Mindfulness and the Prosocial Classroom

Kirsten C. Grant

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

University of Toronto

Creative Commons: Attribution – NonCommercial – NoDerivs Licence

CC BY-NC-ND
Abstract

A body of research has been developed over the past few decades linking mindfulness to recovery from physical and mental illness. More recently, there has been evidence of its value to children and adolescents in schools. This study sought to determine how teachers' mindfulness practices influenced their social and emotional competence and relationships with their students. The research took the form of a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews of two teachers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In this research the teachers communicated greater social and emotional competence including self-knowledge and reflection and responsiveness to student needs and behaviour. The study also found that these teachers take a compassionate and non-judgemental interpretation of student motives and behaviours. This study recommends further research about teachers' personal mindfulness practices and their prosocial behaviour.
Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 2

Chapter 1 – Introduction .............................................................................................. 5
Motivation and Background for the Study ....................................................................... 5
  A definition of mindfulness .......................................................................................... 5
  A definition of social and emotional learning and competence .................................. 5
  The importance of SEC .............................................................................................. 6
Mindfulness in schools .................................................................................................. 6
Mindful teachers ........................................................................................................... 7
Main Problem and Sub-problems .................................................................................. 7
Researcher Background ................................................................................................. 7

Chapter 2 – Literature Review .................................................................................... 9
Defining Mindfulness ..................................................................................................... 9
Research on Adults and Mindfulness ............................................................................ 10
  Main clinical programs ............................................................................................. 10
The Effects of Mindfulness Practices on Children ....................................................... 11
Teachers and Mindfulness ............................................................................................ 13
  Teachers’ wellbeing, resilience, and social and emotional competence ................... 14
  Teacher responses to student misbehaviour ............................................................. 16
    A mindful teacher in the classroom ........................................................................ 16
  Mindfulness programs in education .......................................................................... 17
Reception of Mindfulness Programs ............................................................................ 17
Conceptual Framework: The Prosocial Classroom .................................................... 18

Chapter 3 – Methods .................................................................................................. 20
Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 20
Data Collection ............................................................................................................... 21
Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 21
Ethical Review ............................................................................................................... 22
Limitations .................................................................................................................... 22

Chapter 4 - Results ..................................................................................................... 23
Biographical information ............................................................................................... 23
Qualities of a Mindful Teacher ...................................................................................... 23
  Compassion and non-judgement .............................................................................. 23
  Responsive not reactive ......................................................................................... 25
When Teachers are Attuned to Themselves and Their Students ............................... 25
  Teacher self-knowledge and reflection ..................................................................... 25
Mindful teachers are attuned to the needs of their student ........................................ 27
Mindful interpretation of student behaviour: Attribution and dialectical thinking .... 28
Bringing Mindfulness to Teachers ................................................................. 29
Mindfulness in Schools ............................................................................. 30
  Teacher of mindfulness ........................................................................ 30

Chapter 5 - Discussion .......................................................................... 31
Teacher and Student Wellbeing ................................................................. 31
Teacher Responses to Student Behaviour .................................................. 32
  Responsive not reactive ...................................................................... 32
  Compassion and non-judgement ......................................................... 33
  Teacher attribution and attunement to student needs ......................... 33
Social and Emotional Competence .......................................................... 34
The Mindfulness Practice ......................................................................... 35
Limitations ............................................................................................... 36

Appendix A – Bibliography ..................................................................... 37

Appendix B – Interview questions ............................................................ 41
Personal Background ................................................................................ 41
Relationships and the Classroom Environment ........................................ 41
Student Impact ........................................................................................ 41
Reception of Training .............................................................................. 42

Appendix C – Letter of Consent for Interview ............................................. 43
Chapter 1 – Introduction

Motivation and Background for the Study

A definition of mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 145) defined mindfulness as “...the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.” Research shows that mindfulness activities benefit adults suffering from pain, illness, or mental distress (e.g. Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004). More recent evidence indicates that mindfulness-based interventions benefit children who are experiencing behavioural, social-emotional, and attention problems, and can help develop social and emotional competence (SEC; e.g. Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011; Semple, Lee, Rosa, & Miller, 2010). For more information on the benefits of mindfulness consult the literature review in Chapter 2.

A definition of social and emotional learning and competence. The Collaboration for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)(2014, What is Social and Emotional Learning?) defines social and emotional learning (SEL) as “...the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” These are demonstrated through “...five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioural competencies.” (CASEL, 2014, Social and Emotional Learning Core Competencies): Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.
The importance of SEC. Zins et al. (in Zins et al. Eds., 2004) state that those who show SEC are generally more successful in school, and in life. Furthermore, SEC is important for teachers as well; teachers with high social and emotional competence also have high self-awareness, high social awareness, and they exhibit pro-social values (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers’ SEC and wellbeing are essential to a healthy classroom environment and to the performance as wellbeing of their students (Gu & Day, 2007; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2011; Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Mindfulness in schools. Many mindfulness interventions focus on time-limited programs, often 8 weeks. While these one-shot programs are initially successful, the effect seems to wear off with time. Kabat-Zinn (2003, p.148) states that “Mindfulness is not merely a good idea such that, upon hearing about it, one can immediately decide to live in the present moment... Rather it is more akin to an art form that one develops over time, and it is greatly enhanced through regular disciplined practice, both formally and informally, on a daily basis”. Schools are the place where kids spend the majority of their waking lives; therefore school-based mindfulness programs potentially have the greatest influence in helping children cultivate their mindfulness practice.

Schools can also be a source of stress as students are expected to learn and achieve regardless of their personal circumstances. Every day, students bring to class with them the problems they face at home and in the schoolyard. These problems may interfere with their ability to concentrate and contribute in class. Mindfulness practice such as meditation can bring them back to the present moment; providing grounding and new concentration to continue their day. In ways such as this, mindfulness techniques can improve academic performance and behaviour in students, particularly those students who are “at risk”.
Mindful teachers. Furthermore, there is ample evidence showing that when teachers develop their own, personal mindfulness practices through training, they have a more positive impact on their students. Mindfulness practice allows teachers to cultivate greater empathy and non-judgemental awareness. It strengthens teachers’ social and emotional competence (SEC), which enriches teacher-student relationships.

Main Problem and Sub-problems

My main research question is: How are student-teacher relationships and interactions influenced by a teacher’s mindfulness training and practice?

Researcher Background

I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education; studying the intermediate/senior designation and the teachable subjects biology and mathematics.

I have a personal interest in helping adolescents who are suffering emotionally. Adolescence was a difficult time for me. I was bullied relentlessly throughout high school, which took a tremendous toll on my mental health, leaving me feeling isolated, anxious, and depressed. When I sought help I received very little assistance; I believe that this was a product of the lack of recognition of the signs and seriousness of mental illness in high schools and the lack of any kind of system that would identify students in the school who are mentally ill and in need of assistance and connect them with the appropriate professionals. I believe that this gap stemmed from the silos my teachers lived in, believing
that their job was to teach “content” and that anything else was the responsibility of the guidance department.

After seeking help for my mental illness, I was enrolled in a therapy program that included a mindfulness component. Learning concepts of mindfulness; including willingness, self-compassion, non-judgement, and acceptance; dramatically changed my understanding of my mental illness and contributed significantly to my recovery. I feel that learning these skills changed my life. I had spent most of my waking moments caught in rumination about the past or the future, not really experiencing the present moment. I was missing out on my life because I was so caught up in my head.

I also believe that learning these concepts has changed my interpersonal relationships and my teaching; for example: I strive to practice mindful listening, and compassion and non-judgement of others. I have taken an active interest in learning more about mindfulness and how to integrate that knowledge into my professional life. I attend a weekly meditation group and I am taking continuing education courses in the Applied Mindfulness Meditation program at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work (University of Toronto). I have also participated in a workshop introducing the “Learning to BREATHE” mindfulness curriculum for adolescents with the intention of bringing that curriculum to my own students in the future.

I have a background in quantitative scientific research and have often adopted a mindset described by Tremmel (1993) as a “quest for certainty”. Qualitative research was new to me and posed a challenge to my mindset and skill as a researcher. With that in mind, I undertook this year of qualitative research mindfully, reflectively, and with an open heart.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Defining Mindfulness

Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 145) defined mindfulness as “...the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.” This is contrasted to mindlessness, which includes chronic rumination, multitasking, and living in the past or future, all of which take our attention away from the present moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Based in Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness has, over the past 20 or 30 years, been accepted into secular, Western traditions, particularly as a treatment for mental distress (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Secular practices used in the West do not teach religious tradition, but Buddhism lends its simple and effective ways of cultivating mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Contrary to popular thought, mindfulness meditation is not a relaxation exercise, but rather a “...form of mental training to reduce cognitive vulnerability to reactive modes of mind that might otherwise heighten stress and emotional distress or that may otherwise perpetuate psychopathology” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 231). Neither is it a practice of suppressing thoughts, but instead a practice of observation and acknowledgement of thoughts (Bishop et al., 2004). Crane, Kuyken, Hastings, Rothwell, & Williams (2010) state that mindfulness shifts practitioners from a mode of ‘doing’ to a mode of ‘being’.

Mindfulness meditation is the formal practice of paying attention in the present moment, attending to thoughts, feelings, and body sensations non-judgementally as they arise. It can be practiced while sitting, standing, moving, or lying down. Outside of this formal practice, informal mindfulness practice involves cultivating this same awareness into the tasks of daily living (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Ultimately, a practice of mindfulness develops a greater capacity in the individual “...to see relationships between thoughts, feelings and actions and to discern the meanings and causes of
experience and behaviour.” (Bishop et al., 2004). And it is through this greater capacity that mindfulness lends itself so well to the treatment of inattention and distress. By understanding the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and actions individuals can free themselves of cycles of distress and suffering and from repetitive thoughts or actions that ultimately lead to painful feelings, experiences, or behaviours.

Research on Adults and Mindfulness

Main clinical programs. Baer (2003) identifies the main clinical interventions based on mindfulness training as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). Other interventions incorporating mindfulness are Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Relapse Prevention (RP). For the purpose of this review I will focus on the MBSR and MBCT.

MBSR was developed as a treatment for participants suffering from pain and other stress-related disorders. Over the course of 8 – 10 weeks patients learn mindfulness meditation skills and are expected to practice at home (Baer, 2003). MBSR was not designed as a replacement for medical treatment, but as a complement to it. MBCT was developed for relapse prevention for individuals with major depression and is a combination of the mindfulness taught in MBSR and the Cognitive techniques of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT; Baer, 2003).

“MBSR and MBCT are experiential learning programs that include weekly group sessions, regular home practice, and the core curriculum of formal mindfulness practices (body scan, sitting, movement and walking meditations) and informal mindfulness practices (where participants intentionally bring mindful awareness to activities of daily living...” (Burke, 2010, p. 134)
Many hundreds of studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of MBSR and MBCT so that they are now proven and accepted interventions for stress and mood problems (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). These studies have found benefits for individuals with chronic pain, fibromyalgia, cancer, anxiety disorders, and depression (Grossman et al., 2004). Mindfulness promotes psychological wellbeing and resilience, including “higher pleasant affect, positive affectivity, vitality, life satisfaction, self-esteem, optimism, and self-actualisation” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 832; Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

As well as exploring the possible benefits of mindfulness practice for adults, many studies have considered the mechanisms through which mindfulness benefits individuals. In her review of the literature, Baer (2003) suggests that mindfulness skills result in symptom reduction and behaviour change through promoting cognitive change, self-management, relaxation, and acceptance. Weinstein, Brown, and Ryan (2009) suggest that this cognitive change is facilitated through a “‘turning down’ or attenuation of negative appraisals of events” (p.375) and that individuals as a result perceive events less stressfully. And through this attenuation of suffering and stress by increasing self-management and acceptance of events and sensations as they unfold mindfulness particularly seems to promote resilience and adaptive coping (Grossman et al., 2004; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Weinstein et al., 2009).

**The Effects of Mindfulness Practices on Children**

Research into the effects of mindfulness training on children and adolescents is still in its infancy. Adapting mindfulness programs to youth populations poses challenges of creating learning material and activities suitable to the children’s age and developmental needs as well as acknowledgement that children are often reliant on adults at home, in school, or in childcare (Burke, 2010). The adults caring for children may or may not have knowledge or familiarity of mindfulness practices.
Many programs for youth are under development, though there is as yet considerably less evidence supporting their effectiveness. Some of these programs are directly derived from adult therapies, such as youth DBT programs or Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy For Children (MBCT-C; Semple et al., 2010). Most involve meditation (e.g. Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010), guided breathing exercises (Mendelson et al., 2010), yoga (e.g. Peck, Kehle, Bray, & Theodore, 2005), Tai Chi (Wall, 2005), or some combination of these.

The recent research has show that, like with adults, mindfulness can have positive effects on children’s wellbeing. Semple, Lee, Rosa, and Miller (2010) found that MBCT-C, developed from MBCT was effective in reducing anxiety and behaviour problems in children and that it showed promise for treating attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Further studies confirm that children diagnosed with ADHD show reduced problems with inattention and hyperactivity after mindfulness training (van der Oord, Bögels, & Peijnenburg, 2012; van de Weijer-Bergsma, Formsma, de Bruin, & Bögels, 2012). Youth not diagnosed with ADHD also showed improvement in attention and concentration (Peck et al., 2005; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Steiner, Sidhu, Pop, Frenette, & Perrin, 2013).

Further studies show that mindfulness programs can improve externalising and internalising problems (van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012), behaviour and depressive symptoms (Steiner et al., 2013), and stress response (Mendelson et al., 2010) in youth. Mindfulness has been found to improve Social Emotional Competence (SEC) in 4th to 7th grade students within a representative group of Canadian children and has been found to significantly increase positive emotions such as optimism (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010, p.147). Some have called for the use of mindfulness as a youth development program rather than simply a clinical treatment (Mendelson et al., 2010).

Many of the studies quoted above however suffer from methodological issues such as the lack of a control group, the non-blinded nature of the study, very small sample sizes, and no follow-up. Some
in the clinical treatment community seem to hope that a mindfulness treatment can be applied over 8 weeks and then its effects will be sustained. One study that did a longer-term follow-up found that the effects of the treatment were no longer noticeable after 16 weeks (van de Weijer-Bergsma et al., 2012), thus illustrating that mindfulness is not a one-off treatment, but a practice. Kabat-Zinn (2003) states that:

“Mindfulness is not merely a good idea such that, upon hearing about it, one can immediately decide to live in the present moment, with the promise of reduced anxiety and depression and heightened performance and life satisfaction, and then instantly and reliably realize that state of being. Rather it is more akin to an art form that one develops over time, and it is greatly enhanced through regular disciplined practice, both formally and informally, on a daily basis.” (p. 148).

This is an excellent argument to take mindfulness from the realm of medical treatment and into schools where students spend every day. Mindfulness in schools would allow students to cultivate a practice in the long term. They would have the opportunity during their years at school to develop the practice of mindfulness over time and to realise its long-term benefits.

**Teachers and Mindfulness**

Mindfulness practices can also benefit teachers in addition to students. It is not necessary for teachers to explicitly teach mindfulness to their students. Practicing mindfulness allows them to model mindful, non-judgemental, compassionate behaviour.

Mindfulness programs in education come in many forms. These are generally either direct or indirect. A direct approach consists of giving a teacher mindfulness training with the goal of enabling the
teacher to instruct students on mindfulness skills. An indirect approach teaches the teacher mindfulness, whose personal practice then influences interactions with students and the classroom environment (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Many of the studies examined in this review either took place in clinical centres or were administered in schools by external instructors. Burke (2010) called for more caregiver and teacher involvement, and Steiner et al. (2013, p. 823) states that “it is imperative to have “school buy-in” at the principal and teacher level so that they are prepared to work with yoga instructors in order for the intervention to be successful.” Training teachers in mindfulness at the most basic level makes them more encouraging of student participation in such programs. Further, prompting students to use skills in the classroom encourages the generalisation of their knowledge (Mendelson et al., 2013; van der Oord et al., 2012). Most importantly, teachers model compassion and awareness (Mendelson et al., 2013), thereby promoting the social and emotional development of their students.

Teachers can effectively instruct students only if they have their own practice. Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 150) states:

“...we never ask more of our patients in terms of practice than we ask of ourselves on a daily basis... ...we are all students and the learning and growing are a lifelong engagement... ...For how can one ask someone else to look deeply into his or her own mind and body and the nature of who he or she is in a systematic and disciplined way if one is unwilling (or too busy or not interested enough) to engage in this great and challenging adventure oneself...”

**Teachers’ wellbeing, resilience, and social and emotional competence.** Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, and Walberg (in Zins et al., Eds., 2004) define a framework of person-centred social and
emotional learning (SEL) competences as: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management and relationship management.

People who possess Social and Emotional Competence (SEC) “are able to make responsible decisions, and competent in self-management and relationship management skills so as to foster their academic success” (p.6). Those who show SEC are generally more successful in school, and in life (Zins et al. in Zins et al. Eds., 2004).

But we shouldn’t focus solely on our students’ SEC. Teachers with high social and emotional competence also have high self-awareness, high social awareness, and they exhibit pro-social values, making responsible decisions (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers’ SEC and wellbeing are essential to a healthy classroom environment and to the performance and wellbeing of their students (Gu & Day, 2007; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2011; Meiklejohn et al., 2012) as the teacher needs the ability to provide both structural and emotional support to her students. There is a call for professional development that would address this fact (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2011).

Mindfulness is a proposed method to promote teacher resilience, SEC, and wellbeing (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2011). Franco, Mañas, Cangas, Moreno, and Gallego (2010) found that mindfulness techniques were effective in reducing teacher psychological distress. And Napoli (2004) states that developing a personal mindfulness practice gives resilience in the face of the stress of teaching. Meiklejohn et al. (2012, p. 291) state that “…personal training in mindfulness skills can increase teacher’s sense of well-being and teaching self-efficacy, as well as their ability to manage classroom behaviour and establish and maintain supportive relationships with students.”

Thus, indirect mindfulness programs in education that promote teacher SEC and wellbeing have a direct impact on a teacher’s ability to support her students. Mindfulness, wellbeing, and SEC clearly
support teacher efficacy. However Meiklejohn et al. (2012) point out that professional development programs are likely to be supported only if they are provide direct results on student performance, particularly testing outcomes. More research is needed on how teacher wellbeing and SEC impacts student test scores.

**Teacher responses to student misbehaviour.** Teachers generally perceive the causes of student misbehaviour as being due to the student, not external variables (Medway, 1979). Using predominately reactive strategies to deal with student behaviour was a strong predictor of high levels of teacher stress (Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008). As well, student view aggressive angry outburst as inappropriate (norm-violating) behaviours in the classroom, but have a more positive response to assertive, calm responses to anger (McPherson, Kearney, & Plax, 2003). Children appear happier and more enthusiastic when their teachers appear to be warm and emotionally engaging (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Thus, teacher reactions to difficult student reactions have an impact on student wellbeing and engagement, and thus the classroom climate.

**A mindful teacher in the classroom.** Teachers bring their own personal behaviours and attitudes to the classroom. Those who practice mindfulness bring attention, compassion, non-judgement, and acceptance. These behaviours are manifest in the teacher’s presence and in their interactions with students (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). With mindfulness teachers are better able to attend to children in their care (Napoli, 2004). As such, they are “better able to manage classroom behaviours effectively and compassionately”.(teacher quoted in Jennings et al., 2011, p. 42) and they are “better able to establish and maintain supportive relationships” (teacher quoted in Jennings et al., 2011, p. 42). Finally, mindfulness training for teachers resulted in improvements in their students’ pro-social and on-task
behaviour and academic performance (Jennings et al., 2011). Thus, training teachers in mindfulness is about more than improving the teacher’s wellbeing or facilitating the student’s mindfulness training. It fundamentally changes the classroom environment and the teacher-student relationships. It is my intent to explore this relationship further.

**Mindfulness programs in education.** Meiklejohn et al. (2012) highlights three programs using an indirect approach: Mindfulness Based Wellness Education (MBWE), Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), and Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques (SMART) in Education. These programs focus on developing a teacher’s own mindfulness practice, rather than on teaching mindfulness to students, so they can bring empathy, compassion, and emotional awareness to the classroom. The authors state that their research focused on the teacher wellbeing outcomes and that more research is needed on short- and long-term impact of mindful teachers in the classroom (such as classroom climate, teaching style, and students learning).

**Reception of Mindfulness Programs**

The most important factor in any intervention, whether clinical or educational, is the Hippocratic maxim of “do no harm”. This is certainly the case with mindfulness interventions – they have shown to be well-received by all participants (Burke, 2010). All of the participants in Beauchemin, Hutchins, and Patterson’s (2008) study reported positive feelings about mindfulness meditations, stating that it “…led to feelings of calm, quiet, relaxation, peacefulness, or better overall feelings.” (p.41). And at their follow-up meetings van der Oord et al. (2012) and Steiner et al. (2013) found many families asking for further mindfulness training. Teachers in Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor’s (2010) study found the program easy to implement and found students asking to engage in mindfulness exercises. This very
positive reception is much better than typical medication treatments for ADHD or depression, which typically have a host of side-effects; and it lends a strong motivation for wider implementation of the programs.

Not only is mindfulness a positive experience for the students, but it seems to be positive for the researchers as well. Semple et al. (2010, p.228) describe:

“The girls and boys who participated in MBCT-C eagerly brought creativity and playfulness to their exploration of mindfulness, which are not as readily apparent in adult MBCT or MBSR programs. For example, we suspect that few adults ever try to see how many meditation cushions they can (mindfully, or course) balance on top of their heads”

**Conceptual Framework: The Prosocial Classroom**

The Pro-social Classroom model illustrated in Figure 1 depicts “...teacher SEC as an important contributor to the development of supportive teacher-student relationships... ...teachers higher in SEC are likely to demonstrate more effective classroom management... [and] teachers with higher SEC will implement social and emotional curriculum more effectively...“(Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 493).

Teachers’ SEC and wellbeing are essential to a healthy classroom environment and to the wellbeing and performance of their students (Gu & Day, 2007; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2011; Meiklejohn et al., 2012).
This literature review has found clear linkages between teacher mindfulness practices and SEC as well as teacher SEC and classroom outcomes as show in Figure 1. In this study I have examined the impacts of mindfulness on teacher SEC and wellbeing, as well as the teacher’s classroom management and student relationships to better elucidate the connections between these concepts.

Figure 1. The Prosocial Classroom Model, from Jennings and Greenberg (2009).
Chapter 3 – Methods

I undertook a qualitative research study investigating the effects of training teachers in mindfulness on teacher wellbeing, teacher-student relationships, and classroom environment. Given the constraints of the Masters of Teaching (MT) Research Ethics Board (REB) clearance, the data collection was solely semi-structured interviews with teachers. The nature of mindfulness and teaching is complex, including individuals and relationships, and highly subjective. It was my intention for this study to include the voices of my participants and address the complexity and subjectivity of the problem at hand. For this purpose, the qualitative approach is most appropriate (Creswell, 2013). As well, as there was no classroom observation, the findings of this study are entirely reliant on teacher self-reporting. Clunies-Ross et al. (2008) found that there was a strong relationship between teachers’ self-report data and actual practice.

Literature Review

The literature review serves to support investigation of the research question. It focussed on (a) identifying what benefits and/or drawbacks of mindfulness are known, (b) identifying how mindfulness is used in classrooms, (c) identifying the impact of mindfulness training on teacher wellbeing and SEC, and finally (d) identifying the links between mindfulness, SEC, and wellbeing; the classroom relationships and environment; and student learning outcomes. The literature review has a strong focus on peer-reviewed articles, but also include books where broader concepts are discussed. Although this study is in the field of education, the much of the literature surveyed is from clinical (medical/psychological) journals. This is because the study of mindfulness in education is in its infancy and is slightly more developed in the clinical setting. This is not of great concern as the clinical papers are easily related in the educational context.
Data Collection

Data was gathered through one interview each of two teachers who have received mindfulness training through an external MBSR program at different times. The teachers taught in the elementary panel of a large Ontario school board. The similarity of the teacher’s situations provided some cohesiveness to the study’s findings. I made contact with these participants through various mindfulness initiatives in education and training in Ontario, including posting in organisational newsletters and emails. I recorded the interviews using a Sony digital recorder and an iPhone 4S (for redundancy). I transcribed the interviews using “intelligent transcription” distilling speech into text more suited for reading, thus leaving out unnecessary sounds that would encumber the understand of quotations in this research. My transcription was facilitated by the software ExpressScribe, which allows changes in audio speed. I did not take notes during the interview.

The transcripts were member-checked (emailed back to the teachers for approval), ensuring the participants involvement and agreement with the data collection. The teachers were both asked one follow-up question by email after I had transcribed the interviews, seeking clarification and a further example for one of their points.

Data Analysis

I read the interview transcripts multiple times and then input the digital copies into the software “QDA Miner” using “CrossOver” for Mac compatibility. I coded the transcripts in QDA Miner each twice and then generated a code table with the code category, name, and the highlighted quotation. I printed the entire code table and cut and pasted each code and quotation onto a cue card. I arranged and rearranged the cue cards according to themes as I reread them, arranging them spatially and with
coloured post-it notes in order to represent the relationships between the themes. When I was satisfied with the result I entered the codes, themes, and quotations into a word processor in order to write Chapter 4. In Chapter 5 the research from the literature review was connected to the findings from the study to examine the themes for cohesion and for consideration of the research question. Throughout the process my supervisor provided feedback on the development of the study.

**Ethical Review**

No REB application is needed as the MT program has blanket clearance for interviews of teachers. The participants were informed of the research process, that they would be taped and transcribed, that they would have the opportunity to view the transcripts, and that their names and the names of the school and program would all be kept confidential. They signed an agreement (Appendix C) that they understood this, and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Limitations**

Due to the limitations of the research ethics board (REB) the data collection for this study could only take one form – interviews. Given time and budgetary constraints, the study has a very small sample size and no control group. Given this, and the qualitative nature of the research, the study is not generalizable to any particular group. This study did not seek to be empirical research supporting the implementation of training programs, but instead sought to better understand the experience and perspective of a couple of teachers as they develop a mindfulness practice and teach in their classrooms.
Chapter 4 - Results

Biographical information

I am including 2 interview respondents in this study, Edith and Rosemary (their names have been changed to protect their identities). Both are elementary school teachers in large Ontario school boards – Edith has been teaching for 28 years and currently works with students from grades 1 to 5 and Rosemary has been teaching for 12 years and currently works with students in grade 7 and 8. Both respondents were introduced to mindfulness through the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, which they pursued outside of teaching. Edith has been practicing mindfulness for 7 years and Rosemary has been practicing mindfulness for 8 years. Both teachers reported having considerable stress in their life; Rosemary expressed “I’m not sure I would still be a teacher if I hadn’t taken the MBSR program. And that’s true. I was pretty miserable.” As well as stating that they had a mindfulness practice, both teachers mentioned their practice throughout their interviews.

Qualities of a Mindful Teacher

Compassion and non-judgement. Both Edith and Rosemary felt with their mindfulness practice they are more non-judgemental and compassionate. This was repeated throughout their interviews and was evident from their descriptions of their students. Rosemary repeatedly expresses the feeling that she is a “kinder”, “nicer” person stating

“the big difference is that, even with the kids I’m less critical, like I’ve kind of changed more of my, kinder side, I think is, it comes to the fore more, because I’m really trying to be more, present with them, with the person that’s in front of me... ...in teaching, you’re constantly bombarded with... they all want you at various times and them somebody else will come into the room, and then the principal will, and so that’s so hard for some people to manage
and so I’ve been guilty of like responding not so kindly to everybody, or not so, even not kind, but you know, dismissive, brusquely.”

Rosemary also reports that she doesn’t carry anger the same way she used to and that individuals in her personal life have told her that they feel their relationships have improved. She tells a story about a boy she found difficult in her grade 7 class. She retells her own experience of self-regulation, recognising when she needed to pause and step back from the situation. She describes her inner thought process, repeating a guided meditation “…if a thought arises, don’t judge it or be angry with it, just gently bring the attention back to the breath, without judgement, and begin again”; how gradually her attention moved from an “angry-thought-filled-rage place” to observing the needs of her student. She states,

“And as I watched I started to remember that I actually knew a lot about [this student]. I had taught both his older siblings; I had read a lovely autobiography by his older sister about his birth and when her “adorable little brothers” came into her life. I had watched his dad walk him to school over the years…. …and I had taught his older brother (middle sibling) when their parents were breaking up the year before, and now here was this youngest child. And I remembered that I knew his dad was now with a new partner and expecting a baby. I began to feel a softening towards [this student].”

Over the two years Rosemary taught this student she applied her mindfulness practice with him and her class and she found a place where her class was calmer and more productive. She also found a place where she had grown to appreciate this student for his “humour, his bravado, and his deep sense of justice”. Even when working with this difficult student, Rosemary demonstrated the application of her mindfulness practice and the cultivation of warmth and compassion towards her student; she also showed the ability to see the context that exists around her student’s behaviour.
Responsive not reactive. Both participants outlined the importance of responding rather than reacting when they interact with their students. They said that they strived to respond to their students and not react harshly, “scream”, “snap”, “explode”, or “say things off the cuff”. The participants describe the need for patience in their interactions, patience with difficult students. In describing situations with students the participants often describe their own mindfulness practice as part of the process, for example, Edith states “...I could feel myself bubbling inside and I was ready to pound that kid, like, in the sense like I was ready to “give-out” to him and just, like, what do you think you are do-, just and I just took a breath and said, ok, wait; and then I talked to him...” Edith also describes compassion and humility as a teacher, describing that sometimes she may react too harshly and that she would then return to the student and apologise because “if I didn’t like it done to me, why would I do it to them?”. Begin mindful in difficult situations is not easy, and Rosemary reflects on the strength and dedication it takes to be patient and mindful with her students (after a very difficult period in a mindfulness group she leads)

“And the hardest part is because I care about it so much that after my laugh attack I actually went to the office and I started crying because I was just like, this is so hard! I have to be so patient and so uncomfortable. And that’s mindfulness right? Being uncomfortable, and just feeling that, feeling that discomfort. And not react. I can’t yell at them, I can’t, definitely not in the mindfulness class. It has to just be what it is and I have to respond in a way that takes care of everybody and myself.”

When Teachers are Attuned to Themselves and Their Students

Teacher self-knowledge and reflection. The participants displayed a great deal of self-reflection and subsequent self-knowledge. They were aware of their mental patterns and of the situations and
stresses that would elicit angry or rash responses and accredit this knowledge to their mindfulness training. This is an on-going process – Rosemary states that she writes in a journal and states “Even if there are kids that I don’t feel like I’ve managed very well, or I don’t feel I’ve been very patient, the difference with the mindfulness practice is, that when I go away and reflect on it, I’m like okay, what happened there? What wasn’t working for me” What, why did I get so frustrated, why did I get so upset?”

Both participants used this self-knowledge to regulate themselves and their surroundings. For Edith that meant recognising her triggers and the need to stop and recharge on busy days. For Rosemary, it meant changing jobs to one where the demands were more in line with her strengths, setting boundaries (such as allowing only one person to speak at a time), and not carrying anger over from one day to the next. For both participants, this internal and external regulation was essential when it comes to being responsive and not reactive and patient with their students.

Rosemary states that she suffered from insomnia, anxiety, and depression and that mindfulness helped her recognise her mental patterns. She now feels that she derives more pleasure from her work as a teacher and describes herself as a happier person. This is reflected in her work: “So, that affects the climate in the classroom 110%, if you’re a happier person”.

Edith shows the connection between her mindfulness practice and her students’ behaviour:

“I find that when I am in the mode and I haven’t taken the time to just stop, even for a couple of minutes, it’s like the kids are hyper. They mirror me, exactly; they pick up my energy, exactly. The days when I am, okay, I just need to breathe, I’m just going to close the door, trip the light, I am going to give myself 5 minutes of recess. Or even sometimes just go for a quick walk around the block. The energy changes, and it’s like the kids pick that up,
and they are more responsive in terms of being more calm, being less apt to interrupt others... ...What you bring in is the energy that you feed in the classroom.”

Edith goes on to describe her work in other teachers’ classrooms and that there are tangible differences in the classroom environment when teachers are calm or not. As well as these more abstract effects of mindfulness on the classroom environment, both Rosemary and Edith describe actively working to create an environment that is calm, patient, positive, compassionate, and non-judgemental.

**Mindful teachers are attuned to the needs of their students.** Rosemary states “... you always have the choice to either be open and receive what is out there around you or not”. Both teachers describe that their mindfulness practice not only helps their own self-knowledge, but also leads them to be attuned to their students. They take the time to connect to their students. Rosemary describes that she derives a great deal of joy from listening to and getting to know her students.

Both teachers describe recognising that their students are having difficulties (mental illness, family life, learning disabilities, ADHD, etc.) and that this affects their ability to participate in the classroom. They also recognise that some of these students are difficult to interact with (e.g. Rosemary: “I’ve taught kids with oppositional defiance disorder. And those are really hard. People with oppositional defiance it’s really hard because, you can you know that’s probably what it is when you can start to feel your blood boiling.”). But the teachers show a great deal of dialectical thinking when they describe these students, such as Edith, who says “I tend to be more compassionate, take their side, not giving them an excuse for their behaviour – their behaviour is still unacceptable – but more of an understanding of where that kid is, that is showing the behaviour, so I’ve become attuned to the child and their behaviour.”
Mindful interpretation of student behaviour: Attribution and dialectical thinking. Edith describes avoiding attributing malice when dealing with students whose behaviour she finds difficult. E.g. “Trying to see the behaviour that a lot of our kids are displaying is not always under their control, they’re not doing that because they want purposely to upset me...” She describes how mindfulness has changed her as a practitioner because now she suspends judgement and seeks to help students with behaviour problems, and she avoids gossip in the staffroom. She speaks of “taking their side” because she recognises that students’ behaviour is often a product of their environment; thinking dialectically – holding opposing concepts – she does not ignore that the student’s behaviour is unacceptable. This type of thinking – dialectically, non-judgementally, and avoiding attributing malice – is found throughout her descriptions of her interactions with students.

Rosemary also exhibits this type of thinking as she describes her grade 8 students. She feels her grade eight students are driving her crazy. But she has the ability to step back and look at the pattern, that every year her grade eight students drive her crazy. She suspends judgement and does not attribute malice to this behaviour; she instead reflects on what students experience in their grade 8 year and that it is really hard to go through puberty and learning to be a “big kid”; she recognises that a teacher might “explode at them” but that that was unnecessary and would not help. She can take a step back and suspend judgement, and then use that to regular her own responses.

Edith describes that a student “…is very difficult with impulse control in and out of the classroom and is often being suspended for his bad behaviour. I work with this boy and I find that I am more patient with him especially when I remember that he really can't help it.” In this way, her attribution of the student behaviour makes it possible for her to regulate her own responses.
Bringing Mindfulness to Teachers

I asked the participants about bringing mindfulness to professional development and teacher training. They responded that mindfulness training would have a very positive impact on teaching. However, they reported that it was essential that teachers have an authentic experience of mindfulness for any mindfulness curriculum to be effective, and so “mandating mindfulness” was unlikely to be successful. They stated that there would be resistance to mandating mindfulness because many teachers would see it as an additional task that used more of their scarce time and resources. They also felt that they attended mindfulness training because they sensed they had a problem and that teachers who don’t feel they have a problem or that they need to change might not benefit from mindfulness training in the same way. Finally they stated that teachers must practice mindfulness to bring mindfulness into the classroom – simply training is not enough – and that mindfulness activities can be misused. Edith reported

“I give the teacher a little, perhaps laminated, prompt after a couple of weeks and I say, well you know, just follow this prompt with the kids, once a day for 5 minutes and ask them to close their eyes and just concentrate on their breath, on some sensation in the body and so on and so forth, and then well, listen to the sound and I leave the teacher with my vibratone or with my bowl, what I have noticed the teachers then think, this is the magic solution here because they see how the kids respond to what you are doing. And so the teachers all of a sudden getting the bowl all throughout the day, okay, better listen, blang blang blang. And it’s not that. They’ve totally, they’ve taken it out of context and they are using it as a tool to control the behaviour they don’t like. The kids not listening or whatever it is and they’ve lost it, no longer mindfulness, now it is something else.”
Mindfulness in Schools

**Teacher of mindfulness.** Often, in the interviews, the teachers spoke about being a teacher of mindfulness, rather than a mindful teacher. They had a wealth of experience bringing mindfulness to their students through one-on-one work and whole class experiences. They saw how powerful mindfulness had been for themselves and wanted to bring that to their students. Edith states “if we could give this as a tool for kids, who haven’t had a chance to accumulate all the things that are negative in a way that I have had a chance to accumulate in my life, at the time forty some years old, I say it would have a tremendous positive impact in their lives and a great tool for them to have for the rest of their lives.” Both teachers sought training in programs, curriculum for teaching mindfulness to children and were actively bringing this curriculum into their schools. Both teachers reported that teaching mindfulness to students was generally well received and that they had some very positive effects on student behaviour. They reported that other teachers mentioned to them their students transferring what they had learned – using the mindfulness activities in other classrooms and other settings.
Chapter 5 - Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher-student relationships when the teacher had a personal mindfulness practice, to better understand how teacher mindfulness (without teaching mindfulness) affects the classroom environment. This final chapter will discuss findings from Chapter 4 – Results, including the implications and limitations of the research.

Teacher and Student Wellbeing

In the literature, I found that teachers’ wellbeing and social and emotional competence (SEC) were essential to a healthy classroom and to the performance and wellbeing of their students. Meiklejohn et al. (2012) state that “...personal training in mindfulness skills can increase teacher’s sense of well-being and teaching self-efficacy, as well as their ability to manage classroom behaviour and establish and maintain supportive relationships with students.” Teachers are not solely in the classroom to provide instruction in content; they mould the emotional environment of the classroom and their responses to behaviours and situations affect the way students feel and learn.

My participants reported that mindfulness affected their wellbeing considerably. Rosemary reported that she would likely not be a teacher if it weren’t for her mindfulness practice. Both teachers showed a great deal of self-knowledge and they spoke about using that knowledge to regulate both internal and external processes. By finding an environment that was the right fit for them they were able to manage their own wellbeing and this was reflected in their teaching.

In agreement with the literature, Rosemary states that her classroom environment is affected 110% when she is a happier person. Edith reflects that for her, and for other teachers she has observed, students feed off of the teacher’s energy. This finding has significant implications for policy; teaching suffers when teachers are stressed or unhappy in their environment. Professional development,
including mindfulness training, aimed at improving teacher wellbeing would considerably impact the quality of teaching in schools.

Both Edith and Rosemary spoke frequently about actually teaching mindfulness to their students. While this subject is outside of the scope of the study, I would like to note that both teachers emphasised that through seeing how well mindfulness has worked for their own wellbeing they were compelled to bring the practice to their students.

Teacher Responses to Student Behaviour

The literature states that mindfulness training has greater effects than those of teacher and student wellbeing, fundamentally changing the classroom environment. This study looked deeply at this claim and found that teacher-student interactions, and thus the classroom environment were particularly changed by teacher mindfulness in 4 ways: Mindful teachers (1) have increased compassion and non-judgement, (2) are attuned to their students’ needs, (3) are responsive not reactive, and (4) display decreased negative attribution to students.

Responsive not reactive. The literature states that teachers who used reactive strategies to deal with student behaviours were predicted to have high levels of stress (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008). As well, student view aggressive angry outburst as inappropriate (norm-violating) behaviours in the classroom, but have a more positive response to assertive, calm responses to anger (McPherson et al., 2003). My participants strove to be responsive rather than reactive, avoiding knee-jerk and angry reactions; they viewed mindfulness as the way to achieve this ideal. Edith also reported apologising to students for her angry reactions. The implications of this are many-fold: Students are not motivated by fear in the classroom, student and teacher stress levels are lower, and the teacher is modelling anger management
to her students; all together a positive impact on teacher-student interactions and the classroom environment.

**Compassion and non-judgement.** Both Edith and Rosemary emphasized that they felt they were more compassionate and non-judgemental with their mindfulness practice. This has implications for reactions vs. responses and attribution, likely facilitating them. Besides that, however, they described themselves warmly, as kinder, nicer teachers. Skinner and Belmont (1993) state that children appear happier and more enthusiastic when their teachers appear to be warm and emotionally engaging. It is possible then that students’ sense of a teacher’s demeanour, modified by mindfulness, could positively impact their classroom engagement. This idea needs further research. In Rosemary’s story, she describes how she used her mindfulness practice to turn away from her anger and find compassion for a student she found difficult, and the end result was a calmer, more productive classroom. As well, I interpret that when she felt compassion and “grew to appreciate that student” it is likely that her stress level also fell.

**Teacher attribution and attunement to student needs.** Teachers generally perceive the causes of student misbehaviour to lying within the student, rather than with outside variables (Medway, 1979). However, Edith and Rosemary both report looking outside of the student to find the causes of student misbehaviour – not attributing their behaviours to malice or intention. Edith reports “Trying to see the behaviour that a lot of our kids are displaying is not always under their control, they’re not doing that because they want purposely to upset me...” Edith also reports that she finds it easier to be patient with a student when she has an external explanation (e.g. ADHD) for his behaviour.
The participants reported avoiding gossip about their students and often “took their side”, but remained dialectical, acknowledging that the students’ behaviours were unacceptable. They report feeling attuned to students’ needs and that they derive enjoyment from listening to and attending to student needs.

I believe that these findings are important to the classroom environment because the teachers avoid the proliferation of negative sentiment from themselves and from other teachers. It is possible that this avoidance of negative attribution contributes to their perception of avoiding angry reactions. By attributing students’ behaviours to external factors, teachers might make it possible for themselves to not react angrily at the student, but instead seek external solutions. Finally, I believe that by avoiding negative attributions and looking for external causes of student behaviours the teachers will be more resilient in the face of difficult behaviours.

Social and Emotional Competence

Zins et al. (in Zins et al., Eds., 2004) define a framework of person-centred social and emotional learning (SEL) competences as: self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management and relationship management. My findings show that teachers who practice mindfulness have higher levels of social and emotional competence – showing high levels of awareness and attunement to themselves and their students, and showing the ability to use that knowledge to regulate themselves and their environment in order to manage their teaching and responses. They showed the ability to recognise what their triggers are and the ability to modify their employment and environment to maximise their teaching ability; they also showed the ability to be aware of their students and manage those relationships; and they attributed these skills to their mindfulness practice. And so I draw
the conclusion that my participants have high social and emotional competence and it is their belief that this competence is fostered by their own mindfulness practice.

This increased SEC is tied to the literature; teachers with high SEC implement social and emotional curriculum more effectively. Jennings and Greenberg’s (2009) model of the prosocial classroom shows the reciprocal connections between teachers SEC and wellbeing and classroom climate, effective classroom management, and teacher-student relationships. This study shows that mindfulness is closely tied to the framework of social and emotion competence and so is likely to share the positive effects on teacher-student relationships and classroom climate.

I believe that the relationship between mindfulness, social and emotional competence, and teaching is strong and warrants further research.

The Mindfulness Practice

Both of the participants I included in their study had a regular mindfulness practice. Both teachers expressed reservation about teaching mindfulness teachers or “mandating mindfulness” because of the importance of having an authentic experience and of actually practicing. Kabat-Zinn (2003) states

“Mindfulness is not merely a good idea such that, upon hearing about it, one can immediately decide to live in the present moment, with the promise of reduced anxiety and depression and heightened performance and life satisfaction, and then instantly and reliably realize that state of being. Rather it is more akin to an art form that one develops over time, and it is greatly enhanced through regular disciplined practice, both formally and informally, on a daily basis.”
It is easy to discuss the mindfulness practice and behaviours of these teachers and to recommend that they be implemented widely, but I do not wish to overlook these teachers’ hard work. Rosemary states “I was just like, this is so hard! I have to be so patient and so uncomfortable. And that’s mindfulness right? Being uncomfortable, and just feeling that, feeling that discomfort... ...It has to just be what it is and I have to respond in a way that takes care of everybody and myself.”

Being a mindful teacher, just like being a good teacher, is hard work. But it is hard work that pays off in teacher resilience, wellbeing, and stress; in the classroom environment; and in the quality of the teacher-student relationships that are at the core of education. I call for more research, more rigorous and on a larger scale, into how this myriad of factors comes together in the classroom. I recommend that teachers receptive to the idea be offered opportunities to train in mindfulness programs and be encouraged to practice.

Limitations

Firstly, this study was a non-blinded, non-controlled, self-report study, and so there are great limitations to the generalisation of the results. The findings focus on the experiences of two teachers and do not imply any generalisation or causality in the findings. Nonetheless, it has been found that there is a strong relationship between teacher self-report data and their actual practice (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008), and so I am quite certain of the validity of the teachers’ responses at least to their own practical experiences.
Appendix A – Bibliography


doi:http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1007/s10826-012-9636-7


doi:http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1007/s10826-011-9531-7


Appendix B – Interview questions

Personal Background

- Is this your first experience with mindfulness? Tell me about your background.
- Since your training have you developed a personal mindfulness practice?
- Do you feel that you struggled with stress before this training? Please elaborate.
- How has this mindfulness training affected your personal wellbeing?
- Do you feel that you struggled with classroom management before this training?
- How has mindfulness training changed the way you think about teaching?

Relationships and the Classroom Environment

- Do you feel that your interactions with students have changed? In what ways?
- Do you have any students you identify as “problem students”?
- How has this training changed the ways you think about and identify and/or interact with “problem students”?
- Can you think of a difficult or stressful situation that you encountered with a student where you used your mindfulness training? Tell me about it.
- Have you changed any of your general classroom management strategies? Please describe.
- Do you feel that your classroom environment has changed since your training?

Student Impact

- Do you feel that your students’ behaviour has changed?
- Do you feel that your students’ performance has improved?
Reception of Training

- Do you think attending this training was worthwhile?
- Would you recommend that other teachers also receive this training?
- Would you be interested in further training?
- Do you feel that the administration of your school is receptive to mindfulness training as professional development?
- What do you perceive as barriers to implementing mindfulness in your school?

Follow-up Question (By Email)

You mentioned in our interview that you are more compassionate and non-judgemental and I would like to know more about how that is reflected in your teaching and your relationships with your students. Could you write a response with an example of how your mindfulness practice has brought compassion and non-judgement to an interaction with a student and what impact you think that has had?
Appendix C – Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: _____________________

Dear _____________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying culture in the classroom for the purposes of a graduate research project. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic. I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the research process this year is _______________________. My research supervisor is __________________. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My research data collection consists of a 15 minute initial interview and a 40 minute follow-up interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final research paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known
risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Kirsten Grant

Phone number: ____________________

Email: ____________________

Instructor’s name, phone number, email: ____________________

Research Supervisor’s Name, phone number, email: ____________________