Improving Student and Teacher Well-being: Incorporating Mindfulness into the Ontario Curriculum and Classroom

By

Rachel Lipkowitz

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

This qualitative research study investigates the ways teachers are practicing mindfulness in their classrooms and integrating it into the Ontario curriculum. The existing peer reviewed literature on mindfulness practices with students show that it has the ability to improve neurological processes, and support the mental health and overall well-being of students and teachers. Data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with one Ontario elementary teacher and one Ontario elementary school counsellor/educator. This study draws connections between mindfulness and the current Ontario elementary curriculum while also examining the outcomes mindfulness has on students and teachers. Lastly, this study provides implications and recommendations for the next steps on using mindfulness as a way to support students’ and teachers’ in the classroom.

Key Words: Mindfulness, Well-being, Educators, Curriculum, Pedagogy.
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### Table of Contents

**Chapter 1: Introduction** .......................................................... 5  
1.0 Introduction: Research Context and Problem .......................................................... 5  
1.1 Purpose of the Study ...................................................................................... 9  
1.2 Research Questions ..................................................................................... 10  
1.3 Background of the Researcher ..................................................................... 10  
1.4 Overview ....................................................................................................... 11  

**Chapter 2: Literature Review** ............................................................... 12  
2.0 Introduction ................................................................................................. 12  
2.1 Defining Mindfulness ................................................................................... 12  
2.2.1 Misconceptions associated with mindfulness practice. .......................... 14  
2.3 Why Mindfulness is Relevant and its Association with the Brain .................. 15  
2.3.1 Changes in the brain linked to mindfulness .............................................. 15  
2.4 The Outcomes of Mindfulness Specific to Schooling .................................... 16  
2.4.1 The effect of mindfulness on academic success ...................................... 17  
2.4.2 Mindfulness can improve self-regulation. ............................................... 18  
2.4.3 Mindfulness aids in the emotional well-being of students and teachers. .... 18  
2.4.4 Mindfulness can aid in supporting anger management in schools. ............ 19  
2.5 Avoiding Teacher Burnout ........................................................................... 20  
2.6 How Teachers Incorporate Mindfulness into Their Classrooms .................... 21  
2.6.1 Challenges associated with teaching mindfulness in the classroom. ....... 22  
2.6.2 Mindfulness and cross-curricular integration ......................................... 23  
2.7 Conclusion .................................................................................................... 24  

**Chapter 3: Research Methodology** ....................................................... 26  
3.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview) ................................................................... 26  
3.1 Research Approach & Procedures ................................................................ 26  
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection ................................................................... 27  
3.3 Participants .................................................................................................... 29  
3.3.1 Sampling criteria...................................................................................... 29  
3.3.2 Sampling procedures and recruitment ..................................................... 30  
3.3.3 Participant bios...................................................................................... 30  
3.4 Data Analysis .................................................................................................. 31  
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures ............................................................................ 32  
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths .................................................... 33  
3.7 Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 34  

**Chapter 4: Research Findings** ............................................................. 35  
4.0 Introduction .................................................................................................. 35  
4.1 Practicing Mindfulness in Schools Creates Positive Spaces in the Classroom by Highlighting Gratitude and Bringing Mental Health Awareness to Schools .............................................. 36  
4.1.1 Mindfulness creates positive spaces in the classroom. ........................... 36  
4.1.2 Mindfulness brings mental health awareness and practices to schools. ....... 37  
4.1.3 Mindfulness brings awareness to important social emotions such as gratitude. .......................................................... 38  
4.2 Teachers Argue That Mindfulness Practices Can Be Integrated Across Many Ontario Curriculum Subject Areas .............................................................................. 39  
4.2.1 Mindfulness can help students improve their learning skills. ................... 39
4.2.2 Mindfulness practices coordinate well with specific curriculum areas such as literacy, music, health, and daily physical activity (DPA). ................................................................. 40

4.3 Participants Found That Mindfulness Techniques Prevent Anxiety and Stress That Students Experience in The Classroom Which Enhances Academic Achievement Among Students ................. 42

4.3.1 Mindfulness helps students self-regulate and manage their emotions. .......................................... 43

4.3.2 Participating in mindfulness practices has a positive correlation with a reduction in test anxiety. ................................................................................................................. 44

4.4 Educators Revealed Specific Types of Student and Teacher Outcomes That Are Identified Through the Use of Mindfulness Practices in The Classroom ......................................................... 45

4.4.1 Teacher specific outcomes after implementing mindfulness ............................................................ 46

4.4.2 Student specific outcomes associated with using mindfulness in the classroom. ......................... 47

4.5 Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................... 50

Chapter 5: Implications and Recommendations ......................................................................................... 52

5.0 Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 52

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance .............................................................................. 52

5.2 Implications ........................................................................................................................................... 54

5.2.1 The education community .................................................................................................................. 54

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice ............................................................................................... 55

5.3 Recommendations ............................................................................................................................... 56

5.3.1 Faculties of education ........................................................................................................................ 57

5.3.2 Schools ............................................................................................................................................. 57

5.3.3 Teachers ........................................................................................................................................... 58

5.4 Areas for Further Research .................................................................................................................. 58

5.5 Concluding Comments ......................................................................................................................... 58

References .................................................................................................................................................... 60

Appendices .................................................................................................................................................. 66

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview .............................................................................................. 66

Appendix B: Interview Protocol ................................................................................................................ 68
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction: Research Context and Problem

Every day students and teachers encounter obstacles that cause them to struggle mentally and physically in the classroom. Stress, anxiety, trouble concentrating, and fatigue can be products of a classroom environment. A practice that can help overcome these difficulties is mindfulness learning strategies and coping techniques. Mindfulness is an inclusive practice that allows for an optimal learning environment while strengthening classroom relations between peers (Flor Rotne & Flor Ronte, 2013). Teachers and students benefit from mindfulness learning because it can be practiced formally or informally in the classroom (Meijklejohn et al, 2012). Using mindfulness in the classroom increases the happiness of teachers’ and supports their professionalism by strengthening their patience (Flor Rotne & Flor Ronte, 2013). In addition, Mindfulness increases teachers’ awareness of their classroom behaviors. This allows them to be more present for their students by being aware of their strengths and needs (Bonus et al, 2013). This research paper elucidates the benefits of incorporating mindfulness learning strategies and coping techniques into the classroom that benefit both educational learning and mental health.

Teachers and educators who practice mindfulness are more likely to avoid stress and burnout in the workplace (Holley et al, 2005). Many teachers feel that they cannot meet their demands as educators because of the lack of resources available to them (Franco, Mañas, Cangas, Moreno, & Gallego, 2010). It is important that teachers are equipped with the tools necessary to overcome everyday classroom stress as this will also benefit their students. More specifically, students will benefit from the heightened presence of their teacher while also learning mindfulness techniques to practice on their own (Bonus et al, 2013). Students and teachers can incorporate mindfulness into their everyday learning as a mechanism for concentration, self-regulation, stress, mental
health, and physical activity, (Schonert-Reichl, & Lawlor, 2010) which is why it is a relevant training technique for educators to embrace.

If schools want to help their students succeed in their lives outside of the classroom, they must prepare students to respond mindfully to the problems they may face in the world (Reber, 2014). In addition, mindfulness techniques also support students in being successful educationally as there is a positive correlation between personal happiness and strong academic achievement (Suldo, Riley, & Shaffer, 2006). Mindfulness practices are an innovative teaching method that can bring new ways of thinking to the modern classroom. For instance,

in school contexts, mindfulness theory can be implemented in two ways: First, teachers may arrange instruction and assignments in a way that promotes momentary mindfulness in students. This could be called situational mindfulness. Second, educators may foster mindfulness as a long-term disposition or personal trait; let us call this kind of mindfulness, dispositional mindfulness. (Reber, 2014, p. 1056)

Situational mindfulness can be used to think about learning materials, and looking at aspects of a story in a different way; whereas dispositional mindfulness is perspective taking and looking closely instead of speeding through materials (Reber, 2014). Using these types of mindfulness techniques in the classroom can help reform the current educational ideals in the school system. Furthermore, mindfulness practices can bring many new opportunities for learning and can help assist teachers in changing their classroom pedagogy to support their students effectively. Mindfulness techniques also assist in creating calm and safe environments for students. This is
important as it encourages students to be engaged in their learning (Flor Rotne & Flor Ronte, 2013).

The teaching profession at times can be very stressful and is frequently found to have a high turnover rate, often attributed to burnout (Bonus et al, 2013). Supporting teachers’ ability to cope with the demands of the classroom and strengthening their own well-being is a necessity (Bonus et al, 2013). When teachers are happy and passionate about their work it has positive implications for students’ learning and academic success (Bonus et al, 2013). Therefore, it is important to ensure that teachers are equipped with techniques to keep them motivated and passionate about their work. Mindfulness is a tool that can greatly aid in dealing teacher burnout because it targets stress in a unique way. This is because mindfulness does not directly act on the target of stress, instead, it can change the nature of the stressor itself (Bonus et al, 2013). In this regard, “mindfulness shares similarities with other approaches that have been successfully used to reduce workplace stress, like cognitive re-framing” (Bonus et al, 2013, p.3). A recent study of mindfulness based stress reduction for primary teachers concluded that teachers who practiced mindfulness techniques reported an overall improvement in depression and personal stress (Bonus et al, 2013). Therefore, mindfulness techniques had the ability to enhance the lives of teachers by reducing their feelings of stress caused from the classroom.

Students also struggle with different types of stress in the classroom which can result in anger, conduct disorders, and various types of anxiety, including test anxiety (Holley et al, 2005). Children are under a lot of external pressures caused from school and the home which has resulted in many of the same physiological symptoms of distress seen in adults (Holley et al, 2005). This stress can continue to occur when children become adults because people carry the
patterns they learn as children to adulthood (Holley et al, 2005). Therefore, it is important that student stress is treated at a young age so children can learn to self-regulate their emotions for the present and future. In order for this to occur, it is essential for stress reduction and relaxation methods to be included in schools as it is an integral part of effective education for children (Holley et al, 2005). Research indicates that mindfulness is a successful stress reduction strategy as students who use it have been able to control their disruptive behavior, reduce their anxiety, and improve their concentration and self-regulation (Holley et al, 2005).

Providing mental health techniques for teachers to use in schools can help remove the emotional and behavioral barriers to learning which will enhance their students’ potential for academic achievement (Gouze, Lim, & Walter, 2006). Little attention has been dedicated to understanding how elementary teachers perceive the social-emotional needs of their students or their role in relation to such needs (Roeser & Midgley, 1997). Therefore, it is important that reasonable efforts are made to inform teachers and educators of suitable strategies to use in their classrooms, in order to promote mental health in public schools. (Roeser & Midgley, 1997). It is often teachers who are responsible to ensure the social-emotional needs of their students are met, yet are often left to use their own resources (Roeser & Midgley, 1997). In a study conducted by Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, and Goel, it was discovered that 68% of the 95 teachers surveyed believed that they felt "somewhat" to "very much" burdened by the mental health needs of the students they taught (2011). Of the 192 elementary teachers who were asked about their role in relation to their students' mental health, 99% agreed that mental health concerns were "somewhat" to "very much" a part of their role as a teacher (Reinke et al, 2011). Yet, teachers are not always given the proper tools to ensure that the needs of their students’ mental health are met. Only 28% of teachers surveyed in the study believed they had the level of knowledge
required to meet the mental health requirements of the children that they work with, while 72% disagreed with this feeling or remained neutral (Reinke et al, 2011). It is obvious that teachers feel unclear about how to be successful in helping their students with their mental health. In order to address this problem, it is important that teachers are exposed to stress reduction strategies like mindfulness in their classrooms.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to learn how elementary teachers integrate mindfulness into their teaching through curriculum based learning and to discover what outcomes they observe from students and themselves. The secondary purpose for this study is to discover when it is ideal to practice mindfulness in the classroom in order to be proactive in managing student and teacher stress. Although there is literature available that describes the benefits of mindfulness in society, there is limited research on how mindfulness can be included into the curriculum and daily classroom life. By learning about how mindfulness can be effectively integrated into the curriculum it will become more clear when to perform mindfulness techniques in the classroom.

Managing the mental health of students and teachers is of great importance in the education system, therefore, it is imperative that coping techniques are available for teachers to use in their classroom. It is my hope that the findings from this study will encourage educators to use mindfulness as a teaching pedagogy while also incorporating into the Ontario curriculum to benefit both teachers and students.
1.2 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this study is: How do a sample of elementary teachers integrate mindfulness into their teaching through curriculum based learning? Sub-questions to further guide this inquiry include:

- Why do these teachers believe that mindfulness practice is important in schools?
- How do these teachers integrate mindfulness practice across curriculum subject areas?
- What range of benefits do teachers observe from themselves and their students when integrating mindfulness practice in their teaching?
- Are there particular moments where mindfulness techniques should be used in the classroom to prevent future stress and anxiety and the outcomes of students?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

The topic of mindfulness in education is of great interest to me because I believe it is a beneficial practice for educators and students. After spending almost two decades in educational systems I was never taught how to deal with stress, anxiety, or concentration in a classroom setting. I believe that this is a very big problem and that educational systems needs to add tools like mindfulness in the curriculum to create positive emotional and physical change for students. I also argue that mindfulness strategies can encourage students to be more present and understanding when problem solving and making good choices in the classroom.

When I was a student I had difficulty with problem solving, concentration, and stress management. I think that if I were exposed to mindfulness at a young age my experiences in school may have been different. As an elementary student I often saw students who would act out in the classroom due to fatigue or lack of interest in the lesson. These students would
frequently be sent out of the class as punishment and miss important teachings. I believe this is a problem as students should not be deprived of their education because of their behaviour. Instead, I believe that using mindfulness in the classroom could benefit students who have the tendency to be distracted. I believe that isolation is not beneficial for students and that other inclusive tools such as mindfulness should be used to help teachers with their classroom management.

As a future teacher I am eager to incorporate mindfulness learning into my daily classroom routines. Using mindfulness as a tool for educators has the ability to support teachers and students in different ways. Schools need to be a calm and safe environment for students and teachers in order for it to be an effective learning space. If teachers are able to manage their stress effectively it will have a positive impact on their students. Therefore, I believe having mindfulness activities that are embedded into the curriculum would allow for an innovative and positive learning experience for students.

1.4 Overview

This research project is organized into five chapters. In Chapter 2 I review the literature in the areas of mindfulness and the effectiveness it offers for students and teachers. In Chapter 3 I describe the research methodology and include information about the participants, the data collection, and limitations. In Chapter 4 I report and discuss the research findings. Finally, in Chapter 5 I review the implications of the findings and make recommendations for future directions. References and a list of appendixes are found at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I begin by reviewing the literature in defining mindfulness, and the neuroscience behind mindfulness. I then describe the areas of significance that mindfulness has in the classroom, the changes that teachers and students experience from mindfulness, as well as the impact mindfulness has on mental health. More specifically, I review themes related to the misconceptions of mindfulness, how mindfulness increases gray matter, and how meditation changes the amygdala and hippocampus in the brain. Next, I review the literature that explains how mindfulness positively influences academic success by describing how mindfulness techniques are used in the classroom. I also reveal how mindfulness practices has an effective influence on self-regulation, and the emotional well-being of students and teachers. I specifically review the literature of how mindfulness can be used to manage anger, stress and teacher burnout. I then examine the literature on how mindfulness is practiced in classrooms as well as its challenges. Lastly, I reveal how mindfulness can be integrated into the curriculum and the need to explore this concept further.

2.1 Defining Mindfulness

It is difficult to define mindfulness in one simple definition as it can have many different meanings. However, it is possible to establish a basic understanding of mindfulness. Everyone has the capacity to be mindful, it is what makes us human. Humans have the capacity to be fully conscious of what is around them and to be aware of their surroundings. However, this is most often only done for brief periods of time as people become easily distracted with their own personal lives, or begin to daydream (Siegel, Germer, & Olendzki, 2009).

The practice of being mindful is an ancient practice of Buddhist tradition and has been
practiced throughout history. Mindfulness is very significant for the overall schema of Buddhist culture and its taught broadly in many Buddhist schools (Kang & Whittingham, 2010). The context of mindfulness in Buddhism can be described as being aware moment-to-moment, having introspective caution that monitors the stability and transparency of awareness, as well as being free from conceptual constructs and frameworks (Kang & Whittingham, 2010). This is one of many understandings of the mindfulness practice, however, people who study mindfulness have their own ways of defining it. For example, Jon Kabat-Zinn who is a leading mindfulness researcher and practitioner describes mindfulness as, “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (as cited in Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, p. 375). Mindfulness has also been linked to a “heightened activation in brain regions responsible for regulating attention and positive affective states including empathy and other prosocial emotions” (Bonus et al, 2013, p.2). In contrast, Holley, Krech, and Napoli describe mindfulness as being fully aware of one’s visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile, and cognitive senses (2005). Contemporary psychology has adopted mindfulness techniques for increasing awareness and responding skillfully to mental processes that may trigger an emotional response (Bishop et al, 2004).

In order to truly understand mindfulness and its benefits, it is important for people to practice it directly as it is a deeply personal experience. Although many researchers and scholars are able to define mindfulness independently a conceptual definition of mindfulness does not exist (Bishop et al, 2004). This is because experiencing mindfulness is subjective and everyone’s experiences are unique. As people become immersed in the practice, they will find their own way of understanding what it means to be mindful in life.
2.2.1 Misconceptions associated with mindfulness practice.

Some people are conflicted to participate in mindfulness due to the misconceptions of how mindfulness should be practiced, what it means to be mindful, and its religious and cultural association (Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne, 2013). Mindfulness is a practice meant to inspire and influence people for the better, rather than be used as a replacement of their needs (Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne, 2013). Mindfulness is not: “something that oversteps private boundaries, therapy rather than teaching, retraumatizing, mandatory, religion, or self-centered with no engagement with society” (Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne, 2013, p. 105). One of the largest misconceptions is that practicing mindfulness is a religious experience because of its association with Buddhism (Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne, 2013). Instead, mindfulness is an outlet that can bring people together no matter their religious affiliation. Mindfulness does not associate with a supernatural world or a concept of a divine that influences personal behaviours (Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne, 2013).

Mindfulness is not considered to be a relaxation or mood management technique, rather it is a form of mental training to decrease cognitive vulnerability that may trigger stress and heighten emotional distress (Bishop et al, 2004). Mindfulness is not about dwelling on past or future life experiences, but rather people should experience the present moment with their fullest potential (Germer, 2004). Regardless of the nature of someone’s personal thoughts when being mindful, these feelings should be acknowledged and not ignored (Germer, 2004).

Another common misconception of mindfulness practices is that they have to be experienced in private (Purser and Loy, 2013). Although mindfulness is a method that achieves self-fulfillment the practice itself can be enjoyed by many people at the same time (Purser and Loy, 2013). It is also important to acknowledge that being mindful requires that the people practicing are respectful of other people’s boundaries and personal feelings (Flor Rotne & Flor
Rotne, 2013). It is essential that these misconceptions are expressed with people who practice mindfulness in order for participants to enjoy an optimal experience.

2.3 Why Mindfulness is Relevant and its Association with the Brain

Through the use of MRI scans and neuroplasticity, scientific research has been able to help prove how mindfulness effects brain activity (Hölzel et al, 2011). Research studies have revealed that mindfulness can take its effect in as little as eight weeks (Hölzel et al, 2011). Using meditation practice frequently for long periods of time can change the brain’s structure due to higher amounts of grey matter in the orbito-frontal cortex (Luders et al, 2009). Post-traumatic stress disorder has been associated with a decreased volume of the hippocampus which has also been linked to developing stress-related psychopathology (Hölzel, et al., 2011). This discovery has sparked interest in people to begin using mindfulness in their daily lives to manage stress. Mindfulness has also been proven to affect people’s working memory (Jha, Stanley, Kiyonaga, Wong, & Gelfand, 2010). Because of these discoveries, neuroscience influences the prevalence that mindfulness has on western society. This prominence has sparked the interest of educators to use mindfulness in their classrooms.

2.3.1 Changes in the brain linked to mindfulness.

Meditation practice has been able to benefit higher-order cognitive functions and alter brain activity (Leuders et al, 2009). MRI scans show that after an eight-week course of mindfulness meditation practice, the brain’s “fight or flight” center, the amygdala, appears to shrink (Ireland, 2014). The amygdala is an almond-shaped mass of nerves that controls people’s feelings, in particularly the feeling of rage (LeDoux, 1998). This primal region of the brain, associated with fear and emotion, is involved in the start of the body’s response to stress (Taren
As the amygdala shrinks, the pre-frontal cortex – associated with higher order brain functions such as awareness, concentration, sensory information processing, and decision-making – becomes thicker (Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne, 2013). Therefore, when people are less stressed they are able to think clearer, be more relaxed, and focus more on the present moment (Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne, 2013). Mindfulness has also been linked to structural changes in the hippocampus through increased volumes which heightens learning and memory (Taren et al., 2013). Regular practice of meditation is associated with increased thickness of the frontal cortex which is correlated with the part of the brain that controls somatosensory, auditory, visual and interceptive processing (Lazar et al., 2005). If meditation is practiced regularly it can also slow down age-related thinning of the frontal cortex (Lazar et al., 2005).

In recent MRI studies, mindfulness practice has been associated with increased density of gray matter in the brain when compared with people who do not meditate (Hölzel, et al., 2011). Significantly larger amounts of gray matter were detected in people who meditated in the right orbito-frontal cortex (Luders et al., 2009). The orbito-frontal region of the brain has been implicated in emotional regulation and response control (Luders et al., 2009). The increased grey matter in these areas allow for people who meditate to cultivate positive emotions, be more emotionally stable, and be more mindful (Luders et al., 2009). Overall, a higher amount of gray matter in the frontal cortex and the hippocampus corresponds with improved functioning in the relevant area (Hölzel, et al., 2011). Since these changes in the brain have been proven to be associated with mindfulness, the practice has started to gain popularity and acceptance in western societies.

2.4 The Outcomes of Mindfulness Specific to Schooling

Since mindfulness has become more pervasive researchers such as Barseghian, Hutchins,
and Patterson (2008), have begun exploring the benefits of using mindfulness in the classroom. Practicing mindfulness can have many positive correlations related to academic success in students. This is especially seen in children who suffer from anxiety or have learning difficulties (Beauchemin, Hutchins, & Patterson, 2008). Mindfulness programs can build skills for boosting mental health, enhancing achievement, and improving classroom behaviour (Barseghian, 2013). Therefore, if teachers practice mindfulness for small amounts of time each day, it can produce a positive learning space for students.

2.4.1 The effect of mindfulness on academic success.

Studies have indicated that when students practice mindfulness they have a higher chance of succeeding in school. This is because “unlike mindless individuals, mindful people actively think about what they are going to do in the present context and why they do what they do” (Brown & Ryan, p. 823). In a controlled study conducted by Radel, Sarrazin, Legrain, & Gobancé (2009) it was concluded that “this variable {mindfulness} seems to be a relevant defensive mechanism for controlling the negative impulses of environmental priming allowing people to act more in accordance with their personal goals and desires” (p.11). This reveals that students who practice mindfulness are increasingly motivated to complete their tasks in order to achieve their academic goals. Not only were students more motivated when practicing mindfulness but they were also more engaged in lessons (Radel et al, 2009). Since meditation allows for students to increase their coping mechanisms, self-regulation, and enhance their relationships with their peers, it will also improve their overall school environment (Wisner et al., 2010). In additions, mindfulness is associated with students having higher memory retention due to the mental training that is involved (Jha et al, 2010). This is beneficial because having a strong working memory has been linked to academic success in the ability to process and
remember information, verbal comprehension and strong processing skills (Alloway, & Alloway, 2010).

2.4.2 Mindfulness can improve self-regulation.

Self-regulation is highly spoken about in educational systems and is an important skill that children need for success. To self-regulate, is to be aware of one’s actions and their surrounding environment. Both teachers and students can benefit from tightening their self-regulation. For teachers, this could include delaying their reaction time when coming across a conflict in the classroom. When teachers become more mindful they are able to handle higher stress level problems in a more effective manner. A kindergarten staff had a positive response to the practice, she said, “I love having mindfulness. I can use mindfulness to keep my attention on a problematic situation, and through it find new ideas and solutions” (Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne, 2013, p. 122). Practicing mindfulness can increase student’s ability to self-regulate because, using mindfulness techniques at home and in the classroom heighten student’s motor skills (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Lower stress levels are also associated with higher self-regulation skills among students (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Mindfulness training is known to be a superior tool for cognitive training because it targets both top-down and bottom-up influences on self-regulation (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Therefore, practicing mindfulness is an activity that can benefit both teachers and students because it allows for them to affectively become aware of their own behaviour.

2.4.3 Mindfulness aids in the emotional well-being of students and teachers.

It is important that educators and their students take care of their mental health in order to succeed academically, professionally, and in their personal lives. In some instances, people may
find it difficult to do so or ignore signs that they should receive mental help. Mindfulness is a tool that can be used to prevent some aspects of mental health issues as it has been associated with psychological well-being (Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). It is important that schools and educators can emotionally support their staff and students in order to avoid teacher burnout and to strengthen relationships between teachers and students. People who meditate report experiencing higher levels of self-compassion and a higher overall sense of well-being (Keng et al., 2011). Meditation is also associated with lower levels of thought suppression, fear of emotion, and difficulties with emotion regulation, compared to non-meditators (Keng et al., 2011). Overall, evidence from correlational research reveals that mindfulness is positively associated with psychological health, such as greater levels of life contentment, adaptive emotion regulation, and more energy in their daily lives (Keng et al, 2011). It is important that teachers and students in educational institutions benefit from mindfulness in order to diminish the possibility of struggling emotionally. It is an advantage that mindfulness can be practiced in groups because people may be more comfortable seeking emotional comfort in this way.

2.4.4 Mindfulness can aid in supporting anger management in schools.

With the pressures and chaos that come with being an educator it is without a doubt that teachers will experience stress and even anger at some point during their careers. Teachers who carry feelings of anger inside them pose the risk of creating a negative learning environment for their students. Students also suffer from stress and anger throughout their school careers and therefore should be taught healthy ways to deal with these feelings. Researchers such as Bishop, Wright, Day and Howells, confirm that mindfulness can help aid in dealing with stress, anxiety, and anger management. This is because training in mindfulness attempts to increase awareness of thoughts, emotions, by using maladaptive ways of responding to stress (Bishop et al., 2004).
Using mindfulness enables teachers and students to cope with stress in healthier and more effective ways (Bishop et al., 2004). Doing breathing exercises or practicing meditation can support teachers and students and help them calm down from stress and/or anger (Flor Rotne and Flor Rotne, 2013). Mindfulness coping techniques can also help reduce the emotional reactivity provoked by an observation or interaction; this allows people to control their anger-related sensations effectively (Wright, Day & Howells, 2009). Applying mindfulness skills like breathing techniques allow an individual to step back from an emotional disturbance and view their experience as an emotional state that will pass in time (Wright, Day & Howells, 2009).

Using mindfulness techniques has much to offer for people who struggle with controlling their anger. This is because mindfulness fosters resilience through the use of positive emotional states and can promote calm feelings (Wright, Day & Howells, 2009).

### 2.5 Avoiding Teacher Burnout

Primary teachers have been known to suffer from emotional distress which can lead to occupational burnout. In fact, “teacher stress and burnout have been an ongoing challenge in education. Providing resources to increase teachers’ sense of personal efficacy and ability to manage stress may reduce burnout” (Flook, et al, 2013, p.183). Occupational burnout is known as a “syndrome consisting of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of feeling of accomplishment in one’s work” (Rosner & Schonert-Reichl et al, 2013, p.2-3). Teachers and educators may experience burnout for multiple reasons including the social emotional demands of working with up to 30 children, having grade split classes, the uncertain nature about teaching, the flexibility and creativity involved, and having to make impulsive decisions regularly (Rosner & Schonert-Reichl et al, 2013). Teachers themselves report that they have experienced burnout from their “workload, lack of collaborative time with colleagues, lack of support from
administrators, and the management of difficult student behavior in the classroom are among the most stressful aspects of their jobs” (Rosner & Schonert-Reichl et al, 2013, p. 2).

The model of mindfulness training motivates teachers to focus more on their occupational health and personal wellbeing. Professionals who have been involved in a mindfulness course experienced reductions in stress, depression, and anxiety (Gold et al, 2010). As a result, increased health and well-being among teachers would lead to “greater occupational engagement and satisfaction with lower rates of absenteeism, occupational burnout, health care use, and leaving the profession because of stress and burnout” (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012, p. 170). Overall, it is important that teachers in schools feel supported by their colleagues in order to contribute to their emotional well-being. Therefore, mindfulness practice in schools is an effective preventative measure for avoiding teacher burnout.

2.6 How Teachers Incorporate Mindfulness into Their Classrooms

There are many different techniques available for educators to use when practicing mindfulness in their classrooms. These strategies must be mindful, receptive, generative and reflective and can be demonstrated through posture; breathing; attention; and visualization (Fisher, 2006). For example, practicing good posture in a primary class can be done at any time while the children are in their seats. The teacher can instruct students to become aware of their bodies by requesting the class to imagine an invisible thread pulling them up straight (Fisher, 2006). This activity can easily be incorporated into daily routines despite busy schedules (Fisher, 2006). Breath is also important for practicing mindfulness and can be practiced in the classroom. For example, the classroom teacher can lead the class in breathing exercises before a test to have students relax. Students can also participate in small amounts of yoga or “walking” mindfulness exercises during “DPA”. In addition, many educators use a mindfulness bell as a
way to get their student’s attention and for the use of classroom management (Willard, 2010). Mindfulness can also be practiced formally and informally. An example of formal mindfulness is meditation (Meijklejohn, 2012). Meditation can be performed while sitting, lying down, standing, or moving while paying close attention to thoughts, feelings, and body sensations (Meijklejohn, 2012). Informal mindfulness practice refers to “the weaving of mindful awareness into activities of everyday life, such as showering, walking, eating, and interpersonal interactions” (Meijklejohn, 2012, p. 292). Teachers can resort to both informal and formal mindfulness in their classrooms daily in order to enrich the lives of their students’.

2.6.1 Challenges associated with teaching mindfulness in the classroom.

At times, teachers experience obstacles when trying to incorporate mindfulness into their classrooms because they may feel insecure of their abilities to facilitate mindfulness in their classroom (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This is because “mindfulness meditation is not simply a method that one encounters for a brief time at a professional seminar and then passes on to others for use as needed when they find themselves tense or stressed” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p.149). It may take time for educators to become comfortable with teaching mindful techniques to others and may require them to engage in more professional development on mindfulness. Another concern that teachers have is how to describe mindfulness techniques to children in a way that they can understand (Greco & Hayes, 2008). This is increasingly challenging for primary teachers. Educators also face difficulty in getting their students to take mindfulness practice seriously and fear that they will not experience the benefits because of this (Greco & Hayes, 2008). Sometimes, teachers themselves face challenges when trying to bring mindfulness practice into their classrooms. For example, there be a lack of motivation by schools to encourage mindfulness amongst their students and faculty (Meiklejohn et al, 2012). If mindfulness is
misunderstood, it will be difficult for teachers to spread this practice within their schools. Too add, the preconceptions about meditation, and the obstacle of meditating in groups with sometimes noisy environments can also hinder the practice of mindfulness in classrooms (Wisner, Jones, & Gwin, 2010).

It is important to be aware that mindfulness may not be the best technique for all students. This is because pupils who have difficulty concentrating or focusing also have trouble meditating (Wisner et al., 2010). Some students can also experience drowsiness which interferes negatively with meditation (Wisner et al., 2010). It is also important to consider school settings that have strict schedules dedicated to following the curriculum. Therefore, it is important to provide meditation activities that can easily be incorporated into a school setting that are practical and transferable (Wisner et al., 2010). Bringing mindfulness into classroom environments can be challenging, however overcoming these obstacles could allow for a better overall wellbeing for teachers and students.

2.6.2 Mindfulness and cross-curricular integration.

There is not a lot of research available that explains how mindfulness can be integrated in the curriculum. However, Broderick and Metz conducted the first known study which reports how mindfulness programs can be integrated through cross curricular integration (2011). The “Learning to BREATHE” mindfulness curriculum was created for adolescents to use in classroom settings so that students could better understand their emotions, thoughts, and feelings through group settings (Broderic and Metz, 2011). The program was not mandatory and was offered to students during lunch periods and study halls who were interested in learning about stress management (Broderic and Metz, 2011). In order to ensure the “Learning to BREATHE” program was suitable for a school curriculum the objectives were linked to standards of various
curricular areas such as school health and school professionals (Broderic and Metz, 2011). The program was comprised of multiple lessons that included a short introduction of the topic of mindfulness, along with several activities for groups to participate in, and the opportunity for in-class mindfulness practice (Broderic and Metz, 2011). Students who participated in the study reported increased feelings of calmness, emotion regulation, greater awareness and overall clarity of their feelings and emotions (Broderic and Metz, 2011).

The in school mindfulness program was successful at showing students how to let go of distressing thoughts and feelings in order to manage stress (Broderic and Metz, 2011). One student explained their feelings of the mindfulness program by stating, “I learned that I can control the way I react to things and that nothing is too overwhelming for me to handle” (Broderic and Metz, 2011, p.43). This study affirms that bringing mindfulness programs to school environments through cross curricular integration enhances the wellbeing of students. It is important that mindfulness and cross curricular integration is explored further as it can improve the current educational system.

2.7 Conclusion

In this literature review I looked at research on how mindfulness influences students, teachers, and schools. I also reviewed the influence that neuroscience has had on the increasing popularity of mindfulness in today’s society. Mindfulness has also been proven to be an effective mechanism to help teachers and students with their emotional wellbeing. This review elucidates the extent that mindfulness has on the educational system and great attention has been paid to helping students succeed academically and socially in school environments. It also raises questions about the ability of practicing mindfulness in schools due to outside obstacles and points to the need for further research in the areas of mindfulness in the curriculum. In light of
this, the purpose of my research is to learn how teachers infuse mindfulness pedagogy in
curriculum and classroom routines in order to enrich their students’ learning. Through the use of
a qualitative research study it will become clearer how mindfulness can be infused into the
Ontario curriculum.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

In this chapter I explain the research methodology, identifying the various methodological decisions that I have made, and my rationale for these choices, given the research purpose and questions. I begin with a discussion of the research approach and procedure, before describing the main instrument of data collection. I then identify the participants of the study, listing the sampling criteria, describing the sampling procedures, and providing some information on the participants. I proceed to describe how I have analyzed the data, before recognizing relevant ethical issues that have been considered and addressed. Lastly, I speak to some of the methodological limitations of the study, while also highlighting and acknowledging the strengths.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach, including a review of the existing literature relevant to the research questions and purpose of the study, and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with two educators. Qualitative research has a lot of value as it gives the ability for the researcher to have one-to-one personal communication and a therapeutic touch (Johnson and Waterfield, 2004). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) believe that qualitative research “leads the researcher to adopt particular views of the “other” who is studied” (p.21). This offers a lot of benefits for the researcher as it gives them the ability to study the emotions, feelings, and point of views of their participants. Johnson and Waterfield, (2004) claim that “instead of trying to control extraneous variables, qualitative research takes the view that reality is socially constructed by each individual and should be interpreted rather than measured; that understanding cannot be separated from context” (p.123). This is an effective approach for
my research study as the information that I am exploring cannot be measured quantitatively because I am learning from the experiences of others in their natural environments.

There is a lot of value in qualitative research in the social sciences of education that quantitative research cannot reach. This is because “statistical research is not able to take full account of the many interaction effects that take place in social settings” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.523). Strauss and Corbin (1990) claim that “qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known” (p. 523). This relates to my research study because I seek to discover a topic that is not widely recognized in the world of education. In addition, qualitative research can easily be understood by a broad range of people especially teachers and educators. Qualitative data also has the ability to describe a phenomenon from both the researcher’s perspective and the reader’s perspective (Hoepfl, 1997). Hoepfl (1997) argues the merit in qualitative research by stating, "qualitative research reports, typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world, may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus more meaningful” (p. 524). I seek to report on data that can be understood in a meaningful manner by teachers across Canada in order for mindfulness to be incorporated into their classrooms.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used in this study was the semi-structured interview protocol. Barriball and While (1994) reveal that semi structured interviews are “well suited for the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (p. 334).
This semi-structured format allows for the interviewer to design and plan an interview that fits the needs of their research inquires. This method also enables the participants to elaborate and bring attention to new information that the researcher may have not anticipated. The semi-structured interview was of great interest to me because it allowed for the interviewer to probe the participants. This gave me the opportunity to clarify any responses if necessary, explore sensitive issues, elicit valuable and complete information, and help respondents recall information for questions involving memory (Barriball and While, 1994). Semi-structured interviews can also allow the interviewer and respondent to establish a rapport. Barriball and While (1994) reveals that this is important as it “can reduce the risk of socially desirable answers” (p.331). Using semi-structured interviews will allow me to hear about the participant’s life experiences that relate to mindfulness in the classroom and specific curriculum areas.

I organized my semi-structured interviews to be in person in order to establish comfort and rapport between the interviewer and the participant. In addition, I organized my protocol (located in Appendix B) into 4 sections, beginning with the participant’s background information, followed by the participant’s perspective and beliefs of mindfulness, then their experiences related to Mindfulness in education and curriculum areas, and concluding with questions regarding supports, challenges, and next steps for teachers who believe in incorporating mindfulness into their classrooms. Examples of questions include:

- What does Mindfulness mean to you?
- What specific mindfulness practices do you use with students?
3.3 Participants

Here I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and I review a range of possible avenues for teacher recruitment. I have also included a section where I will introduce each of the participants who have contributed to this research study.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria.

The following criteria was applied to teacher participants:

1. Teachers and school counsellors have demonstrated leadership implementing this practice.
2. Teachers and school counsellors have been working in the field of Education, for at least 5 years.
3. Participants use mindfulness techniques within their practice as an educator.
4. Participants use mindfulness in a school environment and their personal life.
5. Teachers and school counsellors are working in the Greater Toronto Area.

In order to address the main research question, the participants that I interviewed had experience working with mindfulness in school settings and their own personal lives. This is because I am interested in learning about the impact that mindfulness has on children and teachers who use mindfulness to benefit their overall wellbeing. Furthermore, to explore the impact of mindfulness in education, participants that were chosen to participate in the study regularly used mindfulness practices. This was important because they needed to be able to determine if they had seen changes in their students. I chose one participant to partake in the study who practices mindfulness on a personal level in order to understand how mindfulness
effects their personal wellbeing. For example, I found out how mindfulness techniques influence their workplace stress.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures and recruitment.

Purposeful and convenience sampling are two recruitment strategies that are commonly used in qualitative research. Marshall (1996) explains convenience sampling as “the least rigorous technique, involving the selection of the most accessible subjects. It is the least costly to the researcher, in terms of time, effort and money, but may result in poor quality data and lacks intellectual credibility” (p.523). Purposeful sampling can be described as a process where the researcher consciously selects the most productive sample to answer their research question (Marshall, 1996). Marshall (1996) believes that “this can involve developing a framework of the variables that might influence an individual's contribution and will be based on the researcher's practical knowledge of the research area, the available literature and evidence from the study itself” (p.523). For the purpose of my research study I used a combination of both convenience and purposeful sampling. Convenience sampling was prevalent because I found participants who lived in the greater Toronto Area and through personal and professional connections. I used purposeful sampling because I had specific criteria that my small sample of participants must have met. This allowed me to have participants who could enrich my data and help me answer my research question. Lastly, I used snowball sampling when participants were recommended to me in order to fulfill my research criteria needs (Marshall, 1996).

3.3.3 Participant bios.

Two participants were chosen to participate in the study. In order to keep the data diverse, I chose to interview a school counsellor (Erin) and a school teacher (David). Both
participants of the present study are professionals in the field of education in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada. Erin is a school counsellor at a private Jewish school and David is a classroom teacher at a publicly funded Ontario school. Each participant has at least five years’ experience working with students using mindfulness. The participants will remain anonymous through pseudonyms.

Erin

Erin is a registered social worker and psychologist who is currently working as a school counsellor. She has 23 years of experience working with students in K-8. During this time, she has taught social skills, conflict resolution skills, and mindfulness to students in JK to Grade 8 as well as health education. She also leads students and teachers in social skills training and therapeutic interventions with her student’s families and teachers.

David

David has been an educator for 13 years and currently teaches Grade 7 and 8 literacy, health, and history. He also has a Masters degree in Counselling Psychology. David has previously taught primary classes in prep coverage and Grades 4-8 homeroom. In his current school David is known as the mental health resource teacher due to his extensive experience in psychotherapy, counselling, and mindfulness.

3.4 Data Analysis

I went through many different stages of data analysis once I have interviewed my sample of participants. First I transcribed my notes verbatim through coding (Lacey and Luff, 2009). After transcription I organized my data through easily retrievable sections (Lacey and Luff,
2009). Through my analysis of the data I realized the importance of familiarizing myself with the data by closely reviewing the qualitative data, which includes creating memos and summaries before I began the formal analysis (Lacey and Luff, 2009). Once I established themes I engaged in re-coding to develop more well defined categories (Lacey and Luff, 2009). I also looked into “null data” and analyzing why my participants did not speak to certain questions or raised certain ideas that the literature deemed important.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Ethical review procedures are necessary because ethical concerns can be present in any kind of research (Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden, 2001). The point of an ethical review is to minimize harm. Therefore, an ethical review was applied to this research study to ensure that I abided by high ethical standards throughout the research process.

In order to follow ethical protocol all of the participants in this study were assigned a pseudonym and they were notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research study. The identities of my participants will remain confidential along with any identifying markers related to where they work or the identity of their students will be excluded. The protection of human subjects is imperative (Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden, 2001). I informed participants that they have the right to refrain from answering any question that they do not feel comfortable with. All of the participants in my study were given the opportunity to clarify statements and review the transcript before I conducted data analysis. All of the data recorded from the interviews in the form of audio recordings will be stored on my password protected laptop and were destroyed immediately after use. Furthermore, participants signed a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their consent to be interviewed as well as audio-
recorded. This consent letter provides an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications, and specifies expectations of participation (one 45-60-minute semi-structured interview). There are no known risks involved with participating in this study.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Due to the scope of this research study there were some methodological limitations that occurred. Given the ethical parameters that my research study has been approved for I can only interview teachers and school counsellors. It was not possible for me to extend my scope to interview students or parents. To add, I did not have approval to participate in classroom observations. This is a limitation because “observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account obtained in an interview (Merriam, 2002). I was also limited in the number of teachers and school counsellors I could interview to 2-3. I also recognize that the findings in my research study can enable me to inform the topic at hand but they cannot generalize the experience of teachers and school counsellors as a whole.

This research study also has many methodological strengths as conducting face-to-face interviews allowed me to hear from my participants in more depth and sincerity than a survey would allow for (Barriball and While, 1994). I also was able to create a space where teachers and school counsellors could speak to what matters most to them in relation to mindfulness in educational settings which validates and gives meaning to their experiences. Dearnly (2005) believes that, “semi-structured interviews allow for all participants to be asked the same questions within a flexible framework” (p.22). Participants were also encouraged to talk about their experiences through open ended questions. This gave educators the opportunity to reflect on
their practices and explain how they use mindfulness theory and practice in their own unique ways.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research methodology. I began with a discussion of the research approach and procedure, delving into the meaning and significance of qualitative research and highlighting some its major differences from quantitative research. I then described the process of data collection, and identified semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data for my study. This is because the benefits they provide coincides perfectly with my research needs. I then identified the participants of the study, listing the criteria applied to all interviewees, and provided brief introductions for those selected. I chose to sampling methods such as purposeful, convenience and snowball sampling due to the overall extent and scope of the research study. I proceeded to describe how I analyzed the data by examining individual interviews before looking for common themes across the data. Ethical issues such as consent, risks of participation, member-checks, right to withdraw, and data storage were also considered, and ways to address these potential issues were recognized. Lastly, I discussed the methodological limitations of the study, such as the interpretive abilities and biases of the researcher, while also highlighting some of the strengths, such as face to face interviews with teachers and school counsellors. It is clear that the interview protocol chosen for this study allowed for the best possible learning outcomes. In the next chapter, I report on the findings of the research.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings that emerged through the data analysis of the research interviews. Throughout the analysis, I was constantly aware of my research question: How do a sample of elementary teachers integrate mindfulness into their teaching through curriculum based learning? In the discussion, connections are drawn between participants’ experiences and observations and the Chapter 2 literature review. Findings are organized into four main themes:

1. Educators believe that practicing mindfulness in schools creates positive spaces in the classroom by highlighting gratitude and bringing mental health awareness to schools.
2. Teachers argue that mindfulness practices can be integrated across many Ontario curriculum subject areas.
3. Participants found that mindfulness techniques prevent anxiety and stress that students experience in the classroom which enhances academic achievement among students.
4. Educators revealed specific types of student and teacher outcomes that are identified through the use of mindfulness practices in the classroom.

These themes also have sub-themes that further illustrate how they play out in school and classroom environments. For each theme, I will first describe it, then report on the data, and lastly discuss the significance of each theme within the context of the existing literature.
4.1 Practicing Mindfulness in Schools Creates Positive Spaces in the Classroom by Highlighting Gratitude and Bringing Mental Health Awareness to Schools

Participants expressed that mindfulness practices are essential in schools because they help create positive spaces for students to learn. In turn, participants saw that this creates higher academic outcomes due to an increased level of engagement. Participants also argued that managing the mental health of students and staff is also an important component to an effective learning environment. Therefore, participants revealed the importance of teaching mindfulness techniques as it gives students a safe outlet to express their emotions both in and out of the classroom. Lastly, a participant argued that a lot of children need to be taught how to express social emotions like gratitude and respect as it does not always come naturally. Therefore, educators feel that mindfulness techniques are great outlets for this type of teaching to happen.

4.1.1 Mindfulness creates positive spaces in the classroom.

Participants indicated that using mindfulness in classroom settings helps create safe learning environments that foster student engagement. David specified by revealing that students need a sense of calm in order to be successful in the tasks that they approach. David has observed instances where his students are calm and ready to learn because of their use of mindfulness. As a result, they are more engaged in the lesson and their tasks. When students are calm, it fosters a safe learning environment where students are able to speak freely and respectfully with their peers. Erin also acknowledged the importance of creating a mindful space for students in the classroom. She believes that all classrooms should incorporate mindful corners or areas where students can go if they need to refocus or take a minute for themselves. She realized that this helps create a positive and reflective space for students which is necessary in order to foster safe learning environments. This was a specific strategy not discussed in the
existing literature and offers new insight on how to incorporate mindfulness practice through specific pedagogy. The literature also acknowledged the importance of safe spaces in schools. Flor Rotne & Flor Ronte (2013) noted that mindfulness assists in creating a calm and safe environment for students so they can become more engaged in their learning.

### 4.1.2 Mindfulness brings mental health awareness and practices to schools.

David strongly advocated for the use of mindfulness techniques to help with mental health issues because he argued that it is the least intrusive and confrontational method. He suggested that mindfulness can help students build resilience and enhance their overall wellbeing. He also revealed that it is prevention that is the most important aspect of mindfulness. This is because mindfulness equips students with the proper tools to cope with everyday feelings, experiences and challenges. David explained,

> these are just good practices that people can have in their lives anyway and especially in today's world when there is so much social media and so much internet. These things can become second nature to our students lives but what ends up happening is things that we may have taken for granted like being able to be on your own, being comfortable in silence, those kinds of things, it helps to practice those skills that will also be necessary. Otherwise students always have this kind of frenetic energy about them but they don't really know what to do with.

Erin also spoke to this and believes that educators can use multiple mindful techniques to help regulate emotions such as sadness. She explained another technique that focuses on addressing feelings,

> I use the image of holding a balloon on your birthday but I said how often do you hold that balloon? You let it go and it is the same thing with your emotions and your sadness,
you don’t carry that burden for the whole year; after 10 minutes of the party that balloon is gone so you can do the same thing with your anger. So I will remind students that just like a balloon they need to try and let go of their negative feelings.

David and Erin’s approach to mental health is also conveyed in the literature. For example, Keng, Smoski, and Robins (2011) revealed that mindfulness is a tool that can be used to prevent some aspects of mental health issues as it has been associated with psychological well-being. Providing mental health techniques for teachers to use in schools has also been suggested as aiding in removing the emotional and behavioral barriers to learning which will enhance their students’ potential for academic achievement (Gouze, Lim, & Walter, 2006). This aligns with David and Erin’s beliefs because they strongly advocated for the use of mindfulness to regulate students’ social-emotional wellbeing as well as help foster positive outcomes for their academic success.

4.1.3 Mindfulness brings awareness to important social emotions such as gratitude.

Erin argued that it is important for children to be mindful of their surroundings so that they can appreciate them more. Erin claimed that students have the ability to be mindful already, for example when they read a book for a long time or play games because they are able to focus for long periods of time. However, Erin acknowledged that activities such as the fast pace of the curriculum and recess, can prevent students from really being mindful. Nonetheless, Erin argued that children are so far removed from where things come from that they expect that everything is just there. A new finding that Erin suggested was that as educators we must make students think about things, appreciate things more, appreciate relationships more, and take the time to thank people in their lives. Sometimes students even need to be taught how to be grateful because it
might not always be there. David also agreed that focusing on the here and now helps students become aware of their surroundings, but did not mention the teaching of gratitude. The literature speaks to Erin’s beliefs because it discloses that mindfulness has also been linked to a “heightened activation in brain regions responsible for regulating attention and positive affective states including empathy and other prosocial emotions” (Bonus et al., 2013, p.2). Wisner et al. (2010) also mentioned that meditation allows for students to increase their coping mechanisms, self-regulation, and enhance their relationships with their peers. This connects to Erin’s suggestion that educators must make students think about things, appreciate things more, appreciate relationships more, and take the time to thank people in their lives.

4.2 Teachers Argue That Mindfulness Practices Can Be Integrated Across Many Ontario Curriculum Subject Areas

Both participants agree that they see mindfulness strategies being integrated throughout the curriculum rather than being taught as its own course. Both participants recognize that mindfulness techniques can be coordinated to fit into character building, learning skills, literacy classes, health, mental health awareness, and daily physical activity. Furthermore, both participants spoke to how they incorporate mindfulness practices cross circularly and the importance of doing so in terms of creating the best opportunities for academic success.

4.2.1 Mindfulness can help students improve their learning skills.

David and Erin agreed that mindfulness practices can be incorporated and integrated into many aspects of the Ontario curriculum. David revealed that “mindfulness can be added to that category of things that are necessary for teaching to happen, so in that respect it connects to all curriculum areas.” More specifically, David affirmed that mindfulness can be integrated into
specific curriculum expectations like learning skills because it helps students self-regulate and monitor their own behaviour. This generated stronger conflict resolution among peers and positive and reflective character education. Erin also added that any type of character trait building is related to mindfulness. She disclosed, “when you are asking children to be respectful, responsible, optimistic, and resilient, these are all character traits that can be linked to being mindful. The whole concept of optimism and positive education is totally linked in with mindfulness.” Participants claimed that mindfulness connects to conflict resolution because it is teaching students to be aware of what they are saying to their peers. Therefore, participants believe that mindfulness education in schools’ help foster character education and positive learning skills that are necessary for learning in the classroom.

4.2.2 Mindfulness practices coordinate well with specific curriculum areas such as literacy, music, health, and daily physical activity (DPA).

Both David and Erin agreed that incorporating mindful language throughout the day will benefit students’ overall academic success. This is because students are paying more attention to what they are doing in the classroom more specifically, paying attention to what they are reading. David and Erin both spoke to how mindful strategies enhance literacy skills. Erin specifically mentioned that mindfulness helped students understand what they have read and encouraged students to pay attention to what they are writing. Erin revealed many ways in which mindfulness can be integrated into the literacy curriculum. For example, students can participate in weekly gratitude journaling, emotional journaling, as well as reading books on mindfulness. Erin described emotional journal writing as having “children write down what they are experiencing that day, and therefore, they become more mindful about the experiences that they are having.” This type of journal writing can be used to assess students’ literacy skills.
Other curriculum areas that mindfulness can be covered in is Health with a connection to mental health and substance abuse. David argued that teaching mindfulness techniques like meditation, mindful breathing, and relaxation strategies, better students’ overall mental health and has a place in the Ontario curriculum. In this context David believes that teaching students mindfulness strategies will build their resilience and better their overall mental health. In order to build resilience among his students, David conducted a mindfulness activity where he asked students to identify areas of resilience in their lives, whether it was family or hobbies that they had. The goal of this was to bring awareness to the positivity that is currently in the students’ lives in order to connect it to their own resilience. David described an outcome of this activity where he highlighted that “students started to understand that they cannot be anxious and relaxed at the same time.” This helped students realize that they should try and focus on being relaxed in order to help eliminate any anxiousness they were experiencing. These techniques enhanced the delivery of the Ontario Health curriculum because it gave David a strategy to teach in a way that was beneficial and meaningful for students.

Erin believes that music class is a great curriculum area to incorporate mindfulness techniques. She spoke to using language like, “be mindful as you listen to the music,” as this encouraged students to pay close attention to specific sounds and music notes. Teachers can also use mindful language to encourage reflection and questioning based on their experiences of listening to and recording their own music. Erin also encouraged teachers to use mindfulness as a form of daily physical activity (DPA) through the practice of yoga. These activities included having moments of meditation throughout the day and using yoga as a way to de-stress and benefit from physical activity when the students may feel fatigued. Erin encouraged the use of meditation as a great addition to DPA routines because it does not have to be restricted to sitting
and breathing, it can also be completed through movements. The literature affirms the observations discussed by Erin and David as a similar definition of mindfulness has been provided. For example, Meijklejohn (2012) reinforces the notion that meditation can be performed while sitting, lying down, standing, or moving while paying close attention to thoughts, feelings, and body sensations. Students and teachers can incorporate mindfulness into their everyday learning as a mechanism for concentration, self-regulation, stress, mental health, and physical activity (Schonert-Reichl, & Lawlor, 2010). Participants have embodied this in their own classrooms by creating mindful corners, practicing yoga, and conducting mindfulness techniques before tests to decrease stress.

4.3 Participants Found That Mindfulness Techniques Prevent Anxiety and Stress That Students Experience in The Classroom Which Enhances Academic Achievement Among Students

Both participants expressed their belief that mindfulness practices reduce stress and anxiety in their students, especially during exceptionally nerve-wracking times like when writing tests. These emotions should be addressed in order to help students feel ready and confident before engaging in assessments as this will boost their academic outcomes. In order for this to occur one participant revealed that students need to be able to identify when they are feeling stressed or struggling with anxiety in order to properly address the issue. Furthermore, both participants gave their insights on specific mindfulness techniques to incorporate in the classroom that students can engage in as a whole class or individually when they begin to feel a rush of anxiety or stress.
4.3.1 Mindfulness helps students self-regulate and manage their emotions.

Erin spoke to the importance of having students recognize when they are stressed so they can become aware of their emotions and feelings throughout the day. She emphasized this importance because “you want students to be aware of how they are feeling within themselves because you want children to start to recognize when they are stressed or when they have had enough or when the work is too difficult.” She expressed this because it will help them be able to self-regulate their emotions and be proactive with their stress management. Erin also explained that if students can recognize a moment where they begin to become anxious or stressed it will be easier for them to manage it. David also advocated that “prevention is worth an ounce of cure,” meaning, it is important for students to be aware of mindful strategies to regulate their stress and anxiety. David explained that when students can regulate and manage their stress they are able to be more focused and present in the here and now. One technique that Erin suggested students use to prevent anxiety was mindful breathing. Erin spoke to how this would look in a classroom, when she revealed, “everyone can stand up and take a deep breath and blow the air out like you are blowing bubbles or blowing out candles.” She suggested to use this technique for younger children. She also recommended that students participate in mindful walking around the classroom to calm themselves down. The literature validates Erin’s methods as training in mindfulness attempts to increase awareness of thoughts and emotions, by using specific methods to respond to stress (Bishop et al., 2004). David’s belief that students can regulate and manage their stress and be more focused in the here and now is also confirmed in the literature. Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne (2013) revealed that when people are less stressed they are able to think more clearly, be more relaxed, and focus more on the present moment. This is an observation that both participants have seen among their students when using mindfulness practices.
4.3.2 Participating in mindfulness practices has a positive correlation with a reduction in test anxiety.

Many students in Ontario schools experience test anxiety and other moments of stress daily in their classrooms. Erin and David argued that these moments can be reduced and eliminated by having mindful moments in the class during uneasy times. For example, Erin and David both agreed that having mindful moments is necessary for students’ academic success because it calms their nerves and enables them to think about what they need to do in the moment to succeed. David revealed that his students experience a lot of anxiety before math tests. In order to put his students at ease he took his students through a guided imagery meditation before they begin their assessment. He explained,

I would take them through guided imagery to have them envision them writing the math test and I would have them envisioning it while also having them remain calm to give them an idea that they are feeling positive. I would say, you are looking at your test, you feel good about your answers, you notice the sense of calm and positivity that you feel as you are writing this.

By giving students time to be in this type of head space David affirmed that he has noticed a dramatic reduction in anxiety while they are writing the test, which means students can focus on their answers with a clear mind. He has also stated that when students are given the techniques like breathing exercises to lessen their stress and anxiety, they are able to create a space and moment in time where they can just be without feeling the weight of whatever is going on in their lives. His observation aligns with Flor Rotne and Flor Rotne (2013) as they suggested that breathing exercises or practicing meditation can support teachers and students by helping them calm down from stress and/or anger (Flor Rotne and Flor Rotne, 2013).
Similarly, Erin affirmed that mindfulness practices should be embraced before students engage in assessments. Erin advocates for students to take the time to breathe and relax before they write a test. Erin revealed, “I had told the teachers that before you give them a spelling test to let the children take that deep breath, to let them calm down, to let them imagine themselves watching the test so that they can be calm.” Erin suggested that using a chime or a rain stick is a great tool and students can start to associate these objects with being quiet and relaxed. This tool can be used at any time throughout the school day either as a calming chime, or to get the students’ attention in a peaceful way. Erin’s confidence in these techniques are present in the literature. For example, Wright, Day and Howells (2009) argued that applying mindfulness skills, like breathing techniques, allow an individual to step back from an emotional disturbance and view their experience as an emotional state that will pass in time. Research also indicated that mindfulness is an effective stress reduction strategy as students who use it have been able to control their disruptive behavior, reduce their anxiety, and improve their concentration and self-regulation (Holley et al., 2005). Therefore, when people are less stressed they are able to think more clearly, be more relaxed, and focus more on the present moment (Flor Rotne & Flor Rotne, 2013). This view aligns with my participants who have witnessed these outcomes among their students.

4.4 Educators Revealed Specific Types of Student and Teacher Outcomes That Are Identified Through the Use of Mindfulness Practices in The Classroom

Teachers who use mindfulness strategies in the classroom not only see the benefits in their students but also see improvements within themselves. Participants spoke to how students and teachers can experience similar benefits like a greater focus and awareness of what is happening in the classroom, an overall sense of calm, and improved emotional well-being. This
is because they are equipped with the proper tools to deal with issues such as stress and conflict resolution. The classroom management provided by the teacher is also positively affected because of the use of mindfulness techniques. Therefore, both participants argued that mindfulness practices are crucial in the classroom because of the powerful outcomes that teachers and students experience.

4.4.1 Teacher specific outcomes after implementing mindfulness.

Both participants allege that teachers who are mindful embody important qualities that all classroom teachers should display. Erin shared that not only does their teaching practice improve but often times teachers begin to experience a better emotional well-being in the workplace. Erin has observed the benefits that teachers experience from her own mindfulness workshops that she conducts. She acknowledged that mindful teachers experience less feelings of burnout, an increased sense of classroom management, and an overall better awareness of their actions and body language towards the students in their classroom. David reaffirms this argument when he revealed that “mindfulness has helped me focus on the here and now.” He also believes that “classroom management issues diminish significantly when students are being mindful,” which reduces the stress level of the classroom teacher. Mindfulness training also can have a large impact on how educators present themselves in the classroom. Erin recalled an experience where mindfulness changed the actions of a group of teachers. Erin explained,

I was doing a mindfulness training with the teachers once a week and after the session the teachers came up to me and said that when they went into their next class they were different because they used the language that I used for them in the classroom. They were more mindful of their teaching towards the children; all after they left the session with me.
She witnessed how the mindfulness training changed the way the teachers reacted to the students. “The teachers are more aware not to raise their voice, to re-explain something, to give that child the extra time to go for a walk, because she had just experienced that with me.” Erin saw how the act of mindfulness made the educator calmer towards the students. This is a strong finding that adds to the existing literature because it explains how mindfulness techniques influence educators in the classroom. The classroom teacher was also able to bring the tools that she learned right back into the classroom because it was fresh in her mind. Erin hinted towards using mindfulness training for teachers as a mechanism to create a ripple down effect for the students. This is because once the teachers model mindful behaviour, the students often start to experience the benefits for themselves. This causal relationship is also found in the literature. For example, Bonus et al. (2013) affirms that mindfulness also increases teachers’ awareness of their classroom behaviors which allows them to be more present for their students. More specifically, students will benefit from the heightened presence of their teacher while also learning mindfulness techniques to practice on their own time (Bonus et al, 2013). Erin’s suggestion that teachers should be trained in mindfulness and practice it themselves is a technique not yet suggested in the current literature and therefore is a significant finding. However, the literature does recognize that teachers who practice mindfulness techniques reported an overall improvement in their personal experiences with depression and personal stress (Bonus et al, 2013).

4.4.2 Student specific outcomes associated with using mindfulness in the classroom.

Participants indicated that when students are exposed to mindfulness strategies in the classroom they experience a variety of positive behavioral outcomes. For example, students experienced a reduction in stress and anxiety before writing tests or completing assessments.
David revealed that when he opens up a mindful space in his classroom he has seen a dramatic reduction in anxiety while they are writing a test. As a result, mindfulness enables students to remain calm, which in turn has increased their ability to focus on specific tasks.

Mindfulness practices also enable students to become better at conflict resolution because they can begin to understand different perspectives. Mindfulness gives students the ability to stop and think about their actions. Erin explained, “mindfulness can help children see a different perspective and helping children to express what their feelings are, but to respond instead of react.” Erin believes that when students respond instead of react they are able to think reasonably about their actions instead of act in a way that will not contribute to a positive solution. She stated that it is important for students to understand that they need to be aware of what they say and do, but still acknowledge how you are feeling. In order to ensure students behave in this manner, Erin will often use specific language to remind students to be mindful in how they respond. This allows students to take a step back and take a breath before responding to a situation. This also helps students in their ability to positively resolve their conflicts. David affirmed Erin’s observations. He also shares the belief that mindfulness has helped with conflict resolution among his students because they have changed how they handle unexpected or negative situations. He explained,

It {mindfulness} can also help with conflict resolution because where as they may have gotten very very distraught and worked up over things that are happening, especially with their peers, it gives them a strategy and a skill to say, okay hold on a second. So, I can use that mindful exercise to regulate their emotions.

For many students, mindfulness has become an outlet to help regulate their emotions.

David revealed that mindfulness gives the students the chance to think about how they are
feeling and what appropriate action to take next. David also expressed that regulating emotions is an important skill for students to use in and outside of the classroom. He indicated that mindfulness has a ripple down effect because if it is practiced in the classroom students can begin to regulate their emotions outside of the classroom as well.

Erin has used mindful techniques to regulate the emotions of her students as well. She explained,

if you have a student overreacting, screaming, or crying, I always bring them into my office and one of the first things I do is make them take a deep breath. I can also give them a snow globe for them to shake up. I will explain to the children how this expresses their thinking because it is clouded and when everything gets settled we can deal with things.

Erin revealed that she got her entire preschool to get involved in emotional regulation and had the students create their own calming jars. They now use their jars to calm down and self-regulate their feelings and emotions. She believes that using calming techniques like the calming jars enables students to respond appropriately instead of react and think with a clearer and calmer mind, meaning they will be able to express themselves more clearly and with an understanding of multiple perspectives.

The literature affirmed this belief as mindfulness has also been linked to a “heightened activation in brain regions responsible for regulating attention and positive affective states including empathy and other prosocial emotions” (Bonus et al, 2013, p. 2). Meditation is also associated with lower levels of thought suppression, fear of emotion, and difficulties with emotion regulation, compared to non-meditators (Keng et al, 2011). Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010) revealed that incorporating mindfulness into students’ everyday learning will give
students the mechanism needed for concentration, self-regulation, stress, mental health, and physical activity. To add, Reber (2014) suggested that using dispositional mindfulness allows for people to think about different perspectives and become more open minded. Reber (2014) claimed, if schools want to help their students succeed in their lives outside of the classroom, they must prepare students to respond mindfully to the problems they may face in the world. Therefore, the literature aligns with my participants’ beliefs that using mindfulness techniques in the classroom helps prepare students for their future by providing them with a tool to help their emotional wellbeing. Participants contributed new observations to the existing literature when they revealed that students are able to increase their ability to look at different perspectives and engage in appropriate problem solving solutions after engaging in mindfulness.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that teachers and school counsellors in elementary classrooms use a variety of techniques and strategies to implement mindfulness practices in school settings. These strategies include breathing exercises, visualizations, meditation, yoga, using mindful language, and teaching students about being present. It was also discovered that mindfulness practices can easily be integrated into the curriculum and have positive effects on teachers and students. For example, my participants found that when teachers and students participate in mindfulness, they are more present in the here and now, and are able to self-regulate their emotions. To add, significant contribution to the existing literature was made when participants revealed how teachers facilitate mindfulness practices for their students and for staff development, as well as identifying specific behavioral outcomes observed in their students. It was suggested that teachers can use specific mindful strategies to target specific areas of concern like classroom management, and emotional well-being. Most of the literature addresses the
perceived benefits of mindfulness. These benefits and outcomes also align with my participants’
beliefs and findings. Among the benefits include the ability to foster students’ empathy and
understanding of others, increased sense of awareness, a reduction in anxiety and stress, and the
overall benefits of incorporating mindful practices into the classroom. Once educators become
aware of the strategies, they will gain knowledge that they can hopefully use to promote a better
overall well-being of their students and school communities.
Chapter 5: Implications and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the overall implications and significance of this research study. I begin by reviewing my key findings on how teachers in reverse integration classrooms foster inclusion. Then, I discuss the implications of the findings, both for the educational community and my own practice as a beginning teacher. With this in mind, I make recommendations which may be utilized by other educational professionals, such as teachers, schools, and school boards. Finally, I pose questions and suggest areas that I feel would benefit from further research and discussion.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

As discussed in the previous chapter of this study, mindfulness can be incorporated into the classroom and curriculum in various different ways. Both participants and scholars believe that mindfulness practices are essential in schools because they help create positive spaces for students to learn. In order to create positive spaces, my participants claimed that it is essential for classrooms to have designated time where students can refocus and take time for themselves. Participants also noted that is beneficial to create mindful spaces as it gives students the ability to self-regulate and be proactive about their mental health. Therefore, participants found that mindfulness techniques equip students with the proper tools to cope with everyday feelings, experiences and challenges such as stress and sadness. Being mindful also allows students to bring awareness to important social emotions like gratitude. In addition, it was observed that when students are mindful they are able to focus on the “here and now” which makes it possible for students to self-regulate and participate in positive affective states including empathy and other prosocial emotions.
Participants acknowledged that mindfulness practices can be integrated across multiple Ontario curriculum areas and can easily be integrated into many subject areas. Both participants spoke to incorporating mindful practices in key subject areas such as Character Building, Learning Skills, Literacy, Health, and Daily Physical Activity. Furthermore, participants spoke to how they integrate mindfulness practices in the Ontario curriculum and the importance of doing so in terms of creating the best opportunities for academic success. One way both participants used mindfulness is to enrich and report on students learning skills like self-regulation, communication, conflict resolution, and character building. Teachers also believe that mindfulness is a precursor to understanding because the children can pay attention to what they are actually doing and reading. It was found that literacy and mindfulness can be integrated through weekly gratitude journaling, emotional journaling, as well as reading books on mindfulness. One participant found that teaching mindfulness techniques in health units builds resilience and better students’ overall mental health. Participants found that mindfulness can be infused in other curriculum areas in small ways. For example, by encouraging mindful listening in music class, as well as, practicing mindful breathing, meditation and yoga during DPA activities.

Teachers observed that mindfulness practices reduce stress and anxiety in their students in academic situations. My participants account using mindful practices as a way to help students self-regulate and manage their emotions. One participant found that when students can regulate and manage their stress they are able to be more focused and present in the here and now. It was found that participating in mindfulness techniques like deep breathing and visualizations before students engaged in test writing had a positive outcome for students. Teachers felt that their students were more calm and focused and therefore performed favorably on their assessments.
Both the teachers and literature affirm that when students are less stressed, have less anxiety and are more focused, they are able to be present, aware, able to think clearer, and be more relaxed.

Finally, both participants spoke to how mindfulness practice benefits all pupils in a school setting including teachers and students. Participants found that teachers and students experience similar benefits like a greater focus and awareness of what is happening in the classroom, an overall sense of calm, and a higher emotional well-being. Both participants found that if teachers practice mindfulness professionally they experience less feelings of burnout, an increased sense of classroom management, and an overall better awareness of their actions and body language towards the students in their classroom. More specifically, one participant found that when teachers are mindful it strengthens teacher-student relationships because teachers are more aware not to raise their voice, the need to re-explain something, and to give children extra time to cool down if they require it. Participants also determined positive behavioral outcomes within their students when they practiced mindfulness in the classroom. Educators saw improvements with their students’ ability to resolve conflicts, express and self-regulate their feelings in an appropriate way, as well as increase their concentration and overall well-being.

5.2 Implications

In this section, I outline the implications of my research findings. I begin by discussing the broad implications of my research findings for the educational community (as a whole). Next, I discuss the implications of my findings for me both as a teacher and as a researcher.

5.2.1 The education community.

The literature on mindfulness practices in school, as well has my participants' experiences, has emphasized the need to implement mindful strategies in schools and
classrooms. Both participants spoke to doing this work using a cross-curricular approach in the classroom but more can be done to ensure student and teacher success and wellbeing. As we understand how beneficial mindfulness practices truly are, it points to a need for this work to be widespread, and not simply occurring in a few classrooms. In addition, the implications of my research study includes that when resources are provided to teachers by school boards and administrators, they find them very helpful and practical and effect real change in their classrooms. Both participants spoke to the need to be proactive in taking care of both the teachers’ and students’ mental health and well-being. It is important to recognize that mindfulness can help students take control over their emotions and improve their overall success. When mindfulness strategies are taught to students during their primary years they can go back to these strategies throughout their schooling in order to self-regulate their emotions and be proactive about their well-being.

The research literature also spoke to the fact that students achieve at a higher level when students are focused and relaxed. Consequently, mindfulness practices can increase student engagement and academic outcomes when practiced before assessments and lessons. Therefore, as part of caring for our students’ academic success participants noticed that when students engage in mindful practices it provides students with an opportunity to be successful.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice.

In this section I identify and discuss the implications for me as a teacher and as a researcher. I have always had a strong commitment to ensure student success and well-being as current educator. After conducting research on incorporating mindfulness practices into the curriculum, I am confident that I have furthered my own understanding of how to do this in an
INCORPORATING MINDFULNESS INTO THE ONTARIO CURRICULUM AND CLASSROOM

effective and engaging manner. With that being said, I am committed to embracing the
mindfulness strategies participants used in their classrooms in my own practice as an educator. In
my own teaching, and as a person in general, I will always strive to ensure that my students are
able to advocate and address their emotional needs as my research participants have made clear
that academic success is dependent on this. I will also allow this knowledge to inform my
teaching as I aim to create safe, engaging, and relaxing learning spaces for all students in order to
support them in reaching their potential.

As a classroom teacher, I am committed to sharing my passion for mindful education
with my students. I will create opportunities to develop my students’ sense of awareness and the
importance of engaging in the present moment. I recognize that integrating mindfulness
techniques into everyday classroom routines and subjects is essential for me to be successful. It
is also fundamental that I engage in meaningful discussions and activities surrounded by
mindfulness so that students see the value in the practice and are comfortable in engaging in it. I
hope to embrace mindfulness in many ways, even by simply providing proper spaces like
mindful corners for students to engage in the practice as needed. It is also important that I
provide students with the ability to advocate for their own needs and allow them to incorporate
mindful practices as needed throughout their school day.

5.3 Recommendations

In order to continue to connect and assist our students as a whole we must be willing to
make changes in our current education system. It is important that educators demonstrate an
ongoing commitment to updating their teaching pedagogy to stay current and help their students
grow and succeed. Although there are existing policies that exist to ensure student wellbeing, I
make recommendations based on my research and learning to ensure that these policies are being put into practice. I have organized my recommendations into three key areas: Faculties of Education, Schools, and Teachers.

5.3.1 Faculties of education

A participant reported on how the staff at their school felt unprepared to improve their students’ wellbeing. In order to overcome this, it would be useful to prepare teacher candidates in their studies so they feel more comfortable helping students with any mental health needs that arise. The following recommendations include:

- Teacher candidates should be taught about mindfulness and how to conduct mindful exercises for their students through cross curricular integration.
- A mandatory course for teacher candidates to take on mental health and wellbeing in order to equip educators with information to help prevent their students from feeling stress anxiety in the classroom.

5.3.2 Schools

- It is important that mindfulness strategies and pedagogy are implemented through a school-wide and board-wide approach. Mindful ideologies and practices should be present in every classroom.
- It is important that the school’s administration is supportive of their teachers who practice mindfulness by providing them with support and resources.
- Regular staff training sessions to continue to prepare and support teachers on incorporating mindful strategies into their teaching pedagogy.
5.3.3 Teachers

- It is important for teachers to create mindful spaces in their classroom where students have an area to go and refocus as needed.
- Teachers should use mindful language and point to times in the class where students should be extra aware of their emotions and behaviours.
- Integrate mindful practices daily in multiple subject areas such as health, literacy, music, learning skills/character education, and DPA.
- Participate in regular professional development opportunities to learn more about mindfulness.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

The research already confirms the physical and emotional changes that people experience from engaging in mindful practices. Participants were able to give many insightful examples of how mindfulness can be infused through cross-curricular integration but there is still limited knowledge on how teachers infuse mindfulness through Art, Math, and Science. It would also be beneficial to investigate how parents and caregivers perceive mindfulness practices in their child’s classroom and explore how parents can reinforce mindful practices in the home. It would also be valuable to learn more about whole-school approaches to mindfulness and how this is implemented in schools; researchers could clarify what outcomes educators and administrators see when mindfulness is embraced as a school and community practice.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This research study has helped me to better understand how mindfulness practices can be integrated in many important Ontario curriculum areas and the overall effects mindfulness has on
teachers and students. Through my examination of the research literature and through my interviews, I have become more aware of how to implement mindfulness pedagogy effectively into my classroom and lesson plans. Finally, this research study has further strengthened my view on the importance of incorporating mindful practices into the classroom as the immense benefits are clear. I understand how students’ social-emotional wellbeing impact their educational experiences positively and/or negatively. Specifically, I know that when students are happier and prepared to deal with their emotional needs they are more successful socially and academically. This study, particularly the research process and the insight from my participants, has inspired me to go out and advocate for the practice of mindfulness in Ontario schools.
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Incorporating Mindfulness into the Ontario Curriculum and Classroom

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Date:

Dear ______________________________,

My Name is Rachel Lipkowitz and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how a sample of elementary teachers and school counsellors incorporate mindfulness pedagogy into the classroom and school curriculum. I am interested in interviewing teachers and/or school counsellors who have been teaching for a minimum of three years and who integrate mindfulness practices into their classroom in ways that make connections to the curriculum. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60-minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Rachel Lipkowitz
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Rachel Lipkowitz and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name: (printed) _______________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about how educators integrate mindfulness practices into the curriculum. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your beliefs and experiences with mindfulness in your life as an educator. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

To begin can you state your name for the recording?

Section A – Background Information

1. How many years have you been working as a teacher/school counsellor?

2. What grades and subjects do you currently teach? Which have you previously taught?

3. In addition to your role as a teacher/school counsellor, do you fulfill any other roles in the school (e.g. coach, advisor, resource teacher etc.)?

4. Can you describe the community in which your school is situated (i.e. diversity, socioeconomic status)? How long have you taught in this school?
5. As you know, I am interested in speaking with you about your commitment to enacting mindfulness practice. Can you tell me how you became interested in mindfulness practice in the first place?

   1. What personal, professional, or educational experiences informed your interest to this practice?
   2. What experiences helped prepare you to enact this interest / commitment?

Section B – Teacher/ School Counsellor Perspective and Beliefs

6. What does mindfulness mean to you?

   1. What range of practices do you consider to fall within the purview of “mindfulness practice”?

7. In your view, what are some indicators of mindfulness?

8. How has mindfulness practice impacted you personally?

   1. Professionally?

9. Why do you believe that mindfulness has a place in schools? Why do you choose to practice mindfulness in a school setting?

10. In your view, what are some of the benefits of mindfulness for students?

11. In your view, why is mindfulness in schools not more commonly practiced than it is?

Section C- Teacher Practices

12. What does mindfulness practice look like in your teaching (classroom and school)?

13. When do you tend to integrate mindfulness in your teaching?

   1. At certain times of day?
2. In particular subject areas?
3. In response to particular needs or events?

14. What specific mindfulness practices do you use with students?
15. Can you tell me more about how you connect mindfulness practice with the curriculum?
   1. Where do you see it aligning with curriculum?
   2. What curriculum areas, specifically, do you link mindfulness practice to and why?
   3. Can you give me some examples of how you have integrated mindfulness in a range of curriculum subject areas?
   4. Is there any aspect of mindfulness practice that you assess? Why / why not?

16. How do your students typically respond to mindfulness practice?
   1. What outcomes have you observed?
   2. What range of benefits have you observed?

17. What resources do you use when integrating mindfulness in your teaching? *listen and then probe re: videos, music, websites, you tube channels, books etc.
18. How did you become familiar with these resources?
19. How, if at all, has mindfulness practice through your teaching impacted your professional development and overall well-being?

Section D – Supports, Challenges, and Next Steps

20. What kinds of support systems and resources are available to you through your school with regards to your integration of mindfulness practice?
21. Do you face any challenges or barriers when integrating mindfulness in your teaching?
   1. How do you respond to these challenges?
2. What kinds of support resources or factors would help you to better meet these challenges?

22. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to integrating mindfulness practice in their elementary teaching practice?

Thank you, sincerely, for your time and considered responses.