2019

A Phenomenological Investigation of Mindfulness Practice Through the Lived Experiences of Secondary Educators

Karen H. Styers
Gardner-Webb University

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE THROUGH THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY EDUCATORS

By
Karen Hanauer Styers

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2019

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Karen Styers under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Morgan Blanton, Ed.D. Committee Chair	Date
James Palermo, Ed.D. Committee Member	Date
Shannon Peeples, Ed.D. Committee Member	Date
Prince Bull, Ph.D. Dean of the School of Education	Date

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is the collective effort of many and would not have been possible without the love and support of my family. To my husband Ron Styers; parents Ken and Sheila Hanauer; Nathan, Caleb, and Christian Wray; Ashley Styers; and Kaylee, Lance, and Berkeley Cibik (my precious granddaughter), I love each of you and will be forever grateful that my lifelong dream to pursue a doctoral degree has been fulfilled. There were days when I longed to spend time with each of you but knew that I needed to keep the momentum and spend the day researching and writing. You graciously allowed me to chase my dream; and without all your support, patience, and understanding, this dream of mine would have been deferred forever. To my husband Ron, you have been an absolute fortress throughout this whole process. I cannot thank you enough for the way you have taken care of me – your delicious homecooked meals have kept me nourished on this journey. Most of all, you have nourished my soul with your love and abiding support through every twist and turn.

To my beloved roommates Shanna and Marlene, I will always be thankful for the time well spent with you both – weekend road trips to Goldsboro for class, giant cupcakes from Bake My Day Bakery, Target, the Towne's Place, and the mall on Berkeley Boulevard will never been the same! To Molly, I am grateful that our friendship blossomed and that we have been able to support one another through this process.

To Dr. Morgan Blanton, my amazing and supportive dissertation chair, I thank you for believing in me and in my study. To Dr. James Palermo and Dr. Shannon Peeples, thank you for being a part of my committee and making this process as seamless

as possible. To Dr. Karen Bluth, thank you for supporting me from the moment I sent you an email about my desire to conduct a phenomenological study on mindfulness. I will be forever grateful for your expertise and feedback on my dissertation. Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank Dr. Brenda Nelson for giving me the idea and the inspiration to conduct a phenomenological study. It has been a glorious journey!

Abstract

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE THROUGH THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY EDUCATORS. Styers, Karen Hanauer, 2019: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

Teacher burnout and stress are at an all-time high. The teaching profession is reported to be one of the most stressful occupations, especially in 21st century learning environments. The researcher discovered mindfulness and was amazed how this practice allowed her to "breathe" through the difficult and challenging moments. Inspired by her own mindfulness practice, the researcher wanted to discover if mindfulness was as powerful a tool to other mindfulness teachers and educators. This phenomenological investigation explored the lived experiences of 11 secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners. Through carefully constructed open-ended questions, the researcher was able to delve into the participants' history, present lived experiences, and the meaning they attached to those experiences. The in-depth interviews were analyzed for common themes. The overarching theme revealed that mindfulness means creating a safe place for individuals to express, explore, and expound upon personal struggles. Several interwoven themes uncovered that mindfulness educators do the heart work and can suspend judgment where compassion and empathy can overflow and influence students and colleagues. The implication for this study is that mindfulness is an intervention for reducing teacher burnout/stress and can positively influence the culture of a school.

Keywords: mindfulness practice, secondary educators, stress, teacher burnout, compassion, empathy, suspend judgment

Table of Contents

Page

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
- Introduction 1
- Statement of the Problem 2
- The Mindfulness Construct 6
- Purpose Statement 7
- Theoretical Framework 8
- Research Question 11
- Definition of Terms 11
- Summary 14

Chapter 2: Literature Review 15
- Overview 15
- Mindfulness 16
- Mindfulness Practice 20
- Research on Practicing Mindfulness 22
- Research on Mindfulness in Education 26
- Summary 30

Chapter 3: Methodology 31
- Introduction 31
- The Case for a Qualitative Study 31
- Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry 33
- Phenomenology 35
- Overview of the Research Design 37
- Participants 38
- Data Collection 43
- Data Analysis 46
- Limitations 49
- Delimitations 50
- Addressing Internal/External Validity, Reliability, and Objectivity 51
- Initial Postreflection Statement 55
- Summary 57

Chapter 4: Findings 58
- Purpose of the Study 58
- Participant Profiles 60
- Pilot Interview with Alex 61
- Reflections on Pilot Interview 67
- Martha 68
- John 71
- Rose 74
- Lana 78
- Carla 82
- Carmen 87
- Jen 91
- Kendra 95
- Suzanne 99

Debbie 103
Participants' Summary 108
Findings 108
Initial Reasons to Explore Mindfulness Practices 109
Supporting Themes 114
Summary 119
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions 120
Brief Overview 120
Data Collection 121
Data Analysis 121
Overall Findings 123
Mindfulness as Intervention to Reduce Teacher Burnout/Stress 123
Mindfulness as Means from Improving School Culture 126
Limitations 128
Implications for Future Research 128
Final Reflections 130
References 131
Appendices
A Bridling Journal 144
B IRB Approval Letter 151
C Permission Email from Dr. Frias 153
D Dr. Frias's Interview Questions 155
E Sample Email for Member Checking 157
Tables
1 Interview Questions 45
2 Provisions to Address Guba's Four Criteria for Trustworthiness 52
3 Participants for Mindfulness Study 61
Figures
1 A Phenomenological Matrix of Mindfulness Related Practices 10
2 A Mindfulness Practice Space 60

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In 2008, I was diagnosed with a life-threatening heart condition and my middle son was diagnosed with an incurable disease. As a single mom to three boys struggling to make a living as a middle school teacher, I had a serious decision to make. Should I walk away from my beloved teaching profession? I could try to get disability; and if I was unsuccessful, I could find a nice, quiet desk job. After reflecting and considering my options, I decided to continue teaching, hoping I would learn to live with my new normal. Unfortunately, my heart condition worsened; and during the summer of 2015, I found it difficult to walk up a flight of stairs without getting dizzy and out of breath. I returned to my cardiologist; and after some testing, he informed me that I would need a life-saving open heart surgery. It was during this extremely difficult season in my life that I stumbled upon a book entitled *Teach, Breathe, Learn: Mindfulness in and out of the Classroom* by Srinivasan (2014). The title intrigued me, especially the "breathe" part. "What does breathing have to do with teaching and learning," I wondered. The author quoted Palmer (1998):

> Good teachers share one trait: they are truly present in the classroom, deeply engaged with their students and their subject… [They] are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students, so their students can learn to weave a world for themselves. The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts. (p. 27)

This quote inspired me, and I viewed it as a sign that my life and career were far from over! Open heart surgery would give me a new lease on life, both physically and

metaphorically. Stumbling upon Srinivasan's book on mindfulness opened my heart and mind to a whole new way of living and teaching.

Simply stated, "Mindfulness is a way of being aware of what is happening within us and around us with a clear focus of attention on moment-to-moment experience that enables us to be fully present in life" (Jennings, 2015, p. i). Over the last 3 years, my personal mindfulness practice has transformed the way I teach. Two years ago, I started sharing my practice with my students during Mindfulness Mondays. I discovered that students looked forward to Mondays; but most of all, I noticed that I was less stressed and reactionary, which was positively flowing into the classroom climate. Although mindfulness in the field of education is relatively new, research is already supporting what thousands of educators are experiencing firsthand. According to Rechtschaffen (2015), "For teachers, mindfulness reduces stress, helps them focus, and makes them happier" (p. 3). Experiencing the difference of a mindfulness practice made me realize that my preservice education courses prepared me for many important teacher tasks and responsibilities but not how to manage the stress of being an educator.

Since this qualitative study was conceptualized from my personal mindfulness experience and practice, I will use the first-person point of view instead of "the researcher." As stated by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), "Qualitative research tends to be a rather *writerly* activity; this requires a willingness to use the first-person" (p. 41). It should be noted, however, that when I am making generalizable statements from expert sources, I will use the generic term researcher.

Statement of the Problem

Twenty-first century educational environments are becoming ever more

demanding. "Increasing stresses placed on teachers and support staff, coupled with social and economic pressures, have brought new challenges to family life" (Hanh & and Weare, 2017, p. xxxi); thus, changes in society and family settings have contributed to changes in early childhood experiences, contributing to altered brain development and traumatic stress (Solomon & Siegel, 2004). Students who suffer from developmental trauma will find it difficult to focus and learn, especially in an environment where the teacher is stressed, burned out, anxious, and reactive. According to Nakazawa (2015), "When teachers stay mindful and calm, even when kids show behavioral or other problems, they are better able to create a safe environment for their students" (p. 225). Although teachers and support staff cannot fix the traumatic home environments of students, they can interact with students in a compassionate and empathic manner. Robert Whitaker, a pediatrician and professor of pediatrics and public health at Temple University stated,

> The presence or connection with other adults who can help make sense of the meaning of one's life in the context of suffering helps a child become resilient. It's essential to have a compassionate response from a person with whom the child feels safe. (Nakazawa, 2015, p. 225)

Although the present landscape for educators seems daunting, a personal mindfulness practice has the propensity to offset the stress, anxiety, and possible burnout from the field of education.

According to the National Union of Teachers (2013), stress reported in the teaching profession is substantially higher than the workplace average, as 89% of teachers experience stress, anxiety, and depression at their vocations, with 50% feeling

extreme stress. Weare (2014) stated,

> Teaching is the second most stressed profession, second only to ambulance driving. One in three teachers take sick leave annually, and more than half consider leaving the profession as a result of work-related stress. These stress levels appear to be rising inexorably year after year and their human consequences for physical and mental health are serious and wide-ranging: teachers have an increased risk of suicide and premature death. (p. 9)

Why is the teaching profession rated as one of the most stressful jobs? Some have theorized that it is due to working with 30 or more students at once, while others say it is the uncertainties, vicissitudes, and attention-intensive nature where teachers must make hundreds of split-second decisions a day (Roeser et al., 2013). According to Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2018), "The teacher's work environment is marked by incessant psychological encounters" (p. 26). Within the time span of a normal 60- to 90-minute class period, secondary teachers are instructing, redirecting, observing, and assessing 30 or more students nonstop and repeating this process with a total of 100-150 students per day. As if just fulfilling the teaching responsibilities was not enough, Garrett (2006) explained that students have always carried their physical ailments to school, such as broken bones, headaches, and respiratory illnesses. In addition, teachers are required "to make accommodations for students with such conditions as autism, attention deficit disorder, and the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome" (Garrett, 2006, p. 12).

Moreover, there has been a decline in teacher job satisfaction, which appears to be connected to high stress levels. In 2013, according to *The MetLife Survey of the*

American Teacher (MetLife, 2013), teacher satisfaction had declined 23% since 2008. Additionally, 51% of teachers reported high stress levels several days a week, and only 2% reported that they did not view their teaching jobs as stressful (MetLife, 2013).

While the teaching profession has always been stressful, 21st century learning environments have become even more complex. As stated by Lucas (2018), "The teaching profession has become more challenging in the past three decades. Students are coming to school unprepared, exhibiting major behavior issues as early as preschool" (p. 16). This combination initiates a spiraling effect where classroom management becomes problematic, the classroom climate becomes less than optimal, and teachers become emotionally worn down. Teachers who are burned out are less likely to show empathy toward their students and have less tolerance for disruptive behavior (Lucas, 2018).

To assume that only teachers are at risk for experiencing stress and burnout would be a misnomer and a grave oversight to the vital role that the support staff play in the lives of students. School social workers, psychologists, and administrators have numerous opportunities throughout their day to interact with students. Moreover, a recent study at Michigan State University examined survey data from 171 novice teachers and 289 veteran educators at 10 school districts across the Midwest (Kim, Youngs, & Franks, 2017). Their findings suggested that individual teacher burnout reflects the broader school context, especially as it reflects in school resource and support levels. Teacher burnout, according to Kim et al. (2017), is more of a communal concern that has its roots in the organizational culture of the school; therefore, this study sought to understand the lived experiences of secondary educators: teachers, social workers, administrators, counselors, and psychologists.

The Mindfulness Construct

While researching mindfulness from a contextual behavioral science perspective, I sought to clearly define the construct of mindfulness; however, because the literature on mindfulness spans a broad spectrum of approaches and research agendas, a consensual definition of mindfulness was difficult to decipher. The multitudinous definitions of mindfulness found throughout the literature can create more confusion than clarity (Lutz, Amishi, Dunne, & Saron, 2015). Mindfulness as a contemplative practice originated in the realms of religion and spirituality, not in behavior science (Brown, Creswell, & Ryan, 2015); however, even within the various Buddhist traditions, there are disagreements concerning the nature of mindfulness that have been a topic of debate for centuries (Lutz et al., 2015). In the secular realm, mindfulness is researched and examined through multiple domains or subdisciplines, which can create further confusion. According to Lutz et al. (2015), "Some of these subdisciplines include cognitive neuroscience, developmental psychology, positive psychology, clinical and health psychology, psychiatry, preventive medicine, and education" (p. 2). After seeking out and deconstructing many definitional constructs for mindfulness, I was fortunate to discover a meaning of mindfulness via the lens of psychology, cognitive, and affective neuroscience. For the purposes of this phenomenological study on the lived experiences of secondary educators who self-identify as having a mindfulness practice, I operationalized "mindfulness practice" as the following: A mindfulness practice is the embodiment of a variety of cognitive processes which are contextually embedded in multifaceted approaches, purposes, and motivations that contribute to states that resemble one another along well-defined phenomenological dimensions (Lutz, et al., 2015). This

comprehensive definition allowed me the opportunity to accept all secondary educators who self-identity as mindfulness practitioners. In utilizing this comprehensive definition, I maintained an openness to the lived experiences of my participants whose practices were developed in varying contexts broader than clinical medicine, psychology, neuroscience, or religion (Lutz et al., 2015).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice. Current studies have indicated that mindfulness training can promote perceptual changes in teacher mindfulness and attention regulation along with reductions in job stress and burnout (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Roeser et al., 2013). Most of the studies have only used self-report questionnaires to measure the scope of an individual's mindfulness practice, which are not necessarily situated within the context of the educational setting (Rickert, 2016). According to Dr. Karen Bluth (personal communication, June 18, 2018), an associate professor at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and author of books on mindfulness, there needs to be more data via phenomenological studies on the lived experiences of educators who practice mindfulness. Presently, there is little research that explores the lived experiences of teachers and support staff who have a personal mindfulness practice and how that transfers to their work life. According to the Mind and Life Education Research Network's (MLERN, 2012) article, the authors propose that future mindfulness in education studies should focus on whether the skills learned in a contemplative practice, such as mindfulness, transfer to 21st century educational settings. Furthermore, research

should focus on what factors facilitate or inhibit the transfer into the context of schools. Therefore, this qualitative phenomenological study sought to increase the scholarly understanding of how secondary educators perceive and experience the impact of their mindfulness practice in their daily interactions with students and colleagues.

Additionally, there is a significant gap in the literature on understanding the origins of an educator's mindfulness practice. There are multitudinous sources on the Internet and a wealth of books on how to begin and maintain a mindfulness practice. There are phone apps that give practitioners tools to manage their mindfulness on the go. In brief, it is vital to recognize that formal training in mindfulness is not a prerequisite for practice. My quest for personal peace and harmony did not originate in a workshop or professional development. Rather, my mindfulness practice was established through research, readings, and applications. Therefore, this phenomenological investigation answered questions that have both "social meaning and personal significance" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104).

Theoretical Framework

When considering the mindfulness construct coupled with the purpose of this study, I carefully considered several theoretical frameworks. Before solidifying a satisfactory operational definition of mindfulness practice, I looked at the research from Brown et al. (2015), who claimed that mindfulness can be placed in the context of three contemporary psychological theories: the Attention System, the Processing Mode Theory, and the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). I decided upon SDT, as I was drawn to the premise that when individuals are autonomously motivated, they "learn in a deeper way, perform better at heuristic tasks, persist longer at activities, experience more

positive effect, display greater psychological well-being, and experience higher quality relationships than when they are controlled or amotivated ” (Brown et al., 2015, p. 114). Therefore, I postulated that SDT would align with how a secondary educator’s mindfulness practice impacts relationships with students and colleagues.

Moreover, according to Brown et al. (2015), the concept of a mindfulness practice relates positively to autonomous motivation and intrinsic aspirations. According to Weinstein, Brown, and Ryan (2009), individuals with a higher trait in mindfulness experienced less stress, were less likely to perceive demanding circumstances as stressful or intimidating and were more likely to manage stress in dynamic and adaptive modalities. I can attest to the fact that a mindfulness practice changed my mindset, allowing me to view life as it unfolds from a positive lens regardless of external circumstances.

However, this was my experience; and as a phenomenological researcher, I knew that I needed to strike that delicate balance between my personal experiences while remaining open to participant experiences. Acknowledging this potential bias, I kept an open mind by utilizing Lutz et al.’s (2015) phenomenological and neurocognitive framework for investigating and exploring other lived experiences of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice. Lutz et al. (2015) created a multidimensional phenomenological model as a heuristic tool for mapping a variety of styles and stages of mindfulness practice, as seen in Figure 1.

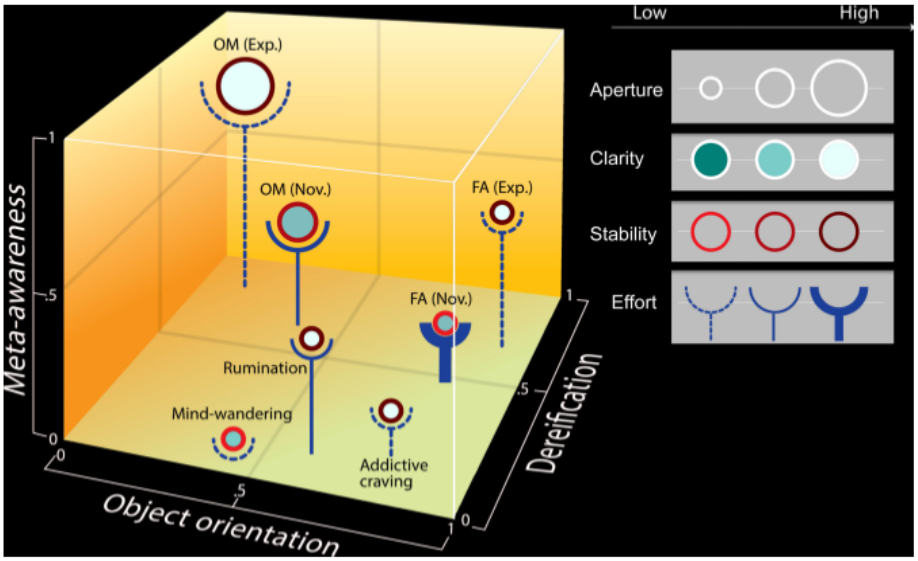


Figure 1.
A phenomenological matrix of mindfulness-related practices: This figure maps hypothetically two standard mindfulness-related practices, Focused Attention meditation (FA) and Open Monitoring meditation (OM), and three mental states relevant for psychopathology on a multi-dimensional phenomenological space. "Exp" and "Nov" stand for expert and novice practitioners. The three primary dimensions of this space are Object Orientation, Dereification, and Meta-awareness. They are mapped on the Euclidian space. The four secondary dimensions correspond to the qualities of Aperture, Clarity, Stability, and Effort. These four qualities are represented, respectively, by the diameter of a circle, fill color of the circle, color of the perimeter of the circle, and by the width of a supporting stalk. See text for details regarding the meditation states. Mind-wandering is represented as an effortless state (dashed line) of absorption (low Meta-awareness) where the contents of experience is phenomenally interpreted as accurate depictions of reality (low Dereification). Addictive craving is depicted as a state strongly and repeatedly oriented toward the object of addiction (high Object Orientation). Rumination is represented as a state where the person is aware of stable intrusive thoughts (some Meta-awareness) that are however still experienced as 'real' (low Dereification).

Figure 1. A Phenomenological Matrix of Mindfulness Related Practices (Lutz et al., 2015, p. 47).

This framework focuses on the phenomenology of mindfulness practice and their key question was, "When one is engaged in a formal mindfulness practice, what observable, instructable, and manipulable features of experience are most relevant to training in mindfulness?" (Lutz et al., 2015). The points plotted on the Euclidian plane are hypothetical, Lutz et al. (2015) explained and are not yet supported by data gathered from practitioners. Therefore, Lutz et al. (2015) clarified that "the model would be

greatly enhanced by gathering first-person data from mindfulness practitioners at various levels, where the collection method would focus especially on the phenomenological features of engaging in a formal mindfulness practice" (p. 9). Understanding that this framework was meant to serve as a heuristic tool to generate and communicate research, Lutz et al. (2015) gave leeway to other researchers to modify the framework, suggesting that a more comprehensive model could be embedded in a distinct cultural/social context or in the context of a teacher/student relationship (p. 9). I revisit this phenomenological framework in Chapter 4 and use the idea of a "mindfulness space" to illustrate the findings from my investigation.

Research Question

The devised research question has grown from an intense interest in mindfulness practice, thus my excitement and curiosity inspired the search (Moustakas, 1994). This qualitative phenomenological study sought to gain further insight into educators' origins and perceptions of their mindfulness practice and how that translates into their daily work lives, which may offer direction and guidance to other educators who seek to improve their sense of well-being in the workplace. The grand tour question (Creswell, 2007) associated with this exploratory inquiry was, "How do secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners describe and conceptualize their daily interactions with students and colleagues?" Through a sequence of interview questions, I constructed the participants' conceptualizations of their mindfulness practices.

Definition of Terms

Attunement. The precursor to compassion in that it involves being in touch with the inner experience of another (or one's self- known as self-attunement; Shapiro &

Carlson, 2009).

Classroom climate. Learning environments that refer to the atmosphere, setting, and feelings of the classroom (Burchfield, 2013).

Compassion. The capacity to feel empathy for the sorrow of the self and for the grief of another, with the desire to act on these feelings to lessen suffering (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009).

Developmental trauma. Dysregulation of the nervous system and all other systems of the body because of an individual's exposure to early trauma. This early threat results in unresolved anger and an incomplete fight or flight response, as the individual uses adaptive survival mechanisms which disrupt the ability for connection and social engagement. The manifestations of developmental posttraumatic stress include physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive dysfunctions (Heller & LaPierre, 2012).

Interpersonal neurobiology. An interdisciplinary field which brings together many areas in science including, but not limited to, anthropology, biology, linguistics, mathematics, physics, and psychology to determine common findings about the human experience from different perspectives **(**Siegel & Kornfield, 2012).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Specifically, the second hierarchy of "safety." Teachers who practice mindfulness create a safe environment so students can move up the hierarchical ladder towards personal growth/learning/problem-solving (Demir, n.d.).

Mindfulness. Simply put, mindfulness is a nonjudgmental awareness of a person's internal and external worlds. It is a personal awareness of the internal flow of experience and an alertness to one's thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, desires,

memories, images, personality dynamics, and attitudes (Hanson & Mendius, 2007).

Mind wandering. The human experience of when the mind is not focused on one's reading, breathing, or any other simple awareness and/or present-moment focus (Brown et al., 2015).

Neuroplasticity. The brain's capacity to change, adapt, and make new connections throughout a person's life (Rechtschaffen, 2014).

Neural integration. Used as a barometer of health and well-being, neural integration is the connection of segregated parts. Each part is a unique entity that functions optimally when there are solid relationships to other optimally functioning parts (Olson, 2014).

Presence. The basic cognizance of the receptive openness of our mind to whatever arises as it rises (as stated by Siegel in Brown et al., 2015).

Richard Lazarus' appraisal/transactional theory of stress. Stress is experienced when a person perceives that the demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual can mobilize (Flow Psychology, 2015).

State of mindfulness. The idea that a mindfulness practice gradually changes the brain of the practitioner (Olson, 2014).

Self-report measures of mindfulness. Questionnaires and surveys used to determine qualities/characteristics/traits of those who have a mindfulness practice (Neuser, 2010).

Teacher burnout. The long-lasting, multidimensional, adverse outlook towards teaching and working in a school (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014).

Teacher mindfulness in the classroom. A construct of mindfulness developed

by Rickert (2016). A mindful teacher is calm, stable, and emotionally regulated, even when there are challenges that arise in the classroom. A mindful teacher is emotionally present in the classroom and sets clear expectations for students. A mindful teacher can engage in perspective-taking as well as display empathy in his/her interactions with students (Rickert, 2016).

The neuroscience measurement of mindfulness. Using brain imaging to determine the changes that occur in the brain due to mindfulness practice (Siegel & Kornfield, 2012).

Trait of mindfulness. The idea that the repetitive practice of mindfulness strengthens and stabilizes these changes in the brain, which allows the practitioner to experience an ongoing mindful state even when not in engaged in a particular practice (Olson, 2014).

Summary

The intentionality of this investigation was not to prove that educators who have a mindfulness practice are better teachers, social workers, guidance counselors, or psychologists. Rather, the intent of this research endeavor was to explore the lived experiences of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice. The audience for this study is educators who are seeking ways to mitigate the everyday stresses of working with the 21st century learner in a secondary educational setting.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature related to the research question, "How do secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners describe and conceptualize their daily interactions with students and colleagues?" According to Vagle (2014), when using the phenomenological method, the researcher must strike a delicate balance between too little and too much literature review. It was vital that this researcher was acquainted with published research and texts on the phenomenon; however, it was advisable not to delve too far into the existing literature on the very phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). Too much knowledge about "how it is" could have made it difficult for the researcher to bracket enough so that new discoveries were illuminated to the researcher (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008). A literature review for a phenomenological study, according to Smith et al. (2009), helped the researcher identify a gap the research questions addressed as well as enabled the researcher to learn something about the participants for the study. Therefore, the researcher's goal was to allow participants to reveal their stories and to state their claims on their own terms. It was to the researcher's advantage, however, to have some idea of the forms the claims may take (Smith et al., 2009).

Therefore, to remain true to the spirit of the phenomenologist's philosophical and methodological commitment to openness (Vagle, 2014), this literature review focuses on mindfulness and the phenomenon of interest by illuminating the origins of mindfulness from the Buddhist's tradition as well as discussing the conceptions of mindfulness from the blending of the Eastern and Western schools of thought. Next, this chapter delves

into the practice of mindfulness and explores the effects of a mindfulness practice. Finally, the chapter culminates with research that demonstrates the impact mindfulness is having in the realm of education.

Mindfulness

Origins of mindfulness. Mindfulness has become one of the most discussed topics in clinical and psychological science. Brown et al. (2015) saw this wide-spread interest as very remarkable, as psychological sciences have historically focused on the content and the outcomes of consciousness rather than a focus on consciousness itself. While there are multitudinous definitions of mindfulness, there is a fundamental thread that runs through all of them: "clear-eyed attention to the workings of the mind, body, and behavior" (Brown et al., 2015, p. 1). Even with this simple and lucid definition of mindfulness, it is difficult to place mindfulness within a conceptual framework. According to Albrecht (2014),

> Each thinker, writer, or researcher's understanding and foundation for defining the construct in reflected in the dynamic interplay of interacting factors, such as his or her unique world view, subscriptions to a religious or philosophical tradition; academic discipline; meditation experience and prejudice or biases. (p. 22)

Mindfulness has most profoundly been informed by the "inner science" developed by the Buddhist traditions over many centuries (Brown et al., 2015). Buddhist teaching asserts that mindfulness is inherent in everyone, but that it has been covered up by conditioning from society, parents, teachers, and relationships. Buddhist psychology teaches that suffering arises from an individual's desire for their circumstances to be

different from what they are (Brown et al., 2015; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Enlightenment, which is the goal of the Buddhist eightfold path, involves an essential transformation in how a person perceives and interacts with the world (Brown et al., 2015). The Buddhist would say, "This is what is true, here, now" and practicing mindfulness is a way of achieving this mindset (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009, p. 6). Acknowledging the common goal that Buddhism, medicine, and psychology each have as a means of mitigating suffering has been the entry of Buddhist Meditation Theravada exercises and mindfulness into the realm of Western medicine and psychotherapeutic programs (Brown et al., 2015). Therefore, it can be stated that mindfulness made a leap from the religious system to the disciplines of science and clinical practice. Rechtschaffen (2014) explained that "throughout history religious and cultural traditions around the world have used meditation to build on the capacities of authenticity, kindness, and insight" (p. 36). Furthermore, Rechtschaffen (2014) explained that mindfulness does not belong to any religion, just as the breath we inhale and exhale does not belong to any one of us. "These universal practices have been cultivated throughout millennia – or, we may say, they have cultivated us" (Rechtschaffen, 2014, p. 36). Nevertheless, the religious traditions and the Western scientific approach deeply complement one another regarding the study of mind and behavior. Even though the methodological approaches are different – one is experiential, the other experimental – the Buddhist contemplative practice of cultivating one's attention has served as a prevailing instrument for direct observation of mind and behavior (Brown et al., 2015). Buddhism embodies an approach of inquiry bridging "rigorous logical analysis (as in philosophy) and empirical investigation (as in science)" (Wallace, 2003, p. 27).

Conceptions of mindfulness. Acknowledging the complexity of this phenomenon called mindfulness, I expounded on the Eastern and Western concepts using *The Wiley Blackwell Handbook of Mindfulness* by Ie, Ngnoumen, and Langer (2014). According to Ie et al., the conception of mindfulness derives from two origins: Eastern and Western.

John Kabat-Zinn: Pioneer of the eastern concept of mindfulness. In the late 1970s, a branch of mindfulness emerged. Based on the Eastern concept, John Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D. was puzzled by the number of patients who were not responding well to the traditional medical treatments for pain and stress. A student of Buddhism, with a personal meditation practice, Kabat-Zinn modified his Buddhist mindfulness training for the secular and clinical setting (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). At the University of Massachusetts, Kabat-Zinn began teaching his 8-week course known as the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program (SR & RP). SR & RP involved a new type of medicine called behavioral medicine, which embraces the concept that one's mental and emotional states can influence one's ability to recover from injury or illness as well as affect one's overall well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Using meditation and Hatha yoga, Kabat-Zinn (2005) was able to help patients deal with pain and mitigate stress by this moment-by-moment awareness. Currently, Kabat-Zinn's 8-week program is known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and it is utilized throughout many medical facilities around the United States (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

Moreover, research studies on the therapeutic benefits of MBSR revealed that this program can produce positive changes in the brain, improve immune response to disease, and aid in the processing of stress (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burney,

1985; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992). A meta-analysis study conducted by Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, and Walach (2004) showed that MBSR can assist individuals with clinical and nonclinical ailments such as anxiety, depression, heart disease, pain syndrome, and even cancer.

In John Kabat-Zinn's (2005) book *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body* and *Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (2005), he stated,

> Simply put, mindfulness is moment-to-moment awareness. It is cultivated by purposefully paying attention to things we ordinarily never give a moment's thought to. It is a systematic approach to developing new kinds of control and wisdom in our lives, based upon our inner capacities for relaxation, paying attention, and insight. (p. 2)

As previously stated, Kabat-Zinn's concept of mindfulness in deeply rooted in the Eastern traditions and the Buddhist's contemplative practice, thus meditation is at the core of developing a mindfulness practice. To fully conceptualize mindfulness, it was important to explore the Western idea of mindfulness.

Ellen J. Langer: Pioneer of the western concept of mindfulness. Langer's (2014) methodological approach to mindfulness does not involve meditation or any other Buddhist's practices, rather it is predominantly constructed upon her research findings of mindlessness versus mindfulness. Langer (2014) stated, "My work on mindfulness has been conducted almost entirely within the Western scientific perspective" (p. 79). Langer, a social psychologist, began examining the antithesis of mindfulness, which is mindlessness. What Langer (2014) observed in her research is when people are mindless, they treat information as though it were context free; they tend to be trapped by

categories and exhibit automatic behavior, not considering the possible novelty in a situation or other perspectives. We are mindful, according to Langer (1989), when we seek out, create, and notice new things. For example, in a breakthrough study, Langer and Rodin (1977) conducted an experiment with nursing home patients. One set of patients assumed the ability to make decisions, such as where to accept visitors. Additionally, they received a houseplant they needed to nurture. The patients had to decide when they should feed the plant and where to place the plant for optimal growth. Langer (2014) stated, "Our intent was to make the nursing home residents more mindful, to help them engage with the world and live their lives more fully" (p. 4). In contrast, the control group in this experiment did not receive directions or opportunities to make choices. Furthermore, they were told the nursing staff would manage the care of the houseplants they had been given. Based upon a series of tests the researchers conducted, their findings a year and half later showed that the treatment group of patients were more cheerful, active, and alert, and many of them were still alive (Langer, 2014; Langer & Rodin, 1977). This experiment, with its astonishing results, was the impetus for over 10 years of research into the powerful effects of mindfulness and its equally powerful yet deleterious effects of mindlessness (Langer, 2014). Langer has revealed that mindfulness offers possible benefits in areas such as aging, both mental and physical health, behavioral regulation, interpersonal relationships, creativity, and the workplace (Ie et al., 2014, p. 1).

Mindfulness Practice

Irrespective of their variances, the Eastern and Western conceptions of mindfulness have enhanced this field of study and have created greater awareness and

appreciation for the plethora of benefits obtained from the extraordinary simple process of acknowledging novel experiences (Ie et al., 2014, p. 3). The "creation of new categories, openness to new information, and awareness of more than one perspective" are the key qualities of a mindful state of being (Langer, 2014, p. 64). Langer (2014) asserted that to be mindful, one simply needs to be present and open to novelty and does not necessarily require meditation or other practices which are often associated within the realm of religion. According to Shapiro and Carlson (2009), fundamentally, mindfulness is a natural human capacity. Nevertheless, a mindfulness practice involves cultivating the skills of intention, attention, and attitude via a formal and informal practice. The formal practice of mindfulness encompasses systematic meditation practices that are targeted toward refining mindfulness skills, such as the three types of meditation: sitting, body scan, and walking. The formal practice of mindfulness can involve brief daily meditation practice or can be practiced on a more intensive scale, such as a mindfulness retreat involving many hours of sitting or walking meditations (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). The informal practice of mindfulness, according to Katz (2014), involves the intentional act of openness, acceptance, and discerning attention to whatever one is doing. The objective of the informal practice is to apply to everyday life what is learned during the formal practice.

Without probing too far into the state vs. trait debate, I acknowledged that there are researchers who view mindfulness as a relatively static trait. According to Brown and Ryan (2003), these studies use self-report evaluations such as the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) to measure the correlations between existing mindfulness and other areas of human life such as marital satisfaction and psychopathology. In the

absence of formal mindfulness training, the research showed the variances in trait or dispositional mindfulness as well as how this variance influences other aspects of an individual's life; however, empirical findings have proved that mindfulness can be cultivated as a skill (Brown et al., 2015). Therefore, Lutz et al. (2015) addressed the issue of trait or dispositional mindfulness vs. state mindfulness by devising a model that is indicative of a space of possible conditions where the duration of any given state is undefined. Mindfulness, as determined by Lutz et al. (2015), can be interpreted as a continuum of practices involving states that can be mapped into a multidimensional phenomenological matrix that is articulated in a neurocognitive framework (p. 1; refer to Figure 1).

For the purposes of this investigation, I did not compartmentalize mindfulness as either a state or trait. Brown et al. (2015) supported this premise by stating,

> All forms of mindfulness represent variations on the theme of state mindfulness; that is, trait mindfulness represents the tendency to reside in mindful states over time, whereas trained mindfulness represents the trained capacity to cultivate and more frequently reside in mindful states. (p. 209)

As stated in Chapter 1, I used the term *mindfulness practice* as opposed to *contemplative practice*. Although mindfulness is the heart of contemplative practice, I wanted to maintain a broad definition, so my phenomenological study will be open to participants who fall anywhere inside of the mindfulness practice space.

Research on Practicing Mindfulness

Over the last 30 years, the interest in mindfulness has undergone exponential growth in books, research papers, journals, and magazines. According to Brown et al.

(2015), the science of mindfulness has seen significant developments along four major fronts: conceptualization, psychological theory, basic science, and applied science (p. 2). In this literature review so far, I described the origins of mindfulness and the Eastern and Western influences on the conceptions of mindfulness. At this juncture, I explored what basic and applied science on mindfulness have revealed as they pertain to healthy populations in the areas of mitigating stress and improving interpersonal relationships. After a general overview of the research, this chapter culminated in examining how mindfulness can prevent educator burnout, alleviate stress, and strengthen connections with students and colleagues.

In basic science, mindfulness originated in the clinic to alleviate suffering, as explained earlier in this chapter with Kabat-Zinn's MBSR program. Since then, mindfulness has been studied from a neuroscience perspective. Neuroscientists have reported changes in neural attentional networks due to brain plasticity. As explained by Davidson (2012), neuroplasticity is the mechanism for behavioral outcomes and is vital for regulating emotions. In the last decade, neuroscientists have collaborated with Tibetan monks to discover how meditation changes the brain (Aguilar, 2018). The amygdala, which is the oldest part of the brain, responds to fear and often overreacts. Following mindfulness training, the amygdala calms down (Hölzel et al., 2010; Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008). The hippocampus, which helps to regulate the amygdala, is also important for memory and learning. A meditation practice has proven to stimulate the hippocampus, thus making it more productive and active (Goldin & Gross, 2010; Hölzel et al., 2011). Researchers Chiesa and Serretti (2010) discovered that regular meditation activates the prefrontal cortex, which is the part of the brain that

regulates emotions, behaviors, and helps an individual make wise decisions.

In the realm of applied mindfulness science, healthy populations have been a focus of study. Mindfulness training programs for adults who are dealing with high levels of stress have become widespread, and there is a large body of research that demonstrates the psychological benefits (Brown et al., 2015). Specifically, Brown et al. (2015) explained that the Mindfulness Stress-Buffering Hypothesis postulates that mindfulness lessens stress appraisals and reduces stress reactivity responses; therefore, these stress reduction effects partially or wholly explain how mindfulness affects the outcomes of physical and mental health.

Brief mindfulness induction studies, according to Brown et al. (2015), normally 3-15 minutes in length, have shown to diminish negative affect and improve emotion regulation in response to various stimuli as well as to more efficiently accept and recover from negative provocation; however, the researchers advised that mindfulness may depreciate "carryover" effects from affective to neutral stimuli (Brown et al, 2015). On the other hand, intervention mindfulness studies, such as the one conducted by Davidson et al. (2003), discovered that among healthy employees, MBSR (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) led to significant drops in trait anxiety and other undesirable emotions in comparison to wait-list control. Moreover, Davidson et al. (2003) noted modifications in prefrontal alpha band electro cortical activity, consistent with a more favorable propensity to motivation and emotions.

In addition to mitigating stress, studies have revealed that mindfulness can improve interpersonal relationships. According to Siegel (2007), mindfulness fosters the concept of presence, which is an essential element for facilitating resonance and

attunement in interpersonal relationships. Presence is "a state of receptive awareness of our open minds to whatever arises as it arises" (Siegel, 2007, pp. 160-161). The essence of presence is embracing the moment as a novel experience without analyzing what is happening; otherwise, according to Phelan (2010), when an individual is reflecting on the past, he has unnoticeably catapulted out of the present. Additionally, the opposite of reflecting on the past is anticipating the future, which also unknowingly propels an individual out of the present. Siegel (2007) explained that the brain is an anticipation machine. In other words, priming is a fundamental property of the brain's neural circuits, so the brain readies itself for the next event based on what has been embedded in implicit memory from past experiences. It is important to distinguish between the brain's automatic propensity to anticipate the future from intentional future planning, which is driven by the prefrontal cortex. This intentional future planning is anatomically, neurologically, and subjectively different from the brain's innate tendency to anticipate what is "next" (Siegel, 2007). Therefore, being present means gently reigning in the innate inclination to be involuntarily preparing for the next thing in order to just *be* with what is presently happening (Brown et al., 2015).

Presence allows an individual to be open and receptive to what is unfolding moment by moment. In the realm of relationships, being present is vitally important for cultivating and building strong relationships. Siegel (2012) defined relationships as the flow of energy and information between two or more people. Siegel (2012) extended his concept of relationships by coining the term *interpersonal neurobiology*, which is a field of study that explores the ways in which relationships and the brain interact to shape an individual's mental life.

> When this sharing is integrated, that is, when people are honored for their differences and compassionate communication links them, relationships thrive. In the brain itself, we can see that both internal and interpersonal forms of integration stimulate the neuronal activation and growth of integrative regions of the brain. (Brown et al., 2015, p. 240).

It is evident from this brief overview that mindfulness yields positive emotional influences on healthy populations. It is no wonder that mindfulness, as a means of reducing stress and burnout along with improved relationships, has made its way into the educational realm. The last section in this chapter examines the research on the role of mindfulness within personally relevant emotion contexts, namely educators.

Research on Mindfulness in Education

As discussed in Chapter 1, the key issues affecting secondary educators are high levels of occupational stress and burnout.

> Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define stress as a particular interaction between the person and the environment, appraised or evaluated by the person as being taxing or exceeding his or her personal resources, and, as a consequence, disrupting his or her daily routines. (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005, p. 460)

In other words, when an individual's normal way of doing something is perceived as inadequate for the demands of the situation, stress can ensue. Kyriacou (2001) explained that "teacher stress can be defined as the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression, resulting from some aspect of his or her work as a teacher" (p. 28). Clearly, teacher stress is subjective in nature and occurs at varying degrees and from different avenues.

According to Jennings (2015), in today's teaching climate, many teachers are unprepared for the social and emotional demands of the classroom environment. Teachers spend most of their cognitive energy on creating rigorous and engaging lessons while simultaneously managing negative student behaviors such as inattention and getting along with peers. These conditions can lead to more anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and emotional exhaustion (Breen, 2016). Greenburg, Brown, and Abenavoli (2017) claimed that teaching is one of the most stressful occupations in the United States and is the cause of teacher burnout, lack of engagement, job dissatisfaction, poor performance, and some of the highest turnover rates in recent years. The researchers stated, "Forty-six percent of teachers report high daily stress during the school year. That's tied with nurses for the highest rate among all occupational groups" (Greenburg et al., 2017, p. 2). There are four main sources of teacher stress: first, school organizations that have a dearth of a strong leadership presence, an unhealthy school climate, and an unsupportive collegial environment; second, escalating job demands with high stakes testing, student behavioral problems, and difficult parents; third, resources that impose limitations on a teacher's sense of autonomy and decision-making power; and fourth, a teacher's social and emotional competency and the ability to manage stress and nurture a healthy classroom (Greenburg et al., 2017).

A recent study conducted by the University of British Columbia discovered a possible connection between teacher burnout levels and student cortisol levels, which is a stress-indicating hormone, leading the researchers to posit that stress may be contagious among students and teachers (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). The researchers surveyed 17 fourth- through seventh-grade teachers to gauge their potential burnout.

They then took salvia samples of over 400 students who were in those teachers' classrooms. The research revealed that in the classrooms where teachers were feeling more stress and burnout, student cortisol levels were higher. Oberle, the study's leading researcher, explained that it is uncertain which came first – elevated cortisol or teacher burnout; however, this novel study shows that teacher occupational stress is linked to student physiological stress regulation (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016).

Most of the literature I reviewed focused on the effects and sources of stress and burnout for classroom teachers; however, a school's culture has a huge influence on teacher stress and a teacher's capacity to moderate that stress as well as having an impact on student outcomes. The actions and management styles of administrators as well as the school's organizational culture and climate can affect a teacher's sense of well-being and therefore influence teachers and students in the classroom setting (Prilleltensky, Neff, & Bessell, 2016). My research investigation aimed to fill in the gaps of the lived experiences of secondary educators and their daily interactions with students and colleagues. The information gleaned from this study enabled the researcher to add to the body of knowledge concerning educator burnout and school culture as it pertains to daily interactions with students and colleagues.

According to Weare (2014), mindfulness interventions for school staff are presently unfolding. Some of these programs are connected to professional development, while others are within preservice teacher education programs. Weare (2014) stated,

> There are currently thirteen studies published in peer reviewed journals of mindfulness with school staff. They include five RCTs, seven control studies, three before and after, and one qualitative study. They mostly use self-report

methodology, but increasingly include tests of real-world performance. (p. 2)

The results are overwhelmingly favorable and echo the wider adult and workplace literature (Weare, 2014). The benefits show the following:

- Reductions in stress, burnout and anxiety
- Better mental health
- Greater well-being
- Increased kindness and compassion to others
- Better physical health
- Increased cognitive performance
- Enhanced job performance (Weare, 2014, p. 2).

As can be seen, mindfulness intervention for teachers has proven to reduce stress, burnout, and anxiety, which is reflected in a decreased number of days teachers take off work as well as diminished feelings of task and time pressure (Weare, 2014). Other improvements in the stress category include "improvement in the ability to manage thoughts and behavior, an increase in coping skills, motivations, planning and problem solving, and taking more time to relax" (Weare, 2014, p. 2). Mindfulness interventions for teachers have positively impacted mental health by offering a greater sense of well-being, including less depression and an optimistic outlook on life. Teachers have greater self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-compassion as well as a belief in personal growth (Weare, 2014). Teachers report that after a mindfulness intervention, they have more empathy, tolerance, forgiveness, and patience with others as well as a decrease in anger and hostility (Weare, 2014). Mindfulness interventions, according to Weare (2014), have improved physical health by lowering blood pressure and cortisol levels, and teachers

have reported fewer overall physical health problems (Weare, 2014). Throughout their daily routines, teachers have noted an improvement in the ability to focus and pay attention, clarity in decision-making, and flexibility in responding to challenges (Weare, 2014). Finally, in the classroom setting, teachers have improved classroom management and organizational skills, including the ability to prioritize and see the whole picture. Teachers are more self-motivated and autonomous and exhibit greater attunement to student needs, thus achieving more supportive relationships with them (Weare, 2014).

Summary

In summation, this review of relevant literature on mindfulness sought to illuminate the origins of mindfulness as well as conceptualize mindfulness from the Eastern and Western perspectives. Since mindfulness has become a booming topic for multitudinous disciplines of study, I provided insight into the most recent neuroscientific research on mindfulness and how brain imaging reveals positive changes in the structure of the brain from meditation practices, including mindfulness practices. Research also shows that mindfulness practice has positive outcomes for healthy populations in mitigating stress and improving interpersonal relationships. Mindfulness in education, as discussed in this review, has salutary effects on teachers. Chapter 3 explains the methodology that I employed to gain insight into the lived experiences of not only teachers but other secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand and to explore mindfulness through the lived experiences of educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners. This chapter illuminates the research design, data collection, and data analysis for this qualitative study. A qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenological method of inquiry, was used to gain a richer and deeper understanding of the lived experiences of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice and how that impacts their daily interactions with students and colleagues.

The Case for a Qualitative Study

Although the mindfulness construct has its origins in the spiritual and religious realm and not in behavioral science, psychology researchers and developers have been successful with measuring mindfulness through various consensual scales. Moreover, new scales with additional items are continuously emerging (Brown et al., 2015). Because of the variations in theory and philosophy, mindfulness has always meant different things to different people, as is the case in both science and religion. The distinguishing difference between science and religion is that the data in science can be utilized to evaluate the effectiveness and rationality of specific mindfulness constructs. (Brown et al., 2015).

Another issue with mindfulness scales is that they do not contain items that adequately ask participants to respond to their contextual experience of mindfulness (Brown et al., 2015). Therefore, there is much diversity in the mindfulness scales, particularly stemming from two foundations. The first source is "the explicit or implicit

conceptual position driving the definition and operationalization" (Brown et al., 2015, p. 160), while second source is "the intended use of the scale" (Brown et al., 2015, p. 160). For the purposes of this research endeavor, I considered using quantitative measures for this study; however, when considering the purpose of this study, none of the scales would measure the rich, complex, and diverse lived experiences of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice.

Creswell (2014) stated that qualitative methodology is the most probable methodology when the researcher hopes to gain insight into a phenomenon. Since I wanted to investigate the lived experiences of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice and their daily interactions with students and colleagues, a qualitative approach of inquiry was best suited for this study. Moreover, qualitative research occurs in the naturalistic settings of people whose experiences are the object of the exploration during the study. The contextual understanding is imperative in seeking to understanding the meanings communicated by the participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Additionally, qualitative research adds to knowledge, not just through the collection of data but through the researcher's own experience, training, skills, background, competency, and capacity for empathy (Patton 2015). "Qualitative inquiry is personal … the researcher is the instrument of inquiry" (Patton, 2015, p. 3). Thus, it is the researcher's responsibility to use qualitative inquiry to understand human meaning (Patton, 2015).

There are many ways qualitative inquiry contributes to making meaning of human experiences that includes making judgments about what is meaningful, understanding

what objects mean to people, finding meaning in the meaningless, and understanding how people and groups construct meaning (Patton, 2015). Therefore, the first contribution of qualitative research is to illuminate meanings, how people engage in this meaning making, and simply stated, making sense of the world (Patton, 2015). Like Patton's (2015) assertions, Savin-Baden and Major (2013) stated qualitative researchers do not test for cause and effect but rather seek to learn because the social world is different from the natural world. Researchers learn from what is perceived by others as meaningful.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) described qualitative research as memos to the self, in that researchers attempt to interpret phenomena through the meanings people bring to these experiences. As the primary instrument of data collection, researchers are influenced by their own value system, causing the research to be value bound since every question asked and every interpretation made is influenced by the researchers' subjective experiences.

Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry

According to Creswell (2014), there are five qualitative approaches that have remained consistent throughout the years and are popular across the social and health sciences: ethnography, grounded theory, case study, narrative, and phenomenology. For the purposes of this study, I examined two probable designs, the case study and phenomenology.

Case study inquiry is a qualitative approach originating from the work of Le Play, a French sociologist and economist who used this method of inquiry in the early 19th century to study the economic conditions of the working class (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). From the American perspective, case study inquiry can be traced to the field of

sociology and to casework in the social work field and is often mistakenly viewed as a method in which data are collected through the employment of participant-observer and fieldwork techniques (Yin, 2018). Education scholars Robert Yin and Robert Stake, both instrumental in introducing the case study to the field of education, emphasized the importance of the subjective creation of meaning that results from this method (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Yin (2018) further elucidated the case study by stating that this method is used to answer the how and why questions that are being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the researcher has little control. Stake (2005) viewed the case study as unique in that researchers provide information on the nature of a case, its historical background, and its relation to other cases, while also describing the participant(s) who contribute the information.

I carefully considered and pursued the case study design. A school site was determined and a group of mindfulness committee members at the site agreed to work with me on the study; however, as I continued to contemplate the essence of the research question, the case study would not be able to delve deep enough into the lived experiences of mindfulness educators. Therefore, I decided upon a phenomenological design.

The phenomenological approach examines the shared commonalties and lived experiences of individuals to make meaning from these experiences while providing the framework that enables the researcher to gain an understanding of the experience at the most fundamental level (Creswell, 2014; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Creswell (2014) stated the type of problem best suited for a phenomenological approach is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a

specific phenomenon. Through the exploration and eventual understanding of common experiences, a deeper understanding of the features of this phenomenon are developed, leading to change in clinical practice (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenological inquiry assumes knowledge is rooted in experiences and allows for the intentional understanding of the lived experiences of others through the exploration of topics considered to be subjective, such as the experiences of judgment, perception, or emotion (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), the aim of phenomenological research is to determine what an experience means to the participants by providing a comprehensive description of this experience. It is from these individual descriptions that universal meanings can be derived (Moustakas, 1994). Since phenomenology was the chosen research methodology for this investigation, the following section expounds upon phenomenology in more detail.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological research is an interpretive philosophy that involves the study of conscious experience from a first-person point of view (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Emerging from German philosophies during the late 19th and 20th centuries, it was first used in social science inquiry by German philosopher Edmund Husserl to study how people describe experiences through both language and senses (Patton, 2015). Husserl posited that humans only know what they experience based on their perceptions and the meanings of these perceptions (Patton, 2015). He theorized that perceptions and experiences are so connected, they often merge, making it difficult to distinguish one's perceptions from one's experiences (Patton, 2015). Interpretation of the perceptions and experiences becomes most important and essential in understanding the experience itself;

and often, the subjective experience incorporates the objective phenomenon, becoming one's reality (Patton, 2015). Husserl developed phenomenological inquiry after criticizing psychology for attempting to use objective scientific methods to study human issues (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). He believed in the importance of examining the way in which people live in their environment rather than viewing the environment as separate from the individual (Savin-Baden & Howell, 2013).

Phenomenology focuses on the lived experience of the participant and the phenomenon which is to be studied. The phrase "lived experience," derived from the German word *erlebnis*, translates to "the experience as one lives through it and recognizes it as a particular type of experience" (Patton, 2015, p. 115). Phenomenological strategy recovers the living moment while attempting to give words, concepts, and theories to these experiences as they are lived (Adams & Van Manen, 2008).

With experiences comes meaning given to these experiences. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on this "meaning making" as the essence of the human experience (Patton, 2015, p. 116). Moustakas (1994) stated the interrelationship between the conscious description of the experience and the underlying structures of the experience provide the meaning of the experience itself. To fully understand participant experiences, the researcher must experience the phenomenon as directly as possible, which occurs most often during observation and in-depth interviews with the participants (Moustakas, 1994); however, phenomenology is often as much about the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of the experience as the meaning of the experience itself (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

The rationale for choosing a phenomenological design was to investigate how the phenomenon of mindfulness "manifests and appears in the lifeworld" (Vagle, 2014, p. 23). It is through my personal lived experience with mindfulness and through the lived experiences of others that allowed me to gain access to important manifestations and appearances of the phenomenon of mindfulness. I was not exclusively studying the subject (the educator) or the object (mindfulness) but rather the relationship between the two.

Overview of the Research Design

As stated in Chapter 1, the grand tour question for this study was, "How do secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners describe and conceptualize their daily interactions with students and colleagues?" It is vital to note that

> phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9)

I do acknowledge, "No single method can grasp all the subtle variations in ongoing human experience" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 29). Nevertheless, by conducting in-depth, phenomenologically based interviews with secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice, I believe I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (Seidman, 2006, p. 9).

Participants

Moustakas (1994) identified criteria that are essential to the inclusion of participants in a phenomenological study. These criteria include the experience by the participant of the phenomenon, the participant's intense interest in understanding the nature and meanings of the phenomenon, the participant's willingness to participate in an interview, and the participant's willingness to allow the researcher to record the interviews and potentially to publish the results in a dissertation or other publication (Moustakas, 1994). By agreeing to participate in the study, the partakers met the criteria considered essential by Moustakas.

Creswell (2013) suggested between 5-25 individuals be interviewed to gather a clear, shared experience of the phenomenon but also supported smaller studies that are truly in depth, as these have historically provided important breakthroughs in the research. Patton (2015), on the contrary, suggested that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. He supported this by stating that sample size depends on what is to be known, the purpose of the study, what is useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available resources and time (Patton, 2015).

Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants for this study. According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling is defined as choosing to include participants in the study based on a set of established criteria that will better inform the study. Patton (1989) suggested that there are several approaches to purposeful sampling, one of which is the "maximum variation" sampling. According to Tagg (1985), maximum variation sampling can refer to both sites and participants. The range of sites and participants should be reasonable to the larger population. This sampling method should allow the

most inclusive possibility for readers of the study to connect to what they are reading (Tagg, 1985). From a quantitative methodologist's perspective, this form of sampling is sometimes deemed as less scientific and therefore less valid; however, qualitative researchers maintain purposeful sampling enriches the study. The selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study informs a study in a way that random sampling cannot and becomes the source of strength in the qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015).

I used maximum variation sampling by recruiting participants from across the United States, Canada, Australia, and Japan and included public, private, and charter schools. Participants were secondary educators in a variety of capacities: teachers, social workers, a media specialist, a school psychologist, and a yoga instructor for special needs students who also taught mindfulness in a high needs charter school. I recruited and interviewed 11 educators. My original intent was between seven to 10 participants or until saturation occurred. As described by Patton (2015), saturation occurs when there is nothing new being learned from the sample of participants. The sample size can be a starting point but may not be the final sample since it can be adjusted either up or down, depending on when saturation has been achieved (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) believed that by analyzing the data as they are collected, the researcher will be looking for this pattern to occur with the understanding that sample size can and should be flexible; however, according to Seidman (2006), it is more prudent to wait until all the interviews are completed before thoroughly analyzing the data. Seidman (2006) advised that it is wise to identify possible salient topics in early interviews, but any in-depth analysis could inadvertently impose meaning from one participant to the other (p. 116). Therefore, I followed Seidman's (2006) premise and did not analyze the interview data after each

interview, but I did make note of possible topics along the interview continuum in my bridling journal (see Appendix A).

Once I received the approval letter from the IRB board (see Appendix B), I conducted a pilot test of the interview questions to ensure that the questions would evoke the responses needed to get information-rich interviews. For the pilot test, I selected a colleague who is a highly trained yoga instructor. Alex also considers herself a mindfulness practitioner and is a seventh grade language arts teacher. The pilot interview solidified my decision to use purposeful sampling, as Alex was able to clearly and seamlessly convey her experiences as a mindfulness practitioner and educator. Because Alex and I have a collegial relationship, I was able to get her honest feedback on the interview questions as well as to determine if the time range for the length of the interview needed to be increased or decreased. Alex assured me that the questions were clear, concise, and thought provoking. Alex expressed appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on her lived experiences as a mindfulness educator, as it offered personal insight into her journey to a mindfulness practice and how that has impacted her personally and professionally. Furthermore, the pilot interview allowed me to shorten the interview time frame from 60-90 minutes to 45-60 minutes. Last, as discussed in my bridling journal, I addressed a bias concerning yoga instructors as mindfulness practitioners. To explain, prior to my pilot interview with Alex, I did not consider yoga instructors as part of the mindfulness practitioner participant pool. After the interview, I determined that I needed to be open minded to other possible participants who were yoga instructors, as they may also prove to offer rich and thick descriptions on their daily interactions with students and colleagues. As is illuminated in Chapter 5, this awareness proved to be beneficial and

greatly enhanced the findings of my phenomenological investigation.

Prior to formal recruitment, I sent an email to a mindfulness practitioner and author, Dr. Karen Bluth from Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Dr. Bluth has written books and materials on mindfulness and self-compassion for teens. Dr. Bluth sent me several email addresses of other mindfulness practitioners throughout the United States and Canada who have participated in her mindfulness training program for teens (personal communication, June 6, 2018). Martha, Debbie, Carla, and Lana (pseudonyms) agreed to take part in my study; and one of the interviewees, Martha, gave me email addresses for two more of my participants, Rose and John. After completing interviews with seven participants, including the pilot interview, I made the decision to continue recruiting and interviewing, although I had no other leads from my initial networking source. As already noted, I did not analyze the data after each interview; however, I did transcribe after each interview by using *Trint,* an online transcribing program. Transcribing after each interview allowed me to peruse the transcripts to determine possible initial emerging themes. During my perusal, I made the determination that I did not have enough data yet. According to Seidman (2014), "Enough is an interactive reflection of every step of the interview process and different for each study and each researcher" (p. 58). Seidman (2014) believed it is best to err on the side of more rather than less data, as from his experience, some of his graduate students have struggled to make sense of the data because it is too "thin."

In my effort to find more participants for this study, I turned to social media, specifically Facebook. I joined several educator/mindfulness groups, and I posted a message about the nature of my investigation. Several people sent me personal messages

of interest, but only one followed through, and her name was Carmen. Carmen was from Australia and on holiday in California. She was willing to interview that evening. With the 3-hour time difference, it was late for me but a good time for her. I decided to interview her "on the spot." This interview proved to be abundantly fruitful in that not only was her lived experience enlightening, she offered to share my study in her mindfulness Facebook group, one I was unable to join because it is only for educators who have participated in their mindfulness training program. Within 24 hours of my interview with Carmen, I had six emails from mindfulness educators throughout the United States and one presently teaching in Japan who were interested in participating. Three of the six possible participants followed through with interviews: Jen, Kendra, and Suzanne wrapped up my data collection. Data collection started on October 4, 2018 with Alex, the pilot interview, and culminated on December 3, 2018 with Suzanne's interview via Skype at 6:30 am my time, as she is working at a university in Japan.

All participants were emailed the informed consent to review, sign, and return. Participants also received a copy of the IRB approval letter and a copy of the interview questions. I deliberated whether to send participants the interview questions. According to Englander (2012), giving the interviewee the questions in advance gives him/her an opportunity "to dwell and ponder on the experience" (p. 27). On the other hand, Englander said that the standard objection for doing this is that the interviewee will start to self-interpret the event and the description will lose its organic, spontaneous, prereflective edge; however, Englander said this is not the case, as the goal is for the interviewee to describe the psychological meaning and his/her self-interpretations.

All participants were interviewed via Zoom except for Alex, who participated in a

face-to-face interview, and Suzanne, who is living in Japan, who requested to use Skype. In lieu of an interview, participants were given the option of writing their lived experiences, as stated in the data sources under Table 1 and as suggested by Vagle (2014); however, no one chose that format. I used a digital voice recorder for all interviews; and for the Zoom interviews, I recorded the audio only as a backup. The interviews ranged in length from 40-65 minutes, which is slightly under and slightly over the anticipated 45-60 minutes range.

Finally, participants' age, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, political affiliation, and economic factors may have been discussed during the interview process but were not a factor in determining their participation. Moustakas (1994) stated that these criteria, while valid in their usefulness, are not essential criteria but can be employed to establish rapport.

Data Collection

To gain a deeper understanding into the lived experiences of secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners, I modeled the in-depth interview questions after Dolbeare and Schuman's (1982, as cited in Seidman, 2006) series of three interviews, which allowed the participants and me to build upon the experience in a contextual manner (Seidman, 2006). Modifications were made to the interview process in that there was one interview session with each participant using the series of the three topics: life history, details of experience, and reflection on the meaning (Seidman, 2006). In striking the balance between respect for participant time and respect for the interview structure, Seidman (2006) did make allowances for modifying the structure by stating, "As long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect

upon their experience within the context of their lives, alterations to the three-interview structure and the duration and spacing of interviews can certainly be explored" (pp. 21-22). Additionally, to establish credibility, I gained permission from Dr. Frias (2015) via email (see Appendix C) to model my interview questions after the probes she used in her phenomenological study on the lived experiences of teachers who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners (see Appendix D). Table 1 displays the open-ended interview questions and their alignment with the data sources.

Table 1

Interview Questions

Topics	Interview Questions	Data Sources
Section One: Participant's Life History	IQ 1: How did you come to be a mindfulness practitioner? IQ 2: How did you come to be a secondary educator?	● Transcripts from audio-recorded individual interviews conducted with participants in person or via online web conferencing (Vagle, 2014, p. 131) ● Participant's written lived experiences (Vagle, 2014, p. 131) ● Researcher's bridling journal (Vagle, 2014, p. 131)
Section Two: Participant's Details of Experience	IQ 1: What is it like to be a secondary educator who self-identifies as a mindfulness practitioner? IQ 2: Describe your interactions with students and colleagues in relation to your mindfulness practice?	● Transcripts from audio-recorded individual interviews conducted with participants in person or via online web conferencing (Vagle, 2014, p. 131). ● Participant's written lived experiences (Vagle, 2014, p. 131) ● Researcher's bridling journal (Vagle, 2014, p. 131)
Section Three: Participant's Reflection on Meaning	IQ 1: What does it mean to be a mindfulness practitioner? IQ 2: What does it mean to be a secondary educator? IQ 3: As a mindfulness practitioner, how do you make sense of your work in the school setting?	● Transcripts from audio-recorded individual interviews conducted with participants in person or via online web conferencing (Vagle, 2014, p. 131). ● Participant's written lived experiences (Vagle, 2014, p. 131) ● Researcher's bridling journal (Vagle, 2014, p. 131)

As seen in Table 1, the first topic focused on the participants' life history. I chose to use the word "how" instead of "why." This purposeful decision allowed the participants to reconstruct and recount a series of constitutive events that place their secondary educator experience and their mindfulness practice in the context of their lives

(Seidman, 2006). The second topic focused on the participants' present lived experiences as secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners. The participants reconstructed their experiences within the context of their school settings, including stories about their daily interactions with students and colleagues (Seidman, 2006). The final topic focused on how the participants make meaning of their experiences. According to Seidman (2006), this concluding section in the interview process "addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (p. 18). To create a comfortable conversation with the participants and guide the conversation, I took minimal notes during the interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Data Analysis

As previously stated, I chose to analyze the data after all the interviews were completed; however, during each interview, I used member checking to confirm accuracy of the data and trustworthiness of the investigation. According to Harper and Cole (2012), member checking is a quality control process used by researchers to improve accuracy, credibility, and validity and involves the researcher restating or summarizing the information given by the participant during the interview. If the participants affirm that the researcher's summary reflects their views, feelings, and experiences, the inquiry is said to have credibility (Creswell, 2013; Harper & Cole, 2012). Another form of member checking occurs at the end of the process when the participants review the final data analysis, interpretations, and conclusions (Creswell, 2014; Harper & Cole, 2012). Each participant received an email with a copy of my crafted narrative for their perusal. Instructions were given in the email to reply to me with any amendments or corrections. This method allowed the participants to give me feedback to ensure that I captured the

essence of the participants' experiences. Patton (1989) explained that the goal is to identify the essence of the shared experience that undergirds the differences among the participants' lived experiences. The essence is seen by analyzing the commonalties in the lived experiences of mindfulness educators. Both methods of member checking (during and after) serve to decrease incidents of misrepresentation by the researcher while allowing the researcher to verify accuracy, increasing credibility of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Phenomenological data analysis advances through the methodological technique of epoche and reduction, which is the analysis of specific statements, themes, and a pursuit for all possible meanings. Hoffman (2014) explained that the researcher must enter a "space of openness" to the phenomenon, understanding that this is "more an attitudinal and intuitive practice than the application of some techniques, codes, or methods in an instrumental sense" (p. 3). Patton (2015) established five steps the researcher should follow in order to identify the essence from the data. For my analysis, I did the following:

Step 1: Epoche. I sought to eliminate or clarify my preconceptions through my postreflective statement and the bridling journal used throughout data collection and analysis.

Step 2: Phenomenological reduction. Throughout the process of data collection, I continually set aside my presumptions and subjective experiences in regard to my participants' experiences, as noted in my bridling journal. When writing the participants' narratives, I used the "eidetic" or essence method of reduction (Hoffman, 2014). In other words, during the winnowing down of the data corpus, I wanted to capture the

phenomenon by extracting verbatim the significant statements from the data and formulating meanings about them through my interpretations (Saldaña, 2016).

Step 3: Bracketing. After each digitally recorded interview, I transcribed the data using the transcription service at https://trint.com/. When all interviews were complete, I spent an entire day on each interview; listening, reflecting, and crafting narratives from each participant's personal experiences, using key phrases and statements that spoke directly to the phenomenon. Using the "vocative dimension of phenomenology" allowed me to capture the voices of my participants by honoring their "special expressive linguistic and rhetorical sensitivities" (Hoffman, 2014, p. 3). Saldaña (2016) labeled this type of coding as *in vivo coding*, "using words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes" (p. 294). This type of coding is appropriate for mostly all qualitative studies, especially novice qualitative researchers and studies that highlight and honor their participant's voice. Next, I interpreted the meanings of these phrases as an informed reader and inspected these meanings for what they uncovered concerning the essential recurring characteristics of being a mindfulness educator. Last, I offered a tentative statement or definition of the phenomenon in relation to the essential recurring features identified (Denzin, 1989). I hand wrote these in the margins of the printed narratives.

Step 4: Established themes. Carefully constructed interview questions and follow-up questions during the interview enabled me to discern themes at the surface level and at the latent level. Following Saldaña's (2016) expertise, as I did in Step 3 with in vivo coding, I also chose the *theming the data* coding method. Saldaña suggested using coding methods that will catalogue and more vividly reveal ontological questions

that address the nature of the participants' realities such as, "What are the lived experiences of…? What is it like being…?

Step 5: Development of structural synthesis. The last set of interview questions asked the participants to reflect on the meaning of their lived experiences. Specifically, "What does it mean to be a mindfulness practitioner? What does it mean to be a secondary educator? How do you make sense of your work in the school setting?" Patton (2015) called this the bones of the experience, the true meanings of the experience of deeper meanings for the individual.

By following the above steps, also known as qualitative coding, I was able to work with and through the rich, descriptive data so common themes or essences could emerge. Creswell (2007) explained that codes can rise to the surface as a result of what the researcher is expecting but also what the researcher finds to be surprising, compelling, or captivating. These findings are presented in Chapter 4.

Limitations

In choosing to investigate the lived experiences of secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners, I acknowledge that there were limitations due to the inherent nature of the qualitative and phenomenological construct. Specifically, the number in the participant pool for this study was 11. Phenomenological researchers use purposeful sampling so they may delve deeply into the lived experiences of a small number of participants. Therefore, the findings from this study may not be generalizable to a wider population. Nevertheless, it is vital to remember that this investigation could inform theory and practice for future larger studies (Seidman, 2014). Furthermore, I chose to only conduct in-depth interviews as a means of data collection. Since my

participants were recruited from around the world, it would not have been logistically feasible for me to do in-person observations of all participants. Seidman (2014) eloquently stated, "The method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (p. 55). A final limitation to this study was that in lieu of a proxy, I was the interviewer. "According to Patton, the credibility of the researcher is especially important in qualitative research, as it is the person who is the major instrument of data collection and analysis" (Shenton, 2003, p. 68).

Delimitations

The delimitations that supported the focus of this study were location, the sample participants for the study, and the purpose. The phenomenological qualities of the chosen methodology were focused exclusively on secondary educators who self-identify as having an established mindfulness practice. The decision to not include K-5 educators was based on my personal secondary educational background and the desire to understand other secondary educators' lived experiences as mindfulness practitioners. According to Moustakas (1994), researchers should have a personal curiosity in what they desire to explore as well as a close connection with the designated phenomena. Therefore, I acknowledge having a personal interest in and personal experience as a secondary educator who has a mindfulness practice. Since I am cognizant of this bias, I utilized a postreflection journal as explicated by Vagle (2014) and as stated in the data sources under Table 1 entitled, "The Researcher's Bridling Journal."

Addressing Internal/External Validity, Reliability, and Objectivity

The intent of this research investigation was to examine the phenomenon of mindfulness practice as it relates to secondary educators in the context of their natural settings. According to Shenton (2003), positivists, those who use existing theory to develop hypothesis, are reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Therefore, Shenton suggested that Guba's constructs are worthy of consideration for the qualitative researcher. Guba preferred to use different language from the positivist researcher (Shenton, 2003), thus the following table is a manifestation of the ways in which I addressed internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

Table 2

Provisions to Address Guba's Four Criteria for Trustworthiness

Quality Criterion	Provisions Made by the Researcher
Credibility (in preference to internal validity)	Use of reflective commentary Researcher background disclosed Pilot interview In-depth interview questions Member checking Site triangulation Peer scrutiny Chapter 4: Thick, rich descriptions
Transferability (in preference to external validity/ generalizability)	Provision of contextual information Convey boundaries of the research
Dependability (in preference to reliability)	In-depth methodological description
Confirmability (in preference to objectivity)	Admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions Rationale on chosen research design Recognition of methodological shortcomings In-depth methodological description Ongoing reflective commentary

For credibility, I utilized reflective commentary in the form of a bridling journal, as explained by Vagle (2014). This bridling journal allowed me to "reign in" my personal biases and assumptions throughout the interviewing process. In my initial postreflection statement, I disclosed my background as a secondary educator and mindfulness practitioner. In addition to using in-depth interview questions that are modeled after Dr. Frias (2015) and her research on the lived experiences of K-12 educators, I completed a pilot interview with the questions that I crafted specifically for my study.

Member checking occurred during the interview process as well as after the data analysis. According to Shenton (2003), "The single most important provision that can be

made to bolster a study's credibility is member checks" (p. 68). Additionally, the nature of my study employed site triangulation, which involved the participation of interviewees among a variety of institutions from all over the United States, Canada, Australia, and Japan. Shenton stated that site triangulation reduces the effect on the study of certain local factors that may be specific to one institution. Furthermore, when similar findings emerge among the various sites, results of the study may lend more credibility in the eyes of the reader. Site triangulation is akin to Dervin's (1997) concept of "circling reality," which she defined as "the necessity of obtaining a variety of perspectives in order to get a better, more stable view of 'reality' based on a wide spectrum of information from a wide base of points in time-space" (p. 24). While playing back each recorded participant's interview, I wrote a carefully constructed narrative, interweaving the actual voices from my participants. This technique was my first step in data analysis, as it gave me an opportunity to "be present" once again with each interviewee. Next, I sent the narrative to each participant and asked them for input and feedback (see Appendix E). There were minor changes to some of the narratives. One participant requested that I add more information to her narrative. She said she was not brave enough to bring it up during the interview but stated,

> After thinking about it, I would be okay with this being included in my story because I think trauma survivors don't always know that the can help make themselves better … they can change their narrative from one of a victim to one of thriving and pull themselves out of the past moment to the present.

For my phenomenological investigation, member checking proved to be invaluable as a way to ensure credibility, as 10 of the 11 interviewees responded to my email.

Peer scrutiny is another method I employed to ensure credibility of my research. Shenton (2003) explained that the fresh perspective from a colleague or peer could afford the opportunity to challenge assumptions made by the researcher, whose closeness to the research could prevent her from viewing the investigation with authentic detachment. After constructing all the narratives, I emailed them to Dr. Karen Bluth, an associate professor at the University of Chapel Hill and an expert in mindfulness, who expressed excitement and interest in my phenomenological investigation on the lived experiences of mindfulness educators (personal communication, June 18, 2018). I asked for her feedback on any biases and assumptions that may be present. I also asked for her insight into any other possible themes based on her experiences and expertise in mindfulness. Finally, Chapter 4 contains thick, rich descriptions of the participants, their background, and the context in which their mindfulness practice intersects with their educator roles.

As far as transferability, it is difficult for a qualitative study to demonstrate that the findings can be applied to other situations and populations (Shenton, 2003); however, Shenton (2003) suggested that the researcher should give rich contextual information so the reader can make the decision whether or not the findings and conclusions could be applied to his/her site. For each participant, I crafted a narrative about their personal background information as well as information concerning the context in which they experience the phenomenon of mindfulness.

To ensure dependability of my research endeavor, I wrote an in-depth methodological description so the study may be replicated. This description included the following: (a) the research design and its implementation, (b) the operational detail of gathering data, including the minutiae of the field work, and (c) the reflective appraisal of

the research, including evaluating the effectiveness of the process of the inquiry (Shenton, 2003, p. 72).

Finally, confirmability was addressed throughout Chapter 3, and I continued to use reflective commentary after each interview session in my bridling journal. The following statement included my initial thoughts, personal understandings, and experiences with a mindfulness practice and how that intersects my work with students in a middle school setting.

Initial Postreflection Statement

According to Vagle (2014), "Examining your own assumptions gives you a better chance of taking hold of them, rather than the assumptions taking hold of you and in turn the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 133). Vagle (2014) suggested that the researcher write an initial statement, revisit this statement throughout the data gathering and analysis process, and update the initial statement as needed. Furthermore, Creswell (2007) advised the researcher to decide how and in what way his or her own personal understandings and experiences should be introduced into the study. Therefore, the following statement was written prior to data collection. I believed it was important to convey my own personal educational experiences as they relate to my mindfulness practice, my personal assumptions, and what I hoped to learn from my participants (Vagle, 2014).

As a secondary educator who self-identifies as a mindfulness practitioner, I framed this study through the lens of someone who views being an educator as one of the most noble professions, yet one of the most stressful. As already explained during the introduction to this study, I stumbled upon mindfulness during a very difficult passage in

my life. As I reflect on those early days of my beginning practice, I recall the feeling of relief wash over me, as it was analogous to discovering a cure for a life-threatening illness. It is also important to note that teaching was not always stressful to me. When I worked in a higher socioeconomic setting with smaller class sizes, teaching was not nearly so taxing; thus, it makes me examine my assumption that all educators find this profession as demanding as I do, which leads me to my second assumption. Prior to embarking on this research journey, I assumed that only classroom teachers experienced burnout and stress. After a discussion with a school social worker who has a mindfulness practice, I realized that support staff also have many opportunities to interact and make connections with students and other colleagues. It was this discussion that allowed me to widen my scope of participants to more than just classroom teachers.

In conducting this phenomenological research endeavor, I hoped to learn from my participants the plethora of ways they came to be secondary educators and mindfulness practitioners. I wonder how many of them were mindfulness practitioners first or if any of them practiced another form of meditation such as yoga. I possess a personal bias that a teacher's personal mindfulness practice can impact classroom climate in positive ways, but I am wondering how other educators who are not teachers view mindfulness and its impact on school culture. This paradoxically simple yet complex study on the intersection of secondary educators and their personal mindfulness practice could open new avenues of research for further recommendations and study. As I ended Chapter 3 and prepared to do my research, I followed this advice: "Be open/Be patient/Be honest, yet gentle with yourself/Be serious, yet playful/Be contemplative, yet decisive/And most of all, be phenomenological" (Vagle, 2014, p. 148).

Summary

This research investigation employed a phenomenological approach to best capture the lived experience of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice. All participants signed an informed consent to participate, and confidentiality was fully discussed. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to data collection to ensure that all ethical standards were followed.

Participants were asked to volunteer for the study and were sought through email and social networking. Criteria such as age, race, religion, level of education, political affiliation, and ethnicity were not considered essential criteria for participating in the study. Data were collected in the form of semi-structured digitally recorded interviews, lasting between 45-60 minutes.

Data analysis occurred after data collection and after I revisited each participant's interview and crafted their narratives. Participant transcripts were coded and analyzed further for themes that manifested from the lived experiences of the participants. From these themes, meanings of the experience were made; and the findings are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain insight into educators' origins and perceptions of their mindfulness practices and how that translates into their daily work lives. The finding from this study may offer direction and guidance to other educators who seek to improve their sense of well-being in the workplace. Presently, there is little research that explores the lived experiences of teachers and support staff who have a personal mindfulness practice and how that transfers to their work life.

When reviewing the literature on mindfulness and educators, it appears mindfulness practices can cultivate one's inner resilience by providing them with the skills they need to be cognizant of their emotions. Additionally, the research on mindfulness and education indicates a possible intervention by providing educators with skills that may help them face the demands of working in 21st century learning environments, thus helping them develop resiliency in times of stress. However, there is a paucity of research literature on the stories and voices of teachers and support staff who have a mindfulness practice. We know very little about the day-to-day experiences of educators who practice mindfulness in their schools. Additionally, the majority of the research on educators and mindfulness is about those who participated in mindfulness training programs. What about educators who have developed their own mindfulness practices? How does one's personal practices affect his or her interactions with students and colleagues?

For this investigation, I interviewed 11 secondary educators who self-identified as

mindfulness practitioners. A mindfulness practice is the embodiment of a variety of cognitive processes, including connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group within their contextual environments and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step (Lutz et al., 2015; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006, p. 266). This comprehensive definition gave me the autonomy to accept all secondary educators who self-identity as mindfulness practitioners, as the potentially transformative effects of mindfulness practices are developed in a context broader than clinical medicine, psychology, neuroscience, or religion (Lutz et al., 2015). I created four categories in which to place my participants in relation to their discovery of mindfulness and adopting a mindfulness practice: spiritual journey, emotional and physical disabilities, stress, and curiosity. As seen in Figure 2, these categories are placed outside of the three-dimensional mindfulness practice space with arrows pointing inward, illustrating the way participants came to be mindfulness practitioners. Underneath each category are the names of the participants. It was important to convey that I purposely chose not to use a mindfulness practice continuum, as a continuum may give the impression that one mindfulness practitioner is "further along" than another. Dr. Bluth concurred with this premise, as she stated in her peer scrutiny feedback that all mindfulness practitioners have their own path; therefore, it should not be conceptualized as a continuum. Rather, it is complex and less linear (personal communication, January 27, 2019). I revisited the Lutz et al. (2015) model (see Figure 1) from Chapter 1; and as Lutz et al. (2015) suggested, the template would be considerably enhanced by gathering first-person data from mindfulness practitioners at various levels from a distinct cultural/social context. Figure 2 is my visual framework

created as a heuristic tool so I could visually display my research findings.

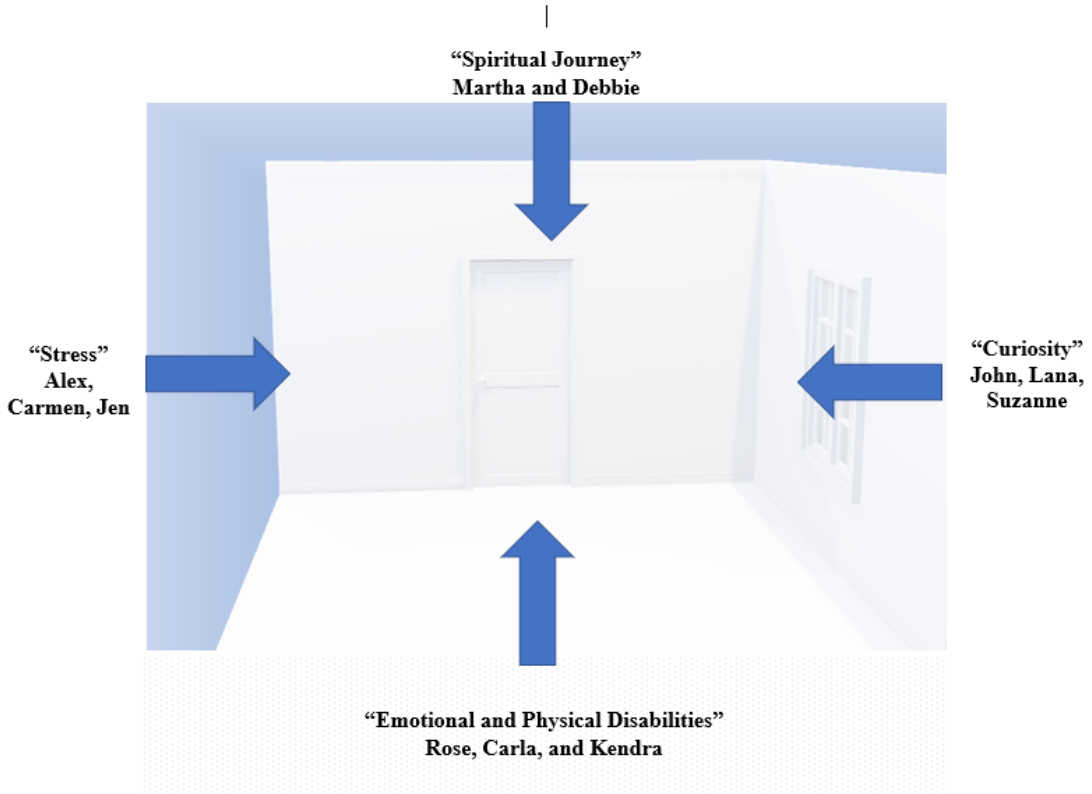


Figure 2. A Mindfulness Practice Space.

Participant Profiles

The participants for this study included 11 secondary educators who self-identified as mindfulness practitioners. Six were teachers; two were school social workers. The other participants included one guidance counselor, one high school psychologist, and one media specialist. All participant names have been changed to ensure anonymity. The following table gives a snapshot of the 11 participants. Participant narratives vary in length, as some mindfulness practitioners were able to share more detailed stories of their lived experiences. Nevertheless, it should be noted that each participant brought something of value to this investigation on the lived experiences

of secondary mindfulness educators.

Table 3

Participants for Mindfulness Study

Name	Role in Education	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Practicing Mindfulness
Alex (pilot interview)	Middle Grade Language Arts Teacher	17 years	5 years
Martha	High School Social Worker	17 years	8 years
John	High School Orchestra Teacher	20 years	2 years
Rose	High School Social Worker	7 years	5 years
Lana	Student Support School Psychologist	15 years	6 years
Carla	Media Specialist for K-7 French Immersion School	16 years	16 years
Carmen	High School Teacher/School Counselor	36 years	8 years
Jen	High School English Teacher	13 years	3 years
Kendra	Yoga Teacher for kids w/ Special Needs	20 years	15 years
Suzanne	English Teacher at the university level	11 years	8 years
Debbie	High School Health Teacher	19 years	10 years

Pilot Interview with Alex

Alex is a 39-year-old seventh grade language arts teachers at an urban middle school in North Carolina. The middle school has over 1,200 students, with approximately 60% of those students receiving free/reduced lunch. The demographic

makeup of this school is about 65% minority and the remaining 35% White. Alex was my only face-to-face interview, as she and I are colleagues and she graciously agreed to pilot my interview questions. Alex and I have worked closely together for 7 years and have a strong, trusting collegial relationship as well as a loving and trusting friendship. I knew that I could trust Alex to offer honest feedback on the interview questions.

Alex has practiced yoga for 6 years and obtained her yoga certification in 2018. Alex considers herself a mindfulness practitioner via her yoga practice. I understood that yoga and mindfulness are related, but I was curious how the two practices are interconnected. I acknowledged in my bridling journal (see Appendix A) that I had not considered asking a yoga practitioner to be a participant in my mindfulness study, and that this bias needed to be set aside during the interview process.

Alex and mindfulness. Alex shared that in 2013 she had a very difficult transition professionally. For reasons outside of her control, Alex had to leave a teaching job she really loved and enjoyed to a much more stressful and difficult age group and demographic. The transfer proved to be extremely difficult and stressful. The summer prior to this stressful transition, Alex happened to find yoga. Alex said,

> It was through the yoga practice that I found mindfulness. It was just the stopping and the breathing. Then, I started buying a couple of books here and there, such as Thich Nhat Hanh's book, so that's how I came to mindfulness.

Alex as a mindfulness middle school language arts teacher. Alex stated that she wanted to be a teacher from the age of four, and when Alex was in fourth grade, her teacher's kind disposition inspired her even more to want to become a teacher. She showed Alex how much she loved and cared for her by having one-on-one talks with

Alex concerning her behavior and how she expected better of her and how much she loved her. Alex shared that her childhood was really rough, and Ms. Fry was aware of this trauma and nurtured Alex is a unique and special way.

Since teaching was what Alex always aspired to do, I was curious if there was ever a time when she felt she needed to leave the profession. Alex said yes and referred back to the 2013 school year where she struggled to build relationships with students, as the relationship building had always been a natural part of her teaching practice. Coming from a rural early college (a high school where students can dual enroll in college courses while completing high school graduation requirements) with smaller class sizes, it was much easier to build relationships. The transition to a large urban middle school with 30 plus students in a class was extremely challenging. Alex said what got her through was her strong collegial relationships and her yoga practice, which daily reminded her that she would not have this teaching experience forever; therefore, she would just breathe through it. Alex shared the following story about what it means to "breathe through" something:

> I remember staring at my back wall, one day in particular, my class was going nuts, and I just sort of looked at my back wall and started breathing. The kids stopped and tried to figure out what I was doing. Somebody asked me what I was doing, and I said, "Guys, I'm just breathing, because at this point, nothing else is working, so I am just going to stop and take a breath." They actually kind of stopped and took one with me too.

Next, I asked Alex what is it like to be a secondary educator who self-identifies as a mindfulness practitioner? Alex shared a recent story of working one on one with a

student who was unruly for a substitute teacher in another class. Alex asked him to start taking a breath because the moment that was happening then was not serving him. She said to him, "You're visibly upset; you're shaking." Alex said she tried to get him to pay attention to what was happening in his body. She started talking him through the process of calming himself down, stepping outside of what was irritating him, and stepping outside of the emotion. Alex wanted him to address what was going on inside of his body and to start to breathe and calm down. Alex said he was able to recognize that he was upset, and he began to breathe with intention. Alex said she could not get him to stand up, but the yelling and screaming did stop. Alex said this was a good example of how she is bringing awareness to her students through her mindfulness practice:

> We have a lot of discussions in my class as to why they feel the way they feel and what can they do when they feel themselves getting anxious or upset, so I really do a lot with the breath work.

During teaching, Alex said there are moments when she will stop her teaching because she senses uneasiness among the students, and they are not paying attention. She understands that when students get to this point, they are not able to learn. Alex will then lead her class through a breathing exercise: "I want you to take a deep inhale through your nostrils and then a deep exhale." Alex has discovered that this simple exercise can help her students to refocus, so she can resume teaching.

I asked Alex if she had any stories that she could share of interactions with colleagues where her mindfulness practice has been beneficial. Alex explained that on an innate level, she can be a little "sassy" with her colleagues. Mindfulness has allowed her to intentionally engage with her colleagues on a personal level, to look them in the eye

and really listen to them, and to be "in" whatever they are telling her. Mindfulness has equipped her with the ability to suspend judgment that she might have of what they are saying. Prior to mindfulness, Alex said she would make quick judgments about colleagues and situations, and many times those judgments would be wrong because she would not know the whole story. Alex said, "With mindfulness, stopping and taking a breath, and the extra pause allows my brain to acknowledge that there is a lot more of the situation that I cannot see."

Without even asking the question, Alex started sharing what it means to be a mindfulness practitioner on a personal level. Alex said that mindfulness has allowed her to get into her own story and to acknowledge her own history. She said that "sitting" with feelings that come up and acknowledging where they are coming from, where her own fears and anxiety are coming from, allows her to connect with others who have their own fears and anxiety.

Alex said she continues to practice yoga, which is really the vehicle that brought her to mindfulness. Alex has a daily meditation practice, where most mornings before her students walk in the door, she takes a few moments to close her eyes, take a few deep breaths, and reflect on why she came to work, which is the sheer love for her students. Alex recognizes that whatever happens today will be ok if "I just stick to loving them and doing what is best for them," which she expresses and articulates to her students on a regular basis. Alex said, "When I get frustrated, I will, mid-sentence stop speaking and take a breath, whether I am speaking to adults and definitely when I am speaking with kids."

I asked Alex to share with me what it means to be a secondary educator. Alex

said that as teachers we wear so many hats and there is so much that is expected of teachers, but her overarching philosophy is "teachers are peddlers of hope." Therefore, being a secondary educator means helping students to become successful in whatever their hopes and dreams may be. When asked where she would place the importance of curriculum and social/emotional learning (SEL), she said that curriculum is secondary. She explained that her students experience so much trauma. It is difficult for students to focus on curriculum when so much is going on in their personal lives. Students are human beings first. Alex poignantly said, "In order to engage the students' minds, you have to engage the human heart first."

The last question I asked Alex was, "As a mindfulness practitioner, how do you make sense of your work in the school setting?" Alex said that the imposed framework and curriculum that we are using with our students is not something she would have chosen. Her mindfulness practice has helped her acknowledge her anger concerning these mandates and how to move forward and view the situation holistically instead of just being angry, as was her initial reaction. Alex expressed that teaching is one of the hardest jobs in the world and there are days when her students' trauma overwhelms her. In the last 5 years, Alex has seen more kids with anxiety, depression, and broken families. Alex described herself as an "empath," one who has the propensity to absorb all of her students' trauma. Mindfulness meditation has allowed her to balance her work and personal life, releasing the trauma that she senses and knows that her students are experiencing. She accepts that she cannot fix all of her students' struggles, but she can give them the tools that they need to manage their own stresses and difficulties: "I have discovered the tools of mindfulness and passing them on to my students is paramount."

Reflections on Pilot Interview

The pilot interview with Alex set me up for success in a plethora of ways. First, it gave me the confidence I needed to sit with another person and ask them to share their lived experiences. Second, Alex assured me that the interview questions were appropriate, thought provoking, and somewhat restorative and rejuvenating for her to reflect on her personal and professional mindfulness journey as a secondary educator. Third, from a logistical standpoint, I was able to change the interview time frame from 60-90 minutes to 45-60 minutes, which proved to be more palatable for subsequent interviewees.

Most importantly, I was able to practice epoche, as described by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas stated that a phenomenological interview involves an "informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions" (p. 114). Moustakas said the researcher should construct questions that will evoke personal accounts from and as experienced by participants as they relate to the phenomenon in question. According to Moustakas, the interview begins as a "social conversation" which is followed by a "focus on the experience" (p. 114) described in full by the participants. Moustakas further postulated that the interviewer should "engage in the Epoche process" (p. 116), which is considered and practiced throughout the research process. Therefore, during my pilot interview, I was able to set aside my own personal bias of a yoga practitioner. After my interview with Alex, I opened up my mind to the possibility of interviewing other yoga practitioners. This proved to be fruitful, as there were two more participants, Carla and Kendra, who also discovered mindfulness from their yoga practice.

Martha

Martha is a 51-year-old school social worker in a middle to upper middle class suburban high school outside of Chicago with a student population of approximately 2,000, with approximately 70% of those being White and only approximately 100 students on free and reduced lunch. Martha has been a school social worker for 17 years and at her present site for 4 years.

Martha and mindfulness. Martha grew up in a very conservative home where it was not acceptable to question her family's religious views or to express emotions; however, Martha always wanted to look for answers and to understand herself in a more meaningful way. After college, she considered going into the ministry but realized it was not for her. Martha said she spent a lot of time in therapy and just continued to question the meaning of life over the course of approximately 20 years. Martha shared how, at a former high school where she was employed, five students and staff committed suicide over a period of approximately 2.5 years. Martha explained that the school community was forced to come to grips with mental health; as prior to these suicides, the community did not openly talk about depression or suicide. In the wake of the school and community's mental health crisis, Linda Lanteri, an expert in social emotional learning and mindfulness, spoke at Martha's school. Martha as well as other faculty members and parents were invited to spend the day with her. It was during this opportunity that Martha was introduced to mindfulness and became very intrigued by the practice. Martha conducted her own research on other mindfulness research and came across a mindfulness curriculum for teens. Martha began consulting with the author of the program and soon began teaching the mindfulness program at her school. Martha was

instrumental in bringing awareness of mindfulness to her school.

Martha as a mindfulness social worker. After college, Martha worked in hospital mental health and was still trying to figure out what she wanted to do. She vacillated between becoming a teacher or a social worker. She decided on social work and discovered that she could be a social worker in a school setting. Martha's present role/title is Prevention & Wellness Program Coordinator at her school, including all things SEL and mental health.

I asked Martha what it is like to be a secondary educator, specifically a social worker, as she interacts with students and colleagues on a day-to-day basis. Martha explained that most of her conversations with students, colleagues, and parents center around the stresses of life. She said there are high levels of depression and anxiety and kids feeling very overwhelmed. Martha recognizes that many students feel ill-equipped to deal with the pressures of everyday life. The common thread that runs throughout most of her conversations with students is helping them figure out who they are. Martha is able to infuse herself into a lot of different arenas, and each day looks different. Martha loves collaborating with students and staff to offer programs and school-wide messages that help students recognize they are not alone and there is always hope.

When asked to explain what it is like to be a mindfulness educator, Martha explained how she works with the leaders of a freshman advisory group, which is a select group of upper classmen who mentor freshmen students. Martha explained the process of taking these mentors through a mindfulness exercise:

> I told the students a story about a heart transplant and then segued into a brief body scan and then ultimately just asked them to focus on the area of the heart,

> feeling the heart beating, feeling the chest rising and falling by putting your hand on your chest and asking the questions, "Where is your heart right now? How are you doing right now? How are your freshmen doing?" I am trying to get them accustomed to the idea that you're here for your freshmen, but if you are not taking care of yourself, then you really can't be present for yourself.

Martha said the point of this process is to get the upper classmen acclimated to the idea that it is ok to take care of yourself and that it is important to pause and ask yourself questions about how you are feeling and how you are doing.

I then asked Martha how her mindfulness practice has affected her interactions with colleagues. Martha said, "Being a mindfulness practitioner is huge, just being more aware myself, of my own reactions and a sense of presence." Martha shared a story about a colleague who "got under my skin in a really big way. I was able to kind of step back, and I just needed to set aside my severe limbic reaction and respond in a different kind of way." This incident occurred over a period of 5 days, but she was able to let it go. Five or 6 years ago, Martha had some entrenched difficulties with certain people because she believed they were not doing what was best for students. It became problematic. Martha stated,

> I feel like now I am aware and I try to have a gentler touch. I can approach my colleagues and my work with an open heart and an open mind. Mindfulness has definitely made a big difference in my work and how much more present I am able to be.

When asked what being a mindfulness practitioner means to her, Martha explained, "I give a lot of priority in my life to pausing. Part of it is a formal practice, but

a lot of it is during the course of my day I'm just trying to be more present." Martha said,

> Being a mindfulness practitioner matters more than anything. It matters more than how smart I think I am or the great ideas I have. If I am not present and available and people don't see that in me, then the rest of my work really doesn't have an impact.

When asked what it means to be a secondary educator, Martha explained that being a secondary educator means helping students become more aware of who they are.

In closing, I asked Martha how she makes sense of her mindfulness practice in the school setting. Martha explained that it is her mission to really bring a greater message of mindfulness to her school and really anybody who works with teens, in terms of parents and colleagues. Martha said her mindfulness practice in the school setting is about growing kids but not in academic areas; rather, teaching kids how to relate to themselves in a way that is healthy.

After my interview with Martha, she gave me emails of other possible participants. The next two interviews, John and Rose, were from Martha's contacts.

John

John has been an orchestra teacher for 20 years at the same high school, which is located about 45 miles northwest of Chicago. The demographics of the school are upper middle class and almost entirely Caucasian. John characterized his site as a high achieving school, which always ranks high in AP test scores. There is only one community that feeds into the high school, thus making it a very contained and supportive community.

John and mindfulness. John explained that his introduction to mindfulness

started with reading some articles and being introduced through the app called *Headspace*. He said it was a gradual process of getting into it. Last year, he was talking to the school's health and wellness coordinator, and she said she was wanting to do a long-term mindfulness program with students, and so he volunteered one of his classes for her to come into once a week. John said his goal this year is to lead those same kinds of meditations with his students, but he is not quite comfortable in doing that yet; however, he has done other things with students such as gratitude building activities. In addition, John explained that the school shortened class times this year by 5 minutes; therefore, he said it is been a struggle to incorporate anything extra. John said that he is worried about taking away his already shortened instructional time and also nervous about leading students in mindfulness activities because of his lack of experience.

John as a mindfulness high school orchestra teacher. While in high school, John discovered that he was good in biology and music; therefore, he chose a college where he could study both. As far as music, John said it did not make sense for him to pursue a performance degree and that he was interested in music education because of his prior music leadership roles in high school. Adding the educational courses meant extra required courses and a semester of student teaching. John said that even with a 5-year program, majoring in biology and music was not going to work. John asked himself, "What can I not see myself giving up?" He dropped the biology and focused totally on music. John went straight to graduate school, as he wanted to become the best musician he could be. After 2 years in graduate school, John landed a teaching job where he did his student teaching, and he has been at the same school for 20 years.

I asked John to describe his interactions with students in relation to his

mindfulness practice. John said that he does not have as full of a description or context of mindfulness that I have. I assured him that it was ok, and then I rephrased my question by stating, "Do you find yourself being mindful when you're interacting with your students?" John then shared the following:

> I had my students do a 5-minute body scan last week. That was my introduction. I used the *Calm* app because *Calm* is free for educators. Since students find mindfulness difficult, the way I describe it is to tell them to look at the back wall and look at the poster, then look at the bottom left of the poster. By having them focus on a certain point, students can begin to see that their mind is so occupied on that point that the mind can't focus on anything else such as stresses or other thoughts in their head. The point of the meditation is to provide these moments, however fleeting, where other thoughts or stressors are not totally dominating every moment.

John explained that to follow up on this mindfulness activity, he sent his students articles on some of the positives of practicing mindfulness. John said that he is only doing these exercises with his top orchestra students. These are the students who are self-selecting to audition and who are already dedicated to bettering themselves in orchestra. John said he was hesitant, or not as comfortable, to try mindfulness with some of his other groups of students; however, he does incorporate times where students can express gratitude.

When asked what being a secondary educator means, John explained that it is teaching students what is really important in life, which are relationships and connections with other human beings. "It's about helping students become better human beings."

John said that he makes sense of his work as an educator because at his core he loves music. It is all about the music for him. "I'm sharing my love of music with my students. I get my kicks out of the creative part of it, like how to build an entire curriculum on empathy within the context of music." Additionally, John believes that teaching students broad concepts like flexibility, problem-solving, and empathy are important because we are preparing students for future jobs that do not even exist yet. John is still grappling with the concept of embedding these concepts into his music curriculum. John envisions true education as opportunities for students to interact and connect with one another in empathic ways.

Rose

Rose is a 36-year-old social worker and has been a school social worker for 7 years. Presently, Rose works at a rural high school on the fringes of the Chicago suburbs. There are approximately 1,500 students, with a 70% Caucasian population and 30% students of color, and approximately less than 3% on free and reduced lunch.

Rose and mindfulness. Rose was introduced to mindfulness in her early 20s when she went to her first therapist who recommended *The Miracle of Mindfulnes*s by Thich Nhat Hanh; since then, she has dabbled in various mindfulness practices. Prior to that, Rose started doing yoga when she was first out of college. I probed Rose a little further about why she started going to a therapist. Rose stated, "I was experiencing some anxiety, and my therapist recommended mindfulness to me, so I would say it was definitely a need." After member checking her narrative, Rose requested that I add the following:

The real reason that my therapist recommended mindfulness to me was due to

> chronic PTSD from childhood trauma, which was manifesting as anxiety. After thinking about it, I would be okay with this being included in my story, because I think trauma survivors don't always know that they can help make themselves better…. They can change their narrative from one of a victim to one of thriving and pull themselves out of the past moment to the present.

Rose as a mindfulness school social worker. Rose obtained her bachelor's degree in sociology and was working as a care provider for a family who had some unique needs when she realized she really loved direct practice with people and did not want to be a nanny forever. Rose started thinking about where she could work with kids and adults in a direct practice situation. Rose said she did not know that schools had social workers, as her high school did not have one when she was in school. When she discovered there was a need for school social workers, she went back to school to get her license in school social work. Rose stated she really loved working with teens, and that is how she ended up as a high school social worker. This is Rose's second year at her present school.

I asked Rose to tell me what it is like to be a mindfulness practitioner and a school social worker. Rose stated that mindfulness has greatly impacted her work in schools as well as her private practice with students and clients. Rose was trained in a mindfulness program for teens and goes into classrooms to teach the materials. During these whole class instructions, Rose can lead students in guided meditations. Rose explained that many individual students come to her in a state of panic or anxiety, and she is able to lead them in a grounding exercise or a body scan. Rose stated, "It's a useful tool for me to be able to move them from a place of having such a physiological response to anxiety to

being able to manage the physiological response to anxiety." Since Rose has many opportunities to interact with students in groups and on an individual basis, I was curious if her students were receptive to mindfulness. Rose said that students fall into one of three camps: super receptive, receptive but respectful in that they will not join in but sit quietly, and not receptive at all. Rose tries to encourage students to treat it like a practice; and for the most part, students are pretty receptive. In addition to working with students at the school, Rose and several of the faculty members at her school meet Thursday mornings to do mindfulness meditations together.

> It has been really nice to have a group of staff that practice mindfulness with me. I also try to mediate on my own with mixed fidelity, at least a couple times a week. I do feel like mindfulness is a practice that I come back to when I am feeling stressed or anxious.

As I was interviewing Rose, I made a note that it was exciting for me to hear how she can use her personal mindfulness practice as well as her mindfulness training. I was curious if she had any stories she could share from interactions with students or colleagues. Rose shared that she has been working with a student for the past year and a half who had extreme anxiety. Rose led her in a body scan, and the student reported that she felt almost 100% better. This story stood out for her because young people believe their physiological responses to stress, anxiety, or panic are completely out of their control (and sometimes they are); but Rose surmised that this student had not realized that she could do something to calm herself down. It was a profound moment for this student. For Rose, this is a tool she can help kids access if they are open to it and if it feels like a right fit for them.

Discerning when mindfulness is a good fit for a student is an important consideration. Rose said she always starts small and puts the experience in his/her hands. For example, she will say to a student, "Sometimes our bodies can react to anxiety, and I am wondering if it would be ok if I led you in a little breathing exercise?" If they seem disengaged, Rose said that she will not move forward; or if they say it did not work and it made them feel worse, she will stop. Rose said she is also cognizant of students who have trauma history and that she might not try mindfulness right away. I asked her why. Rose explained that for people who have a trauma history, it can be triggering to sit with their thoughts. "Mindfulness can actually not be a great experience." As the school social worker, Rose is cognizant of some of her students' backgrounds; therefore, she tries to be mindful of what her students' experiences are and what would be the best form of intervention or help.

Rose shared with me how she makes sense of her work in the school setting. She said that mindfulness at work means not being a reactor. There are so many people who are reactors, and sometimes it is helpful to have someone who speaks after some careful thought, especially when interacting with students and colleagues. Rose stated, "I try to not be reactive, and I think my mindfulness practice helps support that."

I asked Rose if she experienced compassion fatigue. Rose explained that when she notices her mind is racing from work and she cannot let something go, she will do a meditation. She often used the *Insight Timer* app which is a guided meditation that helps to guide her thoughts to a place of calm.

The last question I asked Rose was what it means to be a school social worker and a mindfulness practitioner. Rose views her occupation as a calling and has transitioned

over the last several years from just having a personal practice to using mindfulness in her daily interactions with students and colleagues. The mindfulness curriculum for teens and the Thich Nhat Hanh workbook, *Miracle of Mindfulness,* were the catalysts that enabled Rose to realize that her mindfulness practice and her occupation, which she is very passionate about, could be fused together.

Lana

Lana is a 43-year-old school psychologist and has been in this field for 15 years. Her formal title is Student Support School Psychologist at a high school located in a seaside city in Southern California. Lana's school is about a mile and half from the beach with a population of approximately 3,100 students. The demographic makeup of her school is 75% White, 10-15% Hispanic, and a small Vietnamese population. Lana said,

> We have a lot of socioeconomic diversity – from families who are very wealthy to families living doubled up in apartments. We have kids who live in mansions, kids who live in poverty, and even a small population of students who are homeless. Seventy percent are middle class, 15-20% wealthy, and the rest of the population would be considered low socioeconomic. We seem to have a very high social emotional need at our school – at least compared to other high schools in our district.

Lana and mindfulness. In 2013, Lana's school was approached by UCLA, as they received grant funding and needed to locate schools that would be willing to participate in training for a mindfulness program designed for teens as well as another therapy program. Training for Lana and other school psychologists occurred over the

summer and involved several high schools in the district. Students were screened and chosen to participate in the study based on their self-reported levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Students had to be at a certain level and could not be too far on the spectrum. Pre and postsurveys were used to measure the effectiveness of the program. Lana said from a practitioner's standpoint, the school psychologists loved the mindfulness program, as it was flexible and easy to implement. The frustrating part was that the groups were small, and they were only including approximately 10-12 students per semester. The intimacy of the groups and the effectiveness of the program made a great impact on the students, and they all loved it; however, there were many more students who could have benefited from the program. The grant with UCLA lasted 2 years; so, Lana and another school psychologist put the mindfulness program for teens out to the advanced placement (AP) teachers during the 2016-1-2017 school year because they wanted to work with juniors and seniors who were dealing with high level of stress, taking as many as five to six AP classes a year. Lana and her colleague called their program Mindful Mondays, and they would have approximately 30-37 students per class. The feedback they received from students was positive. Students looked forward to Mindful Mondays; many students were able to implement mindfulness in their daily lives and activities. I asked Lana if she had any experience with mindfulness prior to the training from UCLA and their teen program. Lana said she had a little bit of understanding in mindfulness but no training, so their program was her first major exposure.

On a personal level, Lana said she practices mindfulness when she has a hard time trying to fall asleep at night or when her mind is racing and she needs to calm her mind. Lana has shared mindfulness activities with her two middle school aged daughters who

sometimes experience anxiety.

Lana as a mindfulness school psychologist. Lana started out as a psychology major and liked the idea of working in education but did not want to be a classroom teacher. She heard about school psychology and started researching that field. Lana was fortunate enough that she was already working in a school district in a classified position doing testing for English language learners (ELL). When Lana finished her master's degree in school psychology, her school opened up a position in her school entitled Student Support School Psychologist. Lana works with at-risk students, homeless students, and 504 students, and she is on the Instructional Support Team (IST).

I asked Lana what is was like to be a school psychologist and a mindfulness practitioner. Lana shared that they have a lot of students coming to their office because of anxiety and panic attacks. The counseling office adopted the *Stop, Breathe, Think* app. The counselors will have students pick an exercise they can do together at that moment, especially if they are having a hard time just getting control of their emotions. The *Stop, Breathe, Think* app has also been a good tool to use when the counselors are not immediately available, as they know that it is difficult for students to be in class during anxiety attacks. Students can choose the session from the app that they would like to use and go through the meditation on their own.

I was curious if the students were receptive to using the app and if they were experiencing positive results. Lana said that most kids are receptive and you can see the transformation to the point where they are calm and they can talk and focus on what is going on; however, like Rose the social worker mentioned in her interview, mindfulness is not always the best intervention, especially for students who are struggling with

traumatic events. Lana relayed the story of a student who was dealing with sexual assaults and was having panic attacks. As Lana was leading her through a body scan, the student said she could not focus on her body right now. Lana said she tried switching over to just a breathing exercise, but she was already turned off to the whole experience.

Being a mindfulness practitioner to Lana means using mindfulness techniques with students who are open to the practice and also being mindful of her own needs: "Self-care has become important to me so that I can be in a position of taking care of others."

I asked Lana what it means to be a secondary educator. She said,

> For me, it's preparing students for life after high school. I work with a lot of kids who are getting ready to move out of their parent's house, and maybe not with their parent's blessing. My purpose is helping students figure out the logistics of life after high school.

My final question to Lana was how she makes sense of her work in her present school setting. Lana explained that it is knowing that there are students who are better off from having been able to connect with her. Lana sees the neediest students, those suffering with anxiety and depression, for instance. Lana and I discussed the uptick in depression and anxiety among students. Lana noticed approximately 6 years ago that her 504s have tripled in size. Although her special education referrals have remained consistent, many of the students are now qualifying in the social/emotional arena, and her 504s for anxiety and depression have skyrocketed. Lana believes the social pressures, social media and online bullying, and the burden to always look and be the best are putting a lot of pressure on students today. Parents are having difficulties coping with

their teens as well, Lana added: “It feels like every year we have more kids who are being hospitalized. Last year we had around eighteen students hospitalized for suicidal ideation or attempted suicide.” Lana said, “We talk to our teachers all the time to make sure that they are teaching to the whole child, that it’s not just about your class, homework, and AP tests.” Teachers need to be more flexible with students and understand that sometimes students need extra time for assignments, especially if they have trauma going on at home or if they are experiencing overwhelming anxiety, Lana explained.

Carla

Carla is a 38-year-old media specialist at a K-7 French Immersion school in Canada with a population of approximately 415 students. The surrounding community has a poverty rate of one in four; but because her school is a French Immersion school, their population is a blending of lower socioeconomic and middle-class students with no free/reduced lunch. At Carla’s school, Personal and Social Wellness is a core competency, which is embedded in their curriculum; therefore, all students at her school know and understand mindfulness.

Carla and mindfulness. Carla found mindfulness through her own personal need. Carla had an anxiety disorder and was seeking something to help heal herself. In 2000, she started doing a lot of yoga and became a yoga instructor in 2003. For the last 5 years, Carla has been intensely practicing mindfulness. Last fall, she took a mindfulness and self-compassion course: “The training was mind-blowing!” Carla explained that she has been a yogi and a person who studied Buddhism since 2003, but this course changed everything for her; it is the absolute lineage of meditation that heals. Carla’s teacher encouraged her to take the instructor training course for the teen’s self-compassion

course; therefore, in addition to her school job, Carla conducts workshops for teens. Carla said that teaching self-compassion to young people really fuels her heart. Carla is also a part-time facilitator for the local Dali Lama Center, which has a wealth of resources for educators.

Carla as a mindfulness media specialist. Carla graduated from college with a business degree in marketing and a minor in economics. At the same time, she was a yoga instructor and a personal trainer, which gave her a feeling of personal contentment. Her college degrees did not give her that sense of fulfillment, and she felt adrift; so, at 28, she decided to get a teaching degree. Carla's mother was a teacher, and Carla knew that she also needed a job where she could serve others.

I asked Carla, "What is it like to be an educator who self-identifies as a mindfulness practitioner?" Carla shared a story about a sixth-grade girl who asked to speak to her during the lunch hour. When she met with her, the student immediately disclosed to her that she had been "cutting." Carla explained that students feel so open to share with her because she has "created a safe container and safe space for kids who are screaming out and looking for someone to carry their secret and to get an outside perspective." Carla shared that she does approximately one in four suicide protocols a year and that she receives more "Ministry of Family" calls than anyone else at her school. Carla describes herself as "that safe place; the heart of the school." As a media specialist, Carla has a library monitor program, and students flock to be a part of the program. Carla also runs a lot of clubs because she understands that all students need to feel a sense of belonging: "That is what it feels like to be a mindfulness educator. You really feel like you do the heart work, that you see these kids and that they know you see them."

I asked Carla to share some of her interactions with students and colleagues. Overall, Carla explained that her space at the school is "a center of real compassion." Students are constantly leaving little notes like, "I love you, Madame S." Carla does a lot of mindfulness and kindness lessons with the students at her school; but above and beyond those lessons, as I was interviewing Carla, I got the sense that students are drawn to Carla even before she builds relationships with them. I was curious why this was the case, so I asked Carla to explain this phenomenon of "drawing kids in."

> I always start every year with growth mindset, and I always talk about that it is our flaws where we shine best. I always tell my personal story that I have dyslexia and that it has made me understand things in different ways and that my brain puts pieces together differently. So, I am always the person with ideas. Some things will make your struggle, but some things will allow you to rise.

In working with her colleagues, Carla believes the key is to get educators within the system to be trained in self-care and self-compassion, in order to combat compassion fatigue and educator burnout. For the teachers and media specialists in her province, Carla recently presented a professional development on the topic of teacher burnout. Her room was packed with educators, and half of them cried during the presentation because they could relate to compassion fatigue and teacher burnout.

I asked Carla, "What does it mean to be a mindfulness practitioner?" Carla said the short answer is just being able to *see* the kids. Carla feels like she is in a privileged position as a media specialist in that she gets to "see their little hearts and learn their passions." Her media center in stocked with books about what the students are passionate about as well as a huge self-help section on an array of topics such as

transgendering, divorcing parents, puberty, and eating disorders. "Being a mindfulness practitioner means owning and seeing what's there, and helping the kids manage some of that." Carla shared that she incorporates Kristin Neff's three parts to self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. She shared a story about going into a classroom and observing a student who was really suffering during class. He was kicking a chair and totally losing it because his favorite pen broke. Carla said, "That must be hard; I'm sad when my favorite pen breaks too, and a lot of other kids get sad too." Next, Carla told him that he should take a breath and then handed him a new pen, and he got right back to work. Carla said we have to honor a child's internal world. In this situation,

> I could have used my adult brain and said, "That's ridiculous, get over it; there are plenty of other pens," but losing that blue pen was serious business to that student, and I needed to acknowledge that suffering was present.

Carla shared a powerful quote by Ruth King: "Things feel real, but they may not be true." Carla said that acknowledging someone's suffering is important when working with students and adults.

When asked, "What does it mean to be a school media specialist," Carla described how she used to be on a technology committee for her district and did presentations on Google Classroom and taught coding and robotics. She has her master's in this field and wanted to be taken seriously: "I really wanted to push forth an agenda in a high poverty area and make things more equitable in the area of technology." Presently, Carla said,

> I've totally let go of all the tech stuff; I don't even present anymore. I am presenting at the summit, but it's on Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) technology

> tools. It's just very different; the work is different; what I get out of it is different. I feel much more energetic and enthused about my work. My colleagues are more interested to collaborate, and fifty kids showed up to be library monitors!

It appears that teachers are more fascinated and intrigued with SEL, including mindfulness; and I asked Carla why this was the case. Carla explained that the teacher burnout rate is high, and her union is saying that they have reached the highest rate of teacher burnout. Sometimes home is the cause of the stress for teachers, and school is the outlet or vice versa. For some educators, both the work environment and home life are stressful. Educators reach a threshold where they just cannot take it anymore, and we are just looking for wellness. Carla alluded to the saliva test study that I discussed in my literature review.

> That interaction – that yes – the teacher makes the weather, and it's the chicken and the egg situation. Is it the crowded classrooms with needy students making the educator stressed out or is the stressed-out educator stressing out the students, or is it a co-contributor situation?

Carla went on to explain that the interesting thing about mindfulness is that it is a multi-modality practice in that it can help cutters, perfectionists, depression, super athletes, and the list goes on. In other words, mindfulness is such a wide brush with which you can paint.

When asked, "As a mindfulness practitioner, how do you make sense of your work," Carla explained that she is fortunate enough to live on the west coast where mindfulness is part of the everyday lexicon. Mindfulness is an integral part of her core values, and she just knows it is her life's work. "It might sound dramatic," Carla said,

"but I know that I am changing lives." Carla shared an email from a parent who is reflective of how Carla makes sense of her work. The daughter's name has been changed for anonymity.

> I just want to let you know how grateful I am that you are in Mary's life. I'm so appreciative of all the support you've given me and provided her during her difficult times. And thank you for providing for her today. Mary comes home telling me about how kind her classmates are. Thank you for providing a safe space for my girl. And thank you for teaching these vital life skills that I know will stay with her for the rest of her life. The world needs more people like you; the world needs more teachers like you.

Carla and I shed and shared a tear from this heart-felt letter. Carla said she does not listen to the naysayers but focuses on these life-changing moments. My interview with Carla was inspirational. I expressed to her that her passion and insight into mindfulness radiated through the interview process and that it was such a pleasure to spend time learning about her lived experiences as a mindfulness practitioner.

Carmen

Carmen is a 58-year-old teacher and school counselor. She was a teacher for 16 years and has been a counselor for the past 20 years. Carmen was currently on leave in California from her school counseling job in Australia when she reached out to my Facebook notification in one of the mindfulness groups.

Carmen and mindfulness. Carmen was working as a school counselor; and after approximately five years of this work, she was struggling to manage the stress of the job. Carmen tried different modalities to help with the stress, but nothing was really working.

Carmen started looking into spirituality and meditation. After doing meditation that was spiritually based, Carmen became more and more aware of the mindfulness research. Carmen believed that mindfulness could help mitigate the stress of her job; and mindfulness was something she could use in her work with students, since it is a secular practice. Over the years in her counseling profession, Carmen has taught mindfulness courses in small groups as well as whole class settings. During individual counseling sessions, Carmen has used mindfulness to give her clients strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety.

Carmen as a mindfulness teacher and school counselor. Carmen was always interested in being a teacher, so she went directly from high school to regional teacher training. Carmen earned a scholarship to go to teacher training. Carmen originally trained as a PE teacher and health/personal development teacher in a secondary school. After teaching for 16 years, Carmen got her degree in school counseling. For many years, Carmen was a school counselor for a large comprehensive high school in a rural area with a mixed socioeconomic status. Carmen taught mindfulness to a gifted and talented group. Presently, Carmen is on leave from her job in Australia and is in a supervisory role over school counselors in 20 schools.

Carmen shared a story of what is it like to be an educator who self-identifies as a mindfulness practitioner. She was working with a high school class where students were not very cooperative, and the teacher and Carmen agreed that it would be better to just pull the students who were interested in learning mindfulness. Carmen ended up with approximately eight students. There was one boy who came from a dysfunctional family background, including personal mental health issues and siblings with mental health

issues. Carmen stated,

> He was a really nice boy but could display bad behavior sometimes because he had a lot of problems with emotional regulation. One day he came to class and shared that he had felt like punching his brother like he normally did, but he didn't. He did the breathing exercises and calmed himself down.

Carmen said he was aware enough that he could use some of the strategies to settle himself down, and this was a good example of a student acquiring significant coping skills from learning a mindfulness practice.

I was curious if Carmen's mindfulness practice has helped in her interactions with colleagues. Carmen said mediation and mindfulness have changed the way she responds to people in general. In other words, Carmen said the change is within herself and how she responds to people with whom she may have a differing of opinion or a conflict:

> Mindfulness practitioners talk about "riding the waves of emotions," and that is how I experience my emotions if I'm doing regular practice; I feel a lot of calm. Since I am in a support role, it very important that I can modulate my own emotional states so that I can be available to help others.

I asked Carmen, "What does it mean to be a mindfulness practitioner?" Carmen stated it's about having a solid practice and a theoretical and lived understanding of the tenets of mindfulness. "I have serious training in mindfulness and have practiced for a long period of time." I then asked Carmen how she makes sense of her mindfulness practice in relation to her job as a school counselor. Carmen said that mindfulness gives her an anchor to deal with all the policy changes, extra pressures put on school counselors, and students who are experiencing trauma. Carmen said, "Mindfulness gives

me a home base, a way to stabilize myself and cope with the flow of all of the things that we deal with." I could relate to Carmen's response, and so I took a few moments to share how I came to be a mindfulness practitioner. We discussed Amy Saltzman's (2014) book *A Still Quiet Place* and how we both have found her material effective in introducing mindfulness to secondary students. Carmen said it was difficult to introduce mindfulness to older students and explained that introducing mindfulness to elementary students made it much easier. Carmen has had a wide array of experiences with all grades, and she asked if she could share her process of getting mindfulness into schools. Carmen explained how in some instances, private practitioners will come into the school to teach mindfulness because the school wants to implement the program, but the teachers are not really on board. Since Carmen has relationships within the schools and with teachers, she has been successful in getting teachers to implement mindfulness in their classrooms. Carmen would require that the teachers take a basic mindfulness course and agree to teach it on a regular basis. Carmen said what makes this process successful is when she is able to go into the classrooms twice a week to do mini lessons and the teacher is reinforcing the practice by infusing mindfulness throughout the instructional day.

Carmen was the impetus for getting a few more participants to be a part of my investigation. Carmen is a member of the Mindful Schools Facebook page, which I do not have access to. Carmen graciously offered to share my study on the Facebook page. She said she would let people know that "it was painless and quite pleasant to talk about your experiences." Carmen said, "These groups appreciate the camaraderie because many people have had experiences similar to yours: you've found this 'great new thing' and you're trying to tell people about it." We both agreed that people who are unfamiliar

with mindfulness do not always share the excitement of having a mindfulness practice and how it can impact one's life personally as well as professionally.

Jen

Jen is a 43-year-old English teacher at a high school near New York City. There are approximately 1,200 students with approximately 140 faculty and staff members. It is considered a "wealthy" district; but Jen said they are undergoing a demographic shift, and this is becoming less true. Approximately 15% of the students receive free/reduced lunch. The majority of the student population is Asian. The next largest group is White, and many of those are Jewish. Jen stated,

> It is definitely an achievement culture. The biggest concern for a majority of the students is where they will go to college, and basically everything else that happens in school is about that. They are very stressed out, primarily about workload and grades.

Jen and mindfulness. Jen discovered mindfulness through hot yoga. Jen describes herself as having a Type A personality and as being a perfectionist, so she decided to try hot yoga. She immediately fell in love with the practice, as it helped manage her stress. Then, 4 or 5 years ago, Jen started experiencing insomnia. She did not want to use medication, so she found an app called *Headspace*, which really was the impetus for starting her daily mindfulness practice.

Jen as a mindfulness English teacher. Jen was an English major in college with intentions of becoming a publisher, but she did not like it. One of her professors encouraged her to get a Ph.D., so she enrolled in the program, but soon realized it was not for her. She ended up getting a master's degree in English and education. She was then

hired at her current school, where she has been for the past 13 years. Students at her school are under a lot of pressure to take AP classes and to get into the most prestigious universities. Mostly, students are not experiencing stress from poverty or trauma, but rather they are stressed from a culture of high stakes testing. Students are surrounded by a "culture that fuels its own anxiety." Jennifer also discussed how some students who appear to be fine in high school do not always manifest stress and anxiety until college. Jen believes our culture has reached a crisis level with social media contributing to this crisis. She believes approximately 75% of the students at her school are living in this "crisis mode" of constant stress and anxiety. To support this premise, Jen shared that just last week there were two students who reached a breaking point (that she is aware of in a school of 1,200). One girl checked herself into a behavioral health facility, and the other student was avoiding school because of the stress and anxiety.

Jen became cognizant that stress and anxiety were a concern for students at her school; therefore, 3 years ago, she started infusing mindfulness in her classroom. Jen is *the teacher* who brought mindfulness to her school, but she said that it has definitely been a process. Jen tells a story of a former ninth-grade student who was overwhelmingly busy with school and extracurricular activities, particularly theatre. One day during theatre practice, the principal asked the young lady, "How are you able to handle all of the stress from school and your extracurricular activities?" She told the administrator it was the mindfulness practice that she learned from her teacher (Jen). Recently, the principal shared openly with the staff that at first, he did not understand or believe that mindfulness was beneficial. After speaking with students and seeing the transformations with students, he said he now "gets it."

Jen shared a story that demonstrated what her daily life is like as a mindfulness practitioner and a secondary educator. "Joey" was a student who Jen taught in ninth grade. At this time, Jen was not teaching mindfulness in her classroom; therefore, Joey had not yet learned about mindfulness. Jen had the opportunity to teach Joey again his junior year. Prior to teaching him again, she heard from his friends that Joey was a "hot mess." Jen said that she could really sense that he was struggling and not doing well emotionally. Jen introduced *Headspace* to her class, and Joey started using *Headspace*. His friends noticed that Joey was now calm and described him as "Zen." Jen believed Joey found a way to manage and deal with his stress and anxiety through a mindfulness practice.

When asked what does it mean to be a mindfulness practitioner and a secondary educator, Jen said,

> I am not teaching content; I am teaching people. My students know that I truly value them as people. My students know that they are valued as a person and that I am understanding to situations that may arise when they need to turn work in late or need extra time on an assignment.

Jen said not all teachers are understanding in this way, but with a mindfulness practice Jen said that not only is she calmer and less reactive, but also more empathetic. Her empathy and compassion stem naturally from her practice. It is just "how [she shows] up" every day.

Jen used the words *presence* and *present* several times. Therefore, I asked her, "What does that mean to you?" She said, "Instead of being in my head, I'm in my body and focused on *who* I am teaching. I can feel/sense the energy of a classroom." She

shared a recent story of returning from Thanksgiving break, and as she walked into her fourth period class, she could sense the anxiety and the tension, so she said to the class, "We just returned from a four-day break, and I was thinking that you all would be well rested and relaxed, but I sense anxiety." They told her they were stressed out about an upcoming biology exam. Jen took time to help the students work through the process of dealing with the test anxiety. This is an example of how Jen makes meaning between her teaching and mindfulness practice. She believes it is vitally important to give kids a safe place to deal with their emotions.

Another example of how Jen makes meaning between her mindfulness practice and teaching is creating a classroom environment where students feel comfortable to write about topics that are weighing heavily on them. Being an English teacher gives Jen the platform for students to explore aspects of their own identity. One student, in particular, was having a difficult time deciding on her writing topic. After several attempts to write about something that really had no personal significance, the student decided to write about her struggles with depression. Jen believes that students in her classroom know that it is a safe place to write or explore personal experiences. Furthermore, she believes that her students know that she is more interested in helping them become thriving members of society and socially/emotionally healthy young adults. It was evident from our interview that teaching for Jen is so much more than just covering course content. It is about meeting the needs of the whole child.

During the final moments of our interview, Jen and I discussed her next steps in the realm of education. Jen is working on her administrator's licensure, and she explained to me in one of our email exchanges that she is starting an administrative

internship project where she will be helping teachers implement mindfulness in their classrooms. Jen's efforts to bring mindfulness to her school have truly paid off. Two years ago, when her school district announced that teachers would need to attend a program to hear a mindfulness speaker, many of her colleagues were complaining and not seeing the value of learning about mindfulness. Of course, Jen was excited about hearing the speaker because she already had an established mindfulness practice. Fast forward to now: Jen shared a 3-minute mindfulness practice with her colleagues several weeks ago during a faculty meeting and received a great response. Jen had recruited approximately 10 teachers to participate in the mindfulness internship project just from sending out an email. After the meeting, at least 20 teachers approached Jen saying that they wanted to be a part of her Project Mindfulness PD. Thirty educators of 140 will participate in Jen's mindfulness project. Teachers and other support staff at Jen's high school are much more open-minded and willing to learn about mindfulness.

Kendra

Kendra is a 46-year-old yoga/mindfulness instructor from Chicago. She runs a yoga studio in a small storefront with a waiting room for parents and a yoga room for children with special needs. The students she serves run the gamut of kids who have severe special needs such as cerebral palsy to kids whose parents went through cancer and now the children are suffering with anxiety. Kendra also teaches yoga and mindfulness part-time at a K-8 charter school on the Westside of Chicago. Students are chosen by the lottery system and are all African-American children who come from less educated and impoverished areas of the inner city. Most of the teachers are of the same demographic, with the exception of a few teachers from Teach Across America. Kendra

said it is difficult to get the more educated teachers to that area of Chicago because it is a dangerous neighborhood. Students have been exposed to a lot of trauma such as gun violence, and many of the students live in foster care situations or with a family relative. Kendra and two other yoga teachers volunteer their time 2 days a week to teach yoga/mindfulness at this highly impacted charter school.

Kendra and mindfulness. Kendra shared that when she was a senior in high school, she started losing her vision. She went from doctor to doctor in search of a diagnosis. One doctor diagnosed her with Retinitis Pigmentosa and told her she had 6 more months of eye-sight; after that, she would be totally blind. Kendra was headed to college, and all of the sudden, "You are one person and then another," she explained. She was a runner and a dancer and was wondering how she was going to do all the things she loved. Because of this diagnosis, Kendra started going down a spiritual path of mediation, relaxation, and yoga to help her deal with the fact that she thought she was going blind. Kendra said she was searching for answers: "Why was this happening and what was she going to do?" In college, she became connected with yoga groups that had a more spiritual foundation. Later, Kendra found out that she was misdiagnosed and actually had a genetic condition that shows up later in life, in which one does not go totally blind. Kendra is legally blind, which means she has some of her eyesight, but she is unable to drive. Kendra said her yoga practice helped her navigate the difficult circumstances of having a disability. Her disability brought her to special education and working with underprivileged kids, which has helped her know the reason why she is here. She started training with Sonia Sumar, who developed *Yoga for the Special Child*. Kendra said that she includes children from traumatic backgrounds and children with

anxiety as "special needs" because the brains of these children are different.

Kendra as a mindfulness educator. Kendra was a psychology major in college. While attending a meeting for the Head Start Program, she had an epiphany and switched her major that day to education and child development. Next, she obtained her master's degree in early childhood education. She worked at the Head Start program during the day and attended school at night. Kendra said she just always had a passion for this work. When she and her husband started a family, she did not want to put her children in daycare, so she stayed home while her children were young. Presently, she runs her yoga studio for special needs students and volunteers at the charter school several days a week.

I asked Kendra, "What does it mean to be a mindfulness practitioner?" Kendra said she feels like this is her mission in life. This is her "Dharma"—making the world a better place. I asked Kendra if she could share any stories of her interactions with students that really stood out in her mind. Kendra explained that there were so many stories, such as the child who used to throw the chair across the room at school who is now going to the designated "quiet corner" at school and repeating the little chant that she taught him, which is "OM SHANTI" (Shanti is peace in Sanskrit). Kendra passionately shared that children who come to her yoga studio and who used to have to take medication for sleep were learning breathing exercises and able to decrease their medication because now they know how to stop and breathe. Kendra explained that many anxious children are breathing backwards. In other words, they are breathing into their chest instead of breathing into their belly. Kendra teaches them how to breathe properly by watching their belly go in. Kendra calls it "magic" because of the transformation that she sees on a daily basis. Kendra shared the following:

> I just love what I'm doing. It just gets better and better with the more kids that you interact with. It is the one thing you can do that you see a difference, and you might not see it right away. You have to have some patience, but if there's anything you could do to try to make a difference, I, 100% believe that this is it. There is so much violence, trauma and so much horrible energy that if you can fight it with love and teach these kids a different way – to stop before they make a decision – and to let them know that they have a purpose too.

Kendra 's energy and passion for what she does resonated with me, so I felt compelled to share a bit of my story of finding mindfulness and how I see my daily interactions with students as a powerful opportunity to make a difference. Kendra said at the charter school where she volunteers, she sees the teachers as very stressed out and screaming at the students. She said it is important to train the teachers as well. Kendra said that now they do mindfulness in the teachers' classrooms instead of the teachers just dropping the students off in the gym for the mindfulness practice. I asked Kendra if the teachers at the charter school were receptive to the mindfulness program. She said that some teachers are open to the practice, while others are not. Some teachers claim there is a method to the way they handle children. "We are tough with them, and that is on purpose because these kids need tough skin." Kendra said the teachers can be super strict and mean; and Kendra suggested, "What about firm, but kind?" Kendra said she and her colleagues bring a whole different dynamic and energy to the students. "We love these kids; we listen to them, and we respect them." Some of the teachers are amazed and have noted the difference in their students and are now doing some mindfulness with the students in their classrooms. Kendra and her colleagues have given *singing bowls* to the

teachers so that when a class is out of control and needs a reset, they can use the bowl and guide the students through a simple breathing exercise. Kendra also brought up the fact that the teachers are stressed out as well; they are underpaid and living in the same dangerous inner-city areas as their students.

Kendra and I talked freely about our personal disabilities and how we use them as superpowers to connect with the students we reach and teach. Kendra makes sense of her work through the lens of her disability and yoga/mindfulness practice. Kendra so eloquently stated, "Your circumstances don't have to define what you do with your life." She has never let her disability stop her from doing what she loves. "There is a way to give back to society even if one's circumstances aren't perfect." I asked Kendra if she could read people's energy better because of her disability. She said, "for sure," and that she has a better understanding of children who are struggling with a disability and can empower them because she has been able to rise above her circumstances. Kendra is truly living proof of what rising above circumstances means, as throughout my interview with Kendra, she was seamlessly talking with me and jogging through a park in Chicago.

Suzanne

Suzanne is a 30-year-old English teacher who is presently working at a university in Japan. She is from New York; therefore, during our interview, we discussed her past work in a Brooklyn charter high school and her present work in Japan as a mindfulness practitioner and university teacher.

Suzanne and mindfulness. Suzanne's journey to mindfulness began because of a school where she was working in Brooklyn, NY. The school had implemented "quiet time" and required teachers to get certified in transcendental meditation since the students

meditated every morning and afternoon. Suzanne explained that she was not a mindfulness practitioner at that point and was a little hesitant to invest in it, which is the complete opposite of where she is now in her mindfulness journey. Suzanne was somewhat skeptical, but she believed in the school, and it was very clear that they had their priorities in the social/emotional developmental piece. "I believed if they were incorporating it into the ethos of the school, then it must have benefits." Suzanne said she opened up her mind for the first time and became curious about mindfulness rather than judging the practice based on her limited knowledge. Three years later, Suzanne sought certification in a mindfulness program for schools and started implementing mindfulness with her students. I asked Suzanne to give me a little background information on the school where she implemented mindfulness. Suzanne shared that the school was located in a pretty disenfranchised community in Brooklyn, where approximately 90% of the students received free and reduced lunch. The demographics were approximately 75% Hispanic, and the graduation rate in the district was approximately 57%; however, her charter high school actually had a 97% graduation rate. Suzanne said, "It was kind of a beautiful environment to be working with kids who really needed the support."

Suzanne as a mindfulness English teacher. Suzanne's undergraduate study was in criminal justice. Suzanne said she always knew that she would do something where she could "flex her compassion muscles because that was her calling." She discovered that law was more on the other side of compassion – putting people away – and she was trying to help, so she did not think she could make as big of an impact on the criminal justice side. It was through working with children whose parents were incarcerated that

she started realizing that was more the root of the problem. Suzanne believed she could make the greatest impact in the school setting; therefore, she obtained her master's degree in education immediately after completing her undergraduate degree in criminal justice.

Suzanne shared her teaching experiences with the charter school in Brooklyn. Suzanne explicitly taught mindfulness through the advisory program, but she also infused mindfulness lessons with her special education students during their humanities classes. Suzanne explained that it was especially appropriate when discussing perspective taking and teaching students how to take ownership of their own learning as well as understanding yourself as a learner and as a human. Additionally, Suzanne's school had 2 weeks each semester where teachers were allowed to implement a course that they were passionate about. Students would sign up for the courses they were interested in. Suzanne offered mindfulness courses, and approximately 30% of the students who enrolled in the course thought they would find value in it. The remaining students either just did not know what else to choose, and/or they were comfortable with her or perhaps they were just interested in mindfulness. Suzanne said that the first time she implemented the course was right after Trump was elected president, and many of her students were illegal immigrants. Suzanne believed they were a bit confused and lost personally, and they were looking for some way to make sense of the world. The discussions during her mindfulness course were a way for those students to find peace with such a difficult situation.

Next, Suzanne discussed her current teaching job in Japan and how expressing emotions in this country is not encouraged. "It's very much: Work. Don't cry. Do what you have to. Don't talk about feelings. Keep group harmony. Don't worry about your

individual thoughts," Suzanne stated. She has one particular student who's extremely frustrated growing up in this context, and she is struggling to find her place in the world within a family and within a societal structure that does not allow her to think for herself and about herself. Suzanne said they meet for approximately one hour each day for "speaking practice"; but she is quite high level, so the language is not really an issue. Therefore, they do mindfulness together on most days. Suzanne explained, "We have been spending a lot of time understanding how her negative feelings can be channeled into whatever she wants them to be, and that she has the ability to create space between things that anger or upset her."

Most recently, this young lady wrote and delivered a speech on how to have a sound mind. Suzanne believes that in any other context she would not have been able to do this: "Mindfulness is something that's resonating so deeply with her and for her to be wanting to share it with others now is really special."

As a mindfulness practitioner, Suzanne is able to take ownership of her experiences. She cannot control what kinds of things happen to her, but she can change her perspective on circumstances and choose to see them as working for her. Suzanne said being a mindfulness practitioner means she does not have to be reactive to things. The most eye-opening thing is that before she was practicing mindfulness, Suzanne said, "I was kind of just floating around life and letting things bounce off me or bounce on me, and I also was a little bit tough. I wasn't so understanding of my own emotions as well." Suzanne said as a mindfulness practitioner, she does not always hold herself to super strict standards like "I must meditate for 10 minutes every morning, 20 minutes at night. But to me it's something that I am dedicated to, and I put into practice every day in

whatever way that I can."

Last, I asked Suzanne what it means to be a mindfulness practitioner and a teacher. In other words, how do you make sense of your job, your calling, your occupation and your practice? Suzanne said, "Mindfulness helps me to be a more patient and kind teacher and colleague." On a deeper and more powerful level, Suzanne does not want to be a classroom teacher who just sprinkles mindfulness into her classroom, but she wants to use mindfulness to connect more deeply with her students. Suzanne said her biggest strength as an educator is bringing mindfulness into the lives of people for whom it would had been previously inaccessible.

My interview with Suzanne was so inspiring and a reminder that the human desire to know and understand our emotions and feelings is powerful and real. Suzanne has a truly marvelous opportunity and gift to bring mindfulness to students in a culture where it has not been systemically embraced or practiced.

Debbie

Debbie is a 41-year-old high school PE and health teacher who works at a rural high school in Pennsylvania. The student population is approximately 1,700 students. Debbie said that her school is not very diverse and more middle class, with a small percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Debbie has been teaching at the same school for the past 19 years. There is another high school in the district, which has a lower socioeconomic and more diverse demographic than Debbie's school.

Debbie and mindfulness. Ten years ago, Debbie took two meditation classes. Debbie stated, "I was seeking answers on how to reconcile my very conservative Christian upbringing with the knowledge that I am gay." This apparent juxtaposition, she

explained, created a very sharp contrast for her life, which set her on a path of seeking. Debbie articulated, “I was really trying to understand life in a much broader sense beyond what I had been taught it.” Over the course of 1 year, she read texts from every religion, every faith, and every philosophy. Debbie explained,

> Eventually, it culminated in me taking these meditation classes, and I do very much feel like that has changed my life because it has given me a very different understanding of God, life and our purpose than what I was raised to believe.

Debbie as a mindfulness health and PE teacher. Debbie shared,

> I loved my kindergarten teacher. I decided when I was in kindergarten that I wanted to be a gym teacher, and I did. I don't know how many 5-year-olds know what they want to be when they grow up, but I did. I just never felt like there was anything else I was supposed to do.

Debbie shared what is it like to be a secondary educator who self identifies as a mindfulness practitioner. First, she acknowledged that she has struggled this past year with a rule that she created in her head that if she claims to be this mindfulness, peaceful person that she was never allowed to show emotion or get upset or maybe lose her temper. For example, if a student was doing something and she became aware of her frustration rising, she believed that she could not express herself because it may look like she is not practicing mindfulness. Debbie stated,

> I've come to the realization that that's not true. I am still human; I have emotions, and I'm allowed to express them, hopefully in good ways not in bad ways. But I do want to embody what I teach my students.

At the same time, Debbie explained that she has learned in the process of teaching

the mindfulness curriculum to her students that one cannot just learn the content of the lessons and teach it like you would any other set of lessons or curriculum. "You have to actually practice it yourself, and you have to be able to do it yourself to have any kind of credibility." Debbie can recognize when she feels her anger rising, whether it is with a student or a parent, those warning signs when feeling overwhelmed by emotion. Debbie said, "It's almost like red flags or warning signs because I've been practicing for so many years, I recognize it in the moment, and I am able to take this mental emotional step back instead of just reacting to something." I asked Debbie if she meant that she is more proactive rather than reactive? Debbie said that she preferred the word "responding." To Debbie, responding means you have control and you have a choice, whereas when a person is reacting, they are removing his/her opportunity to make a wise decision. "We see plenty of people reacting to things in the society. And it usually doesn't turn out well for them," explained Debbie.

Debbie shared a poignant story about one of her students who walked out of the school building without permission the day after the Parkland High School shootings. Debbie was not on campus the day that he walked out, but when she returned to school, he approached Debbie to ask for his assignments since he had out-of-school suspension (OSS) for the next few days. Debbie asked him why he had OSS, and he said that he walked out of the school without permission because it just did not feel good in the building. Debbie probed further and asked him why he felt like he had to leave and why he did not seek assistance from his guidance counselor. He insisted that he just needed to leave. Debbie knew there was more to this story, as she had heard he might be heading in a bad direction. She confronted him with this knowledge, and he said, "Are you talking

about what happened with my brother?" When Debbie asked about his brother, the student replied, "He was shot and killed two years ago." Debbie's internal response was that this student goes through a traumatic experience with the shooting of his brother and because he felt unsafe, he walks out of the school and the administration gives him OSS. I could empathize and feel the frustration Debbie experienced in sharing this story. I said, "Honestly, if we dig a little bit like you and I are willing to do with students, I would say 99% of the time there really is a reason why kids do some of the things they do."

This story led to our discussion on the importance of SEL and restorative practices (RP). Debbie and I made a strong connection here, as we are both involved with SEL and RP at our schools, and Debbie is involved at the district level. Debbie said her district has been focusing on the teachers' well-being and helping teachers deal with their stress; next year, the emphasis will be on creating that sense of community and culture for the students. "Right now, we're just focused on helping those teachers who have kind of shut down over the past couple of years – almost like taking a collective breath."

Debbie said being a mindfulness practitioner means doing your day in a different way. It means going through your day and actually paying attention and being there. Meditation is the practice which can be done via yoga, mindful walking, mindful eating, etc.; all of these types of meditation help us get better at recognizing when our minds are starting to take over and get us out of that incessant stream of thought and actually pay attention to where we are in that moment. We are all capable of that, but not everyone is aware that they can do that.

To Debbie, being a secondary educator means preparing adolescents for life. Some people think it is not an educator's job to teach the "soft skills" that our students need to be successful in life. Debbie said that she does not necessarily disagree, but it seems more and more of our students are not learning them from home; and even if they are learning them at home, is it wrong for teachers to reinforce them? We both agreed that it was not. Debbie said she would rather work harder to try and instill these values in her students' lives so they will have an opportunity to be successful in life.

This discussion led me to ask the question: "Do you think kids have changed over the last 20 years?" Debbie said that she believed that there has been shift in the past couple decades where it became okay to feel things and express things; and yet at the same time, we have not taught kids *how* to say and express those things in a healthy, positive way. Our society now says that you are allowed to feel what you feel, but Debbie believes that we have not taught kids the fact that just because you think something does not mean you should say it, especially if it is mean toward someone else. Debbie elaborated,

> I would like to see us get to the point where we're instilling those values of being a good communicator, showing empathy, compassion, and self-awareness in our students and even in our teachers where it's an intrinsically motivated source of making the right decision.

I ended my interview session with Debbie by asking, "How do you make sense of your work in the school setting?" Debbie explained that while other teachers are hyper focused on getting through their curriculum, she does not see that as the main part of her job. In fact, she does not even necessarily call her job "a job." Rather, it is a calling, her

passion and purpose. It is something she loves doing. Debbie beautifully shared,

> Making kids feel cared for and accepted, and I want every kid that I come face to face with to leave feeling better not feeling worse. That is my sense of work – connecting with kids, helping them feel like they have a place. They have an ally, because high school can be rough. I want them to feel like there is at least one place where they feel safe, cared for and loved.

Participants' Summary

Throughout the research process, I made provisions to ensure that I was staying true to the purpose of phenomenology. The carefully constructed research questions allowed me to gain access into the lifeworld of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice. Writing the narratives for each participant gave me the opportunity to winnow the number of themes to explore and to develop an overarching theme from the data corpus (Saldaña, 2016). The predominant theme that emerged throughout the data was that mindfulness creates a safe place for individuals to express, explore, and expound upon personal struggles. This was personal experience for eight of the 11 participants.

Findings

The grand tour question (Creswell, 2007) for this study was, "How do secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners conceptualize their interactions with students and colleagues?" After analyzing the data from the participants' in-depth interviews, an overarching theme emerged from this investigation. Though participants initially explored mindfulness practices for different reasons, the overarching theme found in these data was, "Mindfulness means creating a safe place for individuals to

express, explore, and expound upon personal struggles." Other significant, interwoven themes that emerged were the following:

- Mindfulness creates space to suspend judgment;
- Mindfulness builds compassion and empathy; and
- Mindfulness educators do the heart work.

Initial Reasons to Explore Mindfulness Practices

Though each participant discovered mindfulness practices for different reasons, many of the reasons were related to personal struggle. Spiritual journey, emotional or physical disability, stress, and curiosity were the reasons these participants decided to explore mindfulness.

Spiritual journey. When asked, "How did you come to be a mindfulness practitioner," Martha and Debbie spoke of finding mindfulness because of a deep-seated need to understand "who they are" outside of the realm of their religious upbringing. Martha said she grew up in a very conservative home where one could not question the family's religious views or express emotions. Like Martha, Debbie began taking meditation classes, as she was seeking answers on how to reconcile her "very conservative Christian upbringing" with the knowledge that she is gay. Debbie stated, "This created a very sharp contrast for me in my life, and it set me on a path of seeking. I was really trying to understand life in a much broader sense beyond what I had been taught."

Spiritual journey and mindfulness. Both Martha and Debbie were on a spiritual quest to see the world with greater clarity. Neither meditation nor mindfulness is a religion; religious and nonreligious people mediate. Michaelson (2018) differentiated the

two words by the following analogy: “If mindfulness is like strength or flexibility, then meditation is like running or going to the gym. Meditation is an activity of focused mindfulness or focused attention. Mindfulness is the mindset of meditation applied to the rest of life” (n.p.). Through the meditation process, one is able to cultivate an in-depth compassionate awareness that fosters the ability to examine one’s goals and discover the optimum path towards the realization of one’s values (Williams & Penman, 2011). As discussed in the literature review for this investigation, the Buddhist’s teaching asserts that mindfulness is inherent in everyone, but it has been obscured by conditioning from society, parents, teachers, and relationships. Suffering arises from the individual’s desire for their circumstances to be different from what they are (Brown et al., 2015; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). The Buddhist would say, “This is what is true, here, now”; and practicing mindfulness is a way of achieving this mindset (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009).

Emotional disability. Rose and Carla spoke of finding mindfulness because of struggles with anxiety. Rose explained that she was introduced to mindfulness in her early 20s when she went to see a therapist for her chronic PTSD from childhood trauma which was manifesting as anxiety. She discovered through a mindfulness practice that she could rewrite her narrative “from one of a victim to one of thriving by pulling herself out of the past and by living in the present moment.” Similar to Rose, Carla found mindfulness through her own personal need for healing from an anxiety disorder. Carla explained that she did not want to take medication for her anxiety, so she started doing a lot of yoga. Yoga was Carla’s path into the realm of mindfulness; and for the last 5 years, she has been intensely studying mindfulness, specifically focusing on mindfulness and self-compassion. Carla said meditation is the path to healing.

Anxiety and mindfulness. In examining the research concerning anxiety and mindfulness, it is prudent to note that anxiety can be a normal part of the human experience; however, for some individuals like Rose and Carla, anxiety can lead to substantial interference in life and emotional distress, becoming what is deemed to be Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD; Brown et al., 2015). Research shows that mindful awareness appears to be an efficacious process in reducing symptoms of anxiety as well as coping with anxiety. A mindfulness practice can cultivate the nonjudgmental, nonreactive awareness that enables one to step back from the internal experiences as well as broaden awareness to a full range of experiences instead of fixating on threat-relevant cues (Brown et al., 2015).

Physical disability. Kendra and I have similar stories in that we discovered mindfulness as a result of a personal health crisis. When Kendra was in high school, she was diagnosed with an eye disease and told she would be totally blind in 6 months. She said, "You are one person and then another." Her health crisis propelled her down a spiritual path of meditation, relaxation, and yoga to help her deal with the loss of her eyesight. Although Kendra did not totally lose her eyesight, she is legally blind. Her yoga practice has enabled her to live a productive, fulfilling life. Like Kendra, when I was diagnosed with a congenital heart condition, I had to come to grips with my "new normal." Both Kendra and I see our physical disabilities as our "super power" and have discovered that it is through these apparent weaknesses that we can fulfill our passions and dreams of working with young people who have special needs or traumatic backgrounds.

Physical disability and mindfulness. Mindful acceptance of a physical disability

does not mean a resignation to a future of gloom and doom. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that this experience is here and, rather than judging it, observing it with compassion and curiosity. Mindfulness has been shown to boost resilience. Dr. Aaron Antonovskyy, an Israeli medical sociologist, sought to determine what key physiological traits allowed some people to withstand great hardship and others to not. He determined that comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness are the three traits that equal a sense of coherence (Williams & Penman, 2011). I asked Kendra, "What does it mean to be a mindfulness practitioner?" Kendra said she feels like this is her mission in life. This is her "Dharma" – making the world a better place. "Your circumstances don't have to define what you do with your life. There is a way to give back to society even if one's circumstances aren't perfect." She has never let her disability stop her from doing what she loves.

Stress. Alex and Carmen found mindfulness during difficult times in their professional careers which were causing stress. Alex stated that she was going through a very difficult transition where she was forced to leave a teaching job she really loved and enjoyed to a stressful learning environment. Alex started practicing yoga, and it was through yoga practice that Alex discovered mindfulness. "It was just the stopping and the breathing." Like Alex, Carmen found herself in a stressful place after 5 years of working as a school counselor. Carmen said that she tried different ways to manage the stress; but nothing was working, so she looked into spirituality and meditation. While continuing to research meditation from a spiritual perspective, Carmen discovered mindfulness and discovered that it did help her manage her stressful job. Although not workplace stress, Jen said she was experiencing stress as a result of her perfectionist

mindset. She discovered the power of meditation and relaxation through hot yoga. Five years ago, when Jen was experiencing insomnia, she discovered an app called *Headspace,* which was the motivation to start her daily mindfulness practice.

Stress and mindfulness. During my literature review, I discovered an abundance of research on how a mindfulness practice can be used as a way of mitigating stress. Specifically, Brown et al. (2015) postulated in their Mindfulness Stress-Buffering Hypothesis how mindfulness lessens stress appraisals and reduces stress reactivity responses. Even brief mindfulness induction studies (3-15 minutes in length) have shown to diminish a negative effect and improve emotion regulation in reaction to various stimuli as well as to more efficiently acknowledge and recover from a negative stress (Brown et al., 2015).

Curiosity. John, Lana, and Suzanne were introduced to mindfulness through mindfulness programs at their school. Curiosity took over, and all three of them practice mindfulness and use it in various ways at their schools. "Mindfulness educators do the heart work" was a common thread throughout all of the participants' interviews. Lana and Suzanne offered detailed experiences of how in sharing mindfulness with students, they have been able to help students with their personal battles.

Curiosity and mindfulness. Lana as a high school psychologist explained that even after the grant from UCLA was over, she wanted to continue teaching mindfulness to anxious and troubled teens. Lana said that many of her students' special education referrals are now in the social/emotional realm, and her 504s for anxiety and depression have skyrocketed. Lana said, "It feels like every year we have more kids who are being hospitalized. Last year we had 17 or 18 students hospitalized for suicidal ideation."

Lana is the voice for her students who are struggling with anxiety and depression by informing teachers of the importance of teaching to the whole child. Lana finds purpose in her work by believing that her troubled students are better off from having had the opportunity to talk with her and work through these serious issues.

Like Lana, Suzanne was introduced to mindfulness through a training program required by her school. Although somewhat skeptical at first, she was open and curious, as she believed in the school and the social/emotional ethos they embodied. Like Lana, Suzanne has used her mindfulness training to help students with personal struggles, especially the impoverished and disenfranchised students in the Brooklyn community where she previously taught. Her school was 75% Hispanic with 90% of the students receiving free/reduced lunch. Suzanne stated, "It was kind of a beautiful environment to be working with kids who really needed the support." Suzanne shared her story about the first time she implemented the mindfulness course, which was right after Trump was elected president, and many of her students were illegal immigrants. Suzanne described her students as lost and confused, trying to make sense of it all. Suzanne believes that the discussions during her mindfulness course were a way for her students to find peace with such a difficult situation.

Supporting Themes

Suzanne's story highlights another important theme: Mindfulness creates space to suspend judgment. A mindfulness practice allows the practitioner to explore his/her own biases, as according to Rechtschaffen (2014), we all have them regardless of our racial or cultural background. A mindfulness practitioner like Suzanne has the ability to create the space to suspend judgment and truly get to know the inner world of a student. Suzanne

discussed her current work in Japan with the university student who is eagerly learning mindfulness and feeling empowered to give speeches on how to have a sound mind. Rechtschaffen (2014) explained, “Some children have never felt really cared for or seen. When we get interested, kids can remember that there is something truly special inside of them and gain bravery to show the world who they really are” (p. 109).

Suspending judgment is also important to Debbie. As a mindfulness high school teacher, Debbie shared the heart-wrenching story of the student who walked out of the school without permission the day after the Parkland High School shootings. He received OSS for the behavior, but no one bothered to ask him why he walked out. Debbie’s deep concern and compassion for this student prompted her to ask him why he walked out. When he shared the story about how his brother was shot and killed 2 years ago, it became extremely apparent why this student walked out of the school without permission.

Alex acknowledged that mindfulness has given her the ability to not judge a colleague before taking time to understand the colleague’s perspective. Prior to her mindfulness practice, Alex said she would make quick judgments about colleagues and situations, and many times those initial suppositions were incorrect. Alex is able to stop and take a breath, and the extra pause allows her brain to acknowledge that there is a lot more of the situation she cannot see.

Martha’s experience with colleagues in reminiscent of Alex and her interactions with colleagues:

> Five or six years ago I had some entrenched difficulties with certain people because I thought they were not doing what is best for students. It became

> problematic. I feel like now I am aware and trying to have a gentler touch. I can approach my colleagues and my work with an open heart and an open mind. Mindfulness has definitely made a big difference in my work and how much more present I am able to be.

Suspending judgment is reflective of Langer's (1989) work. Langer (1989) observed in her research as a social psychologist that when people act mindlessly, they view information outside of the context in which it occurs. Therefore, they have the propensity to be trapped by categories and display automatic and reactive behavior, without considering the potential uniqueness of a circumstance or another person's perspective, as with Debbie's student who walked out of the school. The creation of new categories, being open to novel information, and an awareness of varying perspectives are the key attributes to a mindful state (Langer, 2014).

Mindfulness educators do the heart work, and, in the process, mindfulness builds compassion and empathy. In creating that space to suspend judgment, compassion and empathy can flourish. Scientific research using brain imaging has shown that the insula becomes energized through meditation. Williams and Penman (2011) explained that the insula is integral to our sense of connectedness, as it helps us mediate empathy in a very real and visceral way. Empathy allows you to see into another's soul … helping you to understand their predicament "from the inside." With it comes true compassion, true loving-kindness. (p. 49)

Alex so beautifully explained that being a mindfulness practitioner has allowed her to get into her own story and to come face to face with her own childhood trauma and to acknowledge that others are suffering with their fears and anxiety. Alex's students are

the daily recipients of her love and compassion, as she meditates each morning and reflects on her motivation for teaching: the sheer love for her students.

John explained that teaching students what is really important in life, which is relationships and connections with other human beings: "It's about helping students become better human beings." John said that he makes sense of his work as an educator because at his core, he loves music; and he is sharing his love of music with his students. John shared that he is working on building an entire curriculum on empathy within the context of music.

Carla described her space at school as "a center of real compassion." Students are constantly leaving little notes like, "I love you, Madame S." Carla does a lot of mindfulness and kindness lessons with the students at her school. Mindfulness is an integral part of her core values, and she just knows it is her life's work. "It might sound dramatic," Carla said, "but I know that I am changing lives."

Debbie's compassion and loving-kindness are reflected in how she makes sense of her work with young people:

> It is important that I make kids feel cared for and accepted…. That is my sense of work – connecting with kids, helping them feel like they have a place. They have an ally, because high school can be rough. I want them to feel like there is at least one place where they feel safe, cared for and loved.

Martha's compassion for her students and colleagues is evident in her collaborating efforts with students and staff, offering programs and school-wide messages that help students understand they are not alone and there is always hope. Martha leads her student leadership group through a mindfulness meditation asking them,

"Where is your heart right now? How are you doing right now?" Martha wants to stress the importance of self-care and the importance of having self-compassion.

Suzanne said she always knew that she would do something where she could "flex her compassion muscles because that was her calling." Suzanne wants to use mindfulness to connect more deeply with her students. Suzanne said her biggest strength as an educator is bringing mindfulness into the lives of people who otherwise would not have access to mindfulness.

Mindfulness educators do the heart work and use the power of mindfulness in their workplaces. Alex explained that during class time, there are moments when she will pause from her teaching because she senses an uneasiness among the students. Alex will lead her class through a breathing exercise, which enables the students to refocus, so she can resume teaching. Like Alex, Jen can sense the energy of a classroom because "instead of being in my head, I'm in my body and focused on *who* I am teaching." When sensing stress from students during instruction, Jen allows the students to share their emotions and helps them through the process of dealing with the stress. Jen explained that it is about giving students a safe place to explore their emotions through writing. Students in her classroom know that she is more interested in helping them become healthy and productive young adults than just covering course content. Carmen also uses the power of breath with her students. Students who have issues with emotional regulation have learned they can calm themselves down through breathing exercises Carmen has taught them. Scientific research supports what these educators are describing. Neuroscientists have proven how neuroplasticity is the mechanism for behavioral outcomes and is imperative for regulating emotion. Regular meditation

activates the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that regulates emotions and behaviors, and enables one to make wise decisions (Davidson, 2012).

Carla described herself as "that safe place; the heart of the school." She explained that students feel so open to share with her because she has "created a safe container and safe space for kids who are screaming out and looking for someone to carry their secret and to get an outside perspective." Carla shared that she does approximately one in four suicide protocols a year and that she receives more "Ministry of Family" calls than anyone else at her school. As a media specialist, Carla has a library monitor program, and students flock to be a part of the program. Carla also runs a lot of clubs because she understands that all students need to feel a sense of belonging.

Summary

Within this chapter, I illuminated the overarching theme and the supporting interwoven themes that emerged from the participants' interviews. When asked to reflect upon their personal histories and current interactions with students and colleagues, it became clear that mindfulness means creating a safe place for individuals to express, explore, and expound upon personal struggles. Other important emerging and interwoven themes were that mindfulness educators do the heart work and are able to create space to suspend judgment and to open their hearts for compassion and empathy to flourish. In the next chapter, I expand upon these findings and discuss the implications these findings may have on educators and 21st century learning environments.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Brief Overview

In creating and embarking on this study, I wanted to investigate the phenomenon of being a secondary educator who self-identifies as a mindfulness practitioner. The objective for this was twofold. First, I wanted to understand what it means to be a secondary educator who has a mindfulness practice and how they perceive their daily interactions with students and colleagues. Second, I sought to add educators' voices to the literature on the mindfulness in education movement. There are research studies that support the premise that mindfulness practices can assist educators who work in difficult settings and thus improve classroom environments and prevent teacher burnout and stress (e.g., Flook et al., 2013; Jennings, 2015). Many of the published research studies focus on teachers who have participated in formal mindfulness training programs or professional development training on mindfulness; however, the educators' voices and narratives are missing from the research. Furthermore, I was curious to investigate not only classroom teachers' lived experiences but other secondary educators who have daily opportunities to interact with students and colleagues. This study was designed to present rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences. The educators who participated in this study are what I call lay practitioners. In other words, they have personal mindfulness practices, and they have endeavored to use their mindfulness skills in secondary school settings.

For this investigation, I interviewed 11 secondary educators who self-identified as mindfulness practitioners: six teachers, two social workers, one guidance counselor, one school psychologist, and one media specialist. Participants were asked to volunteer for the study and were sought through email and social networking. Secondary educators

who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners were recruited across the globe, including the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia. The grand tour question (Creswell, 2007) for this study was, "How do secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners conceptualize their interactions with students and colleagues?"

Data Collection

To gain a deeper understanding into the lived experiences of secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners, I modeled the in-depth interview questions after Dolbeare and Schuman's (1982, as cited in Seidman, 2006) series of three topics: life history, details of experience, and reflection on the meaning (Seidman, 2006). Data were collected between October 4, 2018 and December 3, 2018. Each participant completed one interview session lasting between 45-60 minutes. Nine interviews were conducted via Zoom, one via Skype, and the pilot interview was conducted face-to-face. For credibility, member checking occurred during and after the interview. All participants received an emailed copy of the narratives I constructed from the interview session. Participants were instructed to review the document and give feedback to me concerning any inaccuracies or discrepancies. Ten of the 11 participants returned my email with minimal or no changes needed.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred at the culmination of the data collection. For my analysis, I took the following steps as recommended by Patton (2015).

Step 1: Epoche. I sought to eliminate or clarify my preconceptions through my postreflective statement and the bridling journal used throughout data collection and analysis.

Step 2: Phenomenological reduction. Throughout the process of data collection, I continually set aside my presumptions and subjective experiences in regard to my participants' experiences, as noted in my bridling journal. When writing the participants' narratives, I wanted to capture the phenomenon by extracting verbatim the significant statements from the data and formulating meanings about them through my interpretations (Saldaña, 2016).

Step 3: Bracketing. After each digitally recorded interview, I transcribed the data using the transcription service at https://trint.com/. When all the interviews were complete, I spent an entire day on each interview: listening, reflecting, and crafting narratives from each participant's personal experiences, using in vivo coding, short phrases or words from the participant's own language (Saldaña, 2016). Next, I interpreted the meanings of these phrases as an informed reader and inspected these meanings for what they uncovered concerning the essential recurring characteristics of being a mindfulness educator.

Step 4: Established themes. Following Saldaña's (2016) expertise, as I did in Step 3, I also utilized the theming the data coding method. Themes were constructed at the manifest and latent level of the data corpus. I discovered one overarching theme interwoven with three other significant themes.

Step 5: Development of structural synthesis. The themes were interwoven with the participants' voices as well as research from the literature review, reflecting the true meanings of the experience for the participants in this study.

In addition to following the five steps as outlined by Patton (2015), I shared the narratives and data analysis with Dr. Karen Bluth, an associate professor at the University

of Chapel Hill and a mindfulness expert. To lend credibility to my data analysis, Dr. Bluth scrutinized my work for potential biases and assumptions that may be present. I also asked for her insight into any other possible themes based on her experiences and expertise in mindfulness. Her valuable feedback and agreement on my data analysis added credibility to my investigation (personal communication, January 27, 2019).

Overall Findings

This study sought to give power and vitality to the lived experiences of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice. The focused research question elicited hundreds of pages of data on the many ways mindfulness educators conceptualize their interactions with students and colleagues. From the voices of the 11 participants, it was vividly evident that mindfulness means creating a safe place for individuals to express, explore, and expound upon personal struggles. Closely interwoven with this theme is that mindfulness educators do the heart work of the school, which results in a sense of equanimity, compassion, and empathy towards students and colleagues. In this concluding chapter, I expand this study by examining these themes and conclusions in order to add a more nuanced understanding of what it means for these 11 participants to be secondary educators who self-identify as mindfulness practitioners.

Mindfulness as an Intervention for Reducing Teacher Burnout/Stress

Teaching has become an extremely challenging and complex profession. According to Greenburg et al. (2017), students' negative behaviors are part of what contributes to teacher burnout and stress. This begs the question of why do individuals become teachers? Alex knew at an early age that she wanted to be a teacher. She experienced a traumatic childhood and was inspired by her fourth-grade teacher who

showered her with love and compassion. Her teacher would have one-on-one conversations with Alex concerning her behavior; Alex knew it was all out of love. Interestingly enough, Alex displays the same love and compassion for her students, as is evident from the story she told of working one on one with an unruly student. She started talking him through the process of calming himself down, stepping outside of what was irritating him, and stepping outside of the emotion. Alex wanted him to address what was going on inside of his body and to start to breathe and calm down. Alex said he was able to recognize that he was upset, and he began to breathe with intention. Alex said this was a good example of how she is bringing awareness to her students through her mindfulness practice. In this excerpt, Alex related how she used her mindfulness practice of deep breathing to help calm a student. The use of deep breathing is a simple mindfulness practice for calming the body and mind (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2005, p. 56). Deep breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which lowers the sense of stress, reduces blood pressure, and strengthens the immune system (Hanson & Mendius, 2007). The moment-to-moment practice of mindful breathing can provide the "power to disentangle us from the compulsive and habitual hold of the mind's many preoccupations" (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 57; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Like Alex, Debbie knew at an early age that she wanted to be a teacher. She loved her kindergarten teacher and never felt like there was anything else she was supposed to do. As a mindfulness practitioner and teacher, Debbie said she does her day in a different way. She is able to recognize when her mind is starting to take over, and she is able to get out of that incessant stream of thought and pay attention in the moment. Debbie believes that teachers need to be trained in SEL and mindfulness practice.

Debbie is involved at the district level in bringing awareness and professional development to the teachers. The focus this year has been on the teachers' well-being and helping them deal with their stress. Research supports the efforts of Debbie's district in that mindfulness intervention for teachers has proven to reduce stress, burnout, and anxiety, which is reflected in a decrease number of days teachers take off work as well as diminished feelings of task and time pressure (Weare, 2014).

Like Debbie, Kendra said it is important to train the teachers in mindfulness practice. At the charter school where she teaches yoga and mindfulness, she notices that the teachers as very stressed out and screaming at the students. Teachers rationalize their behavior by claiming there is a method to the way they handle children: "We are tough with them, and that is on purpose because these kids need tough skin." Kendra suggested, "What about firm, but kind?" The kids are responding in positive ways to Kendra and her colleagues. Kendra said, "We love these kids; we listen to them, and we respect them." Some of the teachers are amazed and have noted the difference in their students and are now doing some mindfulness with the students in their classrooms. Weare (2014) in her research on mindfulness interventions for teachers reported that after a mindfulness intervention, they have more empathy, tolerance, forgiveness, and patience with others as well as a decrease in anger and hostility (Weare, 2014).

Carla believes the key is to get educators within the system to be trained in self-care and self-compassion, in order to combat compassion fatigue and educator burnout. For the teachers and media specialists in her province, Carla recently presented a professional development on the topic of teacher burnout. Her room was packed with educators, and half of them cried during the presentation because they could relate to

compassion fatigue and teacher burnout. Mindfulness interventions for teachers have positively impacted mental health by offering a greater sense of well-being, including less depression and an optimistic outlook on life. Teachers have greater self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-compassion as well as a belief in personal growth (Weare, 2014).

Since I only have a classroom teacher's perspective, I purposely included educators who are not teachers, as I truly wanted to gain insight into their daily interactions with students and colleagues. Hearing the voices of social workers, school counselors, and a media specialist added a dimension to this study that was missing from the current research. I gleaned much insight and a new appreciation for those educators who do not always get the recognition or the glory, and it made me daydream about a school overflowing with mindfulness educators.

Mindfulness as a Means for Improving School Culture

Imagine for a moment that the 11 educators who made up this study were all a part of the same school or even perhaps a small community with several schools. The impact of these teachers and support staff would be remarkable on the culture of that imagined school or community. Carla, the media specialist, builds relationships with students by teaching her media monitors about growth mindset. She shares her personal story about having dyslexia and how it has made her understand things in a different way. She views her disability as a strength and tells the students that she is always the person with ideas. I asked Carla, "What does it mean to be a mindfulness practitioner?" Carla said the short answer is just being able to *see* the kids. Carla feels like she is in a privileged position as a media specialist in that she gets to "see their little hearts and learn their passions." Her media center in stocked with books about what the students are

passionate about as well as a huge self-help section on an array of topics such as transgendering, divorcing parents, puberty, and eating disorders. "Being a mindfulness practitioner means owning and seeing what's there, and helping the kids manage some of that."

In addition to a compassionate media specialist, imagine having a social worker like Rose who takes the time to work one on one with students. Rose has been working with the same student for the past year and a half. This student has extreme anxiety, like Rose did before she found mindfulness. Rose is able to lead her in a body scan, and the student is able to calm down. It was a profound moment for that student that she could do something to calm herself down when she was in that state of panic or anxiety.

In addition to a school full of mindfulness teachers, a media specialist, and a social worker, imagine having a school counselor like Carmen who builds relationships with teachers first and then imparts mindfulness training to them. Carmen said that what makes this process successful is when she is able to go into the classrooms twice a week to do mini lessons, and the teacher is reinforcing the practice by infusing mindfulness throughout the instructional day.

Researchers have found that MBSR practices can have a substantial influence on how stakeholders experience the school environment by advocating for self-care and being concerned for the well-being of others (Flook et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2013). Other research suggests that mindfulness-based practices can positively impact the climate and culture of a school through reducing stress and anxiety, improving emotional regulation, and enlarging the capacity for compassion and empathy (Lutz et al., 2008; Tang, 2014). Educational leaders can benefit from MBSR's "learn to breathe through

disequilibrium" as well as the power of a pause in the unpredictability and complexity of their jobs (Brown & Olson, 2015). When individuals learn to be more present and caring of themselves, they will find themselves in a better position to accept uncertainty, ambiguity, and challenges with a decrease in inner turmoil. Administrators who adopt a mindfulness practice can create a calmer school environment for all stakeholders (Brown & Olson, 2015).

Limitations

A prominent voice missing from this study was the voice of a principal or a school administrator. I did secure an interview with a mindfulness middle school administrator in a neighboring county, but she was unable to participate at the last minute. Ultimately, school administrators are accountable for their school's culture and climate. Fullan (2011) stated that school leaders can improve the school environment by cultivating the welfare of others.

A second and important voice missing from this study was mindfulness educators of different ethnicities. To secure enough secondary educators to interview within a limited time frame, I was unable to solidify a secondary mindfulness educator of a different ethnicity.

A final and potential limitation to this research study was the fact that I am a secondary educator who has a mindfulness practice; however, I purposefully designed my study using Guba's four criteria for trustworthiness, as explained by Shenton (2003; see Table 2) to be proactive in addressing this limitation.

Implications for Future Research

As demonstrated by the participants in this study, educators who have a

mindfulness practice use their skills to manage the stress and complexities of working in 21st century educational settings. Moreover, the participants all use mindfulness as a means of promoting calm, compassionate, and empathic students in whatever capacity they are working within the dynamic school setting. Therefore, the results of this investigation lend themselves to further exploration in the following areas:

1. Future research could investigate the lived experiences of school administrators who have a mindfulness practice and compare the lived experiences of those who do not self-identify as mindfulness practitioners.
2. An action research study on the implementation of a mindfulness training program for teachers. The study could examine pre and postsurveys from the participants.
3. A case study on a school that has implemented mindfulness for teachers, support staff, and students. It would be interesting to follow the implementation process over several years to see the progression of the program and to survey, interview, and observe teachers in the context of their classrooms and to observe support staff in their natural settings.
4. An action research study on providing preservice teachers with mindfulness training at the university in which they are enrolled. Pre and postsurvey results could reveal interesting data and inform future required mindfulness courses for preservice teachers.
5. A qualitative or mixed method study on mindfulness and social justice. As I am wrapping up my investigation, I have noticed that there is emerging research on trauma-informed mindfulness, particularly in the realm of racial

oppression. How can trauma-informed mindfulness interrupt racial oppression in our schools (Treleaven, 2018)?

Final Reflection

This journey across the globe to investigate the lived experiences of secondary educators who have a mindfulness practice was such an inspirational experience. I am grateful for the many educators whom I had the opportunity and pleasure to interview. Each and every encounter was fresh and invigorating, and it gave me such joy in knowing that so many students' lives are being influenced by such loving and compassionate educators. Mindfulness speaks a universal language. Mindfulness should be taught in every classroom across every university where teachers train and every school where students learn. As Kendra stated, "If there's anything you could do to try to make a difference, I, 100% believe that this is it!"

References

Adams, C., & Van Manen, M. (2008). Phenomenology. The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Aguilar, E. A. (2018). *Onward: Cultivating emotional resilience in educators*. CA: Jossey-Bass.

Albrecht, N. J. (2014). Wellness: A conceptual framework for school-based mindfulness programs. *The International Journal of Health, Wellness, and Society*, 4, 21-36. Retrieved June 16, 2018, from http://ijw.cgpublisher.com/product/pub.198/prod.161

Aloe, A. M., Amo, L. C., & Shanahan, M. E. (2014). Classroom management self-efficacy and burnout: A multivariate meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 26*(1), 101-126. Retrieved November 1, 2017, from doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/10.1007/s10648-013-9244-0

Breen, A. (2016). Curry study: Reducing teachers' stress leads to higher quality classrooms. *UVAToday*. Retrieved August 17, 2018, from https://news.virginia.edu/content/curry-study-reducing-teachers-stress-leads-higher-quality-classrooms

Brown, K. W., Creswell, J. D., & Ryan, R. M. (2015). *Handbook of mindfulness: Theory, research and practice.* New York: The Guilford Press.

Brown, V., & Olson, K. (2015). *The mindful school leader: Practices to transform your leadership and school.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, SAGE.

Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84,* 822-848. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2003_BrownRyan.pdf

Burchfield, T. J. (2013). *Teacher relational characteristics and the development of positive classroom climates in third through eighth grade settings*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (3574588).

Chiesa, A., & Serretti, A. (2010). A systematic review of neurobiological and clinical features of mindfulness meditations. *Psychological Medicine, 40*(8), 1239-1252.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dahlberg, K., Dahlberg, H., & Nystrom, M. (2008). *Reflective lifeworld research* (2nd ed). Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.

Davidson, R. J. (2012). *The emotional life of your brain*. New York, NY: Plume.

Davidson, R. J., Kabat-Zinn, J., Schumacher, J., Rosenkranz, M., Muller, D., Santorelli, S. F., … Sheridan, J. F. (2003). Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, *65*(4), 564-570.

Demir, N. (n.d.). *Application of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and theory to education.* Retrieved July 15, 2017, from https://www.academia.edu/7214223/APPLICATION_OF_MASLOW_S_HIERARCHY_NEEDS_AND_THEORY_TO_EDUCATION

Denzin, M. (1989). *Interpretive biography: Qualitative research methods series 17*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *Strategies of qualitative inquiry.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dervin, B. (1997). *Given a context by any other name: Methodological tools for taming the unruly beast.* In P. Vakkari, R. Savolainen, & B. Dervin (Eds.), *Information seeking in context*. London: Taylor Graham.

Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 43*(1), 13-35. Retrieved September 1, 2018, from http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/156916212X632943

Flook, L., Goldberg, S. B., Pinger, L., Bonus, K., & Davidson, R. J. (2013). Mindfulness for teachers: A pilot study to assess effects on stress, burnout and teaching efficacy. *Mind, brain and education: The official journal of the International Mind, Brain, and Education Society*, *7*(3). doi:10.1111/mbe.12026

Flow Psychology. (2015). *Transactional model of stress and coping*. Retrieved July 11, 2017, from https://flowpsychology.com/transactional-model-of-stress-and-coping/

Frias, E. L. (2015). *Mindfulness practitioners in the classroom: An exploration of lived experiences.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (3689679)

Fullan, M. (2011). *The six secrets of change: What the best leaders do to help their organizations survive and thrive*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Garrett, J. L. (2006). Across the threshold. *Kapp Delta Pi Record, 43*(1), 12-13.

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction.* White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group.

Glickman, C. D., Gordon, S. P., & Ross-Gordon, J. M. (2018). *SuperVision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach*. New York: Pearson.

Goldin, P. R., & Gross, J. J. (2010). Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on emotion regulation in social anxiety disorder. *Emotion, 10*(1), 83.

Greenburg, M. T., Brown, J. L., & Abenavoli, R. N. (2017). *Teacher stress and health: Effect on teachers, students, and schools.* Retrieved August 17, 2018, from https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2016/07/teacher-stress-and-health.html

Grossman, P., Neimann, L., Schmidt, S., & Walach, H. (2004). Mindfulness-based stress reduction health benefits: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, *57,* 35-42. Retrieved June 20, 2018, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/8453832_Grossman_P_Niemann_L_Schmidt_S_Walach_H_Mindfulness-based_stress_reduction_and_health_benefits_A_meta-analysis_J_Psychosom_Res_57_35-43

Hanh, T. N., & Weare, K. (2017). *Happy teachers change the world: A guide for cultivating mindfulness in education*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Hanson, R., & Mendius, R. (2007). *Mindful presence*. Retrieved July 21, 2017, from http://www.wisebrain.org/MindfulPresence.pdf

Harper, M., & Cole, P. (2012). Member checking: Can benefits be gained similar to group therapy? *The Qualitative Report*, *17*(2), 510-517. Retrieved June 20, 2018, from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol17/iss2/1

Heller, L., & LaPierre, A. (2012). *Healing developmental trauma: How early trauma affects regulation, self-image, and the capacity for relationships.* Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books.

Hoffman, W. (2014). *What is phenomenology?* Retrieved January 21, 2019, from http://www.maxvanmanen.com/files/2014/03/What-is-phenomenology.pdf

Hölzel, B. K., Carmody, J., Evans, K. C., Hoge, A., Dusek, J. A., Morgan, L., & Lazar, S. W. (2010). Stress reduction correlates with structural changes in the amygdala. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience, 5*(1), 11-17.

Hölzel, B. K., Carmody, J., Vangel, M., Congleton, C., Yerramesetti, S. M., Gard, T., & Lazar, S. W. (2011). Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density. *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging, 191*(1), 36-43.

Ie, A., Ngnoumen, T., & Langer, E. J. (2014). Origins and theory. In A. Ie, C. T. Ngonoumen, & E. J. Langer (Eds.), *The Wiley blackwell handbook of mindfulness volume I* (pp. 1-5). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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

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

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science & Practice, 10,* 144-156. Retrieved June 16, 2018, from https://institutpsychoneuro.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Kabat-Zinn-2003.pdf

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever you go there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York: Hyperion.

Kabat-Zinn, J., Lipworth, L., & Burney, R. (1985). The clinical use of mindfulness meditation for the self-regulation of chronic pain. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, *8,* 163-190. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00845519

Kabat-Zinn, J., Massion A. O., Kristeller, J., Peterson, L. G., Fletcher, K. E., Pbert, L., Lenderking, W. R., & Santorelli, S. F. (1992). Effectiveness of a meditation-based stress reduction program in the treatment of anxiety disorders. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *149,* 936-943. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from http://ftp.columbia.edu/itc/hs/medical/cp4/client_edit/topic4/sg3b-1.pdf

Katz, E. (2014). *Mindfulness and psychotherapy*, edited by C. K. Germer, R. D. Siegel, and P. R. Fulton, *Smith College Studies in Social Work, 84*(1), 132-136. doi:10.1080/00377317.2014.861286

Kim, J., Youngs, P., & Frank, K. (2017). Burnout contagion: Is it due to early career teachers' social networks or organizational exposure? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 66*, 250-260. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2017.04.017

Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: Directions for future research. *Educational Review, 53,* 27-35. Retrieved June 23, 2018, from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131910120033628

Langer, E. (1989). *Mindfulness*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Langer, E. J. (2014). *Mindfulness: 25th anniversary edition*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Langer, E. J., & Rodin, J. (1977). Long-term effects of a control-relevant intervention among the institutionalized aged. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *35,* 897-902. Retrieved June 16, 2018, from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c847/532e56bdc647cd8b2dbab0980b402a764078.pdf

Lucas, L. J. (2018). *Practicing presence: Simple self-care strategies for teachers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Lutz, A. H., Amishi, P. J., Dunne, J. D., & Saron, C. D. (2015). Investigating the phenomenological matrix of mindfulness-related practice from a neurocognitive perspective. *American Psychologist*, *70*(7), 632-658.

Lutz, A. H., Slagter, A., Dunne, J. D., & Davidson, R. J. (2008). Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 12*(4), 163-169.

MetLife. (2013). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Challenges for school leadership.* Retrieved June 2, 2018, from https://www.metlife.com/about/corporate-responsibility/metlife-foundation/reports-and-research/survey-american-teacher.html

Michaelson, J. (2018). *10 percent happier podcasts*. Retrieved January 27, 2019, from https://www.10percenthappier.com/

Mind and Life Education Research Network (MLERN). (2012). *Contemplative practices and mental training: Prospects for American education.* Retrieved June 15, 2018, from https://centerhealthyminds.org/assets/files-publications/DavidsonContemplativeChildDevelopmentPerspectives.pdf

Montgomery, C., & Rupp, A. A. (2005). A meta-analysis for exploring the diverse causes and effects of stress in teachers. *Canadian Journal of Education, 28*(3), 458-486. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from http://aix1.uottawa.ca/~cmontgom/pdf/meta_ana_div.pdf

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Nakazawa, D. J. (2015). *Childhood disrupted: How your biography becomes your biology, and how you can heal*. New York: ATRIA Paperback.

National Union of Teachers. (2013). Tackling teacher stress. Retrieved June 2, 2018, from https://www.teachers.org.uk/tackling-stress

Neuser, N. J. (2010). *Examining the factors of mindfulness: A confirmatory factor analysis of the five facet mindfulness questionnaire* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved July 25, 2017, from http://commons.pacificu.edu/spp/128

Oberle, E., & Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2016). Stress contagion in the classroom? The link between classroom teacher burnout and morning cortisol in elementary school students. *Social Science & Medicine, 159*, 30-37. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301762555_Stress_contagion_in_the_classroom_The_link_between_classroom_teacher_burnout_and_morning_cortisol_in_elementary_school_students

Olson, K. (2014). *The invisible classroom: Relationships, neuroscience & mindfulness in school.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M. Q. (1989). *Qualitative evaluation methods* (10th printing). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.

Phelan, J. P. (2010). Mindfulness as presence. *Mindfulness*, *1*(2), 131-134.

Prilleltensky, I., Neff, M., & Bessell, A. (2016). Teacher stress: What it is, why it's important, how it can be alleviated. *Theory into Practice*, *55*(2), 104-111.

Rechtschaffen, D. (2014). *The way of mindful education: Cultivating well-being in teachers and students*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Rechtschaffen, D. (2015). *The mindful education workbook: Lessons for teaching mindfulness for students*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Rickert, N. P. (2016). *Teacher mindfulness in the middle school classroom: Reliability and validity of a new scale* (Master's Thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest. (10157980).

Rodgers, C. R., & Raider-Roth, M. B. (2006). Presence in teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *12,* 265-287.

Roeser, R. W., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Jha, A., Cullen, M., Wallace, L., Wilensky, R., … Harrison, J. (2013). Mindfulness training and reductions in teacher stress and burnout: Results from two randomized, waitlist-control field trials. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 105*, 787-804. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0032093

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Saltzman, A. (2014). *A still quiet place: a mindfulness program for teaching children and adolescents to ease stress and difficult emotions*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C. H. (2013). *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice.* New York: Routledge.

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Seidman, I (2014). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (4th ed). New York: Teachers College Press.

Shapiro, L. S., & Carlson, L. E. (2009). *The art and science of mindfulness: Integrating mindfulness into psychology and the helping professions.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Shenton, A. K. (2003). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. Retrieved September 15, 2018, from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/452e/3393e3ecc34f913e8c49d8faf19b9f89b75d.pdf

Siegel, D. (2007). *The mindful brain: Reflection and attunement in the cultivation of well-being.* New York: Norton.

Siegel, D. (2012). *Pocket guide to interpersonal neurobiology: An integrative handbook of the mind.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Siegel, D., & Kornfield, J. (2012). *Mindfulness and the brain: A professional training in the science and practice of meditative awareness*. Sounds True. Retrieved July 1, 2017, from https://www.audible.com/pd/Self-Development/Mindfulness-and-the-Brain-Audiobook/B007XVNQ8W?source_code=GPAGBSH0508140001&mkwid=s4PPBX0fU_dc&pcrid=90539104740&pmt=&pkw=&cvosrc=ppc%20cse.google%20shopping.342766860&cvo_crid=90539104740&cvo_pid=23455575420

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis*: *Theory, method, and research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.

Solomon, M. F., & Siegel, D. (2004). *Healing trauma: Attachment, mind, body, and brain.* New York, NY: WW Norton & Company Inc.

Srinivasan, M. (2014). *Teach, breathe, learn: Mindfulness in and out of the classroom*. Berkeley CA: Parallax Press.

Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tagg, S. K. (1985). Life story interviews and their interpretations. In M. Brenner, J. Brown, & D. Canter (Eds.), *The research interview: Uses and approaches* (pp. 163-199). London: Academic Press.

Tang, Y. (2014). Short-term meditation intervention improves self-regulation and academic performance. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Behavior, 02*(04). doi:10.4172/23754494.1000154

Treleaven, D. A. (2018). *Trauma-informed mindfulness: Practices for safe and transformative healing*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Vagle, M. D. (2014). *Crafting phenomenological research*. New York: Routledge.

Wallace, B. A. (2003). *Buddhism and science: Breaking new ground*. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from https://b-ok.org/book/1194281/894a24

Weare, K. (2014). *Evidence for mindfulness: Impact on the well-being and performance of school staff.* Retrieved June 2, 2018, from https://mindfulnessinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Evidence-for-Mindfulness-Impact-on-school-staff.pdf

Weinstein, N., Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2009). A multi-method examination of the effects of mindfulness on stress attribution, coping, and emotional well-being. *Journal of Research in Personality, 43,* 374-385 Retrieved June 12, 2018, from https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Weinstein-MindfulnessStress.pdf

Williams, M., & Penman, D. (2011). *Mindfulness: An eight-week plan for finding peace in a frantic world.* New York: Rodale.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and application: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Appendix A

Bridling Journal

Bridling Journal **For Dissertation**	
Date	**This is a place for me to keep a log of my thoughts and ideas as I go through the interview process as well as the step-by-step process that I took for data collection and analysis.**
10/4/18	Today, I did a pilot interview with my interview questions with a colleague who is a Yoga instructor and a secondary educator. It was interesting to learn that her mindfulness practice was developed because of her Yoga practice. I see that I had a personal bias about Yoga practitioners. I didn't consider that Yoga practitioners could also be mindfulness practitioners.
10/8/18	Since receiving IRB approval on 10/4/18, I have been emailing educators in my contacts who might be interested in participating or who might know of someone who would be willing. Today, I reached out to Dr. Karen Bluth in Chapel Hill. I sent her all the information- informed consent, IRB approval letter, and interview questions. She suggested that I contact the following: *And I just had an idea – you might want to send something out in the Association for Mindfulness in Education listserv (AME) and the Mindfulness in Education (MiEN) listserv. Both are all about mindfulness in education. You can google them, but a person who might be able to assist in how to post is Dr. Amy Saltzman* *dramy@stillquietplace.com* *You might have to submit a modification to the IRB to do this – might want to call them first and ask.* I emailed the above but have not received any feedback.
10/9/18	Today I scheduled an interview with a school psychologist from California. Our meeting is **Thursday, Oct. 18 at 2:30 PT so 5:30** my time. She trained in the Learning2Breathe program with Dr. Karen Bluth from Chapel Hill. I sent her the informed consent, the IRB letter, and the interview questions. I deliberated whether to send participants the interview questions. According to Englander (2012), giving the interviewee the questions in advance gives him/her an opportunity "to dwell and ponder on the experience" (p. 27). On the other hand, Englander (2012) says that the standard objection for doing this is that the interviewee will start to self-interpret the event and the description will lose its organic, spontaneous, pre-reflective edge. However, Englander (2012) says this is not the case, as the goal is for the interviewee to describe the psychological meaning and his/her self-interpretations.

10/11/18	This evening I interviewed "Martha" who is a social worker in Chicago. This was my first interview after the pilot. Her microphone was somewhat faulty, as she would fade in and out at times. But it was a good interview. It was interesting to hear how she came into mindfulness. I am wondering if this will be a theme or a trend, as the pilot interviewee and my personal experience with finding mindfulness was with trying to fill a need. I want to make sure that I address this bias at this point. I need to stay open-minded that perhaps not everyone came into mindfulness via a difficult passage in his/her life.	
10/11/18	A special note about Martha: Martha and I connected last spring when I was planning on doing a case study at a school who had implemented a mindfulness practice. I met Martha through Dr. Karen Bluth with the Learning2Breathe program. Martha was the one who suggested I do a phenomenological study instead of a case study. She was the impetus for my dissertation methodology, and I will be forever grateful! The lesson here is to always follow the leads you are given. She then assured me that she could help me find folks to interview, and she surely did.	
10/25/18	Carla interview- I met Carla through Dr. Bluth. **Bridling-** I was hesitant to do an interview with her at first because she lives in Canada and is a media specialist at a K-7 school. Dr. Bluth told me she would be an amazing participant so I "checked in" with my biases and realized that I was limiting my opportunities by only recruiting teachers from the United States. She does have interactions with students in 6-7 grades, so I decided to interview her. The interview was amazing. She had an anxiety disorder and went out seeking help by doing yoga to try and heal herself. Her interview was extremely powerful and her energy and passion for mindfulness was evident during the virtual Zoom interview.	
10/30/18	This meeting was originally scheduled for October 18, but Lana had a scheduling conflict and so we rescheduled for today. Lana Interview- I met Lana through Dr. Bluth. She went through her Learning2Breathe training, which is a mindfulness course used for adolescents. **Bridling**- During this interview, I detected a personal bias that I had for determining candidates for the *Learning to Breathe* program. Lana said that after the UNCLA grant ended, their school focused on Advanced Placement (AP) students to be a part of the program because of all the stress they are under with performing at high academic levels. From my personal experience, I would not have chosen AP students because my experience has been working with students from trauma and poverty. I intentionally acknowledged this bias and determined to keep an open mind to her rationale for targeting AP students. I had to put aside my belief that students who take AP classes come from supportive families and environments where anxiety and stress are minimal.	
10/30/18	John Interview- Music teacher at a high school in Chicago. I met John through	

	Martha, my connection in Chicago. **Bridling**-During this interview, I found it difficult to not ask leading questions, as I wanted John to share specific stories of his interactions with students and/or colleagues about his mindfulness practice and teaching. It became evident as the interview progressed that John was not comfortable implementing mindfulness in his classes yet. He was not as far along in his practice as other participants. I deliberately kept an open mind and reminded myself of my working definition of mindfulness that we are all at different levels and places on the spectrum and that although he was not where he wanted to be as far as interweaving mindfulness and his teaching, he was making strides toward that. He discussed embedding gratitude and empathy in his music classes. John is still grappling with the concept of embedding these concepts into his music curriculum. John envisions true education as opportunities for students to interact and connect with one another in empathic ways.	
11/7/18	Carmen Interview- The week of 11/5/18, I was somewhat discouraged because I only had one interview set up for the week and no other participants going forward. So, I posted in a Face Book group that I recently joined called, Growing Mindfulness in Education. Within an hour or so, I had one lady named Carmen who emailed me and said she would be glad to interview. She was in the US now on leave from her educational position in Australia. Once again, I was hesitant because my original intent was to interview only educators in the US. As with the Carla interview, I decided to go for it. She was ready to interview that evening, so I jumped on the opportunity, even though it was later in the evening for me (she was on Pacific time). This interview turned out to be an amazing one, and she took my information and posted it for me in her Mindful Schools Face Book group, which I do not have access to because you must go through their training to be in the group. Since Wednesday, I have had six people contact me saying they would love to be a part of my study! I am so thankful for Carmen who opened a whole new avenue of possibilities for me. Once again, the lesson here is to follow every lead and stay open-minded through the phenomenological process! I will most likely surpass my 7-10 participants, but I think this is a good thing, as the more interviews I do, the quality is improving.	
11/8/18	Rose Interview- I met Rose, who is a social worker, through Martha. Rose was interested and willing to be interviewed but somewhat reticent, as she has not been a mindfulness practitioner for a long time. I assured her that it was not about quantity, but simply how your own mindfulness practice has influenced your interactions with students and colleagues. After the interview, Rose said she was intrigued with my study and wanted to read it when it was completed.	
11/21/18	As noted in the 11/7 journal entry, Carmen's connection with Mindful Schools opened up a new avenue for finding participants. After the initial email exchange with five leads, I reached back out to them on 11/21. I set up	

	interviews with the three of the five: Jen, Suzanne, and Kendra.	
12/1/18	Jen- High school English teacher close to NYC. My interview with Jen was interesting as she works with a higher socio-economic population. Her students have anxiety and stress from all of the high stakes testing and competition to get into prestigious universities. I had to keep an open mind because my experience is working with lower socio-economic students who experience trauma and stress from poverty and fragmented communities.	
12/2/18	Kendra- Yoga instructor for special needs children and volunteer mindfulness instructor in a high needs Charter School in Chicago. This was such an amazing and inspiring interview! I am thankful that I kept an open mind to include her in this study. I was a little hesitant, until she told me that she teaches yoga on a volunteer basis for a charter school. She has been able to take yoga and mindfulness into a high needs charter school in a dangerous neighborhood.	
12/3/18	Suzanne-teacher for 10 years in NYC and presently teaches at a University in Japan. Suzanne had great stories from her teaching experience in NYC and her present position teaching in Japan. Her desire to bring mindfulness to people who otherwise would not have been exposed to it was inspirational.	
12/3/18	Debbie- Health teacher for High School outside of Harrisburg PA Debbie and Martha have similar stories for how they became a mindfulness practitioner. I think Spiritual Journey is an initial theme or topic that I am finding.	
1/7/19	Alex- pilot study member checking feedback. Alex replied back on 1/7 with no changes needed.	
12/30/18	Martha member checking feedback. I sent Martha's narrative on 12/30/18. She replied with feedback on 1/11/19. Martha crossed out several things that were not accurate and highlighted a few changes, but for the most part, the narrative was accurate.	
12/30/18	I sent John's narrative on 12/30/18. John replied back on 1/8/19 with two changes- I inadvertently had his title as band teacher and he teaches orchestra. The other change was my use of the word "timid." He explained that he was not timid to share mindfulness with his other classes, but rather hesitant or not as comfortable.	

1/1/19	I sent Rose's narrative on 1/1/19. Rose replied back on 1/7/19 with the following: *I also wanted to add one thing- I wasn't brave enough to say this on the phone... but the real reason that my therapist recommended mindfulness to me was due to chronic PTSD from childhood trauma, which was manifesting as anxiety. After thinking about it, I would be okay with this being included in my story, because I think trauma survivors don't always know that they can help make themselves better... they can change their narrative from one of a victim to one of thriving and pull themselves out of the past moment to the present.* *Thank you for sharing this with me!*	
1/2/19	I sent Lana's narrative on 1/2/19. She replied back on 1/7/19 with only a minor correction of the college acronym from UNCLA to UCLA.	
1/6/19	I sent Carla's narrative on 1/6. As of 1/13/19, I have not heard back from her on any changes. I sent another email on the and still did not hear back.	
1/13/19	I sent Carmen's narrative on 1/13/19. I heard back on 1/21/19 with only minor changes	
1/19/19	I sent Kendra's narrative on and she replied back with minor change—her yoga studio is in a small store front not in her home. Here is a copy of what she said in her email: *Great job! The only thing that sticks out as incorrect is that my studio is not in my home- it is a small storefront yoga studio with a waiting room for the parents and a yoga room in* *********** *Also, the Mantra is OM SHANTI - shanti is peace (in Sanskrit)* I am humbled and impressed with what you wrote!	
1/19/19	I sent Suzanne's narrative on 1/19/19 and she replied back on 1/23/19 with the following email: *Thanks, Karen! It looks great to me. Thanks so much for doing this work :)* *Good luck with everything!!!!*	
1/20/19	I sent Debbie's narrative on 1/20/19. She replied with this Karen,	

	I'm sorry I never got back to you! I started an email and never got it sent. I looked over your transcript and everything looks great. I hope the rest of your dissertation process goes smoothly! I really enjoyed chatting with you! Take care,	

Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter

Date: October 4, 2018 at 1:32:03 PM EDT
To: Karen Wray <kwray2@gardner-webb.edu>
Cc: Morgan Blanton <mblanton4@gardner-webb.edu>, Seth Oprea <soprea@Gardner-Webb.edu>
Subject: Expedited IRB approval

Ms. Styers,
Your IRB Application for the Expedited research project titled "A Phenomenological Investigation of Mindfulness Practice Through the Lived Experiences of Secondary Educators" has been approved, effective October 4, 2018. It has been assigned an expiration date of October 3, 2019, and an IRB file number of 18100201X.

Please be aware that if you need to continue your study beyond the Expiration Date, you must submit a Request for Continuance (http://www.gardner-webb.edu/Assets/gardnerwebb/academics/review-board/irb-request-research-continuance1.pdf) prior to that date.

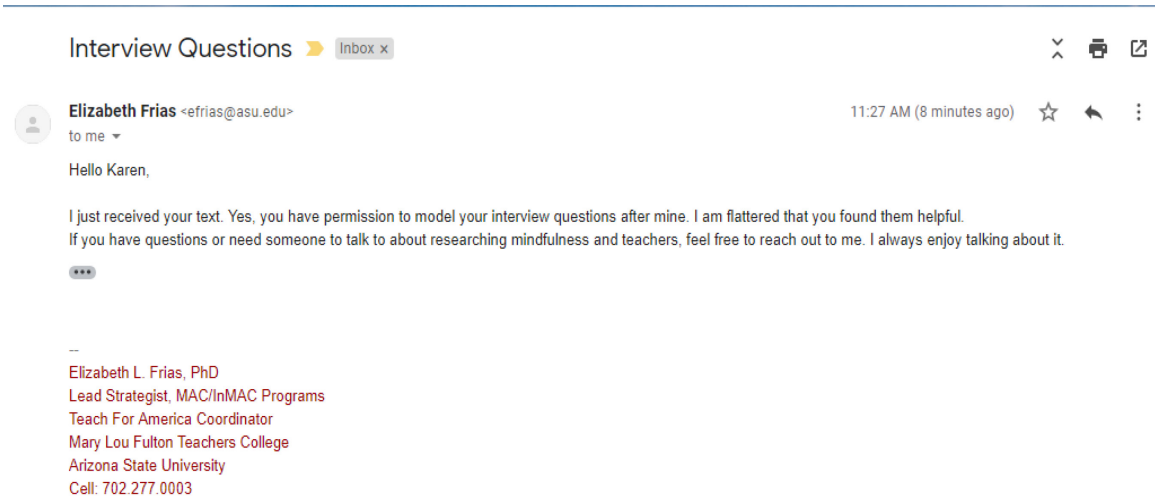
Best wishes for a productive investigation!

Kathi Simpson
Office Manager
Secretary to the IRB
Gayle Bolt Price School of Graduate Studies
P (704) 406-3020 | F (704) 406-3859

GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY | *Where Bright Futures Ignite*

Appendix C

Permission Email from Dr. Frias



Interview Questions Inbox ×

Elizabeth Frias <efrias@asu.edu> 11:27 AM (8 minutes ago)
to me

Hello Karen,

I just received your text. Yes, you have permission to model your interview questions after mine. I am flattered that you found them helpful.
If you have questions or need someone to talk to about researching mindfulness and teachers, feel free to reach out to me. I always enjoy talking about it.

--
Elizabeth L. Frias, PhD
Lead Strategist, MAC/InMAC Programs
Teach For America Coordinator
Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College
Arizona State University
Cell: 702.277.0003

Appendix D

Dr. Frias's Interview Questions

The following open-ended interview questions guided the semi-structured interviews:
Interview One (participant's history):

How did the participant come to be a mindfulness practitioner?

How did the participant come to be a teacher?

Interview Two (participant's contemporary experience):

What is it like for the participant to be a teacher who is a mindfulness practitioner?

What are the details of the participant's classroom experiences as a mindfulness practitioner in the classroom?

Interview Three (participant's reflection on meaning):

What does it mean to be a mindfulness practitioner?

What does it mean to be a teacher?

How does the participant make sense of his/her work in the classroom as a mindfulness practitioner?

Appendix E

Sample Email for Member Checking

Good Afternoon and Happy New Year!

I hope you are doing well! I have attached the narrative that I wrote from our interview back in December. Please look over the document and let me know if I need to change anything that is not accurate. You can write in the actual document any changes that need to be made.

I truly enjoyed going back through our interview and crafting a narrative that I think captures the essence of our discussion. I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

With Gratitude,

Karen H. Styers, M.Ed., NBCT
Teacher, Language Arts-7
Jamestown Middle School
Jamestown, NC 27282
336-819-2100
styersk@gcsnc.com