life activities. I used hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches to explore the meaning of the lived experience found in children's words and uncover its essence. I applied this methodology to 1,136 quotations from children recorded in my personal teaching notes depicting how they used mindfulness in their daily lives. I interpreted this data by applying van Manen's (1997) method of analysis. Next, I offer the research question for this study, followed by the significance of this research.

Research Question

“What is the child's experience of using mindfulness in daily life?”

Significance of the Study

This research provided an in-depth exploration of the dimensionality of how children utilize mindfulness in daily life. The results presented portray the meaning of the child's lived experience autonomously using mindfulness techniques in various settings and circumstances in daily life. Children's lived experiences practicing mindfulness show broad, often relational, applicability in many areas of their lives, and they often reference this phenomenon through their bodies. The lifeworld (Dahlberg et al., 2008) of one child informed another child's lifeworld. The children could have chosen to apply this technique to almost any experience in life, and thus, I often found the threads of similarity between experiences even more intriguing.

This work may contribute to the academic literature centering on children's mindfulness, including education, parenting, psychology, mindfulness, and development. The findings may set

the stage for broadening the research conversation to include the voices of many children practicing mindfulness, to show where they place value in the practice, and how they use it in their lives. Knowing this can be practical for those creating and teaching mindfulness curricula, informing the foci of curricula, and setting the stage for expected experiential outcomes and uses of the practice. Classroom teachers and parents can use this study's results to understand how their children may employ mindfulness practice under various conditions and in various venues. This knowledge can empower children themselves as they reach potential signposts along their practice route as they grow and develop mindfully.

I hope that researchers, educators, parents, and mindfulness practitioners incorporate key learnings from this work when they create curricula or lessons, teach mindfulness to children, design future studies, and when they incorporate these skills into their own lives. The next two sections offer the researcher background and a researcher reflection.

Researcher

I began my career as an elementary school librarian with both teaching certification and a Master's degree in Library Science. As soon as I encountered mindfulness and its benefits in my own life, I recognized the value of the practices for children and immediately started to share what I knew with my students. I participated in the Mindful Schools Year-Long Training during 2013–2014, after which I became a Mindful Schools' Certified Teacher. I continued my own learning over the years; as of this writing, I have participated in 121 (non-consecutive) days of silent meditation retreats and have led two of my own retreats. I taught mindfulness to my students with principal approval as a component of their library class time alongside research skills and literary appreciation. I often worked with children whose behavior was extremely challenging, and introducing mindfulness transformed my individual and class-level interactions

with my students. While I have always been passionate about books and stories, it became clear to me that I was even more passionate about teaching mindfulness and that the children's stories and anecdotes highlighted the vibrancy of this work for me.

Researcher Reflection

As is aligned with hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher's preconceptions are integral to research design; therefore, I share my thoughts with you. When I taught mindfulness in the classroom, I heard the children reporting on how they used the various mindfulness practices that I taught to make their lives easier, better, more bearable, more joyous, and more ethical, among other benefits. Regardless of the context or content of the child's experience, I could see the child's pride in their use of the mindfulness skills and how the resultant actions positively impacted others in the child's life. One does not generally see experiential results like this in teaching and the mindfulness literature. Regardless of the age difference, my students and I were all equally alive on any given day and thereby equally capable of experiencing and perceiving each passing moment. I appreciated the children's authenticity and the way their words spoke to the essential nature of experiencing mindfulness; this is what I want to share with the world through the children's expressions.

I share this through the children's words. I have a deep respect for children and appreciate that in having fewer responsibilities to attend to, sometimes they are more present than adults. I wish to portray the accessibility of mindfulness progress and development by giving the children's words and experiences to the world. Providing insight into children's mindfulness use can broaden and buoy the prospects and possibility for lifespan mindfulness practice and adult mindfulness. Further, insight into how children use mindfulness can also orient the reader or researcher toward natural human uses of and alignment with mindfulness

practice. A profound exploration of experience and process across the life span can paint a more complete picture of the impact of mindfulness practice on the human organism.

The children's words can speak to what is possible within experience. While many children and adults struggle with attention and emotional regulation, cultivating these capacities shows up in life and in experience beyond what surveys and statistics can portray. Showing a practice's effectiveness and knowing a practitioner's experience are nowhere near equivalent. In sharing experience, this work seeks to sit next to the quantitative work, in conversation with the growing field of data.

I want all children, regardless of background and experience, to have less suffering in their lives. As a teacher, people told me many times that I should "teach mindfulness to the kids who *really* need it." I believe that you cannot tell by looking who is suffering silently and obediently as some, or many, do. Quantitative data cannot show this level of relief the way that qualitative data can. If there is even one child whose life was or will be made better by this work, then I am grateful to offer it. As a reflective practice, hermeneutic phenomenology brings the lifeworld of the teacher teaching mindfulness to meet the experiential world evidenced through children's words, along with the opportunity to weave this work with the current research conversation. The next section outlines the limitations and delimitations of this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study's limitations included the fact that I did not conduct interviews for this study's express purposes; instead, I relied on immutable, archived statements, which prevented me from exploring new facets with depth or asking additional questions. Further, archival data is located firmly in the past; while this writing is only 2 to 6 years after the children spoke these words, it is possible (particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic) that results might differ if one

conducted this study today. Additionally, as I was the children’s out-of-classroom teacher, holding a relationship that endured before, during, and after the lessons from which I drew these notes, these results may be influenced by this level of connection. The primary delimitation for this study is that the range of the textual descriptions inherently set the study’s parameters as they already existed in my teaching notes; the situational context set the scope from inception as including the words of elementary students with whom I worked. The next section provides key terms used throughout this study.

Definition of Terms

Key terms used throughout this study include the following:

ACEs: Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are challenging experiences that one endures during childhood and include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, physical and emotional neglect, and exposure to mental illness, violence, divorce, substance abuse, and incarcerated family members (Walsh et al., 2019).

Amygdala: Brain structure “involved in the appraisal of meaning, the processing of social signals, and the activation of emotion... plays a crucial role in coordinating perceptions of memory and behavior” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-4).

Anterior Cingulate Cortex: Brain structure that “Coordinates a number of processes, including the focus of attention, the linkage of thinking with feeling, the registration of bodily states such as pain, and the social representation of interactions” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-4).

Attention: “Attention is defined as the cognitive process of attending to one or fewer sensory stimuli (i.e., external and internal) while ignoring or suppressing all other irrelevant sensory inputs” (Bater & Jordan, 2019, p. 1); it comprises four components: “attention

regulation, body awareness, emotional regulation, changing the perspective of oneself” (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 2).

Awareness: Bringing conscious attention to the fullness of the task, situation, or emotion one finds oneself engaged with (Sanoveriana & Fourianalistyawati, 2017).

Bottom-Up Processing: Brain processes occurring in the limbic areas, often involving raw sensory information from the peripheral nervous system and characterized by reactivity (Siegel, 2012).

Child Practicing Mindfulness: For the purposes of this study, a child receiving the Mindful Schools curriculum in school and practicing mindfulness (through awareness and regulation) in daily life.

Decentering: Decentering is the process by which one applies mindful observation to the facets of experience and consciousness with a sense of non-identification and detachment, which further allows a close observation, an understanding of fluctuations and transience, and the freedom, mental and emotional capacity, and mental flexibility to choose one’s response (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017; Hölzel et al., 2011; Zoogman et al., 2015).

Default Mode Network: “The resting state of brain function that is present when an individual is given no task to perform” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-21).

Executive Function: Functions attributed to prefrontal areas of the brain, including “the regulation of attention, emotion, memory, behavioral response, and planning” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-31).

Frontal Lobes: Brain structure that “makes linkages among widely interconnected processes fundamental to higher thinking and planning” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-34).

Heartfulness: A child-friendly term I use in teaching the concept of “Metta.”

Insula: “A structure in the middle prefrontal cortex that links bodily processes to higher cortical areas... involved in the process of interoception (awareness of internal bodily sensations). Its direct link to other middle prefrontal areas, such as the anterior cingulate, by way of spindle cells has been associated with forms of self-awareness” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-39).

Metta: “‘Metta’ means friendliness or open-heartedness... deep-courageous compassion is for those we may not know, may not like, trust or feel affection for” (Gilbert, 2017, pp. 9–10).

Mindfulness: The intentional practice and result of paying attention, on purpose, to one’s moment-by-moment experience, without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), “paying attention to present moment experiences with openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be with what is” (About MARC, n.d., para. 4), an intentional mental state characterized by open receptivity that employs direct observation and can observe multiple perspectives (Langer, 2014).

Neuroplasticity: “The overall process with which brain connections are changed by experience, including the way we pay attention” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-57), including changes in activation and also neurogenesis (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

Non-School-Based Intervention: Mindfulness interventions or programs that children participate in any context outside of school, including therapeutic contexts.

Prefrontal Cortex: “Central to the process of creating meaning and emotion and enabling a flexibility of response... includes the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, ventral areas such as the insula, and medial structures such as the orbitofrontal cortex, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-61).

School-Based Intervention: Mindfulness interventions or programs that children participate in at school with their class or in small groups or school counseling settings, or in afterschool programs that take place on school premises.

Self-Regulation: Mental effort used to control and bring intentionality to one's internal state, processing, and functioning (Heshmati & Ahmadkhanloo, 2017).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): "The process through which children and adults acquire the knowledge, attitude, and skills to: recognize and manage their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively" (Payton et al., 2008, p. 5).

Top-Down Processing: Brain processes that originate in the cortex and higher areas of the forebrain, often characterized by thoughtfulness, reflection, stability, regulation, and cognitive flexibility (Siegel, 2012).

The next section provides an overview of how I organized this study.

Organization of the Study

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces this research, providing information on the background of this study. I provide the problem that this study addresses to establish this research's purpose and a foundation for the research question. I offer the significance of this study to the field, limitations and delimitations of this research, and definitions of key terminology that I use in this report, along with a researcher reflection.

In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the current literature in the field, including an in-depth exploration of the components of mindfulness, the impact of mindfulness on the brain, developmental theory, trauma and ACEs, mindfulness interventions that take place both in and

out of school, the involvement of parents and teachers in children learning mindfulness, awareness and regulation practices, the impact of regular mindfulness practice, participant benefit, and the impact of self-selective participation.

Chapter 3 offers an exploration of the background of hermeneutic phenomenology to establish the rationale for applying this methodology to the study at hand. In this chapter I provide an overview of the research design, the processes for data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, the establishment of rigor and trustworthiness, and the intention for results presentation.

In Chapter 4, I present this study's findings. I offer a review of the data collection and analysis procedures as I applied them, alongside the frameworks that materialized with each analysis cycle. I present and support the themes and subthemes that emerged through this process.

Chapter 5 presents an analysis and interpretation of this study's findings, relating them to the research question and current literature. I offer a discussion of these findings, implications for practice, an outline of the process ensuring the data's trustworthiness, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review comprises articles obtained through ProQuest, EBSCO, and Google Scholar. Search terms included: “mindfulness,” “meditation,” “child*,” and “school” in various combinations. This chapter provides an overview of trends in the literature on mindfulness work with children. A discussion of the various definitions of mindfulness in the literature provides the foundation for exploring the research, starting with the brain and underlying mechanism informing mindfulness practice. An exploration of developmental theory follows, exploring the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences on the brain and development. Subsequently, this work outlines interventions that occur in and outside of schools, the importance of awareness and regulation and a regular practice, the effect of adult caregiver mindfulness practice, and the impact of the practice on emotional regulation. This chapter concludes with a consideration of how mindfulness offers personal benefit to participants and the implications of voluntary vs. non-voluntary recruitment for practice.

The research question for this study was, “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” This review provides the reader with a general understanding of mindfulness, where developmental theory situates elementary children, and the current state of available research, to provide a foundation for the current study by identifying a gap in the research regarding children’s experiences with mindfulness practice. This review begins with an overview of mindfulness research with children.

Mindfulness Research with Children

Mindfulness, classically defined by Kabat-Zinn (1994), is the intentional practice and result of paying attention, on purpose, to one’s moment-by-moment experience, without judgment. The UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center defined mindfulness “as paying

attention to present moment experiences with openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be with what is” (About MARC, n.d., para. 4). Langer (2014) defined mindfulness as an intentional mental state characterized by open receptivity that employs direct observation and can observe multiple perspectives.

Individuals use mindfulness interventions and skills (incorporating practices such as mindful breathing, mindful listening, mindful walking, awareness of thoughts and feelings, and compassion practices) with children to teach the self-regulation necessary to address behavioral, academic, and medical challenges, including those with both psychological and somatic components (Auerbach & Delport, 2018; Hölzel et al., 2011; Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016). Practicing mindfulness may help ameliorate the impact of maladaptive stress responses, particularly for youth exposed to excessive stress (An et al., 2018; Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2017; Costello & Lawler, 2014; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016), the effects of which may impact children’s health into adulthood (Bazzano et al., 2018). Mindfulness techniques, both formal and informal (whether directing attention to a focal point such as the breath or allowing perception and awareness as with listening), aim to increase concentration (Wolkin, 2015), prosocial behavior (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017; Chorney & Eliuk, 2017), optimism (Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2017; Chandrasekara, 2018), and psychological resilience (Hutchinson et al., 2018; Joyce et al., 2018), which may be especially protective for youth in high-stress environments, which, unaddressed, can ultimately affect brain development and cognition (Zenner et al., 2014). Unaddressed childhood stress can further lead to depression, anxiety, overall poor psychological functioning, and substance abuse in adulthood (An et al., 2018), all of which carry personal and economic costs (Hutchinson et al., 2018). The earlier the intervention, the increased likelihood for the prevention of anxiety, mood, and psychological disorders (Dove

& Costello, 2017), especially with the steadily dropping of the age of first major depression onset (Hutchinson et al., 2018), and an estimated 20% of global youth diagnosed with a mental illness that impacts daily functioning (Smith-Carrier et al., 2015).

Researchers further noted mindfulness to (a) enhance communication skills, (b) reduce stress and anxiety, (c) improve creativity, (d) enhance cognitive capacity, (e) access multiple intelligences, (f) cultivate compassionate and altruistic behavior, (g) contribute to overall well-being (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018; McCabe et al., 2017), (h) reduce ruminating, intruding thoughts, and overall emotional arousal (Bazzano et al., 2018), (i) lessen emotional reactivity (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017), and (j) increase life satisfaction (Chandrasekara, 2018) while (k) enhancing relationship quality (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). Greater awareness directed at symptoms and sensations of conditions such as anxiety enables children to recognize what is happening in their bodies and utilize mindfulness skills to calm down (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017; Cheek et al., 2017). Pediatricians have explored mindfulness as a possible treatment approach for trauma and toxic stress in youth (Forkey, 2019; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016), as early intervention may have a protective (Hutchinson et al., 2018) or preventative/strengthening effect (Viafora et al., 2015) for emotional and mental health resiliency, which can minimize the impact of risk factors.

Chronic anxiety and depression further affect various aspects of older children's experience (academic, social, and physical), negatively impacting adolescents' quality of life (Johnson et al., 2016). Thirty years of research point to mindfulness as a promising intervention for adults facing these challenges (Goldberg et al., 2017; Hutchinson et al., 2018). However, the field needs more research to ascertain whether these results can extrapolate to children and young adults, particularly in adapted and abbreviated formats (Bazzano et al., 2018; Cheek et al.,

2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Kuyken et al., 2013; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016; Sibinga et al., 2013). Early controlled research studies pointed to a reduction in negative affect, depression, stress, and rumination, and an increase in attentional control, optimism, calm, and overall well-being for children and adolescents who received a mindfulness intervention at school (Dove & Costello, 2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Kuyken et al., 2013; McCabe et al., 2017; Monshat et al., 2013; Shapiro et al., 2015; Sibinga et al., 2013). The timing of such an intervention may be pivotal as “teaching mindfulness skills to children before or around the onset of puberty and adolescence may act as a protective factor later in life” (Dove & Costello, 2017, p. 180).

The literature highlighted the benefits of mindfulness for a wide range of problems, from day-to-day stress to clinical conditions (Costello & Lawler, 2014; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2015), with researchers noting that mindfulness “boosts the immune system, brain and nervous system, and aids in relieving eating and sleeping disorders” (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018, p. 2). Self-regulation, stress reduction, and increased attention were prominent foci of many studies (Zenner et al., 2014), with evidence pointing to stress and anxiety reduction, enhanced executive functioning, improved emotional regulation, enriched interpersonal skills, and increased well-being (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017; Hutchinson et al., 2018). These benefits may be because mindfulness increases awareness and addresses how one responds and relates to stressors and discomfort, enabling adaptive choices that reduce the likelihood of disorders and challenges and instead lead to improved relational behaviors (Crane et al., 2017; Dove & Costello, 2017). Thus, the stressors in one’s environment might not change at all, while mindfulness participants’ responses and relationship to distress, along with reduced automaticity, may yield a buffering against the effects of stress (Skoranski et al., 2018). Most studies to date focused on clinical populations (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). However, the field welcomes

research on typically developing and not-yet-diagnosed children who may be present in the full classroom setting (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

With the increased stress load that many of today's children experience (Zenner et al., 2014), children need interventions that increase resilience to help them navigate their everyday lives. Mindfulness skills can remove barriers to children's learning, such as symptoms of ADHD (Chan et al., 2018), and reduce adolescent depression in a clinical population (Perry-Parrish et al., 2016), offering the possibility for more young people to thrive. School-based interventions offer the opportunity for the prevention and amelioration of these adverse conditions, an effect that may strengthen over time and can provide lasting healing to many children who struggle (Johnson et al., 2016). Evidence pointed to this adaptive stress response as preventative against mental, emotional, and social challenges, in turn supporting mental health, promoting academic success, and providing a foundation for healthy adult development (Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2017; Cheek et al., 2017). Schools can reap the benefits of this improved mental health; as Basch (2011) noted with regards to mental health, "healthier students are better learners" (p. 593).

Children enjoy learning mindfulness, which shows promising results, starting with the earliest feasibility studies (Perry-Parrish et al., 2016). In particular, many studies pointed to particular efficacy for teaching self-regulatory skills to low-income, urban populations (Dariotis et al., 2016; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016; Sibinga et al., 2013). These results were especially notable given the early and chronic toxic stress and trauma these children often experienced that can influence cognitive function and brain development, leading to various academic and behavioral challenges in the school setting (Dariotis et al., 2016). As an inherently subjective skill, study authors argued that quantitative measures might not be as strong as qualitative in portraying participants' experiences and growth (Monshat et al., 2013), particularly when addressing the

effects of emotional appraisal, the axes of cognitive and emotional regulation, and social-emotional and behavioral performance (Dariotis et al., 2016). Both in-person and online or mobile formats for teaching mindfulness showed a positive impact, offering young people an engaging form of relaxation that encouraged awareness, practice, and directed attention (Tunney et al., 2017). However, in-person delivery may be more responsive and soothing for participants (Tunney et al., 2017).

Professionals noted curricular modifications as important for teaching mindfulness to children, incorporating traditional aspects of mindfulness of breath and body with new metaphors, repetition, shorter practices, games, involving parents in learning, and creating appropriate group formats (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008). Systematic reviews highlighted mindfulness as an efficacious, non-iatrogenic treatment for a variety of disorders and as a practice that helped in building resilience, cognitive performance, and psychosocial outcomes, thus enhancing learning while capitalizing on children's excitement in the school setting (Felver et al., 2016; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Zenner et al., 2014; Zoogman et al., 2015). Adoption of and public regard for mindfulness practice may link to these outcomes, as "the increasing popularity of meditation use as a stand-alone practice may be due to the perception that meditation is beneficial for various chronic medical conditions, safe, easy to use, and without negative side effects" (Wang et al., 2019, p. 274).

Mindfulness use among children increased over the past few decades, with 1.6% of U.S. children reporting mindfulness use in 2012 and 7.4% in 2017; a majority of these children used mindfulness skills to manage the effects of chronic medical challenges, and they represent diverse participation across age, gender, ethnicity, setting, and socioeconomic status, pointing to the practice's accessibility (Wang et al., 2019). Most notably, for teaching children, one can offer

mindfulness lessons both in the school setting or beyond the school walls. Mindfulness lessons may involve parents and teachers learning mindfulness alongside children, caregiving adults may be responsible for promoting learning and practice outside of lessons, or they may be entirely uninvolved. Mindfulness classes themselves may be taught by an outside provider, by a therapist, or by classroom teachers. Mindfulness may refer to various practices, including those focusing on the breath, the body, or cognitions, and one can teach these practices in innumerable ways.

A key factor of learning and integrating these skills is the extent to which one engages in daily practice (Dariotis et al., 2016). The process of learning mindfulness is as important as its product (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017). Most studies focused on emotional regulation, which, when enhanced, often provided a personal benefit to both the child and adult practitioner, improving coping, mental health, and well-being (Aslam et al., 2019; Bannirchelvam et al., 2017), fortifying the individual's ability to manage emotional and behavioral responses to life situations (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017). The next section provides an overview of how the literature conceptualizes mindfulness.

Concepts of Mindfulness

For researchers to ensure that they are referencing the same phenomenon and experience and to create a sustainable body of research, a clearly established and agreed-upon definition of mindfulness, mindfulness practice, and what is *not* mindfulness practice may be necessary (Crane et al., 2017). Researchers such as Hutchinson et al. (2018) noted inconsistencies in the definitions of mindfulness and the practices and parameters of mindfulness interventions. The “move toward a definition that is more precise and that specifies testable theoretical predictions for the purpose of validation and refinement” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 231) might be preferable from a research standpoint but also might be impossible for a phenomenon such as mindfulness.

A standardized intervention format could allow “for replication and comparison of studies, to develop a firm evidence base” (Volanen et al., 2016, p. 2); however, mindfulness comprises an array of practices stemming from a variety of traditions, offered in myriad formats, for different extents per session, over varying periods, toward a multiplicity of aims (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). It would be impossible to delineate a single intervention as *the* mindfulness intervention. How, then, *does* one define mindfulness?

Some researchers offered definitions of mindfulness that pointed directly to the experience but lacked researchable specificity, such as: “mindfulness is essentially about waking up to what the present moment offers” (Brown et al., 2007, p. 272). Other definitions pointed to the results of mindfulness practice or the state of mindfulness, such as

mindfulness thus serves as a receptive vehicle. It is about being fully engaged in the present moment, rather than being in a distracted mode, daydreaming about the past or future, or caught up in reactivity. When in a state of mindfulness, the mind is open, enquiring and curious. It is free of judgment and reactivity. (Auerbach & Delport, 2018, p. 2)

When a study defines mindfulness by pointing to the fact that “it teaches participants to focus their attention on the experience of emotions, thoughts, body sensations and sounds and to observe them as they arise and subside” (Chan et al., 2018, p. 2), one can again see the *effects* of the practice in the quality of focus. Knowing that one can balance one’s checkbook using mathematics does not explain what mathematics is, and while the fruits of mindfulness are very close to the practice, it remains challenging to condense the field to a single definition.

Further, while mindfulness proliferates in both academic and popular culture, “there remains no single ‘correct’ or ‘authoritative version’ of mindfulness and the concept is often trivialized and conflated with many common interpretations” (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 1). Authors variously noted mindfulness as a non-judgmental state of present awareness that may pre-exist or may arise through cultivation; a trait that could show up in an individual’s thoughts,

emotions, and behaviors; the practice of meditation; or a structured intervention (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). One word refers to a state, a trait, a practice, and an intervention. Additionally, researchers measured these entities through self-report scales that did not show correlative results, further confounding research approaches to this phenomenon (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). In a burgeoning research field, it is perhaps necessary to clarify core components of mindfulness to promote and support program implementation, teacher training, and supervision (Crane et al., 2017). Crane et al. (2017) highlighted the value of this clarification “so that existing research can be meaningfully interpreted, future research uses agreed definitions and established protocols, [mindfulness-based practice] teachers are trained appropriately, and the general public are assured that programs titles accurately describe what is delivered” (Crane et al., 2017, p. 991). The question remains, however, as to the feasibility of such a concise definition.

The term “contemplate” etymologically derived from the Latin words referring to “the act of looking at” (*contemplationem*) or “to gaze attentively, to observe” (*contemplari*) (Shapiro et al., 2015, p. 3), denoting the attentive and observational qualities of contemplative practices. The word “meditation” in Sanskrit “connotes the notion of ‘cultivation,’ or ‘causing to become,’” while in Tibetan, the term “refers to ‘development of familiarity”” (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 2). Together, these words point to attentiveness and familiarity that participate in internal development and cultivation of supportive capacities. While these terms provide an etymological foundation, they still do not provide a clear definition of what people mean across the board when they use the word “mindfulness.”

The most often-cited definition of mindfulness comes from Kabat-Zinn (1994), who described mindfulness as the process of paying attention to a given moment, on purpose, without

judgment. In this approach, one does not apply effort to change what one is experiencing; the non-judgment is a form of allowing and watching, a deep intimacy with the unfolding of a particular moment, with simplicity and with an intentional and increased awareness (Viafora et al., 2015). Sensations, thoughts, and feelings simply arise, and the individual accepts them; one invites a clear seeing of each moment's experience with a welcoming curiosity, rather than through the veil of the mind's stories or judgments *about* what is happening (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). This cultivated attentiveness leads to thoughtful rather than impulsive behavior and allows one to engage with life with openness, acceptance, and responsiveness, rather than with reactivity (Tarrasch, 2018).

Some researchers provided definitions of mindfulness that outlined the components of the process. Smith-Carrier et al. (2015) described this ordinal process as observation/awareness, description/labeling, and then participating in experience. Researchers often used the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) scale in quantitative studies measuring mindfulness. The five facets include: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judgment, and non-reactivity (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Perhaps these components comprise mindfulness, yet they do not delineate between the state of mindfulness and the trait of mindfulness or inform whether these are the intentional activities of being mindful or the result of mindfulness practice. Viafora et al. (2015) added another feature to the mix, highlighting that a definitive aspect of mindfulness is that it is entirely portable. Further, researchers see mindfulness as a vital capacity that individuals can train and strengthen; with somewhat circular reasoning, one also trains one's mindfulness capacity through mindfulness practice (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). According to Vago and Silbersweig (2012), this training developed self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence.

An agreed-upon definition would help ensure quality research in a field that could benefit from a reliable body of quality research. A systematic review found modest evidence for improvement and no overall significant evidence of an increase in quality studies published between 2000 and 2016 (Goldberg et al., 2017). These researchers outlined the methodological features defining quality as having an active control, a large sample size, long-term follow-up assessment, fidelity assessment, quality instructor training, and a report of an intention-to-treat sample. Study authors summarized that the field did not increase in rigor in those years, acknowledging publication bias's possible influence. Perhaps a more precise mindfulness definition (or definitions) could help clarify and streamline the research in this field; or perhaps a variety of definitions would allow reviewers to sort studies more specifically such that they might find that quality studies exist on mindfulness interventions but not on the state of mindfulness, for example. Further, qualitative and phenomenological studies, such as the one at hand, can help deepen the understanding of the experiential phenomenon (or phenomena) of mindfulness and perhaps provide a foundation for a more accurate definition(s).

A meta-analysis published in 2015 (Kallapiran et al.) sought to identify high-quality studies aimed at treating mental health symptomatology in young people. The authors ascertained that mindfulness-based interventions were more effective than control conditions. Out of 15 studies, authors were unable to establish which feature of the presented interventions led to positive outcomes for participants, further highlighting that mindfulness is not a single entity, and the field cannot define it as such. Kallapiran et al. (2015), like Goldberg et al. (2017), pointed to the need for quality studies with an agreed-upon definition.

Crane et al. (2017) outlined an in-depth definition of mindfulness-based practice comprised of several factors:

- Both science and contemplative tradition influence mindfulness practice.
- Psychological, medical, and educational research inform mindfulness.
- It engages deeply with human experience, suffering, and how people can relieve their suffering.
- It offers a new way to relate to experience with presence, decentering, and approach orientation.
- It enhances self-regulation on the axes of attention, emotion, and behavior while cultivating equanimity, wisdom, and compassion.
- It provides the practitioner with training in experiential inquiry and insight development through mindfulness meditation.

All of these factors have a grounding in neuroscience and evidence-based practice, and one teaches them in experiential, participatory, and relational ways. These factors, as Siebelink et al. (2018) pointed out, enhance the individual's overall facility with self-control. Both contemplative and Western traditions "are interested in reducing suffering, enhancing positive emotions, and improving quality of life" (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 1).

With all this in mind, for the sake of simplicity, and for the sake of having the same conversation as existent studies in the field, it makes sense to turn back to Kabat-Zinn's (1994) seminal definition, pointing to mindfulness as both the intentional practice and result of paying attention, on purpose, to a particular moment, without judgment. This definition is more complete with the addition of components of other definitions offering the willingness to be with whatever is happening in one's current experience (About MARC, n.d.) and open receptivity and the capacity to observe multiple perspectives (Langer, 2014).

Researchers defined mindfulness practice with children as that which allows children "to relate to their internal and external experiences in ways that are present-centered, objective and responsive, rather than past/future focused, subjective or reactive" (Auerbach & Delport, 2018, p. 2). This description parallels Kabat-Zinn's (1994) earlier-cited definition incorporating

purposeful, present-centered, non-judgmental awareness. The result of this practice can cultivate observational capacities that can help children be aware of what is happening within and around them, choose their responses, and limit reactive automaticity (Shankland & Rosset, 2017). Curricula targeting children aim for age-appropriate activities to increase focus and attention, relational competency, and regulation. One cultivates mindfulness through activities such as (a) breath focus, (b) sensory focus, (c) attention directed to feelings and thoughts, (e) mindful movement, and (f) heart-centered kindness meditations. As the individual repeats these practices, mindful exercises yield mindfulness as a way of being in all the various settings in a child's life (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). The next section offers possible mechanisms underlying mindfulness.

Possible Mechanisms of Mindfulness

While mindfulness practice may look different with regards to tradition, training, and experience, each tradition points to the cultivation of the state, and ultimately the trait of mindfulness, which is a natural component of human consciousness (Brown et al., 2007). Some mindfulness measures may reflect overall psychological functioning rather than an individual's level of mindfulness. Skills, states, and frameworks are not equal or interchangeable; what causes or results from dispositional mindfulness may not be mindfulness itself (Brown et al., 2007); this remains true regardless of the insight, compassion, awareness, and wisdom that researchers noted arising with mindfulness practice (Shaner et al., 2017).

While many found the practice to be relaxing, mindfulness training showed greater benefit than cognitive or relaxation training due to the mechanism's effects on both top-down (cognition) and bottom-up (raw sensory information) processes that affect regulatory capacity (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Mindfulness practices reduce bottom-up processing and strengthen top-down attentional skills, reducing automaticity, increasing emotional stability (Shapiro et al.,

2015), and limiting the duration and intensity of one's emotional response to stress, even in cases where top-down regulation is limited (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). With a reduction in maladaptive response, one can cultivate prosocial response patterns toward oneself and others, creating space between negative thoughts, biases, and conditions, yielding more healthy and sustainable mind states (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

The mechanism underlying mindfulness-based practices relies upon sustained training that is both formal and informal, which informs both theoretical and therapeutic approaches to mindfulness (Crane et al., 2017). While dispositional mindfulness can be present with or without formal mindfulness training, mindfulness practice can mediate how mindfulness manifests and how one's disposition presents (Brown et al., 2007). Practitioners with more cumulative experience often display lessened emotional intrusion during daily life (Bögels et al., 2010). Even short practice showed a positive effect on the orienting function of attention (Hölzel et al., 2011); thus, researchers noted that conflict monitoring developed early in a practitioner's growth.

Long-term practice, defined by Gamaiunova et al. (2019) as at least 3 hours per week for at least 3 years, shows immense benefit, even though mindfulness practice's benefits may begin immediately, even with small doses (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Extended practice experience appears to regulate behavior automatically, which researchers believe results from more practiced mental and neural pathways (Greenberg & Harris, 2012), which require less cognitive control to employ mindfulness skills (Hölzel et al., 2011). When individuals enact mindfulness earlier in emotional processing, they need less cognitive effort to regulate emotional states (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). Singh et al. (2013) observed that classroom teachers with mindfulness practice displayed this effect and were less likely to be swayed by premature

cognitive commitment and confirmation bias in the classroom, with less effort needed to shift conditioning.

Consistency of practice, defined by Hoge et al. (2013) as nearly every day, much like the regularity of weight training, can be seen as a form of mental training. This training aims to diminish cognitive vulnerability and reduce reactivity, thereby ameliorating stress and yielding greater mental well-being and lessening clinical symptoms (Bishop et al., 2004). Thus, mindfulness is much more than a mood management technique and is much more than mere relaxation (Bishop et al., 2004). Vago and Silbersweig (2012) proposed that as a practitioner trains and develops more integrated and automatic mindfulness skills, “more efficient allocation of resources is observed” (p. 18). Early on in this training, one’s perceptual sensitivity increases, even before the intentional attention capacities foundational to mindfulness practice begin to cultivate (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

Components of Attention

One of the main mechanistic components of mindfulness is attention, which researchers believe develops early in an individual’s practice and facilitates many of the positive effects of mindfulness training (Hölzel et al., 2011; Tarrasch, 2018). Attention is a dynamic process, with conceptual models that include various processes in the mind and body, comprised of “alerting, orienting, executive functions, dorsal system functions, ventral system functions, directed attention, and involuntary attention” (Su & Swank, 2019, p. 1), all of which evoke and maintain the state of mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004).

Researchers believe that attention itself includes four clear components: “attention regulation, body awareness, emotional regulation, changing the perspective of oneself” (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 2). When one engages in mindfulness training, the brain enters a state that enhances

and influences the entire attentional network, strengthening an individual's ability to regulate, orient, alert, and sustain attention (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017), all of which can help ameliorate children's attention challenges (Tarrasch, 2018). Building the skill of sustaining attention allows an individual to utilize attention capacities to be aware of current experience; regulatory capacities allow an individual to direct attention to a sensation, thought, or feeling, which further enables contact with direct experience, in turn attending to any of these phenomena without rumination (Bishop et al., 2004). These pathways of interaction parallel Kabat-Zinn's (1994) previously offered definition of mindfulness, through an understanding of "an open, unbiased awareness of and attention to inner experience and manifest action; rather than generating mental accounts about the self" (Brown et al., 2007, p. 273). Thus, mindfulness is a form of bare observation that one accesses through attention.

Through the ability to attend to a particular stimulus at a given time, an individual builds the capacity to reduce cognitive inhibition, encountering an experience's novelty through direct observation. Bishop et al. (2004) proposed that mindfulness, as a metacognitive skill, enabled an individual to monitor and control attention, such that "mindfulness can be defined, in part, as the self-regulation of attention" (p. 233). When one applies this level of investigative awareness to the flow of internal experience, the individual utilizes their observational powers to glean a greater understanding of how they construct thoughts and feelings (Bishop et al., 2004). This heightened self-awareness does not correlate with self-consciousness (Brown et al., 2007).

Studies focusing on the impact of meditation displayed an increase in attention, with a concurrent decrease in distraction as participants showed a reduction in mind-wandering and startling and an increased engagement with intended stimuli (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). A study comparing focused-awareness meditation to open monitoring found that an 8-week

training reduced anxiety, depression, and rumination and improved overall mindfulness, with focused attention lifting mood (reducing anxiety and depression) and improving mindfulness, and open monitoring attention contributing more to mood regulation and positive mood (Zhang et al., 2019). These results support the assertion by Shapiro et al. (2006) that “attention has been suggested in the field of psychology as critical to the healing process” (p. 4).

Because attention regulation is key to the meditative experience and is the foundation of all mindfulness techniques, it “appears to be a prerequisite for the other mechanisms to take place” (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 549). Attention is necessary to feel the body during a body scan, as it is necessary to fully feel an emotion. Maintaining attention on habitual patterns is necessary for the requisite awareness to choose new responses rather than to go along with conditioned patterns. Attending to the current moment with full awareness of experience can train the mind not to rely on discursive thought and self-reference. Any pleasantness that one attends to can inspire continued development and regulation. The functional capacities of attention within mindfulness practice reinforce each other as one’s practice develops (Hölzel et al., 2011).

Teasdale (1999) presented mindfulness as a form of attention that one controls intentionally in order to process information more skillfully and healthfully. In a somewhat circuitous fashion, while attention increases mindfulness, concentration practices also increase attentional efficiency (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). One must complete this process with self-compassion and kindness, as “the attitude one brings to the attention is essential” (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 4). Through exploring this continuous and compassionate practice, researchers noted that “attention may be the internal psychological mechanism that transmits the effects of mindfulness interventions based upon previous research showing attention to improve through

mindfulness practice” (Zoogman et al., 2015, p. 299). Attention can help individuals to relate more skillfully to experience.

Skillful Relating to Experience

Experiences, emotions, and thoughts constantly shift. The metacognitive understanding of the flowing nature of these as states, rather than as fixed traits, allows an individual to attend to them differently, perhaps more positively (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). The mind bases automatic and practiced patterns on fear, avoidance, and lack, which increases stress and leads to habitual reactivity. Through mindful attention, an individual can respond to life with more discernment and a broader array of responses (Crane et al., 2017). Mindfulness allows an individual to relate directly and openly with experience, taking an active stance in welcoming whatever enters awareness (Bishop et al., 2004). This receptivity, in turn, can lead to clarifying how one operates in the world.

Discernment and Clarity

What one thinks is happening and what is actually happening are not necessarily the same. Simply watching a person walk out of a building carrying a book, one can purely observe, or have myriad thoughts adorning the observation such as: the person stole the book, the person bought the book, the person borrowed the book, the person is bringing the book to someone else, the person read the book, the person will read the book, the person will never read the book, or even that the item looks like a book, but it actually has a hidden storage compartment with a treasure in it. The only thing that is actually happening in this example is that the person is walking out of a building carrying a book. In close relationships, individuals have many opportunities to impute meaning behind another’s actions that may not correlate with reality. When one can see that thoughts do not necessarily reflect reality, clarity increases (Crane et al.,

2017). Ryan et al. (2007) posited that “mindfulness concerns a ‘clear seeing’ of reality as it is rather than, as is common, implicitly or explicitly relying upon cognitive representations as accurate reflections of reality, in mindfulness, reality is contacted directly, unfiltered by learning histories and memories” (p.181). With clarity and conscious attention (as opposed to non-conscious attention), it is easier to make choices about how one acts in the world, rather than functioning with unawareness or automaticity (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). This clarity can also “help people recognize what is meaningful for them and what they truly value” (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 8).

Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) posited that mindfulness practice’s calming effect leads to attentional control and subsequent clear thinking. Perceptual clarity and discernment between actual reality and imaginary reality, in a sense, feed further clarity and reason; working in harmony, this entity “improves well-being, creating a state of level-headedness and reducing reactivity and attachment to conditioned patterns of thinking” (Auerbach & Delport, 2018, p. 5). Adaptive re-perceiving, defined by Schussler et al. (2019) as “a shift in perspective... [whereby] three mechanisms of mindfulness—intention, attention, and attitude—operate cyclically to result in re-orienting one’s relationship to an experience” (p. 2567), allows an individual to be flexible, rather than rigid, reactive, and overidentified with experience. Adaptive re-perceiving further allows an individual to see a situation both externally and internally with clarity, allowing freedom and choicefulness of behavior and facilitating learning new behavior patterns (Shapiro et al., 2006). An individual who faces reality clearly without the reconfiguration of cognitive accommodation is more likely to be flexible and regulated when facing life’s turbulence (Ryan et al., 2007). Clarity and responsiveness are foundational to emotional control and self-regulation.

Emotional Control and Self-Regulation

Self-regulation “is defined as a process that enables individuals to guide their goal-directed activities by modulation of thought, affect, behavior, or attention via deliberate or automated use of specific mechanisms” (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 549). Self-regulation improves behavioral, physiological, and neural functioning (Shapiro et al., 2015; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Mindful emotional regulation is more active and strategic than emotional suppression as a regulatory strategy (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017). Mindfulness training strengthens the cognitive and psychological functioning necessary for self-regulation (Cheek et al., 2017); mindfulness both predicts and is the result of enhanced self-regulation, with a slightly greater emphasis on creating and enhancing self-regulation than on being the product of it (Brown et al., 2007; Shapiro et al., 2015). Attention and discernment provide the awareness of emotional content that is necessary as a precursor to being capable of adaptively regulating the duration, selection, intensity, and mode of expression of emotions (Hölzel et al., 2011; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Shapiro et al., 2015); individuals noted this to be an invigorating process when they utilized it to successfully regulate behavior (Brown et al., 2007).

Attention to how one habitually reacts to distress through sustained mindfulness practice, combined with the open, receptive quality of nonjudgmental awareness of one’s feelings and thoughts, allows the cognitive and emotional capacity for self-regulation in the emotional experience, and further yields adaptive and integrated responsiveness, rather than reactivity (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012; Viafora et al., 2015). Research supported this shift, which may provide the space for reflection in a matter of milliseconds after a trigger, subtly reducing automaticity (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Further, this ability to be fully present and see clearly allows one “to act congruently with one’s perceptions, reflectively considered goals, and self-

endorsed values” (Brown et al., 2007), leading to greater coherence. Through its positive impact on depression symptomatology and stress response, improvements in emotional regulation “associated with mindfulness practice likely underlie many of the positive effects of mindfulness practice on mental health” (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 544).

When an individual practices mindfulness and can engage with thought and experience more responsively, stress levels decrease (Hölzel et al., 2011). In turn, an individual can see and experience the self as less reactive, which allows the individual to engage in a wider array of life experiences with more ease (Hölzel et al., 2011). The mindfulness practitioner does not lose an initial affective trigger; rather, the stimulus links to a different context in the mind, interweaving past conditioning and new associations, yielding strengthened responsiveness (Hölzel et al., 2011). This responsiveness is a function which “could directly influence one’s capacity to extinguish conditioned fear by enhancing the structural and functional integrity of the brain network involved in safety signaling” (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 547). An individual’s broadened understanding of what is pleasant and what is unpleasant further enhances this freedom of responsiveness, “in Western psychological terminology, one could say that nonreactivity leads to unlearning of previous connections (extinction and reconsolidation) and thereby to liberation from being bound to habitual emotional reactions” (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 547). Kerr et al. (2011) noted this dynamic in exploring responses from a study participant, indicating that her writing’s content remained the same while the attitude with which she greeted her experience improved.

Researchers indicated that this attitudinal shift towards responsiveness and reduced negative reactivity is more critical than the array of events one’s life experience offers (Kerr et al., 2011). The responsiveness inherent in self-regulation, in turn, yields equanimity and acceptance, rather than anger and reactivity (Shaner et al., 2017), and provides a foundation of

stability and the greater likelihood of adaptation in the face of change (Shapiro et al., 2006). Mindful self-regulation also prevents allostatic load and the subsequent deterioration of the mind and body caused by such stress (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Further, self-regulation yields compassionate responsiveness to the entirety of one's experience, which can help prevent disorders resulting from catastrophic and ruminative thinking (Kerr et al., 2011). As an individual gains perspective on thoughts and emotions and how these phenomena arise and pass, reduced automaticity leads to "reperceiving," which interrupts the loops in the mind that lead to practiced maladaptive reactivity (Shapiro et al., 2006). The components of these mechanisms of mindfulness are not linear; while it is also the product of clarity, the open awareness necessary for self-regulation provides clarity that allows an individual operating from a state of mindfulness to choose behaviors that are congruent with the individual's values (Shapiro et al., 2006).

As meditation practice accrues, physiological metrics show an extremely fast return-to-baseline after a triggering event, which the individual may experience as non-reactivity (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). These processes also "strengthen neural systems important for emotion regulation, specifically evaluative, expressive, and experiential aspects of emotion" (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 18). Neuroscientists affirmed this structural and functional impact on the brain as due to the increased self-control resulting from mindfulness-based interventions (Siebelink et al., 2018). Together, these improved self-regulation measures may be the factor that creates the benefits associated with mindfulness practice (Viglas & Perlman, 2018). Increased self-regulation resulting from mindfulness practice plays a crucial role in adaptive responses and social-emotional growth in children (Viglas & Perlman, 2018). Mindful awareness allows children to intentionally apply the regulatory skills that they learn, which researchers observed as

enhanced emotional skillfulness and an increased ability to cope with environmental stress (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017). Emotional regulation distinctly links with the mechanism of decentering.

Decentering

While self-regulation is a component of the mechanism underlying mindfulness, decentering is a component of self-regulation. Decentering is the process by which one applies mindful observation to the facets of experience and consciousness with a sense of non-identification and detachment, which further allows close observation, an understanding of fluctuations and transience, and the freedom, mental and emotional capacity, and mental flexibility to choose one's response (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017; Hölzel et al., 2011; Zoogman et al., 2015). Through decentering, one can sense awareness itself, which remains independent from and unperturbed by experience (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017). Decentering allows an awareness that "provides enough 'psychological distance' from one's thoughts and emotions to see them in the moment as temporary events in the mind, as opposed to reflections of the self that are absolute, immutable, or unalterable" (Cheek et al., 2017, p. 2574); researchers credited this shift in perspective as contributing to the clinical benefits of mindfulness practice (Cheek et al., 2017; Kerr et al., 2011). Rather than holding onto thoughts as distinct and taken to be real entities, one may engage with thoughts about thoughts, whether synchronously or asynchronously, creating cognitive capacity (Teasdale, 1999). Disidentification from habitual, unreflective thought, perception, and experience facilitates psychological flexibility; decentering is a key mechanism contributing to the changes that allow disidentification to arise through cultivated attention, intention, and attitude (Hutchinson et al., 2018).

During a triggering experience, mindfulness helps an individual disengage attentional faculties from an emotional stimulus (Tarrasch, 2018), reducing rumination, and perhaps preventing depression relapse (Bishop et al., 2004). While triggering stimuli may continue in one's life, decentering alters "the *impact* of, and *response* to, thoughts, feelings, and sensations" (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 237), which ultimately transforms how one thinks (Zhang et al., 2019). The contents of life remain the same but the individual processes them differently (Teasdale, 1999). Decentered attention distributes non-conceptually across consciousness, process, and experience, allowing for executive monitoring of subjective experience through meta-awareness (Hölzel et al., 2011), as well as diminished reactivity, inflexibility, rigidity, over-attachment, and reactivity (Kerr et al., 2011; Zoogman et al., 2015). This disidentification, like increased self-regulation, also contributes to the enhanced objectivity and clarity with which one witnesses experiences as they arise (Shapiro et al., 2006).

As a practitioner becomes more proficient in mindfulness, decentering strengthens, and, along with other improved psychological processes, decentering helps to develop meta-awareness (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Meta-awareness helps one experience negative stimuli and thoughts as mental events, which prevents the likelihood of getting locked in rumination or a depressive loop of thinking (Teasdale, 1999; Zoogman et al., 2015). The space decentering provides creates a welcoming awareness wherein the individual does not shut out thoughts, emotions, and stimuli, which reduces stress and the energy needed for regulation (Teasdale, 1999).

Decentering allows an individual to cultivate an observational or witnessing mind in order to be present with both stimulus and response, and the space in between, providing perspective, insight, and therapeutic growth (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). This insight "provides

awareness that one's thoughts are subjective and transient in nature, thus facilitating non-attachment and subsequently improving satisfaction with life, well-being and interpersonal functioning" (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 23), which further improves affect (Kerr et al., 2011). Thus, researchers see mindfulness-based interventions as a potential adjunctive therapeutic mental health intervention, particularly for depression, offering the possibility to create a new metacognitive approach to one's mental cognitions (Teasdale, 1999).

The mindfulness practitioner can experience less preferable emotional states, withstand strong emotions, and experience greater objectivity through decentering, which yields greater relaxation and less avoidance. Further, as mindfulness helps to cultivate a decentered and experience-welcoming approach, it enables an individual to perceive interdependence with the world around them, and to experience the self as an experiencer, rather than as a fixed entity; "it is precisely this 'forgetting' of oneself that is held to lead to a comprehension of one's own true nature" (Fasching, 2008, p. 463), yielding the spiritual benefits of mindfulness practice. Decentering and the aforementioned mechanistic factors supporting mindfulness "share at their core a fundamental *shift in perspective*" (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 6), that allows an individual to engage more directly with experience.

Contact with Direct Experience

When an individual can intentionally direct attention, regulate emotion, and adopt a decentered perspective, "one ceases to be actively occupied with the objects of consciousness in order to become conscious of consciousness itself" (Fasching, 2008, p. 464). An individual continually applies attention, in particular, to both inner and outer experience (Shapiro et al., 2006), which, in turn, alters the individual's relationship to direct experience (Teasdale, 1999). Within this discussion of each of these components, this work points to an individual's ability to

engage with the fluctuating stream of experience and of consciousness with awareness, openness, and acceptance (Greenberg & Harris, 2012), which was termed by Fasching (2008), “the self-presence of experiencing itself” (p. 464). All mindfulness practices share this aim: to still the mind and “to remain fully awake while letting all intentional activity come to a halt” (Fasching, 2008, p. 465), being fully present with the essence of whatever presents itself in a moment, or even to be aware of awareness (Kerr et al., 2011). The ability to be this profoundly present with one’s internal experience links with the ability to respond empathically to others (Hölzel et al., 2011).

When one stays present with one’s moment-to-moment experience, one enhances the ability to feel strong emotions with healthy detachment and without reacting, a process which teaches the individual that they can withstand all thoughts, emotions, and body sensations, and which yields reduced fear, anxiety, and avoidance (Shapiro et al., 2006). In particular, people who display limited empathy and affect regulation seem to benefit from increased body awareness, as one can only feel body sensations in the current moment (Hölzel et al., 2011). Knowing thoughts’ unreliability trains wisdom faculties and heightens the individual’s awareness that thoughts are distinct mental arisings rather than actual reality itself (Teasdale, 1999). One does not apply consciousness to presence; consciousness is presence itself; it is not one of an array of arisings; it is the phenomenality of arising itself (Fasching, 2008). Rather than focusing on the objects found within consciousness, the mindfulness practitioner focuses sustained awareness on awareness (Fasching, 2008).

Consciousness of self may arise in two distinct forms: through one’s identity aligning with certain characteristics and ideas over others, or through awareness applied to bare experiencing (Fasching, 2008). Meditation inhibits the content of characteristics and ideas as a

conscious self, such that one can discover subjective being through awareness and experience (Fasching, 2008). To experience life directly in this way, an individual requires a shift through a form of practiced, experiential learning; one cannot learn these skills through merely reading about them (Teasdale, 1999). Experiential learning through engagement with one's direct experience further decreases suffering as "learning to sit with and notice thoughts, feelings, and body sensations teaches engagement with rather than avoidance of experience" (Zoogman et al., 2015, p. 291). Researchers noted that those who engage directly with life experience, in turn, experience a higher quality of life, exhibit greater flexibility when facing difficulty, persist through challenging times, pursue life goals, and demonstrate enhanced psychological well-being (Yela et al., 2020).

Relationship to Suffering

Increased attention, emotional regulation, decentering, and direct observational engagement with experience shift an individual's relationship with suffering. When individuals shift the perspective through which they experience undesirable or even painful feelings and thoughts, they can approach them with more acceptance, simultaneously shifting the psychological context of experience (Bishop et al., 2004). A disengagement with thoughts and preferences about experiences allows a person to focus on goals and other areas of life they can change and improve (Brown et al., 2007), while simultaneously "an experiential understanding develops that pain is an inherent part of human experience and is ever changing" (Crane et al., 2017, p. 994). One can experience this physical, mental, and existential pain with less suffering, an internal relationship that provides greater well-being, and is mediated by the self-compassion aspect of mindfulness (Hölzel et al., 2011). Self-compassion further contributes to emotion regulation when one approaches stimuli with kindness towards oneself, even when self-judgment

and suffering occur (Hölzel et al., 2011). As self-compassion grows, one may experience less of a sense of distinction between oneself and others; the difference between self-directed and other-directed compassion diminishes, further enhancing the well-being that results from this skill (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Results such as these reflect in the brain, in which “meditators show increased activation of the prosociality circuitry over non-meditators” (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 23), an aspect of experience which may be mediated by compassion and self-compassion.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion, according to Neff and Germer (2017), “involves being touched by and open to one’s own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one’s suffering and to heal oneself with kindness” (p. 371). Further, self-compassion “involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one’s pain, inadequacies, and failures, so that one’s experience is seen as part of the larger human experience” (Neff & Germer, 2017, p. 371). Yela et al. (2020) posited that mindfulness’s mental health benefits result from the mechanistic components of self-compassion, meaning, and engagement with life experience. Yela et al. (2020) indicated that increased mindfulness practice yielded greater self-compassion, more effective mindfulness engagement, and overall greater dispositional mindfulness; further, “a person’s recognition of what is valuable and truly matters in life could explain, to some extent, the positive effects of mindfulness on mental health and well-being” (p. 1633). Mindfulness training yields a compassionate attitude towards self and others, which, in turn, yields greater purpose and meaning in life, increased overall life satisfaction, and mental health (Yela et al., 2020). Mindfulness curricula for both children and adults often include lessons to cultivate

Metta, a form of lovingkindness that serves as the foundation for compassion directed toward the self and toward others.

Researchers theorize that self-compassion is the mechanism by which practicing meditators experience better psychological health than non-meditators (Neff & Germer, 2017; Yela et al., 2020). As such, the benefits one receives from mindfulness practice may correlate with the extent to which one practices a self-compassionate attitude, which may also promote internal safety and the individual's capacity for handling life's challenges (Yela et al., 2020). Further, the self-compassionate attitude that one cultivates through meditation may also make one's life more meaningful (Yela et al., 2020). The next section offers an overview of executive functioning.

Executive Function

From a mutual-influence perspective, mindfulness training also impacts executive functioning and benefits from strengthened executive functioning. The aforementioned benefits and possible mindfulness mechanisms discussed in this section mostly fall under the umbrella of executive functions, which include attention, memory, and cognitive and behavioral regulation (Chan et al., 2018). Self-regulation and executive functions are essential in the classroom as they are “central to a child's emerging ability to adaptively respond to the academic and social demands of his or her preschool and early elementary classrooms” (Neuenschwander et al., 2017, p. 881).

Executive functions are of particular interest in this dissertation as they “predict children's altruistic behavior, school achievement and social-emotional competence, and long-term life success” (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 53). Executive functions complete their developmental trajectory in adulthood but show the most rapid growth from birth to 8 years of

age (Neuenschwander et al., 2017). Providing enrichment such as mindfulness during the critical developmental window of childhood and adolescence can strengthen these skills and improve young peoples' life experiences on various metrics (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015) as mechanisms often interrelate.

Composite Models of Mechanisms

Several researchers theorized composite models to explain the mechanism underlying mindfulness. Bishop et al. (2004) posited that mindfulness comprises two components: self-regulation of attention, such that one maintains engagement with immediate and direct experience to see mental events clearly, and a curious openness that allows one to accept whatever one discovers inside experience (Bishop et al., 2004). Zoogman et al. (2015) offered a model with three components: “focused attention, decentering, and emotion regulation” (p. 291). Hölzel et al. (2011) provided a model comprised of four distinct components: “(a) attention regulation, (b) body awareness, (c) emotion regulation... and (d) change in perspective on the self” (p. 537). As one sustains clear, undistracted attention on a chosen point of focus, one can become aware of any component of internal experience, which allows the individual to respond differently to emotions or to simply watch their arising and passing, a process through which one becomes less identified with a solid, fixed identity (Hölzel et al., 2011).

Shapiro et al. (2006) outlined three axioms that comprise mindfulness: intention, attention, and attitude (IAA). This model aligns with Kabat-Zinn's (1994) definition of mindfulness (as cited in Shapiro et al., 2006) by describing the three components as “1. ‘on purpose’ or intention, 2. ‘paying attention’ or attention, 3. ‘in a particular way’ or attitude (mindfulness qualities)” (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 3). Unlike Hölzel et al. (2011), Shapiro et al. (2006) saw these as simultaneous, interwoven, revisited and cyclical processes (or components

of the process), rather than as distinct stages through which one passes. IAA subsequently leads to decentering and re-perceiving, which further allow one to regulate oneself; clarify values; engage with a broader range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses; and maintain intentional exposure to more of life's internal and external experiences (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 5).

Vago and Silbersweig (2012) coined a framework comprised of self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence (S-ART), which “operates using the underlying premise that our perception, cognitions, and emotions related to our ordinary experiences can be distorted or biased to varying degrees” (p. 2). The authors presented six mechanisms supporting this framework, informing mindfulness as both a state and as a trait, and providing the foundation for practicing and cultivating mindfulness and clarity: “(1) intention and motivation; (2) attention regulation; (3) emotion regulation; (4) memory extinction and reconsolidation; (5) prosociality; (6) non-attachment and de-centering” (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 15). Each of these models appears to focus on very similar facets of the mindfulness mechanism, perhaps with varying levels of nuance, pointing to process and result orientation of cultivating mindfulness. Siegel (2009) pointed to this process of mechanistic cultivation and neural change as inherently relational, whereby “you become your own best friend” (p. 145). The next section outlines the relationship between mindfulness and the neurophysiological functions of the brain.

Mindfulness and Neurophysiological Function

Concurrent with the functional mechanisms underlying mindfulness are structural mechanisms present in the brain¹. Kaunhoven and Dorjee (2017) pointed out that a

¹ **Amygdala:** Involved in the appraisal of meaning, the processing of social signals, and the activation of emotion... plays a crucial role in coordinating perceptions of memory and behavior” (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-4).

neurocognitively-grounded understanding of mindfulness can provide a more in-depth understanding of the neurodevelopmental mechanism and a clearer depiction of any changes than the behavioral and self-report assessments that are common in mindfulness studies. The brain's neuroplasticity contributes to improved life quality and brain health through new neural pathways that result from actively engaging in mindfulness practice (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Siegel (2007) further offered that even with "intermixed uses of the term *mindfulness*, while quite distinct in practice, may actually share common neural pathways" (p. 22).

Changes in the Brain

The results of several studies showed "that mindfulness practice can modulate and produce enduring neuroplastic changes" (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 12) and that "experience can shape the circuitry of resilience" (Siegel, 2007, p. 271). One can observe these changes in the brain's attention-related networks with as little as 5 days of mindfulness training, an effect that strengthens over time and with more intensive practice (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). This impact on neural circuitry can have an ameliorative effect on stress reaction and immune response, providing the foundation for improved physical and psychological health (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). When a mindfulness practitioner encounters stress, the individual will meet the stimulus

Anterior cingulate cortex: "Coordinates a number of processes, including the focus of attention, the linkage of thinking with feeling, the registration of bodily states such as pain, and the social representation of interactions" (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-4).

Default mode network: "The resting state of brain function that is present when an individual is given no task to perform" (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-21).

Frontal lobes: "Makes linkages among widely interconnected processes fundamental to higher thinking and planning" (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-34).

Insula: "A structure in the middle prefrontal cortex that links bodily processes to higher cortical areas... involved in the process of interoception (awareness of internal bodily sensations). Its direct link to other middle prefrontal areas, such as the anterior cingulate, by way of spindle cells has been associated with forms of self-awareness" (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-39).

Prefrontal cortex: "Central to the process of creating meaning and emotion and enabling a flexibility of response... includes the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, ventral areas such as the insula, and medial structures such as the orbitofrontal cortex, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex" (Siegel, 2012, p. AI-61).

with increased dorsal and ventral vagal tone as a result of attention-strengthening practices (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Long-term mindfulness practitioners show evidence of less age-related neural decline, particularly in the frontoparietal control network and other areas that support self-referential modes of thought (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

Further evidence pointed to increased parasympathetic nervous system activation with decreased sympathetic nervous system response, as a direct result of mindfulness cultivation (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). The parts of the brain that show the greatest change with mindfulness training are the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, the anterior cingulate cortex, and the insula, “suggesting frontoparietal control network and experiential phenomenological self-related processing is heavily influenced through training” (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 12). Hölzel et al. (2011) pointed to the synergistic interaction between the temporoparietal junction, insula, anterior cingulate cortex, default mode network, and frontal-limbic network during and as a result of mindfulness practice, which promoted increased self-regulation and the associated neuroplastic growth.

Increase in Gray Matter

Researchers pointed to increased gray matter concentration as a result of mindfulness practice, with particular augmentation in the hippocampus (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012), cortical thickness (Hölzel et al., 2011), and the prefrontal cortex (Chan et al., 2018). Even simple attentional training with anchored focus, such as basic mindful breathing practices, showed physical and structural changes affect changes in the size and structure of brain areas for managing stress response, emotional regulation (Costello & Lawler, 2014; Hölzel et al., 2011), and attention regulation (Chan et al., 2018). Hippocampal growth indicates a greater capacity for

learning new material and unlearning irrelevant or unhelpful material (Auerbach & Delpport, 2018), while thickening in the prefrontal cortex helps modulate fear (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

As the density and volume of gray matter increase, memory networks strengthen, enhancing overall functioning and regulation in the brain. Vago and Silbersweig (2012) proposed that their self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence (S-ART) framework “involves working memory, efficiency of memory encoding, retrieval, and extinction processes, all aspects of hippocampal and parahippocampal activity” (p. 10), all of which an increase in gray-matter density further enhances. Regular mindfulness practice increases the interconnectivity and efficiency between parts of the brain, particularly those that activate to enhance awareness, compassion, and objective introspection (Auerbach & Delpport, 2018).

Activation

Greater baseline mindfulness predicts enhanced activation in the prefrontal cortex, decreased activation in the amygdala, and greater regulation of the amygdala by the prefrontal cortex (Hölzel et al., 2011). When compared with controls, people who participated in a mindfulness intervention showed greater activation in “the right lateral PFC, the right insula, secondary somatosensory cortex, and inferior parietal lobe” (Hölzel et al., 2011, p. 548). Correlated with the increased relaxation that mindfulness practitioners often feel, researchers observed increased parasympathetic efficiency and reduced sympathetic arousal (Hölzel et al., 2011). The decrease in self-referential thought characteristic of mindfulness practice also supports less activity in the default mode network during mindfulness practice than during basic relaxation (Hölzel et al., 2011).

Prefrontal Cortex

The prefrontal cortex is widely cited in the neurocognitive literature on mindfulness as regular mindfulness practitioners show increased neural activity in the prefrontal cortex (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). However, long-term practitioners show decreased prefrontal cortex activation during emotional regulation, indicating greater neural efficiency through maintaining attention on present-moment sensations, rather than being swayed by either internal or external distraction (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). This pattern holds during painful experiences as well, as adept mindfulness practitioners use less effort to manage emotional responses to pain (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). The prefrontal cortex contributes, in great measure, to the executive functioning outlined above, as supported by Hölzel et al. (2011), who pointed to the reciprocal connectivity between the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus during the extinction response to inhibit contextually unhelpful emotions such as unnecessary fear (Hölzel et al., 2011).

As executive functioning is particularly helpful in the school setting, Shapiro et al. (2015) noted that children who practiced mindfulness showed more mature prefrontal cortices and frontoparietal networks and more significant increases in intelligence and reflection than those in a control condition. Further, this increased development “underlies the development of particular executive function skills, such as cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control, and working memory” (Shapiro et al., 2015, p. 21). Increased connectivity between the prefrontal cortex and other areas of the brain supports present-centered awareness, episodic memory function, and motivation (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012), all of which are called upon when one asks a child to pay attention in class. The dorsomedial prefrontal cortex, in accordance with the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, shows activation during decentering and non-attachment, assisting with perspective-

taking and emotional appraisal during interactions with others (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012), yet another essential set of classroom skills that one can strengthen. Further, both mindfulness practice and secure attachment indicate the prefrontal cortex, a relational factor that contributes to learning (An et al., 2018).

During active emotional reappraisal, individuals with high dispositional mindfulness levels also show greater prefrontal cortex activation (Hölzel et al., 2011). Along with increases in positive affect associated with dispositional mindfulness, researchers found greater dopamine levels in the prefrontal cortex (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). These individuals, displaying increases in dispositional mindfulness, also showed general activation in the prefrontal cortex along with attenuation of amygdala activity (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Neuroimaging shows the explicit improvement associated with mindfulness as increased activation in the prefrontal cortex concurrent with its ability to regulate amygdalar response (Hölzel et al., 2011).

Amygdala

Brain activity involving the prefrontal cortex often interrelates with the amygdala's functioning, which plays a role in an individual's stress response. Emotional regulation modulated by the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus working together downregulate the amygdala (Hölzel et al., 2011). The more stress one encounters, the more active one's amygdala is, which feeds fearful and negative responses, which further creates a cycle whereby one experiences heightened stress (Bauer et al., 2019). Thus, with an inhibited amygdala, an individual experiences less fear, is no longer caught in a cycle of reactivity, and can make more thoughtful and intentional behavioral choices (Hölzel et al., 2011). Theorists posited that the stress reduction that one experiences through mindfulness training is due to the neural mechanism found in this plasticity in the amygdala's functioning (Bauer et al., 2019).

The reduced overall stress often experienced as a result of a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)² program correlates with lower grey matter thickness in the amygdala, indicating that strengthened circuitry in other areas of the brain (prefrontal cortex and hippocampus) yield less need for a response from the amygdala, especially as the practice strengthens (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). From a practice standpoint, labeling or noting emotional content as a mindfulness technique may inhibit amygdala activity, reducing negative emotional expression (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). When participating in compassion-based meditation practice, experienced mindfulness practitioners showed enhanced neural circuitry response to emotional tone in a human voice, particularly in the amygdala, pointing to mindfulness practice's prosocial benefits (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Lowered amygdala activity and reduced stress further decrease the chances of one's developing a mood disorder; this result is promising for mindfulness work with youth, "given that almost 75% of mental illness can be traced back to the transition between childhood and adolescence, and 30% of mental illness is linked to early life adversity" (Bauer et al., 2019, p. 580). Bauer et al. (2019) linked this beneficial impact on the amygdala to the promising possibility that mindfulness can help ameliorate and prevent the adolescent depression prevalent in current society.

Anterior Cingulate Cortex

The anterior cingulate cortex contributes to the neural mechanism that supports mindfulness by helping an individual intentionally allocate attention resources, even when multiple, conflicting sources of information are perceivable at the same time; this impact may be especially helpful in addressing symptoms of ADHD and bipolar disorder (Hölzel et al., 2011).

² MBSR is a secular, evidence-based mindfulness training upon which most modern mindfulness programming finds its foundation; it "is a group-based health promotion intervention to improve health and the way people deal with stress and life's challenges. The core ingredient is mindfulness training through physical and mental exercises practiced daily for eight weeks" (de Vibe et al., 2017, p. 6)

Anterior cingulate cortex activation is common across studies on meditation, correlating with focus and intentionally directed mental activity (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

Insula and Temporoparietal Junction

Experienced mindfulness practitioners showed stronger activation in the insula during negative auditory stimuli, but not during neutral or positive auditory stimuli, a result which research did not show in beginning practitioners (Hölzel et al., 2011; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). This functional change is incremental, as research showed increased insula activation in participants after an 8-week course (Hölzel et al., 2011). Likewise, after the same 8-week course, researchers found greater brain density in the temporoparietal junction (Hölzel et al., 2011). Craig (2009) posited that the anterior insular cortex (AIC) “engenders human awareness” (p. 65) and “provides a unique neural substrate that instantiates all subjective feelings from the body and feelings of emotion in the immediate present (now)” (p. 65) which may strongly associate with mindfulness practice.

Linked Brain Areas

In addition to strengthening particular brain areas, researchers pointed to strengthened connectivity between different brain parts. Emotional regulation (in both humans and animals) correlates with increased communication efficiency between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex (Bauer et al., 2019). As outlined earlier, various forms of attention are modulated by circuitry that connects throughout the brain in various complex systems (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Overall, strengthened top-down cognitive flexibility facilitates self-regulation and less reliance on disturbing bottom-up reactivity, impacting prosocial behavior and strengthened neural functioning across the brain, with the anterior cingulate cortex, the prefrontal cortex, and the insula communicating more effectively (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

Attention regulation most closely associates with enhanced connectivity with the anterior cingulate cortex, body awareness associates with the insula and temporoparietal junction, and reappraisal associates with the prefrontal cortex (Hölzel et al., 2011). Reconsolidation associates with the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala, and changes in self-perspective associate with the medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate cortex, insula, and temporoparietal junction (Hölzel et al., 2011). At a certain point, it is impossible to tease out a particular part of the brain responsible for a singular component of the mindfulness process.

Emotional Regulation

Following one of the mechanisms of mindfulness through the brain, one can trace the neural pathways associated with emotional regulation. The prefrontal control systems regulate emotional generation, specifically with the amygdala, which activates to sensitively detect negative stimuli from the environment. The dorsal area of the lateral prefrontal cortex associates with attention and activates working memory, while the ventral area of the prefrontal cortex inhibits unwanted response mechanisms at the same time as the anterior cingulate cortex regulates control processes in the brain, and the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex moderates affective state regulation. When this system operates effectively, an individual can intentionally regulate emotional, mental, affective, and behavioral responses with increased activity in the prefrontal cortex and diminished activity in the amygdala (Hölzel et al., 2011).

With negative stimuli, cognitive reappraisal is possible through a mechanism that activates the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, the orbitofrontal prefrontal cortex, the anterior cingulate cortex, and the dorsal prefrontal cortex (Hölzel et al., 2011). As individuals who display greater proficiency in emotional regulation, long-time mindfulness practitioners showed enhanced activation in the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex and the rostral anterior cingulate cortex,

especially when compared to the activation found in the brains of beginning meditators (Hölzel et al., 2011). Siegel (2007) offered that insofar as “nonreactivity reveals a central aspect of resilience” (p. 214) and “resilience can be learned through experience” (p. 215), “mindful awareness may directly influence nonreactivity by altering the connections between prefrontal cortex and limbic zones” (p. 212). These processes grow and develop throughout one’s lifetime.

Developmental Theory

When discussing mindfulness training with children, it is essential to have a foundation in understanding developmental theory and where the child’s mind situates in grasping concrete, theoretical, abstract, and interpersonal concepts. As the human mind develops, capacities for meta-awareness and self-awareness strengthen and the individual can gain a clearer perspective on cognitive and emotional habits, which are essential for cultivating mindfulness (Cheek et al., 2017). Greenberg and Harris (2012) supported this notion that “careful consideration of developmental theories is essential in future research... [and that] taking a developmental perspective can facilitate more thoughtful consideration of theories of change and mechanisms of action” (p. 164).

Early Development

Providing experiences and an environment that cultivates well-being as a child grows are vital to set the foundation for thriving as an adult (Dove & Costello, 2017). Given the myriad and intense stressors children encounter in our current society, “it is more important than ever to foster mental health from an early age” (Dove & Costello, 2017, p. 173); as Neuenschwander et al. (2017) noted, “both bottom-up and top-down self-regulatory processes emerge as early as in the first year of life” (p. 881). Early development is an important window for the adaptive functioning provided by strong attachment (Ryan et al., 2007); further, of crucial importance

during early development is fostering emotional-regulation, which links with increases in inhibitory control (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Emotional regulation skills, in turn, lay the foundation for improved wellness, improved mental health, stronger social relationships, improved adaptive functioning, and greater socio-economic outcomes into adulthood (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

Children who display signs of strong emotional regulation in preschool further evidence more school readiness skills when they enter kindergarten (Shapiro et al., 2015; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). When children struggle with emotional regulation in early childhood or adults do not provide them with an environment that supports the cultivation of emotional regulation, they are more likely to have physical health problems, substance use disorders, encounter poverty, or commit a criminal offense as adults (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

The pre-puberty brain finds itself situated in a period of tremendous growth and development, paralleling the individual's growing ability to engage strategic and complex self-regulation strategies, rather than those that are rigid and brief. Brain networks become more efficient and utilize more top-down control processes as the child matures (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). An infant has minimal access to attentional control, using simple regulatory strategies while remaining highly distractible; orienting attention develops before executive attention as self-regulation begins to develop (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). Bottom-up processing, which is more reactive, shows greater prominence during childhood, as the salience network and the ventral attention network still maintain a strong link, which leads to greater reliance on short-term emotional regulation strategies (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). Further, the posterior cingulate cortex and the prefrontal cortex maintain weaker connections within the default mode

network during childhood, a connection that strengthens throughout development, thereby improving reflective capacity and self-monitoring (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017).

As the child grows, so does their capacity for increasingly complex self-regulation. On the more mature end of childhood, the brain is capable of antecedent-focused strategies, which regulate an emotion early in the process, modulating the perception, expression, duration, and strength of response (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). The orienting attention that strengthens through mindfulness practice assists with antecedent-focused strategy, providing the foundation for efficient and effective emotional regulation; as the child develops and has access to the executive attention network, the child can employ even more complex regulation strategies. Mindfulness training strengthens attentional networks, thus contributing to developmental maturity (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017).

Due to the plasticity of the child's brain in the active phase of laying neural pathways, childhood is a favorable time, from a developmental standpoint, for integrating mindfulness practices as the benefits can have a positive, compounding effect (Shapiro et al., 2015). Neuroscientific research supports this notion and points to the fact that "executive function develops most rapidly during the preschool years, together with the growth of neural networks involving prefrontal cortex" (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012, p. 154). Even brief mindfulness programs showed a salubrious effect on self-regulation development in children (Viglas & Perlman, 2018), like drops of water collecting in a bucket, which, over time, can fill the bucket. The shifting dynamic between bottom-up and top-down processing in childhood is receptive to the effects of mindfulness training, which strengthens top-down processes (such as regulation) while interfering with and weakening bottom-up processes (such as automatic stress responses), and enables a child to put experiences into perspective and to be more reflective, present, socially

competent, empathetic, and school-ready (Shapiro et al., 2015; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). With so many benefits to the developing mind, “mindfulness appears to be a promising intervention modality for youth” (Zoogman et al., 2015, p. 290).

Adolescent Development

During adolescence, the developing child’s personality begins to strengthen and maintain, as it largely will, into adulthood (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). A rapid increase in synaptic production in the prefrontal cortex fortifies executive functions, while top-down processes take even greater precedence in modulation than during childhood (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Abstract reasoning, self-representation, moral acuity, self-reflection, and self-regulation strengthen during the adolescent years, alongside neural reorganization (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Developmental research shows adolescents as less egocentric than children, as they show stronger evidence of empathy, moral processing, and prosocial behavior (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Developmental Span

While stages punctuate development, many aspects of development display a continuous trajectory throughout the lifespan. Connectivity between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala grows for the first several decades of life, contributing to consistent growth in reappraisal and regulation (Bauer et al., 2019). As reflective capacity increases over time, the individual produces a more nuanced understanding of experience, providing a greater likelihood for the psychological distance required for a decentered approach, which in turn supports the growth of “cognitive flexibility, working memory, inhibitory control, emotional reappraisal, theory of mind, and empathic concern for others” (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012, p. 155). An eye toward the longer span of development is key in recognizing that psychopathological vulnerability increases

over time as more detrimental experiences and negative thoughts accrue; as such, “mindfulness practice can unravel the cycle of dysfunctional attitudes toward the self and toward one’s relationship with the world” (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 6).

Development and Education

An informed understanding of child development theory can help schools, and specifically, educators “(1) know when and how the child learns and develops; (2) identify when the child is not learning and developing optimally; and (3) support and intervene when children present with developmental and learning difficulties” (Ragpot, 2017, p. 6). Teachers engage with children as learners, humans, and feelers, all of which comes to bear in the classroom where one teaches mindfulness. Maladaptive or unhelpful classroom behaviors, such as the presenting symptoms of ADHD, often relate to deficits in inhibitory control, attention, emotional competence, and self-regulation (Viglas & Perlman, 2018). Children enter school during a peak developmental period for these skills, though admittedly at different speeds for different children, yielding variations in social and emotional competencies (Viglas & Perlman, 2018). The development of these key executive function skills correlates highly with children’s self-reports of mindfulness capacities (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

Mindfulness interventions are key for the classroom environment because they bolster the self-regulation necessary for classroom and academic success (Viglas & Perlman, 2018). In fact, “self-regulation is strongly predictive of school readiness” (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012, p. 158). While some of the mindfulness benefits for adults translate to children, Zoogman et al. (2015) noted that mindfulness programming aimed at children is more likely to ameliorate negative symptomatology than create positive functioning in struggling children. Just as development is

incremental, in stages which have been identified by various theorists, it appears that the beneficial impacts of mindfulness interventions are incremental.

Erikson

A fertile period of human development occurs during the elementary years. Children ages 3 to 5 complete Erikson's psychosocial stage three: initiative vs. guilt, and between ages 6 to 12 move solidly into stage four: industry vs. inferiority (Cherry, 2019). These children have learned to assert their presence in the world and are in the process of learning competence and belief in themselves. As children progress through the earlier stages of Erikson's model, they develop a composite self based on the strengths of hope, will, purpose, and competency that is critical for survival, optimal functioning, and establishing purpose and meaning in life; Erikson termed this self the "resourceful self" (Capps, 2012, p. 269). The resourceful self has internal and external agency, calling on inner strengths and abilities while also interacting with the world to meet the individual's needs (Capps, 2012).

The virtues that develop throughout the lifespan as an individual traverses all of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development are interdependent: will requires secure hope, competence requires secure purpose, love requires secure fidelity (Capps, 2012). If one virtue is missing, because of their interdependence, there is a higher likelihood that others may be missing as well (Capps, 2012). The developing individual cultivates these strengths as they encounter each subsequent orienting psychosocial crisis, which is epigenetic as a sequence that distributes with varied timing across individual lives (Capps, 2012).

During Erikson's first stage of development, as the baby navigates basic trust in the world, mutual regulation mediates its experience insofar as the baby and its nurturing parents' coregulatory capacities are both implicated in the acquisition of hope as a resource (Capps,

2012). Due to the influence that an adult's nurturing presence has on development, it is crucial for adults to respectfully help a child navigate each psychosocial stage and develop virtues (Capps, 2012). During Erikson's third stage, as the child aged 3 to 5 navigates the interplay between initiative and guilt, they do so with a strong reliance on experimentation, speculation, imagination, and thus, play, exploring purpose as a life resource (Capps, 2012). It is through play that the child gives verbalization to their inner world; the adult is a guest in a child's inner world, and the child may ask the adult to join in the child's play to gain insight into their thinking and development rather than the child to adapt to the adult world (Erikson, 1987).

Thus, the resourceful self comprises the virtues gained from the psychosocial struggles of development, as an individual discovers how to be in the world and is the natural product of navigating life's challenges and crises, particularly those in Erikson's first four stages (Capps, 2012). As one acquires each of the first four virtues (hope, will, purpose, and competency), the skills must operate in concert to comprise the resourceful self (Capps, 2012). When one introduces elementary school children to mindfulness training, one does so as the children are developing the virtue of competency and starting to master a rudimentary resourceful self.

Bandura

Albert Bandura is a psychologist who contributed to development in personality psychology, therapy, and social cognitive theory; he was a key influencer in the shift from behaviorism to cognitive psychology (Fadul, 2014). Bandura's significant contributions to the field include the 1961 Bobo doll experiment, theorizing the construct of self-efficacy, and creating the social learning theory (Fadul, 2014).

According to Bandura's social learning theory, children reproduce the behaviors and ways of being that they see in the world around them as they retain them through sustained

attention and are subsequently motivated to replicate them in the world (Fadul, 2014; Fryling et al., 2011). Knowledge acquisition is not merely an academic project, but also a social one, as “knowledge should not be considered a pre-packaged commodity to be delivered by the teacher, but as an ‘outcome’ constituted in the classroom through the dialogic interaction among teachers and students alike” (Wallace & Ewald, 2000, p. 4). Learning behaviors reproduce in a context that is learning-promotive, whether the content is academic or social-emotional.

Piaget

Jean Piaget was a Swiss child development psychologist who contributed to the shift from philosophical to empirical questions in psychological and epistemological frameworks. One of his most remarkable contributions to the field was to offer the constructivist approach, which paved the way for a developmental orientation to psychology (Marwaha et al., 2017).

According to Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory, elementary school children are leaving the preoperational stage with a command of language but not yet logic, abstract thinking, or perspective-taking, and are still quite egocentric and imaginative (Marwaha et al., 2017). Most elementary school children situate squarely in the concrete operational stage, developing the ability to think logically and imagine how others think and feel (Marwaha et al., 2017).

Vygotsky

Lev Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist who published widely in educational psychology and childhood development (Phillips, 2014). Some of his most influential contributions included a focus on language and thinking, emphasis on the sociocultural environment, and the zone of proximal development (Phillips, 2014).

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory points to children’s ability to learn through active, intentional, hands-on experiences in the social world (Esteban-Guitart, 2018) and is

complementary with Piaget's cognitive developmental theory (Yvon et al., 2013). As a social interactionist, Vygotsky's theory relays that behavior and mental function build on social experiences that become internalized before children can replicate them (Yvon et al., 2013). Even the highest order mental functions can trace back to social patterning as their origin (Yvon et al., 2013). The child orients to the tools of the environment, then develops higher mental functions, and later in development, language and symbolic thought generate the consciousness that one requires for social interaction, and thus, learning (Yvon et al., 2013).

A key component of Vygotsky's (1978) theory is the zone of proximal development, which is the area just beyond a child's knowledge, in which they stretch and construct knowledge in the context of the relationship between the child and a guiding adult (Yvon et al., 2013). An optimal learning environment in this framework would be

a school that transmits knowledge or a school that seeks to rearrange learning situations in order to permit pupils to learn as agents with their peers' collaboration. When situations are rearranged in this way, the pupil's activity is based on the resolution of authentic problems that challenge and raise intelligence. (Yvon et al., 2013, p. 34)

Learning is thus a continually collaborative exploration between a child and a fully developed adult, with keen attention on children's social needs, interests, motivation, and the connection between the adult and the child, which ultimately contributes to development (Yvon et al., 2013).

Learning is more than mere intellectual development, and language is a critical function that sheds light on the acquisition and strengthening of concepts throughout a child's learning span (Yvon et al., 2013). Further, what comprises learning is far more than what a child acquires in school, with the life skills and understanding that a child gains outside of school sometimes competing with and sometimes complementing school-related schemas (Yvon et al., 2013). Due to this variation in learning, children assimilate academic content at varying rates; Yvon et al. (2013) posited that "it is irresponsible to propose the same method of appropriation for all pupils,

who do not follow the same stages in their appropriation of knowledge” (p. 39). Vygotsky explored the internal development that particular content ignites, and the process involved in this learning (Yvon et al., 2013). Mindfulness, while taught in schools, is quite different from academic material; the content is found quite clearly in the interaction between the instructor and the child, and the child may learn this content quite differently from academic subject matter.

Kohlberg

Lawrence Kohlberg, a Harvard professor and psychologist, contributed to childhood development, moral theory and development, and moral education (Kolb, 2007). Kohlberg’s (1981) theory of moral development comprises six steps outlining the thinking that underscores moral behavior. Like those of other theorists, Kohlberg’s framework rests on the understanding that social interactions are necessary for providing cognitive development, in a succession that is increasingly complex as the child matures (Hayes, 1994). In Kohlberg’s (1981) theory, the interaction that promotes development restructures “the (1) concept of the self, (2) in its relationship to concepts of other people, (3) conceived as being in a common social world with social standards” (Kohlberg, 1969, p. 349). As such, people participate in their own maturation through that with which they choose to engage (Hayes, 1994). Cognition restructures itself as the product of the interaction between the mind and the world that one encounters, informing what one knows and how it is known (Hayes, 1994).

Through organizing experience internally, individuals create or make sense of their lives (Hayes, 1994). Thus, “development is an activity of self-construction that involves making meaning rather than the more passive ordering of made meanings” (Hayes, 1994, p. 262); self-understanding is the product of a shared social context. An individual and their environment link inextricably, and as the ego develops, the individual has a greater awareness of the meaning

found within the self and the environment. If an individual continuously constructs meaning, to understand the individual, one must navigate the space between what has happened and the individual's response to understand how they constructed meaning (Hayes, 1994). Kohlberg identified development stages as the qualitative leaps in cognition and problem-solving that children display when encountering the same problem throughout development in more holistic, integrated, and complex ways, with the growing ability to identify nuance and organize more types of thoughts and experiences (Hayes, 1994). Growth through these stages characterizes development as adaptive, differentiated, and integrative through "distinct modes of thought in a universal, invariant, and hierarchical developmental sequence" (Hayes, 1994, p. 263).

Similar to Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development rests upon the idea

that exposing individuals through moral discussion to the reasoning of those who were more developmentally advanced was most successful in stimulating the development of moral reasoning when the arguments were presented at a level just beyond the individual's current level of functioning. (Hayes, 1994, p. 263)

The social component of moral learning is also important insofar as when an individual learns through interaction, the individual can hear their thoughts aloud and has the opportunity to clarify intentions, encounter contradictions, and solve problems in a cohesive manner (Hayes, 1994). Through this notion, students of Kohlberg introduced psychosocial education in the 1970s in the school environment to bolster adolescent development (Hayes, 1994). With an emphasis on meaning-making, Kohlberg's work informs personality development through interventions based on social interaction around encountering the developmental crises of maturation; it is the interactions that lead a young person through the stages, rather than the stages that inform what interactions an individual is ready for (Hayes, 1994). When children can generate meaning amid a developmental crisis, they evidence true growth (Hayes, 1994).

Moral development is at home in the classroom insofar as Kohlberg's work highlights "the importance of promoting group development as a means for influencing individual development" (Hayes, 1994, p. 265). The classroom provides such a group, in which children have the opportunity to create a "just community" in order to mature sociomorally and behaviorally (Hayes, 1994). In the myriad encounters with the other, the self finds the requisite audience for understanding the value and meaning of the actions one chooses to take, alongside a wide array of interactions that set the stage for understanding self and other and the perspective-taking requisite for moral growth in knowing what is right and fair for the self, the other, and the collective (Hayes, 1994).

Theory of Mind

The developmental theory of mind urges the adults in children's lives to nurture young peoples' understanding of emotions, thoughts, and beliefs (and thereby themselves and others) as they grow. Adults can do this by ensuring that children understand that they have agency in the world through responding to children's cognitions; speaking about cause and effect, different points of view, and what is happening in one's own mind; and expressing a wide range of natural emotions, both positive and negative (Pavarini et al., 2013). This developmental framework helps children understand others, both in and out of school, and to know what to expect from human behavior and mental states.

Theory of mind is especially helpful in school, where children with this capacity can understand what other children are feeling, cultivate empathy, understand that others may have a different perspective than they have in a given moment (Shapiro et al., 2015), and imagine others' intentions (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Another critical aspect of the theory of mind is

that those with a developed sense of theory of mind understand that emotional expression may look and feel different for different people experiencing the same emotion (Shapiro et al., 2015).

Mindfulness and Development

Many considerations come into play when creating mindfulness programming that is age-appropriate for youth. Some considerations include: at what age to begin training, at what age to integrate certain practices, how to offer practices to meet developmental capacity, how to modify training over time as children grow emotionally and cognitively, how to stay true to the core aspects of mindfulness, how often to repeat key learnings, and how to nurture both mindful disposition and mindfulness skills (Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012; Zoogman et al., 2015). Researchers noted qualitative research as key in identifying mindfulness practices' developmental appropriateness (Greenberg & Harris, 2012).

Mindfulness practices, including sitting meditation, may be more appropriate for adolescents than for younger children, depending on the length of time and expectations for engaged focus. These measures are in concert with the metacognitive and attention capacities upon which these practices depend (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). On the other hand, because younger children are less self-conscious than adolescents, they may be more willing to experiment with new practices (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). The two most important factors when considering the age-appropriateness of mindfulness practices are the “developmental differences in the ability to focus and sustain attention on the present moment” (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017, p. 165).

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) as modified for children (MBCT-C) focuses on concrete sensory observation instead of on noticing cognitions, feelings, or abstract experience; repeats content more often; features overall shorter sessions, with shorter

mindfulness-of-breath practices; includes more sessions than the format for adults; and offers more practice opportunities per session to meet children's shorter attention spans (Semple et al., 2010). Research on this protocol consistently found that the mindfulness intervention displayed direct improvement on both attention and mindfulness and "most robustly addressed symptoms of psychopathology" (Zoogman et al., 2015, p. 298), with twice as strong an impact as on other factors, with three times as strong of an impact on clinical as opposed to non-clinical populations, and displayed significant improvement over the control condition in every trial.

A classroom environment founded on age-appropriate self-regulation from a neurocognitive and emotional standpoint would support the notion that "social, emotional and cognitive learning are interconnected to a greater extent in young children" (Viglas & Perlman, 2018, p. 1151). In such a classroom, mindfulness practices, lessons, and sessions would be shorter, have simpler instructions, would incorporate more movement, and teachers would use props, stories, and clear metaphors to meet children's self-regulation capacities and to clearly portray the goals of the activities (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Skills can build on one another sequentially, as "asking children to focus their attention on their sensations may lay the foundation for mindful awareness of more complex aspects of their subjective experience, such as emotions or thoughts" (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012, p. 157).

The field needs further research that focuses directly on mindfulness theory, developmental theory, and interventional application for children and adolescents to create programming that is developmentally appropriate and tracks with the changes that a young person undergoes during this window of growth (Viafora et al., 2015, p. 1180).

Mindfulness Training and Development

Practicing mindfulness is a way to support growth in self-regulation, strengthen executive function, and promote overall development during childhood (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Specifically, “mindfulness is simply a continuation of the naturally occurring human developmental process whereby one gains an increasing capacity for objectivity about one’s own internal experience” (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 6). With self-regulation noted to be a key aspect of development, evidence from mindfulness studies “confirms that participating in programs that explicitly engage children in tasks that foster self-regulation improves this skill over time and is consistent with evidence from studies looking at the success of programs aimed to improve self-regulation” (Viglas & Perlman, 2018, p. 1157). Zelazo and Lyons (2012) highlighted two essential factors for augmenting self-regulation development: practicing top-down, reflective processes and modulating bottom-up arousal disturbances. These authors saw mindfulness as a foundational component of an intervention that would enhance the already-occurring development process through its capacity to support both of these factors, thereby enhancing self-regulation (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

Just as physical exercise training progresses for children throughout an individual program and as the child matures, so too does mindfulness training, grounded in an understanding of the brain, body, and development to cultivate attention training that builds over time (Crane et al., 2017). Both formal and informal mindfulness practices cultivate experiences that enhance the development that is already at play in the young mind, with an eye towards practices that support interdependence and socio-cognitive development in the context of empathy (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Repetitive use of neural networks supporting regulation strengthens them and makes them more efficient; researchers noted these changes in the adult

brain after only 2 weeks of mindfulness practice (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). A preschool child's brain has a high level of neural and behavioral plasticity, indicating that self-regulation capacities are both impressionable and trainable in this key developmental window, particularly for children from disadvantaged home lives (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

The scientific basis of childhood development “informs us that the brain is built over time and that excessive stress damages the architecture of the developing brain leading to vulnerability to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and overall health” (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 296). Mindfulness curricula can support self-regulation by training emotional regulation, executive functions, and perspective-taking, key skills that show promising results with children raised in stressful environments (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). These skills “enhance students' capacities in self-regulation of attention and emotions, and buffer the developing brain from the deleterious effects of excessive stress” (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 296). Mindfulness can play a key role in helping children heal from trauma.

Trauma and ACEs

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Researchers see Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs); which include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; and exposure to mental illness, violence, divorce, substance abuse, and incarcerated family members; as potentially preventable experiences that have a drastic effect on physical and mental functioning (Walsh et al., 2019). People who experience ACEs are more likely to sustain chronic health problems and poor health throughout the lifespan (Walsh et al., 2019). Researchers believe that this effect maintains through exposure to long-term stress, the neurocognitive and physiological effects of which impair memory, cognition, attention, and behavior (and thus, school readiness), and delay

development (Walsh et al., 2019). The Center for Disease Control has studied the health impact of ACEs for several decades; Walsh et al. (2019) explored the association between these traumatic experiences and preschool children's ability to learn, pointing to a dose-response relationship whereby each additional ACE further impairs learning abilities.

A child experiencing four or more ACEs is more likely than their peers to develop ADHD and other attention challenges and to struggle more with the minor hassles of everyday life (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Stress is unavoidable, and one of the tasks of living and growing is learning how to acknowledge, manage, and skillfully respond to life's stressors to yield positive outcomes (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Under-resourced youth experience more stress in their homes, evidence more mental health problems, and are more likely to witness abuse and violence in a cycle that increases the stress load on already vulnerable developing minds, yielding diminished emotional self-efficacy (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Similar to Kohlberg's notion that meaning is a personal construction, children's self-perceptions of their ability to cope with a challenge indicate whether or not they are problematic (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Thus, it is essential to offer children skills such as mindfulness to effectively manage stress in order to bolster vulnerable children's psychological and physiological functioning and counteract the deleterious impact of the stress in their lives (Costello & Lawler, 2014).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Excessive stress, such as that of a child who has experienced several ACEs, harms the developing brain, often yielding post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Children and adolescents experiencing PTSD have difficulty learning, show diminished executive functioning, have impaired working memory, have poor mental health, and display reduced general functioning (Volanen et al., 2016). The reactivity characteristic of PTSD

associates with increased amygdala activity in children with high ACEs scores when they gaze at fearful facial expressions (Bauer et al., 2019). Children who experience homelessness often have a high ACEs score and an even greater likelihood of PTSD due to the traumatic situations that they often experience; thus, they are more likely than their peers to gain greater benefit from mindfulness training that targets emotional awareness and responsiveness (Viafora et al., 2015). Mindfulness can help ameliorate post-traumatic stress symptomatology (An et al., 2018).

Stress and the Brain

Stress, especially in excess, is particularly damaging to the developing brain's structure and function and is a strong contributor to academic, behavioral, and health challenges into adulthood (Auerbach & Delport, 2018). Prolonged stress exposure, childhood poverty, and maltreatment strengthen the amygdala, increase fear response, and impact how the amygdala functions throughout the lifespan (Bauer et al., 2019). Further, researchers observed a weaker link between the ventromedial prefrontal cortex's modulating function and the amygdala in early elementary children who experience more ACEs (Bauer et al., 2019).

Psychopathology

Children presenting with depression, anxiety, self-esteem issues, and aggressive behavior are more likely to be from under-resourced backgrounds due to their likely exposure to ACEs (Costello & Lawler, 2014). For those who will experience a psychological disorder in their lifetime, half of the disorders present by the time the individual is 14 years old (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017). Children who experience ACEs are more sensitive to stress, display delayed brain development in top-down regulatory areas, show impaired attention, and have increased amygdala activation, yielding greater vulnerability to psychopathology and increased negativity bias, which further impact their capacity for cognitive reappraisal and their ability to inhibit

reactivity (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). Mindfulness for these children can have a long-term influence as “bolstering self-regulation skills during childhood may potentially ameliorate adverse outcomes during adulthood” (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017, p. 164). In fact, “mindfulness training decreases chances of psycho-pathological outcomes by reducing stress” (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018, p. 5); in cases where caring adults cannot change what happens to a child, they can give them the skills to heal from what has happened.

Clinical Improvements

Positive stress coping skills facilitate growth in self-regulation, which can ameliorate the interference caused by stress and trauma in a child’s life (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Mindfulness interventions offered to clinical populations of children and adolescents “have shown improved diagnostic changes and significant improvements in stress, anxiety, self-esteem, quality of sleep, interpersonal difficulties, personal goals, awareness, impulsivity, social problems, happiness, and general improvements in ADHD symptoms” (Viafora et al., 2015, p. 1181).

Increased Benefit to Traumatized Children

Children who experience ACEs or who suffer from post-traumatic stress face increased challenges in their lives and stand to benefit more from the practice of mindfulness than their peers with more stable homes and lives (Viafora et al., 2015). Viafora et al. (2015) offered that “children with more difficult emotional lives experience certain additional benefits from mindfulness training” (p. 1188) and that research results pointed to “significant improvements for participants with the highest levels of clinical symptoms” (p. 1188). When families cannot afford or do not value mental health care, children are “more likely to use mindfulness meditation [which] points toward the feasibility and affordability of mindfulness meditation as a

[complementary and alternative medicine] approach for maintaining psychological health in the pediatric population” (Wang et al., 2019, p. 275).

Mindfulness interventions offer behavioral and psychological improvement to children from more impoverished families, helping narrow the health equality gap by supporting well-being (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Perhaps these children show such significant improvement with mindfulness practice compared with their non-clinical counterparts because they have more room for improvement in executive function with lower baseline functioning, poorer skills, and increased clinical symptoms (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017; Zoogman et al., 2015).

Attachment

When children have a strong attachment figure in their lives, they can better cope with a stressful life (An et al., 2018). Without a secure attachment figure, young adults are more likely to develop PTSD (An et al., 2018). From a functional neurophysiological standpoint, Siegel (2012) offered the benefits of attachment such that “interpersonal patterns of communication that are integrative stimulate the activity and growth of integrative fibers in the brain... that enable self-regulation because they are the circuits responsible for coordinating and balancing the internal and interpersonal elements of the individual” (p. 34-2). Insecure attachment may be a predictor of PTSD and psychological problems such as depression and poor stress coping resulting from trauma (An et al., 2018). This factor increases with economic risk (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Likewise, secure parental attachment provides resilience for children and adolescents who experienced ACEs (An et al., 2018).

Attachment signals safety, security, and protection to the child and supports regulation (Ryan et al., 2007). The practice of mindfulness fosters “a feeling of security, perhaps cultivating a secure attachment with oneself” (Hutchinson et al., 2018, p. 3947), as children who lack

support “are able to ‘be there for themselves’” (Viafora et al., 2015, p. 1187). With this work’s interest in the school setting, a key learning is that secure attachment with both parents correlates with academic motivation and burnout prevention (An et al., 2018).

An attachment figure has a profound effect on the developing child, as “the priming of positive and loving attachment figures can activate positive states of mind, whereas the priming of rejecting, controlling or cold figures may activate fewer, and perhaps even crowd out, people’s positive capacities” (Ryan et al., 2007, p. 177). Further, attachment correlates with positive psychological metrics, increased reflection and regulation, and an increased likelihood of developing dispositional mindfulness (Ryan et al., 2007); in fact, “people who have experienced attentive, responsive, and sensitive caregiving are likely to be both more securely attached and more mindful... developmental supports may enhance both of these outcomes” (Ryan et al., 2007, p. 180). Relationships are essential.

Effect on Schooling

Researchers in various studies found a strong association between trauma and school readiness, with 50% of the kindergarten students in one study deemed by their teachers as displaying maladaptive classroom and social behavior (Singh et al., 2013). In another study, “ACEs were associated with poorer academic skills and behavioural problems during the final month of kindergarten” (Walsh et al., 2019, p. 16). Students who participated in a mindfulness intervention noted benefits in emotional regulation, attention, relaxation, social interactions, and academics, ameliorating the specific areas that children experiencing homelessness and trauma may struggle in: “aggression, shorter attention spans, sleep disturbances, friendship and school disruptions, and poorer educational outcomes” (Viafora et al., 2015, p. 1189).

When children struggle with self-regulation and face behavioral and social-emotional challenges at school, they suffer more academically and are subsequently more likely to drop out than their peers who have encountered less trauma (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Researchers saw these struggles evident as young as preschool, preventing underprivileged children from benefitting as much from school as other children, thereby missing out on the social and educational benefits schools can provide (Singh et al., 2013). Training often leaves teachers underprepared to meet these children's needs, and teachers are thus unable to prevent or completely resolve challenges as they arise, which contributes to teacher burnout, affecting the educational setting in a systematic manner (Singh et al., 2013). To cultivate a setting that provides the opportunity for optimal learning for all students, Costello and Lawler (2014) suggested that "strategies designed to address stress should be a fundamental part of any successful education program as children can benefit from programs teaching positive coping skills and prevention of psychological and behavioural problems associated with high stress environments" (pp. 22–23).

School-Based Interventions

Students spend approximately 15,000 hours in school between kindergarten and high school graduation (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Schools have long supported children's positive development and can serve an emotionally protective function by implementing social and emotional training programs (Dove & Costello, 2017; Lawlor, 2014). Stress-free or low-stress classroom environments can promote development and academic success (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Further, Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) noted that school-based interventions are logical and distinctly advantageous over other venues for mindfulness work

with children insofar as children already spend their days learning new skills in schools; researchers noted that

with the majority of children enrolled in schools, and with children spending a significant amount of time at school, schools have more scope than any other institution to deliver accessible social and emotional wellbeing programs to the majority of children. (p. 305)

When students learn mindfulness skills in the classroom, it is easier for them to implement them in the classroom environment, and when the mindfulness teacher teaches the lessons in the classroom, they are likewise easier to implement without the time lost to room transition (Felver et al., 2016).

Targeting entire class or school populations is less stigmatizing than the inequity highlighting or social comparison that can be the result of singling out children by diagnostic criteria (Johnson et al., 2016; Kuyken et al., 2013), and can thus cultivate more caring learning communities where teachers and students model mindful qualities and behaviors throughout the school day (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). This non-criteria-based approach “through equal reach may even act as a counterforce for the prominent development of increasing inequality between different groups” (Volanen et al., 2016, p. 2).

As schools search for effective ways to teach resilience and social-emotional skills, mindfulness offers the opportunity for an early intervention to enhance these skill sets (Dove & Costello, 2017). The social-emotional learning (SEL) curricula offered in schools today comprise five competencies, all of which mindfulness supports as a tool for “self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision making” (Lawlor, 2014, p. 84).

Teaching mindfulness as an SEL intervention to an entire class allows all children the opportunity to benefit from the intervention and reaches children whose challenges may not be seen by others or are undiagnosable (van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2014). Full-class instruction

also reduces the possible stigma resulting from criteria-based selection (McCabe et al., 2017). As a result, even brief mindfulness programming helps reduce stress (Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2017), improves the learning environment (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017), bolsters social skills, and improves overall adaptive school functioning (Greenberg & Harris, 2012) for children with a wide array of backgrounds and aptitudes. These skills apply to situations such as pre-test anxiety, bullying, and hyperactive classroom environments (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017).

Researchers further noted that “mindfulness practices in schools foster prosocial behavior, as they strengthen self-regulation and impulse control. They alleviate the effects of stress that obstruct learning and provide a skill set that promotes intellectual, physical and emotional well-being throughout life” (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018, p. 2). When an entire class learns mindfulness, as opposed to a few students, the class learns a language for regulation that the teacher can employ when student misbehavior derails the class and it is challenging to bring the class back; the teacher thus regains precious moments for instruction that were once lost to misbehavior and cultivates academic and social engagement through mindful regulation (Singh et al., 2013).

While mindfulness is not an academic content area, the evidence supporting the connection between long-term health (physical and mental), well-being, and educational success points to mindfulness programs as appropriate for the school setting (Hutchinson et al., 2018; McCabe et al., 2017). Shapiro et al. (2015) posited that this benefit may result from the cultivation of mental and neural habits that address both automatic and choiceful components of regulation and which mindfulness training in the classroom supports. This understanding is concurrent with schools’ interest in improving academic performance through attention to children’s social and emotional needs (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Further, on a practical level,

schools “frequently ask children to pay attention but give them no instruction as to how to do so” (Shankland & Rosset, 2017, p. 367); mindfulness training does just this. Shapiro et al. (2015) posited that this attentional training is the result of practicing full engagement with what is happening rather than losing oneself to discursive thought and of the open curiosity to experience that mindfulness promotes; it further supports the reflective capacities that engage a learner actively rather than passively in the learning process.

Programs offered to children in schools are usually more didactic and feature shorter practice sessions than adult interventions (Hutchinson et al., 2018; Shapiro et al., 2015). Mindfulness curricula adjusted for children’s cognitive development level can simultaneously address the increased social and academic stressors that young people face today (Johnson et al., 2016). Further, mindfulness programming implemented with an eye towards fidelity, teacher training, and ongoing development, integration, and evaluation is more likely to be sustainable (Lawlor, 2014). School-based mindfulness programs offer a preventative component through “a unique opportunity to access a broad spectrum of the population during a key developmental window” (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 1). These school-based interventions show the same psychological and behavioral improvements evidenced in programming offered in more therapeutic settings (Perry-Parrish et al., 2016). Further, the self-regulation development that children achieve through practicing mindfulness comes into play in and out of school as children are better able to problem-solve and to flexibly adapt to the challenges they face in their lives (Shapiro et al., 2015).

While the field is relatively new, with most published studies dating after 2007 (Cheek et al., 2017), there is growing evidence for school-based programs as efficacious in preventing adult mental health concerns while supporting the social and emotional learning and overall

well-being of children as they grow and develop (Kuyken et al., 2013). Most of the evidence supporting mindfulness training for youth results from studies conducted in the school setting (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). McCabe et al. (2017) supported this notion, stating that “the use of mindfulness as a treatment for childhood anxiety has been well established and the implementation of school-based early intervention programs is a recommended method of promoting mental health and wellbeing in children” (p. 2). Further, mindfulness supports the cultivation of “self-compassion, moral development, creativity and learning” (Shapiro et al., 2015, p. 24).

These skills can immediately address the wide range of stressors in school, from academic to social: performance anxiety, absenteeism, hostility, testing anxiety, infractions, homework, bullying, suspension, fitting in, among others (Bazzano et al., 2018; Greenberg & Harris, 2012). Further, researchers noted that “in school settings, studies have shown that [mindfulness-based interventions] are associated with increases in well-being, resilience, optimism and prosocial behavior, improved cognitive and executive functioning, academic performance, and lower levels of problem behaviors, emotional distress and perceived stress” (Cheek et al., 2017). Offering these practices to children allows them to access benefits during a critical developmental window for learning self-regulation, and classes often fit easily into the school day (Kuyken et al., 2013).

While most studies focus on attentional and emotional regulation and symptom reduction, McCabe et al. (2017) conducted a study to ascertain students’ acceptance of a mindfulness intervention, highlighting the importance of engagement for program efficacy. In prior studies, researchers noted the intervention as efficacious in improving mindfulness skills and emotional regulation. In this study, children enjoyed the program, indicating that there were no aspects of

the program that they disliked, that it contributed to their relaxation and regulation, and that they would recommend it to other children. Thus, the program was deemed acceptable, and researchers pointed to the benefit for children who might be identified by diagnostic criteria learning mindfulness in a whole-class setting to enhance acceptability by reducing possible stigma (McCabe et al., 2017).

A qualitative study (Dariotis et al., 2016) explored the aspects of a mindfulness program that children incorporated into their daily lives, both in and outside of school. Students at three high-poverty urban schools participated in a twice-weekly, 16-week mindfulness and yoga intervention. The intervention delivered 45-minute sessions to entire classes. Researchers collected measures after the completion of the program through recorded interviews and focus groups with teachers and students (mean age = 11.3). Researchers paid specific attention to skills that children carried beyond the program and to changes observed by classroom teachers. Qualitative exploration focused on learning, retention, and application to provide information about the intervention. Children retained and used body-based skills (breath, posture); beneficial practices fostered use and sharing outside of school; practice increased emotional awareness and regulation and reduced reactivity; teachers and students were both hopeful that these benefits would maintain over time. Most preceding qualitative studies focused on school or behavioral factors; however, Dariotis et al. (2016) intentionally focused more on learning and process than on school-level or behavioral elements.

A 2015 study (Viafora et al.) offered an 8-week mindfulness intervention for both housing-insecure and housing-secure middle school students. Students facing homelessness displayed greater significance in improvement measures, including emotional well-being,

practice implementation, dealing with difficult emotions, and were more likely to recommend the practice to others.

Smith-Carrier et al. (2015) implemented the Mindfulness Without Borders intervention over 12 weeks with 80 secondary students, and through qualitative analysis found the program to augment personal growth, reduce stress, increase relaxation and emotional regulation, improve social awareness, enhance collective well-being, improve learning outcomes and concentration, inspire self-discovery, and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Authors supported mindfulness programming oriented toward the school setting.

In 2018, Viglas and Perlman provided a mindfulness intervention to ascertain the effects on self-regulation, prosocial interactions, and hyperactive behavior. One hundred twenty-seven kindergarteners received 20-minute lessons three times per week, over 6 weeks. The intervention significantly improved self-regulation and prosociality and diminished hyperactivity. This improvement was stronger for children who started with lower baseline measures. Children who received mindfulness training were “more (1) considerate, (2) helpful and (3) caring as well as more likely (4) to share and (5) to be kind to younger children” (Viglas & Perlman, 2018, p. 1157). The authors pointed to these results as supporting the efficacy and benefit of school-based mindfulness programming in the early childhood setting.

Tarrasch (2018) conducted a study to assess the effects of mindfulness on 101 upper elementary students’ attention faculties. Study results pointed to a significant increase in both sustained and selective attention, which can, in turn, reduce impulsivity and can support academic achievement, self-awareness, school confidence, and persistence on frustrating tasks. Tarrasch (2018) pointed to anxiety reduction as a possible mechanism supporting these results “as anxiety impairs attention” (p. 2639).

In a 2018 study conducted by Bazzano et al., researchers randomized third grade students presenting with anxiety into an 8-week mindfulness and yoga intervention or treatment as usual condition to assess student well-being. The intervention consisted of ten 40-minute sessions that took place before the school day. Results showed improvements in emotional and psychosocial metrics of well-being, pointing to an improvement in anxiety symptoms and stress-management. It is of note that this school already had a social-emotional curriculum and empathy programming, which highlights the impact of comprehensive support and programming on psychosocial and emotional improvement.

A 2013 non-randomized, controlled intervention targeting both teachers and students (ages 12–16) in six different schools used a 9-week program matched with a control condition (Kuyken et al., 2013). The program consisted of lessons on both practical skills and attitudes intended to cultivate open, non-judgmental awareness. Baseline, completion, and follow-up measures assessed acceptability, as well as the mental health and well-being effects of the program. Researchers pointed to evidence for improved depression symptomatology after the course, which maintained after 3 months, along with the addition of lower stress and increased overall well-being (Kuyken et al., 2013).

Johnson et al. (2016) conducted a study to measure the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based intervention that measured self-compassion, mindfulness, and emotional dysregulation, with a particular focus on outcomes for depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and overall well-being in middle school students. Researchers randomly selected socio-economically diverse seventh and eighth grade classes (mean age = 13.63) into either a mindfulness or control group. Researchers utilized the “.be” curriculum for consistency and to facilitate comparing results with previous studies using the same curriculum. Researchers implemented the intervention over nine

weeks, with individual weekly sessions ranging from 35 to 60 minutes. The control condition included social action projects with the same temporal parameters. Researchers obtained measures before and after the intervention and at an 11-week follow-up. Assessing responses from both students and their teachers, researchers found no statistically significant results for any of their variables. Researchers noted an increase in anxiety, as has been found in other studies. Theorists posit that this results from increased mindfulness resulting in greater awareness of existing emotional states, which may ultimately result in a decrease in anxiety over the longer term (Johnson et al., 2016). While results indicated no improvement, the authors pointed to the need to create studies that focus on optimal dosing for this age group.

A 2014 mixed-methods study (Costello & Lawler) interviewed 16 students and two teachers who participated in a mindfulness program to understand children's subsequent stress-management and mindfulness experiences. Quantitative results pointed to significant reductions in stress levels, while thematic analysis pointed to the themes of "conceptualization of stress, awareness, self-regulation, classroom regulations, and addressing future stress" (p. 21), indicating mindfulness as an effective and empowering tool for children to use to manage stress, increase well-being, and to succeed academically. These adaptive benefits improved both student- and classroom-level measures of behavior.

A 2018 study conducted by Chandrasekara provided an MBSR intervention to 30 secondary school students, twice a week for 8 weeks. Scores on a depression and stress inventory were significantly lower after the intervention, while life satisfaction and mindfulness and attention scores increased significantly. These results indicated that a mindfulness intervention delivered in the school setting can improve mental health and overall life satisfaction (Chandrasekara, 2018).

Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) offered a mindfulness intervention to 99 fourth and fifth graders, measuring executive functioning, salivary cortisol, self-reported well-being, prosocial behaviors, and math grades. Program results found improved cognitive functioning; inhibited physiological stress; greater display of emotional regulation, mindfulness, and empathy; enhanced peer recognition of prosocial behavior; improved peer preference; and significantly improved attentional functioning over a control group. These findings pointed to mindfulness as a strategy for relieving stress and challenges while promoting thriving.

Volanen et al. (2020) conducted a large-scale study comparing a 9-week mindfulness intervention with a relaxation program and active control condition, delivered to 3,519 middle school students in 56 schools. The intervention included 45-minute sessions in school and a daily home-practice component. Results pointed to a slight improvement in mindfulness participants' resilience, with girls more likely than boys to improve in depressive symptomatology. A 6-month follow-up indicated that students who continued to practice mindfulness daily also continued to improve in resilience measures.

A 2019 study (Bauer et al.) provided a mindfulness intervention for the entire sixth grade (without selective criteria) of a school to investigate the program's impact on stress reduction and explore its underlying neurocognitive mechanism. The mindfulness training lowered stress in all areas of daily life, ameliorated negative affect, and promoted neuroplasticity through inhibited right amygdalar activation. Results showed a stronger connection between the right amygdala and the ventromedial prefrontal cortex for children who completed the mindfulness programming. This effect endured in non-meditative states, pointing to the enduring positive impact of brain changes and regulation in generalized experience. Authors noted the effectiveness of the program as applied to an entire class, as "mindfulness may help buffer

increases in stress and negative affect that occur across the academic year” (Bauer et al., 2019, p. 579).

Dove and Costello (2017) implemented a 1-hour mindfulness program for 6 weeks with 57 fifth-grade students in three schools, noting a relatively low investment of both time and money for the program, which focused on skills that could be applicable in a variety of areas of children’s lives. Results evidenced an increase in mindfulness skills along with decreased emotional symptoms, particularly those associated with anxiety, pointing to school-based interventions as promising in improving student well-being.

A randomized study focusing on non-clinical adolescent boys (mean age = 12.5) from low-income backgrounds entailed 50-minute sessions, once a week, over 12 weeks (Sibinga et al., 2013). The control condition was a health education program. Researchers measured psychological functioning, stress response, coping skills, mindfulness, and sleep quality. Researchers obtained data at the beginning and end of the intervention and at a 3-month follow-up. Participants who learned mindfulness displayed lower levels of anxiety, rumination, negative coping, anger, and reactivity (Sibinga et al., 2013). Researchers found an association between the mindfulness skill of awareness and decreased anxiety, believing that the MBSR-based intervention reduced anxiety and rumination and increased self-regulation (Sibinga et al., 2013).

A 2018 (Hutchinson et al.) qualitative study explored children’s use of school-taught mindfulness in their everyday lives. The curriculum taught regulation in the face of challenging emotions, inner relationship to difficult thought patterns, response rather than reaction, and happiness cultivation (Hutchinson et al., 2018). Researchers interviewed sixth grade students who learned and practiced mindfulness for 2 years; they elicited four themes through thematic analysis, noting that children used mindfulness for emotional regulation, how dysregulation

prompted mindfulness use, challenges students encountered, and the environmental conditions that made mindfulness use more or less likely (Hutchinson et al., 2018).

Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) conducted an interview-based exploration of elementary children's experiences after completing eight sessions of a mindfulness intervention in their classrooms. These children found mindfulness to be helpful with emotional regulation, particularly applicable to the experience of anxiety and fear, most often employing breath focus as the primary out-of-class practice, upon the arising of an undesirable emotion.

Cheek et al. (2017) conducted a qualitative exploration of letters written by 112 elementary students who learned mindfulness in order to understand the children's perspectives, where they placed value in their learning and practice, and what the impact was, in order to inform optimal mindfulness programming creation. Researchers elicited five themes that were foundational for the focus and implementation of the program: the mindful environment, a sense of community, agency, relating to each other, and contact with the inner self. Students' relational sense of self and reflective awareness enabled both the learning and unlearning of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that hinder connection and subsequently made them less self-centered. Students were more responsive, less reactive, and more patient with discomfort, as they utilized the practice throughout the day (in and out of school). Because the classroom teacher implemented the practice, the mindful environment of the classroom itself shifted the agency that students felt in the learning process. The authors pointed to the insights gained in this study as highly informative for future program implementation.

A 2019 study authored by Su and Swank provided a mindfulness intervention for students in a counseling group who struggled with attention challenges. As compared to the control group, the third and fourth grade students who participated in the mindfulness program

displayed a positive effect on attention, a decrease in attention problems, and increased on-task time in the classroom, which in turn enhanced academic performance. Authors pointed to the applicability of mindfulness skills across the various settings in a child's life to increase self-management and promote development and growth in childhood (Su & Swank, 2019).

These studies pointed to the applicability of mindfulness in the school setting; however, children learn social and emotional competencies in a variety of venues. As a skill that one can teach in medical, therapeutic, and non-school settings, the following section provides evidence of the impact of mindfulness training in such settings.

Non-School-Based Interventions

By taking note of the setting in which children learn mindfulness, the research community can ascertain the optimal setting in which to teach these skills and practices. Carreres-Ponsoda et al. (2017) noted that the reach of mindfulness programming need not be confined to the school building, such that large numbers of children are accessible outside the school day. Many out-of-school interventions reach children in a clinical setting, and Viafora et al. (2015) cautioned: "those who aspire to use mindfulness to relieve the suffering of children with traumatic backgrounds should be cautious, and have highly developed clinical skills, or experience working with this population" (p. 1181).

Auerbach and Delpont (2018) provided a music and mindfulness intervention after school for 10 months to under-resourced children between 11 and 14 years of age. Through qualitative exploration, this program provided evidence of increased self-awareness, compassion, and enhanced attention skills. This study supports the applicability of focused attention on sound as developing mindfulness capacities in an informal educational setting.

Monshat et al. (2013) completed a qualitative study to understand how adolescents approach mindfulness practices and ideas. Following 6 weeks of participating in a 90-minute class taught by a physician, along with a daily home-practice component, 11 young people participated in focus groups and individual interviews. As a non-school-based intervention, this study entailed greater age diversity in intervention participants. Using a grounded theory approach, researchers analyzed the data for emergent themes to encapsulate participant experiences. Coding iterations led researchers to six core categories of experience. According to this study, young mindfulness practitioners progressed from a state of emotional distress and reactivity to the point of relative stability and relaxation with the ability to manage stress with greater responsiveness, which further provided a foundation for gaining insight and clarity and applying mindfulness more broadly. The mindfulness intervention helped the young people in this study deal with familial, social, and academic stress without “freaking out” (p. 574) as much. The adolescents gained perspective, disentangled from uncomfortable emotions, and learned not to listen to the insecure, questioning, internal voice. Researchers theorized that the fact that children received this program outside of a school allowed participants to experience and emphasize integrating mindfulness into daily life (Monshat et al., 2013).

A study focusing on attention, anxiety, and maladaptive behavior in inner-city, low-income, minority children displayed increased attentional control through a 12-week mindfulness program comprised of 90-minute sessions (Semple et al., 2010). The intervention was a therapeutic application utilizing MBCT-C, a modification of the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) program for children based on using cognitive skills to increase regulation. Adaptations include shorter breathing practices, smaller groups, more games, increased movement, a greater variation of practices, a multi-sensory approach, and focus on both internal

and external sensory experiences. This study's emotional resilience benefits maintained at follow-up, and researchers noted that they continued to positively affect behavior problems (Semple et al., 2010).

Liehr and Diaz (2010) conducted a controlled study with a group of clinically identified minority children (mean age = 9.5) to assess the effectiveness of mindfulness in ameliorating anxiety and depression symptoms. Researchers obtained measures at both the beginning and completion of the intervention, which utilized the Mindful Schools curriculum and which they offered every day for 15 minutes, over 2 weeks. Evidence pointed to mindfulness as a possibility for decreasing sadness, anxiousness, and depression, through an intervention taught by an experienced mindfulness practitioner and educator (Liehr & Diaz, 2010).

A 2017 study (Carreres-Ponsoda et al.) provided an 8-week after school program to 30 adolescents, along with 45 minutes of home practice per day. Students receiving the intervention displayed reduced experiential stress, increased optimism, and increases in five key mindfulness skills: "observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience and non-reactivity to inner experience" (Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2017, p. 41). These results pointed to mindfulness programming as effective in promoting well-being and reducing stress while building competency in socioemotional skills. Whether children learn mindfulness in or out of school, adults teach mindfulness, sometimes involving the caregivers in a child's life.

Adult Caregiver Involvement

There are many adults involved in nurturing children, and there are many ways mindfulness interventions can involve these adult caregivers in the process of children learning mindfulness. Adults with whom children have familiar bonds can be co-participants in learning, learn mindfulness in a separate setting, or be actively involved in teaching mindfulness to

children. As mentioned prior, an adult's mindfulness capacity can mediate healthy childhood attachment. Therefore, adults' own levels of mindfulness are significant as "stressful experiences can spillover from one stressed individual to another within a shared social setting" (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016, p. 30).

Teachers

Bringing mindfulness practice into the educational setting may help teachers themselves become more mindful, be more stress-resilient (particularly in the face of occupational stress), exhibit more well-being, manage classrooms more effectively, and be more motivated at work, all of which can improve daily interactions with students (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2013; van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2014). Singh et al. (2013) indicated that "mindfulness training for teachers was effective in changing teacher-student interactions in desirable ways" (p. 212). This notion is especially important for those tasked with nurturing our society's children as "burnout is presumed to be highest in teachers compared to other professions" (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016, p. 31).

Theorists posited that those who teach mindfulness to children must have significant training as well as a commitment to a personal practice (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008). Program success may depend on such characteristics of the teacher themselves (Cheek et al., 2017) as the teaching transmits through the curriculum and the teacher's inhabited qualities (Crane et al., 2017). Kabat-Zinn (as cited in Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008) affirmed that an instructor can only teach mindfulness with authenticity when the instructor has the foundation of their own daily practice, as there are non-verbal aspects of learning mindfulness skills. Teacher behavior is a model for the developing student (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

Evidence points to a correlation between teacher well-being and positive classrooms, positive classroom relationships, student well-being and academic outcomes (Lawlor, 2014), and children's executive functioning (Neuenschwander et al., 2017) as "mindfulness-trained teachers embody mindful behaviors and attitudes through their presence and interaction with students in the classroom" (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 294). When teachers have a difficult time regulating their own emotions and are reactive, the resultant stress impairs teacher-student relationships, classroom quality, and feeds a cycle of high stress, particularly for teachers who experience professional stress (Neuenschwander et al., 2017). Teachers who are most competent in managing their own emotions during chaotic classroom episodes exhibit strong socioemotional skills overall (Neuenschwander et al., 2017); this parallels evidence in psychological and medical fields where the practitioner-leader's mindfulness had an impact on those with whom the professional worked (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Negative emotional arousal impairs a teacher's ability to be attentive to the behavior, activity, and details in the classroom, which increases the likelihood of chaos and narrow focus (Neuenschwander et al., 2017). Teacher well-being can have a profound impact on children as teacher burnout is correlated to children's cortisol levels (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016); further, "exposure to teacher stress may be regarded as a stressful experience in young children's school life, possibly playing a crucial role in shaping children's self-regulatory abilities, including [executive function]" (Neuenschwander et al., 2017, pp. 892–893). Children's executive function parallels adult well-being, such that consistent exposure to a depressed caregiver can suppress the development of a child's executive functioning (Neuenschwander et al., 2017).

Teachers' occupational stress and the resultant burnout they experience impact students directly and further influence "personal health, education systems, and societies around the world" (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016, p. 35). This effect is so stark that teachers who receive comparatively less respect from their colleagues and who inhabit stressful classroom environments are more likely to have students with increased adjustment and behavioral challenges (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). The compounding consequences correlate such that "higher levels of occupational stress in classroom teachers transfer to students in the classroom" (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016, p. 35). The more support teachers receive, the less stress they experience, and the more empathy and stress regulation their students exhibit (Neuenschwander et al., 2017; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Students learn SEL skills better from a teacher who inhabits the skills and behaves from strong, positive, social-emotional functioning (Lawlor, 2014). Therefore, mindfulness training directed toward teachers can promote positive outcomes for students, while teachers become more competent, more confident, experience less burnout, increase in dispositional mindfulness, and improve in health outcome measures (Lawlor, 2014; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). The more mindfulness training a teacher has, the greater the positive impact on their students; however, poor training, learning, and mindfulness implementation can negatively impact a child's SEL measures (Lawlor, 2014). Further, a child with increased risk factors will experience a positive relationship with a teacher as a protective factor, while the same child will experience exacerbated risk of failure with disconnected teacher relationships (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

The mindfully attuned teacher can promote positive relational functioning in the classroom, help children develop emotional awareness through being heard, and model empathy

and compassion throughout the school day, thereby increasing the safety in the classroom that promotes learning and emotional development (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Unlike other management training, “the promise of mindfulness training is that it produces transformational change in the teacher” (Singh et al., 2013, p. 214). Implementing individual strategies can help achieve the results above; however, mindfulness is an ongoing process that one must practice and is one that an individual transmits more through behavior than through lessons in complex classroom environments. To aid student development and provide coherence and continuity, the teacher must deepen their practice and cannot merely attend a one-day training (Jennings et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Over time, the cultivation of this practice in educators shows increased compliance in students, decreased maladaptive classroom behaviors, decreased poor social functioning, and an increase in self-guided play (Singh et al., 2013); this is extremely important, as “teaching has been ranked among the most stressful of occupations” (Neuenschwander et al., 2017, p. 882). Singh et al. (2013) pointed to the efficacy and efficiency of mindfulness training for teachers insofar as “changing teacher behavior is more cost effective because it is less labor intensive than changing the behavior of multiple children, and a well-trained teacher can use the same skills with students in successive classes” (p. 213).

The Jennings et al. (2013) Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) program significantly improved teacher well-being, classroom efficacy, and mindfulness while reducing burnout and urgency by employing the prosocial classroom theoretical model which “emphasizes the significance of teachers’ social and emotional competence (SEC) and well-being in the development and maintenance of supportive teacher-student relationships, effective classroom management, and social and emotional learning” (Jennings et al., 2013, p. 374).

Further, the prosocial classroom model shows teacher and student characteristics to be bidirectional in the classroom; healthy outcomes set the stage for healthy outcomes (Neuenschwander et al., 2017). Findings from this study indicated that a teacher's psychological health provides a stronger foundation for a positive classroom environment than teacher experience, training, or level of educational attainment (Jennings et al., 2013). Likewise, teacher burnout and overall stress levels paralleled maladaptive classroom behavior and poor student achievement (Jennings et al., 2013); this finding points to the strong need to ameliorate teacher stress in order to maximize what the individual teacher is capable of and to provide an academically and emotionally supportive classroom for students (Jennings et al., 2013).

The CARE model helps teachers address challenging behavior with less reactivity, more self-awareness, and more sensitivity to both the needs of the individual student and the classroom emotional climate (Jennings et al., 2013); this factor prompted 87% of teacher participants to indicate that the CARE training would be beneficial in both teacher training and professional development settings. The prosocial classroom model supported improvements in effective classroom management, positive classroom climate cultivation, strengthened teacher-student relationships, increased teacher well-being, improved teaching efficacy, increased teacher mindfulness, and decreased burnout, which all yielded improvements in students' academic outcomes (Jennings et al., 2013). The improvements in classroom climate promoted by the CARE model "may result in improvements in students' academic achievement, thus, supporting initiatives and policy aimed at these outcomes, especially those seeking to narrow the 'achievement gap'" (Jennings et al., 2013, p. 386). Professional development offerings such as CARE can support both students and teachers in performance and resilience through building SEL competence (Jennings et al., 2013).

A school-based study (Bazzano et al., 2018) offered teachers hour-long professional development sessions on yoga and mindfulness, after which they integrated the practices they learned in their classrooms and noted the benefits. Over the course of the school year, the teachers increased the frequency with which they used these skills, especially mid-year (a time which teachers highlight as especially stressful). Teacher health tends to take a downturn over the school year due to the stress of teaching, and teachers still indicated that they derived benefit from the mindfulness program. Further, teachers were more likely to offer mindfulness practices in their classrooms if their students were receiving mindfulness lessons (Bazzano et al., 2018).

The creators of the “.be” curriculum used in the Johnson et al. (2016) study specified that classroom teachers deliver the content, necessarily involving the teachers in mindfulness education, thereby allowing teachers to embody and model mindful behavior throughout the school day. By extension, the trained teacher can provide reminders to individual children to practice the skills they are working on, opportunities for more group practice, and reinforcement of lessons throughout the broader curriculum. While researchers noted these benefits in the intended curricular delivery, one of the researchers involved with the Johnson et al. (2016) research delivered the curriculum for the study, perhaps limiting teacher buy-in and integration, but increasing participation for teachers-as-learners (Johnson et al., 2016).

In the Dariotis et al. (2016) study, an outside provider taught the intervention, and classroom teachers did not participate in the classes. At least one teacher indicated learning about mindfulness from overhearing students talking about what they learned. Another teacher wished that teachers had more involvement with the program along with information about what students were learning so they could extend and integrate skills throughout the day. Teachers

who participated in breathing exercises before standardized testing noticed the benefit for themselves and echoed this desire for more personal learning (Dariotis et al., 2016).

A 2013 study (Singh et al.) offered an 8-week mindfulness program to preschool teachers and measured the effects on student behavior. The intervention took place in 2-hour, one-on-one sessions, and teachers were required to practice at home. The students' maladaptive behaviors decreased, and compliance increased commensurate with their teachers' mindfulness training and practice. While there was no evidence of increased positive behaviors, developmentally appropriate neutral interactions (children playing by themselves) increased, and negative peer interactions decreased significantly. Authors pointed to mindfulness as improving teacher well-being, self-efficacy, behavioral management, and student interaction, noting that "training teachers in mindfulness changes student behaviors" (Singh et al., 2013, p. 226). Further, teachers who participated in this study noted improvements at school and at home.

Van de Weijer-Bergsma et al. (2014) involved teachers directly in mindfulness classes and required them to practice with students on days without mindfulness lessons. Results indicated that preventative mental health effects were stronger at follow-up than they were even at the program's completion, with both children and parents reporting persistent improved stress and mental well-being (van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2014).

Cheek et al. (2017) noted the extensive training and initiative of the classroom teacher who implemented the mindfulness program for her own students in their study. Due to her familiarity with and dedication to the practice, she could invest the time and flexibility to weave the skills throughout the school day. Study authors suggested "that successful integration of [mindfulness training] in the classroom critically depends on teachers who are well trained in,

and committed to, [mindfulness training] themselves” (Cheek et al., 2017, p. 2575), and that the sum of all of her interactions with her students was as significant as the curriculum itself.

The next section outlines the impact and role of parent participation in children learning mindfulness.

Parents

Increases in parent mindfulness correlate with reductions in child ADHD symptomatology (Cassone, 2015), perhaps due to the parental attachment relationship that serves as a protective factor and is partially mediated by the parent’s level of dispositional mindfulness (An et al., 2018). Typically developing infants with attuned and mirroring caregivers develop stronger self-observational, reflective, and awareness capacities, as unconditional positive regard from a parent yields positive self-regard in a young person (Brown et al., 2007). Results of caregiver reflection include feeling secure, loved, and capable. Brown et al. (2007) further pointed out “that children with more attentive, sensitive, accepting caregivers develop greater reflective and regulative skills, including those associated with mindfulness” (p. 179), while those raised in harmful and traumatizing environments showed deficits in these areas, which compound throughout development.

When parents are well-regulated, manage their own stress, and limit reactivity, children’s ADHD symptoms improve significantly (Chan et al., 2018), perhaps because empathy supports both attachment and mindfulness cultivation (Brown et al., 2007). Because children operate both in classrooms and in families, some treatment programs (Semple et al., 2010) focus on parents as well as children. Parents can be “trained to support changes in their children by attending an orientation before the start of the program, completing homework with their children, and providing feedback on the intervention” (Zoogman et al., 2015, p. 292). An adult who is present

and socially and emotionally aware can respond skillfully to trauma responses that may arise in children by “recognizing the signs of flooding and responding appropriately to meet the child’s emotional needs” (Viafora et al., 2015, p. 1181). Children can even identify the positive influence that a caring adult’s mindfulness practice has on their interactions and lives through the adult’s managed reactivity (Hutchinson et al., 2018).

As parents practice mindfulness and develop socially and emotionally themselves, researchers noted that “internal attunement of a parent to a child enables the child’s mind to become resilient” (An et al., 2018, p. 3), while parents themselves benefit from reduced stress and increased mindfulness (Chan et al., 2018). A supportive, secure, caring, mindful relationship with a parent can set the stage for positive teacher-student relationships as the child grows, as caregiver attunement reduces relational vigilance and encourages presence and relaxation (Brown et al., 2007). Further, mindfulness training sets the foundation for self-attunement, which in turn sets a secure foundation for all types of relationships, pointing to a transactional relationship between attunement to self and other (Brown et al., 2007). Thus, Singh et al. (2013) posited “that mindfulness training of caregivers—teachers, staff and parents—decreases maladaptive behaviors and increases social behaviors in the individuals they provide care to, and decreases the use of aversive procedures such as physical restraints and stat medications” (p. 227).

Overstressed parents are more likely to be reactive, exhibit less warmth, reject or attempt to control their children, and repeat abusive or dysfunctional parenting techniques from their own childhood (Bögels et al., 2010). As with children, parents experiencing stress have less access to higher cortical functioning and operate based on thoughts and behaviors regulated by the amygdala’s automaticity (Bögels et al., 2010). When a parent can employ mindfulness

(regardless of what they experienced as a child) during moments of familial stress, intensity, and painful interactions, the parent may be able to interrupt the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Bögels et al., 2010). When parents attend to their own thoughts, emotions, and body sensations before responding to a child's behavior, they can respond more thoughtfully and disrupt triggering and impulsive cycles, which is especially crucial during parenting encounters that resemble schemas from a parent's own dysfunctional childhood experiences (Bögels et al., 2010). Further, a higher level of dispositional mindfulness in a parent is negatively correlated with poor parenting skills and parental depression and can prevent psychopathology in the child (Bögels et al., 2010).

Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (2014) defined mindful parenting in line with the classical definition of mindfulness as "paying attention to your child and your parenting in a particular way: intentionally, here and now, and nonjudgmentally" (p. 71). With the application of this form of attention and presence, a parent can attend to the situation and the child in front of them, rather than to ruminations or negative cognitions (Bögels et al., 2010). Seeing a child and a situation clearly are imperative parenting skills, as "the way parents perceive the temperament of the child, more than the child's actual temperament as assessed during objective observations, is found to shape the way parents parent the child" (Bögels et al., 2010, p. 111). Seeing what is actually happening, rather than the story the parent has in their mind, can make a tremendous difference for the child; this awareness level also triggers empathy in the parent (Bögels et al., 2010).

When parents spend more time in positive mental states and being compassionate toward themselves as they cultivate mindfulness, they can better balance the attentional needs of the child and the self (Bögels et al., 2010). Some studies measured benefits in children by cultivating

mindfulness in their parents to bolster familial relationships and parenting skills (Bögels et al., 2010). Mindfulness thereby contributed to attunement, insofar as “mindfulness is a necessary prerequisite for the affective attunement that occurs within the intersubjective relatedness of mother and infant” (Bögels et al., 2010, p. 110), setting the stage for all the aforementioned benefits associated with parental attunement. This attunement repair offered by mindfulness helps to ameliorate depressive symptoms in parents, increases presence, and helps the parent meet both their own needs as well as the child’s. Further, the connection offered by the parent who is able to share an emotional state with a child allows the child to feel understood and to develop a theory of mind (Bögels et al., 2010).

Studies focusing on mindfulness interventions for parents assessed their capacity to improve poor parenting skills, prevent intergenerational transmission of dysfunction and psychological disorders, and treat children’s psychological disorders (Bögels et al., 2010).

Bögels et al. (2010) outlined the mechanism of parental mindfulness as

(1) reducing parental stress and resulting parental reactivity; (2) reducing parental preoccupation resulting from parental and/or child psychopathology; (3) improving parental executive functioning in impulsive patients; (4) breaking the cycle of intergenerational dysfunctional parenting schemas and habits; (5) increasing self-nourishing attention; and (6) improving marital functioning and co-parenting. (p. 107)

Through a year-long study that employed this mechanism, Bögels et al. (2010) showed a decrease in aggression in the children of the parents who participated in the training, alongside an increase in positive familial interactions. The combination of child and parent mindfulness training is promising in ameliorating childhood depressive symptomatology, attention regulation, prosocial behavior, and overall psychological symptoms (Bögels et al., 2010). Thus, studies that focus on mindful parenting showed great benefit for their children and on their children’s behavior, even when interventions did not focus on childhood behavior (Bögels et al., 2010).

Emphasis on training the adults in children's lives abounds in the literature (Sibinga et al., 2013), as is evidenced in many studies.

A 2012 study (van der Oord et al.) provided parallel interventions for elementary-aged children with an ADHD diagnosis (as referred by a mental health clinic) and their parents. Researchers offered the programs once a week, in 90-minute sessions, for 8 weeks. Both programs evolved out of MBCT and MBSR. Three of the eight sessions involved activities that parents and children participated in together. Researchers further encouraged parents to establish their own daily practice. Results indicated that parents noticed improvements in both themselves (through a reduction in reactivity) and their children over this period.

In 2015, Haydicky et al. conducted a similar intervention with parallel child-parent programming with adolescents. The intervention was 8 weeks long, after which adolescents improved in attention, behavior, and peer relationships, while their parents indicated increases in mindful parenting and reduced stress, all of which still presented at the 6-week follow-up measure. These results pointed to the possibility of mindfulness in improving functioning at both the personal and family-unit levels (Haydicky et al., 2015).

A 2018 study (An et al., 2018) found that parental mindfulness positively impacts the attachment relationship between parent and child, which, in turn, diminished PTSD severity and overall traumatization and increased academic motivation. Four hundred forty-three adolescents who survived a devastating tornado completed measures of academic burnout, parental attachment, and parental mindfulness. Strong attachment and mindfulness correlated highly, indicating the healing impact of "less PTSD symptoms and academic burnout through the development of mindfulness" (An et al., 2018, p. 7), implicating parental mindfulness as a resource for traumatized children.

Parents experience greater stress levels when their children carry a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD); this increased stress can affect their parenting skills (Lo et al., 2017). Family-based mindfulness interventions (FBMI) may be appropriate to assist parents in developing and maintaining constructive parenting skills and for children when there is a concern about offering them medication for ADHD.

An 8-week randomized controlled study assessed 100 children between the ages of 5 and 7, along with their parents, to evaluate the impact of mindfulness on ADHD symptomatology and behavior and parents' stress levels. Results pointed to the fact that early intervention may weaken ADHD, again finding that changes in attention led to changes in behavior (Lo et al., 2017). The effect was even stronger on the parents, for whom stress and reactivity reduced more significantly than for the children, alongside an increase in nurturing skills. Researchers cited the family-based intervention as particularly beneficial for young children (Lo et al., 2017).

A 2018 (Chan et al.) randomized, controlled trial offered 140 parent-child pairs (including children ages 8–12 diagnosed with ADHD) the MYmind program, taught by a trained professional. Ninety-minute sessions were offered weekly for 8 weeks highlighting that through “the reciprocal nature of children and parent behavior, an intervention that works simultaneously for parents and children can be more effective and may be cost-effective for families affected with ADHD” (Chan et al., 2018, p. 7). Authors pointed to mindfulness as a skill that is useful to increase resilience across the lifespan.

When adults learn mindfulness, it impacts the children in their lives. Researchers noted mindfulness to be “particularly relevant for youth and families” (Perry-Parrish et al., 2016, p. 172), with mindful parenting as a vital tool for deepening interactional learning. In one study, students of a teacher who implemented a mindfulness program displayed a decrease in clinical

symptoms, regardless of whether the students themselves learned to meditate (Britton et al., 2014). In another study, mindfulness programming delivered through a parent program improved child behavior and parent well-being (particularly for fathers) and strengthened the parent-child relationship (Coatsworth et al., 2015).

Another study (Semple et al., 2010) reached out to parents by inviting families to a meeting introducing them to the content their children would be learning during the intervention and offering them two mindfulness sessions taught by a trained therapist. Researchers encouraged parents to participate in home practice with their children and to model behaviors and practices, noting that “family involvement in treatment can enhance outcomes” (Semple et al., 2010, p. 223). The next section provides an overview of awareness and regulation practices.

Awareness and Regulation Practice

While the term “mindfulness” refers to a wide array of practices, many have a similar aim. Developing specifically the orienting, alerting, and executive capacities of attention can build overall attention skills (Cassone, 2015). These skills allow children to take in substantial sensory input and selectively focus and sustain vigilance while monitoring internal behavior. Attention builds through mindfulness practice, a beneficial factor insofar as though children “may ‘hear’, they do not necessarily ‘listen’ attentively” (Auerbach & Delport, 2018, p. 1). Researchers theorized that this is the mechanism that enables a shift to more adaptive behavior (Cassone, 2015). More recent studies consistently pointed to the connection between attention and behavior (Zenner et al., 2014).

An early landmark feasibility study explicitly focused on a cognitively oriented model, noting that “impaired attention is a core symptom of anxiety” (Semple et al., 2005, p. 379). A 6-week trial with anxious elementary children used observations to establish mindfulness as a

potential treatment yielding favorable improvements in anxiety and behavior challenges.

Researchers highlighted attention, awareness, and regulation as key factors in mindfulness education for young people.

The Johnson et al. (2016) study utilized both guided and unguided practices to increase focus, attention, and presence. Sibinga et al. (2013) used a modified form of MBSR intended to increase attention and non-judgment. Ryan et al. (2007) posited that “mindful awareness of self and others ideally allows one to transcend... biases” (p. 181). Dariotis et al. (2016) designed an intervention to increase awareness of the present moment and any sensory or emotional components to engage regulatory skills to encourage positive stress-management responses and decrease reliance on maladaptive coping techniques. Yoga and breathing techniques helped foster this awareness process, as paired with discussions and the exploration of strategies for dealing with stress. Semple et al. (2010) highlighted that children experience and enhance attention and regulation by creating space around emotions.

Awareness and regulation skills benefit clinical, average, and flourishing populations (Kuyken et al., 2013), yielding awareness interventions that address mental states and cultivate overall physical and mental well-being. Repeatedly, researchers noted attention and self-management to be key mechanisms of mindfulness (Liehr & Diaz, 2010). Emotional regulation skills may correlate with benefits in academic, social, emotional, and physical realms, integral to a child’s optimal development (Liehr & Diaz, 2010). The next section provides an overview of the impact of mindfulness on emotional regulation.

Impact on Emotional Regulation

With the connection between emotional awareness and one’s ability to regulate emotions, the literature pointed to mindfulness practices’ strong impact on emotional regulation (Greenberg

& Harris, 2012; Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Liehr & Diaz, 2010; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016; Semple et al., 2005; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; van der Oord et al., 2012; van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2014; Zenner et al., 2014). Sibinga et al. (2013) found that mindfulness participants improved their ability to control emotional reactivity, especially with anger, along with overall lowered anxiety. These effects led to improved psychological functioning (Sibinga et al., 2013). Dariotis et al. (2016) reported that students articulated that physical postures and breathing exercises contributed to their ability to calm down and relieve stress. The increased calm enabled them to apply the correct adaptive skills to the correct need, whether facing a health problem or emotional challenge (Dariotis et al., 2016). Further, students improved their ability to identify emotional states in themselves and others (Dariotis et al., 2016).

Monshat et al. (2013) noticed the sense of calm that participants gained through practicing mindfulness and that it enabled young people to be aware of their emotions and choose their responses. In turn, this awareness allowed them to be cognizant of which situations were beyond their control (Monshat et al., 2013). Kuyken et al. (2013) intentionally planned their follow-up during the most stressful part of the school year, and even so, participants maintained the emotional regulatory growth that they obtained through the mindfulness program. The next section outlines the effects of a regular mindfulness practice.

Regularity of Practice

Learning about mindfulness and practicing mindfulness are not inherently synonymous. While mindfulness lessons usually contain an element of practice, researchers noted the effects of a mindfulness intervention as stronger when a home practice accompanied training (Zenner et al., 2014). Yela et al. (2020) explained that “to experience salutary effects due to meditation, the regularity of the practice is important,” and that “occasional meditation may produce no effects

on mental health” (p. 1645). The skillset that mindfulness provides “develops over time and requires regular exercise” (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018, p. 2).

Research on the effectiveness of treatment pointed to greater benefit when one adhered to the treatment, which, in the case of mindfulness, reflected developing a regular practice (McCabe et al., 2017). Smith-Carrier et al. (2015) pointed out that “the regular practice of mindfulness has myriad psychological, therapeutic and health benefits, and contributes to heightened emotional intelligence and improved performance in a host of activities” (p. 377). However, the research did not point to a strong home practice as a featured component in most mindfulness-based interventions for children (Hutchinson et al., 2018).

On the one hand, interventions comprised of as little as 5 days of meditation practice show improvement in children’s attention (Hölzel et al., 2011); however, “qualities like equanimity and clarity develop over time along with mindful awareness” (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 2). While the format, content, approach, and duration of mindfulness programs for children may differ, “repetition and practice may be critical to alter neural activity and create healthy habits of mind and body” (Greenberg & Harris, 2012, p. 165).

From a neurocognitive standpoint, practice supports the connection between the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex, strengthening the neural circuitry involved in emotional regulation; mature reflection is more frequent, more effective, and more efficient through practicing the mindfulness techniques that repeatedly recruit the prefrontal cortex to address emotionally stimulating situations (Shapiro et al., 2015). Due to these brain processes, mindfulness practice “may require continuity and regularity of practice so that the psychological mechanisms leading to beneficial effects may be activated or developed to some extent, that is, occasional meditators are not taking the adequate ‘dose’ to benefit from the intervention” (Yela

et al., 2020, pp. 1645–1646). Thus, in order for children to automatically rely on positive social and emotional response and coping skills in the face of stressful experiences, they need to build competence in socio-emotional capacities through repetitive activation of the skills; “meditation must be practiced in order for the benefits to be realized” (Shaner et al., 2017, p. 100).

Most children’s mindfulness curricula contain modified components of either MBSR or MBCT, both of which highlight the importance of daily practice to enhance and deepen the effects of utilizing the practice (Johnson et al., 2016). Dariotis et al. (2016) included homework in their study, focusing on yoga poses, awareness practice, and emotional regulation practice. Children used mindfulness outside of class to “calm down, reduce anger, wake up, deal with boredom, remedy distraction, prevent impulsivity, and help with aches and pains” (p. 82). Deep breathing was the practice that children used most often (Dariotis et al., 2016). Van der Oord et al. (2012) used a token-reward system to encourage children to practice regularly at home. The benefit of this daily practice was not limited to children, as “a particularly distinctive feature of teaching mindfulness is the teacher’s own ability to apply the practice in her own life to the extent that it is fruitful in her daily living and working” (Viafora et al., 2015, p. 1181); further,

clinical observations throughout the research literature impart that the mere curriculum of MBSR or MBCT will be lifeless and powerless to help the participants unless the teacher himself is able to authentically deliver the teachings from the wisdom of his own experiences and insights. (Viafora et al., 2015, p. 1181)

A daily practice shows benefit for all practitioners, not solely for children.

Monshat et al. (2013) noted that regular practice led to understanding mindfulness as a mindset and way of approaching the world, rather than as merely a stress management technique. Kuyken et al. (2013) highlighted that more frequent use of mindfulness skills displayed stronger evidence for overall well-being. Volanen et al. (2020) found a 4-point increase in resilience for students who implemented a sustained daily practice for the 6 months following their

intervention over those who did not. Liehr and Diaz (2010) provided an intervention that took place every weekday, and thus daily practice was an automatic component of their program.

Results reported a decrease in depression in a matter of 2 weeks (Liehr & Diaz, 2010).

The Johnson et al. (2016) study directly measured the moderated benefit of daily practice. While this study did not display a relationship between home practice and outcome as hypothesized, the authors noted that a low level of compliance (26% of participants versus 70% in a similar study, yielding a small number of participants) perhaps caused this result (Johnson et al., 2016). Only a few participants practicing at home, only sometimes, may not accurately reflect the impact of participating in a daily practice. Dove and Costello (2017) supported this assertion and further offered that there is a “positive association in the mindfulness group between amount of practice and improvement in psychological well-being and mindfulness” (Dove & Costello, 2017, p. 174).

A controlled study assessing the effects of mindfulness on psychological well-being and emotional resilience in adolescent boys did not display significant results between the intervention and control groups as hypothesized; however, researchers found a positive association between regular personal practice and overall psychological well-being (Huppert & Johnson, 2010). Meanwhile, researchers found a significant benefit in an intervention that required 45 minutes of home practice per day (Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2017).

Shankland and Rosset (2017) found that “frequent practicing (more than once per day) generated more significant findings among well-being variables” (p. 368). Su and Swank (2019) pointed to continuous mindfulness practice as key for enhancing attentional capacities, encouraging school counselors to promote practice outside of sessions for their students. Costello and Lawler (2014) found “that students who undertook ten minutes of home practice a day

evidenced significant improvements in well-being, with smaller changes noted for those who did not engage in daily practice” (p. 24). The next section offers the personal benefits that mindfulness participants reported.

Personal Benefit

While the objective and subjective benefits of mindfulness interventions on students’ regulatory capacities are notable, in many cases, participants identified personal benefit from participating in the programs. Both teachers and students in the Johnson et al. (2016) study reported a high acceptance rate for the practice. The Dariotis et al. (2016) qualitative study highlighted students’ excitement about reporting what they learned and noted that almost every student interviewed shared what they learned with child and adult family members and friends. Children identified personal benefits related to “memory, stress, depression, and anger... stress reduction, calming, self-regulation” (Dariotis et al., 2016, p. 83). Students called the program “the calm down program” or “the land of peace” (Dariotis et al., 2016, p. 83) and projected the skills as being helpful when they get older. Several children reported leaving a difficult situation rather than fighting, identifying this as a significant benefit they gained from participating in the program (Dariotis et al., 2016). Additionally, students in this study wanted a longer program to help them implement skills in the future. Teachers echoed this notion, hoping that children could learn these skills throughout their education (Dariotis et al., 2016).

A 2019 study (Aslam et al.) involving child-parent pairs learning mindfulness together during summer vacation acknowledged the training as “‘fun’, ‘useful’, ‘crucial’ and a ‘vital skill’” (p. 163). Monshat et al. (2013) noted that all participants reported positive associations with mindfulness practice and its benefits by the end of a 6-week program. Kuyken et al. (2013) reported that 70% of students enjoyed the mindfulness program, while 80% were still regularly

using mindfulness skills three months after the program ended. The children who participated in the Liehr and Diaz study (2010) integrated skills into games they already knew to help incorporate it into their lives, without teacher guidance, while Viafora et al. (2015) found students noting mindfulness to be “applicable to diverse areas in their lives” (p. 1188).

Huppert and Johnson (2010) reported that 74% of their participants would continue to use mindfulness in the future. Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) found that all of the participants in their study identified mindfulness as “good” and “helpful” (p. 309), with many reporting feeling “calm” and “relaxed” (p. 310) after the practice, regardless of whether or not they liked the program itself. Eighty percent of children in an early study (Semple et al., 2005) were enthusiastic about mindfulness and wanted the mindfulness group to continue. Van der Oord et al. (2012) reported that families requested further training and programming to continue using and integrating mindfulness skills into daily life. In a more recent study, Bazzano et al. (2018) shared that 95% of participants were excited to learn mindfulness and yoga before the program even began. The next section offers an overview of the effect of participants self-selecting mindfulness programming.

Self-Selected Participants

One aspect of differing program locations and formats is the possible willingness with which children participate. In some settings, children may self-select to participate in mindfulness programming; in others, a counselor or therapist may assign them to this programming, and in others, they may receive mindfulness teaching in a whole-class format. Dariotis et al. (2016) posited that when students self-select into a mindfulness program, they evidence high efficacy levels. This self-selection may be due to child interest or due to parent interest in helping children with behavior difficulties. In this manner, children who need more

support can obtain it (Bazzano et al., 2018). Monshat et al. (2013) noted that self-selection might impact the depth with which participants integrate mindfulness into their daily lives, enabling them to gain self-confidence and shift life perspective.

In a longitudinal randomized, wait-list controlled study performed by van de Weijer-Bergsma et al. (2014) with elementary students (mean age = 9.92), researchers offered 30-minute sessions twice a week for 6 weeks. Children self-selected into the intervention, and researchers tested for stress and mental well-being before and after the intervention, and at follow-up; parents and teachers provided additional feedback. Follow-up measures showed that the program had a prolonged and preventative capacity to strengthen mental well-being and decrease stress. Thus, the research pointed to self-selecting participation in a mindfulness program as one factor among many that may contribute to positive results. The next section offers a theoretical or conceptual framework for this study.

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

Saunders and Kober (2020) delineated that mindfulness-based practices find their basis in various theoretical constructs, including psychodynamic thought, Buddhist thought, cognitive-behavioral framework, and neuroscientific theory, among others. Contemplative and mindfulness theories guided this research and provided a theoretical basis for this study's development and analysis.

Contemplative theory derived from contemplative psychology and stipulates that concentrated attention applied to the present moment is a form of contemplative consciousness that is uninterpreted, bias-free, and non-judgmental; this framework aligns with the definition of mindfulness (Sherman & Siporin, 2008). In line with the philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology, contemplative theory stipulates that "in mindfulness meditation the subjective

and deeper level of consciousness that is attained is prior to thought, to conceptualization, and to the beliefs or theories we have about reality” (Sherman & Siporin, 2008, p. 262).

Dawson (2019) synthesized a conceptual framework of mindfulness comprising cognition, attitude, and ontology. Langer (2000) offered mindfulness as

a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context. Being mindful leads us to greater sensitivity to context and perspective, and ultimately to greater control over our lives. (p. 220)

Langer et al. (1989) established that learners enact creativity, cognitive flexibility, and knowledge application when applying this theory to the learning process. Theorists offer broad support for applying mindfulness theory to the activities of the learning environment (Sherretz, 2006). The next section provides a summary of the literature that I presented in this chapter.

Summary

This research aimed to answer the question: “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” The evidence from multiple studies pointed to the salience of a mindfulness intervention improving the self-regulatory capacity of children and their adult caregivers. As a relatively nascent field, this body of work’s evolution is evident in the few short decades that the literature covers. Researchers completed both qualitative and quantitative studies, offering a variety of lenses through which to view both experiences and outcomes of the practice. Recent studies addressed more specified populations; Sibinga et al. (2013) focused specifically on urban male youth to highlight a missing group in prior research.

Mindfulness, the intentional practice and result of paying attention, on purpose, to one’s moment-by-moment experience, without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), with a willingness to be with things as they are (About MARC, n.d.) and with open receptivity and the capacity to observe multiple perspectives (Langer, 2014), appears to be a promising intervention for youth. Researchers explored various mechanistic, theoretical, and outcomes-driven approaches to

understand and share the benefits with the broader community. While mindfulness itself is a specific topic, broader fields of education, psychology, parenting, and social-emotional learning both offer to and gain from this research conversation.

The literature points to the efficacy of short-dose educational programming that fits into the school day and delivers the curriculum to students right where they are. Early studies focusing on dosing for children indicated that simply having a mindfulness program had a greater impact on students than variations in course format (Perry-Parrish et al., 2016). Studies with matched control conditions on criteria such as having an outside provider, non-academic peer-group processing, attention, time, homework, and training provided quantitative lenses to understand mindfulness work with children. While the field is not large, having quality, representative studies is important. Studies that view mindfulness from various points of view, focusing on different populations, and with a variety of measures, broaden the conversation. Dariotis et al. (2016) noted the ease with which a classroom teacher can integrate mindfulness into other subjects such as science or health and its overall applicability to real life, a point that several studies highlighted.

As a field that is gaining research traction, there are many strengths, and many areas for improvement. The present study contributes to the research conversation by adding children's voices to elucidate how young people use mindfulness skills within and beyond the classroom walls, what their experiences are, and the value they perceive in what they learn. One factor that is lacking in many of the studies presented here is an indication of children consciously or independently employing the skills in daily life. In a metaphorical sense, this study stands in the dimensions of effectiveness and use much like: "Okay, this medicine is effective, but how does it taste? Would you take it every day?"

Many mindfulness studies explored the applicability of modified adult programming for children (Johnson et al., 2016). Perhaps building organic programming for children might provide clearer insight into effective mindfulness work with young people. Additionally, most of the studies in this review focused on middle school students and high school students. Exploring work with elementary school children might help inform the optimal age for these interventions. Perhaps the short-dose mindfulness programming that easily fits into a school schedule may be a weakness and not a strength: if the dosing is inaccurate, it may need to be modified to influence young people. The present study's results may help reverse-engineer this process: if children themselves point to the use and value they gain, perhaps mindfulness educators can figure out how to create programming with this end in mind.

A strong foundation exists for the exploration of mindfulness as an intervention for improved attention and emotional regulation. Whether programming takes place in a school or in a therapeutic or community environment, the benefits of children and adults learning mindfulness skills can impact the social, academic, and emotional arenas of our society's developing youth, particularly for those who most need support. A well-constructed mindfulness intervention for children has the potential to provide great benefit. The following chapter describes the methodology I used for the present study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to explore the lived experience of the child practicing mindfulness in daily life. This chapter provides a background of hermeneutic phenomenological research methods to establish a rationale for using this methodology to answer the research question: “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” An exploration of van Manen’s (2014) method of interpretation and van Manen’s four thematic constructs follows, along with the preconceptions that I held in advance of this project. This chapter then outlines the research design, providing a clear description of the method of data collection, and ethical considerations, after which it specifies the plan used for data analysis, the establishment of rigor, results presentation, and the significance and limitations of this research.

Background of Method

Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on subjective experience in order to unveil the world through individual and group perception and life-world story construction; describing a phenomenon is an inherently interpretive process, in a world composed of interpretation (Kafle, 2011). Hermeneutic phenomenology is an interpretive theory that explores Being through lived experience in order to see being-in-the-world. It is almost as though the researcher captures Being as paint in a can. Hermeneutic phenomenology both looks into the particular can, to see the paint and, at the same time, places great value in exploring all that has been painted with the paint. In this way, the hermeneutic phenomenologist harvests experiences and brings them forth as textual entities through which they may illuminate the meaning of Being (Miles et al., 2015). Ricoeur further offered that “acknowledging that language constitutes the self and structures the world in which the self is couched” (as cited in Masong, 2012, p. 3), which reflects experience as

partly constructed of language, whereby “language makes the self transparent to itself” (Masong, 2012, p. 4).

The foundation of hermeneutics rests on the belief that there are many truths, which one continually reconstructs through experience. Truthfulness, adopted from Greek philosophy and known to Heidegger as *aletheia*, associates with meaningfulness (Miles et al., 2015) and reflects a deep attunement with experience. One constructs truth: temporal, relational, and individual, through knowing, experiencing, and speaking. Truth further interrelates with experiencing the essence of a phenomenon, to accessing being, and inherently connects with a way of approaching the world.

Hermeneutic phenomenology’s epistemological underpinnings point to knowledge and meaning-making as intrinsic components of subjective experience and personal insight. Knowing emerges through familiarity with experience and unfolds over time; knowing is not factual and fixed. Ontological orientation delineates reality as a personal construct, situationally relevant, and inherently welcoming multiple realities (akin to multiple truths). The meaning of Being is a fundamental aspect of an ontological orientation that looks directly at existence to construct an understanding that reflects through one’s existence and inner awareness.

Ontological reduction guides reflecting on a phenomenon. Understanding the temporality, corporeality, relationality, and spatiality of an issue helps the researcher look at parts of the phenomenon before returning to the whole. Ontic reduction situates its center in the experience of the phenomenon, and eidetic reduction situates itself in the participant’s unique perspective, unraveling the construction to find the essence of the phenomenon. Van Manen’s contribution further extrapolated this view as an attitude of wonder and openness to experience,

both in living and in research (Heinonen, 2015; van Manen, 2014). Through axiology, the researcher involves their values, opinions, and ethics in the generation of the work.

Background

Hermeneutics engages the researcher's self-reflection toward an aim that differs from and evolved out of transcendental phenomenology (Lavery, 2003). Transcendental or Husserlian phenomenology is a descriptive phenomenological approach that theorists sometimes refer to as *just* (solely) phenomenology. By studying the lived experience and the bracketing off of preconceptions and layers of stimuli, transcendental phenomenology aims to transcend the human experience to obtain the essence of the phenomenon. Through epoché, reduction (ostensibly leading one back to the source of meaning, the first encounter), and going beyond the everydayness of experience, theorists believe that this essence is achievable. Husserlian phenomenology stipulates that there is a truth that lies beyond interpretation, an objectivity beyond the social constructs of humans (McLeod, 2001). Transcendental phenomenology yields a solid, "correct" interpretation of a phenomenon's essence, through the phenomenon itself as ascribing meaning, in line with Husserl's teaching (Miles et al., 2015).

Hermeneutic phenomenology, by contrast, specifies that departure from the constructs of society and one's own mind is impossible. Rejecting epistemology and embracing ontology, Hermeneutic, or Heideggerian, phenomenology is interpretive and existential, interpreting life's text. Rather than removing the meaning-making that humans do, hermeneutic phenomenology embraces it; being is more important than knowing, and "understanding is always from a perspective" (McLeod, 2001, p. 56). The researcher, and the entire context that the researcher finds themselves in, thus become part of the interpretation of the phenomenon, as humans live in a world that is inherently contextual, experienced, interpreted (McLeod, 2001), and relational

(Miles et al., 2015). The study of the lived experience incorporates the Dasein, or being, or mode of being in relation to the phenomenon. Hermeneutic phenomenology, therefore, cannot distill a “correct” conclusion, insofar as it explores the space between the phenomenon and the subjective researcher (Allen, 2017). Through exploring stories, the hermeneutic phenomenologist explores the livedness of experience (Miles et al., 2015).

Heidegger and Gadamer discovered hermeneutics through Schleiermacher and Dilthey’s work, from whom they departed in their eventual development (Miles et al., 2015). Gadamer focused on the power of language to elicit discovering, knowing, and interpretation of a phenomenon (Miles et al., 2015), as hermeneutics developed out of the exploration of sacred texts in a manner that readers and theorists could apply more broadly to both text and experience-as-text. Van Manen (1990) further highlighted the internal and external relational contexts that construct and reveal both reality and perception, and he brought forth the philosophical framework to have a distinct place in research. Therefore, according to hermeneutics, subjectivity is not only merely acceptable or basically necessary, but it also adds richness to discovery, and is essential to constructing understanding (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

Fusion of Horizons

Through language and interpretation, Gadamer introduced the interplay between researcher and participant experiences termed the *fusion of horizons*, which heightened the understanding of a particular phenomenon (as cited in Miles et al., 2015). The term “horizon” in the frame of phenomenology refers to the multiple reference points and perspectives that negotiate the meaning of a phenomenon beyond thematic categorization (von Eckartsberg, 1989). People experience a fusion of horizons daily through relationship and conversation, and the researcher can fuse with the participant’s horizon through the awareness that arises during

immersion in the textual world of a phenomenon (Miles et al., 2015). The mutual understanding upon which the fusion of horizons depends is a necessary element of deep understanding and interpretation of a phenomenon.

Hermeneutic Circle

Heidegger offered that the hermeneutic circle was a symbolic “analytic movement between the whole and the part, in which each gives the other meaning” (Miles et al., 2015, p. 288). The spiral and the space between analysis and interpretation are crucial elements, necessary to shine light on both the context and meaning of the phenomenon. Understanding and meaning each inform the other, as humans act as sense-makers in the world.

Researcher Alignment

I, as a subjective being in the world, explored the wonder that I have about the experience and application of children using mindfulness in their daily lives. This wonder itself added depth to my experience and piqued my curiosity. I believe that living in the “now” of this inquiry simultaneously added to my experience and the greater research conversation pertaining to children using mindfulness. Exploring meaning through literary and poetic language suited my topic and researcher personality and allowed me to navigate the “irrevocable tension between what is unique and what is shared” (van Manen, 2014, p. 68). The reflexivity of thought and writing involved in the phenomenological inquiry allowed a deeper engagement with what was present and meaningful.

Thus, my worldview aligns with hermeneutic phenomenology, as I cannot separate myself as an experiencer and researcher from what I experienced and researched or from what I will experience or research. To this end, I have long had a relationship with concepts of belonging and “being part of,” and based on my exploration of phenomenology, it appears that

Heidegger's approach allowed *me* to belong and "be a part of" my research. Thus, through my investigation, I brought my whole self to the table to shine light on the phenomenon about which I am passionate.

Further, I sought not to define the phenomenon but to bring children's lived experience practicing mindfulness to light. I sought to peel back the layers of experience and highlight the horizon of a shared understanding of being between myself and the children's textual descriptions. I care deeply about the unique perspectives the children brought through the myriad lived experiences found in their words. Concurrently, I embarked on my own reflection, explored my own biases, overturned some of them in the process, and explored the corners beyond which I could previously see. As such, hermeneutic phenomenology was the appropriate methodology for this project and for me.

Rationale for Methodology Application

Hermeneutic phenomenology was the appropriate methodology for my work due to the focus on the children's lived experience and the lens that my unique lived experience as a mindfulness educator and researcher offered. The application of this methodology is supported by Singh et al. (2013), who posited that "given that mindfulness is an experiential phenomenon and that the target of mindfulness-training is a person's experiences of their thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations, it is important to ask about people's experience" (p. 229), a focus that is largely missing from existing research on mindfulness with children. Further, this work aligned with van Manen's interpretation method and van Manen's four thematic constructs.

Van Manen's Method

Turning: Turning to a Phenomenon Which Interests Us and Commits Us to the World

When I turned my attention, my openness, and my being toward children's experience using mindfulness, I felt a hopeful forward-momentum. When I taught mindfulness or heard children's responses to the lessons, I always thought, "This, this is the world that I want to live in." Their responses drove me; they interested me; they are what I wanted to shine the light on; this was my commitment to the world.

Investigating: Investigating Experience as We Live it Rather than as We Conceptualize it

I had my ideas about how children use mindfulness, and I had my perceptions about what the practice meant and how it evidences in the world. However, I could not know how I would feel when I deep-dove into the children's words. Holding the not-knowing of what I would find or experience—and knowing that it may be different from prior experiences with the same material—kept my research fresh. It was much like hiking through a forest that one knows quite well and seeing the trees (And undergrowth! And animals! And moss!) with new eyes.

Reflecting: Reflecting on the Essential Themes Which Characterize the Phenomenon

This interpretation method existed at face-value for my study: when I immersed myself in the children's words, I reflected on the essential themes that arose or were apparent. *What was profoundly essential? What did one see when the light caught on the words of the children?*

Describing: Describing the Phenomenon Through Writing and Rewriting

This step was a delight. Using the gift of words, I had the opportunity to portray the essential themes, the essence of the lived experience through woven sentences that sifted together throughout the process. It was messy—what I wrote on the first run-through was not

what I wrote later on, but much like quilting, scraps of the eventual were evident even in the first steps. I allowed myself to be messy, to learn, and to grow through my own writing.

Maintaining: Maintaining a Strong Learner’s Perspective to the Phenomenon (Pedagogical)

Using the skills *I* gained through mindfulness, I continued to not-know throughout the entire process. This not-knowing reflected the “openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be with things as they are” (About MARC, n.d., para. 4) aspects of mindfulness. I saw this much like beginner’s mind and tied it to ritual to keep the strength of wonder and exploration throughout the project. Suzuki (1973) classically framed beginner’s mind as, “in the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, in the expert’s mind there are few” (p. 21). Engel (2012) further offered, “when you know something, it is extremely difficult to think about it from the perspective of someone who does not know it” (p. 2). Thus, a beginner’s mind set the foundation for wonder. I asked myself: *How can I wonder all the way through? How can I hold a sense of openness and receptivity the whole time – even if it is a project that I would like to see completed (in a timely manner)?*

Balancing: Balancing the Research Context by Considering Parts and Whole

Balancing reflects the hermeneutic circle, and by keeping true to the methodology and being “in tune” with the exploration process, it was important to go back and forth at regular intervals between the quotations and the greater phenomenon. I found this process intuitive, and I completed it at intervals to maintain the balance between parts and whole.

Van Manen’s Four Fundamental Existentials of Human Experience

There are two levels at play for van Manen’s existentials: (a) I used them as the framework to explore the children’s textual descriptions directly, and (b) I used them to explore the spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality of my experience doing the research

itself. In both cases, the existentials functioned to allow another to walk in the shoes and inhabit the lifeworld of the experiencer (Miles et al., 2015) through guiding questions.

Spatiality

Where did the child practice mindfulness? (both physical location and with relationship to the child's comfort zone). What is the felt space of my own experience reviewing the children's words?

Corporeality

Where was the body in the child's words? Were they talking about the body directly? Were they experiencing a feeling in the body? Were they giving a window into an internal lived experience? How am I bodily present with the children's words—and in life—in the experience of reviewing the body of data?

Temporality

Most of this work focused on the past, insofar as children reported experiences that they already had. Some of them shared experiences of what was happening in the then-present. The future presented through expressions in which children shared how they would use mindfulness in the future. I taught these children in the past, so even reviewing their words was a re-enlivening of a past era of my own life. These quotations happened in what was then the present, and the importance of this work is that it will shift the lens of my future, if even for simply going through this experience.

Relationality

Since I focus on and thrive in relationships, this existential was quite present in my work. Much of the content that the children shared also reflected their relational worlds with their families, friends, and school communities. What was the relational space between my former

students and me? And current students? How do the children's words shift my relationality with others in my current world-sphere?

Pre-Study Preconceptions

Prior to embarking on this project, I carried many preconceptions with me. I believed that mindfulness is incredibly beneficial for children, that it allows them to tap into the essence of who they each are as individuals and to utilize the extent of their age-appropriately developed self-regulation skills. I believed that the practice deepens calm, compassion, and connection, and bonds the group that practices together. Therefore, as a classroom practice for schoolchildren, I believed that mindfulness is invaluable. I believed that this value translates into children using these skills and practices in their daily lives. While this was my belief, my intention in my analysis was to pay close attention to *all* textual descriptions, including those depicting neutral and negative experiences (with a nod to the fact that many children did not share experiences at all), in order to portray the fullness of what actually was, and not only what I might like it to be.

I was further aware of the perception of mindfulness for children in broader society and that it shifted to greater acceptance during my time in the field. In this project, I stood in my integrity in sharing any value that I found and portrayed it as clearly as possible in the words that I offered. I maintained keen awareness that I do not know how it feels to be a child and experience mindfulness; I do not know what leads a child to use mindfulness in daily life; I do not know how it feels to be a child and successfully (or unsuccessfully!) enact these skills; I do not know what a child's experience is in maturing, having learned mindfulness as a young child. All of these preconceptions are welcome in a well-designed hermeneutic phenomenological study.

Research Design

Research Question

This research design laid the foundation to answer the question: “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?”

Data Collection

The quotations analyzed for this study were recorded in my teaching notes as I taught my students the Mindful Schools curriculum, which “aims to improve students’ school-readiness, aptitude, and mental health by teaching children the skill of mindfulness” (Biegel & Brown, 2010, p. 1). Biegel and Brown (2010) conducted “a pilot study to assess the efficacy of the Mindful Schools program... offering results that it improved attention and teacher-rated social skills” (p. 6), establishing the efficacy of this program. Viglas and Perlman (2018) further established the Mindful Schools intervention’s efficacy with children ages 3 to 6. Shapiro et al. (2015) verified the validity of the Mindful Schools curriculum for K-12 students, offering that “Mindful Schools works to integrate mindfulness into education by teaching children how to focus, manage their emotions, handle their stress, and resolve conflicts” (p. 17).

The Mindful Schools program encourages children to bring presence to challenging interactions. Teachers offer the curriculum directly in the classroom in 16, 15-minute sessions over 8 weeks. Specific lesson topics “include mindfulness of sound, breath, body, emotions, test taking, generosity, appreciation, kindness and caring, and others” (Shapiro et al., 2015, p. 17). Mindful Schools offers courses for educators that include an introductory course, a curriculum training, conferences, a yearlong training, and programs on specialized topics such as self-compassion for educators, working with strong emotions, and mindful communication (www.mindfulschools.org). As of 2015, Shapiro et al. noted that Mindful Schools trained at least

1,500 educators serving more than 18,000 children, nearly 3/4 of whom were under-resourced, offering skills “to improve concentration, attention, and empathy among students while building a climate of calmness in the classroom” (Shapiro et al., 2015, p. 17). A Mindful Schools employee confirmed that as of 2020, the organization trained 55,887 teachers and served three million children (B. Hanger, personal communication, December 9, 2020). A pilot study utilizing the Mindful Schools curriculum contributed to establishing the program’s efficacy and evidenced sustained results in attentional and social domains (Shapiro et al., 2015).

I taught the Mindful Schools curriculum to my own students when I was their elementary school librarian. I collected quotations of how children used mindfulness in daily life while learning the Mindful Schools curriculum in my reflective notes on teaching mindfulness; I stored these quotations accordingly as archival material for up to 6 years. Hermeneutic phenomenology necessitates a further kind of data that one elicits during the analysis phase, which yielded a more complete interpretation of the phenomenon.

Data Collected

As I recorded these textual descriptions several years before this study’s conception, the method of collecting the statements was set before the inception of this study; I described, rather than planned this portion of my exploration: textual descriptions were either transcribed shorthand or recorded and then transcribed, verbatim (with any grammatical and linguistic errors in fidelity with the child’s speech, and with punctuation used to portray pauses). I attributed textual descriptions in my notes only to the child’s grade, with no identifying name, gender, or age (insofar as not all students are “on track” according to the expected grade). I used 1,136 textual descriptions from children ages 4 through 12, describing how they used mindfulness in their daily lives, for this study. I used all of the quotations I found in my teaching notes without

selectivity, except for 30 quotations that I used for my dissertation pilot study. I gathered quotations from respondents out of a larger pool of approximately 2,000 students. I stored these textual descriptions in a document on my computer in the order in which I heard and recorded them in my notes.

The nature of these quotations as pre-recorded for non-research purposes parallels the research of Cheek et al. (2017), who remarked that “the phenomenological content of one’s mind is strongly related to one’s emotional wellbeing” (p. 2574), and who analyzed children’s written letters and noted

the fact that the letters were produced for reasons other than research, may actually be an advantage in that because they generally exist independent of a research agenda, they are nonreactive – that is, unaffected by the research process. They are a product of the context in which they are produced and therefore grounded in the real world. (p. 2567)

One can say the same about the nature of the children’s quotations, as recorded in my reflective teaching notes. The fact that the quotations were children’s spoken words provides greater insight into young children’s experiences as “children of this age find it easier to express themselves through speech rather than through written language” (Hutchinson et al., 2018, p. 3937). Further, in alignment with Erikson’s (1987) ideas, these quotations provide value as “the child rarely verbalizes his world. Only he who enters the child’s world as a polite guest... as a most serious occupation learns what a child thinks” (pp. 556–557). These quotations allowed me to be a polite guest in my students’ worlds as I reflected on teaching mindfulness to them.

The reflective practice in hermeneutics allowed for my interactive experience with the material to be part of the research. Therefore, I read through, resorted, and reimagined the children’s textual descriptions, bringing to life *my* experience interacting with the children’s words. As I read and interpreted the data through the lens of my own experience, I maintained a keen awareness of any thematic material that arose and broadened my experience and perception,

specifically through engaging with the material. I expressed myself with written words because that is the method to which I have the most robust access.

I embarked on a reflective practice about what it meant and felt like to be *me*, teaching mindfulness to children, with an awareness that this is the lens through which I viewed and interpreted this work.

Ethics

As ethical consideration views children as a vulnerable and protected population and my work involved children's words, it was essential to ensure that the research I completed would not provide more than minimal risk to the children who responded to my questions.

This research fell under Common Rule, Title 45, Subtitle A, Subchapter A, Subpart D 46.104 exemption category 1: "Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, specifically *involving normal educational practices* that are not likely to adversely affect students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction" (emphasis added), or category 4ii:

Information, which may include information about biospecimens, is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that *the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained* directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, the investigator does not contact the subjects, and the investigator will not re-identify subjects. (emphasis added) (Protection of Human Subjects, 2009).

Additionally, this study's data were collected between 2014 and 2018 before I set the intention for this research. Because prior assent and consent were not obtained, and clear research expectations and parameters were not set, it is incredibly important that I ensured that my work was ethical and would cause no harm to anyone involved. I obtained approval for this study from the Saybrook University Internal Review Board.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is “a popular interpretive strategy to identify themes in transcribed” (Ho et al., 2017, p. 1760) works wherein the researcher recovers “the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work” (van Manen, 1997, p. 78). This process assists with “recovering the structure of meanings embodied in human experiences in text” (Ho et al., 2017, p. 1760), a progression that occurs over subsequent readings of a text. One needs to cultivate an understanding of the meaning that language reveals (Ho et al., 2017), in a fluid process whereby “formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning that is driven by the epoché and the reduction” (van Manen, 2014, p. 320).

A first open reading of all of the data obtained the holistic approach; this is horizontalization, or “perceptual attention, the tendency toward sustained perceiving and toward a unity and identity of continual changes that occur in each perceptual act” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 52–53) wherein the researcher is “receptive to every statement of the co-researcher’s experience, granting each comment equal value” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

Eidetic analysis helps the researcher distill meaning and recognize interrelated components of a phenomenon, clustering meaning and deepening an understanding of the lived experience (Finlay, 2014). A second reading provided the opportunity to see what stood out in a cohesive format; a third reading arrived at what an individual sentence holds. Van Manen (2014) termed these three approaches as the “wholistic reading approach,” the “selective reading approach,” and the “detailed reading approach” (p. 320). At each pass, more revealed itself in a process that involved both the reader (myself) and the text. Thus, I used a thoughtful and intentional process to analyze data and track findings:

1. Brainstorm, think, allow thoughts on the daily use of mindfulness and child-lives (and child-self inside myself).
2. Read all of the textual descriptions.
3. Return to presuppositions, notice where they line up, and if they have shifted at all.
4. Return to the textual descriptions, line by line, underlining and extracting those that “hit me in the heart” (sorting as necessary). Ask: what concepts are arising from the text?
5. Meditate on the connection between the textual descriptions and my presuppositions. Notice the overall themes that arise.
6. In the face of themes (while holding them in my mind), return to textual descriptions, noticing what words or phrases are “in conversation with” the theme.
7. Write a well-distilled, well-crafted statement on the essence of children using mindfulness in their daily lives. Ask and answer: what *is* that lived experience? Use creativity as warranted.

These steps were a practical application of van Manen’s (1990) research activities

fundamental to interpretive research:

1. Turning to a phenomenon, which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.
3. Reflecting on the essential themes, which characterize the phenomenon.
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30–31)

Results

I presented results through clear documentation of the iterative process of the seven steps outlined above. Results portrayed both process and content/product. I presented themes with words and visual representation as necessary; I explored van Manen’s existentials deeply and horizontally. Further, I explored the felt-sense of this process and shared it in writing. I used tables, as appropriate, to display themes and findings and used narrative and expressive writing to share the depth and significance of each finding.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Throughout this project, I maintained a process of reflexive journaling and memoing to establish rigor and trustworthiness, to provide a clear perspective on adherence to the methodology, and to address weaknesses. I began this process in a Cornell notebook and then switched to a digital format. I used photographs to document my process. The question I asked myself repeatedly was: *What is needed at this moment, in terms of process, to establish and document rigor and trustworthiness as I obtain results?*

I employed a variety of techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of my data. I was not selective in choosing quotations from my teaching notes; in order to limit bias, I simply chose every single quotation I found in my notes (except for those already used for my pilot study). I maintained transparency by keeping detailed and precise notes of my data analysis process. During data analysis, I maintained clarity around whether the content I was analyzing arose in me or from the words themselves. As both are welcome in hermeneutic phenomenology, I made sure to record them clearly as such. I maintained ongoing field notes to track both process and progress throughout the research.

Insofar as “one needs to establish contextual criteria for trustworthiness” (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 175) in a hermeneutic phenomenological study, I used the iterative process of each stage of analysis to check the data against itself. For instance, I created the experiential framework using only the headings I extracted during the previous round of analysis. When I reorganized the analysis notes into an outline, I checked to ensure that the quotations matched the framework. During this process, I perceived the term *stuck* as an emotional sense of dis-agency, but when I read the associated quotation depicting an experience where the child was stuck in an elevator, I moved this heading to a more appropriate location in the framework. I

used this process for each map: I would return to the text itself to ensure that the framework represented the text from which it derived. I would ask myself: *Does this framework represent the text, or my interpretation of the text?* This process is an inherent component of van Manen's stages of data analysis, which establishes credibility.

A thorough literature review, contextualizing study findings in the literature, and the use of a pilot study also contribute to this work's trustworthiness. Further, my notes span a period when I worked at two different schools with populations that varied on several metrics; insofar as there is no distinguishable difference in quotations according to the date of their collection, two school populations adds an element of representativeness to the data.

I further established trustworthiness through maintaining credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008; Høye & Severinsson, 2007; Rambod et al., 2016). While it was impossible to employ member checking as I had no identifying features to use to match individual quotations with the children I worked with and my research focused on the text and not the children, I adhered to stringent accuracy, checking quotations against my teaching notes and using textual descriptions in their totality in order to ensure credibility. Further, I endeavored to fulfill the "prolonged engagement" and "persistent observation" that characterize credibility in qualitative studies (Høye & Severinsson, 2007), and I attempted to disprove several conclusions (through strategies such as rearranging subthemes or attempting to find support for the opposite of a conclusion), to no avail. To establish dependability, I applied the results of each round of analysis back to the complete data set, weaving together themes, quotations, ideas, and perceptions to ensure that they aligned before moving forward. Further, when I completed the study, I ensured that quotations, reductions, analyses, and findings all aligned with each other.

To establish confirmability, I ensured that each assertion and theme reflected the textual descriptions. As an inherent component of hermeneutic phenomenology, this process required meticulous navigation between the part and the whole. The broad selection of textual descriptions established meaning transferability as the words reflected the experience of numerous children. To further support my findings' transferability, I offered ample evidence supporting my claims and connected them to corroborating results throughout the field, alongside descriptive outlines rife with depth to support my analytical frameworks, such that the reader may "evaluate applicability of the data to other contexts" (Rambod et al., 2016, p. 312).

Limitations and Delimitations

While I managed this study to the utmost of my ability, this study departed from traditional hermeneutic phenomenological studies in a few key ways, which may be considered limitations. There were no formal interviews, which means that the exploration could not have as much depth as it could have breadth. I recorded the quotations between 2014 and 2018 before I conceived this study, so the data collection process was descriptive rather than prescriptive and intentionally crafted for this study's purposes. Further, it was impossible to follow up with the children and ask additional questions. An intentional process might bring more to bear in the data collection phase. While these quotations were relatively recent, they may lack relevancy due to changes in the intervening years; at the time of this writing, there is no in-person instruction with children in much of the country, which would likely offer different results if the data were collected today. Both schools where the quotations were collected were culturally-diverse urban public schools; perhaps the data would show different results in a different location or with a different or broader population, thus possibly limiting the transferability of findings.

Further, because I was the students' (out-of-classroom) teacher, there may be a form of bias inherent in the data collection. Students would raise their hands to share stories. Were they sharing stories in order to be seen favorably in my eyes? Were stories fabricated in order to "sound more mindful?" (I always strove to respond to each story with the same receptivity, but my general experience as an educator is that children are quite adept at figuring out what a teacher prefers). Would responses vary if the researcher and the mindfulness teacher were two different individuals? With these questions in mind, it is evident that it is impossible to ascertain whether any individual quotation reflects an accurate depiction of the child's experience. However, phenomenological research regards individuals' reported experiences, perceptions, and professed influences as truth (van Manen, 2014). Insofar I did not collect these quotations for research purposes, and without identifying information, validation of the quotations and experiences would be impossible. Thus, I believed that children were reporting their honest experiences, and their reported words stood for interpretation in this study, regardless of their subjectivity.

Additionally, the voices were self-selecting: the children were those who were brave enough to raise their hands in front of their peers, perhaps showing a preference for extraversion, and the stories were those that children felt comfortable sharing in front of their peers. What stories might children have shared in a private format or one that was more introvert-friendly? Further, as their mindfulness teacher, it is possible that my own inherent bias was present in interpreting the children's words.

This study's primary delimitation is that I already possessed the wealth of textual descriptions in my teaching notes, which provided inherent constraints on the scope of this study: the words are those from the elementary students with whom I worked. While this study's

parameters would be quite different if one were to repeat it with a research intent, I am intrigued by the thought of what one might discover. Given the availability of my personal teaching notes, and this phenomenological study's scope, the 1,136 quotations analyzed were appropriate for this research.

Summary

This study explored the child's lived experience practicing mindfulness in daily life using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. I used hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology to analyze 1,136 textual descriptions by children using mindfulness.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents this hermeneutic phenomenological study's findings on children's experience using mindfulness throughout daily life experiences. The central research question that guided this exploration was: "What is the child's experience of using mindfulness in daily life?" Here, I present the results from reviewing my teaching notes, which included 1,136 quotations from children. I analyzed data using van Manen's interpretation method and four thematic constructs; this chapter presents this analysis, including quotations to elucidate and support findings. Eight themes emerged from this data analysis, pointing to the child using mindfulness in daily life to (a) stay with experience (*Staying With*), (b) navigate the way through circumstances (*Navigating the Way Through*), (c) manage their interactional/relational world (*Managing Interactional/Relational World*), (d) *Return to Baseline*, (e) fill the self up ("*Filling Self Up*"), (f) thrive in the "trappedness" of childhood (*Thriving in the "Trappedness" of Childhood*), (g) enact caring (*Caring*), and (h) to grow and see clearly (*Blossoming*). This chapter presents the layers of analysis from which these themes emerged and quotations that illustrate and validate the results alongside an in-depth exploration of these themes and their subthemes. This work offers these results in the order in which I obtained them.

Data Collected

The data collected for this study were archival data extracted from my reflective teaching notes that I recorded between 2014 and 2018 when I taught the Mindful Schools curriculum in the schools where I worked. The children's textual descriptions were either transcribed shorthand or recorded and then transcribed, verbatim (in fidelity with the child's speech) in my reflective teaching notes. I attributed textual descriptions only to the child's grade, with no identifying

name, gender, or age; there were 1,136 textual descriptions from children ages 4 through 12. I regularly gathered responses for my teaching notes from respondents out of a larger pool of approximately 2,000 students. I stored these textual descriptions in a document on my computer. I initially listed the quotations in the order in which I found them in my teaching notes, and thus, in the order the children spoke them. These quotations were pre-recorded for non-research purposes and are the text to which I applied hermeneutic phenomenology. I obtained approval from the Saybrook University IRB for this study.

Data Analysis

I examined the data through several rounds of hermeneutic analysis, deepening and reflecting at every pass. Hermeneutic phenomenology proved to be the appropriate methodology for this work as I explored the children's lived experience and the unique lens that my lived experience as a mindfulness educator and researcher offered. I applied van Manen's (1990) method to this work, alongside van Manen's four fundamental existentials of human experience: spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality. I followed a practical application of van Manen's (1990) research activities fundamental to interpretive research:

1. Turning to a phenomenon, which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.
3. Reflecting on the essential themes, which characterize the phenomenon.
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30–31)

First Cycle of Analysis: Turning To

Before engaging with the data, I recorded my assumptions and presuppositions. A holistic approach to the data guided a first reading of the entire data set in accordance with my keen reflection upon reading each individual quotation. Guiding questions that prompted the first cycle of analysis were: "What do I notice?" and "What do I feel?" I produced copious notes and

reflections, after which I linked this content back hermeneutically to my presuppositions for this study.

Second Cycle of Analysis: Investigating

The second cycle of analysis focused on the question, “What do I notice *in* the quotations?” yielding 159 categories of observation. I printed these 159 categories, manually cut them into strips of paper, and then sorted them on the floor according to arising thematic groupings. Next, I sorted each central theme into further subthemes, rearranging individual categories as necessary. These themes provided the basis for an experiential mind map, presenting a visual framework for understanding the child’s experience using mindfulness. Subsequently, I translated the mind map back into outline format supported by individual quotations to confirm and support dependability.

As I analyzed the anecdotes at the level of the sentence, I noticed that most sentences followed a similar pattern; an exemplar of an anecdote looked like this:

When I was at [place] with [relational], and [condition] was happening, I [intervention] and [result] happened.

Third Cycle of Analysis: Reflecting

During the third cycle of analysis, I sorted quotations into categories according to the emotion or condition associated with the experience of using mindfulness. This process yielded 78 categories. These categories provided the foundation for a mind map portraying the emotion, condition, or context present when the child reported autonomously using mindfulness in everyday life. I subsequently translated this mind map into outline format supported by individual quotations to affirm dependability; these supportive quotations were each distinct from those used for support during the second cycle of analysis.

Fourth Cycle of Analysis: Describing

During the fourth cycle of analysis, I sorted quotations into grade-level categories. I then read through them ordinally, focusing on features of the quotations themselves, yielding 51 distinct features that I portrayed in a chart according to grade level. I translated this chart into an outline that offered quotations as support for dependability and relied on some previously offered quotations.

Fifth Cycle of Analysis: Maintaining

During the fifth cycle of analysis in moving between the part and the whole, I generated word clouds to take in a holistic view of concepts in a visual manner. One may observe what analysis evokes over time and in individual instances, or as an amalgamation. The word cloud is the perfect medium for aggregating qualitative data. I used a thorough process to create the word clouds: I read through each individual quotation as a unit and dissected it according to six categorical criteria: place, relationship, condition, intervention, result, and body. It was unnecessary nor possible for every quotation to contain all six categories, so I simply noted categories as present; I did not note absence.

I compiled the six lists separately in a single Microsoft Word document, using headings to navigate between sections, color-coding so that each category was apparent at a glance, and using the underscore in place of a space to indicate that each entry is a separate “word.” A sample of the first three lines of the “place” list reads: “school, school, school, school, school, school, school, school, school, school, school, school, school, library, library, library, art_class, library, school, art_class, school, home, outside, library, library, library, library, library, my_bed, home, home, home, home, park, McDonalds, karate.” The finalized document with all six word

lists was 6,166 words long, with each section varying in length due to the prevalence of representation in each category.

To create the word clouds, I copied each list into several different online word cloud generators. I sought the word cloud generator with the most nuanced sizing to reflect the prevalence of words within lists. The three websites that provided the most robust images were: <https://www.jasondavies.com/wordcloud/>, <https://www.wordclouds.com/>, and <https://wordart.com/>. Each algorithm provided a different image. Rather than choosing one image over the other, I decided to use all three in concert to capture the distilled essence of each category.

Sixth Cycle of Analysis

During the sixth cycle of analysis, I re-read my personal notes regarding my own mindfulness teaching and personal mindfulness use when I was teaching. I noted words and phrases that stood out to me and wrote a poem using verbatim words and phrases as they appeared in my notes.

Seventh Cycle of Analysis: Balancing

During the seventh cycle of analysis, I reviewed each of the products from the previous cycles to deduce specific themes representing the essence of the children's lived experience using mindfulness in daily life. I presented these themes in a mind map supported by images. I checked this mind map against the original set of quotations for validity and ascertained that these results apply to and represent the data.

Findings

As I investigated the lived phenomenon of the child practicing mindfulness in daily life, several frameworks emerged, comprising and articulating the breadth of this experience across

the many textual descriptions. In this section, I present an experiential framework that outlines the aspects of experience evident in the array of occasions that the children shared; these aspects describe the experience and the experience's result. I present an emotion and condition framework that portrays the emotion or condition present before or as the child chose to apply a mindfulness technique. Next, I offer a detailed exploration of the features present in quotations according to the speaker's grade level. I then offer an analysis of word prevalence throughout the quotations, followed by exploring my personal teaching notes. Finally, I offer themes and subthemes with supporting quotations. Hermeneutic phenomenological analysis informs each of these layers of analysis.

Experiential Framework

Categories emerged during the second cycle of analysis, outlining the child's experiential components using mindfulness in daily life. Quotations indicated that children applied mindfulness practices internally to the experience of being in their bodies, to their breath, to interact with their body systems, and to deal with pain. Textual evidence pointed to youth enacting growth and autonomy by using mindfulness skills and integrating them in meaningful ways. The recorded phrases indicated that children used mindfulness when they faced more challenging moments and emotions in life, to enact care, and as a mode to be more careful. Quotations revealed that mindfulness enabled children to increase focus and patience, regulate internal states, handle emotions, persist, change courses when necessary, and meet and savor preferable moments of life.

The children's words indicated that these practices made children more aware, created peace, increased presence, bolstered confidence, and helped children engage with their feelings. The frequent and broad application that the quotations depicted, along with many reports of

sharing the practices with others, indicated that the children recognized the value in the mindfulness practices, particularly in instances when their age limited their agency. Some quotations pointed to children's interaction with more expansive states of consciousness. Children's words indicated that the mindfulness skills helped them navigate relationships with parents, siblings, friends, classmates, teachers, and me, pointing to enhanced connection and harmony in these domains.

Appendix A presents a visual framework for understanding the child's experience using mindfulness and the interplay between various facets of experience. Appendix B offers an outline that provides support and quotations for the experiential components outlined in Appendix A.

Children's textual descriptions of the experience of mindfulness fell along internal and external axes.

Internal Experiential Axis

Children's words depicted both the internal experience and the internal result of the mindfulness occurrence. This section describes and supports the array of internal experiences that children shared, outlining growth, emotions linked to action, emotions towards life or feelings, active emotional handling, emotions directed towards the self, practice, and spirituality.

Body sensations characterized the internal axis, such as the felt sense of being in one's body, as offered by a kindergartener, "It felt like ants crawling everywhere inside me, but it felt good like that. It was all over inside me in all parts." Children's words evidenced an internal ability to shift the perception of a physical sensation, as a fifth grader reported, "Right now, I was feeling a little hungry, and I did the Mindful Breathing and my mind was not on the hunger

and it went away!” Children depicted mindfulness as a tool to impact body systems, such as to refrain from throwing up; to fall asleep, as a fifth grader shared,

When I went into bed I had this really strange feeling that someone was watching me, so I kept looking out the window, and part of my window doesn't have a curtain, and I did my Mindful Breathing, and I fell asleep, and when I woke up I felt better;

or to modulate the heartbeat, as a second grader offered, “Mom, she April fooled [sic] me, and I was so scared that my heart kept going fast so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

Data indicated many reports of children using mindfulness internally in reference to the body to deal with pain. Children used mindfulness to distract themselves from pain as offered by this fifth grader, “I had a stomach ache, so I used my Mindful Breathing to get my mind out of my stomach”; to feel and forgive pain; to apply mindfulness to continuous pain; to use mindfulness to get through pain as a fourth grader reported, “When I got my stitches and I did my Mindful Breathing and I stopped hitting my doctor”; and to recuperate faster.

Growth. Children’s internal experience reports exhibited growth and growth trajectory, reporting that children used mindfulness to face developmental fears and transmuted them into feeling good and into finding capacity internally. Children used mindfulness when they encountered a new phenomenon, or to face a new experience, as a fourth grader offered, “At the first class of dancing I was scared so I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.” Children enacted autonomy through mindfulness skills, as when they exhibited self-sufficiency, even with adults around; regulated themselves without adult assistance, as a third grader reported, “When I watched Curious George BooFest and then I was so scared, and my mom wouldn't sleep with me, I used my Mindful Breathing and then I took other dreams to think about”; they further enacted autonomy when they were more mature than those older than them, and when they developed their own mindfulness techniques. Many of the children I worked with had

challenging lives, and they reported using mindfulness to meet challenges, such a fourth grader who offered,

When my little brother was crying because he wanted my Mommy, but she said he had to stay in his bed and he kept crying and crying, and I said to him: “I’m here,” and then I had to use my Mindful Breathing to calm down and stay helping him and nice.

Emotions Linked to Action. Children’s words indicated that they used mindfulness to enact care and carefulness; to direct autonomous action in their worlds; to increase concentration, as the words of this fifth grader indicated, “When it started to snow in the middle of school, and the kids were going crazy, I used my Mindful Breathing to block them out and keep learning”; to disengage from a compulsive pattern; and to wait.

Emotions Towards Life or Feelings. Textual descriptions evidenced that children used mindfulness to deal with life and emotions when they wanted to be somewhere other than where they were; to tolerate what was happening; to be okay; and to deal with trauma that might not be addressed by an adult, like that offered by a second grader, “When my sister pushed me off the floaty and held me under water, and then I used my Mindful Breathing when I came up because I was so scared.”

Children’s words also indicated that they applied mindfulness to moments of delight; momentous occasions; to access a capacity for awe, as reported by a second grader, “Yesterday when we went to Sunset Park, and I thought it was so beautiful I was going to cry. I used my Mindful Breathing and then I calmed and I just felt happy”; to value what one has; and to feel good in challenging moments.

The quotations analyzed for this study indicated that children employed mindfulness as a method to maintain presence during a challenge and to persist; to meet fear in all its various measures, as a fourth grader offered, “When my sister fell and didn’t move, I used my Mindful Breathing because I was scared”; to be there for oneself when one was lonely; to deal with the

sadness associated with change; to face failure; to self-soothe during painful moments such as that conveyed by a second grader, “When my mom said ‘No fair, it’s your birthday and I don’t have any presents for you,’ and I was sad, and then I used my Mindful Breathing to feel better”; to deal with feeling creeped out, regret, deep disappointment, pure misery, feeling grossed out, boredom, trapped, grief and loss, mixed feelings; or as a last resort.

Active Emotional Handling. Children’s words revealed that children experienced mindfulness as a strategy to handle emotions internally: to get out of their own way or to follow the path of least resistance; as a release valve, particularly with excitement; to change how time felt, particularly while waiting, as depicted by a fifth grader, “I had to wait for an hour, so I did my Mindful Breathing and time flew by”; to free up a logjam of emotions; to shed unnecessary emotions; to engage with emotions they were already having more skillfully, as illustrated by a second grader, “When my mom fell on her head, she went to the doctor, and I was scared so I did a lot of Mindful Breathing”; to provide an emotional buffer zone; and to avert and reorient responsive choices.

Textual descriptions depicted goal-oriented mindfulness experiences in children’s emotional handling through intentional use to return to regulatory baseline; to deal with emotional discomfort; to navigate the mind, as demonstrated by a fourth grader, “I was having a lot of thoughts, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I ignored my mind and I kepted [sic] going”; to find an outlet for anger; to keep the mind from getting in the way; to navigate projections of the mind; to calm down without external motivation; and to digest an emotion.

Quotations offered the outcome of emotional handling through portraying children’s awareness of awareness; settled temperament; ability to create peace, as exhibited by a fourth grader, “Me and my brothers was arguing, and we almost started fighting, and I used my Mindful

Breathing and I stopped it”; ability to savor and enact presence; to maintain the simplicity of presence, as reported by a fourth grader, “My mom told me that B. was coming over for dinner, and I was so excited that I turned off the TV and looked out the window and used my Mindful Breathing”; to feel happiness more deeply, as offered by a third grader, “Today when you said you like my letter, it made me happy, so I did my Mindful Breathing to feel all the happy”; to be willing to feel feelings more fully; to engage with deep feeling; to realize priorities; and to enjoy the mindfulness itself as a first grader shared, “It was really, really, really, really good. The Mindful Breathing.”

Emotions Directed Towards the Self. Children’s reports indicated that the experience of mindfulness engendered self-referential emotions such as action-oriented confidence; emotional confidence; enacting care directed towards oneself; listening to the body and finding the quiet place within oneself; and coming home to the experience of self as described by a fifth grader after their first mindfulness experience,

I didn’t want to stop when you said we could open our eyes. It felt really calm and I never get a chance to feel like that in my life, it was just so peaceful and I didn’t want it to end.

Practice. Textual descriptions pointed to children valuing the practice, as they often offered several anecdotes in an individual report; indicated a rudimentary understanding of how their practice impacts brain function; and reported continuous, autonomous, and pervasive practice, as indicated by a fifth grader, “Basically, I use my Mindful Breathing constantly.” Further, children’s words indicated that mindfulness did not always “seem to work,” even when its effects were welcome, or that it sometimes “seemed to work” even when the child did not expect it to work.

Soul. Quotations indicated that children’s experiences included those beyond the rational, as offered by a fifth grader, “I think I was in another dimension, it didn’t feel like just my eyes

closed. There was someplace else I went to”; or those referencing the soul as offered by another fifth grader, “It’s like we could all be old souls just in different bodies.”

Present Moment

Children’s words indicated the use of mindfulness in the moment of reporting, an integrated sense of their experience meeting my experience, and in response to me, as a third grader reported, “I used my Mindful Breathing when I saw that you’re really bad sick right now.”

External Experiential Axis

Children’s words depicted aspects of experience, describing both the external experience and the external result of the mindfulness experience. This section describes and supports the array of external experiences that children shared, including parental relationships, a sense of connection, modification of interaction, external circumstances that prompt a responsive internal state, external experience and a resultant active modification of the internal state, feelings related to others, and interaction with the physical world.

Parental Relationships. Textual descriptions indicated children using mindfulness to move toward parental relationships when they missed their parents and sought their love and when they savored parental pride. The words evidenced the experiential use of mindfulness in moving against parents when fighting with parents; being mad when the child did not get what they wanted from the parents; navigating unhealthy parent interactions, as presented by a third grader, “Last week when my dad was yelling at me and calling me a ‘liar, liar,’ I did my Mindful Breathing and I stopped crying, and stopped thinking I was going to punch him”; navigating moments when children felt backed into a corner by their parents; and moments when they were afraid of their parents.

Sense of Connection. Children's words revealed the use of mindfulness to "feel with" others through shared happiness; coregulation, as depicted by a fourth grader, "I used my Mindful Breathing when my mom and I were very frustrated, and then we calmed down. I taught it to her, too"; empathy; and the sense that the boundaries between self and other dissolved. Textual descriptions supported a sense of connection through generosity and through employing mindfulness in various relational actions. These relational actions included growing closer, as a fifth grader offered, "I wanted to tell my cousin one of my secrets, but I was scared, so I did my Mindful Breathing and then I told her"; reconnecting; apologizing; returning to connection after absence; and forgiveness.

Textual descriptions referenced the experience of warmth in mindfulness through heartfulness, and savoring connection, as presented by a fourth grader, "I used my Mindful Breathing because yesterday I was happy, because yesterday a new girl came in the class and I asked her do you wanna be friends, so she said yes."

A prominent component of the sense of connection was evident in textual reports of children teaching mindfulness to others in their lives, as a fifth grader offered, "I was on the phone with my stepmom and I heard one of her daughters wasn't behaving, I taught her the Mindful Breathing and she taught her so her daughter would calm down."

Modification of Interaction. Children reported the experience of mindfulness in modifying interactional components with others when mindfulness enabled preferable behavior; helped children function at school, as a third grader reported, "I used it in class when someone was bothering me and I was trying to listen to the teachers and then I was able to do it!"; helped children refrain from hurting or hitting others; and helped children meet external behavioral expectations.

External Circumstances Prompt a Responsive Internal State. Textual descriptions indicated the use of mindfulness to respond to external circumstances such as bullying, as described by a second grader,

That time when a big boy said that “second grade sucks” and it made me mad, because I really like second grade, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I knew the big boy was wrong and I felt better;

when children found themselves caught in the actions of numerous others; when they faced deep unfairness, such as the fifth grader who shared “When I was in Las Vegas to see my baby cousin and they wouldn’t let me hold her cuz I’m a boy and I got mad and used my Mindful Breathing and calmed down”; in the face of injustice; when someone else gave away their belongings; during traumatic incidents; or when they found themselves physically stuck.

Children’s words indicated the use of mindfulness to face conditions that could not be changed; to comply, as the fifth grader who shared,

When my dad told me I have to go to the doctor and maybe get a brace for my back, I got so scared I tried to run away and then I did my Mindful Breathing and then now I will go to the doctor;

to deal with circumstances the child wished were different; to tolerate annoyance and understand its impermanence; when they realized they could not control others, such as the second grader who reported, “On Wednesday Claudia was my best friend, and then on Thursday she wasn’t my friend anymore, and I was sad, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I was still sad, but then I was okay.”

Quotations indicated an ability to meet life responsively by dealing with things as they are and staying with an experience as it is, as the fifth grader who shared, “My big sister had a baby, and I was so excited to be an uncle, that I was too excited, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

Children's reports often indicated a sense of perceived external control that I called "the magical," as with the second grader who reported,

When I went to my dad's house, my dog was there, and she was a girl, and then she had babies, and one baby didn't come out and I got so scared and sad and then I did my Mindful Breathing and the baby came out.

External Experience and Active Modification of Internal State. Children's words indicated that they used mindfulness to actively shift internal states in response to external stimuli when they generated positive behavior to avoid getting in trouble or to make a productive choice, as the second grader who reported, "When my little sister wouldn't share her toys, I did my Mindful Breathing and then I played by myself with my own toys"; to change oneself when it was impossible to change what was happening; or to join what was already happening.

Quotations indicated that children enacted mindfulness use to meet external challenges such as being lost or moderating effects of punishment. Textual descriptions showed children using mindfulness to fully show up when they felt shy, either interpersonally or when performing on stage.

External circumstances prompted children to use mindfulness as prevention, as depicted by a fifth grader, "I used my Mindful Breathing *before* going in the Haunted House!"

Feelings Related to Others. Textual descriptions pointed to mindfulness use to internally modulate feelings related to others such as feeling unseen; feeling unwanted; feeling left out, as reported by a fifth grader, "My mom got my brother an early Christmas present, and forgot to get me one, instead of getting mad I did my Mindful Breathing"; taking care of oneself when feeling sidelined by the actions of others; or when one was unheard. Likewise, children employed mindfulness to savor the appreciation of feeling seen by others. Children reported using mindfulness to deal with missing family members, fear in school, and agitating stimuli they could not alter.

Interaction with the Physical World. Children reported using their mindful eyes to increase situational awareness and to literally see more of what was in front of them; slowing down as bringing more awareness to the world around them; and appreciating quietness, as a fifth grader shared, “Since it was so quiet I could hear the gym and feel all the vibrations in the floor. It got so quiet I felt like I could hear everything and feel everything.”

The next section offers a detailed exploration of the emotional and conditional framework that emerged during data analysis.

Emotion and Condition Framework

Categories emerged during the third cycle of analysis, outlining the emotion or condition present when the child used mindfulness in daily life. Textual descriptions indicated that children used mindfulness skills to enact acceptance, care, carefulness, compassion, heartfulness, to make good choices, and to calm down. Quotations suggested that children used mindfulness to ameliorate allergies, disappointment, dizziness, hyperness (the children’s own descriptive term for the state of being hyper), injury, meanness, mistakes, nausea, pain, illness, trauma, unfairness, temperature discomfort, and to fall asleep. The words revealed that children employed mindfulness to meet anticipation, tears, embarrassment, fear, frustration, surprise, grief, hunger, tiredness, momentous occasions, the mundane, the feeling of not mattering, overwhelm, rushing, sadness, to self-regulate, deal with anger, and avoid fights.

The analyzed words pointed to mindfulness use to deeply feel awe, calm, excitement, funny moments, happiness, their bodies, quietness, togetherness, and to notice, hear, taste, see, feel, and walk more presently. Quotations indicated that children used mindfulness to notice brain function, to delay urination or defecation when a bathroom was inaccessible, to activate confidence, determination, empowerment, self-advocacy, generosity, hope, patience, and a sense

of the magical. The words revealed mindfulness application to navigate doctor's visits, friendships, sibling and parental relationships, teacher relationships, extended family, school life, poverty, and moments when mindfulness did not work. The children's words indicated the employment of mindfulness to seek peace, to simply be more present, as a regular practice, and as something worthy of sharing with others. Appendix C presents a visual representation of the emotional and conditional contexts that prompted mindfulness use, while Table 1 presents a matrix exploring emotional response and generation on axes of interaction and self-reference. Appendix D offers an outline that provides support and quotations for the emotional and conditional components outlined in Appendix C.

Table 1

Emotional Matrix: Emotional Response and Generation on Axes of Interaction and Self-Reference

Referent	Generative	Both	Responsive
Self-Referential	Awe Brain Science Calm Determination Hope Noticing Quietness	Confidence Hyper Self-Regulation	Embarrassment Excitement Fear Overwhelm
Both	Anticipation Care Carefulness Empowerment Heartfulness Patience	Peacefulness- Seeking	Acceptance Anger Compassion Crying Disappointment Frustration Happiness Meanness Sadness Surprised Waiting
Interactive	Calming Down Generosity Self-Advocacy		Grief Not Mattering

Conditions	Allergies, Didn't Work, Dizzy, Doctor Visit, Extended Family, Fight, Friendship, Funny Moments, "Holding It," Hunger, Injury, "Magic Powers," Mindful Body, Mindful Ears, Mindful Eating, Mindful Eyes, Mindful Walking, Mistakes, Momentous Occasions, Multiple-Use Scenarios, Mundane, Nausea, Now, Pain, Parents, Poverty, Pretending, Regular Practice, Rushing, School Life, Siblings, Sick, Sleep, Smart Choices, Teacher Eyes, Teaching Others, Temperature Discomfort, Tired, Together, Trauma, Unfairness
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Generative Self-Referential Emotions and Conditions

Children's words indicated application of mindfulness to generate self-referential emotions and conditions such as awe, as described by a first grader, "When I went to the Statue of Livery [sic], and it was SO big!"; connecting with brain science, as depicted by a first grader, "When I was playing that game, I used my prefrontal cortex to make a good decision so I could win!"; generating calm, as offered by a kindergartener, "After the breathes [sic] I felt really relax calm"; enacting determination, as reported by a second grader, "When I was running, and I couldn't run no more, I used my Mindful Breathing and then I run again!"; hope, as illustrated by a third grader, "I lost a bird, Mom left the cage open and the window open, and we had to put up a sign for a reward so I used my Mindful Breathing"; noticing, as offered by a second grader, "I went to a different library with my mom, and I couldn't find a book, so I breathe in and breathe out and then I found the book"; and quietness, as reported by a second grader, "I went to spy on animals in the woods, and I had to use my Mindful Breathing to stay so so quiet."

Responsive Self-Referential Emotions and Conditions

Textual descriptions pointed to the application of mindfulness to responsive self-referential emotions and conditions such as embarrassment, as portrayed by a fourth grader, "When I slipped on the floor and my cousins laughed at me, then I did my Mindful Breathing"; excitement, as shared by a fourth grader, "When I got my scooter on my birthday I was so excited and I ran all over the house, then I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down"; fear, as depicted by a first grader, "I was going to a scary movie, and then it made me cry so I deep breathed"; and overwhelm, as illustrated by a fifth grader,

Last night my grandpa threw up and he got dizzy, so we had to call for help and people, and there were so many people, and they took him to the hospital, and I was sad, because I didn't want him to feel bad, so I used my Mindful Breathing when everyone was outside very loud and I just ignore them.

Generative and Responsive Self-Referential Emotions and Conditions

Quotations indicated the experiential use of mindfulness with self-referential emotions and conditions that are both generative and responsive, such as confidence, illustrated by a fifth grader, “In bike club I was so scared to ride a bike, cuz I think I might fall, then I use my Mindful Breathing and I try it!”; hyperness, depicted by a third grader, “When we were at music and our teacher picked us up and I was hyped up because the music teacher gave us a recorder I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down and walk in line”; and self-regulation, as offered by a fifth grader, “A kid tripped me and I got so mad I was gonna bust his face, then I did my Mindful Breathing and I walked away.”

Generative Interactive Emotions and Conditions

Children’s words depicted the use of mindfulness during the experience of the generative, interactive emotional condition of calming down, illustrated by a second grader, “I used my Mindful Breathing when I was angry cuz I couldn’t play tag and I went like this [shows a deep breath] and I calmed down. [The class mimics this student.]... It really calms your nerves”; generosity, as offered by a fifth grader, “I used my generosity when I shared my food with a homeless person”; and self-advocacy, as depicted by a second grader, “We were playing football in my room and they kept hitting me and I got mad, and used my Mindful Breathing, and then I said, ‘Don’t hit me!’”

Responsive Interactive Emotions and Conditions

Textual descriptions offered mindfulness application as a response to the emotions and conditions of grief, as reported by a fifth grader, “I went to the graveyard to see my cousin because he died, and I was sad so I used a lot of Mindful Breathing,” and not mattering, as

shared by a fifth grader, “On Saturday my sister brought her dog and I was allergic, and I was so mad she brought it that I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

Generative Self-Referential and Interactive Emotions and Conditions

Quotations pointed to children applying mindfulness to generative emotions and conditions that may be both self-referential and interactive, such as anticipation, shared by a third grader, “I used my Mindful Breathing because I was a little bit excited because my dad gonna be here in 28 days, and then I felt calm”; care, offered by a third grader,

At the park by the school, my little uncle (he’s like five years old or something), he was going to jump off the slide and I was scared, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I told him to be careful and I took care of him;

carefulness, depicted by a third grader, “I used Mindful Breathing at my church when the floor was just waxed and it was so slippery”; empowerment, offered by a first grader, “When I fell off my scooter, I used my Mindful Breathing so then I knew I got up and I practiced!”; heartfulness, illustrated by the imagery of a fifth grader, “I was at a thing like a gas station, and the pump was pouring something pink directly into my heart, and that thing was my own kindness that I could share”; and patience, reported by a fifth grader, “I used my Mindful Breathing so I didn’t open my Christmas presents.”

Responsive Self-Referential and Interactive Emotions and Conditions

Textual descriptions indicated that children applied mindfulness to responsive emotions and conditions that may be both self-referential and interactive such as acceptance, as offered by a fifth grader, “I used my Mindful Breathing when it was okay to lose sometimes”; anger, as depicted by a fourth grader, “I used it when my face turned red and I started screaming. I used it and calmed down a little bit”; compassion, as shared by a fourth grader,

I made a pigeon trap with glue, and then a pigeon came and got stuck and I was really sad for it, so I used my Mindful Breathing to figure out what to do, and then I let the bird go. I felt really bad;

crying, as illustrated by a second grader,

Child: Yesterday when I was sleeping, I looked up at the top bed, it's a bunk bed, and my mom wasn't there and little tears came out of my eyes and I used my Mindful Breathing and I knew my mom would say that I'm a Big Girl. I'm going to rub my eyes now.

Me: It's okay, you can rub your eyes.

Child: I'm just rubbing my eyes, I'm not crying. Stop it, water!

disappointment, as described by a fourth grader, "When I saw this stuff on the internet, and I wanted to buy it and mom said no, so I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better"; frustration, depicted by a fifth grader, "When I tried to teach my sister to ride a scooter I had to calm down, because it was really hard to teach her and I was really annoyed, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down"; happiness, offered by a second grader, "When I went to Target and I saw my friend Teagan and she said hi. And I was so happy I used my Mindful Breathing"; meanness, illustrated by a third grader, "When I wanted to be mean to someone in the lunchroom and I just got quiet and I sent kind thoughts to them instead"; sadness, depicted by a second grader,

When my Grandpa was living at the Kingsborough hospital last weekend and we all had to go on the long train and my mom was crying and then we were all crying and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I was sad;

surprise, reported by a fourth grader, "When my guinea pig gave birth, I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down, because I was so surprised!"; and waiting, as depicted by a second grader, "I can't make a video until I'm 80 years old, so I used my Mindful Breathing to wait until I'm 80."

Generative and Responsive Self-Referential and Interactive Emotions and Conditions

Children's words depicted the use of mindfulness during the experience of the generative and responsive, self-referential and interactive emotional condition of Peacefulness-Seeking, illustrated by a fifth grader as

On New Year's, everybody was screaming in my ear, and I got really mad at everybody cuz they were just like shouting, so I used my Mindful Breathing, and I just calmly went to my room, and just started breathing.

Conditions

Conditions that provided a context for the experience of mindfulness include the following situations and strategies: allergies, mindfulness not working, dizziness, doctor's visit, extended family, a fight, friendship, funny moments, delaying urination and defecation, hunger, injury, "magic powers" or the seemingly impossible, mindful body, mindful ears, mindful eating, mindful eyes, mindful walking, mistakes, momentous occasions, multiple-use reports, mundane moments, nausea, now, pain, parents, poverty, pretending, regular practice, rushing, school life, siblings, sick, sleep, smart choices, "teacher eyes," teaching others, temperature discomfort, tiredness, togetherness, trauma, and unfairness.

Grade Level Features

During the fourth cycle of analysis, I analyzed the quotations' features in order of the speaker's grade in school. With varying facility at different ages, at the level of the individual quotation, children's words pointed to (a) accessing maturity, (b) stream-of-consciousness, (c) anticipation and forethought, (d) application to a greater context or story, (e) being present, (f) caring for others, (g) compassion for others, (h) a concrete comparison to other experiences, (i) dealing with change or loss, (j) dealing with the self, knowing they cannot control others, (k) dealing with what is, (l) delaying gratification, (m) engaging with deep emotion, (n) enacting empowerment, (o) facing life's bigness, (p) focus, (q) for results, (r) frustration and discomfort tolerance, (s) generally applied to an aspect of life, (t) grief, (u) hopefulness, (v) using imaginative or non-standard syntax, (w) increased awareness, (x) directly with or to another in a relational context, (y) with developing language or subjective worldview, (z) listening to their body, (aa) makes sense to them, but the meaning is not necessarily apparent through the words, (bb) making connections with other knowledge, (cc) making wise choices, (dd) managing the

content in the mind, (ee) miscellaneous or uncategorizable content, (ff) prevalence in a specific category of experience, (gg) a sense of openness to learning about how the world works, (hh) having perspective and letting things go (ii) describing presence, (jj) preventing unfavorable action, (kk) regular daily use, (ll) in relation to the self, (mm) to remove oneself from a distressing situation, (nn) to savor, (oo) to self-advocate, (pp) to self-regulate, (qq) to self-soothe, (rr) to share the practice with others, (ss) to shift gears, (tt) to shift not-wanting to wanting, (uu) to access expansive states, (vv) to stick-with-it, (ww) to see reality clearly, (xx) to not repeat a mistake, and (yy) in a construct such that “*when* this was happening, *then* I used my mindfulness.”

First-grade quotations predominated the “noticing/awe” category; second-grade quotations predominated the “fear” category; third-grade quotations predominated the “pain/physical” category; fourth-grade quotations predominated the “anger,” “disappointment,” and “excitement” categories; fifth-grade quotations predominated the “frustration” category. Figure 1 offers a visual representation of the proportions of quotations according to the grade levels they represent. Table 2 is a frequency chart depicting the presence of various features of the quotes according to grade level, while Figure 2 offers a visual representation of prevalent features. Appendix E offers an outline that provides support and quotations for the features outlined in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Figure 1

Proportion of Quotations by Grade Level

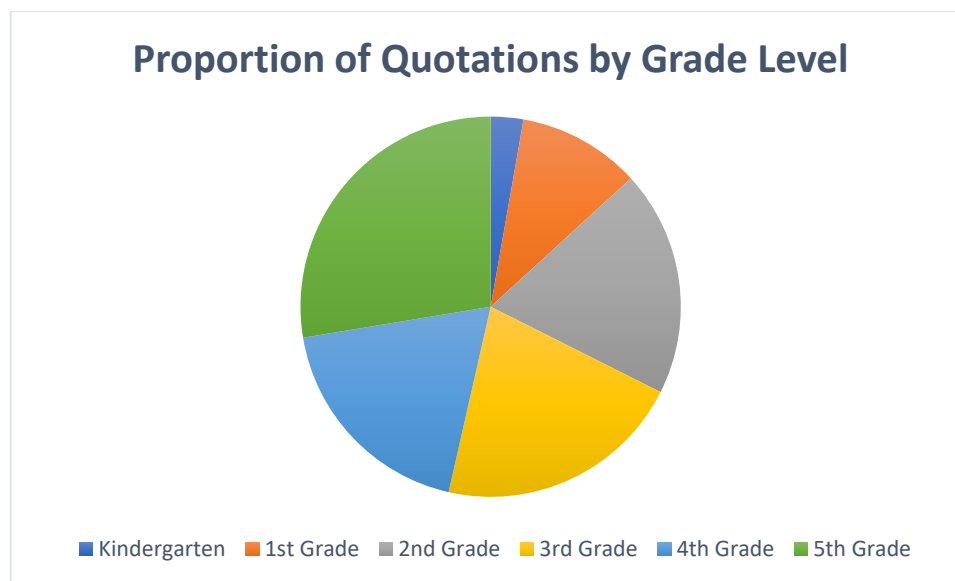


Table 2*Grade Level Feature Chart*

Feature	K	1	2	3	4	5
Accessing Maturity			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
“And then... and then...” (Stream-of-consciousness)	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Anticipation/Forethought			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Application to context/story		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Being present			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Caring for others				⊗	⊗	⊗
Compassion for others			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Concrete comparison		⊗				⊗
Dealing with change/loss			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Dealing with self when can't control others					⊗	⊗
Dealing with what is		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Delaying Gratification					⊗	⊗
Depth of Emotion			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Empowering		⊗		⊗	⊗	⊗
Facing life's bigness				⊗	⊗	⊗
Focus		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
For results		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Frustration/Discomfort Tolerance			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
General		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Grief			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Hopefulness			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Imaginative/ Different Syntax	⊗					
Increased Awareness				⊗	⊗	⊗
In relational connection (with/to – not reaction)				⊗	⊗	
Language/Entering their world	⊗		⊗			
Listening to body						⊗
Makes sense to them, but not necessarily to me		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Making connections	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Making wise choices			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Managing content in the mind			⊗		⊗	⊗

Feature	K	1	2	3	4	5
Miscellaneous		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Most of X Category		Noticing/ Awe	Fear	Pain/ Physical	Anger Disappoin tment Exciteme nt	Frustra- tion
Open to learning how the world works	⊗					
Perspective/Letting things go					⊗	⊗
Presence (Description)		⊗	⊗			⊗
Preventative		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Regular use			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Relationship with self					⊗	⊗
Remove from distressing situation			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Savoring			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Self-Advocacy			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Self-Regulation			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Self-soothing				⊗	⊗	⊗
Sharing with others		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Shift gears			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
Shifting to wanting					⊗	⊗
Soul talk						⊗
Stick-with-it			⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗
To see clearly what's in front of one				⊗	⊗	⊗
Use to not repeat a mistake				⊗	⊗	⊗
When -> then		⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗

Figure 2

Grade Level Features Prevalence Graph



Feature Trajectory

Selected children's quotations offered a view of the architecture of development as the speaker progressed through the grades. Out of 51 possible categories, I offer eight for illustration: anticipation and forethought, application to context and story, concrete comparison, towards desired results, grief, making connections, soul, and the when/then construct.

Anticipation and Forethought. A structural trajectory was apparent in the "Anticipation/Forethought" feature, wherein children applied mindfulness to the anticipation itself or intention to use mindfulness; the second-grade speaker offered, "When it was November 1 when I was eating breakfast I find out on the calendar it was Thanksgiving, and I was so excited so I used my Mindful Breathing while I was eating"; the third-grade speaker offered, "Last night I did Mindful Breathing because tomorrow (which is now today!) is my birthday!"; the fourth-grade speaker offered, "Yesterday I was scared because today is my birthday, and I was scared of what the class might do, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down"; and the fifth-grade speaker offered, "You know, Ms. Terrizzi, I'm not feeling so well, so I'm probably going to go home really soon, because I might throw up - and when I'm there I'm probably gonna do a whole LOT of Mindfulness."

Application to Context and Story. Textual descriptions became increasingly complex as children progressed through the grades as they applied mindfulness to a context or story rather than an isolated condition or emotion. A first grader shared, "When Grandma was cooking, I tried to steal a food, but they didn't let me, so I tip toe, but they see me, then I do my Mindful Breathing and I be patient"; a second grader shared,

When my mom said next summer we're going on a trip, I got so excited when she said I could bring a friend, then I got nervous who to pick so I did my Mindful Breathing and then I picked someone!;

a third grader shared,

When we went to North Carolina and we were staying in the RV, we got stuck, and the door wouldn't open and it was way too hot, so I used my Mindful Breathing, and then my dad used a hammer to get us out;

a fourth grader shared,

On Friday, me and three friends had a water fight, and I took the last water balloon and threw it at my friend and he got mad, and then he snuck up on me and I got mad, so I did my Mindful Breathing;

and a fifth grader shared,

My mom made cupcakes for the dance, and I wanted to eat one, she didn't let me, I did my Mindful Breathing, and then I ate one, and then I ran for my life and I hid in my room and then she found me and yelled at me and I did my Mindful Breathing to calm down.

Concrete Comparison. Children's words offered concrete comparisons as to how mindfulness practice felt. A first grader stated, "When I did it, it felt like I was going to sleep on the floor"; a fifth grader stated, "On Wednesday I used my Mindful Eyes and it was like I had clean eyes."

Towards Desired Results. Textual depictions often highlighted children's experiential use of mindfulness for the intention of achieving a desired result. A first grader reported, "Yesterday in the park I used my Mindful Breathing and it maked me faster"; a second grader reported, "In ballet class when I was doing this stretch, when I did my Mindful Breathing it didn't hurt"; a third grader reported, "On Saturday I lost my baseball game and I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down"; a fourth grader reported, "I used my Mindful Breathing when I was climbing a tree, and I got scared of heights, I used my Mindful Breathing to calm so I can climb down"; and a fifth grader reported, "It was yesterday when my head started hurting a lot, and I started to cry and I just did my Mindful Breathing and then I stopped crying and just kept my head down."

Grief. Children's words indicated meeting grief through mindfulness. A second grader shared,

When I went to see my Great-Grandma in the hospital and I found out she stopped breathing for 30 minutes and part of her brain shut down and she's only gonna live for a little bit, because her brain needs oxygen, and I was sad, because she made funny jokes and tried to give me money - even though I never tooked [sic] it - and I used my Mindful Breathing because I'm sad she's going to go away in a few days, two or three;

a third grader shared, "I used my Mindful Breathing when I missed my uncle who died, and then I felt better"; a fourth grader shared; "I used my Mindful Breathing when my pet tarantula died"; and a fifth grader shared, "When my mom and dad said Grandma has to move out, I went to my room and did my Mindful Breathing because I was sad."

Making Connections. Textual descriptions pointed to the connections children made between mindfulness and other concepts or experiences in their lives. A kindergartener offered, "Reading chapter books is like mindfulness. You have to focus on the intention"; a first grader, after calling out during class, offered, "Oh my goodness! My amygdala just called out!"; a second grader made a connection as they offered, "I did exactly what she did"; a third grader offered,

This morning I woke up feeling sick and my mom made me take medicine. I thought I was going to throw up. Mom told me to breathe in and out and I said that's what we do in library, and then she said to do what we do in library!;

a fourth grader offered, "When my amygdala is active, everything is just black and white and that's all there is, it's like I can't think"; and a fifth grader offered, "In chorus we did some breathing and it was just like Mindful Breathing."

Soul. Only fifth graders referenced their souls. One particular child illustrated their experience after their first mindfulness class,

Ms. Terrizzi! Ms.Terrizzi! Yesterday when you taught us Mindfulness I looked out of my spirit's eyes and I saw I was floating in an empty, black shell - like the shell was my body outside and my spirit was separate, inside. And then when I listened inside my body again, it felt like my eyes were going deeper into it.

When/Then Construct. Many reported experiences followed a when/then construct, wherein the child would state “when” something was happening, they used their mindfulness, “and then” something else happened. A first grader reported, “When I’m sleeping, then I went waked up! And what? And then I did my Mindful Breathing, and then there was no more scared!”; a second grader reported, “When I was mad I actually - - I was mad at my brother and I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down and it felt better”; a third grader reported, “When I fell and my friend, he laughed at me, and then the coach helped me, so I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better”; a fourth grader reported, “When me and S. went to the movies and then I was so too excited I used my Mindful Breathing”; and a fifth grader reported, “When I jumped off the top of a sailboat and I was scared and I took a deep breath and then I jumped I wasn’t so scared.”

Word Prevalence Analysis

During the fifth cycle of analysis, I created word clouds offering visual representation of prevailing key units of information offered in the recorded quotations. Figure 3 presents the location word clouds, Figure 4 presents the relational word clouds, Figure 5 presents the emotion and condition word clouds, Figure 6 presents the mindfulness practice word clouds, Figure 7 presents the result word clouds, Figure 8 presents the body referent word clouds, and Figure 9 presents the complete data set word cloud.

Where did the children use mindfulness practices?

Figure 3*Location Word Clouds*

Note. Full-size word clouds are available in Appendix F.

Who was involved in the mindfulness experience (either as a character or a referent)?

Figure 4*Relational Word Clouds*

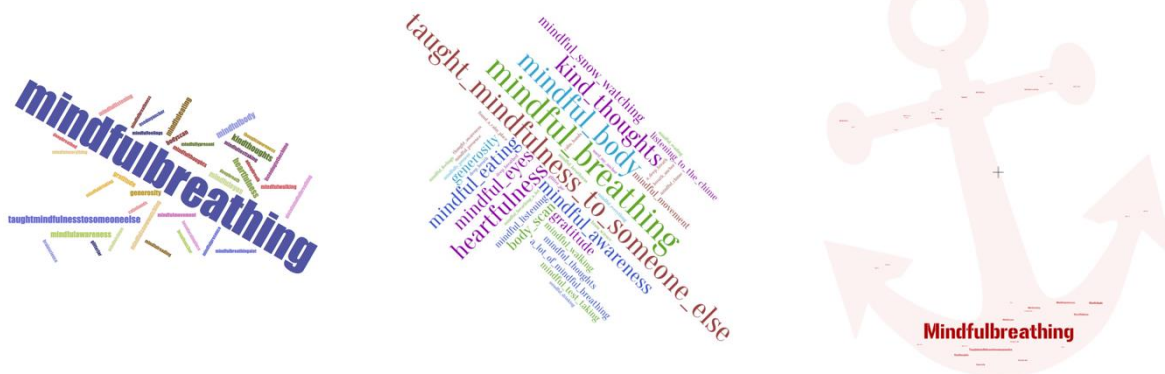
Note. Full-size word clouds are available in Appendix F.

What did the child feel or experience before using the mindfulness practice?

Figure 5*Emotion and Condition Word Clouds*

Note. Full-size word clouds are available in Appendix F.

Which mindfulness technique or strategy did the child report using?

Figure 6*Mindfulness Practice Word Clouds*

Note. Full-size word clouds are available in Appendix F.

What happened after the child used their mindfulness?

Figure 7*Result Word Clouds*

Note. Full-size word clouds are available in Appendix F.

What reference did the quotation make to the child's body?

Figure 8*Body Referent Word Clouds*

Note. Full-size word clouds are available in Appendix F.

Which words were most prevalent in the entire body of data?

(*Navigating the Way Through*), (c) manage their interactional or relational world (*Managing Interactional/Relational World*), (d) regulate (*Return to Baseline*), (e) fill the self up (“*Filling Self Up*”), (f) thrive in the “*trappedness*” of childhood (*Thriving in the “Trappedness” of Childhood*), (g) enact care (*Caring*), and (h) grow and develop capacities (*Blossoming*). Figure 10 offers a visual representation of how I brought the frameworks together for the themes to emerge. Figures 11 and Figure 12 offer visual representation of these themes; Figure 13 presents the internal and external nature of the themes.

Figure 10

Framework Interaction for Theme Emergence

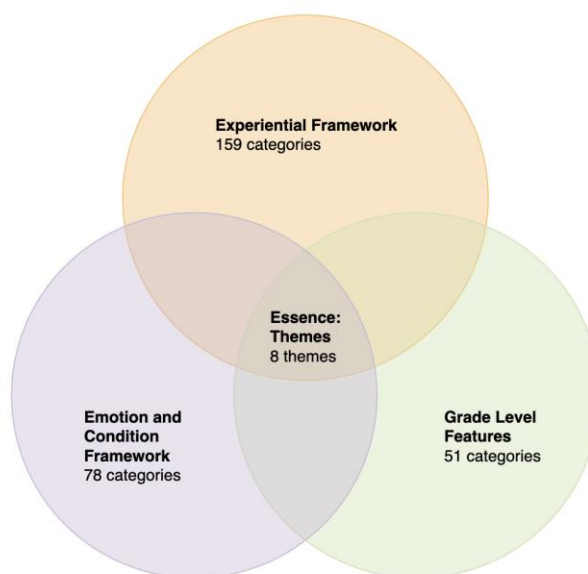


Figure 11

Essence Framework

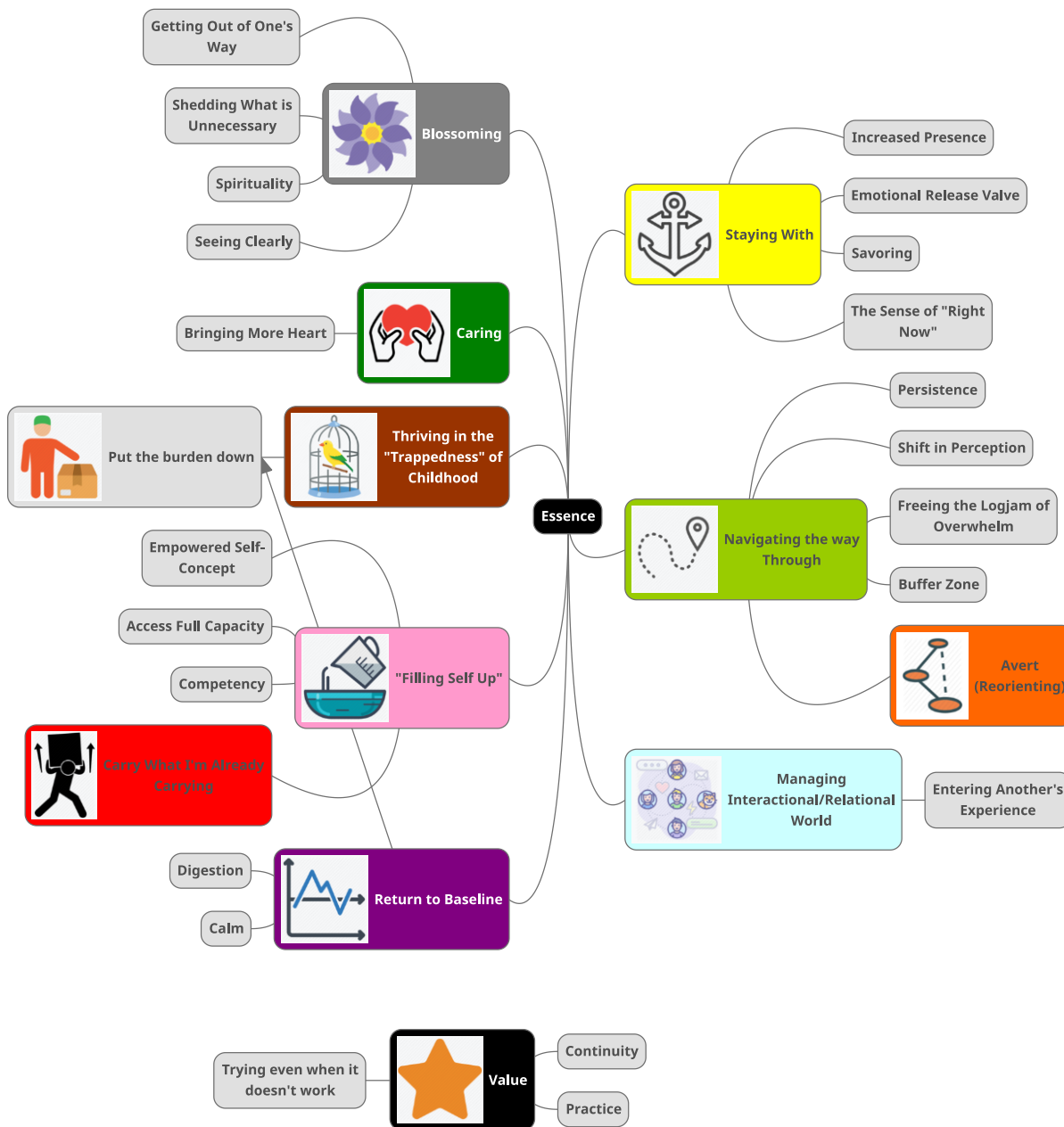
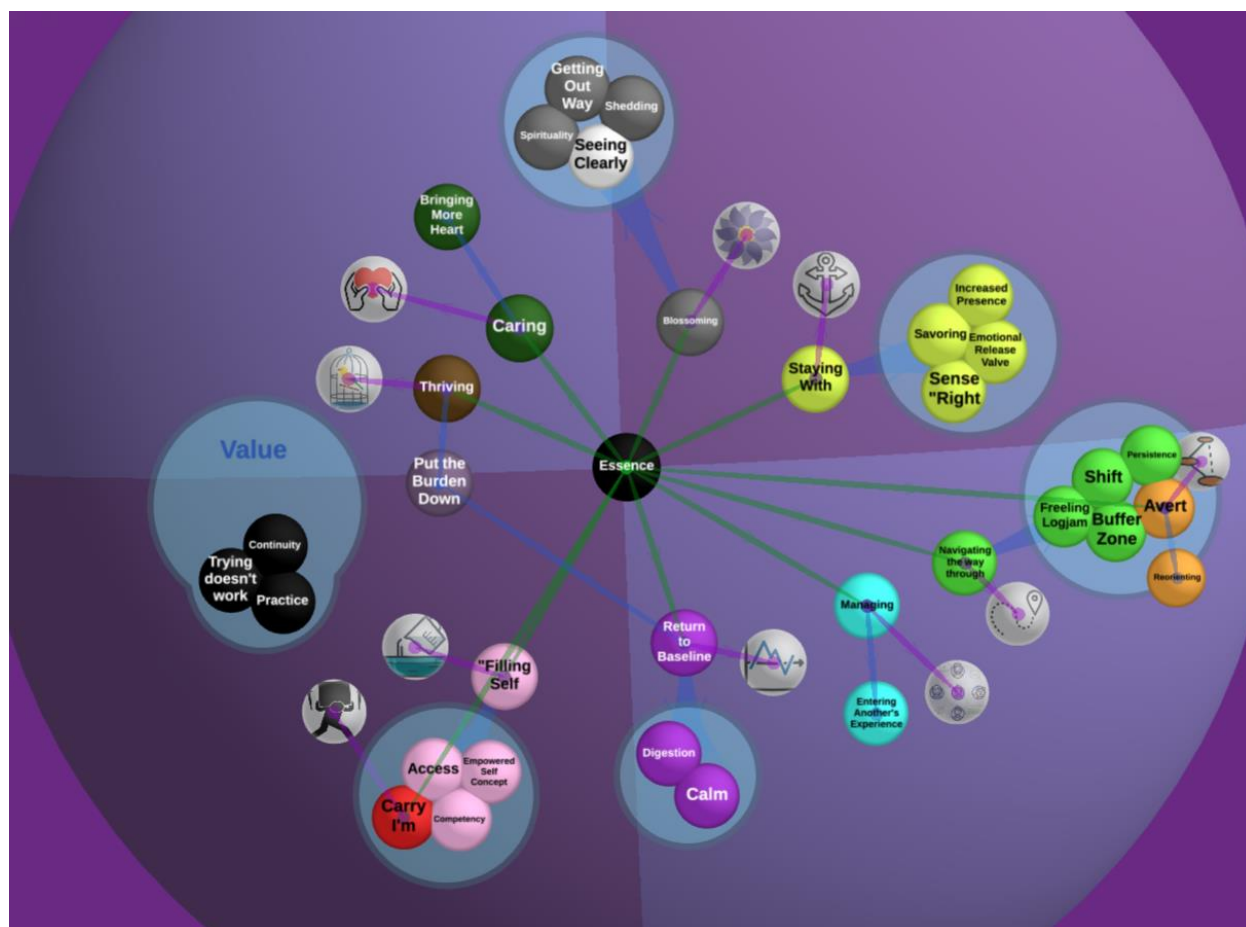
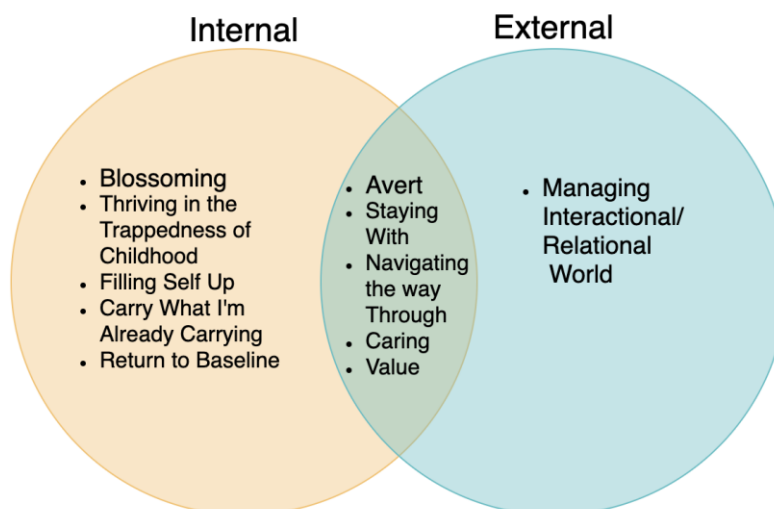


Figure 12

Three-Dimensional Rendering of Essence Framework

Note. Interact with digital, full-size, movable framework here: <https://thort.space/569507003>

Figure 13*Internal and External Nature of Themes*

I checked these themes against the original set of quotations for validity to ensure that each quotation expressed at least one of the themes.

Themes

This section provides a more in-depth exploration of each of these themes.

Theme One: Staying With

In the *Staying With* theme, the quotation indicated that using the mindfulness practice enabled the child to stay with the experience they were already having, whether by increasing presence, employing an emotional release valve, savoring, or becoming aware of the sense of “right now.” In staying with the moment, the moment became more bearable. Children used their mindfulness skills to stay right with the experience that they were reporting, such as this second grader offered, “I used my Mindful Breathing when my mom said we’re going somewhere fun so I didn’t faint”; or this second grader, “At Coney Island, I went on the roller coaster, and it was going like this, and then I wanted to get off so I used my Mindful Breathing”; or this fifth grader,

“My baby sister wanted to play and play and play, and I was annoyed, because she would play forever if she could. So then I used my Mindful Breathing and I kept playing with her until she was done.”

Increased Presence

One distinct aspect or strategy for staying with an experience was increasing the level of presence, as this fifth grader shared, “On Saturday we went to the wrestling tournament and I was so nervous. I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down to focus,” and as this fifth grader shared after their first taste of mindfulness, “When we did the Mindful Listening, I felt like I could hear my body working on the inside. It was like standing in the forest near a river and hearing it but not seeing it.”

Emotional Release Valve

Another common feature of statements that depicted staying with an experience was employing an emotional release valve, as reported by this fourth grader, “Last night when I was getting a phone, I was too excited, and I wanted to rush everything, then my dad said to use my Mindful Breathing and then I felt calm and slowed my mind down.”

Savoring

Savoring was a common feature of statements that indicated the theme of staying with a positive experience, like that offered by a fourth grader, “When my uncle came back from the army a few days ago, I was so excited to see him, because I haven’t seen him in so long, and I did my Mindful Breathing and I calmed down.”

The Sense of “Right Now”

A final component of staying with an experience was an increased sense of the present moment, as this third grader shared, “I used it right now, and then I felt a lot better.”

Theme Two: Navigating the Way Through

When the *Navigating the Way Through* theme was apparent, the child's statement began with an indication that the presenting experience was challenging, needed carefulness, or required thoughtfulness. The child used the mindfulness technique to access a capacity for persistence, changing how they viewed the presenting situation, freeing the logjam of overwhelm, or providing a buffer zone, ultimately finding their way through the situation. This fourth grader used mindfulness to navigate their emotions, "When my dad told me that my smallest brother is going to the hospital (he's six months), I was scared so I used my Mindful Breathing," as did this third grader, "On Sunday I had to use my Mindful Breathing at Ikea because it was scary."

Persistence

One manner of navigating through an experience was enacting persistence, as this fourth grader depicted, "Last night I was racing with my brother and I kept losing and losing, then I used my Mindful Breathing and then I calmed down and ran faster!"

Shift in Perception

An experiential essence of using mindfulness to navigate through a situation was applying the mindfulness to shift perception, if ever so slightly, as this third grader reported, "When I failed my multiplication test, and then I went home and I was crying and I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt a little bit better," and was further apparent in the words of a fifth grader, "It was cold and raining and I wanted to cry and we had to walk with the teacher on the trip and so I used my Mindful Breathing to feel better."

Freeing the Logjam of Overwhelm

Reports such as this one from a third grader, “I used it to empty my mind so I could sleep,” were common in presenting situations where mindfulness helped to free the logjam of overwhelm, particularly to assist with falling asleep.

Buffer Zone

Children often used mindfulness as a buffer between themselves and something unpleasant that was happening, allowing themselves to “be alright,” as depicted by a fifth grader, “I couldn’t sleep for two days because my baby brother was crying, so I used my Mindful Breathing to be alright.”

Avert

In the *Avert* subtheme, the story seemed to head in a particular direction, then the child used mindful breathing, and the story headed in a different (often more adaptive and more mature direction). This theme indicated a reorientation. I visualized this subtheme in my mind as a line either going around an obstacle and continuing or turning and heading another direction entirely. There was an obstacle, the direction changed, and the story’s trajectory went around the obstacle, without the obstacle impeding, and continued. Many of the quotations follow this theme, such that the original story trajectory altered and continued more adaptively. The *Avert* subtheme was present in this quotation from a second grader, “My dad picked me up from school, we were going to the store and I got mad and I used my Mindful Breathing and I fixed my attitude and I wasn’t mad anymore,” this quotation from a fourth grader,

Today at recess, it was really bad. Really something terrible almost happened. I don’t want to say it. [pause] Okay, I’ll say it. I almost had a fight. And then there was kids there, they were reminding me to do my Mindful Breathing and then I changed my mind. I was so angry and then I calmed down!

and this quotation from a fifth grader,

We went to the movies and my godbrother he was so scared and he kept crying and I just wanted him to stop and I almost hit him, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I was nice to make him stop crying.

Theme Three: Managing Interactional/Relational World

The *Managing Interactional/Relational World* theme indicated the use of mindfulness practice in response to another's behavior or expectations or to generate a connective or productive behavior in relation to another person. These quotations often pointed to increased harmony or refraining from harm and the ability to enter another's experience. This theme was present in this textual description by a second grader, "Last week at my Grandma's, my baby cousin scratched me, and I accidentally poked him in the eye, then we cried, and I did my Mindful Breathing and I tried to hug him"; this one by a fourth grader, "Me and my sister used it when we were really frustrated together"; and this one by a fifth grader,

Yesterday when I called my mom to see if she's coming back and she said she's too busy and she's not coming back soon and I don't know when I'll see her, and so I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.

Theme Four: Return to Baseline

In the *Return to Baseline* theme, the textual description indicated a ramped-up condition or strong emotion at the beginning of the experience, mindfulness practice application, and a return to regulation afterward; this often connected with "digesting" the emotion, resultant calm, or "putting the burden down" and no longer having a problem. The *Return to Baseline* theme was present in this statement offered by a kindergartener, "It felt insanely relaxing, like no one was bothering me"; this one offered by a fourth grader, "We were on our way to Atlanta City, and my sister had nothing in her bottle and she kept crying and crying and I wanted to hit her so I used my Mindful Breathing, and then I calmed down"; and this one offered by a fifth grader, "When my teacher said things and I heard everyone laughing at me, and my friend told me to use my Mindful Breathing to feel better and it worked." This textual description spoken by a fifth

grader offered an experience of using mindfulness to digest an emotion, “I was mad that the break was gonna be over so I was mad all over the place, then I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

Theme Five: “Filling Self Up”

The “*Filling Self Up*” theme characterized textual descriptions that portrayed the child as using mindfulness techniques to empower themselves, access their own full capacity and competency, and realize empowerment in their actions and interactions. This theme was offered clearly in the words of this first grader, “When I was in afterschool I did my Mindful Breathing and I was rockstar of the day!”

Competency

Textual descriptions pointed to mindfulness in facilitating competency, as in the words of this second grader, “I was on the top of the monkey bars, and I was so scared I would fall, but then I used my Mindful Breathing, and I didn’t fall”; and in knowing one’s competency as in the words of this fifth grader, “When my friend was telling me what to do, I used my Mindful Breathing, because I already knew what to do, and then I was still mad.”

Empowered Self-Concept

This third grader offered a textual description of using mindfulness to feel fully empowered in their self-concept,

I used my Mindful Breathing when I was at my Dad’s house and I had Christmas there on the real Christmas, and then at my mother’s house my godmother and my godsister, they were coming over and I got to pick up my godsister and I got like really excited, but I almost dropped her, and I got really scared and I felt like bad, and I almost started to cry, but once I did my Mindful Breathing I didn’t feel bad, and I saw that I have like a really good family, and they won’t feel mad if I just had a little mistake.

Access Full Capacity

Even when they felt like perhaps they might not be able to do something, children often reported using mindfulness to access the fullness of their capacity, as with this third grader, “On the half-a-day I had to take my baby cousin off of my bunk bed and I was so scared so I used my Mindful Breathing and he was okay”; and this fifth grader, “I went ice skating, and I was the first one out, and I was scared I would fall, so I used my Mindful Breathing and copied other people.”

Carry What I’m Already Carrying

In the *Carry What I’m Already Carrying* subtheme, the child was in a difficult situation; they did not see how they could get out of it; it may have even felt impossible. The child used the mindful breathing, and then they seemed to increase their capacity to carry what they were already carrying; the result was more ease and greater fortitude. I visualized this subtheme as two images, each depicting a person and a box; in the first image, the person struggles to hold the box. In the second image, the person holds the box triumphantly overhead. The box or experience was the same weight; the child was the same; the individual experienced enhanced capacity.

To this extent, the mindfulness *did* almost seem like a magic wand, which allowed the child to wave it by using mindfulness and magically recognize or utilize more of the capacity that they already had. The words of this third grader illustrate this essence, “When the doctor said something bad was inside my body I was really really scared and so I used my Mindful Breathing”; this third grader, “One day when my uncle died, his name was Uncle Mickey, I got a lot of sad so I used a lot of Mindful Breathing and then I felt just a little bit better”; and this fourth grader, “I used my Mindful Breathing because today, a lot of people have been telling on me and laughing at me, and then when I used my Mindful Breathing it got better.”

Theme Six: Thriving in the “Trappedness” of Childhood

A particular feature of childhood is the lack of agency that children often have in their lives. Children do not have autonomy over where they are, how they spend their time, what tasks are required of them, with whom they spend their time, what they eat, and various other metrics. In many of the quotations recorded in my teaching notes, children exhibited frustration with this lack of agency; they employed mindfulness skills in ways that allowed them to thrive within these parameters. Many times, children put down the burden of this powerlessness in order to thrive. This theme was evident in these words from a third grader, “I used my Mindful Breathing 15 times yesterday when my mom was cutting my hair - then she said we would go to sleep with no dinner, so I used it again”; these words from a fifth grader,

On Monday I called my mom and she asked if I wanted to go to summer school, and I said “No,” and then we argued, and mom told me to put the phone down, and I was so sad and angry that I cried and then I used my Mindful Breathing;

and these words from another fifth grader, “On Thanksgiving I wanted to go see my mom, and my Grandma didn’t have enough money to go there on the subway and come back so I went in my room and did my Mindful Breathing.”

Putting Down the Burden of Lack of Agency

Many textual descriptions offered an acceptance of the child’s relative powerlessness and lack of agency in the world, as this second grader described,

I used it when I went to Prospect Park and I saw them cut a tree down and I felt sad and so I sat on a tree trunk and did my Mindful Breathing. Then we put rocks around it, I felt wind and nature.

Theme Seven: Caring

Textual descriptions aligned with the *Caring* theme depicted the child bringing more thoughtful intention and more heart to themselves, others, and their actions due to employing the mindfulness skills. A second grader’s words depicted the theme of caring towards self, “When I

fell down at recess nobody picked me up so I started to cry, then I used my Mindful Breathing, and then I picked myself up”; a third grader’s words depicted care toward the generalized other, “Other people was teasing other people and I was really sad so I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better”; and a fourth grader’s words depicted care towards a family member, “When my sister took my iPad, I used my Mindful Breathing because I was angry. Then I let her play, cuz she’s my sister after all!”

Bringing More Heart

A subtheme of *Caring, Bringing More Heart*, was a subtle essence that emerged within this theme. A third grader’s words depicted bringing more heart to their thoughts towards their father, “I was sending kind thoughts to my father, because I want to go where he lives and play with him cuz I never see him,” while another third grader’s words depicted bringing more heart to me, “I use my Mindful Breathing today when I was trying to give you a good day.”

Theme Eight: Blossoming

Quotations exhibited the *Blossoming* theme when they depicted evidence of growth, getting out of one’s own way, shedding what is unnecessary, and elements of spirituality. Much like a flower blooms, statements exhibited growth as the external fruition of what was inside. Likewise, this category offered growth and external evidence of internal capacities.

Growth and evidence of internal capacities were present in the words of this kindergartener, “I use my mindfulness when my dad makes me really angry, and then I talk to him, and then I use my Mindful Breathing. And then I teach him it, and then I feel good again”; in those of this second grader, “When my mom told me to calm down, I didn’t know how, and so I used my Mindful Breathing and then I calmed down”; and in those of this second grader, “I

used my Mindful Breathing when I read a story to the whole class, and I was scared so I used my Mindful Breathing and then I read my story.”

Getting Out of One’s Way

In many quotations, children reported using mindfulness to refrain from behaviors that would otherwise be hindrances, as this third grader reported, “I did my Mindful Breathing yesterday cuz I wanted to stay up and keep watching a show and my mommy said, ‘Time to go,’ and I was mad and I did my Mindful Breathing and I wasn’t mad anymore”; and as this fifth grader similarly reported,

We were at a water park on Memorial Day, and when my mom said we were leaving I refused to go and I got mad and my mom yelled at me and then I did my Mindful Breathing and we left okay.

Seeing Clearly

Often a child’s words indicated that using mindfulness techniques enabled them to see the presenting situation clearly. A third grader offered,

I used it when I was looking at pictures from my birthday and I felt excited, and then I got mad at my friend when she almost made me drop it, and she made me really mad, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I wasn’t really mad because I realized it wasn’t her fault because I’m the one who told her to come to my house.

Shedding What is Unnecessary

Sometimes as a child presented more mature behavior, they shed behaviors or ideas that were unnecessary or simply let things go, as this second grader reported, “I was playing on the swings and then my mom told me I had to go to afterschool, and I screamed at her, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I said, ‘Oops, I can’t yell at her!’”; as this fourth grader reported, “On Tuesday I went to the library and I borrow some books, and when I went out someone pushed me, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I just let it go”; and as this fifth grader reported, “I was

working in the garden, and there were all these little kids, and they were SO annoying, and so I used my Mindful Breathing to make them not annoying and I calmed down and it was fun.”

Spirituality

Elements of spirituality were also present in many statements falling into the *Blossoming* category, as in this textual description from a fifth grader, “When I close my eyes and do the Mindful Breathing, my mind drifts out of my body, and I feel like I’m somewhere above like right there. [points]”

Value

I do not offer *Value* as a distinct category alongside the previously mentioned categories, but rather I offer it as an underlying foundational orientation toward the practice.

Establishing Value

The simple fact that the children used the practices they learned in our mindfulness lessons communicates that the practice has value for them. Some quotations indicated continuous use, independent practice, and using the practice even when it did not work, all further supporting the notion of personal value for the children. *Value* was present in this third grader’s report of turning toward mindfulness even when they did not deem it effective, “When somebody hit me and it hurt and I did my Mindful Breathing and I couldn’t hold the tears in and it didn’t work”; and in this anecdote from a fifth grader characterized by continuous attempts,

In another class I was sitting there and someone said I like this girl and I got really mad that he was talking about liking her so I did my Mindful Breathing and it didn’t work, and I did it again, and it didn’t work, and I did it *again*, and then I left the classroom and came down here and did my Mindful Breathing *again* and then it worked.

Teaching Others

Another component that depicted value presented in numerous quotations wherein children shared reports indicating teaching mindfulness to others in their lives. One fifth grader

shared, “I taught my dad how to do Mindful Breathing because he was sick and he couldn’t breathe well, so we both did Mindful Breathing together,” while another fifth grader shared,

I used my Mindfulness at Six Flags last week... My friend had never been on a roller coaster before, and we started with the scariest one, and so we used the body scan and we could feel the wind rushing past the skin on our arms, and how tight our hands were holding on, and then how much we were screaming. Then we used our Mindful Breathing even though we were scared to try to put our hands up in the air like everyone else. I think it really calmed her down.

Summary

The findings presented in Chapter 4 represent an in-depth hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of 1,136 quotations from children using mindfulness in daily life, as recorded archivally in my teaching notes. This chapter reviewed data collection and thematic analysis strategies. Data depicted experiential components of mindfulness use, the emotions and conditions that prompted mindfulness use, developmental features of mindfulness use according to grade level, and the prevalence of common characteristics, the analysis of which revealed the essence of the lived experience of children using mindfulness they learned in school throughout their days. Figures and charts offer visual representation of these findings.

Results indicate that children use mindfulness in daily life to (a) stay with experience, (b) navigate the way through, (c) manage interactional/relational world, (d) return to baseline, (e) operate from their full selves, (f) thrive in the “*trappedness*” of childhood, (g) care, and to (h) blossom and grow. The fact that the children practiced mindfulness throughout various contexts and with continuity, even when it did not always work, pointed to the practice’s value for children.

Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the implications of these study findings, including a reappraisal of the theoretical framework that is the basis for this research, an answer to the

research question guiding this study, implications for teaching mindfulness to children, scope and limitations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored children's lived experiences using mindfulness skills they learned in school throughout their everyday lives. This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of children's mindfulness use than the largely quantitative research conversation provides. This work intended to give voice to the children's experiences and interpret their words to obtain a more robust understanding of the phenomenon of the child's autonomous use of mindfulness practice beyond the mindfulness lesson's parameters.

This chapter offers a discussion based on key findings and answers the research question that is the foundation of this study, alongside my final reflections. Insofar as hermeneutic phenomenological research helps us to "understand what we see... in contexts" (Freeman, 2014, p. 832), this chapter provides context and relates findings to theoretical implications found in the literature; thus, I offer each theme as related to the essence of the investigated phenomenon and my contextual interpretation of each theme. This work then offers the implications of these results in the field, provides recommendations for further research, and concludes with a summary of this entire study.

Overview

For this study, I reviewed 1,136 quotations from my teaching notes reflecting children's reports of how they used mindfulness between our sessions together as I taught the Mindful Schools curriculum to them. I collected the quotations between 2014 and 2018, before I conceived this project, as a reflective practice for my teaching. My primary interest was investigating students' lived experiences, which provided the foundation for the research question: "What is the child's experience of using mindfulness in daily life?" Chapter 4 offered detailed findings from the data analysis phase of this process. I used a practical application of

van Manen's (1990) six data analysis activities to organize and present emergent themes found in the quotations in my teaching notes.

Phenomenological studies interpret individuals' words to capture the essence of a particular phenomenon's lived experience, and the epistemological means of being in the subjective world (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, I explored what it means to be a child using mindfulness in daily life by analyzing, extracting, and visualizing children's words. The manner in which children employed mindfulness skills demonstrated facets of personal experience that phenomenology aims to reveal and understand. Guided by seeking to understand how a child uses mindfulness skills in daily life, 1,136 quotations offered experiences, emotions, thoughts, stories, perceptions, relational factors, and values that contributed to providing a better understanding of children's lived experiences. Immersion in the children's words captured in my teaching notes allowed me to establish a fusion of horizons and a deeper phenomenological understanding of children's experiences. This study helped clarify an understanding of children's use of mindfulness in daily life.

How do children experience the use of mindfulness in daily life? While research points to myriad benefits for children practicing mindfulness (Maravilla, 2020), this study aimed to capture the qualitative fullness of this lived experience's meaning for children. The result was the essence of the experience derived from a broad range of quotations from numerous children, through which interpretation gives voice. As an instrument of the research myself, I reflected on the experiences found in the children's words and sought representation that could most clearly evoke this understanding. The hermeneutic pathway informed my exploration back and forth between the parts and the whole, interweaving text and meaning to illuminate the essence.

Hermeneutic analysis offered eight integrated themes. The next section provides a response to the research question.

Response to the Research Question

This section presents a response to the research question for this study. The research question that guided this study was: “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” Textual descriptions pointed to children using mindfulness for both positive and negative daily interactions, by themselves and with others, in a variety of locations, often with effect but sometimes without. Distinct rounds of analysis explored the overall experience of this phenomenon, the emotions and conditions present during the experience, features of textual descriptions present through grade level development, and word prevalence, all of which provided scaffolding to understand the thematic essences that answer this question.

With this study, I aimed to offer a qualitative exploration of many children’s experiences, giving voice to them, and filling a research gap by exploring how *many* children articulate the experience of using mindfulness in daily life. I achieved this aim. As Erikson (1987) offered in reference to his third stage of development, language offers the adult the opportunity to act as a guest in a child’s inner world in order to understand their thinking and development. Listening to the children’s words and exploring them through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to take full advantage of this opportunity. This study’s findings establish that children’s experiences with mindfulness allowed them to stay with their experiences, navigate circumstances and relationships, regulate emotional overwhelm, enact confidence and care, and thrive and grow during the particular parameters that childhood offers in our culture. Children’s words elicited an understanding that the practice had value to them, with the reporting of so many and so varied examples of incorporating the practice into daily experience.

Discussion of Themes

In hermeneutic research, the researcher distills the structure of meaning through exploring the human experience (Ho et al., 2017) and uncovers the essence of the experience through themes that embody the meaning of the work (van Manen, 1997). I uncovered themes and subthemes by investigating the phenomenological experiences of children's reports of using mindfulness in daily life. Themes coalesced around ideas and concepts that elucidated the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; van Manen, 1990).

During phenomenological data analysis, the researcher embarks on an iterative process that allows them to peer into meaning (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological themes are not merely categories; they identify, align, and interweave threads of understanding in order to distill the essence of the body of text (van Manen, 1990). The hermeneutic circle provided me with the opportunity to move between the text and the context, the part and the whole, to maintain fidelity with the essence of the phenomenon. Eidetic analysis enabled this meaning-extracting process by providing frameworks to observe interrelated facets of the phenomenon, as meaning assembles itself and deepens a researcher's conception of the lived experience (Finlay, 2014). I ensured that my findings supported my research question through multiple analysis cycles in which I applied van Manen's stages of analysis (van Manen, 1990).

Theme One: Staying With

Theme One answers the research question, "What is the child's experience of using mindfulness in daily life?" Children's words depicted their mindfulness experience in daily life as enabling them to *stay with* the feelings and situations that life presented to them. The emergence of the sense of the child staying with the emotions or conditions that prompted the mindfulness use concurs with mindfulness literature on attention. Attention is a cognitive process

that enables an individual to maintain selective focus even in the face of interference, while mindful attention increases one's facility with engaging with the fluctuating course of inner and outer experience with greater awareness (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). Hölzel et al. (2011) posited that this quality of sustained mindful attention contributes to overall regulation and may be the key to other mindfulness mechanisms.

At the neurocognitive level, mindfulness implicates the anterior cingulate cortex through its assistance in allocating attentional resources, even in the face of incompatible perceptions, which may contribute to lessened ADHD symptomology (Hölzel et al., 2011). Vago and Silbersweig (2012) noted that the attention that mindfulness cultivates correlates with enhanced connection and efficiency between the prefrontal cortex and other brain areas, which facilitates a child's ability to pay attention in class. Adults in children's home and school lives often request that children pay attention without teaching them how to do so; Shankland and Rosset (2017) suggested that mindfulness training can provide techniques to meet this aim.

The children's reports I analyzed for this study supported this claim from an experiential standpoint; I did not tell children to use mindfulness techniques to pay attention; however, a significant portion of quotations indicate that children autonomously used mindfulness to maintain attention on inner and outer stimuli. This theme aligns with Marlatt and Kristeller's (1999) definition of mindfulness as "bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis" (p. 68), and with several researchers across the field who demonstrate sustained attention as a primary result of mindfulness practice (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018; Chandrasekara, 2018; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Su & Swank, 2019; Tarrasch, 2018). Four subthemes emerged to further define *Staying With*: (1) *Increased Presence*, (2) *Emotional Release Valve*, (3) *Savoring*, and (4) *The sense of "Right Now."*

Increased Presence

The children's words indicated that a prevalent experience of staying with life's arisings resulted in increased presence, whereby the child was fully present with the essence of whatever presented itself to the child in a moment (Kerr et al., 2011), that which the child was "staying with." While many individuals may use mindfulness as a technique to increase concentration and presence (Wolkin, 2015), the textual descriptions I analyzed for this study indicated that increased presence may also be an experiential byproduct of employing mindfulness skills. Sibinga et al. (2013) supported this notion with results from a study offering an MBSR-based intervention that decreased rumination alongside increased mindful awareness capacities. Fasching (2008) further offered mindfulness as the self-presence of experience, an approach that aligns with hermeneutic phenomenology's philosophical underpinnings.

Emotional Release Valve

Textual descriptions often depicted mindfulness use as helpful in lessening the severity of an emotion. The children's words indicated that the emotion might persist, but in a more manageable range, operating much like a release valve. The experiential sense of an emotional release valve reflects studies that implicate that individuals who practice mindfulness may employ the meta-awareness necessary to prevent getting locked into an emotion (Teasdale, 1999; Zoogman et al., 2015). Vago and Silbersweig (2012) identified a thickening of the prefrontal cortex associated with mindfulness as significant in modulating strong emotions such as fear; perhaps the child experienced this modulation as an emotional release valve. Researchers pointed to the strategic ability to employ emotional regulation skills such as an emotional release valve as improving overall adaptive functioning and wellness (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

Savoring

Bryant (1989) defined savoring as the ability to intentionally regulate positive feelings in order to appreciate and maintain attention on pleasant experiences. Children's words indicated their use of mindfulness to stay with and enjoy pleasant feelings, sensations, and experiences in their daily lives. Bryant and Veroff (2007) posited that this ability to savor may increase an individual's overall life happiness through resultant thoughts and actions. Tan (2019) offered that "mindfulness can be considered a pre-requisite for momentary savoring to occur" (p. 11), a notion that Beaumont's (2011) findings support, indicating mindfulness and savoring as correlated in a large-scale study of young adults.

The Sense of "Right Now"

The textual descriptions I explored for this study often indicated an increased awareness of the current moment, as offered in reports of increased awareness in prior moments as anecdotes and in reports of using mindfulness in the then-current, shared moment when children offered their reports. This sense is concurrent with Kerr et al.'s (2011) characterization of mindfulness as being aware of awareness. Researchers believe this quality of present-centered awareness develops early as one practices mindfulness and may foster the array of benefits that result from mindfulness practice (Hölzel et al., 2011; Tarrasch, 2018).

Bögels et al. (2010) indicated that the ability to sense the current moment reduces overall emotional intrusion, which may contribute to ameliorating children's attentional difficulties (Tarrasch, 2018). Vago and Silbersweig (2012) suggested that the increased neurofunctional connectivity resulting from mindfulness practice supports present-centered awareness; Craig (2009) suggested that the anterior insular cortex associates with mindfulness practice and contributes to the human capacity for awareness and the subjective sense of the now.

Theme Two: Navigating the Way Through

Theme Two answers the research question, “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” Children’s words indicated that they experienced mindfulness use in daily life as a tool to navigate through emotional and situational challenges. Meiklejohn et al. (2012) supported this notion, indicating that young people utilize mindfulness to engage daily life’s associated stressors. Life brings stress and challenging moments, and as a young person develops, they cultivate the ability to respond to life’s stressors skillfully and make choices that generate positive outcomes; Costello and Lawler (2014) offered that mindfulness enhances this capacity. When individuals employ mindfulness, they can better enact behaviors aligned with their personal values (Shapiro et al., 2006).

In addition to the cognitive benefits that mindfulness supports, Auerbach and Delpont (2018) indicated that mindfulness “boosts the immune system, brain and nervous system, and aids in relieving eating and sleeping disorders” (p. 2), such that employing mindfulness may be a tool for navigating the body’s natural healing responses. Zelazo and Lyons (2012) offered an exceptional depiction of this theme, noting that children

exercise those attentional and reflective processes that make it possible to go beyond simply responding relatively automatically to the most salient aspects of a situation (such as responding emotionally to a thought and then ruminating on it). Instead, increased reflection provides individuals with the psychological distance to identify other possible, and potentially more appropriate, responses. (p. 156)

Five subthemes emerged to further define *Navigating the Way Through*: (1) *Persistence*, (2) *Shift in Perception*, (3) *Freeing the Logjam of Overwhelm*, (4) *Buffer Zone*, and (5) *Avert*.

Persistence

One distinct manner by which children navigated through experiences was enacting persistence in the face of challenges, seeking solutions, and applying the fortitude necessary to reach a resolution. Yela et al. (2020) supported this notion, indicating that mindfulness facilitated

persistence in challenging experiences. Parsons (2020) theorized that mindfulness practice might increase an individual's ability to persist, while Lu et al. (2017) offered empirical evidence supporting mindfulness as a technique to augment a child's capacity for persistence, which in turn enhanced academic performance.

Shift in Perception

Children's textual descriptions offered evidence of a shift in perception; after using mindfulness techniques, children could see experiences differently, leading to more adaptive solutions as they navigated their way through daily life experiences. This shift in perceptions aligns with Schussler et al.'s (2019) explanation of adaptive re-perceiving, whereby mindfulness enables an individual to reorient their relationship to a stimulus, engendering flexibility.

Re-perceiving can interrupt habitual patterns of mind that lead to maladaptive reactivity, allowing an individual to gain perspective and choose less automated responses (Shapiro et al., 2006). The mindful attention associated with this shift in perception and re-perceiving helps the individual access discernment in choosing from a wider array of responses to a situation or stimulus (Crane et al., 2017).

This shift in perception also characterizes decentering, which can transform how the individual processes all thoughts (Zhang et al., 2019). Specific mindfulness practices such as noting or labeling can inhibit amygdalar processing, allowing an individual to view any particular experience with reduced negativity and increased positivity (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). This notion is compatible with Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory whereby brief positive emotional experiences broaden an individual's access to future positive states and overall resourcing.

Freeing the Logjam of Overwhelm

Children's words described experiences where they were overwhelmed by the number of requests aimed at them, thoughts flowing through their minds, or actions they needed to take. This experience resonated with me as the image of a logjam, differing from emotional overwhelm due to the multiplicity of competing stressors. Amirkhan et al. (2015) articulated the nature of stress as due to overwhelming demands on an individual's capacity, inhibiting navigation through and adaptation to circumstances. Tarrasch (2018) posited that mindfulness assists an individual's ability to disengage attention from overwhelming experience, while Kerridge (2019) connected mindfulness practice with lessened overwhelm. The stress relief that mindfulness provides in the face of an overwhelming number of stimuli may increase an individual's ability to navigate through each stimulus and ultimately enhance overall well-being (Kuyken et al., 2013).

Buffer Zone

The quotations I analyzed for this study often indicated that the child's employment of mindfulness techniques offered space between the trigger and the emotion. Skoranski et al. (2018) identified this buffering effect as a result of an individual's changed relationship to stress, regardless of whether or not the stress maintained, further supporting the individual's enhanced ability to navigate life circumstances. This buffer zone may contribute to overall psychological resilience (Hutchinson et al., 2018; Joyce et al., 2018).

Avert

Children's quotations pointed to children enacting agency to adaptively shift the trajectory of an experience that supported their ability to navigate or even avoid challenges. Costello and Lawler (2014) offered support for this shift, and the reflection that brings it to

fruition, which may happen as quickly as in a few milliseconds; they observed children and “many gave recounts which illustrate abilities to pause and be more reflective about how they react in certain stressful situations” (p. 33). The child’s ability to experientially avert a possible crisis aligns with the behavioral flexibility Young (2016) identified as necessary to choose more adaptive behaviors. Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2017) further offered evidence supporting overall trait mindfulness as augmenting the individual’s ability to enact this averting capacity.

Theme Three: Managing Interactional/Relational World

Theme Three answers the research question, “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” Numerous textual descriptions indicated experiential evidence of children using mindfulness to ease interactions and bring harmony to relational contexts. This evidence aligns with Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) and Chorney and Eliuk (2017), who posited that mindfulness supports prosocial behavior, and Vago and Silbersweig (2012) who implicated improved interpersonal success. Interactions characterized by thoughtfulness, attentiveness, and responsiveness rather than reactivity and impulsivity commonly correlate with mindfulness practice (Tarrasch, 2018). Hölzel et al. (2011) postulated that these characteristics may result from the individual’s capacity for presence with their internal experience, facilitating empathic responsiveness. Internal presence yields self-compassion, in which the aforementioned empathic response is directed towards and diminishes the distinction between the self and the other, further improving overall well-being (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

The prosocial neural functions of mindfulness practitioners display greater activity than those of non-practitioners (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 23). Top-down cognitive flexibility supports self-regulation in the relational context (thereby diminishing bottom-up reactivity), which in turn supports prosocial functioning and mutually enhances brain functions in a cycle

that supports prosocial functioning (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Vago and Silbersweig (2012) observed this relationship in action in participants in a compassion-based mindfulness intervention who displayed enhanced prosocial neural response. Mindfulness techniques involve the prefrontal cortex, as does secure attachment, further supporting relational aspects of the practice (An et al., 2018).

Mindfulness cultivation yields empathy, which supports healthy attachment (Brown et al., 2007). Coatsworth et al. (2015) pointed to evidence of mindfulness programming supporting relational functioning even when only one member of a parent-child dyad engaged in the practice. Therefore, mindfulness practice may augment the natural development of empathy, moral processing, and prosocial behavior throughout childhood (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). A wealth of resources supported improved relationships and interactions as a result of learning mindfulness (Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2017; Haydicky et al., 2015; Smith-Carrier et al., 2015; Viglas & Perlman, 2018), particularly as a result of enhanced compassion (Auerbach & Delport, 2018).

Theme Four: Return to Baseline

Theme Four answers the research question, “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” The children’s words indicated that mindfulness practice in daily life highlights an experiential capacity to self-regulate and return to baseline functioning. A wealth of literature in the field supports the children’s experience, whether it points to overall diminished initial emotional reactivity (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017) or to the ability to manage one’s stronger emotions with more facility once they arise (Bazzano et al., 2018; Siebelink et al., 2018). Studies are ripe with evidence pointing to mindfulness as improving emotional regulation and its resultant increase in overall well-being (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017; Hutchinson et al., 2018).

Kaunhoven and Dorjee (2017) outlined self-regulation as the result of the resolution of conflicting attentional sources and the ability to direct attention in a preferable direction.

Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) found that students used mindfulness to manage emotions, especially unpleasant ones; researchers reported that “within all of the student’s responses describing their use of mindfulness was the theme of actively seeking emotional control, or calmness, instead of allowing an undesired emotion to escalate or continue” (p. 309). Reducing fear and avoidance in response to emotions helped ameliorate anxiety (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017). This ability to emotionally regulate may implicate improved personal experience for children and the adults with whom they regularly interact (Aslam et al., 2019; Bannirchelvam et al., 2017).

Vago and Silbersweig (2012) indicated that dedicated mindfulness practice improved an individual’s ability to maintain homeostasis and to automatically regulate in the face of distress

by protecting the internal milieu from the harmful effects of a stressor, which can be referred to as the “raincoat effect,” and by facilitating recovery, which we refer to as the “towel effect.” The raincoat acts as a metaphor for protection, as it protects one from getting wet; the towel acts as a metaphor for recovery, as it facilitates drying off when one already has gotten wet. (p. 19)

Vago and Silbersweig (2012) borrowed this metaphor from psychoneuroimmunology in order to depict the relationship between mindful awareness and equanimity, by which “sympathetic tone is reduced and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis-mediated mobilization is suppressed” (p. 19).

Physiological metrics of regular mindfulness practitioners exhibit such fast return-to-baseline measures post-trigger that the individual may not even register reactivity (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Continued mindfulness practice improves psychological and cognitive metrics that lead to increased self-regulation (Cheek et al., 2017), which, in turn, supports improved neural functioning (Shapiro et al., 2015; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). These

improvements may limit the strength and extent of distressing emotions, even in individuals with weaker top-down functioning (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). This notion aligns with the work of Hölzel et al. (2011), who pointed to increased efficiency in the interactions between the temporoparietal junction, insula, anterior cingulate cortex, default mode network, and frontal-limbic network in mindfulness practitioners, a dynamic which fosters increased self-regulation and measurable neuroplastic growth. Bauer et al. (2019) corroborated increased neurocognitive efficiency in the pathways between the amygdala and prefrontal cortex as associated with the ability to return to baseline during strong emotions. Over time, mindfulness practitioners exhibit strengthened dorsal and ventral vagal tone, even in the face of stress (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012).

An individual's ability to return to baseline can generate the emotional mechanism necessary to have broad self-compassion, a factor which Kerr et al. (2011) associated with preventing psychological disorders. Researchers also observed mindfulness practitioners' enhanced ability to return to baseline when they encountered physical pain (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). As children mature, their brains become capable of regulating an emotion earlier in its inception, resulting in more skillful and efficient modulation (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). Mindfulness practice can support this neurocognitive maturation, strengthen executive functions, foster growth, and promote enhanced self-regulation (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Viglas & Perlman, 2018). Augmenting these skills during childhood may prevent maladaptive outcomes (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017) and reduce the chance of psycho-pathological diagnoses in adulthood (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018).

In a qualitative study, Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) aligned with the results of this study, reporting that "a strong subtheme was the experience of returning to an emotional equilibrium after practicing mindfulness" (p. 309). Many studies provided further evidence of self-regulation

and an ability to return to baseline as an outcome of mindfulness practice, alongside resultant benefits of increased regulation and emotional resilience (Costello & Lawler, 2014; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Liehr & Diaz, 2010; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005; Smith-Carrier et al., 2015; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; van der Oord et al., 2012; van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2014; Viglas & Perlman, 2018; Zenner et al., 2014).

Theme Five: “Filling Self Up”

Theme Five answers the research question, “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” Children’s descriptions of using mindfulness in everyday life indicated that they used mindfulness to access a sense of their personal fullness. This notion aligns with Kohlberg’s assertion that an individual personally constructs meaning; children’s self-perceptions inform the extent of their capacity to meet the world and the extent to which any challenge is, in fact, problematic (Costello & Lawler, 2014). Children live their lives in response to the parameters outlined by schools and parents, regardless of whether they are compatible with children’s individual natures. Mindfulness may enable children to find this sense of fullness within themselves. Four subthemes emerged to further define “*Filling Self Up*”: (1) *Competency*, (2) *Empowered Self-Concept*, (3) *Access Full Capacity*, and (4) *Carry What I’m Already Carrying*.

Competency

Textual descriptions pointed to children knowing what they were capable of and exhibiting pride in this sense of competency. Brown et al. (2007) reported that the non-judgmental approach to one’s experience that mindfulness characterizes allows individuals to operate with clarity and emphasize facets of their lives where they have agency and feel

competency. Further, Hölzel et al. (2011) offered that the limited reactivity that mindfulness supports likewise allows individuals to engage with life experiences with ease.

Empowered Self-Concept

Children's words conveyed the experiential sense of mindfulness as informing an empowered self-concept. A portion of this empowerment may result from children's awareness that they can regulate their behavior more successfully than they could prior (Brown et al., 2007), or it may result from overall enhanced self-awareness (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018). When children know that they can manage emotions and behaviors in response to what life brings, this knowledge itself may engender a sense of empowerment (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017) or self-confidence (Monshat et al., 2013).

Bajaj et al. (2016) asserted that self-esteem correlates with mindfulness. During development, a growing capacity for reflection and self-monitoring may support mindfulness and find support from mindfulness practice as the connection between the posterior cingulate cortex and the prefrontal cortex strengthens, enhancing the individual's neurocognitive capacity to engage with an empowered self-concept (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). Further, Vago and Silbersweig (2012) conveyed that mindfulness itself can support functional attitudes (alongside the unwinding of dysfunctional attitudes) towards oneself and one's place in the world.

Access Full Capacity

As I mentioned previously, children find themselves operating primarily in contexts designed by others, contexts that may not highlight children's strengths and allow them to operate in or understand their full capacity. Fasching (2008) highlighted decentering as a vital component of the mindfulness experience that helps an individual comprehend "one's own true nature" (p. 463). In a society that does not orient towards exploring individual identity at a young

age, perhaps these practices can point children to a greater understanding of their personal capacity. An experiential understanding of human experience's inherent components can help children locate themselves and their fullest capacities, even in the ever-changing nature of the flow of experience (Crane et al., 2017).

Carry What I'm Already Carrying

Carry What I'm Already Carrying is similar to accessing one's full capacity, but with slight variation. Whereas accessing one's full capacity indicates integrating the belief that what one thought might be beyond oneself is actually already within oneself, *Carry What I'm Already Carrying* points specifically to recognizing greater strength. Cassone (2015) identified that enhanced alerting and orienting skills bolstered attentional skills and subsequently increased the acumen with which one monitored internal capacity. Skoranski et al. (2018) posited that "mindfulness theoretically may shift the way in which an individual relates to and processes psychological distress, resulting in a more adaptive stress response in the face of acute challenges" (p. 2255), relating differently, even as the distressing situation remains the same. When children face the task of dealing with challenging experiences, or those otherwise beyond their ken, mindfulness may enable the perspicacity with which they can see the strength they already have (Cassone, 2015).

Theme Six: Thriving in the "Trappedness" of Childhood

Theme Six answers the research question, "What is the child's experience of using mindfulness in daily life?" Children's reported experiences using mindfulness in daily life pointed to significant use to orient towards emotions and behaviors that contributed to thriving, especially when the child lacked agency. Many of the scenarios that applied to this theme would not arise in adults' general experience. When children applied mindfulness to the experience of

the mental and existential pain associated with powerlessness and lack of agency, they experienced less suffering, buoyed by an internal relationship permeated by self-compassion and yielding well-being (Hölzel et al., 2011). This orientation contributes to the construct of equanimity (Desbordes et al., 2015). Experience itself can teach resilience, and applying mindfulness to disagented childhood experiences may shift connectivity between limbic and prefrontal areas of the brain, bolstering nonreactivity (Siegel, 2007). In turn, this diminished reactivity contributes to resilience and helps children thrive (Siegel, 2007). One subtheme emerged to further define *Thriving in the “Trappedness” of Childhood: Putting Down the Burden of Lack of Agency*.

Putting Down the Burden of Lack of Agency

Children’s textual descriptions indicated widespread use of mindfulness as a technique for putting down the emotional burden of a lack of agency, which, in turn, enabled them to thrive in the “*trappedness*” of childhood and often indicated a return to baseline. In some instances, this experience of metaphorically putting down the burden allowed the child to be open to experience as it changes, and as childhood is a process of growth, experience is continually shifting and changing (Whitehead et al., 2018).

Stanley (2007) posited that the mindfulness capacity of feeling one’s feelings fully is what allows the individual to put down the burden, while Miller et al. (2020) conveyed the prospect that simply seeing experience clearly, such as that of one’s relative powerlessness or lack of agency, allowed the individual to manage life content objectively, rather than engaging with unhelpful thoughts and feelings regarding experiences like powerlessness. Seeing the “*trappedness*” of childhood objectively may initiate the process of accepting and setting down

the burden of lack of agency and any associated unconstructive cognitions and emotions (Whitehead et al., 2018).

Theme Seven: Caring

Theme Seven answers the research question, “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” Children’s depictions using mindfulness in daily life evoked an experiential component of increased care. Words indicated that children directed this care towards themselves, towards individuals they interacted with, towards groups of others, towards people they never met, towards animals, or even fictional characters. Self-compassion is a strong component of care directed toward oneself, offering non-judgmental acceptance of one’s struggles and failures, contextualized as a component of human experience (Neff & Germer, 2017). Decentered awareness contributes to self-compassion (Cheek et al., 2017; Hutchinson et al., 2018).

Further, mindfulness enables an individual to attune with themselves; self-attunement is a foundational underpinning that supports the interactional attunement that characterizes the relationships an individual has with others (Brown et al., 2007). A 2016 study by Jazaieri et al. provided evidence that compassion-based mindfulness practices increased the level of care that one directed towards oneself and others. One subtheme emerged to further define *Caring*:

Bringing More Heart.

Bringing More Heart

Children’s words pointed to the lived experience of bringing more heart to their interactions, paralleling an assertion by Orellana-Rios et al. (2018) that mindfulness contributes to “inner warmth” (p. 3). Individuals can share this warmth with themselves or with others, and it is associated with neurophysiological changes that enable an individual to become their own best

friend (Siegel, 2009). Heartfulness, an important, compassion-based component of mindfulness practice, contributes to enhanced psychological well-being and overall improved human functioning by enabling individuals to bring more heart (through warmth and awareness) to themselves and others (Voci et al., 2019). When children see themselves in this warm light (Bajaj et al., 2016), they enhance their capacities for kindness, empathy, and gratitude through bringing warmth, care, and heart to solution-oriented actions and interactions (Voci et al., 2019).

Theme Eight: Blossoming

Theme Eight answers the research question, “What is the child’s experience of using mindfulness in daily life?” The child’s experience using mindfulness in daily life was a means by which the child experienced growth, clarity, and spirituality. Shaner et al. (2017) identified insight, compassion, awareness, and wisdom as the fruits of mindfulness practice. Vago and Silbersweig (2012) corroborated, relaying that clarity and equanimity developed alongside mindful awareness. The clear seeing that developed from mindfulness practice resulted in limited cognitive reconfiguration, ultimately leading to increased flexibility and resilience in the face of life’s challenges (Ryan et al., 2007).

Qualitative measures, in particular, discern overall experience and growth more keenly than do quantitative (Monshat et al., 2013). These qualitative observations parallel neurocognitive benefits associated with the growth and clarity accompanying mindfulness practice. While bottom-up processing characterizes the child’s brain functions with a stronger link between the ventral attention network and the salience network yielding short-term emotional regulation strategies, mindfulness practice strengthens top-down processing, attentional networks, and overall developmental maturity (Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017). The brain’s executive functions are especially adaptive in the academic setting; Shapiro et al. (2015)

identified a strengthened frontoparietal network and developed prefrontal cortex alongside increased intelligence and reflective capacity in children who practiced mindfulness.

Shapiro et al. (2006) indicated that mindfulness augments the natural human development process. Shapiro et al. (2015) further supported this notion, offering that children who consistently practiced mindfulness more often enlisted the prefrontal cortex to meet strong emotions and exhibited more mature reflection. Four subthemes emerged to further define *Blossoming*: (1) *Getting Out of One's Way*, (2) *Seeing Clearly*, (3) *Shedding What is Unnecessary*, and (4) *Spirituality*.

Getting Out of One's Way

The decentering mechanism of mindfulness allows an individual to sense awareness and to tap into a form of objectivity that enables the individual to remain unperturbed and less-identified with life's challenges; this objectivity further contributes to the individual's ability to have perspective and make choices from a standpoint of non-interference (Bannirchelvam et al., 2017). In a qualitative study exploring the mindfulness process, Monshat et al. (2013) identified that young participants gained perspective, navigated unpleasant emotions, and gained proficiency in ignoring the insecure, questioning internal narrator in order to get out of their own way.

Seeing Clearly

The literature showed strong support for increased clarity as an outcome of mindfulness practice (Cooper et al., 2018; Dummel, 2018; Hanley & Garland, 2017; Schmidt, 2017; Tsur et al., 2016). *Seeing Clearly* is interdependent with *Getting Out of One's Way* and with *Shedding What is Unnecessary*: as an individual gets out of their own way or sheds what is unnecessary, they experience more clarity; as an individual gains clarity, they can more easily get out of their

own way and to shed what is unnecessary. As the individual became more adept at realizing that their thoughts did not necessarily reflect reality, they experienced more and more clarity (Crane et al., 2017). This clarity can also “help people recognize what is meaningful for them and what they truly value” (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 8).

Shedding What is Unnecessary

Mindful awareness helps individuals delineate which circumstances they have agency in, thereby supporting the individual’s ability to let go of what is unnecessary or less adaptive (Monshat et al., 2013), supporting equanimity (Desbordes et al., 2015). When mindfulness practitioners are less reactive, their brains unlearn reactivity patterns through extinction and reconsolidation, whereby the brain itself sheds what is unnecessary while the individual sheds unnecessary and unhelpful emotional reactivity habits (Hölzel et al., 2011). The same hippocampal brain growth that supports learning new content supports the unlearning of maladaptive patterning (Auerbach & Delport, 2018). Experientially, “freedom in attitude to external conditions affects how the self is, or even can be, thought about in relation to those conditions” (Cheek et al., 2017, p. 2574), especially as one sheds what is unnecessary.

Spirituality

Fasching (2008) offered spiritual benefit as a product of mindfulness practice. Cobb et al. (2016) identified spirituality as an innate human capacity, “cultivated by relational and psycho-spiritual developmental opportunities” (p. 250). Authors further offered that spirituality and mindfulness “both serve as access to interdependence with the universe, including building awareness of one’s sense of purpose in the world” and that “both of these practices and ways of being in the world are accessible to every child as a possibility to offer a framework for self-growth and purpose” (p. 251). Hay and Nye (1998) associated the processes of both spirituality

and mindfulness, stating that “both possess similar underlying processes of attention – to the inner self, to others, and to the greater world” (p. 63). Perhaps the overall self-compassionate attitude that the mindfulness practitioner cultivates yields a life of greater meaning and well-being (Liu et al., 2020; Matiz et al., 2018; Yela et al., 2020).

Value

I did not ask or assign children to practice mindfulness outside of class. I believed that the children would benefit more by hearing from each other than if I compelled them specifically to practice. This thinking aligns with Dariotis et al. (2016), who revealed that program efficacy increased when children chose mindfulness. Every single quotation in this study revealed evidence of children choosing to practice mindfulness; as they employed the technique to stay with and navigate through experience, to manage relationships with others, to regulate, to access their full capacity, to thrive in the face of a lack of agency, to care, and to grow and develop, each report pointed to the fact that the children experienced this practice as valuable in meeting these experiential components. Further, every report indicated another instance of mindfulness practice, yielding more time spent engaging with and integrating mindfulness, likely further strengthening the individual’s overall mindfulness (Dariotis et al., 2016; Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

The relationship between mindfulness and value is cyclical; the more the individual practices mindfulness techniques, the more automatically the individual generates mindfulness-based responses, as supported by augmented mental and neural pathways (Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Monshat et al., 2013), implicating less cognitive effort to enact mindfulness (Hölzel et al., 2011). Researchers see mindfulness practice as a form of mental training (Hoge et al., 2013); valuing this training and continuing to engage with it can increase resilience over time (Volanen

et al., 2020). Van de Weijer-Bergsma et al. (2014) observed greater mental health benefits in follow-up measures than at the completion of a mindfulness intervention, indicating that continuing to value and engage with practice can have compounding benefits. Continued mindfulness practice shows continued benefits and well-being (Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2017; Costello & Lawler, 2014; Dove & Costello, 2017; Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Kuyken et al., 2013; McCabe et al., 2017; Shaner et al., 2017; Shankland & Rosset, 2017; Smith-Carrier et al., 2015; Su & Swank, 2019; Yela et al., 2020; Zenner et al., 2014).

Another factor that contributed to children employing mindfulness practices beyond the lessons was that children enjoyed the practice itself, or they enjoyed the results of the practice. The literature showed strong support for children enjoying mindfulness (Aslam et al., 2019; Bannirchelvam et al., 2017; Bazzano et al., 2018; Dariotis et al., 2016; Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Johnson et al., 2016; Kuyken et al., 2013; Liehr & Diaz, 2010; Monshat et al., 2013; Semple et al., 2005; Viafora et al., 2015).

Children often reported autonomously teaching mindfulness skills and techniques to others in their lives. Dariotis et al. (2016) and Viafora et al. (2015) observed children's excitement in sharing mindfulness with other children and adults in their families and communities.

This study's findings established that children's experiences with mindfulness allowed them to stay with their experiences, navigate circumstances and relationships, regulate emotional overwhelm, enact confidence and care, and thrive and grow during the particular parameters that childhood offers in American culture. These findings aligned with those of Hutchinson et al. (2018), who conducted a qualitative study and found that children used mindfulness to emotionally regulate, as a response to dysregulation, and to meet challenges in various settings.

Likewise, Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) identified children using mindfulness techniques, usually breath focus, to help children regulate unpleasant emotions, particularly fear. Cheek et al. (2017) supported independent mindfulness use benefiting students' relational functioning and the factors associated with *Blossoming*. Dariotis et al. (2016) also supported the autonomous use of mindfulness techniques beyond the mindfulness classroom for self-regulation and navigating life's circumstances. This study's findings align with the Mindful Schools curriculum's aim to enhance focusing, managing emotions, handling stress, and resolving conflicts (Shapiro et al., 2015).

Discussion of Findings

Acceptability

Children enjoyed the mindfulness practice. When I asked how the children used their mindfulness practice between lessons, they might not have provided any answers at all. Thus, children's quotations aligned with an observation by Cheek et al. (2017) that indicated "individuals choosing to act on that motivation [to use mindfulness] and making decisions about how to act in response to... situations within, and importantly, outside of that classroom community" (p. 2571). Without assigning and specifying mindfulness use, reports "resulted from being intrinsically driven and engaged rather than relying on being motivated extrinsically, such as by the teacher" (Cheek et al., 2017, p. 2571). The wealth of quotations I recorded in my notes, as a mere fraction of the statements children spoke aloud over the years I was teaching, pointed to the fact that they found benefit and meaning in the practice and incorporated it into their daily lives. As one third grader offered, "I use it every day and it feels really good." Insofar as "we experience what we believe" (Auerbach & Delport, 2018, p. 6), children's belief in the practice may have contributed to experiencing its benefits.

McCabe et al. (2017) observed children displaying a similar affinity for mindfulness practice and its benefits. I recall the pride and joy on the children's faces as they shared their anecdotes with me, further implicating the practice's acceptability. Wang et al. (2019) supported this notion, highlighting that the perception of and acceptability of mindfulness' benefits buoyed widespread use of mindfulness practices. Aligned with this study's findings, Hutchinson et al. (2018) noted that participants "seemed to practice mindfulness when they needed it, rather than by developing formal practice at home" (p. 3947). Dariotis et al. (2016) further provided support for children retaining, using, sharing, and benefitting from mindfulness practice. As such, for my students, mindfulness practice was "something that existed, and had currency, beyond the classroom. In many ways, the degree of actively taking it on was the ultimate test and expression of intrinsically driven engagement with [mindfulness]" (Cheek et al., 2017, p. 2571).

Definitions

Thematic findings from this study aligned with the definitions that established this study's underpinnings. Kabat-Zinn's (1994) definition of mindfulness as the intentional practice and result of paying attention, on purpose, to one's moment-by-moment experience, without judgment parallels the *Staying With* theme. The UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center's definition offering mindfulness "as paying attention to present moment experiences with openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be with what is" (About MARC, n.d., para. 4) aligns with the *Staying With* theme, the *Shift in Perception* subtheme, and the *Shedding What is Unnecessary* subtheme. Langer's (2014) definition of mindfulness as an intentional mental state characterized by open receptivity that employs direct observation and can observe multiple perspectives aligns with the *Staying With* theme and the *Seeing Clearly* subtheme.

Development

Childhood is a process of development, and as such, a developmental perspective highlights theories of change and mechanisms of growth (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). Mindfulness practices may offer a positive, compounding effect when children learn them during a time when the brain's plasticity is optimal (Shapiro et al., 2015). Developmental theory informs educators as to how the brain develops and retains information, when development is not on schedule, and when intervention may be necessary (Ragpot, 2017). Mindfulness can influence and enhance the development process, supporting self-regulation by allowing children to practice enacting top-down processes and modulating bottom-up processes (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Many of the theorists discussed in this section support the social and interactive functions of development, which align with Siegel's (2012) understanding of brain growth as a function of interpersonal communication that strengthens the integrative brain fibers that support self-regulation alongside internal and interpersonal balance. The results of this study aligned with the offerings of various developmental theorists.

The children who spoke the words that I found in my teaching notes were primarily in Erickson's stage four: industry vs. inferiority (Cherry, 2019). As some of the primary tasks of this stage are learning to believe in themselves and learning about their competence and agency (Capps, 2012), these tasks aligned with the "*Filling Self Up*" theme. The qualities that represent the "*Filling Self Up*" theme supported the virtue of competency that the child may learn through social interactions (maintained by the *Managing Interactional/Relational World* theme) and the beginnings of establishing a resourceful self.

Bandura's social learning theory (Fadul, 2014) supports the idea that children reproduce the behaviors and approaches that they witness around them. This notion may align with how I

modeled mindfulness skills in my interactions with the children. Further, Bandura's theory outlines that children establish ways of being by sustaining attention on them in a manner that motivates them to replicate them in their own interactions (Fryling et al., 2011); as children listened to their peers reporting how they used mindfulness, they had the opportunity to sustain this attention, and the act of sharing may have motivated them to replicate such behaviors in the world.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory further pointed to children learning through intentional social experiences (Esteban-Guitart, 2018). Vygotsky's theory postulates that social experiences lay the foundation for mental and behavioral functioning that the child internalizes before replicating (Yvon et al., 2013). Hearing their peers' experiences with mindfulness may have functioned both as a social interaction and employed the listeners' brains in internally mapping mindfulness-based functioning. If I told children how to use their mindfulness in their daily lives, I might have offered irrelevant or unreachable suggestions for individual children. Hearing their peers' personal experiences may have activated learning in children's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), enabling them to stretch and construct knowledge between their experiential capacity and my lessons (Yvon et al., 2013). Yvon et al. (2013) suggested that an optimal learning environment engages peers as agents in each other's learning, applying skills to "authentic problems" (p. 34) that scaffold development. Listening to each other's experiences provided children with this opportunity, especially as language provides critical support for conceptual strengthening, particularly beyond academic content (Yvon et al., 2013).

Kohlberg identified the shared social context as necessary for self-understanding (Hayes, 1994). Hayes (1994) outlined a comprehension of Kohlberg's framework whereby understanding

an individual is a product of exploring meaning-construction through the space between experience and response, an approach that is hermeneutic in its very nature. Kohlberg's ideas, like Bandura's and Vygotsky's, rely on social interactions as supporting cognitive maturation through increasing complexity throughout development (Hayes, 1994). The structure of children's textual descriptions, linguistically as well as content-wise, supported this assertion. Additionally, Hayes (1994) identified that a critical component of social and moral learning is the individual's opportunity to hear their thoughts out loud; the process of sharing anecdotes in mindfulness class afforded children this opportunity. Further, Kohlberg's work offered group development as a means by which one might motivate individual development (Hayes, 1994); teaching mindfulness in the whole-class platform and offering children the opportunity to share their experiences likely achieved this aim.

Kohlberg's theory further outlined children as participants in their own development, as social interaction reorients self-concept, relational orientation with others, and the standards by which groups operate (Kohlberg, 1969). Choosing to engage with mindfulness practice and sharing stories aligned with Kohlberg's assertion that intentional engagement with promotive processes allows individuals to participate in their own maturation (Hayes, 1994); children chose to engage with the practice outside of class and to share their experiences in class. Cognition reorganizes itself based on the interactional world and what was known (Hayes, 1994); thus, children's known worlds reorganized around enacting, sharing, and hearing mindfulness experiences.

The children who spoke the words I recorded in my teaching notes primarily found themselves in Piaget's concrete operational stage, mastering logical thinking and the ability to imagine the thoughts and feelings of others (Marwaha et al., 2017). Piaget's theories established

learning as an exploration navigated collaboratively between children and adults attending to connection, motivation, and social needs that promote development (Yvon et al., 2013).

Mindfulness curricula focus on “teaching mindfulness” as well as “teaching mindfully,” appreciating that what the teacher teaches is as important as how they teach it. Children learned from witnessing embodiment and interactions, both from watching me operate in the classroom and as they witnessed the cognitive and emotional anecdotes that other children shared.

As children develop a theory of mind, they establish a deeper understanding of cause and effect, a stronger capacity for staying with an experience, familiarity with mixed emotions, and a mental representation of others’ minds (Pavarini et al., 2013). Hearing their peers’ stories might have fostered empathy in the children present for the mindfulness lesson. Theory of mind is beneficial in the school environment where children find themselves surrounded by others; understanding what others are feeling, cultivating empathy, and understanding that other children might have a different perspective (Shapiro et al., 2015), or imagining others’ intentions (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012) may be a result of directly hearing others’ experiential reports. Table 3 offers developmental theories alongside quotations from this study that illustrate them.

Table 3*Developmental Theories Aligned with Textual Evidence*

Theorist/Theory	Elementary Child Situates:	Evidence:
Erickson: Children encounter crises at each stage of development with parent and caregiver support.	Children ages three to five are completing Erikson's psychosocial stage three: initiative vs. guilt, and between ages six to twelve have moved solidly into stage four: industry vs. inferiority (Cherry, 2019).	Navigating social interaction: 4th Grader: "When my friend never showed up I was sad and had to use my Mindful Breathing." Competence: 5th Grader: "I was in a performance and it was so scary so I used my Mindful Breathing to do a good job."
Bandura: Children reproduce the behaviors and ways of being that they see in the world around them as they retain them through sustained attention and are motivated to replicate them in the world (Fadul, 2014; Fryling et al., 2011).	Continual process.	Reproducing behavior: 5th Grader: "I went ice skating, and I was the first one out, and I was scared I would fall, so I used my Mindful Breathing and copied other people." Replicating parental behavior: 2nd Grader: "When I was sleeping, my baby brother scared me, so I did my Mindful Breathing then I took the mask off him and put him back to sleep."
Piaget: Learning tasks for children must be appropriate for their development level.	Most elementary school children are squarely situated in the concrete operational stage, developing the ability to think logically and imagine how others think and feel (Marwaha et al., 2017).	Awareness of others' feelings: 5th Grader: "We're moving and it's stressful and I put my sister's box down and she got mad at me and so I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better."
Vygotsky: Social contact is essential to intellectual development; children learn through active, intentional, hands-on experiences in the social world (Esteban-Guitart, 2018).	Egocentric Speech (3-7 years), Inner Speech (7+ years).	Applying mindfulness to the social world: 4th Grader: "Yesterday me and my brother had a big fight and I got mad and I just used my Mindful Breathing and I let him play." Inner speech: 2nd Grader: "Yesterday when I was sleeping, I looked up at the top bed, it's a bunk bed, and my mom wasn't there and little tears came out of my eyes and I used my Mindful Breathing and I knew my mom would say that I'm a Big Girl. I'm going to rub my eyes now." Me: "It's okay, you can rub your eyes." Girl: "I'm just rubbing my eyes, I'm not crying. Stop it, water!"
Kohlberg: Stages of development are the qualitative leaps in cognition and problem-solving that children display when encountering the same problem throughout development in more holistic, integrated, and complex ways (Hayes, 1994).	Conventional Morality: Interpersonal Concordance & Law and Order	Conventional Morality, obeying norms independently: 4th Grader: "Me and my sister we had a fight and I was mad at her, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I apologized."
Theory of Mind: This developmental framework helps children understand others and know what to expect from human behavior and mental states.	Understanding the reciprocal nature of thoughts and others' representation of the world, the realization that knowledge can be derived through inference and understanding of mixed emotions and non-literal situations.	Mental representation of others' thoughts: 5th Grader: "This Monday I was racing at swimming, I cracked my glasses, and I thought I'd be in big trouble with my mom, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down." Mixed emotions: 4th Grader: "When we went to the airport to drop off my cousin and my brother was coming back so I was sad and happy all at the same time, cuz my cousin has always been there for me, and I had to use my Mindful Breathing to feel better."

Frameworks

Experience Framework

Textual descriptions pointed to the fact that children applied mindfulness skills to a broad range of internal and external experiential factors. Internal experiential factors included relating to the body, growth, emotional agency, emotional orientation towards life, emotional management, self-concept, practice, and soulfulness. External factors included interpersonal relating and connection, parental relationships, modulating response to life circumstances, generating adaptive interaction, and interacting with the physical world. I presented these factors in Appendix A. Traditional mindfulness substantiates the role of this focus on “internal and external phenomena thereby facilitating emotional regulation” (Feldman et al., 2007, p. 178).

Emotion and Condition Framework

Children’s words elucidated the experiential aspect of children applying mindfulness skills to various emotions and conditions. These conditions comprised both external and internal components, ranging from physical discomfort and application to the contexts the children would find themselves in, to a wide range of internal emotions that may be generative or responsive, towards the self, others, or the physical world. Further, the broad integrated nature of these results corroborates with emotional researchers who note that “children express a range of emotions on a daily basis” (Kwon et al., 2017, p. 76).

Grade Level Features

Some features of children’s words skewed towards younger children, such as using an imaginative or subjective framework, while other features skewed towards older children, such as delaying gratification, taking perspective, shifting to want what was previously unwanted, or managing the self in a context where the child could not control anything else. While clear

developmental patterns did not emerge from the textual descriptions, the features present only in words offered by fourth graders and fifth graders indicated greater maturity. Access to these regulatory skills paralleled a developmental observation by Hutchinson et al. (2018) that “research into the mechanisms of mindfulness has suggested that it might help cultivate key foundational self-regulatory skills involving attention and emotion regulation that are essential for adaptive psychological functioning across the life-span” (p. 3946), such that development and practice meet and augment each other.

Word Prevalence Analysis

The word clouds offered the assessment of an extremely close word-level reading of the textual descriptions that supports three of van Manen’s existentials.

Spatiality. Where did the child practice mindfulness? What is the felt-space of my own experience reviewing the children’s words? Table 4 presents an exploration of spatiality.

lived experiences. The fact that most anecdotes reported an increase in presence, or an expression of a lived-nowness, which is the felt-temporality of the mindfulness experience, augmented the sense of temporality.

Relationality. Much of the content that the children shared also reflected their relational worlds with their families, friends, and school communities. What is the relational space between my former students and me? And current students? How do the children's words shift my relationality with others in my current world-sphere? Table 6 presents an exploration of relationality.

Table 6

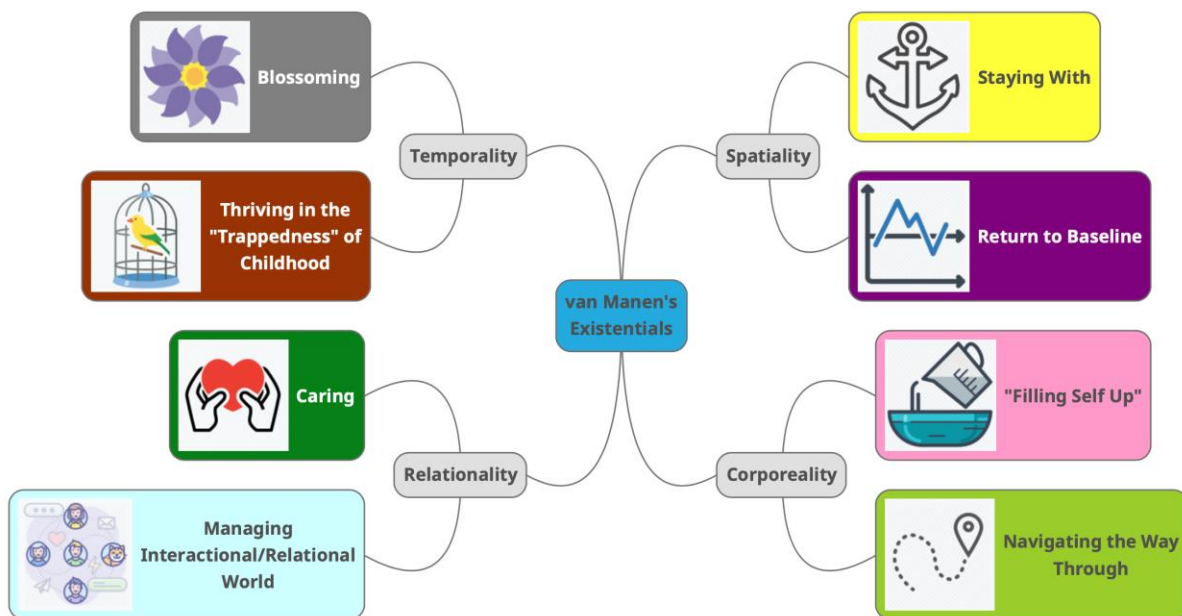
Relationality

<p>Children's Responses:</p> <p>Self mom brother, sister Grandma, cousin, dad, teacher, class, Ms. Terrizzi</p> <p>Grandma's friend, cousin's brother, friend's mom, babysitter, cat, uncle, somebody, girl, snakes, pet tarantula</p>	<p>My relational space:</p> <p>Moments of increased closeness (sharing a secret) – I can feel the scariness of this in my current life. Moments where the connectivity is higher – like there are more apples in the connectivity basket.</p> <p>To meet another where they're at.</p> <p>Heartfulness = deep interconnection. I am still interconnected with these children due to the heartfulness that we shared. Quality of relationship with self and with other.</p>

Spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality are discernable but not discrete, insofar as “they all form an intricate unity which we call the lifeworld – our lived world” (van Manen, 1990, p. 105). This intricate unity can also map onto the eight essential themes that emerged through this study:

Figure 14

Themes Mapped onto van Manen’s Existentials



I. Spatiality

A. *Staying With*

1. The concept of *Staying With* locates the child in orientation with their experience. The felt-sense of *Staying With* has a locality in the child’s mind.

B. *Return to Baseline*

1. In “returning to baseline,” the child’s experience has locality in relation to other experience. The resultant calm has a location in the body and the mind.

II. Corporeality

A. “*Filling Self Up*”

1. Accessing capacity, competency, confidence, and empowerment has location in the body, and the “filling up” has a physically lived bodily experience. The children are bodily present with life.

B. *Navigating the Way Through*

1. *Navigating the way Through* implies a physical concept or journey which the body and mind traverse. This navigation requires a full bodily presence.

III. Temporality

A. *Blossoming*

1. *Blossoming* or the process of growth and clarity is an oriented journey through time.

B. *Thriving in the “Trappedness” of Childhood*

1. Childhood and its parameters locate in time.

IV. Relationality

A. *Caring*

1. The child enacts care in the relational space as they bring more heart to interactions with self and with others.

B. *Managing Interactional/Relational World*

1. The interactional and relational world exists entirely within relationality; they are one and the same.

Fusion of Horizons

A fusion of horizons offers a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Miles et al., 2015). This fusion of horizons is evident throughout daily life as individuals meet each other in relationships and conversations. Throughout this study, I achieved a fusion of horizons through immersing in the textual world of the phenomenon (Miles et al., 2015) in a reflective, hermeneutic practice that brought my lifeworld to meet the experiential lifeworld present in the children’s words (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017). A fusion of horizons also presented itself between my current experience and the experience I had while teaching, between my experience learning mindfulness and the children’s experiences as learners, and between my words and the children’s

words. As the Tibetan term for mindfulness designates the “development of familiarity” (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012, p. 2), this aspect of mindfulness informs the immersion necessary for the fusion of horizons. The process of this exploration was thus as fruitful for me as the product.

Internal/External Axes

Through several cycles of analysis, a focus on the internal and external nature of experience arose, paralleling the work of Shapiro et al. (2006), who noted a continuous application of attention to both inner and outer stimuli, which, in turn, contributed to a shift in relationship to direct experience (Teasdale, 1999). This dynamic was also apparent in the methodology I used for this project in van Manen’s (1990) focus on the inner and outer relational contexts that comprise and elucidate truth and perception. Additionally, approaching this content qualitatively using hermeneutic phenomenology offered the opportunity to observe the internal experiential components of the child practicing mindfulness, rather than solely observing external measures.

Methodology

Hermeneutic phenomenology finds its foundation in interpretive theory that yields a clear depiction of being-in-the-world by exploring lived experience and interpreting the text of life. In this study, I explored the lived experience of the child practicing mindfulness in daily life. As “understanding is always from a perspective” (McLeod, 2001, p. 56) and as being is more essential than knowing, in this work, I embraced human meaning-making through the children’s words. As the researcher, my entire context became part of this phenomenon’s interpretation, as the individual inherently experiences, contextualizes, and interprets the lifeworld (McLeod, 2001). Gadamer pointed to the power of language to bring forth the discovery, knowledge, and interpretation of a phenomenon of interest (Miles et al., 2015); for this study, the children’s

words provided this linguistic access point. Insofar as subjectivity adds richness to the hermeneutic phenomenological discovery, my subjectivity as the researcher, former mindfulness educator, and out-of-classroom teacher for these students added this richness.

The individual's experience is critical in phenomenological research, regardless of whether the individual portrays lived experience with factual accuracy. As one cannot access the pre-reflective state, observations and anecdotes such as the children's textual descriptions provide plausible experiential accounts; Feldman et al. (2007) supported that "the assessment of mindfulness by self-report offers a convenient, non-invasive method for assessing an individual's internal, thus inherently subjective, experience" (p. 188). Ricoeur pointed to language as structuring the self and context, offering language as the construct which makes the self apparent (Masong, 2012). Hermeneutics rests on the ontological understanding of many truths, reconstructed continuously through experience and layers of meaning as one attunes with experience (Miles et al., 2015). Insofar as the fact that "the meaning or the essence of a phenomenon is multidimensional and stratified makes it impossible to capture its meaning in a single definition or concept" (Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2019, p. 3), this work yielded eight themes to capture the essence of the explored phenomenon. Knowing emerges through immersion in experience and through time; hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to capture and distill this knowing.

Cycling back to this study's preconceptions, I still believe that mindfulness is beneficial to children, that it helps them self-regulate and to know themselves better. Aligned with my original beliefs, I still see that mindfulness deepens compassion and connection and is valuable in the school context, as is evident through the children's autonomous use of the practice, especially in school. I am no longer as concerned with the perception of mindfulness in broader

society, as I observe the number of studies has increased even as I attended to this study, alongside greater receptivity as I have discussed my work with others. Most importantly, the results provide such strong experiential support for the practice, I feel less swayed by those who may not accept them, and even more conviction that time spent practicing mindfulness can facilitate schools' other aims; while mindfulness is not a panacea, every little bit helps.

This study upheld my preconceptions that individuals would experience calm, increased regulation, and an ability to prevent harmful behaviors alongside increased responsive agency. This work provided a greater experiential understanding of the child practicing mindfulness in daily life. Hermeneutic phenomenology was an effective methodology for completing this research.

Relational Attunement with Me

Positive attachment figures benefit children's development by activating constructive states of mind and supporting positive capacities (Ryan et al., 2007). Attachment further augments positive psychological functioning, promotes self-regulation and reflection, and increases trait mindfulness (Ryan et al., 2007). Responsive, attentive caregiving supports secure attachment and promotes development (Ryan et al., 2007). Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) offered that "it is the interaction between the intrapersonal and environmental risks and protective factors which predicts whether the individual goes on to develop psychological wellbeing or psychopathology" (p. 304); relationships with caring adults are essential in children's lives.

Parents often serve as primary attachment figures; however, due to the amount of time that children spend in school, teachers also serve as attachment figures for students (Cantor et al., 2019); when schools focus on the quality of these attunement relationships, children reap myriad academic, social, and behavioral benefits (Rose et al., 2019). Attachment, particularly in schools,

is foundational to children's success (Bergin & Bergin, 2009), most especially for children with increased risk factors (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

The literature showed strong support for mindfulness educators having their own in-depth training and personal mindfulness practice (Jennings et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008), whereby the teacher may exhibit coherent mindfulness characteristics throughout their inhabited qualities and interactions (Cheek et al., 2017; Crane et al., 2017). Children learn as teachers model behavior (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

Mindfully attuned and attachment-focused teachers connect with the lived lives of their students (Kearns & Hart, 2017). Bögels et al. (2010) posited that mindfulness promotes attunement; attunement, in turn, promotes a resilient mind (An et al., 2018).

Perhaps all the hours I spent practicing mindfulness myself over the years that I delivered this curriculum promoted the benefits I witnessed in my students, a notion supported by van der Oord et al. (2012), who noted that children benefit when the adults in their lives practice mindfulness. Further, I found my work and interactions with the students to be quite challenging before I taught mindfulness to them; as we engaged with mindfulness together, our relationships' quality deepened. I saw the lived lives of the young people I worked with, felt more connected with them, and enjoyed my work more. This dynamic was likely cyclical in nature, strengthening relationships and enjoyment in turn. I have no way of knowing whether the curriculum itself or the benefits of my own mindfulness practice and resultant likely-increased attunement capacity augmented the children's integration of mindfulness.

Researcher as an Instrument

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher is an instrument in the study. It is impossible to completely eradicate bias, as human beings are the result of their own lifeworld,

such that my experience as a mindfulness teacher (in general) and as the mindfulness teacher of the speakers of the quotations used in this study (in particular) informed the lens through which I viewed this work. My very interest in this particular topic results from encountering this practice myself, training in it, and teaching it to my students. I can recall the moment I first conceived of this study, knowing that my experience, thoughts, and enthusiasm for this topic directed my interest in this work for my dissertation research. Hermeneutic phenomenology welcomes the researcher's lifeworld alongside critical awareness to ensure that the results reflect the text and not the researcher.

To ensure that I, as the researcher maintained my status as an instrument of analysis, I took copious field notes to check in with myself and referred back to the original text to ensure my findings' accuracy. I kept the research question forefront in my mind and my visual field while working, often asking myself, "Am I answering *this* question right now?" My own mindfulness practice allowed me to enact the self-awareness necessary to ensure that I upheld my role as an analysis instrument and not as an engineer of results.

Sharing Stories

As Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (2014) defined mindful parenting in line with the definition of mindfulness as "paying attention to your child and your parenting in a particular way: intentionally, here and now, and nonjudgmentally" (p.71), mindful teaching could be offered likewise: paying attention to one's students and one's teaching in a particular way: intentionally, here and now, and nonjudgmentally. As an out-of-classroom teacher, my responsibilities included relationships with hundreds of students. Simply taking the time to hear the children share their experiences allowed me to enact this capacity; the teaching and listening was an act of mindfulness itself. Insofar as "mindfulness may affect some children differently"

(Costello & Lawler, 2014, p. 30), the quality of my presence allowed me to non-judgmentally be present with each anecdote I heard, regardless of what the child shared.

As mindfulness practice improves efficiency and interconnectivity between brain structures and develops awareness and introspection (Auerbach & Delport, 2018), the act of sharing stories allowed the child to repeatedly enact this introspection aloud. Additionally, as the children heard each other's stories and witnessed me meeting the speaking child's emotional state (another fusion of horizons), this context parallels that which helps children develop a theory of mind (Bögels et al., 2010). Wallace and Ewald (2000) proposed knowledge acquisition as a social project, not as something that the child might receive and ingest from the teacher, but as the product of a discursive, interactive experience between teachers and students; this parallels the dynamic present in the discussions we shared on children's mindfulness use.

Hutchinson et al. (2018) pointed to the need for research focusing on children's experience and use of mindfulness; this work provides elucidation in these areas. Further, the findings herein address a gap in the literature that Bannirchelvam et al. (2017) identified through "the general omission of the child's voice in how they experience" (p. 304) mindfulness; this work offers many children's voices to this conversation. As mindfulness enables an individual "to relate to their internal and external experiences" (Auerbach & Delport, 2018, p. 2), sharing stories in the classroom brought forth the experience of bringing awareness to and relating these experiences. Teasdale (1999) posited that an individual cannot learn mindfulness through reading about it, that practiced, experiential learning is necessary to experience life more mindfully; sharing anecdotes provided evidence for and emphasized this experiential learning.

Trauma

One of the schools that I worked at during this time was a high-poverty school. As an out-of-classroom teacher, I was not privy to all of the particulars of children's lives, but I often heard challenging details of individual children's home lives. One child reported using mindfulness to help them stay calm during a home visit by child protective services. Many studies explored mindfulness training for high-poverty, urban populations (Dariotis et al., 2016; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016; Sibinga et al., 2013), as high-stress environmental factors and trauma, when unameliorated, can inhibit cognition and brain development (Zenner et al., 2014) and contribute to maladaptive academic and behavioral functioning (Dariotis et al., 2016). Researchers posit that the improved stress response that the mindfulness practitioner experiences inhibits the amygdala, unhooking the cycle of reactivity and fear, lessening stress, and leading to more adaptive and intentional behaviors (Bauer et al., 2019; Hölzel et al., 2011).

Neuroplasticity, especially active in children's brains, allows self-regulation training to develop neurocognitive faculties; researchers note that due to this adaptability, learning mindfulness as a child may be particularly beneficial to children with challenging home lives (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Even when a child experiences excess stress, mindfulness practice can prevent harmful effects on the developing brain (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). I worked with children experiencing homelessness, and children with this experience often exhibit higher ACEs scores and more frequent PTSD; Viafora et al. (2015) offered that children with these experiences and diagnoses can be more likely than their peers who experience more stability to benefit from practicing mindfulness. An et al. (2018) supported mindfulness as a practice that counters the deleterious effects of PTSD.

Many children who face poverty and extreme challenges do not receive the mental health care they may need, Wang et al. (2019) offered mindfulness as an affordable, feasible, and accessible practice that may support mental health in childhood. In the school setting, this practice may even offer preventative mental health benefits (Johnson et al., 2016), as Perry-Parrish et al. (2016) pointed to school-based mindfulness programming as comparable with therapeutic behavioral and psychological interventions.

Parents practicing mindfulness can also support psychological benefits in their children (An et al., 2018). Attachment and attunement relationships signal safety and protection to a child (Ryan et al., 2007). Mindfulness augments this feeling of security, in a manner Hutchinson et al. (2018) described as enabling a secure attachment with the self. In situations where adults do not fill their expected roles, children learn to be there for themselves; mindfulness supports and enhances this aspect of the relationship with the self (Viafora et al., 2015).

Curricula such as the one I taught my students might help to fulfill the “need for a practice such as mindfulness to counteract the high levels of stress and anxiety amongst learners within the current education system, especially those who grow up in challenging socio-economic contexts” (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018, p. 6), as even one mindfulness session shows a reduction in pupil stress (Maravilla, 2020). Schools are limited in their capacity to change what has happened to a child; however, mindfulness training may offer children support for moving forward from difficult circumstances.

Implications for Practice

This study illuminated children’s lived experiences practicing mindfulness in daily life. Children’s textual descriptions provided a rich illustration of their varied and creative experiences autonomously applying mindfulness to their daily lives. This study’s findings offer

implications for researchers, educators, school communities, parents, mindfulness instructors, those creating mindfulness curricula, and child mindfulness practitioners.

Researchers

Qualitative research can help contextualize the findings from quantitative research (Cheek et al., 2017). As such, these results stand in conversation with the largely quantitative field of completed studies. The children's interest in and autonomous application of the mindfulness techniques they learned can support and buoy quantitative findings, offering new directions for future research.

Educators

Educators can use this study's results to obtain a deep understanding of the value that mindfulness practice can add to their classroom communities. The wealth of textual descriptions indicating that children used mindfulness skills in the classroom (fifth grader: "When my teacher was mad and I thought what she said was funny, I used my Mindful Breathing not to laugh out loud.") can bolster the quantitative findings that point to the benefits of mindfulness practice. Mindfulness can support learning by providing myriad measurable benefits to children (Auerbach & Delpont, 2018; Hölzel et al., 2011; Kaunhoven & Dorjee, 2017; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016), particularly for an individual's psychological health (Dove & Costello, 2017), especially for youth raised in high-stress environments (An et al., 2018; Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2017; Costello & Lawler, 2014; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016) and those struggling with attention disorders (Viglas & Perlman, 2018). These results support the fact that children appreciate and apply mindfulness skills and practices to their lives, corroborating Perry-Parrish et al.'s (2016) findings indicating that children enjoy practicing mindfulness.

Educators can review the experiential framework, the emotion and condition framework, and the grade-level features I presented in this study to orient themselves towards possibilities for growth and integration for their own students, especially when they interweave SEL and cognitive learning for their youngest learners (Viglas & Perlman, 2018). Reaping mindfulness benefits “allows students to focus on their present, enabling them to be better learners who are more focused and engaged in their learning” (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017, p. 5). Classroom teachers employing their own mindfulness practice due to encountering this work may inhibit and unlearn confirmation bias (Singh et al., 2013), improve health measures, experience less burnout, and live with less stress (Lawlor, 2014; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Further, students learn SEL skills better from a teacher with strong SEL and mindfulness skills (Lawlor, 2014), and the teacher’s psychological well-being improves the classroom environment and student behavior more than teacher training or experience (Jennings et al., 2013; Singh et al., 2013).

Learning and teaching mindfulness transformed my personal experience and my interactive experience with my students, a benefit I anticipate I might share with others who likewise engage with this work (Singh et al., 2013). Results like these demonstrate the importance of the teacher’s own mindfulness practice and experience (Liehr & Diaz, 2010). I hope that these findings might inspire educators to incorporate mindfulness into their lives and their teaching.

School Communities

I was the sole champion of mindfulness programming at the schools where I worked and taught mindfulness. A few years into this work, I recorded in my notes,

One of the teachers who was most skeptical of this program came up to me in the hallway and said, “Ya know, I didn’t think the mindfulness was really going to do anything, but nothing else has changed and you’ve shifted the tone of the whole school, it’s so much calmer now!”

While the results of this study pointed to experience at the individual level, school communities can use these results to portray the range of experiential benefits to the variety of stakeholders involved in making decisions for a school and those who might decide whether or not the school offers mindfulness to students. This value aligns with McCabe et al. (2017), who stated that “establishing the acceptability of school-based mindfulness programs from the perspective of the child adds substantially to the literature” (p. 8).

Mindfulness can support conscious education and integrate SEL skills to help the school community meet students’ whole-human needs alongside the academic curriculum (Auerbach & Delport, 2018). Mindfulness training has the potential “to improve mental health, behavior, and school performance, as part of fostering contemplative pedagogy that can positively impact the lives of young children” (Cheek et al., 2017, p. 2564). Cheek et al. (2017) advised against an add-and-stir approach to bringing mindfulness training to the classroom; integrating mindfulness programming requires a thoughtful, intentional approach to deciding which practices a school community chooses to introduce and nurture, and how the community can sustain and integrate the skills. Mindfulness is more than just another class.

With the range of experiences and benefits I provided in this work, I hope that the words I offer encourage and support offering mindfulness in the whole-class format, across school communities, to improve the learning environment (Chorney & Eliuk, 2017) for both the personal and economic benefits (Hutchinson et al., 2018) that such programming provides, in addition to the fact that it supports the other facets of SEL competencies (Lawlor, 2014). School communities may recognize the economic benefit of supporting teachers learning mindfulness due to the positive impact such training shows in children, along with the longevity insofar as the teacher can apply the skills year after year (Singh et al., 2013).

I further hope that reviewing these findings in the context of the associated literature that I provided will help school stakeholders see how the experiential benefits that the children reported may connect with supporting and enhancing brain development and functioning and ameliorating the impact of trauma, especially since learning mindfulness before or around adolescence may augment these skills' protective factors across the lifespan (Dove & Costello, 2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Costello and Lawler (2014) supported these conclusions, offering that mindfulness "interventions are relatively cheap to introduce, can fit into a wide range of contexts, are enjoyable for pupils and demonstrate positive effects over a relatively short duration" (p. 35).

Parents

Parents can use this study's results to see what is possible for their children and understand the qualitative benefits alongside quantitative benefits that their children might reap if their school offers mindfulness training. Parents want the best for their children, and mindfulness can offer children benefits beyond those that are academic and social, as I found in this anecdote in my notes:

A Parent: You know, my son is so angry and bitter inside - I tell him he's doing a good job, and he's so well-behaved, so you'd never notice in school, but he's really resentful about going to school, and nothing makes him happy. I always ask him about his day, and he never has anything good to say, but then he started telling me that he likes the Mindfulness - he tried to describe it to me, that you had them close their eyes, even for a short period of time, and that he had some sense of peace or relief or SOMETHING - I don't know what he felt, but you could really tell it made some sort of shift in him...

Numbers cannot paint as clear of a picture as stories can. I hope that parents might find a deep commitment for sharing this work with their own children as they read the results of this study, knowing that even brief practice can have a positive impact (Hölzel et al., 2011) and that these skills support the self-regulation that indicates school readiness (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012) and improve adaptive functioning at home and elsewhere (Shapiro et al., 2015). Further, parents

might use the findings of this study to engage in their own mindfulness practice through understanding that if they are feeling stressed, they are automatically sharing it with their children (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016), and that they, like the speakers who offered the textual descriptions for this study, might benefit from the practice themselves.

Mindfulness Instructors

Mindfulness instructors can use this study's results to recognize experiences and perhaps benchmarks that their own students might be reaching as they practice and integrate mindfulness skills. While curricula provide benchmarks as a scale of attainment in academic subjects, benchmarks for mindfulness practice may indicate a manner of observing experiential development as it happens and deepens. Further, I hope that mindfulness instructors reading this study might incorporate the practice of asking children directly how they use and experience the practice so that their students can learn from one another.

Creators of Mindfulness Curricula

Those creating mindfulness curricula can use this work to understand the experiential components for the children and then reverse-engineer curricula that meet the children's natural inclinations. What might a curriculum look like, based on the eight themes I uncovered? This approach might meet children's natural predilections where they are, rather than creating a program based on adults' orientation; this notion aligns with Greenberg and Harris (2012), who noted that qualitative research is pivotal in ascertaining the developmental appropriateness of mindfulness programming.

Children

Lastly, I hope that this study's results might inspire children to practice mindfulness or might support those who already practice mindfulness skills. Perhaps the children's words

presented here might inspire another child with an idea as to how to apply mindfulness in their own life. Perhaps they might understand the experiences presented in this work or feel understood by voices offering similar experiences. I would be grateful if even one child's life is made better as a result of the time and heart that went into this research.

Earlier in this work, I offered an analogy comparing mindfulness to a medicine, noting that while it may be effective, one might wonder if individuals might actually take it; while quantitative studies find mindfulness as effective on various measures, results from this study indicate that children do, in fact, utilize this entirely portable (Viafora et al., 2015) practice regularly and autonomously. The next section provides recommendations for future research.

Future Research

While most research to date on children using mindfulness reports myriad quantitative benefits, my research explored this phenomenon of interest using archived textual descriptions of how children used mindfulness in daily life to provide a qualitative depiction of children's lived experience with this practice. The fact that children autonomously employed mindfulness skills and that they benefited from and appreciated them fosters the likelihood that they will ultimately reap the quantitative benefits outlined in other studies. This section offers recommendations for future research in this field.

With an understanding of children's lived experiences applying mindfulness practice to daily life situations, future research can take a more in-depth look at how children experience shifts in behavior and enhanced capacity. While my research explored this phenomenon using archived textual descriptions, future research could record children's experiences expressly for research purposes, asking further questions such as: "What in your experience indicated to you that you wanted to use a mindfulness practice at that moment?" "What are all of the situations

where you apply mindfulness skills?” “Why did you choose that particular mindfulness technique?” “How did it feel when you used the mindfulness practice?” “How does it feel when you use your mindfulness with someone else?” “Why do you use your mindfulness practices?” “How would you describe mindfulness in your own words?” These questions, among others, might provide more in-depth insight into the lived experience of the phenomenon.

Additionally, as human experience is incredibly dynamic, researchers can conduct a study exploring this same phenomenon in other geographic locations, with different populations, or with younger or older children. The field needs more qualitative studies, particularly those focusing on the elementary population, as most studies to date have been with high school students (Dariotis et al., 2016). Additionally, the field needs more qualitative studies with a larger group of participants for triangulation, as most have used single-informants (Dariotis et al., 2016). As this writing occurs during the COVID-19 pandemic, a study might focus on children’s experiences using mindfulness during a quarantine, a lockdown, or in the face of the distinct challenges they face as a result of the pandemic.

Future research could use the current study to select aspects of the lived experience to apply specific focus. Quantitative research might measure approaches aiming to develop these essences, while qualitative research might further explore the meaning found within them. Future research might also orient itself toward cultivating these capacities or reach deeper into understanding the impact of this development on one’s life. Qualitative studies might focus on experiential components of different mindfulness practices and techniques or on experiences as a function of age. Further, future research could explore the impact of the essence of mindfulness on brain development, PTSD, empathy, ADHD symptomatology, self-compassion, stress-

reduction, co-regulation, attachment, and specifically the associated experiential components of these domains.

Qualitative studies in this area to date mostly focus on one or a few participants; researchers might be inspired by the current work to explore qualitative factors in a larger population sample. Additionally, a foundational element of the field needs strengthening: the term “mindfulness” does not refer to a single practice; therefore, different studies on mindfulness may be looking at very different practices, techniques, and structures. Research clarification in this area could be beneficial.

Research is necessary to compare implementation in various age groups; assess the optimal age for a mindfulness intervention; compare different mindfulness practices; explore deeper into the effects, content, and parameters of a daily practice; and obtain more open-ended feedback. This research found no studies comparing clinical, behavioral, normal, and thriving populations, and there is further need for results that are triangulated by parents, as well as an exploration of the qualitative and quantitative effects of school-wide programming. Studies incorporating school-matching, and those that compare the effects of mindfulness interventions taught by an outside provider and those taught by a trained classroom teacher, could strengthen these results. Longitudinal studies or those with significantly longer-term follow-up could help establish a research base on the lasting effects of regular practice, as “children continue to integrate mindfulness into their lives, strengthening their skills over time” (van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2014, p. 246). It could be informative to know if children use strategies and practices after the program has finished (McCabe et al., 2017). One study offered the possibility that a mindfulness intervention’s benefits sustain even three years later (Shankland & Rosset, 2017).

Researchers might explore this work longitudinally, exploring whether the qualitative effect sustains over time, whether children continue to use these practices long after completing the course, what role mindfulness takes over time, whether something further develops out of the longevity of these skills, whether the change itself is dynamic over time, or whether the changes diminish without practice. Research questions might include: “How do changes in the child affect key figures in the child’s life?” “What is the impact of families practicing together?” “Do children experience qualitative differences if their teacher practices mindfulness?” “How does a secular mindfulness program affect a child’s spirituality?” “Does enjoying mindfulness lead to using mindfulness skills autonomously?” Hutchinson et al. (2018) pointed to the fact that “research evidence on long-term impact of mindfulness training in childhood is virtually absent” (p. 3935), highlighting this need. There is so much that research can bring light to with regard to the enhanced presence that children bring to their own lives.

Conclusions

This chapter concluded this study by answering the research question, discussing the eight themes that emerged during this exploration, offering implications for practice, and providing future research recommendations. This qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological study’s objective was to explore the child’s experience using mindfulness in daily life and to add children’s voices to the research conversation. This study’s findings established that children’s experiences with mindfulness allowed them to stay with their experiences, navigate circumstances and relationships, regulate emotional overwhelm, enact confidence and care, and to thrive and blossom during the particular parameters that childhood offers in American culture. Individuals can apply the findings from this study to various fields that relate to children’s well-being.

This study illuminated dynamic aspects of how, when, and why children autonomously apply mindfulness techniques in daily life. Textual descriptions pointed to the fact that children applied mindfulness skills to a broad range of internal and external experiential factors, including relating to the body, emotional agency, emotional orientation towards life, emotional management, self-concept, interpersonal relating and connection, parental relationships, modulating response to life circumstances, generating adaptive interaction, and interacting with the physical world. Children's words elucidated the experiential component of children applying mindfulness skills to a variety of emotions and conditions comprised of both external and internal components, ranging from physical discomfort and application to the contexts the children would find themselves in, to a wide range of internal emotions that may be generative or responsive, towards the self, others, or the physical world.

“Our capacity for social and emotional learning resides not only in our heads but also in our hearts” (Burke & Hawkins, 2012, p. 38). Sharing one's experience facilitates the meaning-making process (Seidman, 2006); in the context of social and emotional learning, this process builds bridges between individuals and between one's head and one's heart. Exploring the head and the heart through the content that one shares aloud offers access to being's experiential components. In this study, I explored 1,136 quotations in my teaching notes describing how children autonomously used mindfulness techniques between mindfulness lessons. As children depicted their experience using mindfulness in their daily lives, children reflected on their lived experiences. Their experiences provided the meaning and depth present in my findings. I am forever grateful to the children who shared their experiences with me, whose honesty and skill inspired me, and whose learning shaped me as a mindfulness instructor.

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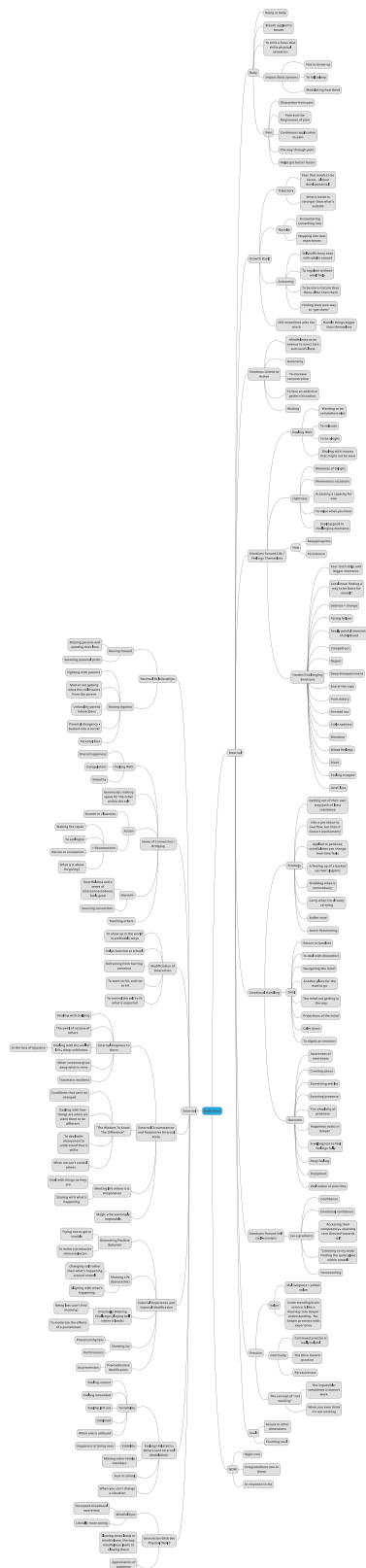
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Experiential Framework



Note. View digital, full-size framework here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VsaD0PWYhKLBxLvExSRp47GmMIZd42g9/view?usp=sharing>

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Appendix B: Experiential Framework Outline

The following outline provides support for the experiential components outlined in Appendix A.

I. Experience

A. Internal

1. Body

a) Being in body: the felt sense of feeling one's body

(1) Kindergartener: "It didn't feel like my body was here, it felt like these three separate parts of me just floating - not my body."

(2) Kindergartener: "It felt like ants crawling everywhere inside me, but it felt good like that. It was all over inside me in all parts."

(3) Kindergartener: "I felt so super really calm. Like all of me was relaxing at the same time. Like a vacation."

(4) Kindergartener: "I felt like I was turned very small and went in my feet like a museum."

(5) Kindergartener: "I felt like I was in my heart and taking a trip around."

(6) Kindergartener: "When we got to each part I felt like it was asleep and I woke it up when we got there."

(7) Kindergartener: "I felt like I could see my bone and my lungs."

(8) Kindergartener: "It felt insanely relaxing, like no one was bothering me."

b) Breath applied to breath

(1) 1st Grader: "I used my Mindful Breathing when I couldn't breathe."

(2) 2nd Grader: “At recess I almost couldn’t breathe through my lungs, so I took a deep breath and used my Mindful Breathing.”

c) To shift a focus that shifts physical sensation

(1) 5th Grader: “Right now, I was feeling a little hungry, and I did the Mindful Breathing and my mind was not on the hunger and it went away!”

d) Impact body systems

(1) Not to throw up

(a) 2nd Grader: “On Friday I had to wake up at 5:00 AM and it made me so dizzy I thought I would throw up, so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(2) To fall asleep

(a) 4th Grader: “I used it in my sleep when my Grandma was yelling at me to sleep and I couldn’t fall asleep so I did my mindful breathing.”

(b) 1st Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I am sleeping, then I am very sleep.”

(c) 4th Grader: “Yesterday I wanted the weekend so badly when I went to sleep so I was squealing in my bed, and I had to do my Mindful Breathing to fall asleep.”

(d) 3rd Grader: “I used it to empty my mind so I could sleep.”

(e) 4th Grader: “I was trying to sleep, and then at 2:00 AM my Grandma turned on all the lights, even the one I use to do my homework which is really really bright, because she was sewing, and then I couldn’t sleep, so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(f) 3rd Grader: “On Wednesday night I felt something hard in my bed and then I looked and I saw my mom in my bed and I was surprised, but I didn’t want to be tired on Thursday so I turned the other way so I wouldn’t wonder why she was there, and I did my Mindful Breathing to fall back to sleep.”

(g) 5th Grader: “Yesterday I couldn’t get to sleep, because I was so excited that it would be snowing today, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I fell asleep.”

(h) 1st Grader: “When I was sleeping I scared myself, and then I was almost sleeping and I used my Mindful Breathing and it was really super good.”

(i) 5th Grader: “When I went into bed I had this really strange feeling that someone was watching me, so I kept looking out the window, and part of my window doesn’t have a curtain, and I did my Mindful Breathing, and I fell asleep, and when I woke up I felt better!”

(3) Modulating heartbeat

(a) 2nd Grader: “Mom, she April fooled me, and I was so scared that my heart kept going fast so I used my mindful breathing.”

e) Pain

(1) Distraction from pain

(a) 5th Grader: “I had a stomachache, so I used my Mindful Breathing to get my mind out of my stomach.”

(2) Pain and the forgiveness of pain

(a) 3rd Grader: “My brother threw the ball and my friend stepped on my foot and I had to go to the hospital, then I did my Mindful Breathing and I forgived him.”

(3) Continuous application to pain

(a) 5th Grader: “When I stayed up watching videos on my phone, and then my neck started to hurt, and now it just hurts all the time so I keep using my Mindful Breathing.”

(4) The way through pain

(a) 4th Grader: “When I got my stitches and I did my Mindful Breathing and I stopped hitting my doctor.”

(b) 5th Grader: “When my bike fell, I got hurt and I used my Mindful Breathing to stay calm.”

(5) Helps get better faster

(a) 1st Grader: “When I had allergies I use my Mindful Breathing so I get better faster.”

2. Growth Itself

a) Trajectory of growth

(1) Fear that needs to be faced, perhaps developmental

(a) 2nd Grader: “When I was scared of the diving board, I used my Mindful Breathing and then I jumped in!”

(2) Fear that has been dealt with: transmutes

(a) 5th Grader: “In summer camp I went to Coney Island and I used my mindfulness on the roller coaster, and when I got off I felt good a little bit.”

(3) Internal experience stronger than external experience

(a) Child: "It was completely silent."

Me: "Inside or outside?"

Child: *mystified* "Both. I feel so CALM!" This is a child who may RARELY feel calm. That room was loud and zany, nowhere near quiet, and this young one felt a quiet inside of her that was louder than the noise around her.

b) Novelty

(1) Encountering something new

(a) 2nd Grader: "When I was reading a word I didn't know, I used my Mindful Breathing."

(b) 5th Grader: "I visited a middle school, and there was a loud bell that rang and then I got scared and so I used my Mindful Breathing."

(2) Stepping into new experiences

(a) 4th Grader: "At the first class of dancing I was scared so I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt better."

c) Autonomy

(1) Self-sufficiency even with adults around

(a) A parent walks into the library: "I took my daughter to the carnival this weekend, and she wanted to go on my favorite ride, it spins you around and around like this and then it goes up, and you're almost upside down, and then it goes faster and pins you down. So I took her on it, and she started freaking out and screaming, because she didn't like it, and then she said to herself out

loud: 'I have to do what Ms. Terrizzi taught us, I have to do my Mindful Breathing!' and I was like 'I'M RIGHT HERE! But do what you gotta do, girl, do what you learned in school!' And so she did her Mindful Breathing on the ride and she calmed herself down all by herself, even though I was right there. I thought you'd like to hear that, because it really worked and I saw it!"

(2) To regulate without adult help

(a) 3rd Grader: "When I watched Curious George BooFest and then I was so scared, and my mom wouldn't sleep with me, I used my Mindful Breathing and then I took other dreams to think about."

(3) To be more mature than those older than them

(a) 5th Grader: "I was trying to sleep, and my big brother was afraid of the dark and he was crying, so I had to use my Mindful Breathing to fall asleep."

(4) Finding their own way to "get there"

(a) Me to a specific child: "I noticed you doing something interesting with your hands during Mindful Breathing - I'd love to hear about it, only if you feel like sharing..."

5th Grader: "Well, see I had my hands like this" *holds them out in front of him, parallel, about a foot-and-a-half apart, as if he was about to clap*

"because I was having trouble keeping my mind away from my thoughts - so instead I put my attention (with my eyes closed) on the space between my hands. Then I slowly - reeeeeeealllllly slowly - brought my hands closer together and farther apart. And that made it easy because all of my attention

was between my hands, and not in my head, so I was really able to focus very clearly.”

Me: “Did you make this up yourself?”

Kid: “Yup”

d) Life sometimes asks too much

(1) Handle things bigger than themselves

(a) 4th Grader: “When my little brother was crying because he wanted my Mommy, but she said he had to stay in his bed and he kept crying and crying, and I said to him: “I’m here.” and then I had to use my Mindful Breathing to calm down and stay helping him and nice.”

(b) 5th Grader: “When I had to go home by myself and feed my brother and then he was playing on the iPad instead of eating the food and I got mad and so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

3. Emotions Linked to Action

a) Mindfulness as an avenue to enact care and carefulness

(1) 1st Grader: “When I dyed the egg, I thought I cracked it and then I used my Mindful Breathing, and I didn’t crack it!”

b) Autonomy (action)

(1) 5th Grader: “When my friend was telling me what to do, I used my Mindful Breathing, because I already knew what to do, and then I was still mad.”

c) To increase concentration

(1) 5th Grader: “I couldn’t concentrate on my Chinese homework, so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(2) 5th Grader: “When it started to snow in the middle of school, and the kids were going crazy, I used my Mindful Breathing to block them out and keep learning.”

(3) 5th Grader: “In typing class, like, I couldn’t really focused cuz everybody’s like AAHHHHHHH, AHHHHHHH, AHHHHHHH! and then I suddenly messed up, and I keep on messing it up, and I’m like AHHHHHHH and then I do my Mindful Breathing and I calm down and focus.”

d) To face an addictive pattern/situation (disengage from compulsive pattern)

(1) 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing to get myself to stop playing video games.”

e) Waiting

(1) 5th Grader: “When I got my present, I was too excited to open it, but then I didn’t want to wake up my mom and dad, so then I used my Mindful Breathing and just do something else while I wait.”

4. Emotions Toward Life / Feelings Themselves

a) Dealing with life/emotions

(1) Wanting to be somewhere else

(a) 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when we didn’t have school, because I wanted to be at school.”

(2) To tolerate what is happening

(a) 5th Grader: “My baby sister wanted to play and play and play, and I was annoyed, because she would play forever if she could. So then I used my Mindful Breathing and I kept playing with her until she was done.”

(3) To be alright

(a) 5th Grader: "I couldn't sleep for two days because my baby brother was crying, so I used my Mindful Breathing to be alright."

(4) Dealing with trauma that might not be seen

(a) 2nd Grader: "When my sister pushed me off the floaty and held me under water, and then I used my Mindful Breathing when I came up because I was so scared."

b) Lightness

(1) Moments of delight

(a) 5th Grader: "I was watching a video on YouTube, and it was so hilarious, my face hurt, so I tried to stop, but then I had to use my Mindful Breathing to calm down."

(2) Momentous occasions

(a) 5th Grader: "I was opening my acceptance letter for middle school and I was so nervous I used my Mindful Breathing."

(3) Accessing a capacity for awe

(a) 2nd Grader: "Yesterday when we went to Sunset Park, and I thought it was so beautiful I was going to cry. I used my Mindful Breathing and then I calmed and I just felt happy."

(4) To value what one has

(a) 3rd Grader: "I used my Mindful Breathing when I was at my Dad's house and I had Christmas there on the real Christmas, and then at my mother's house my Godmother and my Godsister, they were coming over and I got to

pick up my Godsister and I got like really excited, but I almost dropped her, and I got really scared and I felt like bad, and I almost started to cry, but once I did my Mindful Breathing I didn't feel bad, and I saw that I have like a really good family, and they won't feel mad if I just had a little mistake."

(5) Feeling good in challenging moments

(a) 3rd Grader: "When I was at the pool and I didn't have anything to help me, I used my Mindful Breathing and I feel good."

c) How: mindfulness as a method

(1) "Keepgoingness"

(a) 4th Grader: "When I didn't know how to ride the bike and I couldn't control it I used my Mindful Breathing and controlled it."

(b) 3rd Grader: "When I was about to get scared on a ride I used my Mindful Breathing and I didn't get scared."

(2) Persistence

(a) 5th Grader: "In another class I was sitting there and someone said I like this girl and I got really mad that he was talking about liking her so I did my mindful breathing and it didn't work, and I did it again, and it didn't work, and I did it AGAIN, and then I left the classroom and came down here and did my mindful breathing AGAIN and then it worked."

d) Harder/challenging emotions

(1) Fear: both daily and bigger moments

(a) 1st Grader: "I was going to watch a scary movie with my big brother, then when I was scared my big brother held me."

(b) 4th Grader: “When my sister fell and didn’t move, I used my Mindful Breathing because I was scared.”

(c) 4th Grader: “When my dad told me that my smallest brother is going to the hospital (he’s 6 months), I was scared so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(2) Loneliness: finding a way to be there for oneself

(a) 2nd Grader: “When I fell down at recess nobody picked me up so I started to cry, then I used my Mindful Breathing, and then I picked myself up.”

(3) Sadness = change

(a) 5th Grader: “When my mom and dad said Grandma has to move out, I went to my room and did my Mindful Breathing because I was sad.”

(b) 5th Grader: “When I got the news that my parents found a new home for us, but it’s in Queens so we’re going to have to leave this school, I got really sad and I cried and I did my Mindful Breathing.”

(4) Facing failure

(a) 3rd Grader: “When I failed my multiplication test, and then I went home and I was crying and I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt a little bit better.”

(5) Really painful moments of childhood

(a) 2nd Grader: “When my mom said ‘No fair, it’s your birthday and I don’t have any presents for you.’ and I was sad, and then I used my Mindful Breathing to feel better.”

(b) 3rd Grader: “I used it yesterday cuz I didn’t get that much sleep, because my mom went to the emergency room, and I didn’t want to go and I was mad

and scared and she made me go and so I did my Mindful Breathing and I fell asleep there even when I was scared.”

(c) 4th Grader: “When I was going to Connecticut I was scared because I was with my dad and not my mom, and my dad always works, so when I did my Mindful Breathing I felt a little bit better.”

(d) 5th Grader: “On Thanksgiving I wanted to go see my mom, and my Grandma didn’t have enough money to go there on the subway and come back so I went in my room and did my Mindful Breathing.”

(6) Creeped out

(a) 5th Grader: “I was creeped out at the air vent and used my Mindful Breathing actually several times.”

(7) Regret

(a) 2nd Grader: “It was my sister’s birthday party and all my aunt’s friends were there with their babies. And then we went on the trampoline with the babies and one of them bit me and I accidentally clawed him in the eye, and then I had to do my Mindful Breathing because he was crying.”

(8) Deep disappointment

(a) 4th Grader: “My father was going to return my dirt bike, since I can’t go there anymore so I did my Mindful Breathing, and I don’t know if he returned it since I can’t go there but it keeps making me feel a little better.”

(9) End of the rope

(a) 3rd Grader: “When I came out of the bathroom and my brother slapped me, and we was having pizza and he ate all my slices. Then I HAD to do my Mindful Breathing.”

(10) Pure misery

(a) 5th Grader: “It was cold and raining and I wanted to cry and we had to walk with the teacher on the trip and so I used my Mindful Breathing to feel better.”

(11) Grossed out

(a) 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my baby brother put his toy in his diaper.”

(12) Little sadness

(a) 1st Grader: “When I was sad, and then I Mindful Breathed, and then I calmed down. It happened just right now!”

(b) 5th Grader: “I went to the movies and I saw a sad movie and I started to cry. Then I breathed and I was okay.”

(c) 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing today at recess when I was going to be sad that I couldn’t get a library book, then I was still sad, then I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt a tiny better, and a little bit happy.”

(13) Boredom: when there’s nothing else to do

(a) First Grader: “I don’t have T.V., and I wound up using my Mindful Breathing.”

(14) Mixed feelings

(a) 4th Grader: “When we went to the airport to drop off my cousin and my brother was coming back so I was sad and happy all at the same time, cuz my cousin has always been there for me, and I had to use my Mindful Breathing to feel better.”

(15) Feeling trapped

(a) 2nd Grader: “At Coney Island, I went on the roller coaster, and it was going like this, and then I wanted to get off so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(16) Grief, loss

(a) 2nd Grader: “Two big dogs came in my yard and they tried to eat my dog so we had to take my dog to the dog hospital and he was okay, and then he died and so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(b) 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when we moved, and my mom said I won’t go to school here next year.”

(c) 2nd Grader: “My mom bought me a balloon and it popped and I was sad so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(d) 3rd Grader: “One day when my uncle died, his name was Uncle Mickey, I got a lot of sad so I used a lot of Mindful Breathing and then I felt just a little bit better.”

5. Emotional Handling

a) Strategy

(1) Getting out of their own way/path of least resistance

(a) 3rd Grader: “When we was playing tag, and I was confused who’s it, I used my Mindful Breathing and then I just asked ‘Who is it?’”

(2) Like a pot about to overflow, but then it doesn't (excitement)

(a) 5th Grader: "I got really excited because I had really good news and I almost couldn't breathe, so it took me like two WHOLE minutes to do my mindful breathing, and then I calmed down so I could be happy."

(3) Applied to patience, mindfulness can change how time feels

(a) 5th Grader: "I had to wait for an hour, so I did my Mindful Breathing and time flew by."

(4) A freeing up of a backed-up river (logjam)

(a) Kindergartener: "I use my mindfulness when my dad makes me really angry, and then I talk to him, and then I use my mindful breathing. And then I teach him it, and then I feel good again."

(5) Shedding what is unnecessary

(a) 4th Grader: "When I was coming home from school, I thought I saw my friend with her little sister, but it wasn't her, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I just forgot about it."

(6) Carry what I'm already carrying: deal with things as they are. Slightly different flavor than self-regulation, like the mind not getting in the way.

(a) 2nd Grader: "When my mom fell on her head, she went to the doctor, and I was scared so I did a lot of Mindful Breathing."

(b) 5th Grader: "When I saw a girl walking down the street and a man slapped her, I didn't like that so I used my Mindful Breathing to feel better."

(7) Buffer zone

(a) “Best action of the day: backstory: difficult 5th grade boy, working with a strategy to ‘ease transition’ into the library, allowing him a ‘5 minute buffer zone’ to ‘be himself’, and I look up, and this often-angry child is smiling hugely and participating in my silly mindfulness-training games from afar... seeing him shed that rough exterior (if for a moment), and seeing that smile was one of those moments that ‘makes it all worth it.’”

(8) Avert: Reorienting

(a) 2nd Grader: “When my little brother broke my punkin, I was going to break his toy, then I did my Mindful Breathing and I didn’t break it.”

b) Goal

(1) Return to baseline

(a) Kindergartener: “Well, so, my dad was joking at me, and he wouldn’t stop, and it made me madder than I’ve ever been in my whole life, and I was so angry that I stopped and did some mindful breathing in my room, and then I came back and I talked to him about why I was mad and he listened to me and I could feel more calm then to ask him not to do that.”

(2) To deal with emotional discomfort

(a) 5th Grader: “We had dinner and we met my brother’s girlfriend and I was really uncomfortable with her there with my family and so I did my Mindful Breathing when I had to sit next to her.”

(3) Navigating the mind

(a) 4th Grader: “I was having a lot of thoughts, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I ignored my mind and I kepted going.”

(4) Another place for the mad to go

(a) 3rd Grader: "When I went to get pizza with my aunt and then my sister ate all my slices and I got mad and I didn't hit her and then I felt better.

(b) 5th Grader: "I used it when I was really really really mad at my brother."

(5) The mind not getting in the way

(a) 5th Grader: "I went ice skating, and I was the first one out, and I was scared I would fall, so I used my Mindful Breathing and copied other people."

(6) Projections of the mind

(a) 3rd Grader: "Every Wednesday we watch a scary movie in October, then my mom told me it was time for bed, and I thought a guy from the movie was going to follow me, so I used my Mindful Breathing."

(7) Calm down = not an externally motivated mechanism

(a) 4th Grader: "I used my Mindful Breathing and it made my peaceful mind so I wouldn't be angry and break stuff."

(b) 1st Grader: "I use my Mindful Breathing when I am frustrated, then I calm down and I am a little calm."

(c) 2nd Grader: "When I saw my baby about to touch the mouse in the hall I got scared, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I got not-scared."

(d) 4th Grader: "I used my Mindful Breathing when I was so mad at my sister to calm down."

(8) To digest an emotion

(a) 1st Grader: "When I was mad I used my Mindful Breathing and I got happy."

c) Outcome

(1) Awareness of awareness

(a) First taste of Mindfulness (5th grader): “When we did the Mindful Listening, I felt like I could hear my body working on the inside. It was like standing in the forest near a river and hearing it but not seeing it.”

(2) Creating peace

(a) 5th Grader: “When this person was saying something mean I used my Mindful Breathing and walked away.”

(b) 4th Grader: “Me and my brothers was arguing, and we almost started fighting, and I used my Mindful Breathing and I stopped it.”

(3) Something settles

(a) “One of our most behaviorally struggling students in the school (who is a few lessons behind his class) sat there, so still, with his eyes closed, the rhythms of concentration clearly washing across his face... I could literally feel the energy around him settling. Knowing a fraction of his story, I’m convinced that in these five minutes, this child was “accomplishing” more than I’ve accomplished in five years.”

(4) Savoring/presence

(a) 5th Grader: “I was very excited that my little brother got home from the hospital, and I got to see him, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down and get ready to hold him.”

(5) The simplicity of presence

(a) 4th Grader: “My mom told me that B. was coming over for dinner, and I was so excited that I turned off the TV and looked out the window and used my Mindful Breathing.”

(6) Happiness soaks in deeper

(a) 2nd Grader: “It was my baby cousin’s birthday and I cried because I was happy and when I cried I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(b) 3rd Grader: “Today when you said you like my letter, it made me happy, so I did my Mindful Breathing to feel all the happy.”

(7) A willingness to feel feelings fully

(a) “That was happiness falling out” – In touch with the face of life.

(b) A “staying with” especially with embarrassment 5th Grader: “When my big brother was singing really loud on the train platform and he sings so bad and I was embarrassed so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(8) Deep feeling

(a) 2nd Grader: “I used it when I went to Prospect Park and I saw them cut a tree down and I felt sad and so I sat on a tree trunk and did my Mindful Breathing. Then we put rocks around it, I felt wind and nature.” – Part of the helplessness of childhood?

(9) Enjoyment

(a) 1st Grader: “It was really, really, really, really good. The Mindful Breathing.”

(10) Realization of priorities

(a) 4th Grader: “When my sister took my iPad, I used my Mindful Breathing because I was angry. Then I let her play, cuz she’s my sister after all!”

6. Emotions Toward Self (self-concept) - as a gradient

a) Confidence

(1) 3rd Grader: “Yesterday I used my Mindful Breathing because Yesterday I was going to pour some juice in my bottle, my sister said ‘no more will go in there.’ And I got mad and I did my Mindful Breathing and when she left the kitchen I felt better and I poured the juice.”

b) Emotional confidence

(1) 5th Grader: “My dad told me he was signing me up for summer camp in the DR and I got really angry, so I started crying because I didn’t want to go, so I went to my room and did some mindful breathing, then when I came out, I told my dad that I would go for two weeks instead, and the rest of the time I’m spending with him.”

c) Accessing their competency - enacting care directed towards self

(1) 2nd Grader: “I was on the top of the monkey bars, and I was so scared I would fall, but then I used my Mindful Breathing, and I didn’t fall.” Full capacity.

d) “Listening to my body,” finding the quiet place within oneself

(1) “Second grader, during their first Mindfulness lesson ever: “When I listened outside, I heard all the noise and sounds, and then when I listened in the room, I didn’t hear it so much. When I listened inside myself, all I heard was quiet.”
We’ve all got that still, quiet place inside us. No matter how loud the playground is.”

e) Homecoming

(1) First taste of Mindfulness (5th grader): “I didn’t want to stop when you said we could open our eyes. It felt really calm and I never get a chance to feel like that in my life, it was just so peaceful and I didn’t want it to end.”

7. Practice

a) Value

(1) Multi-reports = added value

(a) 3rd Grader: “I did three things. I did my Mindful Breathing when my cousin came to my house, and when he leaved, I just use my Mindful Breathing and I feel better. And I used my Mindful Eyes at the library, when I was looking for the bookshelves. And I sent kind thoughts to my mother, because she is working hard to buy my brother an iPad mini.”

(b) 5th Grader: “I used my Mindfulness three times in the last two weeks. Once because I was really sad so I started to cry, and once because my dad had lied to me and I got upset and I used my Mindful Breathing, and then yesterday I was talking on the phone to someone that I really missed, and I started to cry again, so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(2) Understanding brain science is like a doorway into deeper understanding or deeper presence with experience

(a) 4th Grader: “When my amygdala is active, everything is just black and white and that’s all there is, it’s like I can’t think.” Relevant, regardless of academic standing.

b) Continuity

(1) Continued practice is really helpful

(a) “Last month they did 100 minutes of mindful breathing as a class. It really shows: the impulsivity is lower, there’s more eye contact, there was a gentler air to the room, and even the more dysregulated children were calmer.”

(2) The drive toward practice

(a) “A 5th grade class came to the library today, and the teacher asked: “You know, we missed our daily mindfulness practice, can we do at least a minute with you?”

“Can we do 10?!!” Calls out an energetic one.

And so we sat together. And in 5+ years of teaching Mindfulness, this was the first time I sat with a group of children who were taught their mindfulness skills by someone else (their teacher). This group regularly sits 9, 10, and sometimes 15 minutes per day. It was glorious, glorious: the palpable calm, the groundedness, the skill of these young ones... the sense of presence in the room. It filled my heart like a gift.”

(3) Pervasiveness of practice

(a) 5th Grader: “Basically, I use my Mindful Breathing CONSTANTLY.”

c) The concept of “not working”

(1) The impossible: sometimes it doesn’t work

(a) 3rd Grader: “When somebody hit me and it hurt and I did my Mindful Breathing and I couldn’t hold the tears in and it didn’t work.” Increased awareness sometimes means awareness of what IS, and mindfulness cannot take away all of what is.

(2) When you even think it's not working

(a) First grader (often not paying attention during mindfulness lessons) says,

“Oh it's awesome! You get to relax your whole body and it feels really good!”

8. Soul

a) Access to other dimensions

(1) 5th Grader: “When I close my eyes and do the Mindful Breathing, my mind drifts out of my body, and I feel like I'm somewhere above like right there.” *points*

(2) 5th Grader: “I put my fingers together like you showed us you do, and first I felt like a wall - like something solid between my hands, and then it was like I couldn't feel the edge of my fingers or my hands, so I open my eyes and it stopped. So then I closed my eyes again and it felt like my whole arms melted.”

(3) 5th Grader: “When I put my fingers also like you do, my whole arms feel like there's something there.”

(4) 5th Grader: “My legs tingled that whole time. Really, the whole time.”

(5) 5th Grader: “I think I was in another dimension, it didn't feel like just my eyes closed. There was someplace else I went to.”

(6) 5th Grader: “So the top of me, and the bottom of me felt like two different pieces, or like three. I had my mind and my body and everything was separate. Like it could be apart or together.”

(7) 5th Grader: “So when we did the thing like our minds were a room, I felt like I was really able to look around the room inside my mind, like it was a real place. I could really look around at the thoughts or at the space.”

(8) 5th Grader: “So I could hear your voice, but really I didn’t hear your words at all because it was like it was coming from far away.”

b) Touching soul

(1) “It’s like we could all be old souls just in different bodies, just like in ‘Ms. Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children,’ in the third book - what it’s like for the Peculiars... maybe people are like that, too.”

B. NOW

1. Right Now

a) 2nd Grader: “Right now!”

2. Integratedness (me to them)

a) “I can see the thread of myself going forward into your life. I was waiting for a different train, and then I saw a little face... a face I’ve seen most of the weeks since it was in PreK... a now-5th-grade face I haven’t seen since June. So I got on the ‘wrong’ train.”

“Why did you leave us?” she asked, “I cried when they told us you were gone.”

“I got a new job in Brooklyn.” I told her. “I didn’t know I was going to get a new job.”

“We miss you so much,” she said.

“Did you know I made your library?” I said, “Until you get new books this year, I touched every book that’s in there. So when you miss me, just know that I touched every book!”

“Did you touch the basketball books?” (I nodded.) “So you helped me with my basketball group! I learned so much things about basketball from the books.” (She listed the things she learned, and my eyes stung with proud tears.) “Is your foot better?” she asked. “How are your new kids?” she asked.

“My foot feels much better,” I told her: “Some of the new kids behave nicely, and some of them have some real challenges.” “I like kids with challenges,” I said, “Sometimes they need a little extra love, and sometimes my heart has extra love to give.”

“I have extra challenges,” she said, “did you know that?”

“Yes,” I said with my heart, “I know that.” “Sometimes I send you kind thoughts like I taught you in Mindfulness.”

“I still use my Mindfulness,” she said, “I used it last week when a man did something inappropriate on the subway and I didn’t want to see it.”

“Did it help?”

“Yes.”

“Good, then I’m glad you still have it.”

“We miss you.”

“I miss you guys, too.”

“Don’t cry.”

“I’m not crying. Well, yes I am.”

“Do you remember when I was little and I fell asleep in your lap?” she squeezed my hand, “Don’t go, I don’t want you to leave.”

Over her head, as we spoke, I got sweet smiles of appreciation from nearby strap-hangers... She kept hugging me and hugging me - with a tremendous fierceness (which is like a shock when you don’t get many hugs) and telling me how much she missed me. This 5th grader, alone on the trains at night - it tugged my heart and I wanted to adopt her on the spot.

And then the train pulled out of the station, and the tears streamed down my cheeks. I forgot how deeply the kids nestle into your heart when you’ve known them most of their lives. I forgot that my love and care matters and made a difference. I struggled so much in other ways in that job that I forgot so much... this child: I remember some seriously defiant and concerning and even painful moments with her - and I forgot how much love is a thing you can pretend with your heart in the darkest of places, and turn around to find out all along it was real.”

3. In response to me

a) 4th Grader: “When you just yelled at me. Then I did my Mindful Breathing and now I feel better.”

b) 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I saw that you’re really bad sick right now.”

C. External

1. Parental Relationships

a) Moving toward

(1) Missing parents and wanting their love

(a) 5th Grader: “Yesterday when I called my mom to see if she’s coming back and she said she’s too busy and she’s not coming back soon and I don’t know when I’ll see her, and so I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.”

(b) 2nd Grader: “My dad was away for years and years and he was working a lot and I missed him and he’s coming home today so I used my Mindful Breathing because I can’t wait to see him.”

(2) Savoring parental pride

(a) 3rd Grader: “I sent kind thoughts to my mom, because she is very proud of me all the time, because I like to read books a lot, and she likes when I read books, because then I get smarter and smarter.”

b) Moving against

(1) Fighting with parents

(a) 4th Grader: “Mom said to go to sleep, and then we yelled at each other, and then I did my Mindful Breathing, and then she let me stay up a little longer.”

(2) Mad at not getting what the child wants from the parent

(a) 5th Grader: “We were at a water park on Memorial Day, and when my mom said we were leaving I refused to go and I got mad and my mom yelled at me and then I did my Mindful Breathing and we left okay.”

(3) Unhealthy parent interactions

(a) 3rd Grader: “Last week when my dad was yelling at me and calling me a ‘liar, liar,’ I did my Mindful Breathing and I stopped crying, and stopped thinking I was going to punch him.”

(b) 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing 15 times yesterday when my mom was cutting my hair - then she said we would go to sleep with no dinner, so I used it again.”

(c) 5th Grader: “When my dad rubbed it into my face when he beat me when we was bowling, I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

(4) Parental disagency - backed into a corner

(a) 5th Grader: “On Monday I called my mom and she asked if I wanted to go to summer school, and I said ‘no’, and then we argued, and mom told me to put the phone down, and I was so sad and angry that I cried and then I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(5) Parental fear

(a) 2nd Grader: “I used it when I was scared to say Happy Mother’s Day to my mom.”

2. Sense of Connection / Bridging

a) Feeling with

(1) Shared happiness

(a) 1st Grader: “I use my Mindful Breathing at my mommy’s house AND at my Grandma’s house, and my Grandma and my auntie and my uncle be happy.”

(2) Coregulation

(a) 3rd Grader: “When I was watching a scary movie and I was with my little sister, and then we were both scared and we used the Mindful Breathing together.”

(b) 4th Grader: “Me and my sister used it when we were really frustrated together.”

(c) 4th Grader: “When me, my mom and my brother went to this relaxing place, so we could sit down and relax, close our eyes and do Mindful Breathing, and hear everything that was happening. We did it all together.”

(d) 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my mom and I were very frustrated, and then we calmed down. I taught it to her, too.”

(3) Empathy

(a) 3rd Grader: “Other people was teasing other people and I was really sad so I did my mindful breathing and I felt better.”

(b) 3rd Grader: “When my friend got hurt I used my Mindful Breathing and asked her if she was okay, and she felt a little better.”

(c) 3rd Grader: “I felt sad for my friend, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.”

(4) Human-ing together, all in it together – boundaries between self/other dissolve slightly – experiencers of experience, Being together, glimpses of joining

(a) “One of the most incredible Mindfulness experiences I’ve had (thus far): I had four children for “Advanced Mindfulness” at recess today. We were doing a noticing practice, in a circle, around and around, the five of us practicing together. Suddenly, all of the differences between us slipped away, to the point where I can only describe: we were five humans, sitting there human-ing together.

When we stopped, I shared my experience with them - that I've never really understood how one person could be more "important" or "powerful" than another (to the point where in the past I've literally looked with confusion at a variety of people at work when they came from a stance that suggested they were at all superior. Different? Sure. Better? I don't understand.), and though I don't feel superior to them, I understand that my job is to care for children - but for those sweet moments, they weren't even children to me, they were fellow humans deeply experiencing a moment of time WITH me. And I felt so connected to them. One experiences life as a boy. One experiences a different language forefront in her mind. But this was way deeper - it was like we slipped underneath all that - way underneath age and race and gender to the commonest thing we all have: as experiencers of experience.

I said it better, to them, in the moment. And they all understood, because they all felt it, too. We were attuned to one another, sitting in that circle."

b) Generosity: making space for the other within the self

(1) 5th Grader: "I used my generosity when I used some of my money to help my little brother buy his \$50 karate shirt."

(2) 5th Grader: "I used my generosity when I gave clothes to homeless people."

c) Relational Action

(1) Growth in closeness

(a) Getting closer

(i) 5th Grader: "I wanted to tell my cousin one of my secrets, but I was scared, so I did my Mindful Breathing and then I told her."

(2) Reconnection

(a) Making the repair

(i) 4th Grader: “Me and my sister we had a fight and I was mad at her, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I apologized.”

(ii) 2nd Grader: “Last week at my Grandma’s, my baby cousin scratched me, and I accidentally poked him in the eye, then we cried, and I did my Mindful Breathing and I tried to hug him.”

(b) To apologize

(i) 2nd Grader: “When I used my Mindful Breathing, and then I apologized to my sister, she apologized back to me!”

(c) Return to connection

(i) 3rd Grader: “I used it when I was looking at pictures from my birthday and I felt excited, and then I got mad at my friend when she almost made me drop it, and she made me really mad, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I wasn’t really mad because I realized it wasn’t her fault because I’m the one who told her to come to my house.”

(d) Forgiveness

(i) 1st Grader: “When I was on vacation last Saturday and Sunday, I was at Disney, and my little sister kicked me and I fell down and I was mad, until mom said we’re sleeping at a Lego hotel and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I forgave my little sister.”

d) Warmth

(1) Heartfulness and a sense of interconnectedness feels good

(a) 5th Grader: “It wasn’t really like an image, it was more like my entire body was just saying ‘WOW!’ and ‘YES!’ as a feeling.”

(2) Savoring connection

(a) 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing because yesterday I was happy, because yesterday a new girl came in the class and I asked her do you wanna be friends, so she said yes.”

(b) 4th Grader: “When there’s a Saturday, right? When my brother come back from the hospital, I was so excited, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I was keep on hugging him.”

e) Teaching others

(1) “[Tonia] LOVES the mindfulness, too. Her little brother is 4-years-old, and she often guides him through tantrums using mindfulness. I overheard them together one day and she was saying to him: “Okay, now let your thoughts float away, and feel your breath in your belly, and take some big breaths and let your mindfulness take your tantrum away.””

(2) 5th Grader: “I was on the phone with my stepmom and I heard one of her daughters wasn’t behaving, I taught her the Mindful Breathing and she taught her so her daughter would calm down.”

(3) 3rd Grader: “When my little brother wakes up in the middle of the night and he wakes me up and bothers me and I want him to stop, then I told him to use his Mindful Breathing and I gave him a hug.”

(4) 2nd Grader: “I taught my three-year-old sister how to use Mindful Breathing.”

(5) 5th Grader: “I taught my dad how to do Mindful Breathing because he was sick and he couldn’t breathe well, so we both did Mindful Breathing together.”

(6) “Today a kindergartener I thought was non-verbal told the school guidance counselor that he felt really good when I taught his class Mindfulness. It made him feel calm, and made him feel better. Then he taught the skills he learned to the rest of his therapy group. !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

3. Modification of Interaction

a) To show up in the world in preferable ways/behaving toward the best part of ourselves

(1) 3rd Grader: “My grandma brought her friend and her friend brought her annoying grandson to Myrtle Beach, so I had to use my Mindful Breathing when I wanted to crush him for being so annoying. I’m thankful it’s there, cuz otherwise I would have gotten in trouble!”

(2) 5th Grader: “I was so mad at my Grandma, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down and be nice.”

(3) 2nd Grader: “My dad picked me up from school, we were going to the store and I got mad and I used my Mindful Breathing and I fixed my attitude and I wasn’t mad anymore.”

b) Helps function at school

(1) 3rd Grader: “I was late for the test on Tuesday, and so when I got to school I did Mindful Breathing for like ten whole seconds and then I sat down and did the test.”

(2) 3rd Grader: “I used it in class when someone was bothering me and I was trying to listen to the teachers and then I was able to do it!”

(3) 4th Grader: “When the teacher got mad at me I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

c) Refraining from hurting someone

(1) 5th Grader: “When I didn’t hurt [Jimmy], I used my Mindful Breathing so I didn’t hurt him.”

d) To want to hit, and not to hit

(1) 4th Grader: “We were on our way to Atlanta City, and my sister had nothing in her bottle and she kept crying and crying and I wanted to hit her so I used my Mindful Breathing, and then I calmed down.”

(2) 5th Grader: “My sister started to bit me, and then my hand was about to hit her and then I used my Mindful Breathing and then I didn’t.” RESTRAINT

(3) 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my sister was fighting with me, and I started hitting her, and then she hit me with a hard book on my lip, and I used my Mindful Breathing so I won’t punch her in the face.”

e) To control the self to fit what is expected

(1) 5th Grader: “When my table wanted a table square, and I was really hyper, I used my Mindful Breathing not to laugh.”

4. External Circumstances and Responsive Internal State

(a) Internal response to harm/danger

(1) Dealing with bullying

(a) 2nd Grader: “That time when a big boy said that “2nd Grade sucks” and it made me mad, because I really like 2nd Grade, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I knew the big boy was wrong and I felt better.”

(b) 3rd Grader: “I use my Mindful Breathing today in writing workshop when someone was being mean to me.”

(c) 5th Grader: “This guy who bothers me punched me and I used my Mindful Breathing and then the teacher helped me.”

(d) 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing because today, a lot of people have been telling on me and laughing at me, and then when I used my Mindful Breathing it got better.”

(2) The swirl of actions of others

(a) 2nd Grader: “I made a bowl of cereal, and my aunt took it, and I made another one, and my mom took it, and I made another one and my brother took it, so I made ANOTHER one and it fell on the floor, and I used my mindful breathing, cuz I was so sad and so hungry and I made one more and I ate it.”

(3) Dealing with the wall of life: coming up against barriers

(a) Deep unfairness

(i) 5th Grader “When I was in Las Vegas to see my baby cousin and they wouldn’t let me hold her cuz I’m a boy and I got mad and used my Mindful Breathing and calmed down.”

(b) In the face of injustice

(i) 2nd Grader “Yesterday someone dragged me on purpose and I got mad and I cried , then I used my Mindful Breathing and I didn’t hit I went to the teacher.”

(ii) 5th Grader: “Some kids were kicking me and making fun of me and I wanted to say something back and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I still said something mean but I didn’t hit them.”

(iii) 3rd Grader: “When my brother broke my computer and my mom thought it was me, and then she grounded me, and I was so, so, so mad so I did my Mindful Breathing.”

(4) When someone gives away what is mine

(a) 4th Grader: “When my dad put my brother on my bed and gave him my teddy, I was so mad I almost hit him. I did my Mindful Breathing and then I didn’t hit him.”

(5) Traumatic incidents

(a) 4th Grader: “When my afterschool was on fire I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(b) 2nd Grader: “When we were in the car we almost crashed, then I used my Mindful Breathing, and then we didn’t crash.”

(c) 3rd Grader: “When I found out my uncle was locked up, because someone blamed it on him (he really didn’t do it), I was so so mad, so I did my Mindful Breathing, and then I felt a little happy.”

(d) 4th Grader: “When my babysitter didn’t take us to the park, I turned off her computer, then she hit me, so I run out the door and use my Mindful Breathing.”

(e) 2nd Grader: “When my baby brother climbed the bedrail of my bed and got on my windowsill, I panicked, and I screamed and my big sister came to get him and I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(6) Stuck

(a) 4th Grader: “When I was stuck in an elevator I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

b) “The wisdom to know the difference”

(1) Conditions that can’t be changed

(a) 5th Grader: “On the plane, when the lady said how high in the air we were I was so scared I had to use my Mindful Breathing all the way until we got to Colorado.”

(b) Compliance

(i) 5th Grader: “When my dad told me I have to go to the doctor and maybe get a brace for my back, I got so scared I tried to run away and then I did my Mindful Breathing and then now I will go to the doctor.”

(2) Dealing with how things are when we want them to be different

(a) 2nd Grader: “When it was my brother’s birthday and I wanted to blow out the candles and I couldn’t, I was angry, so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(3) To deal with annoyance/to understand that it shifts

(a) 3rd Grader: “On Saturday we went to the pool, and my baby brother was crying and crying and I used my Mindful Breathing and he stopped crying.”

(b) 5th Grader: “On Saturday when it was too cold, [Angelo] put on the A/C, and I was so mad, I took a deep breath.”

(c) 5th Grader: “I ignored my sister when she was being mean, and I kept just doing what I was supposed to do, that’s how I used the Mindful Breathing.”

(d) 1st Grader: “When my sister was bothering me, I did my Mindful Breathing and then I felt calmer.”

(e) 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing yesterday because my sister and my brother were being annoying, so I used my Mindful Breathing and it made me feel better.”

(4) When we can’t control others

(a) 2nd Grader: “On Wednesday Claudia was my best friend, and then on Thursday she wasn’t my friend anymore, and I was sad, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I was still sad, but then I was okay.”

c) Meeting life where it is (responsive)

(1) Deal with things as they are

(a) 3rd Grader: “I was standing in the ice cream line and it was so so long and I used my Mindful Breathing and the line started to move.”

(2) Staying with what’s happening

(a) 5th Grader: “I went to my friend’s house and I was so silly happy and it was too much until I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(b) 4th Grader: “Last night when I was getting a phone, I was too excited, and I wanted to rush everything, then my dad said to use my Mindful Breathing and then I felt calm and slowed my mind down.” In a full moment, able to fully be there.

(c) 2nd Grader: “Yesterday when I was at home and it was my birthday and I was so excited we were going to Chuck E. Cheese’s and I did my Mindful Breathing and I got calmeder and calmeder.”

(d) 5th Grader: “My big sister had a baby, and I was so excited to be an uncle, that I was too excited, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

d) Magic - the seemingly impossible

(1) 2nd Grader: “When I went to my dad’s house, my dog was there, and she was a girl, and then she had babies, and one baby didn’t come out and I got so scared and sad and then I did my Mindful Breathing and the baby came out.”

(2) 5th Grader: “It was raining really hard in central park and we got soaked so I did my Mindful Breathing, and it stopped raining.”

(3) 1st Grader: “When I was in a book and there was a ninja in there. I used my Mindful Breathing and I teleported.”

5. External Experience and Internal Modification

a) Generating positive behavior

(1) Trying not to get in trouble

(a) 5th Grader: “When my dad was yelling at my sister for her homework, and I was laughing so I used my Mindful Breathing not to laugh so I wouldn’t get yelled at.”

(b) 5th Grader: “When I bumped into the wall and cracked my tooth, I thought my mom would yell at me, so I took some time for Mindful Breathing and then told her about my tooth, and she didn’t yell!”

(2) To make a productive choice/solution

(a) 4th Grader: “My sister put stickers and ponytails on my dog and I got mad because it’s not only her dog, so I did my Mindful Breathing and took it all off.”

(b) 5th Grader: “We went somewhere and I got lost, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I found my way back.”

(c) 2nd Grader: “When my little sister wouldn’t share her toys, I did my Mindful Breathing and then I played by myself with my own toys.”

(d) 3rd Grader: “Today in the morning when I checked my PlayStation, Batman was gone so I got a little bit furious - then I used my Mindful Breathing so I could put my sweatshirt on.”

(e) 5th Grader: “I got so mad in the park, I wanted to put a crater in this boy’s face, so then I did my Mindful Breathing and I asked him to go away instead.”

(f) 5th Grader: “We went to the movies and my God Brother he was so scared and he kept crying and I just wanted him to stop and I almost hit him, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I was nice to make him stop crying.”

(g) 5th Grader: “On Sunday my sister was beating me up, so I used my Mindful Breathing to stay calm and to tell my mom.”

(h) 4th Grader: “On Monday I went to an arcade with my sister, and she was bragging that she had more points than me, and I was going to start a fight, but then I used my Mindful Breathing and calmed down.”

(i) 3rd Grader: “My brother hit me in the face with a ball, and instead of hitting him back I went to my room and did my Mindful Breathing.” (this is one of our most challenging students)

b) Meeting life (generative)

(1) Changing self rather than what’s happening around oneself

(a) 5th Grader: “I was working in the garden, and there were all these little kids, and they were SO annoying, and so I used my mindful breathing to make them not annoying and I calmed down and it was fun.”

(2) Aligning with what’s happening

(a) 4th Grader: “I was so mad when it was raining outside, and we couldn’t go out and play, so the girls told me to use the mindful breathing, and I did, and then I wasn’t as mad at the rain.”

c) Internally meeting challenge (playing the ball where it lands)

(1) Being lost (can’t find mommy)

(a) 1st Grader: “I was playing on the playground and running so so fast, and then I couldn’t find my Mommy and I got really scared and I used my mindful breathing and then I found my Mommy.”

(2) To moderate the effects of a punishment

(a) 5th Grader: “When someone got me in trouble at lunch and I had to sit in the corner, I put my head down and I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt a little better.”

(b) 4th Grader: “Me and my brother share a room, and we fought over the remote and he hit me and mom put me in time out, and I got extra mad so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

d) Showing up

(1) Presence/shyness

(a) 2nd Grader: “When my Auntie got a new roommate I had to use my Mindful Breathing because I was really shy.”

(2) Performance

(a) 2nd Grader: “When it was December 15 I performed in a museum, and I had to use my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

e) Pre-meditative modification

(1) As prevention

(a) 3rd Grader: “I was at my cousin’s house, having a sleepover, and I was afraid if I rolled over and hit my sister by accident she’d push me off the bed, so I did my Mindful Breathing, and it was okay!”

(b) 5th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing *before* going in the Haunted House!”

6. Feelings Related to Others (and Internal Modulation)

a) Invisibility

(1) Feeling unseen

(a) 5th Grader: “My newborn baby sister, everyone was paying attention to her, and I went to serve the cupcakes, and I tripped and dropped them, and then my uncle knocked over the table, and everyone checked on the baby, even though she was far away and they ignored me, so I went up to my room and did my Mindful Breathing.”

(2) Feeling unwanted

(a) 2nd Grader: “Today in music someone didn’t want to be my partner and I was sad, so I sitted out and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I found a new partner.”

(b) 2nd Grader: “I wanted to play with my sister and she said no and I started to cry, and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.”

(3) Feeling left out

(a) 5th Grader: “When my mom took my big brother and my little brother with her and she left me behind I was sad, so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(b) 5th Grader: “My mom got my brother an early Christmas present, and forgot to get me one, instead of getting mad I did my Mindful Breathing.”

(c) 2nd Grader: “Lungs make you breathe, right? When my two brothers didn’t want to play with me, so I did my Mindful Breathing and then I played with my sister.”

(4) Sidelined (taking care of self while on the sideline)

(a) 4th Grader: “We went somewhere and there was a dog and the dog bit my brother’s ear and there was lots of blood and I was scared so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

(b) 3rd Grader: "I used my Mindful Breathing this weekend, I was playing in the snow with my cousin - he was on top of a big pile of snow, and he was about to do a backflip, and he hurt himself, and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt better and he was alright."

(5) When one is unheard

(a) 3rd Grader: "I used it when someone pushed me and I wanted to tell the teacher but she wasn't listening so then I just used my Mindful Breathing."

b) Visibility

(1) Happiness at being seen

(a) 3rd Grader: "My sister bought me a snack and I was so happy I use my Mindful Breathing to calm down."

c) Missing other family members

(1) 3rd Grader: "I used my Mindful Breathing because my cousin hasn't come back yet, but he might come back."

d) Fear in school

(1) 3rd Grader: "I did it at Parent/Teacher conferences when I was scared because of my grades."

(2) 5th Grader: "When I was late to hand the slip in for the trip, it was really stressful, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down."

(3) 2nd Grader: "I used my Mindful Breathing when I read a story to the whole class, and I was scared so I used my Mindful Breathing and then I read my story."

e) When you can't change a situation

(1) 5th Grader: “My friends tried to squeeze my knee and I didn’t like it - I did my Mindful Breathing and they didn’t stop, but it stopped bothering me.”

(2) 4th Grader: “Wednesday, I was mad and excited at the same time, cuz my uncle was bothering me, and he was bothering me - he bothers me every day, thinks he’s playing around, and this time I couldn’t take it, so I used my Mindful Breathing, and I was a little bit mad, and then he just stopped.”

7. Interaction with the Physical World

a) Mindful eyes

(1) Increased situational awareness

(a) 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful eyes, because I was looking for my remote, because my mom set it somewhere, and so I used my Mindful Breathing and I found it.”

(2) Literally more seeing

(a) 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Eyes when I was cleaning my room to see everything I needed to clean.”

b) Slowing down leads to mindfulness, the way mindfulness leads to slowing down

(1) 1st Grader: “I was eating so slow and then I did my mindful breathing eating.”

(2) 2nd Grader: “Every day I use my Mindful Breathing. Sometimes walking really slow, and drinking really slow, and eating really slow, and all the other ones!”

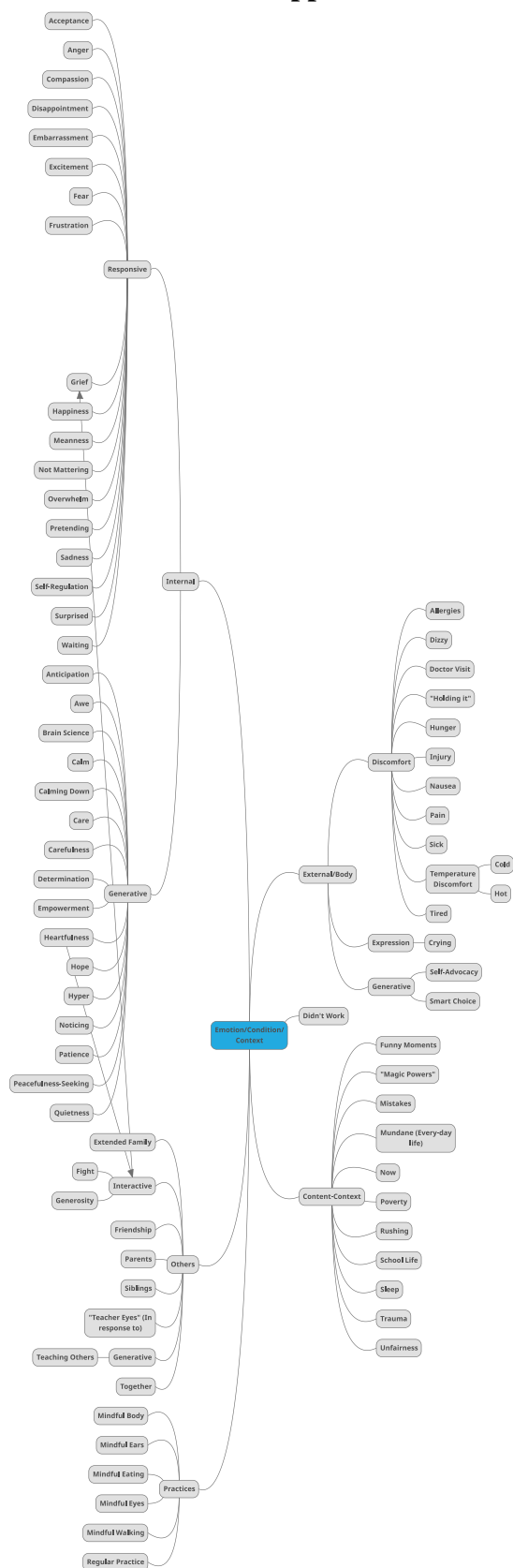
c) Appreciation of quietness

(1) 5th Grader: “Since it was so quiet I could hear the gym and feel all the vibrations in the floor. It got so quiet I felt like I could hear everything and feel everything.”

D. Miscellaneous:

1. 2nd Grader: “I used it in Pennsylvania.”
2. 1st Grader: “I Mindful Breathing on McDonalds!”
3. Kindergartener: “I was making something special in my bed and all the covers got into a pile and then it was all over the place, but I made a space to the air to make sure to do my mindful breathing.”

Appendix C: Emotion and Condition Framework



Note. View digital, full-size framework here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cvhg7Dx5ZbVhLbNg7lwrU9aVq4iSoZn2/view?usp=sharing>

Appendix D: Emotion/Condition Framework Outline

The following outline provides textual support for the experiential components outlined in Appendix C.

I. Acceptance

A. 5th Grader: “On today, when we were taking a test, and my mom said I had to get a 100, cuz I’ve had some failing grades, I took the test, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I realized maybe I would ace it or not.”

B. 5th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when it was okay to lose sometimes.”

II. Allergies

A. 5th Grader: “I was outside playing in the park and my eyes started itching, so I used my Mindful Breathing and then I felt better.”

III. Anger

A. 5th Grader: “I went to sign up for this program, and they told me there was a kid with my EXACT SAME NAME, and I got really angry that someone else has my name, so I used my mindful breathing to calm down.”

B. 4th Grader: “I used it when my face turned red and I started screaming. I used it and calmed down a little bit.”

IV. Anticipation

A. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing because I was a little bit excited because my dad gonna be here in 28 days, and then I felt calm.”

V. Awe

A. 1st Grader: “When I went to the Statue of Liverty, and it was SO big!”

VI. Brain Science

A. 1st Grader: “When I was playing that game, I used my prefrontal cortex to make a good decision so I could win!”

VII. Calm

A. Kindergartener: “After the breathes I felt really relax calm.”

VIII. Calming Down

A. 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I was angry cuz I couldn’t play tag and I went like this” *shows a deep breath* “and I calmed down.” (the class mimics this student)... “It really calms your nerves.”

IX. Care

A. 3rd Grader: “At the park by the school, my little uncle (he’s like 5 years old or something), he was going to jump off the slide and I was scared, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I told him to be careful and I took care of him.”

X. Carefulness

A. 3rd Grader: “I used Mindful Breathing at my church when the floor was just waxed and it was so slippery.”

XI. Compassion

A. 4th Grader: “I made a pigeon trap with glue, and then a pigeon came and got stuck and I was really sad for it, so I used my Mindful Breathing to figure out what to do, and then I let the bird go. I felt really bad.”

XII. Confidence

A. 5th Grader: “In bike club I was so scared to ride a bike, cuz I think I might fall, then I use my Mindful Breathing and I try it!”

XIII. Crying

A. 2nd Grader: “Yesterday when I was sleeping, I looked up at the top bed, it’s a bunk bed, and my mom wasn’t there and little tears came out of my eyes and I used my mindful breathing and I knew my mom would say that I’m a Big Girl. I’m going to rub my eyes now.”

Me: “It’s okay, you can rub your eyes.”

2nd Grader: “I’m just rubbing my eyes, I’m not crying. Stop it, water!”

XIV. Determination

A. 2nd Grader: “When I was running, and I couldn’t run no more, I used my Mindful Breathing and then I run again!”

B. 2nd Grader: “It was Mom’s birthday and I wanted to get a present but I didn’t have money so I used my Mindful Breathing and I cleaned up the apartment. And then I used my Mindful Breathing even when it was hard to clean. I even cleaned the shoes and fixed the pajamas.”

XV. Didn’t Work

A. 5th Grader: “I did it when I got mad at my customers. It didn’t really work though cuz I was still mad.”

XVI. Disappointment

A. 4th Grader: “When I saw this stuff on the internet, and I wanted to buy it and mom said no, so I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.”

B. 4th Grader: “When on Wednesday I found out that I had to do rehearsals on Saturday, Friday AND Sunday, I had to do my Mindful Breathing, because Sunday is supposed to be my relaxing day.”

XVII. Dizzy

A. 5th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I was dizzy on the train.”

XVIII. Doctor Visit

A. 5th Grader: “I went to the doctor, and I had to get three shots, and I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

XIX. Embarrassment

A. 4th Grader: “When I slipped on the floor and my cousins laughed at me, then I did my Mindful Breathing.”

B. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I used the bathroom and I peed on myself a little and then my dad fixed me.”

XX. Empowerment

A. 1st Grader: “When I fell off my scooter, I used my Mindful Breathing so then I knew I got up and I practiced!”

XXI. Excitement

A. 1st Grader: “I got so excited ‘cuz I got a new book and I used my mindful breathing!”

B. 4th Grader: “When I got my scooter on my birthday I was so excited and I ran all over the house, then I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

C. 4th Grader: “When my uncle came back from the army a few days ago, I was so excited to see him, because I haven’t seen him in so long, and I did my Mindful Breathing and I calmed down.”

XXII. Extended Family

A. 3rd Grader: “I used it two times, once at Grandma’s house on the porch in the rain with my cousin, and when I left my Grandma’s house and I was sad to go.”

XXIII. Fear

A. 1st Grader: “I was going to a scary movie, and then it made me cry so I deep breathed.”

B. 2nd Grader: “I was in the dark in my house and I had to sleep by myself and so I used my Mindful Breathing so I wasn’t scared in the dark.”

C. 5th Grader: “I went to the zoo and I didn’t want to go, and then I breathed, and then I went and I just walked past the part where I was scared.”

XXIV. Fight

A. 4th Grader: “Today at recess, it was really bad. Really something terrible almost happened. I don’t want to say it. [pause] Okay, I’ll say it. I almost had a fight. And then there was kids there, they were reminding me to do my Mindful Breathing and then I changed my mind. I was so angry and then I calmed down!”

XXV. Friendship

A. 2nd Grader: “On the way to library, my friend told me he didn’t want to be my friend and I cried and then I used my Mindful Breathing.”

B. 3rd Grader: “I sent Mindful thoughts to my friends, and it felt good.”

XXVI. Frustration

A. 5th Grader: “When I tried to teach my sister to ride a scooter I had to calm down, because it was really hard to teach her and I was really annoyed, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

XXVII. Funny Moments

A. 3rd Grader: “On Sunday I had to use my Mindful Breathing at Ikea because it was scary.”

B. 5th Grader: “This big boy, he shook his butt, and it was too crazy and we had to see it so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

XXVIII. Generosity

A. 5th Grader: "I used my generosity when I shared my food with a Homeless person."

XXIX. Grief

A. 5th Grader: "I went to the graveyard to see my cousin because he died, and I was sad so I used a lot of Mindful Breathing."

XXX. Happiness

A. 2nd Grader: "When I went to Target and I saw my friend Teagan and she said hi. And I was so happy I used my Mindful Breathing."

XXXI. Heartfulness

A. Kindergartener: "I felt like I was treating myself very very fair, like I treat other people."

B. 3rd Grader: "I sent a Mindful Thought to my cousin."

C. 5th Grader: "I was being wrapped up in big duct tape of joy with smiley faces all over it."

D. 5th Grader: "I was at a thing like a gas station, and the pump was pouring something pink directly into my heart, and that thing was my own kindness that I could share."

XXXII. "Holding it"

A. 3rd Grader: "When I was outside and I needed to use the bathroom and I couldn't, so I used my Mindful Breathing to hold it."

XXXIII. Hope

A. 3rd Grader: "I lost a bird, mom left the cage open and the window open, and we had to put up a sign for a reward so I used my Mindful Breathing."

XXXIV. Hunger

A. 4th Grader: "When I was really, really hungry, and the food wasn't ready yet, I used my Mindful Breathing and then the food was ready and I ate."

XXXV. Hyper

A. 3rd Grader: “When we were at music and our teacher picked us up and I was hyped up because the music teacher gave us a recorder I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down and walk in line.”

XXXVI. Injury

A. 1st Grader: “When I cut myself when I was playing on the playground and it hurt and Mindful Bleeding [blushing smile] I mean, I was bleeding and I had to use my Mindful BREATHING, and then my Auntie put alcohol on my booboo and it hurted more and then I used more Mindful Breathing to feel better.”

XXXVI. “Magic Powers”

A. 3rd Grader: “Yesterday when I was playing basketball, and I usually I don’t miss, and I missed a lot, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I made all the shots.”

B. 3rd Grader: “On Saturday my dad cooked, and I had to do my Mindful Breathing because he always uses too much salt, so then I did my Mindful breathing, and he did it right.”

XXXVIII. Meanness

A. 3rd Grader: “When I wanted to be mean to someone in the lunchroom and I just got quiet and I sent kind thoughts to them instead.”

XXXIX. Mindful Body

A. 1st Grader: “When I was in my friend’s car, I used... using my Mindful Body.”

XL. Mindful Ears

A. 4th Grader: “So I used the Mindful Listening this morning because I didn’t want to get in trouble - I get in trouble ALL THE TIME - so I tried to use the Mindful Listening.”

Me: “And what happened?”

4th Grader: “Well I just stopped and listened to what was happening instead of doing something and then I didn’t get in trouble.”

XLII. Mindful Eating

A. 2nd Grader: “I used it when I was eating dinner and it felt tasty good.”

XLIII. Mindful Eyes

A. 3rd Grader: “I used Mindful Eyes when I didn’t know where’s my Grandma.”

XLIV. Mindful Walking

A. 1st Grader: “When I was walking around everyplace, I use my Mindful Breathing.”

XLV. Mistakes

A. 5th Grader: “I was making oatmeal and my mom said to get the butter and I accidentally got the margarine instead and it tasted disgusting, so I had to use my Mindful Breathing.”

XLVI. Momentous Occasion

A. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing because I was a little bit excited because my dad gonna be here in 28 days, and then I felt calm.”

XLVII. Multiple-Use

A. 5th Grader: “I did Mindful Breathing twice. When I couldn’t go to bed, and it was very noisy because my baby brother was crying a lot, so I did my Mindful Breathing to help me go to sleep, and I went to this trampoline place, and I couldn’t do this rock climbing thing, it was really hard, so I did my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

XLVIII. Mundane (Every-day life)

A. 1st Grader: “I was using my Mindful Breathing, and every time I keep asking my Mommy if we can go to the Brooklyn Bridge and run, but every time she forgets when I say that, and sometimes she’s too busy doing laundry.”

XLVIII. Nausea

A. 3rd Grader: “I ate too much food yesterday, and then I almost threw up on my brother, but then I did my Mindful Breathing and I didn’t throw up.”

XLIX. Not Mattering

A. 5th Grader: “On Saturday my sister brought her dog and I was allergic, and I was so mad she brought it that I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

L. Noticing

A. 2nd Grader: “I went to a different library with my mom, and I couldn’t find a book, so I breathe in and breathe out and then I found the book.”

LI. Now

A. 3rd Grader: “I used it right now, and then I felt a lot better.”

LII. Overwhelm

A. 5th Grader: “Last night my grandpa threw up and he got dizzy, so we had to call for help and people, and there were so many people, and they took him to the hospital, and I was sad, because I didn’t want him to feel bad, so I used my Mindful Breathing when everyone was outside very loud and I just ignore them.”

LIII. Pain

A. 5th Grader: “My book bag is so heavy my neck and my shoulder hurts, so I do my Mindful Breathing when it hurts.”

LIV. Parents

A. 4th Grader: “I fell off my bunk bed, then I jumped on my parents’ bed, then I cracked my dad’s phone and then I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down, he was so mad and yelling at me.”

B. 5th Grader: “On Tuesday my mom called to say my dad is coming back and I got too excited so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

LV. Patience

A. 5th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing so I didn’t open my Christmas presents.”

LVI. Peacefulness-Seeking

A. 3rd Grader: “When my cousin’s mom got home and said, “Stop jumping,” and he was screaming and she was screaming, I did my Mindful Breathing and then I went away.”

B. 5th Grader: “On New Year’s, everybody was screaming in my ear, and I got really mad at everybody cuz they were just like shouting, so I used my Mindful Breathing, and I just calmly went to my room, and just started breathing.”

LVII. Poverty

A. 5th Grader: “When my mom said we wasn’t going to have no Christmas presents this year I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt a little better.”

LVIII. Pretending

A. 1st Grader: “I was using my Mindful Breathing, and every time I keep asking my Mommy if we can go to the Brooklyn Bridge and run, but every time she forgets when I say that, and sometimes she’s too busy doing laundry.”

LIX. Quietness

A. 2nd Grader: “I went to spy on animals in the woods, and I had to use my Mindful Breathing to stay so so quiet.”

LX. Regular Practice

A. 3rd Grader: “I did it all week at home.”

LXI. Rushing

A. 5th Grader: “The teacher was mad, and she kept blaming me with her eyes like she was looking at me, and so I did my Mindful Breathing and I kept listening to her.”

LXII. Sadness

A. “Today during some mindful breathing that I was leading a class through, I looked down and a 2nd grade boy had tears running down his face. I quietly asked him if he was okay, and he said yes, with a smile, “I’m not sad about anything, there’s just some sadness inside of me.” And I was overcome by emotion by the overcoming of emotion.”

B. 2nd Grader: “When my Grandpa was living at the Kingsborough hospital last weekend and we all had to go on the long train and my mom was crying and then we were all crying and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I was sad.”

LXIII. School Life

A. 1st Grader: “I used it when I came in school and I felt happy and good.”

B. 3rd Grader: “On Tuesday, I didn’t have money for the bookfair, and I was so upset, and then I went to the bookfair and saw all the books I couldn’t get and I was so mad, so I used my Mindful Breathing and then I just looked at the books.”

C. 5th Grader: “When we were mad when we couldn’t play outside, we sat down and did our Mindful Breathing.”

LXIV. Self-Advocacy

A. 2nd Grader: “We were playing football in my room and they kept hitting me and I got mad, and used my Mindful Breathing, and then I said, “Don’t hit me!””

LXV. Self-Regulation

A. 4th Grader: “When I got mad in Toys R Us, and I took it out on my sister, then I did my Mindful Breathing.”

B. 5th Grader: “A kid tripped me and I got so mad I was gonna bust his face, then I did my Mindful Breathing and I walked away.”

LXVI. Siblings

A. 1st Grader: “When my little sister messes with me and she gets mad, I hit her so when I do my Mindful Breathing instead I am still angry sometimes when I don’t hit her though.”

B. 2nd Grader: “This morning my little sister called me something and then I used my Mindful Breathing to feel better.”

C. 2nd Grader: “When I went to the hospital and they put something in my sister’s throat I was so scared I used my Mindful Breathing.”

D. 3rd Grader: “I sent kind thoughts to my brother when we went to urgent care because I hit him with a belt buckle and he was bleeding.”

E. 4th Grader: “When my sister hogged the computer and we were supposed to share it!”

F. 4th Grader: “My friends, we decided to exchange things with each other and my sister got mad and aggressive because she didn’t like what she got. I was afraid she was going to hurt someone so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm her down.”

G. 5th Grader: “When I was fighting with my sister and I calmed down.”

H. 5th Grader: “When my sister thought she was a barbie doll, and she hit me, I just HAD to use my Mindful Breathing.”

LXVII. Sick

A. 5th Grader: “When I was really sick and I was shivering and my mom had to rub me down, then I used my Mindful Breathing and I stopped shivering and I felt better.”

LXVIII. Sleep

A. 1st Grader: “It was too noisy so then I did my Mindful Breathing and I fell asleep in my bed.”

B. 3rd Grader: “When my nephew was crying half the night and it woke me up and I couldn’t sleep because he was so loud, and then I used my Mindful Breathing because it was hard to sleep.”

C. 5th Grader: “I had a nightmare, so I stayed up doing my mindful breathing until 3:00 AM.”

LXIX. Smart Choice

A. 3rd Grader: “When I was at the park and there were big kids, and I got hurt one time, and I used my Mindful Breathing and I didn’t go over there and I didn’t get hurt again.”

LXX. Surprised

A. 4th Grader: “When my guinea pig gave birth, I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down, because I was so surprised!”

LXXI. “Teacher Eyes” (In response to)

A. 5th Grader: “The teacher was mad, and she kept blaming me with her eyes like she was looking at me, and so I did my Mindful Breathing and I kept listening to her.”

LXXII. Teaching Others

A. 2nd Grader: “When we were at Chuck E Cheese and my uncle got so mad because he kept missing seeing Chuckie, and then he got madder and madder, and I told him to take some Mindful Breaths.”

B. 5th Grader: “I gave advice to my Dad when he got really caught up with work and he was really stressed and he did some Mindful Breathing and he felt better.”

LXXIII. Temperature Discomfort

A. Cold

1. 2nd Grader: “When I was cold I used my Mindful Breathing and I didn’t feel cold anymore.”

B. Hot

1. 2nd Grader: “When we went to lunch after gym and I was so hot, I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt a little cold.”

LXXIV. Tired

A. 4th Grader: “My cousin had a trampoline in the backyard, and she filled the bucket with like water and then the water, like it froze, so we crushed the ice, and then we took the ice out and put it on the trampoline, and we started jumping and the ice started chasing us. And then after that I was so tired, I used my Mindful Breathing.”

LXXV. Together

A. 2nd Grader: “Me and my three sisters used our Mindful Breathing to fall asleep when we stayed up after our parents went to sleep.”

LXXVI. Trauma

A. “About as real as mindfulness gets:

During a practice evacuation drill, with half our school in the gym of another school, we had a very real code blue situation (the situation was well-handled and the person is now fine).

Knowing that the medical situation was being attended to (though uncertain about the severity of the outcome!), I felt a huge surge of protectiveness/nurturing rise up - how could I silently help my scared students?

Near me was a 4th grader from one of my mindfulness classes, I bent down, put my hand on my abdomen and whispered: “You’re okay, find your breath,” and there are no words for what I saw from her and her friends other than “they dropped right in.”

Near the incident at hand were 2 of my 5th grade classes, I went over, crouched low, put a hand on my heart and one on my belly, and mouthed: “Breathe” - the kids nudged each other to look at me instead of the situation, many closed their eyes, found their anchors, and breathed with me.

I have never felt such simultaneous raw fear and concern for the one person, at the same time as the wave of the feeling of needing to help alllllllll my kids know they were safe, all at the same time.

All that adrenaline, and the instinct to ground.

So much humanness.”

LXXVII. Unfairness

A. Kindergartener: “My brother was talking and my parents already said I couldn’t talk anymore because I was supposed to be asleep. But he was talking so I said something and then my parents yelled at me and then I had to go to sleep so I needed some breath, so I breathed-ing and then I didn’t talk and I got some anger away and I went to sleep.”

LXXVIII. Waiting

A. 2nd Grader: “I can’t make a video until I’m 80 years old, so I used my Mindful Breathing to wait until I’m 80.”

Appendix E: Grade Level Features Outline with Quotations by Grade

The following outline provides textual support for the grade level features outlined in Table 2 and Figure 2.

I. Accessing Maturity: Within a child’s span of maturity, operating from more mature capabilities.

A. 3rd Grader: “I did my Mindful Breathing yesterday cuz I wanted to stay up and keep watching a show and my mommy said ‘Time to go’ and I was mad and I did my Mindful Breathing and I wasn’t mad anymore.”

B. 3rd Grader: “We were at the train, and I had to keep my brother from getting on the wrong train and I was scared so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

C. 4th Grader: “When everyone was laughing at Carnegie hall, because ‘horses say neigh’, I used it to calm down.”

D. 5th Grader: “I used it when I was going back from my cousin’s house, and I didn’t want to go home because it was really fun there, so I use my Mindful Breathing and then I went back home.”

II. “And then... and then...” (Stream-of-consciousness)

A. Kindergartener: “This friend was sleeping at my house and she was crying so much that I couldn’t sleep and then she called her Mommy to go home and I was mad and I still couldn’t sleep and I did my Mindful breathing but it didn’t work except that I wasn’t mean when my friend was sad even though I couldn’t sleep and I was tired.”

B. 1st Grader: “It was raining and I forgot my umbrella cuz Daddy kepted on rushing me, and I got mad, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I forgived him even though I got wet in the rain.”

C. 1st Grader: “When I was at home, it was time for bed, and my mom didn’t let me do yoga with her, and this morning, I was getting dressed and my sister, she didn’t let me see the paper for exercise, but I said ‘stop’, and she did it anyway, and that’s when I was using my Mindful Breathing.”

D. 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I was in the park, and my water bottle was glass, and I put my water bottle on the statue, then my friend hung it from the tree, and when I got there, there was water and broken glass. I was very mad, cuz that was actually my water bottle, and we were walking to C-town, and I was so so mad that my Amygdala turned on. I used my Mindful Breathing, but I was still mad, because my friend didn’t apologize.”

E. 3rd Grader: “When I went to Taj Mahal, my cousin came over on the second day and we played, and I used my Mindful Breathing so we started playing before I got over-excited.”

F. 3rd Grader: “I sleep in the living room, the couch is my bed and I thought a stealer was in the house so I took a broom and I hit a shadow and I thought it was somebody and I was mad and I used my Mindful Breathing to go back to sleep.”

G. 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I was at Wednesday, I was going to my cousin’s house - I was nervous, because I was going there for sleep, and I didn’t know what was going to happen, like anything could pop out, but like, I was shaking so bad, after when I play with him a while, I used my Mindful Breathing and I calmed down.”

H. 4th Grader: “When we were leaving, my sister dumped over the snake container, and all the snakes got out and then when we came home they were all in my bed, and I thought they had laid a lot of eggs but it was actually snake poop and then my mom made us get rid of the snakes and I was so mad I yelled at my sister and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I calmed down but I was still some mad.”

I. 4th Grader: “Yesterday my sister had to go to the Technology room, and she said if me and my baby brother could go to my old PreK teacher, and so I went to her class for like 20 minutes, then I was painting, and then my sister came in and I was mad cuz I didn’t get finished, and I was having too much fun, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I just left.”

J. 5th Grader: “I went to my friend’s house right, and we were playing for a while, right, and I brought my iPad with me, right, and like, well, while I was basically playing with, like, his Xbox, he was playing on my iPad, and then well, he never had an iPad before and he pressed the delete everything button in the settings, and he ended up deleting every single thing I have, except for the lame ones, and he gave me back my iPad, and I was itching to punch his face, and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I said ‘You delete everything, when I download them back, you’re gonna pay for it.’ And he did.”

K. 5th Grader: “I was in the kitchen eating watermelon, and the dog went in the chair, and the chair fell over and the watermelon fell all over my facial areas, and my face was sweet but sticky, then I run into the bathroom and dip my face in the sink, because I was too lazy to shower, and then I got some soap in my eyes, and it hurt real bad, and then I used my Mindful Breathing and felt better.”

III. Anticipation/Forethought: Application of mindfulness to the anticipation itself or intention to use mindfulness.

A. 2nd Grader: “When it was November 1 when I was eating breakfast I find out on the calendar it was Thanksgiving, and I was so excited so I used my Mindful Breathing while I was eating.”

B. 2nd Grader: “On Sunday my mom said on Wednesday I’m going to the dentist with my friend and I was so excited, I had to use my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

C. 2nd Grader: "I used my Mindful Breathing when my mom told me I was moving to New Jersey, and I was so excited, and I jumped up and down and I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down and it felt really good."

D. 3rd Grader: "Last night I did Mindful Breathing because tomorrow (which is now today!) is my birthday!"

E. 4th Grader: "Yesterday I was scared because today is my birthday, and I was scared of what the class might do, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down."

F. 5th grader: "You know, Ms. Terrizzi, I'm not feeling so well, so I'm probably going to go home really soon, because I might throw up - and when I'm there I'm probably gonna do a whole LOT of Mindfulness."

G. 5th Grader: "Yesterday we were going to sleep, and the next day woulda been my big brother's birthday, I got so excited, I couldn't go to sleep, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I went to sleep."

IV. Application to context/story: Mindfulness applied to a story or series of actions rather than to an individual condition or emotion.

A. 1st Grader: "When Grandma was cooking, I tried to steal a food, but they didn't let me, so I tip toe, but they see me, then I do my Mindful Breathing and I be patient."

B. 1st Grader: "I used it when I was sick, and then I almost feel better."

C. 2nd Grader: "When my mom said next summer we're going on a trip, I got so excited when she said I could bring a friend, then I got nervous who to pick so I did my Mindful Breathing and then I picked someone!"

D. 2nd Grader: "At the princess party we were playing simon says, and my friend's mom and her uncle were fighting screaming so much and I got mad, so I used my Mindful Breathing."

E. 3rd Grader: “When we went to North Carolina and we were staying in the RV, we got stuck, and the door wouldn’t open and it was way too hot, so I used my Mindful Breathing, and then my dad used a hammer to get us out.”

F. 3rd Grader: “I was at the skating rink, and there was this boy, right? And he couldn’t skate, every time he took a step he fell, and then every time I passed him, he smiled at me. Then I was right there and he was right there, and he came over and pushed me down, so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

G. 4th Grader: “On Friday, me and three friends had a water fight, and I took the last water balloon and threw it at my friend and he got mad, and then he snuck up on me and *I* got mad, so I did my Mindful Breathing.”

H. 5th Grader: “When I was driving to Florida, when we got there, our room got flooded, so we had to be sent to a whole nother hotel, and it was so annoying, cuz like at 11:00 at night, cuz there was so much traffic, and it was so annoying, I did my Mindful Breathing, and then the next day we ended up getting another room at the first hotel.”

I. 5th Grader: “My mom made cupcakes for the dance, and I wanted to eat one, she didn’t let me, I did my Mindful Breathing, and then I ate one, and then I ran for my life and I hid in my room and then she found me and yelled at me and I did my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

V. Being present: Staying right with what’s happening.

A. 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my mom said we’re going somewhere fun so I didn’t faint.”

B. 2nd Grader: “When I was too excited when my little sister started to crawl, I used my Mindful Breathing.”

C. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I was playing in the snow, and then I was so excited so I used my Mindful Breathing so I could play snowballs!”

D. 4th Grader: “When I got my lizard, I got so excited I had to use my Mindful Breathing. I got two fish and a lizard!”

E. 5th Grader: “When I used my Mindful Eyes, I found chocolate.”

VI. Caring for others

A. 3rd Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

B. 4th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

C. 5th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

VII. Compassion for others

A. Second Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

B. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing yesterday because people were bothering me at afterschool, and I used Mindful Breathing and they stopped bothering me, and then I sent kind thoughts to my mother, I believe it was two weeks past by, um, she got mad because we weren’t asleep, and I used my Mindful thoughts to send Kind thoughts to her and she got a little better, but not that much.”

C. 4th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

D. 5th Grader: “Yesterday my teacher started to cry, and I tried to use my Mindful Breathing to make myself not sad, but it didn’t work.” [this precipitated a whole class discussion on how sometimes the ‘mindful breathing doesn’t work’ because we really feel sad about things that make sense to feel sad about, and that’s okay.]

VIII. Concrete comparison: What mindfulness feels like.

A. 1st Grader “When I did it, it felt like I was going to sleep on the floor.”

B. 5th Grader: “On Wednesday I used my Mindful Eyes and it was like I had clean eyes.”

IX. Dealing with change/loss.

A. 2nd Grader: “This morning when I got up I couldn’t see my fish, and then when I got dressed by the window and I saw my fish at the bottom. And I started to cry, and then when we flushed her down the toilet I was sad, because she was going to have a baby, and then I never got to see her baby, so I used my Mindful Breathing to feel better.”

B. 3rd Grader: “When my friend said we can’t be friends no more, I was so sad, I did my Mindful Breathing.”

C. 3rd Grader: “When my mom left. Then I used my Mindful Breathing. I didn’t want her to leave.”

D. 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when Mom threw out all our toys.”

E. 4th Grader: “When my dad went back to work and I cried I had to use my Mindful Breathing.”

F. 5th Grader: “After the dance show I was so sad it was the last day of dance so I used my Mindful Breathing to cheer me up.”

G. 5th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when we had to leave my church.”

X. Dealing with self when can’t control others.

A. 4th Grader: “My friend played a game, and he was cheating, and I wanted him to stop cheating and I was mad, so I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better!”

B. 5th Grader: “It was my cousin’s birthday and we went ice skating, and my mom was taking forever to go, and I was very hyper and happy, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

XI. Dealing with what is (often with an inability to change it).

A. 1st Grader: “When I was at Grandma’s and I was afraid of my best buddy Gomez jumping on me, so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

B. 2nd Grader: “When my baby brother was biting me like kkkhhh, and I used my Mindful Breathing, but he didn’t stop biting me.”

C. 2nd Grader: “I used it on Monday at Grandma’s. I wanted to use my auntie’s kindle, but it was dead so I was sad, so she charged it and I used my Mindful Breathing.”

D. 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my sister, she’s 30, was driving too fast and I thought she was going to crash and my baby sister was crying and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I calmed down and she slowed down.”

E. 2nd Grader: “I went to Coney Island, and I drunk the salt water, and it tasted disgusting so I had to go get juice. So I used my Mindful Breathing because it was just so gross.”

F. 2nd Grader: “When I lost my tooth, and then I put it under my pillow, and when I woke up it was still there and there was a note from the tooth fairy saying she was being chased by zombies. Then I was sad and I had to use my Mindful Breathing.”

G. 3rd Grader: “I saw a cat stuck on a gate, so I did my Mindful Breathing because I couldn’t help it.”

H. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing because my baby cousin was about to fall because she was on her crib, and her crib tipped over, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I put it back to normal.”

I. 4th Grader: “I was in the tunnel at the science place, and they turned the lights out, and I was scared, and then I used my Mindful Breathing to find my way out.”

J. 5th Grader: “I was mad that the break was gonna be over so I was mad all over the place, then I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

K. 5th Grader: “I went to a strange place, and I didn’t like it there so I used my mindful breathing.”

XII. Delaying gratification.

A. 4th Grader: “When I was on the computer, looking at something, my mom said turn it off, and I didn’t want to turn it off because I was still looking for a phone that I can have when I’m twelve, so I did my Mindful Breathing and my mom said I can keep looking tomorrow morning.”

B. 5th Grader: “My dad put workers in the house, and then because they were fixing the water there was no pipes, and I couldn’t use the bathroom or wash my hands so I had to use my Mindful Breathing.”

XIII. Depth of emotion.

A. Second Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

B. 3rd Grader: “I was sending kind thoughts to my father, because I want to go where he lives and play with him cuz I never see him.”

C. 4th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

D. 5th Grader: “I was watching a really sad video and then I started crying, so then I started doing my Mindful Breathing.”

XIV. Empowering: Finding/utilizing the capable part of the self, often with confidence.

A. 1st Grader: “When I was in afterschool I did my Mindful Breathing and I was rockstar of the day!”

B. 1st Grader: “In Karate I had to chop a board and it was so so hard but I did my Mindful Breathing and I chopped it!”

C. 3rd Grader: “On Spring break my Aunt and my mom and my sister and me, we went roller skating, and I didn’t know how to get the rollerblades to go and then I used my Mindful Breathing when I thought I was going to fall, and I didn’t!”

D. 3rd Grader: “When my brother threw a curve ball, I used my Mindful Breathing, and I almost hit it out of the park.”

E. 3rd Grader: “On the half-a-day I had to take my baby cousin off of my bunk bed and I was so scared so I used my Mindful Breathing and he was okay.”

F. 4th Grader: “I was playing chess with my friend, and he was about to beat me, and then I used my Mindful Breathing and just found a move, there’s two pawns here and then the queen was trapped in the middle, and I just moved and then I won him.”

G. 4th Grader: “Last night I was racing with my brother and I kept losing and losing, then I used my Mindful Breathing and then I calmed down and ran faster!”

H. 5th Grader: “When I was ziplining I was afraid that it would break and I would fall in the ocean so I did my Mindful Breathing and then I did the ziplining!”

XV. Facing life’s bigness.

A. 3rd Grader: “When the doctor said something bad was inside my body I was really really scared and so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

B. 4th Grader: “On Monday I went to the heart doctor, and when they put the stickers on me, and I was so, so scared and I told my dad ‘I don’t want to be here. I don’t want to be here.’ and then I did my Mindful Breathing and everything went fine and it was fun!”

C. 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my Aunt said I couldn’t go to her wedding, because it was on a school day, and it was in the morning, not the night time, and I got sad, and I used my Mindful Breathing to calm me down.”

D. 4th Grader: “When my cousin came over and I didn’t like him - he used to lock me in his room, and this time he played basketball with my brother and I was jealous, so I used my Mindful Breathing.”

E. 5th Grader: “Something bad happened to me and I was crying, I did my Mindful Breathing but I still cried.”

F. 5th Grader: “When my dad got in contact with me, I used my Mindful Breathing because I miss him so much.”

G. 5th Grader: “My mom got electrocuted and I was really really scared, so I did my Mindful Breathing and then I was a little bit okay even though it was scary.”

XVI. Focus.

A. 1st Grader: “When I was playing ping pong with my dad, I kepted on missing and I used my Mindful Breathing and then I kepted on hitting it.”

B. 2nd Grader: “I got excited when it was Thanksgiving and it was all different kinds of foods so I used my Mindful Breathing so I could eat!”

C. 3rd Grader: “During math time kids was chit-chatting and I got angry and used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

D. 4th Grader: “I was practicing baseball, and I was on the mound, and I was practicing hitting the target, and I used my Mindful Breathing and I aimed, and I hit the target.”

E. 5th Grader: “On Saturday we went to the wrestling tournament and I was so nervous. I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down to focus.”

XVII. For results: Intentional use of mindfulness to achieve a desired result.

A. 1st Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing every day yesterday and I felt SO happy!”

B. 1st Grader: “When I was brushing my teeth, and it just got cleaner!”

C. 1st Grader: “Yesterday in the park I used my Mindful Breathing and it maked me faster.”

D. 1st Grader: “When I was playing hide and go seek, and then I found my brother!”

E. 2nd Grader: “In karate class, when we did the running part, I did my Mindful Breathing, and then I wasn’t tired.”

F. 2nd Grader: “In ballet class when I was doing this stretch, when I did my Mindful Breathing it didn’t hurt.”

G. 3rd Grader: “On Saturday I lost my baseball game and I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

H. 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I was climbing a tree, and I got scared of heights, I used my Mindful Breathing to calm so I can climb down.”

I. 4th Grader: “When I had the hiccups, and the Mindful Breathing got rided of them!”

J. 5th Grader: “It was yesterday when my head started hurting a lot, and I started to cry and I just did my Mindful Breathing and then I stopped crying and just kept my head down.”

XVIII. Frustration/discomfort tolerance.

A. 2nd Grader: “At home I was always so frustrated to have to go somewhere so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down when my mom said that.”

B. 3rd Grader: “My mother and me and my sister were going somewhere I thought would be scary, then I was mad, so I did my Mindful Breathing, and I felt better.”

C. 4th Grader: “When I went to Dorney park, and there was a long line, and I got really angry so I used my Mindful Breathing to just breathe while I waited.”

D. 4th Grader: “I got frustrated when I was looking for a picture and I couldn’t find it and I got more and more and more frustrated, then I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.”

E. 5th Grader: “When I couldn’t use my master lock that they gave us for middle school, I had to use my Mindful Breathing to calm my anger down.”

XIX. General: Simple phrasing of application to condition.

A. 1st Grader: “When I’m mad or somebody bothers me or even when I’m sad.”

B. 1st Grader: “I did my Mindful Breathing on Sunday and it made me feel really relaxed.”

C. 2nd Grader: “I used it when I was scared in the shower.”

D. 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my mom took me to the hospital to see my other mommy had a baby.”

E. 3rd Grader: “I used it when I was in the house by myself, I used my Mindful Breathing and it felt very good.”

F. 4th Grader: “When my mom went with me to buy a cake, I had to use my Mindful Breathing!”

G. 5th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing for my anger issues.”

XX. Grief.

A. 2nd Grader: “When I went to see my Great-Grandma in the hospital and I found out she stopped breathing for 30 minutes and part of her brain shut down and she’s only gonna live for a little bit, because her brain needs oxygen, and I was sad, because she made funny jokes and tried to give me money - even though I never took it - and I used my Mindful Breathing because I’m sad she’s going to go away in a few days, 2 or 3.”

B. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when someone spilled my dog’s ashes cuz he’s dead.”

C. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I missed my uncle who died, and then I felt better.”

D. 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my pet tarantula died.”

E. 5th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

XXI. Hopefulness.

A. 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing on the phone, because my mommy lives in Queens and I want to visit her. I did some Mindful Breathing and I asked my mommy if I could visit and she said she’ll think about it!”

B. 3rd Grader: “I didn’t have anything to play with, and then my Grandma found my cousin’s DS, so I use my Mindful Breathing so I can think about keeping it forever.”

C. 4th Grader: “When I went to the joint hospital, and I was scared of bad news, and then I used my Mindful Breathing and everything was okay!”

D. 5th Grader: “When I was at the doctor, I was scared I would need a back brace, so I did my Mindful Breathing and she said I didn’t need it right now.”

XXII. Imaginative /different syntax.

A. Kindergarten: “So happy, like really beautiful flower happy.”

B. Kindergarten: “After the breathes I felt really relax calm.”

C. Kindergarten: “I felt really resting.”

D. Kindergarten: “So calmful.”

E. “I taught “Heartfulness” to a Kindergarten class today, and after sending kind thoughts to herself, one little voice shared:

‘I felt like the sky.’”

XXIII. Increased awareness.

A. 3rd Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

B. 4th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

C. 5th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

XXIV. In relational connection (with/to – not reaction).

A. 3rd Grader: “I use my Mindful Breathing today when I was trying to give you a good day.”

B. 3rd Grader: “I sent my Mindful thoughts to you!”

C. 3rd Grader: “I sent kind thoughts to my Daddy and he felt happy.”

D. 4th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

XXV. Language/entering their world.

A. Kindergarten: “After a mindful body scan with kindergarten: (Note: This interaction takes place with a wiggly kid who kept talking when I would have rather he listened...)”

Me: “What did you notice?”

Child: *what I heard* “It felt like my head was in poop.”

Me: *clarification* “What was that?”

Child: *what I heard* “it felt like my head was in poop.”

Me: *feeling a swell of frustration, working to keep my voice soft* “Huh, interesting, tell me more about that.”

Child: “It was like the ocean, like the pool.”

Me: *now, unfeigned fascination* “Why was that?”

Child: “It felt like all the light. Like the sun was on my face.”

Whew. Careful about believing that the wiggly non-listener isn’t GETTING it. Completely.”

B. 2nd Grader: “My mom is doing something, then me and my brother is in my friend house and then my mom comes want to eat, and my brother go back home, and my mom tried to come to go, then I like, feet out, then my mom fall on the ground, then my brother head like

so, like hurt, and I used my Mindful Breathing, then my mom tell my friend mom then we go home, then I used my Mindful Breathing, then I not scared of my brother hit his head anymore.” [so proud of this child for being brave and using her new English skills!]

XXVI. Listening to body.

A. Me: “Who used their Mindful Listening since I last saw you?”

5th Grader: “I noticed that whenever I tried to slouch down I remembered and immediately sat up with my slinky spine and then it got easier because my body wanted to sit up straight!”

Me: “Awesome report, I love how excited you were to share it... but do you remember the question I just asked?”

5th Grader: “Yeah...” *sheepish grin* “you asked if we used our Mindful Listening...”

Me: *Nodding*

5th Grader: “I did! I was listening to my body!”

Me: *Throwing my hands up* “Amazing. Just amazing.”

Just Amazing.”

XXVII. Makes sense to them, but not necessarily to me.

A. 1st Grader: “When we went to the park with D. and Daddy and K. and me didn’t even bring our backpacks, so we did Mindful Breathing!”

B. 1st Grader: “When we took my dog to the vet so he doesn’t smell like popcorn anymore!”

C. 1st Grader: “I was playing with my eyeballs and in the park, and my Mindful Breathing.”

D. 2nd Grader: “I was using my Mindful Breaving at my home, and I got a little bit nervous, before, then I forgot what happened.”

E. 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful eyes when I saw that I’m a lion, and then that’s it.”

F. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing 3 times - One, when I accidentally spilled my soda on the stairs right next to his recorder where he would record stuff, my second one is last night, because I usually sleep with my mom, but she went to a casino, so then my dad, he he, he, saw his computer, and then he remembered, and he smelled one of his foods and then he, um, he, he ran to get it, and he usually wears slippers, but he forgot to put it on, and then he see it, and nothing happened, and then when he went back we heard something pop, and it was actually exploded, and the lid fell on the floor. And the last one... I forgot what my last one.”

G. 4th Grader: “My dog was being too loud, so shoved him in the doghouse and nailed the doghouse shut.” [kids make faces] “What? It’s not like I hit him, I wouldn’t hurt an animal!” {pause} so then I heard my dog inside crying and I knew I was in trouble when I saw my mom. She was mad so I used my Mindful Breathing and then my dad took the nails out of the doghouse.”

H. 4th Grader: “When we were walking home from school yesterday my Grandma touched a squirrel’s tail, and then the squirrel ran past me and touched my leg and it was so awkward and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I totally forgot about it.”

I. 4th Grader: “When I didn’t feel so well, I used it because if I ate a little piece of broccoli, then my head wouldn’t hurt.”

J. 5th Grader: “I used it when all these weird, odd Ms. Terrizzis went up there and were impostors.”

XXVIII. Making connections: between concepts or experiences.

A. Kindergartener: “Reading chapter books is like mindfulness. You have to focus on the intention.”

B. 1st Grader, after calling out: “Oh my goodness! My amygdala just called out!”

C. 2nd Grader: “I did exactly what she did.”

D. 3rd Grader: “This morning I woke up feeling sick and my mom made me take medicine. I thought I was going to throw up. Mom told me to breathe in and out and I said that’s what we do in library, and then she said to do what we do in library!”

E. 4th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

F. 5th Grader: “In chorus we did some breathing and it was just like Mindful Breathing.”

XXIX. Making wise choices.

A. 2nd Grader: “I was playing on the swings and then my mom told me I had to go to Afterschool, and I screamed at her, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I said ‘Oops, I can’t yell at her!’”

B. 3rd Grader: “I said something mean to my aunt, and then I did my Mindful Breathing, I felt better, and then I went out of my room and I gave her a hug and kiss.”

C. 4th Grader: “When I went online on my phone to see what I wanted to get my mother for mother’s day, and I found a ring or a bracelet, and it was fifty dollars, so I couldn’t get it, so I did my Mindful Breathing and decided to make a bracelet.”

D. 4th Grader: “I fell the other night, and it didn’t hurt, but when I saw blood I used my Mindful Breathing and I went home.”

E. 5th Grader: “I was playing a snowboarding game, and then the next day I went snowboarding with my uncles and cousins and I tried to do the tricks that I did in the game, but I couldn’t do it and I did my Mindful Breathing and I just did something regular.”

XXX. Managing content in the mind.

A. 2nd Grader: “When I watched a scary movie, it was about a long time ago, it was non-fiction, and it was the Japanese people killing Chinese people, and then I went to sleep and there was a nightmare and then I did my mindful breathing and I still knew it was a nightmare but also it wouldn’t come true. [this child is Chinese]”

B. 2nd Grader: “When me and my sister were thinking of how to scare my mom and dad and sisters on Halloween night, I got scared thinking about how to scare them, and then I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

C. 4th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

D. 5th Grader: “At recess a person who was crazy and was ripping his clothes was on the street and I was scared I would see him when I walk home later, so I used my Mindful Breathing, and then I felt okay.”

E. 5th Grader: “When I felt like I was going to be kidnapped, then I used my Mindful Breathing and no one took me and I got home.”

F. 5th Grader: “I was nervous about a big test, and I couldn’t stop thinking about it, and I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.”

XXXI. Miscellaneous.

A. Kindergartener: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

B. 1st Grader: “I did it when I was going someplace special, I forgot where.”

C. 2nd Grader: “When I babysat 8 babies, and I had to change their diapers, and it was so stinky! Then I used my Mindful Breathing.”

D. 3rd Grader: “I used it two times. One is when my cousin you see, three times. One is when my cousin came to my house, and I didn’t know it, so then I used my Mindful Breathing and I told him what was going on when he was there the last day, he came that day

before. My second time is when I... it was today, this morning, when my dad said every time I said a game, my dad said I could download it. And today there was a discount on my PS3 and he said it ended, and I didn't know that, so then I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt better."

E. 4th Grader: "I used it when my mom bought me a new shirt."

F. 4th Grader: "There was a cat licking my ice cream, and I got so mad that the only thing I did was my Mindful Breathing."

G. 5th Grader: "When I was dressed up like a chicken I had to do my Mindful Breathing to ignore the laughers."

H. 5th Grader: "I was sick and I had been flowing [sic] up and I used my Mindful Breathing to fall asleep."

XXXII. Most of "X" Category: High prevalence in these categories:

A. 1st Grade: Most of "Noticing/Awe" Category

B. 2nd Grade: Most of "Fear" Category

C. 3rd Grade: Most of "Pain/Physical" Category

D. 4th Grade: Most of "Anger" / "Disappointment" / "Excitement" Categories

E. 5th Grade: Most of "Frustration" Category

XXXIII. Open to learning how the world works: Learning and immediately applying.

A. Kindergarten: "A kindergarten kid hit his head, I saw it happen, and he came to me screaming "It hurts! It hurts! It hurts!" I had him take three deep breaths with me, and then he said, "Hey, it feels better!" and ran off. I don't know this little guy's whole life story, but I know he's got a lot of challenges and often has really difficult behavior and dirty clothing... But there's more cuz then this happened:

ANOTHER little boy hit his head and came over crying, and I hadn't even gotten there yet when Boy #1 rubbed his back and said: "Here, take three deep breaths with me, ready:

One...hhhhhhh, two, hhhhhh, three, hhhhhh - are you feeling better now?"

I've already rewritten my story in my mind about this little boy, and it STARTS with compassion."

XXXIV. Perspective/letting things go.

A. 4th Grader: "On Tuesday I went to the library and I borrow some books, and when I went out someone pushed me, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I just let it go."

B. 4th Grader: "I was going to the shower, and I come back, and my brother's supposed to clean the floor and swept the floor, but he didn't, he just watched iPad so I got mad and I used my Mindful Breathing and just let it go."

C. 5th Grader: "When I was getting yelled at because my shoe broke at school. See, then I went home and my Grandma yelled and yelled at me, and I used my Mindful Breathing and I forgot about it."

XXXV. Presence (description).

A. 1st Grader, after trying Mindful Breathing for the first time: "I felt a lot of things. Like soft stuff, and calm."

B. 1st Grader: "This morning while I was looking out the window I used my Mindful Breathing."

C. 1st Grader: "I did it and it was so fun, it was like a field trip in my mind!"

D. 1st Grader: "I was at home and I was breathing in and breathing out, it was good."

E. 1st Grader: "When I did it, it felt like I was on the moon, and it felt cool."

F. 1st Grader: "When we got here I was doing my Mindful Breathing right now."

G. 2nd Grader: "I used it when I was playing my toy, it felt fun!"

H. 5th Grader: "I felt like I was a king, because I got respected."

I. 5th Grader: "Nice, cool and steady, relaxed, kindness."

XXXVI. Preventative: To prevent an unwanted action.

A. 1st Grader: "When I wanted to hit my brother with my pillow, I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down."

B. 2nd Grader: "I dropped juice and the glass broke and I was really scared that my mom would be mad. So I did my Mindful Breathing and then I cleaned it up carefully and my mom came and she saw and she wasn't mad."

C. 2nd Grader: "My brother was hitting me, and I wanted to hit him back, but when I used my Mindful Breathing, I didn't hit him."

D. 3rd Grader: "We were at my aunt's house, and then my sister came there, and I thought something bad was going to happen because she was there, and then she was crying and then I did my Mindful Breathing and nothing bad happened."

E. 3rd Grader: "At my cousin's house I was about to jump off the bed, and I used my Mindful Breathing, and I didn't fall."

F. 4th Grader: "It was like a few weeks ago, and I had to dance at my cousin's sweet 16 party, and I was really nervous, cuz if I mess up everything was going to get messed up, so then I used my Mindful Breathing and I didn't mess up."

G. 4th Grader: "I used my Mindful Breathing so I wouldn't be afeared when the haunted house was scary."

H. 5th Grader: "In the dance show I did my Mindful Breathing before the show and it worked a little bit."

XXXVII. Regular use: Consistent use or practice.

- A. 2nd Grader: “I use my Mindful Breathing when I’m scared of the dark every day and then when I use it I feel better.”
- B. 3rd Grader: “When someone made me mad, I used it, and then they made me mad again, so I used it again.”
- C. 3rd Grader: “I use it every day and it feels really good.”
- D. 3rd Grader: “I was practicing it for today with my jar of water crystals, I sat on my bed and practiced my Mindful Breathing for library.”
- E. 4th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.
- F. 5th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

XXXVIII. Relationship with self.

- A. 4th Grader: “I used it when I got mad at myself.”
- B. 5th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

XXXIX. Remove from distressing situation.

- A. 2nd Grader: “I got upset so I went to my Grandma’s room to use my Mindful Breathing.”
- B. 2nd Grader: “I used... my auntie made me really mad, so I walked away and I used my Mindful Breathing.”
- C. 3rd Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.
- D. 4th Grader: “In hockey, the ball whacked me in the thumb, and I got a bad bruise so I was like ‘AAAAAHHHHH!!!’ and I went to took a break and I used my Mindful Breathing and it didn’t hurt no more.”
- E. 5th Grader: “Um, I got mad at my dad, and I also got frustrated, so I went to my room and did my Mindful Breathing and I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt calm.”

F. 5th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I was having an argument, and then I walked away instead of hitting them.”

XL. Savoring: /appreciating.

A. 2nd Grader: “When my mom and dad didn’t have to work for one day which was Thanksgiving I was so happy I used my Mindful Breathing.”

B. 3rd Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

C. 4th Grader: “When it was my birthday, and my dad was home, so I had lots of food on the table, and I was so excited, I used my Mindful Breathing.”

D. 5th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing this week on New Year’s Eve, I got to see Taylor Swift perform in Times Square and I was very excited.”

E. 5th Grader: “I did Mindful Eating with candy to make the flavor last longer.”

XLI. Self-Advocacy.

A. Kindergartener: “I was forewarned of a Kindergartener (with multiple diagnoses)’s state of dysregulation as the class came in. We did our mindfulness and then took our deep breaths, and then this child asked for two more deep breaths. Absolutely. And afterward I expressed my gratitude.”

B. Second Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

C. 3rd Grader: “When we was running in the sprinklers last night, then my mom said we had to go, and I started crying, and then Mom said that I’m a baby, and I was so mad, and I did my Mindful Breathing, and I felt better, and then my mom said I’m not a baby.”

D. 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my cousin was pulling my hair, and I was mad at her, and I told her to stop, so then I did my Mindful Breathing and I wasn’t mad at her.”

E. 5th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

XLII. Self-regulation.

A. 2nd Grader: “At the Puerto Rican parade, cuz I couldn’t go, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I feel better.”

B. 2nd Grader: “This morning we was watching Aladdin, and I screamed and I was really embarrassed, so then I used my Mindful Breathing.”

C. 2nd Grader: “I went to my cousin’s house and he said I was going to see a friend I didn’t see in a long, long, long time and I used my mindful breathing so I wouldn’t get too much excited!”

D. 3rd Grader: “On Saturday we won our game, but I struck out, so I was so so mad, so I did my Mindful Breathing!”

E. 3rd Grader: “When I woke up, because I didn’t know where I was, because I was under the blanket so I got scared until I used my Mindful Breathing.”

F. 3rd Grader: “When I got mad I kicked the wall and then I cried and then I kicked the wall again and then I ran around like crazy, and then I did my Mindful Breathing and I calmed down.”

G. 4th Grader: “I didn’t finish my ELA test, and I got really sad and angry so I used my mindful breathing.”

H. 4th Grader: “Yesterday when I went to the doctor and had a lot of toys and I had to calm down, I used my mindful breathing.”

I. 5th Grader: “When graduation got changed I got scared that mom wouldn’t come, so I started panicking, so I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

J. 5th Grader: “When my teacher said things and I heard everyone laughing at me, and my friend told me to use my Mindful Breathing to feel better and it worked.”

XLIII. Self-soothing.

A. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing the day after New Years, because my friend pushed me and I got mad and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.”

B. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when my mom yelled at me and I was about to cry.”

C. 3rd Grader: “Our mother had to hit us when we didn’t go to bed, so I was crying and then I used my Mindful Breathing to feel better.” [Please note that I followed up appropriately with this child, and that everything is okay!]

D. 4th Grader: “When it was time to leave I fell on the floor and got embarrassed, so I used my Mindful Breathing and felt better.”

E. 4th Grader: “When I was playing with my dad, and he was only chasing my brother, and I got mad, and my brother pushed me down, so I used my trip around my body [body scan] in order to feel better.”

F. 4th Grader: “My dad made me get in the car, and I really wanted to walk to school, and then he yelled at me and made me, so I did my Mindful Breathing in the car.”

G. 4th Grader: “A couple days ago my dad was leaving and I was crying, cuz we don’t see each other so often, so I did my Mindful Breathing and then I felt a little better.”

H. 5th Grader: “When I went to the doctor and I had a blood extraction, I had to keep my Mindful Breathing on and I didn’t cry.”

XLIV. Sharing with others.

A. Kindergartener: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

B. 1st Grader: “When I went to my cousin’s house and I teached her, and she did it all by herself!”

C. 2nd Grader: “When my sister and I were laughing a lot we used our Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

D. 2nd Grader: “On my birthday my sister got scared because we went to the Bronx, cuz my friend made a haunted house for my birthday, and my sister thought the monsters was real but they wasn’t. She cried to death. Then I told her to use her Mindful Breathing.”

E. 3rd Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

F. 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I was, one time, my dog ran out of my house, and I was chasing after it, past my house, past the street, and it stopped at a snowy place. And when he ran out I got a little freaked out so I used my Mindful Breathing. And I told my mom about it, and she used her Mindful Breathing too.”

G. 5th Grader: “I used my Mindfulness at Six Flags last week... My friend had never been on a roller coaster before, and we started with the scariest one, and so we used the body scan and we could feel the wind rushing past the skin on our arms, and how tight our hands were holding on, and then how much we were screaming. Then we used our Mindful Breathing even though we were scared to try to put our hands up in the air like everyone else. I think it really calmed her down.”

XLV. Shift gears: To change what is happening either in the mind or in action.

A. 2nd Grader: “When I was reading, mom said to stop and I didn’t want to, so I had to use my Mindful Breathing.”

B. 2nd Grader: “When my mom told me to calm down, I didn’t know how, and so I used my Mindful Breathing and then I calmed down.”

C. 3rd Grader: “I was mad, and thinking of hurting my friend, when I did Mindful Breathing and I stopped thinking of hurting them.”

D. 4th Grader: “Yesterday during chess club when I was versing my friend in chess, we were playing the gambit and I didn’t really know what to do, and I just played a move, and he took my queen, and I used my Mindful Breathing to not get mad, and I forfeited.”

E. 5th Grader: “I was ice skating, I fell down on the ice and I hurt my knee, instead of getting mad, I did my Mindful Breathing, I got up, and I had fun!”

XLVI. Shifting to wanting: Turning an unwanted situation all the way into a wanted one.

A. 4th Grader: “Today I didn’t feel like going to school, and I realized my teacher would miss me, so I used my Mindful Breathing and then I wanted to go to school.” [Me: “You know who else would miss you?” Child: “You!”]

B. 4th Grader: “When I had to go back to Staten Island, and then I had to get up really early, and so I didn’t want to go because I was tired - so I did my Mindful Breathing and then I wanted to go!”

C. 5th Grader: “Last time when one of my cousins came over, she was being really annoying and I was trying to play a game, and when she came into the room, she said: ‘can I play, can I play, can I play,’ and I said ‘no’ but she always keeps on asking, so I used my Mindful Breathing and I let her play.”

XLVII. Soul talk.

A. 5th Grader: “Ms. Terrizzi! Ms. Terrizzi! Yesterday when you taught us Mindfulness I looked out of my spirit’s eyes and I saw I was floating in an empty, black shell - like the shell was my body outside and my spirit was separate, inside. And then when I listened inside my body again, it felt like my eyes were going deeper into it.”

B. (Same Child, Another day)

Child: “So last Friday I got a minor concussion - don’t worry, I’m okay - and I had to just relax a bit so I did the body scan to feel the parts of my body, and the first time I did it, I truly felt the Fire of Life!”

Me: “Is that a good thing or a bad thing?”

Child: “Obviously it’s a good thing, I felt what it was like to be filled up with the feeling of being alive - like touching life itself!” [thoughtful pause] “Then I did it a second time, and this time I felt the ice of life... I didn’t like that at all!”

XLVIII. Stick-with-it: Staying with an action/responsibility even when it is undesirable.

A. Second Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

B. 3rd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I need to do my homework, and I got mad, but then when I went back to school, I didn’t have to do none of it on recess, so then I felt better.”

C. 4th Grader: “I use Mindful Breathing yesterday when we did the fun run and I was so so tired, and then when I did it I wasn’t so tired anymore.”

D. 5th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when someone ice skated over my hand, and then I ice skated for two more hours.”

XLIX. To see clearly what’s in front of one: To see a situation as it is/to see what’s truly in a situation.

A. 3rd Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

B. 4th Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing on Saturday when I went sledding, I mean on Tuesday, and I was going down this steep hill, I was afraid I was going to crash into somebody or crash into a tree - and then I used my Mindful Breathing and I steered the sled.”

C. 5th Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

L. Use to not repeat a mistake.

A. 3rd Grader: Evidence offered in previously shared quotation.

B. 4th Grader: “When I was coloring and my brother colored on the wall, and then he hit me, and I hit my brother, I did my Mindful Breathing, and the second time I didn’t hit him.”

C. 5th Grader: “Last Saturday I was playing with my iPad, and my iPad just won’t load, and I’ve been waiting like 5 minutes, 10 minutes and like, ‘Oh my God!’ I smashed my iPad, and it got a crack, and before I could smash it again and completely break the screen, I used my Mindful Breathing and I was like ‘You know what? Screw this iPad, I’m just gonna use another one.’”

LI. When -> then.

A. 1st Grader: “When I got angry and I used it and I calmed down.”

B. 1st Grader: “When we went to visit my Grandma, and her baby threw garbage sauce at me, then I did my Mindful Breathing.”

C. 1st Grader: “When I’m sleeping, then I went waked up! And what? And then I did my mindful breathing, and then there was no more scared!”

D. 2nd Grader: “When I was mad I actually - - I was mad at my brother and I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down and it felt better.”

E. 2nd Grader: “When my mom said we’ll go to a real restaurant I was so excited I did my Mindful Breathing.”

F. 2nd Grader: “I used my Mindful Breathing when I went to Hawaii because I was really excited, and I jumped up and down when I came to Hawaii and also I lived near the sea when I went to Hawaii, and I used my Mindful Breathing to calm down.”

G. 3rd Grader: “When I fell and my friend, he laughed at me, and then the coach helped me, so I did my Mindful Breathing and I felt better.”

H. 4th Grader: “When me and S. went to the movies and then I was so too excited I used my Mindful Breathing.”

I. 5th Grader: “When I jumped off the top of a sailboat and I was scared and I took a deep breath and then I jumped I wasn’t so scared.”

Figure 4c

Relational Word Cloud 3

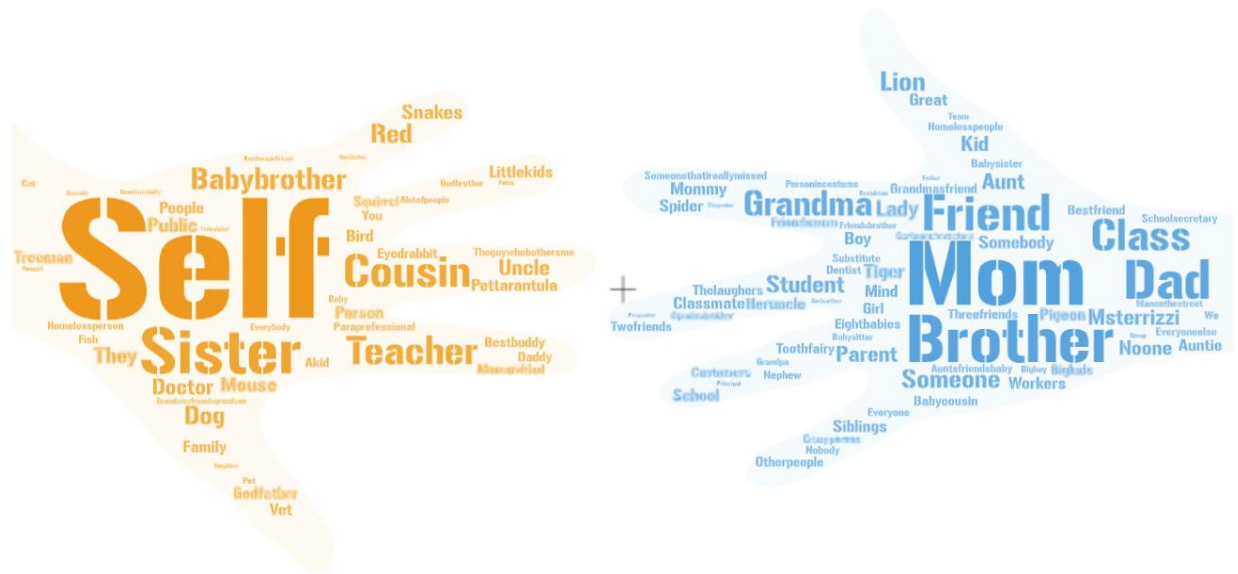
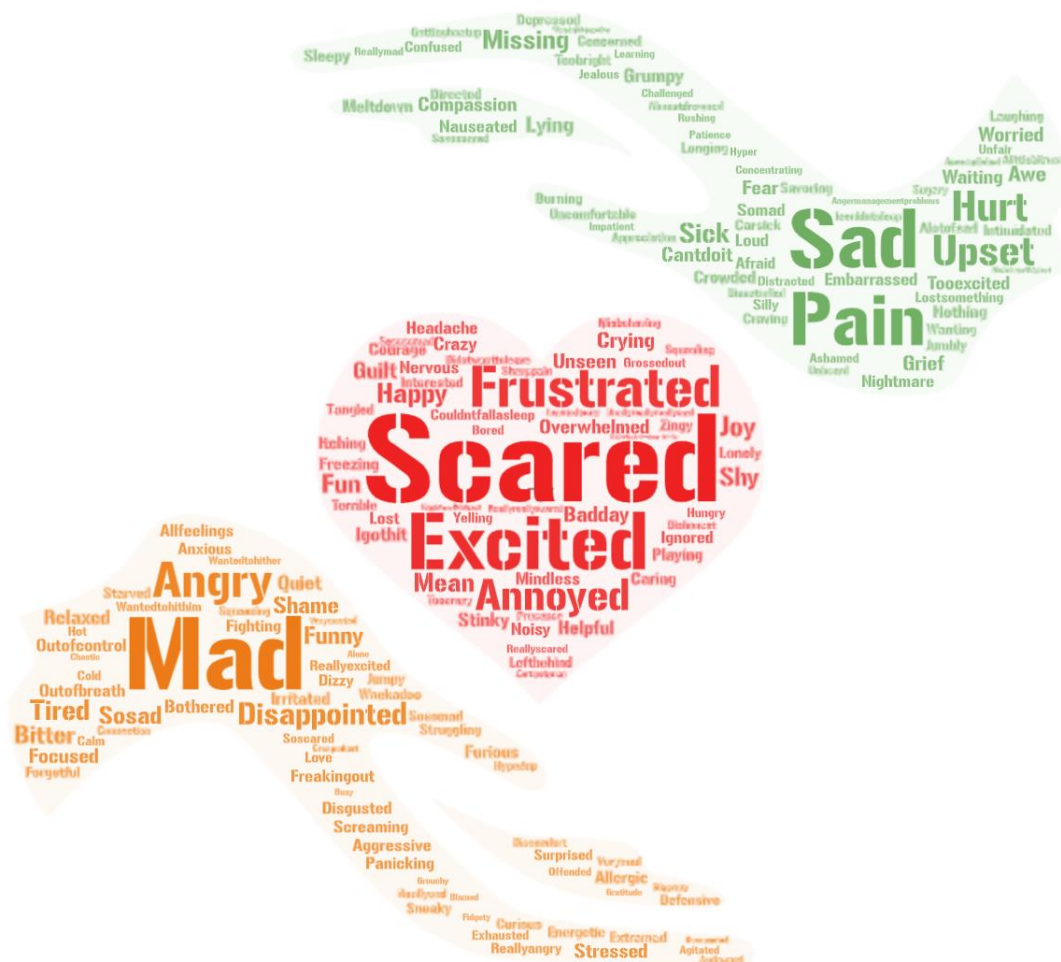


Figure 5c

Emotion/Condition Word Cloud 3



Appendix G: Personal Teaching Notes Poem

I comprised this poem solely of words used verbatim from my teaching notes.

Gazing at the Horizon

Opportunity

Me, standing in my professional integrity

believing in the power

of this work and

living it, living it, living it,

and

surrendering, surrendering

(more layers than I knew I had!).

I am so lucky to be

standing in the right place at the right time,

open-handed

and able to offer an open heart

to help nurture this process along.

I am not *doing* this,

I am *part of* this –

and for that, my gratitude is immeasurable:

one of my dreams is

coming true before my very eyes.

This dream's got wings and it's gonna fly -
and, I think I need to dream even bigger...

Seeing this work in action
in communal dynamics
is so inspiring,
and gives me hope about possibilities
for the world we all share.
We *can* get out of our own way,
and let what we need to say shine through.
I only wish I could start every morning
with a microphone in my hand,
and the opportunity to say:
"I believe in all of you."

Groups were capped at 10 participants.
I had 22 show up.
I've never felt so calmly, deeply
excited-and-I've-totally-got-this!
Hang onto your hats, guys,
it's about to get real mindful all up in here!

Strategy

Now, you can take your breath with you.

How many breaths per mile you breathe:

This may lead to

feeling mesmerized as to the

largeness/smallness of the world,

and to the depth of

a mile-long breath.

After the umpty-teenth-ish breath

a tiny gap of space appeared

in the blanket of overwhelm,

and in that moment I could clearly see

that the frustration was not-me.

And that tiny gap of internal space

reminded me that it would pass.

Emotion

If I could describe my feeling

it would be:

a softness of calm,

with a dash of stillness,

the thrill of connection
and meaning,
and a flavor of hope
I've never tasted before!
It feels like when you get home
and finally you relax into the couch
and think "I'm home" –
it's that feeling
plus
feeling clear, focused, happyish, and
relaxedly okay.

I don't have words
for the power of this interaction,
for how completely it filled me
with life-ness,
or for the myriad ways
my heart melted open.
It's like the world whispering:
"I love you, keep growing."

The volume has been turned up
on my heart,

the moments are more mine
and when they open their eyes,
it feels like beginning all over
at a new beginning
it almost feels like magic,
my eyes are nearly tumbling over with tears.

Shift

My senses hyper-tuned
to everything around me,
knowing that nothing around me
had in fact changed,
only my heightened awareness of it
(and the space between me and the perceived 'it')
was different.

This is not a head-in-the-clouds
kind of flightiness –
my life still has huge challenges
and areas of deep heartbreak
(these, having carved my soul into
a bowl-like shape
that can hold so much more) –

but even these have shed
at least a thin layer of unpleasantness
along the way.

I'm incredibly grateful for this.

It turns out that it's softening ME,
somehow paving over my wariness
and frustration
and exhaustion;
extreme frustration prickling inside me,
transformed into a thing that smiles
and achieves my goals with the kids.
How clear it is that right now:
this is really helping.

Result

How I got through today:
breath by breath,
by breath.
Sweetness and resilience poured out of me –
meeting the kids right where they were,
and being kind to myself...

When I asked them what the experience felt like to them,
one kid answered:

“Safe.”

Without even expecting it to be there,
the well inside me is much deeper than I thought.

I did my Mindful Breathing,
and just did the very next thing.
Out pour soft words and sweetness,
compassion you can almost taste
like a dance almost –
and it all comes out so genuine,
so natural -
like a good friend
you haven't seen in a while,
it comes to visit more and more
and more often.

That's what it feels like:
like opening your mouth and
your best self shows up to talk.
sayin', "Hey world, look at this aliveness!"

Edges softened,

everything feels clearer,
I was almost mesmerized
by how my mind stayed so even -
I (sometimes!) am able to
just float right along with whatever happens,
it's like choosing to be more alive -
I felt the sweet delight of: "Oh, there you are!"

Daily commitment to this practice
hasn't changed my life:
it's changed ME –
I can literally feel my brain responding differently
every single day.
The anger slipped off and
in five or so minutes
I was authentically wishing
happiness,
health,
safety,
peace,
and strength
to this person.
You see, turning the power of our hearts to others is so moving.

And turning our kindness onto ourselves?
that uncharted territory is ripe for the tender heart.

Factors

Knowing that people are REALLY listening
makes all the difference -
there is nothing that fills me
with tingling joy of aliveness
as much as hearing someone
speak their Truth and
their Experience
We - all of us –
have far greater capacity
than we can possibly imagine.

I

The answer to that is
a more resounding,
deeply heartfelt
yes
than that child could ever imagine.

I think my Mindfulness is showing
awarefully (mindfully)
I'm the one
tapping into
a lot of mindful breathing -
how amazingly
we somehow know what we need,
even when it's difficult for us.

You

Do you know how to shine?
You have a lot more in you than you ever realized.
You managed to make a light thing.

Interactive

It's thrilling to share your passion
with just about anyone -
sometimes you teach the thing you most need to hear.
My greatest teachers are
a fraction of my age.

They remind me to always
keep on
keep on
keep on growing.

Bring your full self, kid,
bring your full self.
I think life is *so* much better
when the Tired Black Octopus
and the Angry Blue Crocodile
(who are already there, of course)
are invited to dance with all the kiddos
(and with the Happy Pink Octopus, too).

Nothing changed around me,
my afternoon kids were both
as sweet and
as challenging
as my morning kids,
but it was like exchanging a
slip-sliding-roller-blade mind
for a
rugged-pair-of-grippy-hiking-boots mind.

“Take three deep breaths with me.”

After all these months of practicing,

I got the glinty joy-eyes from them

and *wordlessly*

(like we were in on the same secret)

we all shaped up -

them and me,

together.

One big deep together-breath

whispering through the room

then something beautiful happened

(like a springtime leaf unfurling from a bud) –

after each page

the silence just dropped in,

and we hung out in it

together.

I totally basked in it

with them,

keeping count and

sharing so much delight.

Really guys, really:

the way words swing through the air and

land in everyone's ears all at once
all of them leaning forward
to see if we'll be able to hold onto the silence...
there's something really nice about
moments carved out of silence,
and sharing a story together.

When you speak loudly enough,
people you don't even know
can hear your deepest message.
That's something I'd choose
over many 'luxuries' in life:
just hearing another person's truth,
having the opportunity
to *really* listen.

And the sweetness
of being *truly* listened to...
so rare and incomparable...
I don't have words enough
to hold the weightless relief in that –
in just how much it does make
all the difference.

People tell the most incredible stories

when you listen.

Let everyone have the opportunity
to be *seen*.

“I really like myself!” is said
more than 2,000 times
in my library
by hundreds of kids
each week.

I offer them this to believe in:
words that build a self
that can float
on the harder times in life –
words that I wish,
more than any other words,
I had had the opportunity to sing
into the shape of belief
in my own childhood.
I wish I could always give them
what they really need.
I wish we all could.

Two things:

1) When you've lived your whole life
with the people who had
a lifetime of opportunities to believe in you
actively doing the opposite,
you doubt this,
and it can crack you with gratitude that
someone so removed
from your daily sphere
can see you in your light.

2) No one's dreams come true
in isolation,
there are big, believing hearts
pulling strings all around us.

Believing in someone
more than they believe in themselves,
and leading them there
over and
over and
over and
over again
Holding them up,
but not too tightly,

so they can learn
to balance on their own...
Knowing they can, and
knowing they can, and
knowing they can,
even when they don't know it themselves.

And so I walk with them
to the edge of their fear,
knowing that
when they pick both feet up
off the solid ground they trust so well,
they will indeed be able to fly.
And they *do*.

I felt the grounding,
the deep sense of being
firmly okay in the moment,
to fill me up, and fill my voice with
the hopes of that exact thought
reaching my students' ears.
Seriously, it's like harmony
with the intention to

connect and be real and human.

Hey kid: you warm my heart,

simply because you exist.

I'm reminded of

the slowness of the heart opening:

smile by smile,

child by child,

moment by moment.

I was overwhelmed with

a huge surge of love for

all of those kids I threw my heart and soul into

Librarianing and Mindfulnessing

for seven years.

My heart...

I didn't realize how much it had grown!

And right now?

I miss my old students,

and wish every one of them the best,

from the tippy toes of my heart.

Wishing

Every morning I ask for
“just enough love for today.”

Just to give it all away.

I wish I could be as
present and savvy
with my internal vulnerabilities
as I was with these external ones
trying to find some small
aspect of human experience
within it to enjoy.

To untie the knots of my personality,
to find calm places,
to learn reacting in a different way...

I feel so alive
when I teach this work.

The child who is
me-as-a-kid
who so quietly
and unassumingly
needs the power of this work
in his/her life.

My wish for you:
find *your* way
to benefit the world
that makes you feel this alive,
and throw your whole heart into it.
Letting whatever happened to happen.

If only I had these tools
as a child,
instead of forming the armor
of habitual reactions
to all the aching
life brings along the way.
I can only hope
these tools are sinking into your habits,
such that when life comes in big waves,
you are able to breathe,
and be,
and let life wash through you.

Gratitude

There was nothing sweeter

to be mindful about
at that moment!
I was able to touch,
beneath the veil of unpleasantness,
a deeper gratitude.

This day was utterly filled
with sweet joy
and absolute presence.
it's been an honor,
a delight,
and a real opportunity for growth...

Being able to witness these
moments of these children
touching their own humanness
is one of the greatest gifts in my life.

If there's any one thing I'm
proud and grateful for,
it's this –
and the way it's tremendously impacted
my ability to *give*.

I delivered what I believe to be

my highest quality of giving
to each of them.
With the openest palms of my heart,
I gave them the groundingest grounding I could:
whether you get what you want
or not,
you are lovable,
and can have a happy and fulfilled life.
And no matter what: you will still be breathing.

Increased Awareness

Sometimes the moments are absolutely magical.

What was in front of my eyes was vastly superior
to my expectations of these kids
(and worlds upon worlds more pleasant
than what I was allowing in my own mind),
so I took a mindfulness lesson from them this time:
I found my anchor,
I breathed with them,
and let myself see what was right with the world.
To give *at least* as much attention

(and inner appreciation!)
to 'what's right' as I do
to 'what's wrong.'
To see it with my eyes,
to spend a moment savoring it,
and only then to figure out where to go from there.

These gratitudes were the minorest of flashes,
enough to know that neither experience
was fully unpleasant-colored.
This morning was not marred.

Sometimes,
being that vulnerable,
you feel the world so much more
and watch that great show of being-human.

I love when the world gets magical like that.

And I wondered:

What is a river?

Is it the water?

But the water moves away

and becomes part of something else.

Is it the carved-out bank?

But that is earth, eroding –

how can it be river?

It's this (right now).

And then the next moment.

And the next moment.

And the next moment.

Right now

I'm simply basking

in the total unremarkable normalness

of a day of life.

There's a neutrality

in just this moment,

and then just this one,

and then just this one,

and then just this one,

that kind of just *is* life.

That balance thing,

it's somewhere inside,

in the middle.

I thought that was where all the magic was,
accomplishing, well... the art of nothing

Today there is an added layer of sweetness,
that I kind of want to hold onto.

So I'll hold it right now.

And tomorrow? I let go.

I don't get to keep them,

but I did get to savor all the sweetness

of that moment in time,

knowing its ephemerality,

and letting in all that accomplishment and joy –

something I could soak up for a long, long time.

I love when the world gets magical like that.