

MAY ALL TEACHERS BE HAPPY: A MINDFULNESS MANUAL FOR SCHOOL
STAFF

By

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A Project Presented to

The Faculty of Humboldt State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

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May 2021

Abstract

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There are many teachers who leave the profession early due to burnout; furthermore, there are many requirements for teachers to support the social emotional wellness of their students. With training provided to teachers as to how to help students as the norm, and no support for helping the teachers who are burnt out, this project aims to bridge this gap. After facilitating and surveying participants in a mindfulness staff group, the results of this study clearly show that teacher well-being can be supported, and enhanced, with a simple mindfulness support group provided on site to school staff.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my son. I dedicate this work to him.

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Introduction

When I was a girl, I used to always play school. If you had an overhead projector at your house, I would do everything in my power to play at your house. There would be no question as to who would play teacher, that would always be me. I am, and always have been, the teacher archetype. From the moment I could, I have always extended a loving, supportive, and scholarly hand to others. I have always wanted to hold the baby, to nurture the doll, to lead the playscape. It's as if there has always been some ingrained notion in me to care for others, which is why I chose teaching as my profession. I feel as though my entire life has guided me to this exact moment, where I stand by my notion of teachers needing a loving support system extended to them. Teaching is my calling, but it wasn't until I stopped playing teacher, and actually became a teacher, that I realized how painful it is.

Teaching is hard on the mind, the body, and the soul; and yet, I live to love these kids. I live to look them in the eye and tell them from soul to soul how special they are. I love to remind them to always choose well. I often leave work praying that my students choose well, but I often realize that they don't. It is a curse to be a teacher; to care so much that it hurts.

There was a time when I was in grad school, specifically the year I was getting my admin credential, when I heard a rumor about me. The director of the admin program told a colleague of mine that I was, "a light on campus, and they didn't realize how lucky they were to have me." I didn't understand. How could I be a light? Amidst the burdens

of the job, and the overwhelming heartache of holding space for those who don't have it at home, how was I a light? I was burnt out, completely.

I meditate. I have been meditating since I was twenty-three years old. During that year of my life, I was soul searching. I hadn't become an official teacher yet, but I was battling with myself and my life. Who should I be? How should I be? I was in a place of wanting better for myself, my community, my planet, and my home; however, I was so conditioned, and so tired, from a life of modern, young, white, American culture, that I was lost.

What happened to my life after embarking on a journey of meditation was a clear cut path to this moment right here. I came face to face with my true self for the first time since I was a very young child, and I wept for my lost self, and the lost world. How painful this life has been, and how painful it looked like it would be. I knew that I needed to keep going in the practice of meditation, so I returned again and again to long, silent, transformative meditation.

Bridging the worlds of this practice with the best practices in academia have been my mission. I proudly pursued a career in servitude, as the meditation world would describe teaching. I was doing the practice of meditation, and committing to this practice, by becoming a teacher. While I was so happy and proud to become a teacher; I was so happy and proud to become a teacher after finding and becoming a meditator.

What a gift to serve children. What a gift, even more so, to teach Language Arts and all of its possibilities while bringing magic to the foreground with storytelling, and through direct contact with children's stories. Serving our children in this capacity is a

grim fairy tale. Their stories can bring out the worst in me, their stories have broken my heart over and over again. There are days when I lose myself, my way, my integrity, and my heart. There are days when I feel like I cannot teach anymore because I cannot feel my heart break any longer.

When I started teaching, I made a plan to be a mindful teacher. The business of school is bigger than me and it oppressed my soul's purpose by requiring boxes and boundaries that do not support my passion for serving and helping others. It takes a great deal of faith, strength, perseverance, confidence, focus, and forgiveness to be a teacher, a good teacher. I am not the world's greatest teacher, I am not the best friend, or the best mom, or the best student, or anything for that matter. I know through all of this that I need support, too. I need support in order to remain purposeful and passionate about these kids, within a framework of the business of schooling.

There is a deficit in academia. The most important aspect of this entire system is missing from the policy, protocols, and purpose of school. The most important aspect of this entire system is helping ourselves and helping each other choose well. If we all chose well, we would have schools of love. There is no greater choice in this life than the choice of unconditional love. There is no greater choice than that of support and servitude, and this is the purpose of this work. This is why a mindfulness group for teachers naturally and purposefully found its way to me, and now to you.

This is my activism, resistance, social justice, reform, revolt, repent, and revival all in one. My calling is to teach. My wisdom is in meditation. My purpose is to combine the two, and this is the story of what happened.

A group of colleagues approached me during a Professional Development day a few years ago. We had a trauma-informed learning specialist as our PD speaker, and it incited a lot of talk about mindfulness amongst the faculty. Our schools have been focusing on interventions for students who suffer from trauma. To use mindfulness as a tool for students was suggested and shared, and my name buzzed around as someone who had some background in this. The next thing I knew, a group of teachers came up to me that day during lunch and asked if I could teach them about mindfulness. I was asked to do exactly what I knew was necessary: give the teachers the intervention of meditation first. The research shows the impacts of trauma on the ability to learn, but the research also shows that teaching in the modern world is absolutely traumatizing. The intervention of having trauma informed pedagogy is imperative; however, the teachers are traumatized, and they need an intervention first. Teachers need a space to heal if we are truly going to be the light that these children need.

This profession is filled with angels. I tell you, these humans live on the threads of their heart beats. There is so much grace involved in showing up each and every day to the purpose of serving others. There is an absolute existence of benevolence and nobility that hangs in the air of staff meetings. These heartfelt human beings coming together after a long hard day of trying so hard to help others. How magnificent a room full of teachers really is.

Bringing teachers together for meetings is often informational. We come together, as powerful as we are, to receive painful requirements, updates, policy changes, etc. What is missing from this powerful gathering is the lifting up and support of the spirits of

teachers. We cannot expect our staff to carry out these expectations that leave us burnt out, without offering some sort of support systems. We cannot expect to teach children and teens interventions for trauma, if we ourselves aren't given the same resources. If we are being expected to support classrooms filled with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), while working in a system that leaves a majority of its workers acquiring adversities due to the stresses of the job, then we need support for the teachers first and foremost.

I was asked to share mindfulness with a group of struggling teachers. This is what happened when we came together, in solidarity, in spirit, in the contemplative practice of helping and healing ourselves, first. There is power in collective consciousness. When we are together in meditation, we spread a vibration of love in and around all of us. That is it; that is the entire practice. It's as simple as a frequency, or as complicated as a gust of wind. Each person brings vibrations to the space and before you know it, it is amplified.

The teachers deserve loving kindness support services as a way to enhance their lives. The job is so hard. This project is a manual for facilitating and maintaining a group mindfulness program for staff at their school site. By looking at this manual, and observing the process through which we observe and attain awareness through collective mindfulness practice, I am hoping you will feel its benefits and find your own way of creating a space for yourself and your beautiful, angelic, colleagues.

The following sections are organized by chapters in the following order: literature review, methodology, results, and conclusions. The literature review is a reflection of the current state of teacher burnout, and attempts to draw in as many resources as possible

that explain the benefits of meditation in groups, and most importantly at work. The methodology explains how exactly the manual came to be, and also how the research was conducted. The results expose the benefits of the manual put into practice. and the conclusions draw all the pieces together in a final moment of wishing and praying for this manual to find its way to the teachers who need it.

Literature Review

“I love you... keep going.” -Vinny Ferraro

Introduction

There are numerous studies contributing to the understanding of teacher burnout and why burnout forces educators to leave the teaching profession. It is understood that almost ten percent of teachers leave the profession after their first few years (O’Brennan, 2017). Among other contributing factors, the possible reasons why a teacher might leave the profession after just beginning include teacher self-efficacy, connectedness to their work environments, safety, and demographics (O’Brennan, 2017). The understanding of this crisis has led many researchers to explore ways to cure burnout and to stay with the professions that they worked so hard to attain.

This literature review will explore what burnout is, how it impacts teacher well-being and/or happiness, the necessity of happiness and well-being for teacher efficacy, existing support services that enhance teacher well-being or happiness, mindfulness and meditation as a support service to combat burnout, and how mindfulness services in schools can create happy teachers who are ultimately resilient to burnout.

Teacher Burnout

Burnout

Some define the phenomenon of teacher burnout as: “a psychological defense mechanism developed in response to unmet expectations of newbie workers who were enthusiastic, vibrant, and idealistic” (Bozkus, 2017, p. 61). There are three recognized

components of burnout which include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Van Der Want, 2019). These components include symptoms such as energy depletion and fatigue, as well as developing negative and distant attitudes towards the job (Van Der Want, 2019). Even more so is the apparent lack of collegial support and the correlation between burnout levels and lack of support which result in higher stress levels (Hinds 2015, p.285). One study found that, “people in this dimension of burnout feel unhappy about themselves and dissatisfied with their accomplishments” (Shukla 2008, p.321). When examining what exactly burnout does to the lived experiences of teachers, “the effects of work stress and burnout on the individual include disruption of teachers’ normal habits, lack of work enthusiasm and creativity, inability to concentrate, lowered self-respect, loss of self-control in class, and overreaction to moderate amounts of stress” (Yong 2007, p.79).

Experiential Avoidance

Experiential avoidance (EA) can be explained as a psychological problem where one avoids one’s own feelings (Hinds et al. 2015). One study focused solely on EA and its association with teacher stress and social emotional well being (Hinds et al. 2015). EA is believed to be a part of the psychopathology field that can be treated or subdued with acceptance and mindfulness practices. The study found that by helping teachers to cultivate these practices they were found to have more energy, better relationships with students and colleagues, and be less stressed, ultimately combating the negative impacts of experiential avoidance as a contributor to burnout (Hinds et al. 2015).

Self-efficacy

One facet of the multi-faceted dilemma of teacher well-being is the ability to perform, and some researchers have learned valuable lessons related to this idea of teacher performance (Erozkan, 2016). One study suggests that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy actually enjoy life more (Erozkan, 2016). Self-efficacy is necessary for teachers because it is an action directly related to whether or not an individual is able to produce certain actions (Erozkan, 2016). Therefore, these studies suggest that good teachers have high levels of self-efficacy. Conversely, low self-efficacy has direct correlations to burnout. It has been found that teachers with low self-efficacy levels experience burnout more than their colleagues with low teacher self-efficacy levels (Savas et al., 2014). Teacher self-efficacy consists of fulfilling professional requirements, organizing teaching processes, performing tasks in schools, belonging to a school community, as well as the ability to adhere to social and political protocols of schools (Savas et al, 2014). Even more so, teacher's self-efficacy is the degree to which the educator believes that he or she has the ability to reach certain outcomes of student educational success (Van Der Want, 2019). There are multiple findings regarding the ways in which teachers combat or surpass the state of burnout, including the experience of high self-efficacy levels (Van Der Want, 2019).

Servicing self-efficacy deficits within a teaching community is not common, but the need for these services becomes apparent through the research including the suggestion that, “an integrated approach to teacher preparation and in-service professional development that supports the mind (i.e., mental agility), body (i.e.,

emotional agility), and spirit (i.e., awareness of self) to be beneficial in preparing teachers for the courageous and commendable inner and outer work they are called to engage” (Niedzielski, 2018, p. 9). Understanding the social-emotional competence of teachers and its connection with performance and found that mindfulness can predict one's social-emotional competence in relation to classroom performance (Abovenoli, 2014).

Why we need happy teachers

The problem of burnout has its roots in the idea that teachers are not happy. One researcher claims that, “school is not understood as a place for teachers to pursue their happiness, but for students to pursue theirs. Similarly, one may say that teachers are hired to enhance students’ happiness, not their own” (Takayanagi, 2016, p.18).

Teaching is an act of sharing oneself with impressionable young people. Understanding this act of service is the focal point of one researcher who claims that, “teaching, like any human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or for worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together” (Palmer 1997, p. 15). This example leads to the ultimate understanding of the problem of burnout as giving so much of oneself away, that there might not be anything left to give.

In a keynote speech by a successful administrator on helping schools be their best, the speaker repetitively claims that, “one of our most important goals should be to retain the best teachers. To accomplish that, we need to keep them happy” (Pryor 1998, p.2).

Layers of burnout

The personal dimensions of burnout are hard to follow, but the social reasons why educators leave the profession have been studied over the years and have yielded many interesting arguments (Tsang, 2018). In one study the idea that psychological causes are difficult and ambiguous to track led to a focus and argument that societal impact is the reason why teachers suffer burnout (Tsang, 2018). This particular study found that power impacts one's performance in the workforce because “social structures deprive teachers of the power to control labor and the labor process in teaching, which leads to teacher burnout”(Tsang 2018, p.457). In the field of special education, many studies have understood the immense devotion a teacher must have towards their job and ultimately this devotion can create intense stress (Martin, 2010). “When understanding the demands in the field of special education, it has been found that: It appears that high levels of teacher stressors, emotional and quantitative demands paired with low quality of leadership; creates a recipe for stress, leading towards feelings of emotional exhaustion and burnout for special education teachers” (Martin 2010, p.90). Being of service to others can have negative impacts. The understanding of giving so much that one reaches depletion, and ultimately burnout, is the basis of another study that claims working with psychological, social, and physical problems of others can inhibit an immense amount of emotional and physical stress that ultimately creates a debilitating work experience (Shukla 2008, p.321).

In a study that examined the longitudinal causes of burnout, or how burnout increases or decreases over time, it was predicted and supported that job demands, work-

to-family conflict, and family-to-work conflict positively contribute to burnout, whereas resources, autonomy, and support services negatively impact burnout (Lee, 2018).

Learner to teacher bullying

When realizing why teachers suffer from burnout, there are multiple rationales to this problem, one of them being the fact that teachers are victims of bullying by their students (Woudstra, 2018). While taboo in this society to actually speak up on the abuse teachers succumb to everyday, one study managed to quantify data regarding this act and how it relates to teacher well-being (Woudstra, 2018). A study conducted on student to teacher bullying found that bullying's effect included experiences of anxiety and depression as a direct result of bullying (Woudstra 2018, p.6). The study states, "it is clear that learner-to-teacher bullying does occur, and can have serious consequences for teachers as victims" (Woudstra 2018, p.2). The list of ways teachers experience verbal and physical bullying were quantified and it was found that teachers are bullied by the acts of being called hurtful names, being threatened, being victims of sexualized violence, and being victims of theft and damaged property (Woudstra 2018, p.4). There was also a quantified study of how teachers cope with this problem and they found that, "When bullying was experienced, most teachers talked to a colleague at school (29.3%), a family member (24.5%) or a friend or friends (23.8%) about the situation, while 3.1% of the teachers did not speak to anyone" (Woudstra 2018, p.4). It became clear in this study that teachers do have some form of support system, which was found to be a miniscule antidote to the overall problem and its damaging effects on classrooms and teacher anxiety and depression levels (Woudstra, 2018).

Teacher Well-Being

The act of well-being can be defined as, “the degree to which a teacher feels good at school and is free of school-related psychological or psychosomatic problems” (Van Der Want 2019, p.490). Teaching can be reflected as, “acknowledging one’s own position, placement, and experience during tumultuous times. It no doubt requires a delicate balance to be reflexive without making the personal problematic with using experimental methods in the classroom” (Martinez-Cola 2018, p.). One must stay connected, but also disconnect enough to have thick skin and not take things personal. There is a suggestion that student teachers are not given proper resources either (Cullen, 2013). There is opportunity for student teachers to receive training during induction programs so that they might understand their own stresses and impacts of the demands of the job (Cullen, 2013). This supports the idea that there is opportunity in researching what providing more interventions such as mindfulness to veteran, novice, and pre-service teachers would do to the burnout epidemic.

There is a study on compassion that strikes a chord in relation to second-hand trauma and what teachers have to float away from in order to survive their daily lives. Tania Singer’s research on empathy versus compassion reveals that the act of empathy, which is inherent in all educator’s, actually exhausts the nervous systems (Kupferschmidt, 2013). Tania’s research examined both the meditator and non-meditator brain, and provided insight into the activity of those feeling the pain of others (Kupferschmidt, 2013). The meditators in this experience were monks, and their response to this study astounded Tania because they insisted that compassion in the only way to

stop the negative impact of second-hand trauma (Kupferschmidt, 2013). This suggests that the second hand trauma that teachers feel from their students can actually be a cause of burnout. The meditators in the study revealed that empathy is actually harmful, and feeling pure love and compassion for others, rather than solely empathy, is the only way to experience second-hand trauma without it being harmful (Kupferschmidt, 2013). To put it in the words of another researcher, “It is through re-incorporating our thinking with our feeling in recounting our experience that the transformative can take root and reconcile a person to his/her humanity and the living world...” (Miller, 2007, p. 26). Furthermore, The results of one study found “that it is through the skills of mindfulness and self-compassion mind-set that teachers can more effectively manage stress on the job and, by inference, better attend to the interpersonal and instructional complexities of teaching and learning” (Cullen, 2013).

Mindfulness as an intervention

The impacts of a specific yoga and mindfulness course provided to 64 teachers and staff members before school twice a week, revealed the positive results this kind of practice has on the social-emotional, stress and burnout, and physiological rates and levels of the teachers who participated. This unique study is one that stands idly in comparison to other research because it specifically studied teachers, and revealed results that strongly support the use of a mindfulness program as survey results provided significant proof of burnout relief (Cullen, 2013).

One empirical study that has contributed to the overall knowledge of meditation as professional development had results that showed improvements in anxiety, emotional

exhaustion, stress reduction, and a decrease in depersonalization (Flook, 2013). Another empirical study focused on female teachers and emotional regulation. The self-reports collected in the study contained pre, post, and a five-month follow up of collected data. Experimental tasks and an eight week training were administered to the test group which totaled to 42 hours of session time. The teachers in the intervention group, compared to the control group showed an increase in empathy and understanding of others' emotions and also greater levels of compassion recognition tasks. Finally, the study expressed that blood pressure levels were shown to be less reactive in individuals who practiced more mindfulness consistently over time (Flook, 2013).

Focusing on qualitative data of teachers who practice meditation during the school day, one researcher defines the job of teachers as part of their rationale, giving light to teachers requiring the act of presence in their jobs, and meditation being a key ingredient in remembering and practicing presence (Irwin, 2016). The study argues that, "if we teach from that place where we are present and attentive, teaching can become a more fulfilling and enriching experience" (Irwin 2016, p.88). The qualitative results of this study support the idea of a regular meditation practice as a positive contributor to the overall experience of teaching (Irwin, 2016).

Mindfulness-based interventions, or MBIs, have shown growing popularity in professional development, especially because of the associations with increases in job satisfaction and reduced occupational burnout (Reiser, 2018). Members benefitted from sharing mutual frustrations, processing successes and challenges in practicing

mindfulness techniques, and receiving encouragement and support from each other in and outside of the sessions (Reiser et al., 2016).

Findings from one study suggest that if teachers do not receive interventions for stress and burnout in the school year, they are susceptible to increased physiological stress as shown in the cortisol levels studied and also the reflections of personal accomplishments collected (Flook, 2013). Teachers who did not receive training had cortisol function decline, so this study hypothesized that mindfulness training acts as a support system, or antidote, to the elevated stressors that continuously arise during the school day, and throughout the school year (Flook, 2013).

Group meditation as intervention

The experience of feeling emotional support from colleagues has been found to impact professional longevity (Kennedy, 2012). Feeling connected with others was a repeated result of meditation studies; feeling like one belongs within a school community has been shown to be a helpful factor in battling burnout (Bradshaw, 2017). One important study found that mindfulness support groups on campus were missing empirical evidence and chose to focus the study on the group aspect of mindfulness practice (Reiser, 2013). The results reported that the interviewees mentioned enjoying the act of building relationships with colleagues during the group and experienced a sense of belonging and acceptance (Reiser, 2013).

One study conducted in a higher education group, actually brought intersections of teacher well-being and teacher productivity together in their qualitative study of mindfulness group interventions (Damico, 2018). This study aimed to analyze the

effectiveness of a group mindfulness practice as a way to decompose the root-level experiences of teachers and examine the deeper meanings and experiences of the job, resulting in a profoundly positive experience of the group participants further supporting the cause of this type of support service for educators (Damico 2018).

Healing teachers through social interactions

There is one significant claim in the vault of this research that hypothesizes the need for strong social support, rather than independent or isolated support (Chircher, 2016). The study suggests the idea that schools would benefit from creating positive interactions and interpersonal relationships with its teaching staff. Positive interactions therefore increase job satisfaction and combat the negative impacts of burnout (Chircher, 2016).

Finding Peace in Schools

Professor Peter Fonagy from University College London and his collaborators in Houston, Texas, examined the existence of peaceful learning environments as a better intervention than individual bully interventions (Lubelska, 2012). The trial in nine schools in the US midwest showed that the program, 'Creating a Peaceful School Learning Environment', was effective in reducing aggression and victimisation (Lubelska, 2012). Rather than focusing on fixing the schools, the peaceful school project believes that teaching peace in schools allows for the wellbeing of all stakeholders to be the prevention and the medicine in all areas of struggle in a school (Lubelska, 2012). Prevention is another way schools can offer in-house services, and this study supports this notion.

One dissertation study (Neidetske, 2018) which considered the impact of meditation on teacher well-being emphasized the presence of a teacher as the gateway to overcoming stress, the determiner of one's capacity to experience the influence of group mediation support, and climbing the different modes of awareness both for the internal experience of the teacher and the external experience of the whole classroom. The process of exploring oneself, even more so in groups, becomes layered in good and bad experiences and one must remember, intense experiences are the threshold of this journey (Neidetske, 2018). One's presence is always either evoking a connection with another or repelling the connection. Teacher presence brings together the all encompassing mind, body, and spirit experiences of the teacher and the entire experience of being in the classroom (Neitdeske, 2018).

In a study published in the *Journal of American Psychology*, psychologists compared the effect of teacher support groups with the effect of inoculation training (a specific stress management), and found the results to be comparable (Cecil, 1990). The results of the study found the inoculation training to decrease stress levels, but conversely found the support groups to not impact stress levels (Cecil, 1990). By intersecting these two studies, rather than compare their results in parallel studies, a question arises: what if the inoculation training was facilitated in a support group environment? This is the type of question that evolves from the literature review, because each study describes the apparent lack of research or next step for research.

Teacher happiness

One finding that stands out in the review of the literature was that of comparing the existence of classroom management and satisfaction with life (Ihtiyaroglu, 2018). “Findings from a correlation analysis put forth a positive relationship between happiness and satisfaction with life, and an appreciative classroom management profile, whereas a negative relationship was detected in relation to an indifferent classroom management profile... happiness and satisfaction with life are significant predictors of appreciative and indifferent classroom management profiles” (Ihtiyaroglu 2018, p. 2227). This study concluded that classroom management is more successful when the teacher is happy and satisfied with their life’s work (Ihtiyaroglu 2018, p. 2227). Happiness is defined in this study to better understand this key term, and the authors believe that happiness is subjective but ultimately expresses an individual’s perception of the amount of joy and positivity they experience in their life (Ihtiyarglu, 2018). One expert in the field of mindfulness intervention reported that, “prosocial responses can be enhanced and destructive emotional responses can be reduced with a meditation based intervention” (Kemeny 2012, p. 347), therefore supporting the idea that happiness is cultivated through this practice.

One result of a study focused on compassionate responses in meditators versus non-meditators, trying to quantify ancient Buddhist traditions and beliefs. The study clearly proved the Buddhist belief scientifically because the results showed that meditation directly influenced and elevated compassionate response levels (Condon, 2013). The results of this study showed that meditators were more likely to offer support

to sufferers than those who did not meditate (Condon, 2013). There was an enhanced prosocial response in meditators of all kinds, whether it be compassion meditation or mindfulness meditation (Condon, 2013).

Attitude of gratitude

In a book published by Patricia Jennings titled *Mindfulness for Teachers*, the message of how to cultivate a truly mindful classroom for students begins with a message for the teachers. Jennings argues that compassionate teachers offer the best services to students and there are specific requirements teachers must take in order to take care of their students. Offering gratitude in one's daily experience is a way that she supports her claim. In a very emotionally driven rationale for her claims Jennings writes, "if teachers practice gratitude on a regular basis, they may improve their overall well-being and prevent burnout, especially if they are among those who find it difficult to feel gratitude" (Jennings 2015, p. 99). If gratitude is an antidote to burnout as Jennings claims, it would be worthwhile to experiment or research a group cohort focused on gratitude cultivation.

Teaching is a hero's journey

In comparing the work of overcoming burnout to that of Joseph Campbell's theories on the hero's journey and myth, it was compelling to visit a study that uses the hero in relation to a teacher's life journey (Goldstein, 2005). To enhance the idea that being a teacher requires devoted and exhausting work ethic, one author suggests using the hero's journey as a guide to becoming the best teacher one can be, and to remind educators that it isn't going to be easy and one must overcome some major dragons and demons, metaphorically speaking, to become the teacher that is needed in this

problematic existence of burnout (Goldstein, 2005). For people becoming teachers, this journal emphasized the fact that the dragons within a teacher can be the reason for their burnout and must be faced and defeated (Goldstein, 2005). As this researcher explained and believed, teachers have so much work to do within themselves if they are to survive in this profession.

Corporate Heart Space

In *The Heart's Code* by Paul Pearsall Ph.D., the benefits of hearts together in space and time is explicitly stated. Dr. Pearsall uses his research on heart transplant patients in order to theorize that there is a collective healing that takes place when hearts come together, and even more specifically when they can communicate in a silent environment. In this book, Dr. Pearsall describes the way hearts cells function, and heart muscles thrive, paying particular attention to the ways hearts pulse. He writes, "Place one throbbing heart cell in a laboratory dish next to another heart cell and they will beat in their solitary rhythms. Place several heart cells together in a dish without any physical contact between one another and with no synapse connecting them and they suddenly fall into a rhythmic unison, a rhythm that is distinct from the rhythm of each individual cell. This is another manifestation of the heart's subtle code" (Pearsall, 1998, p. 62-63). This code happens whether we want it to or now, so this research even more so supports the notion that when we come together, we communicate in ways that we might not even know or see. When mindfulness happens with a group, hearts communicate (Pearsall, 1998).

Lack of Research

Roeser et al.'s study conducted in 2013, argued that research on mindful professional development for educators was only in the beginning stages of existence, and that most professional development does not aim at cultivating emotion regulation skills or managing stress, and that these are the exact topics that should be highlighted in educational professional development because they are necessary for professions like teaching. Groups, as a method for studying impacts of meditation on teacher burnout, have significant reason to be a powerful intervention, and there are very few studies that have observed and analyzed this method. "The etiology of burnout is not agreed upon by scholars... while solutions to aid in the treatment of burnout seem plausible, these solutions do not provide an empirically grounded method of treatment. Theories related to the topic should be expanded and replicated. Contributions of this nature will enhance the body of knowledge and aid in the prevention of teacher burnout" (Kennedy 2012, p.2).

Mindfulness for classroom teachers is only in the early stages of research and understanding. The majority of studies focus on the student, and few studies actually investigate the effects of mindfulness training on teachers (Flook, 2013). With so much ambiguity on the definition, implementation, and training, there is no such recommended format for teaching and training teachers in mindfulness (Flook, 2013). It is argued that there is not a program that systematically implements professional training for teachers, and much more needs to be studied and understood in order to support the changing climate of education (Flook, 2013). Flook's study argued even more that because teachers

workloads are so heavy, and they often juggle that with family responsibilities after their work day, teachers might not have the motivation to seek these trainings outside of school, igniting and supporting the idea even more so that these trainings should, in fact, be offered as professional training within the schools and outside of health care frameworks that teachers would need to seek on their own (Flook, 2013).

Happy Teachers

In a presentation from Dacher Keltner as presented to a cohort of students in the 2015-2016 MindfulSchools Year long program, Dacher explained that happiness at work exists in a few ways: more productive employees, better job performance, boost in creative thought, better problem solving skills, more integrative negotiators, and emotionally intelligent managers with more satisfied teams (Keltner, 2015). Additionally in this presentation, the idea of feeling connected with others was brought to light significantly with the argument that strong connections add 10 years to life expectancy, are a strong predictor of happiness, lower levels of cortisol, and strengthen meaningful connections with children (Keltner, 2015).

Conclusion

Happiness is a crucial part of the literature examined in this review. Understanding how to support happiness for teachers as an in-school intervention is the next step in research that examines the causes and solutions to burnt-out teachers. *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*, by Richard J. Davidson and Sharon Begley, is an interesting examination into the science of brain power, and also a clear explanation as to how the act of thinking and feeling is something we can control, if we are taught how.

Our schools need teachers to learn these skills, as most of the research expressed here shows. Even more so, our schools need to understand and process the actions needed in order to cultivate antidotes to burnout starting with determination from within the individual, and then within group settings. The research shows there is potential, but also shows there is not enough research done to prove this notion. Davidson and Begley argue in their book that the thoughts we think can train our brain. They explain, “The revolution in neuroplasticity has shown that the brain can change as a result of two distinct inputs. It can change as a result of the experiences we have in the world...the brain can also change in response to purely mental activity” (Davidson et al., 2012, p. 175). This book reiterates the information presented in this literature review because group mindfulness interventions on campus would offer an experience, the experience of healing within a group, and mental activity, the activity of meditating. Whole heartedly, the literature provides insight into the opportunities that exist, and have yet to come, in understanding how to support teachers in combating burnout by creating group spaces on campus that use mindfulness as a healthy intervention.

Methods

The creation of this project was that of divinity. This was something that came into fruition based on the interest and curiosity of a group of teachers. Mindfulness is trending in education, and word got around that I am a legitimate practitioner. When I first started teaching 7 years ago, I was trained by Mindful Schools and have used their curriculum in and out of my classroom ever since. Word travels fast in school hallways, and eventually my name came up in professional development about trauma-informed practices. I was titled as being the in-house expert in this field of mindfulness as an intervention, and after that professional development day, where my name was briefly mentioned, a group of curious teachers cornered me and asked me to teach them mindfulness. I, of course, said yes.

A few weeks after their initial request, I worked with the campus instructional coach to put together a simple curriculum guide for the group. She helped me organize and market the group by creating flyers, emailing staff, and introducing the group at a whole staff meeting. We decided on a day, time, and location for the group, and the next thing we knew we were meeting weekly during lunch to practice mindfulness together.

The project is a manifestation of what happened during this group. It has been almost two years since the first gathering, and we aren't going anywhere. I have compiled what I felt to be the most important lessons to teach when starting a mindful staff group. The compilation of lessons is a sequence of meditations, all meant to build off one another, and complement each other.

The inspiration and root of the project is the Mindfulness curriculum that I originally inherited from my year-long training program through Mindful Schools (*Mindful Schools*, 2013). This is the backbone of my training and the skeleton through which I created the curriculum. All praise and thanks go to the work of Mindful Schools, as it has been the foundation through which this project was created.

I wrote the lessons in this project based on my own knowledge and understanding of mindfulness, but I started with the Mindful Schools curriculum. What I found from this guide was a recipe for teaching the practice. In order to teach mindfulness, there must be two main ingredients: what it is, and how to do it. This is the basis of the lesson template: first give background as to what mindfulness is by storytelling, and then describe what to do to access this content with instructions as to how. What is mindfulness, and how to do it. That's all it takes to make a lesson. The curated list of lessons in the manual are key areas of contemplation and practice in order to fully grasp these two parts of the practice.

Participants

The participants surveyed were all regular attendees of the mindfulness group. There were eleven total participants surveyed, and six of those eleven responded to the survey. The participants were all women with varying roles within the school.

Survey Instrument

In order to develop the following curriculum, I developed a survey to inform the curriculum design and to learn about my participants' experiences (Appendix A). The survey conducted was adapted from the Mindful Schools Survey (Mindful Schools). In

fact, most questions come directly from their survey for adolescents. The survey was meant to understand what the participants gained, or not, from the group. The manual is a printed manuscript of what content the participants interacted with during the group, and the survey intended to understand the experiences of each participant as a result from the curated lessons. The results of the survey are a clear indication of the impact of the group on its participants, and a clear indication of the usefulness of the manual.

Procedures

The survey was given anonymously and voluntarily, and 6 of the 11 participants in the group responded to the survey. The survey was distributed electronically using Google forms. The group is offered to all school staff, and there are a regular number of participants who come most days. The survey was distributed to all participants who attended regularly. I did not give the survey to those who came to one or two sessions, but those who attended most of the sessions.

Analysis

The survey was analyzed through two rounds of coding. Results were reported on a spreadsheet. In my first round of coding, I highlighted words that evoked an emotional response from me in each question response that was given. My first step was to take the felt-sense experience of the participants' responses to the survey, and compile a list from that. I read through the responses multiple times, and each time I had a felt-sense experience to a response. I highlighted it. This revealed several common themes, as I reviewed the highlighted words over and over again. I asked myself what I noticed, what was similar, and what were some common themes. The words and phrases that began to

reveal themselves as repetitive or thematic included: love, feeling, ritual, taking time, noticing when I feel stress, more awareness, tools and strategies, happier, antidote to isolation during the pandemic, gratitude and appreciation, beneficial, and coming together. In the second round of coding, I grouped four common themes that were then compiled into the results: Increased awareness, finding center, benefits in other areas outside of the group, and benefits of mindfulness in community.

Results

From my survey results, I have reported four main findings: the benefits of mindfulness in community, the benefits in other areas of life outside of the group, the support in finding center, and increased awareness of the felt-sense experience.

Benefits of Mindfulness in Community

Coming together in this way is beneficial according to those who responded to the survey. What this means is that there is a felt-sense response generated within, and it is noticeable and palpable to the senses. The consensus is that it isn't like coming together at a staff meeting to receive information; it is a sharing experience where all members sync up in present space and time energetically. There is no softening of the exchange through receiving and producing information, like we usually do in staff meetings, or professional development training. There is something tangible on the felt-sense experience that happens when humans come together in this way, and this is what the survey results have clearly proved. Some of the participants' responses that have led me to this conclusion include the following: "having the group allows me a more social outlet than the meetings we have as school staff", "knowing there is a group of wonderful people who are all sharing the same feelings and experiences and also practicing, it is a beautiful community", "collective meditation feels very different from individual meditation", "The group experience carves out some time to support one another and to create routine and ritual around mental health", "It's also very nice to share the experience with others instead of in isolation at home", "connect with my colleagues on a personal level". Seeing these responses have led me to the result that being together in

meditation at a workplace is actually a very real healing tool. When time is taken to be together, silently, still, and contemplatively, there is a noticeable exchange of information energetically that feels really healing and really good. There is a general well-being afterward that encourages participants to understand that being together in this way is really helpful to the general well-being of an individual.

Taking care of one-self can involve coming together collectively and quietly. Being in a room together, eyes closed, dropping down into the awareness and energy of the practice like the lessons suggest, brings us to a certain state. And while this state is healthy and good to do on your own, there is an actual tangible difference between the felt-sense experience of doing this on one's own, and doing this as a collective practice. The benefit of this collective self-care experience is shared repeatedly in the survey responses; therefore, the result of a group mindful practice is a collective healing energetic response for each individual member of the group.

Benefits in other areas of Life Outside of the Group

The participation in this group proved to be a worthy endeavor for benefitting other areas of life outside of the group. The result of this benefit was concluded in words and phrases such as: conflict reduction, active listening, empathy, inspiration, thoughtfulness, reduction of stress from online school, slowing down, appreciation, presence in the moment, encouragement to practice every day, discipline to make the practice a habit, inspiring other mindful activities at home, coping with loss of control due to the pandemic's impact on teaching and the system of school, provides a tool for

support that can be accessed anytime, relevant and applicable, trusting ourselves, and a relaxation technique after a long work week.

This list of responses reveals the breadth of impact this collective healing process has. Participants had so much to say about the benefits and use of the practice interwoven throughout their days and lives. Whether this was found in benefits at work, at home, in relationships, or other ways, the collective report is that there are layers to this healing that ripple out into the world around them. Participating in the group is sort of like unlocking a door that allows for new pathways for experiences to occur. There are moments where awareness arises because the participants understand the tool for what it is after observing themselves in the collective group. Taking what was learned in the group into other areas of their life just happens seamlessly. There is no homework or assignments to try, the participants reported that awareness arises, and they've changed in ways that they wouldn't have noticed prior to this awareness practices learned and experienced in the group.

Support in Finding Center

Another thematic result I found from similarities in survey responses was that of a general sense of centering or grounding oneself. This is an elusive phrase and can mean many different things, which is exactly what the survey results revealed. This concept of coming back to something whether it's self, awareness, remembering something; there was a general feeling of remembering. I feel as though there is a sense of gravity that was reported, sort of like a gravity that pulls one into experience on a physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual plane. Survey participants indicated that participating in the

group gave them a sense of ease in relation to this sense of gravity, like they needed the reminder to drop into the felt-sense experience of the body, in order for other aspects of the self to feel grounded, as well. This suggests that participation in the group induces a sense of coming home, or settling into the experience of being alive, and really observing what truly is, rather than what the story we tell ourselves might be. Some of the concepts reported in the survey included experiences such as: feeling lighter, sense of peacefulness and ease, remembering to take a moment to breathe, remembering to be calm, coming back to a centered state, checking back in with oneself, being kinder and better to oneself, slowing down, a general sense of grounding, refreshing, relaxing, realization of how thoughts can impact one's actions, remembering to pause and anchor oneself with breath, and feeling connected to oneself.

Increased Awareness

The act of observing oneself revealed an increased awareness from the participants and this was found through the reporting of experiences such as: realizing reactions to stressful situations, awareness of tension in the body, awareness of perception, awareness of feelings and judgements whether for oneself or others, awareness of the need to practice in order to live and learn better, awareness of the actions of the body, awareness of presence. It is interesting to note that participants had epiphanies of self in this way. It is as though the responses show that prior to this group the awareness around basic functioning wasn't fully intact. When one thinks of metacognition, and this need in education to think about thinking, it makes one wonder, how can someone teach without having this initial awareness of self? The survey shows

that unless explicitly taught and practiced, the awareness of oneself in relation to mind, body, and spirit doesn't really have a place in the busy teacher's day. What this general awareness result informs me is that we need to actively provide this training for teachers.

Conclusions

In summary, this project is a recommendation as to how to create and maintain a mindfulness group at one's school in order to help support teachers. The data informs me that this project is a worthy endeavor for anyone who works in education. Whether you are trying to better yourself, your teaching practice, your life, your workplace, etc, the usefulness of this project is clear based on the results of the survey responded from those who participated. There is ample evidence to suggest that this manual can be used in schools to help increase school staff's capacity to perform their expected duties, which are traumatizing! Teaching is a career that asks so much from its teachers and school staff members, and bringing school staff together in this way, can ultimately change lives and heal the ones who teach our youth.

The initial project came together because teachers were being asked to heal kids, but my question always has been and always will be, shouldn't we make sure the teachers are okay, first? How can someone be asked to help a child, when they themselves are being burdened each and every day by the oppressive nature of systemic education? When combining the harsh realities of our jobs, no one suggests that maybe we should come together for collective self-care in a way that has proven to work. This project shows an option for just that.

It is proven here that it is good, healthy, healing, and productive to come together at one's work and to practice mindfulness meditation together. Whether there is stress on the job, anxiety due to the pandemic, pressure from one's work place to perform under stressful conditions, or the harsh reality of our inequitable education system, the project

suggests that there is a way to help teachers. Coming together, in a collective mindfulness practice, for as little as half an hour per week, can change the lived experience of teachers. When we heal the teachers, we heal the schools and all stakeholders. By providing this opportunity for school staff to come together in this way, the school changes. The teachers are more aware of themselves, and better equipped to provide ideal conditions for their students. The teachers are given an opportunity to come together in a way that doesn't seem to exist in any other capacity. When teachers are told to take care of themselves in emails from administration, it is meaningless. When teachers come together and practice a self-care program collectively, there is an absolute shift in the well-being of all those involved, and this changes the lives of the participants. If the lives of the participants are changed for the better, then it must be assumed that the lives of our students are changed as well.

There is something palpably real about coming together in silence. When one enters the group, whether it is real or in zoom, things shift for those involved. There is a deep undefined sense of community and togetherness that is formed when people come together in this way, and there is nothing like it. When teachers are expected to fulfill so many duties in their school days, how do we sustain our efforts? The answer is in this project. I truly believe that this type of group, a mindfulness group for staff, can heal a lot of issues that teacher's face. The literature review explores so many facets of a teacher's experience, whether it is the trauma of student to teacher abuse, or the burnout that comes with the profession, the research shows that teachers have some of the most challenging

careers in our world. If there was a way to come together and process and feel the reality of our jobs, the good and the bad, this would be it.

This group is healing; this group is safe. The feelings reported in the results from the participants is clear proof that those who participated had an experience of relief and togetherness that cannot be found in any other aspect of the job. What if all schools chose this support group? What if all teachers had a place to go to revive themselves from the burnout that the job creates? I believe the answer is in this manual and this research. Something happened to these participants, and despite the pressure of the job, they showed up and found healing in their participation. It is a beautiful tale of so many humans trying to help others. We give so much as educators, and we often don't have the support to keep pushing through, and I believe a group like this for teachers is a great start in the healing process of the system of schooling.

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Appendix A: The Manual

May All Teachers Be Happy

A Mindfulness Manual for School Staff

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Introduction

This is why we meditate together.

The feeling one gets when sitting quietly with a group of people is indescribable, and that's the point. There is a felt-sense experience that exists without words, and it is the most healing gift on this planet. This feeling can and should be accessible at work. When people sit quietly together, they heal in a way that can't be done in a doctor's office. There is an energy exchange that takes place through the systems of our nerves, our hearts, and our gut feelings. These pieces of ourselves are always active, always available, and discreetly subtle forces. Tapping into these energy systems, within a group of professionals, can be a healthy way to come together after a long day of teaching. This manual is a guide for starting a group of this nature. In each lesson you will find a guided talk, a meditation lesson, and some notes. This manual is meant to be a support system, not a method to live by. Use these lessons as a way to interact with your professional community in a healthy and healing way. Let us exchange the energy of peace, harmony, and freedom with this handbook, and bring our school communities together by sitting quietly together, and healing.

Getting Started

It is my recommendation that the staff member who takes on this manual as a way to support their colleagues, should have experience and background in meditation. Most of these lessons come from the inspiration of MindfulSchools. In order to properly facilitate a group such as this, it is my recommendation to be trained by Mindful Schools, or a similar organization. Having background, experience, and knowledge in meditation and mindfulness is important for facilitating this group. Anyone who wishes to take on a role of facilitator may want to take some time to practice with Mindful Schools first. By taking their introduction to Mindfulness courses, you will have a solid foundation to start from. If you are comfortable with meditation, and have a solid understanding of what it means for you, you are on your way to facilitating this group.

Admin Approval

It is always recommended to check-in with your administration prior to starting this group. Admin like to know what is going on, and they might even be interested in joining the group! Before you invite your staff, reach out to your admin team with a proposal. I recommend doing this in the following order:

1. Email your admin asking to hold a meeting regarding your request to offer a mindfulness group for all faculty and staff.
2. During the meeting explain to the admin what mindfulness is, what this group will be like, and how and when you intend to introduce the staff and hold the meetings.
3. Let them know that this is a voluntary offering, and all participants will do so at their own will.

4. Ask for permission to introduce mindfulness to the staff at the next staff meeting, and for permission to hold the group once a week.
5. In my experience, admin are very appreciative of this service. If your admin is hesitant: lead them to the MindfulSchools website for more information.
6. Be patient, be honest, and be consistent.

Staff Introduction

Introduce mindfulness to the staff at an all staff meeting. This will only take a few moments. It is best to inform the staff by simply stating that there will be a voluntary mindfulness group offering once a week at the date, time, and location of your choosing. Share a little bit about why you practice mindfulness, what it has done for you, and that if anyone is interested in learning and exploring mindfulness to create community at work, to please join you. Tell the staff to look forward to an introductory email with an invitation to join.

At this point, it is best to set reminders around the school, such as a flyer in the teacher's workroom, and an email invitation, sent a week prior to the first meeting, with a calendar invite, and some background information about mindfulness. In my experience, It works well to send an email with 4 main components: a flyer with invite information, a document explaining what mindfulness is, a link to more info, and a calendar invite.

Self-Care

Taking care of yourself so that you can be the best mindfulness teacher you can be is the way to do this. If you are trying to share this practice, you have to walk your talk. Be gentle with yourself, but be real. You are leading a group of teachers on a very serious journey of reflection, discovery, and renewal. You are the driver of the car, and you need to be well oiled to stay running smoothly. Get good rest, eat healthy meals, give yourself time to meditate daily, and remember to always wish for the best in yourself and the best in others. Make a constant intention to wish well-being for yourself and for everyone else. This is a tenet of mindfulness and should be practiced habitually. You have to walk into the mindfulness group mindfully, so that others can learn from your example. Take care to give yourself what you need to be authentic.

Materials

- This Manual
- A bell
- Writing Material, a journal and a pen/pencil

The Lessons

Instructions: Use these lessons as a guide for facilitating the group. Each Lesson is sectioned by theme, guiding questions, stories and examples script, guided practice script, reflection, and sharing. My recommendation is to read through each lesson and practice sharing the lesson prior to each group meeting. What part of the lesson works for you, what part can you speak on as if it was your own, and what parts can you leave out? These lessons are guides, and should be used as such. Use what parts work best for you, but keep in mind that each lesson builds off the last. Happy meditating.

Lesson #1: Introduction to Mindfulness

Guiding Questions: We take care of our bodies with exercise, we rest our bodies with sleep, but when do we care for our minds, hearts, and nervous systems?

What are some ways that you nurture your mind, nerves, and heart?

When or where have you ever acquired tools or knowledge about self-care, real self-care?

What do you know about Mindfulness? What do you want to know?

Lesson #1 Script:

(Take a couple minutes to tell your personal story of learning and practicing mindfulness. A personal anecdote about why you practice mindfulness, and when and why you began, is a great way to start the first lesson)

So, what is mindfulness? A common definition is this: Mindfulness is paying attention to our experience in a way that allows us to respond rather than react. It is a quality of inner-stillness that is available even when our life, or circumstances, feel out of control and chaotic. It is possible to be mindful, aware, and pay attention to everything in our experience including anything we experience through our five sense doors, our thoughts, and our emotions (*Mindful Schools, 2013, p. 5*).

When we meet here every week, we will discover a different way “to do” mindfulness. My hope is that you remember that this isn't something you do. For one meeting a week, the expectation is that you just are. No expectations, no requirements, just raw and real self-awareness. Whatever your experience is, you will find yourself in a space that could go anyway. You could have a good sit, a bad sit, a weird sit, a wrong sit, a right sit, etc. So I have a recommendation of something to remember while we are on this journey:

“I love you, keep going”- This is a quote from Vinny Ferraro that was said at a Mindful Schools retreat, and the phrase is a really great support system. The most important thing to remember is that remembering is half the battle. When we practice mindfulness, we fine tune our attention to something such as breath, or another sense door, and we notice things that may have been unnoticed before. We notice that we have shifted our

focus from the mindfulness practice to something like, our grocery list, or the meeting we had yesterday, or a conflict we are having. A lot of times we think we are failing at practicing mindfulness, when in fact, noticing that you're thinking of something else, is being mindful! When you notice that you've wandered or forgotten, give yourself credit. You remembered. A lot of people think they are failing when they notice this, but you remembered. And when you think of this you can tell yourself, "I Love you, keep going".

So each time we meet we will discover a new doorway to encounter awareness from. Today is a focus on breath, to soothe the nervous system, and to train our mind to focus our awareness of the sensation of breath. The more we pay attention to one thing, like the sensation of breath, the more we will be able to carefully pay attention to the rest of the things, and there are a lot of things in this body to pay attention to. Breath is the most simple way to generate awareness. What does breath feel like; where does it go; how long does it last; is it fresh; is it clean; is it dry; is it cold? The way we pay attention to our breath is the starting point in awareness. Train ourselves to bring our attention to this, and we can bring our attention to a different sense-door next time. This is the first exploration.

Lesson #1 Guided Sit Script:

(Ring the Bell)

Take a few breaths to settle in, and relax your breath so that it is in its most natural state. No need to exaggerate or change the natural rhythm of your breath. Bring your attention to this natural, normal, breath.

Bring all of your attention and awareness to the nose. Observe this sense door as if its the only thing there is right now. Surrender to the awareness of breath.

What does breath feel like? Hot, cold, warm, soft, sticky, thick, tingly, prickly, dry, damp? Observe all sensations in and around the nose, as you breath in and as your breath out. See if you can remain aware of the sensations of breath for a few minutes. Let's observe.

Sit for 2 minutes.

If you noticed your mind wander in those few minutes, give yourself credit for remembering. Start again. Each time you move attention away from breath and remember, just simply and gently come back. I love you, keep going.

Sit for 2 minutes.

Notice how you feel now. Is it different from when we started? How do you feel now?

I am going to ring the bell, and when you can't hear the sound of the bell any longer, go ahead and open your eyes.

(ring Bell)

(give everyone a minute to readjust by modeling some deep breaths and smiling.)

It felt really nice to sit with you all, and I am wondering if anyone would like to share their experience?

(Let participants share)

Reflection:

Ask participants to give some time to focus on breath whenever they remember over the next week, and mention that you'd like to hear some experiences when we meet again.

Lesson #2: The Reminder of Mindfulness

Guiding Questions: How can we remember to be mindful?

What does the practice look like when we remember?

Why is the habit of practice beneficial?

Lesson #2 Script:

Welcome and thank you for coming. Showing up is one of the most gracious acts of mindfulness, no matter what we are showing up for. Being in a true state of awareness for any and all of our objectives is a truly mindful state.

Let's take a minute to really arrive by grounding ourselves in this mindfulness space. Just take a moment of silence. Breathe, feel your body in your space, feel the support of your seat, the touch of the air, and the sounds in and around you. Give your heart a noting practice, by just gently noticing how you feel inside your heart right now. Are you at peace; are you anxious; are you okay? Check in with yourself for a few breaths.

Today I wanted to *Remind* you of why we are here and why we are doing this.

1. Reminder: We are the scientists of ourselves and no one else can do this work for us.
 - a. It is so important that we take the time to observe ourselves. This quiet stillness of self-observation can be a few things- it can be balm to soothe us, it can recharge our batteries, and it can help untie the knots of our days.
 - b. Being still is the ultimate path to finding the truth within ourselves.
 - c. We take time to be still and just observe. Don't move. Try not to move. Don't get up; don't open your eyes; don't scratch an itch. Just remain aware.
 - d. Watch the impulses, the memory, the dialogue, etc. arise and pass away.

We have to start somewhere. Each class will take a different tone and approach until we have a full contact understanding of this practice. Today is a reminder. Whenever we remember is a moment of mindfulness

(Personal Note: tell a story of a time you were reminded of the importance of awareness- I tell the story of a friend of mine who passed away who appeared in a dream, and the feeling I had when I woke up. I was in awe of the grace of his presence, and it made me remember how short and precious life is)

So, I ask you: When was the last time you were reminded of how precious, how fragile, how short this life really is? When was the last time you remembered that every breath is worthy of noting and being grateful for? All life is precious and sacred and special! By taking time to really let that feeling soak in, we are taking the time to remember what a joy it is to be alive.

Let's give breath the attention it deserves it today by observing it completely and remembering how grateful we are for the opportunity to breathe.

After a long day, it can be especially hard to focus on breath. Remember last week's talk.

Just keep going back to home base. That area in and around the nostrils. Be aware of home base.

Lesson #2 Sitting Script:

(Ring the bell)

Close your eyes or soften your gaze so that you can rest here for a bit.

Remember all the people who came before you in order for you to have this breath right now.

Remember all the breaths that brought you to this moment of this breath right now.

Remember all the moments that conspired to create this moment here and now.

As you breathe in, as you breathe out, whatever sensations you feel just remain aware and equanimous.

Is the breath warm or cold, dry or moist, light or heavy.

Observe the breath completely for each in breath and outbreath.

You can choose to keep your attention at the nostrils, or you can keep your attention in the lungs, or you can keep your attention around the belly.

You can move from part to part observing the breath in each of its places.

Follow, observe, and remember to come back to observation of breath if the mind wanders.

Be gentle with yourself if you forget, remembering by forgetting is a beautiful stage of mindful awareness.

(Give five minutes of sitting time.)

(Ring Bell)

Open their eyes when you are ready.

Reflection:

What was this practice like for you? Would anyone like to share their experience?

As you go through your week, see if you can remember to be mindful at any moment. What is the setting, what is the moment, what was the reminder? Let us know next week.

Lesson #3: Fine-Tuning Our Awareness**Guiding Questions:**

How do we practice mindfulness?

Why is this acute attention to breath a necessary step?

Lesson #3 Script:

Welcome and thank you for coming. The act of showing up is one of the greatest gifts we can give to ourselves. Showing up is one of the most gracious acts of mindfulness, no matter what we are showing up for. Being in a true state of awareness for any and all of our objectives is a truly heroic state.

Let's take a minute to really arrive by grounding ourselves in this mindfulness space. Just take a moment of silence. Breathe, feel your body in your space, feel the support of your seat, the touch of the air, and the sounds in and around you. Give your heart a noting practice, by just gently noticing how you feel inside your heart right now. Are you at peace; are you anxious; are you okay? Check in with yourself for a moment.

Last class we talked about remembering.

- a. Did anyone have a reminder?
- b. (Listen to any shares)

Today we are going to understand the importance of this home-base of breath. Coming home to breath and really finding our resting place with this is an important step in understanding the value of mindfulness practice.

The breath is so dependable! It is like a friend you can always go to, but it never asks anything of you. The best of friends! The most supportive friend. Just gives and gives unconditionally. Let us observe the unconditional love of the breath today.

This Rumi piece is a great reminder of the value of this practice:

Return at Last

How Long will you move backwards? Come forward!
 Don't stray towards disbelief, come to religion.
 In grief see gentleness: come towards gentleness.
 Return at last to the origin of your own origin.
 Although you may seem to be the child of earth
 You are the Son of the pearls of certainty,
 The faithful guardian of the treasure of Divine Light.
 Return at last to the origin of your own origin.
 When you have tied yourself to detachment from yourself
 Know you'll be sprung free of your "I"
 And escape that prison with its thousand traps.
 Return at last to the origin of your own origin.

You're of the race of Adam, the Caliph of God,
But you've lowered your eyes to this bad world,
And satisfied yourself with meager scraps.
Return at last to the origin of your own origin.
Although this world has you still in its thrall
In your heart, you're a hidden treasure.
Open now your inner eyes, the eyes of Love:
Return at last to the origin of your own origin (Harvey, p.6).

This Rumi piece always reminds me what a wonderful place the breath is, and how the days can sometimes take us away from ourselves, so it is extra important to give time for coming home.

Sitting with ourselves quietly can be tough. And we have to remember that this work is important. We are doing something so important! I like to compare it to Rumi, the mystic's words often. Rumi has this way of exposing the human experience in a way that you can taste. In this case, when we sit quietly together, we are graciously welcoming ourselves in. Like a guest that hasn't been over in a very long time, we step into awareness like a gracious greeting to a stranger we haven't seen in some time. It is quite phenomenal in fact to come back inside yourself, and to just be in awareness of you and nothing else.

After a long day, the perspective can be foggy and fatigued. Zoom in on the subtle spaciousness that surrounds your attention- the point of your focus. It might feel like a dance, or even war-fare. Coming back to breath after a bad day can be disheartening. Keep trying to zoom back into the perspective of breath. Keep bringing yourself to a focus point. This is the beginning of a long journey of self-awareness and observation. We need to have a focus point to come home to. Observing the breath is like coming home after a long day. You open the door, it's clean, and warm, and everyone is happy to be there.

That remembering to focus on sensations of breath is the clearing of the fog and the fatigue, and giving attention to a focal point.

We focus our attention to build the capacity to see the sky more clearly. We train ourselves to drink up the light of a clear sky.

Being able to focus our perspective on one subtle, universal, thing, is the most dependable act. We are preparing ourselves for the journey ahead, for the focus on the next item of awareness.

So by gaining true awareness of breath, as it is, we are preparing ourselves for more observation, and we must give ourselves a lot of time to do this.

Let's practice.

Lesson #3 Guided Sit Script:

(Ring Bell)

Go ahead and find a comfortable position, but give it some dignity. Really become the scientist of yourself right now.

Take some deep breaths to settle the body after adjusting to your chosen position. Once you've taken a few deep breaths, go ahead and rely on the steady, natural, neutral, and normal breath. Do not try to inhale or exhale with force, just let the breath come and go as it would if you weren't paying any attention, but instead pay the closest of attention in this natural state.

Just remain aware. When you have noticed yourself not paying attention to breath, gently remind yourselves to come back.

It might feel tingly. It might feel like buzzing. It might feel like ants crawling. It might feel light. It might feel soft. It might feel heavy. It might feel cold. It might feel dry. It might feel warm. It might feel damp. It might feel clean. What is it like for you?

Practice awareness of this subtle focus point for a few minutes.

(Ring Bell)

When you're ready, open your eyes.

Reflection:

As you go through your week, give yourselves some time to digest your dances of the day by focusing on the subtle sensations of breath. Remember and try, if you can.

Notes:

Lesson #4: Alchemy and Equanimity**Guiding Questions:**

Why should we be still? How do we stay still? How do we purify our minds and hearts? What happens when we practice mindfulness?

Lesson #4 Script:

Let's begin by settling in with some mindful breathing for a minute.
Thank you for arriving.

There is this idea of interdependence. Everything I do impacts everyone else, and everything everyone else does impacts me. So what happens when we meditate? What does that do to the ether? What does this do for ourselves and others?

I once heard a meditation teacher say the idea of not being mindful is like "having clung". That is really what a bad day is: having clung. Alchemy is the unclinging. We want to return to our most refined state. By becoming experts of breath, which is where we have been, this paves the way for the territory to come: the awareness of the other sense-doors. We built our capacity to observe all the sense doors when we paid very close attention to breath, and now we can move to awareness of other areas.

Chris McKenna said it best when he claimed, "Let the system have its chance. Relax, soften, receive...Meditation is putting yourself in a state of deep receptivity. It's like a deep, deep intimate listening. It's like a love affair. Whatever comes up is the beloved." (McKenna)

The Alchemist is the body. Our bodies are huge filters. The food we consume gets filtered, but also our environments, our experiences, our expectations, our lives become filtered through our bodies.

When we settle enough, that stillness that I talked about before, the unravelling begins, and knots become undone. This is the great alchemizing.

In ancient Pali language they call knots "Sankharas", and we want no more new sankharas. So, we untie the knots with stillness, and we remember this practice so that we don't have more knots to undo next time.

Remain aware, remain still and remain equanimous. Equanimity is the key to untying the knots. Equanimity is the key to receiving the truth beneath the knots. If we move, we fight the unravelling and the alchemy pauses. Stay with stillness with strong determination in order to allow the knots to move. Stillness gives space for this phenomenon. It really is magical and unlike any other experience that I can remember, but you'll have to decide for yourself what that experience is like. Stillness is like rebelling against all the things that cause harm, and stopping everything in its tracks in order to liberate ourselves.

Being still is really the key to allowing the system to have its chance. By letting things move through still awareness, uninterrupted for quite some time, there is a chance for things to move in ways they can't when the system is really active.

Just think about it: If we are always doing, are there really available resources for the system to digest what is being done? Besides sleeping? I mean really? What is happening in the system when we are constantly engaged in activity? There's exhaustion. We have to filter our experiences just like we filter our food and our air and our thoughts and our emotional capacity. The system needs a chance to just let it all work itself out and this is done by allowing this to happen in a state of still awareness. We aren't doing, we aren't sleeping. We are aware, equanimous, and observing whatever happens. This open awareness state is really the key to a grounded mindfulness practice. In this state of awareness, wisdom arises, and I ask you to just let it happen.

I know this can get tricky, and uncomfortable, and I ask you to just watch what happens.

This could be like watching your favorite show. It is time for the new episode you've been wanting to watch. This is the sequel you've been waiting for. Here we go. Observe the system just like you observe the breath. Something comes up, you notice it and let it be, keeping awareness of breath as the returning place if it gets tough.

Be gentle with yourself. Don't be hard on yourself. Just see what it's like.

Let us try to not move today. Let us give the system it's chance. What arises, what unravels, what reveals itself?

Lesson #4 Guided Sit Script:

(Ring the bell)

Get into a position of dignity. Be alert and attentive, but also calm and relaxed.

Remember the breath as the landing gear we need to soften into stillness. Land from the day with breath. Breath until you feel yourself grounded and held by your seat.

Now that the breath has helped you land into the body, let us try to observe the sensations of the body with complete stillness.

Begin at the top of the head, and move down, down. Down the forehead, down the eyes, down the nose, the ears, the cheeks, the mouth, the chin, the jaw. Down the back of the head and the neck. Down the right shoulder the right elbow the right arm the right hand. Down the left shoulder the left elbow, the left arm, the left hand. Down the shoulders and the back, the spine. Down the chest and the belly. Down to the right leg and the right knee and the right foot. Down the left leg, the left knee, the left foot.

Stay in the overall awareness for a moment, without reacting, without moving, without fighting.

Slowly move back up the body with pure awareness of sensations, and begin again at the top of the head.

Move up and down with dignity and equanimity. Try this for a few minutes.

(Ring the bell)

When you are ready you can open your eyes.

Reflection:

What did you notice in the body? What was this practice like for you? Would anyone like to share their experience?

Notes:

Lesson #5: Polarities & Possibilities**Guiding Question:**

How do we maintain equanimity?

Lesson #5 Script:

[Give Anecdotal Experience of overwhelm or unbalance in your life. E.g. My anecdote: (Sometimes it feels as though there is not enough sage in the world to get me through these times. The pandemic, the zoom fatigue, the rising tensions in our world... I don't know about you, but sometimes I really struggle to remain equanimous during really difficult days).]

The duality of our existence is simple to notice but not easy to let go of, especially with the overwhelm of our jobs in education. I am in a constant battle with myself in terms of how I react or respond to the stresses of this job.

All of these experiences can be separated into two polarities:

- a. We either like it
- b. Or we don't.

This in itself is a lot of "having clung", like I mentioned in our last meeting.

Even more so is the notion of the present moment and the natural inclination to go to the past and remember, or miss, or regret. Or go to the future and maybe worry or wonder.

So, what if we just watched these polarities put on a show? Rather than letting them embody us by reacting with the clinging of craving or aversion, we just observe and note the habit patterns without clinging to them.

This could work for noticing sensations of the body: there could be really sharp sudden pains, or really blissful pleasant vibrations. Clinging to either of these only furthers our separation from equanimity.

So, as we sit today, let us practice noting our experience. Whether it is a symptom of the active mind pulling our attention, or a sensation in the body that is leading us on.

Keep developing your strength of equanimity by just observing.

One way you could gain some stability is by counting. You can count the breaths out of the clinging.

Another way to gain some stability is to just note, or label the experience. Pain, Tension, Tightness, Warmth, Hopefulness, Excitement. And keep moving your attention through each and every part of the body.

So, if you need an anchor or some “internal sage” to return to an equanimous state, try noting sensations or counting breaths. This way you can notice the patterns as well, and by remaining still, we are giving space for these patterns to arise and pass away.

Lesson #5 Guided Sit Script:

Use this sit to quietly reflect on the talk. Allow the group to go at their own pace, and find awareness and equanimity at their own ease. This is a quiet, still, and non-guided sit.

Reflection:

What was this practice like for you? Would anyone like to share their experience?

Notes:

Lesson # 6: The Art of the Heart**Guiding Questions:**

What is the heart's role in mindfulness practice? How does coming together in silence and stillness allow us to communicate and connect?

Lesson #6 Script:

The majority of the time, our awareness is in the mind. Think about it- we are in zoom all day, or teaching in a classroom all day, and we tackle our objectives one by one with the thinking mind. All of our tasks are oriented around our mind's ability to organize and process our thinking. Think about it (wink, wink).

What if we were to move our awareness to a different area of the body? Somewhere other than the mind. If you were to sit in awareness right now, where is your attention? Maybe there's energy in the belly because you're hungry, or maybe there's tension in the wrists from all the typing, but primarily, in my experience, our attention is stable in the area in and around the mind, no matter what we are doing.

The goal for today is to imagine awareness elsewhere, and to give credit to awareness in general. Just noticing that our brains are getting the majority of our attention is a huge wake up call. So today, I wanted to give credit to the heart by first describing how incredible this part of our body is.

The Heart's Code, by Paul Pearsall Ph.D., describes the research around the heart and this indescribable wisdom and knowledge that it has. While doctors and scientists haven't been able to label this phenomenon, there is the reality of heart transplant patients receiving the traits of their heart's original owner. This research has informed us that the heart is smart, and we should be putting our awareness in the wisdom of the heart just as much as, if not more than, the brain.

Here are a few of Dr. Pearsall's quotes regarding the incredible nature of our hearts:

"Place several heart cells together in a dish without any physical contact between one another and with no synapse connecting them and they suddenly fall into a rhythmic unison, a rhythm that is distinct from the rhythm of each individual cell" (62).

"The brain may contain more cellular connections than there are stars in the Milky Way, but it is nowhere near as energetic as the heart. By bioscience's own measurement, the heart is five thousand times more electromagnetically powerful than the brain" (65).

"...heart cells do something other cells in the body can't do: they pulsate. Every one of the billions of heart cells throbs along with other heart cells constantly communicating between one another" 64).

"The heart muscle does not seem to weaken with age. The heart's physical strength surpasses all known mechanical pumps the brain has been able to construct. It is never still and, even if a patient is declared 'brain dead,' the heart can continue to beat on its own" (65).

What we want to “do” today, is to put our awareness around the heart. We have spent many days looking at the touch of the breath, then awareness of sensations in the body, so today let us observe the touch of the heart.

Go ahead and just feel your pulse for a minute, just so we can get acquainted and say hello.

The piece of this that really tugs on my heart strings, is this communicating between hearts. Like the quote explained, heart cells sync up. So, by sitting here quietly together today, our hearts are actually communicating. There is an exchange between all our bodies, even when we aren't speaking. See if you can sink into the wisdom and knowledge of the heart today, and notice what it feels like when awareness settles in this area.

Let's practice.

Lesson #6 Guided Sit Script:

(Ring the bell)

Begin by taking a few deep breaths and settling in. Feel your feet on the floor, your seat in the chair, and where your hands are resting.

Now start with a few minutes of mindful breathing, settling into awareness around breath.

Now let us observe the body with a body scan, before settling into the heart.

Begin with your awareness at the top of the head, and move down down down to the tip of the toes. Observe each and every part of the body as you move down and back up.

How do you feel now?

Now bring your attention to the five sense doors. Take a deep breath, smell the air. Notice the sounds in the room. The lightness or darkness that you see with closed eyes. The sensations in the mouth. The touch of your body in this spaciousness. This is awareness in the moment.

Now take all of these sensations and move your awareness to your heart. What is the touch of the heart right now? Can you hear it? Can you smell it? Can you taste it? What is the touch of the heart?

Bring all of your awareness to the sensations of the heart, and remember to stay here.

If your mind wanders, gently come back.

What is it like to be completely immersed in heart awareness? The heart knows so much. The heart cares so much. The heart feels so much. What is it like to live in the awareness of the felt sense of the heart?

Stay with this for a bit. (Allow time to sit:10 minutes)

Notice how you feel now, having given all of your attention to the heart. See if you can describe how you feel.

Bring awareness back to this moment, this room, this place in time and space. Wiggle your fingers and toes, and gently open your eyes when you're ready.

(Ring the bell)

Reflection:

What was this practice like for you? Would anyone like to share their experience?

Remembering to bring awareness to the heart, and you can allow this to happen anytime, anywhere. I ask you to remember this act of heartfelt awareness throughout the week.

Notes:

Lesson #7: Heartfulness Completely**Guiding Questions:**

What is compassion, and how do we generate compassion for ourselves and others?

Lesson #7 Script:

After experimenting with the touch of the heart last week, the goal this week is to practice heartfulness for ourselves and for others with a guided heartfulness practice. You can't have mindfulness without heartfulness.

I remember once hearing someone say, "Life is a spell so exquisite that everything conspires to break it."

How many times have you wished for things to be otherwise?

There is this negativity bias at play all the time, constantly persuading us to be harshly critical of our experience.

This is helpful. We needed it to evolve, but at this point, we need to remember the other areas of our experience. We need collaboration and interconnectedness within and around each and every part of the body.

This is a practice of compassion, and it is an active state, but can become habitual if we train ourselves.

And just like that, let's sit.

Lesson #7 Guided Sit Script:

(Ring the bell)

Find a dignified posture, and welcome yourself to the world of awareness.

Follow the breath, then scan the body, and settle into a neutral and equanimous state of being. Remember we aren't doing anything, just allowing stillness and awareness take over so that we can receive whatever arises and passes away. (give three minutes of silent practice)

Now I want you to imagine yourself doing something that you really love. Imagine you are proud of yourself for this thing that you love. What does it feel like? Can you describe where and how these sensations are experienced?

See if you can stay with those joyous sensations for a little bit? What does it feel like to love something so much it makes you proud? (give two minutes to practice)

Now I want you to think about someone that you love and imagine this person (or pet) in its most joyous state. What does it feel like in and around the heart when you imagine yourself and others joyful?

Stay with this sensation as long as you can, and when you remember, come back to it.

Settle into a heartfulness practice for a few minutes.

(give ten minutes of silent practice time)

What is it like to feel joyful for yourself and others?

Let us silently repeat these phrases:

May I be healthy

May I be happy

May I be peaceful

May I be safe

May all beings be happy

May all beings be peaceful

May all beings be safe

(Ring the Bell)

Reflection:

What was this practice like for you? Would anyone like to share their experience?

What was it like to notice sensations of loving kindness? Can you try to remember to think from the heart over the next week?

Notes

Lesson #8: Conventions & Questions**Guiding Questions:**

What happens when we see the truth?

What is revealed to us in meditation?

Lesson #8 Script:

When we are mindful, we realize our individual experiences and realities as they are, and that lifts the curtain of conventions.

It can be blinding when the curtain is lifted. It can hurt.

I am going to read you a quote from a Tibetan Teacher

“Even this body is not really ours, we just suppose it to be so. It’s truly just an assumption on our part. If we try to find a real substantial self in it, you can’t. There are merely elements that are born, continue for a while, and then die. Everything is like this. There’s no real, true substance to it, but it’s proper that we use it. It’s like a cup. At some time that cup must break, but while it’s there you should use it and look after it well. It’s a tool for your use. If it breaks there is trouble, so even though it must break, you should try your utmost to prevent it” (Phra Phōthiyānathēra pp. 25)

To me, this quote reveals the fragility of life, and reminds me to be grateful and to live each moment in complete awareness. Protect ourselves because we are fragile.

Let the system have it’s chance by taking time each and every day to let the system run its course.

When we meditate, we are giving ourselves permission to be rather than do. This being is so complex, it’s like a fractal.

Like sand at the beach or stars in the sky, there are infinite ways to observe ourselves in the moment, and when we observe we realize how pressure and fleeting this life is.

When we are aware, we care. When we care, we take care. When we take care, we honor the preciousness of our lives.

Today, I want us to practice this careful consideration.

Lesson #8 Guided Sit Script:

(Ring The Bell)

Let’s take a few minutes to settle in to the present moment and all of its complexities. Start with breath, then with body, and continue in whatever way feels right for you.

Take this time to be mindful in your own way, and let the truth reveal itself to you as it is.

Reflection:

Notes:

Reflection and Continuity of Practice

The general way to continue planning your own lesson is with a simple formula:

What is mindfulness + How do we do it = a simple lesson.

Here is a template for you to try on your own.

What Mindful Experience have you had lately? (tell a story from your life)

What mindful reference have you read, heard, watched, or experienced lately? (poem, video, story, song, conversation, etc. and connect this to your story?)

How can we sit with this experience right now?

What can we do to continue the practice throughout the week?

I hope you can take these lessons with you and continue to reflect, wish, and remain aware and equanimous throughout your days. Teaching is a precious profession, and you are a light in this world! Shine your light!

Appendix B: The Survey

Staff Mindfulness Group Survey

Directions: Please respond in as little or as much depth as you wish.

1. Why did you choose to participate in the mindfulness group this year?
2. If you feel as though you have learned something through this mindfulness group this year? What have you learned? Was there something you hoped to learn?
3. What motivated you to choose to participate in the mindfulness group this year? Were there any particular events or past experiences that made you feel this would be useful?
4. Has the group experience informed your approach or feelings about mindfulness? If so, in what ways?
5. Have you noticed any differences in your thoughts, feelings, or emotions during work days when you participate in the mindfulness group, compared to days when you do not attend mindfulness group sessions? If yes, please explain.
6. How have the discussion topics, and the integration of mindfulness into daily life, helped, or not helped, you? If yes, how? If not, what might make these more helpful?
7. Have you noticed a change in your general well-being from participating in this mindfulness group? This could include anything such as self-esteem, stress, sleep, etc.
8. Has participating in the group had any effect on your ability to deal with intense emotions or feelings at work? What about how you deal with conflict? If so, in what ways? If not, what might make it more helpful in these areas?
9. Have you noticed any changes in your awareness around thoughts, emotions, or your physical condition, movement, or sensations?

10. What changes do you think would make the group more effective or useful for you?

What about for others?

11. Do you feel as though your participation in this group has had an effect of your life?

Explain.

12. Has participation in the mindfulness group provided tools that are helping you during the challenges created by the current pandemic? Is so, in what way?

13. Is there anything else we should know about your experience with the mindfulness group?

14. Would you recommend this mindfulness group to other staff members, schools, or school districts? Why or why not?