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MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Mindfulness Interventions for Educators:
Preventing Burnout Through Personal and Professional Development

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August 2020

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Table of Contents

Hyperlinks.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	4
Abstract.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Personal Background.....	7
Current Cultural Climate.....	9
Exigence.....	12
Teacher Burnout.....	13
The Impact of Burnout on Students.....	16
The Roots of Burnout.....	19
Burnout & Wellness.....	23
Mindfulness Interventions in Education.....	25
The Current Conversation about Education in Field of Contemplative Science.....	25
The Benefits of a Mindfulness Practice for Teachers.....	27
Preventing Teacher Burnout with Mindfulness Interventions.....	30
Cultivating Inclusive and Anti-Racist Learning Spaces.....	33
Rationale.....	35
Mindfulness Personal and Professional Development Presentation.....	36
Explanation of Offerings.....	37
Conclusion.....	40
References.....	42
Appendix.....	46

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Hyperlinks

Creative Project Presentation Screencast Link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/160XwxA7atoBxaIuOv7nM7hezNb60ObqC/view>

Creative Project Presentation Link: <https://prezi.com/view/PSuEFMdHv6Dh6XLCO5MV/>

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MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Abstract

When it comes to professions with the highest rate of burnout, educators are prime candidates for facing this often debilitating and life-altering phenomena. Although the causes of teacher burnout are vast (and typically depend on the teacher's context and level of experience), the effects appear to not only impact the life and career of the teacher, but also the students and school community. Despite the sense of both hopelessness and helplessness that arise with burnout, there are accessible strategies teachers can use in order to mitigate the amounting stressors. The growing field contemplative sciences have found that mindfulness, the act of paying attention on purpose, can largely impact one's mindset. Previous studies within the field have found that mindfulness interventions can help prevent and/or combat teacher burnout. As the rates of burnout continue to rise—especially during the unprecedented times of a global pandemic in which the teaching profession has been largely reshaped—it is essential to provide educators with access to mindfulness strategies to help support their social and emotional well-being. With more mindful teachers, we will begin to see more mindful students and, in turn, more copacetic school communities. My findings have led me to creating an in-service personal and professional development presentation that provides educators with an overview of mindfulness and support in how to implement mindfulness strategies in their own lives and even their classrooms.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Education, Professional Development, COVID-19

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

“Public school teachers feel extremely confined by classroom size and set lesson plans where they have little choice about the content of the material they are required to teach. And if required standardized testing is institutionalized anew, it will be even harder for public school teachers to bring creative ideas to the work of teaching. They will be required simply to relay information as though the work they do is akin to that of any worker on an assembly line.” –bell hooks

Mindfulness Interventions for Educators:

Preventing Burnout Through Personal and Professional Development

When the COVID-19 global pandemic reared its head in the US, many states and cities issued “stay-at-home” orders in hope to flatten the curve of the rapidly spreading virus.

Although most school buildings around the country were closed, teaching and learning were still happening from remote locations. Remote learning required many parents and guardians to play an active role in supporting their child’s learning from home. It was during this time when teachers felt more seen than ever before. The media displayed a growing recognition of the role that teachers play in society which contributed to a sentiment of heroism in the profession.

However, now, nearly five months later followed by sheltered summers, many parents are eager to send their students back to the school buildings for traditional in-person learning. Despite the safety concerns for students and staff, there is a great divide when it comes to the demands for what learning should look like in the fall. The badge of honor that teachers proudly wore in the spring when they were acknowledged for their efforts is being replaced by similar fears and concerns that teachers often face in response to the lack of community support—whether it’s in regard to school safety in the wake of school shootings or the lack of funds for adequate resources and staffing. The amounting stressors amidst the chaotic times are reflective of the ever-changing nature of the teaching profession and the challenges change brings. Such stressors

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

contribute to declined social and emotional wellness among teachers which can often lead to the phenomena of burnout. Teacher burnout has a domino effect in that it can wreak havoc on a teacher's personal and professional life along with the learning experience of his/her/their students. Thus, it is critical for school districts to recognize the growing need for social and emotional support for both teachers and students. Mindfulness training is one way to support educators in minimizing the stress that comes with fear and uncertainty. By providing educators with a remote personal and professional development opportunity in mindfulness interventions, administrators can support their teachers in pursuing a well-balanced approach to starting this unique school year.

Personal Background

As a child, I knew I wanted to one day become a teacher. Much of this inspiration came from watching Ms. Frizzle from *The Magic School Bus*—a wildly dedicated teacher who advocated for experiential learning, or Ms. Honey from Roald Dahl's *Matilda*—a teacher with a huge heart who loved her students as if they were her own children. Generally, teachers in our entertainment are portrayed as nurturing and compassionate individuals who live to do their work; however, in some sitcoms and films we see the occasional burned out or angry teacher who is disconnected from his/her/their students—or, worse yet, a teacher whose words are heard as muffled noise like Charlie Brown's teacher. Although these images of educators in our entertainment might inspire—or accurately paint a child's greatest fear—it is important to consider the ways in which an educator's presence largely contributes to the classroom climate and, in turn, their students' learning. Such awareness has led me to investigating the ways in which a classroom community—where all voices are heard—invites students to feel awakened to their learning and teachers to feel supported in their teaching. It is teachers like Ms. Honey or

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Ms. Frizzle—teachers who teach with love—who are remembered for their love and kindness—not data-driven success.

Unfortunately, when it comes to achieving the ideal school culture or classroom community—one that is rooted in compassion and equity—it is more challenging than it sounds. On the surface, it may appear that the largest contributor to discordance in a school is the population of students; however, the rising rates of burnout among teachers arguably plays an even greater role in the volatility of a school community. With that said, a large focus of my experience in the Mindfulness Graduate program has been on ways in which mindfulness can fit within the fabric of the public school system. Initially, my interest was primarily on the students and finding ways to engage students through social and emotional support. The community where I teach (Western Chicago Suburbs) is an affluent community where students are generally high-achieving. Throughout the past eight years of teaching at this school, I've informally observed student mindsets and behaviors—especially within my AP (Advanced Placement) courses. Many students in the community have developed obsessions with grades and standardized test scores as they dream of attending ivy league universities. Although this is often a celebrated quality, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the stress students are forced to manage is contributing to a large increase in anxiety and depression. Many students are striving towards an image of perfection and becoming crippled by the pressure.

As a teacher in a school whose culture is focused more on students' academic success instead of their overall well-being, we are often given little to no support in behavioral health management; much of our professional development is driven towards high stakes testing and curriculum development. Thus, I've become increasingly in-tune with the fact that teachers at the school are also in a place where they might be struggling with systemic challenges that are

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

inhibiting their own wellness. Unfortunately, this dis-ease is creating a vicious cycle that is constantly being seen and felt by students. With that in mind, I felt called to serve as a mindfulness coach for my fellow colleagues as my Mindful Internship. My goal was to hold space for teachers and provide them with strategies that they can use in their own lives to develop a more mindful approach to living and working. Ideally, once teachers are able to cultivate a greater sense of awareness, they will be able to share their practice with students.

Current Cultural Climate

Unfortunately, my in-person internship was brought to a halt in March of 2020 when the Illinois governor issued a stay-at-home order in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. This unprecedented experience opened my eyes to the impermanent nature of all things. Like most parents, professionals, and essential workers, educators had to scramble for ways to quickly adapt to the changes we were up against—especially after receiving the final order that schools will not re-open for the remainder of the school year. Many schools (from primary to higher education) both nationally and globally responded to school closures with distance learning via virtual platforms. This shift presented a great deal of challenges both logistically and emotionally for all parties. Despite the efforts to find the silver lining in the shift to e-learning—like later wake-up times, unlimited bathroom breaks, and a very short commute—this time increased stressors for many educators due to the lack of preparedness in traversing uncharted territory. Challenges like maintaining authentic connections with students—many of whom opted out of the e-learning opportunity—along with fielding the demands of administration and navigating through the endless trail of resources while adapting curriculum to fit in an online platform added up quickly to outweigh the “perks” that came with remote learning. Also, the nature of the situation required teachers to continue in their efforts to foster students’ social and

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

emotional well-being even at a distance. Many students expressed feeling depressed and anxious due to the isolation while some students who sought school as a safe place were forced to stay in their homes where they felt unsafe. Although supporting students with social-emotional concerns within the classroom happens daily for teachers, the growing challenges that came with being able to not only recognize student struggles, but also support them, can create a sense of powerlessness for teachers. With that said, teacher suffering was still happening, and, worse yet, it was done in seclusion in their own homes without tangible community presence. The gratification that makes the career worth the struggles began to diminish leaving many teachers feeling unfulfilled by their efforts.

In a time when community feels crucial, and when our students' health and well-being are our greatest concerns, educators faced challenges to maintain our own well-being while trying to cultivate safe spaces for our students to retreat to. Although I thought the end of working at my internship site in-person meant the end of my internship opportunity, I knew my efforts in providing mindfulness practices for teachers and students was needed now more than ever. Elena Aguilar (2018) outlines the four principles which allow one to manage unwanted change in order to thrive: "(1) to slow down, (2) to evaluate and analyze the situation, (3) to use your energy where it counts, and (4) to be open to outcomes" (p. 273). Thus, I heeded this advice and, with the support of my instructor and class community, I developed a plan that would allow me to continue to provide offerings for my community on a virtual platform. The ability to provide my school community with virtual offerings via Instagram inspired my vision for a distance-learning approach to a personal and professional development designed for educators.

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Currently, in the summer of 2020, school districts and universities across the country are attempting to navigate what exactly classrooms and campuses will look like when school resumes in the fall. Some school districts across the country have already announced that they will extend remote learning into the fall while other districts are devising plans for students and teachers to safely return. Even for the schools that are returning to in-person instruction, it is already known that classrooms and campuses will not look like they did before—from mandated face masks to social distance between desks and even staggered scheduling. Even with tentative blueprints, no teacher, administrator or student can truly imagine what the learning environment is going to look and feel like. In a recent article from the *New York Times*, Goldstein and Shapiro explore the growing fear among teachers across the country who feel they are being pressured by both the Trump administration and school boards to return to in-person teaching despite the upward rise of coronavirus: “Teachers say crucial questions about how schools will stay clean, keep students physically distanced and prevent further spread of the virus have not been answered. And they feel that their own lives, and those of the family members they come home to, are at stake” (2020). Goldstein and Shapiro (2020) convey the current national debate about whether or not teachers and students should return which is heightening anxieties as the average teacher salary nationwide is roughly \$60,000 per year making the risk to return to in-person instruction not worth the benefits. The growing uncertainty of the COVID-19 virus is contributing to educators’ fears and concerns.

Not only are learning communities attempting to field the challenges that come with a global pandemic, but the social unrest in America is prompting teachers to recognize the growing need for their impact. The Black Lives Matter movement sparked this summer in response to the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. According to Buchanan, Bui, and Patel

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

(2020) of *The New York Times*, about 15 million to 26 million people have participated in demonstrations across the nation making the Black Lives Matter movement the largest movement in the country's history. With majority of the protesters being under the age of 35, the country is seeing more civic engagement among the nation's youth (Buchanan, Bui, & Patel 2020). This activism is igniting a thirst for knowledge and information among America's youth. From understanding the roots of racism, what it means to be anti-racist (and how to be anti-racist) while recognizing privilege, the movement is inspiring followers to find a means to become educated in more meaningful ways about content that is often left out of curricula. Despite the fervor within the US, the responsibility to educate our country's youth during such volatile times can create a sense of uncertainty and doubt. Whether it is in regards to a lack of resources or time to plan curriculum that effectively educates students on social injustices or the fear of backlash due to the strong divide between political parties and their perspectives, educators are feeling challenged to step up into such a critical role.

Exigence

Thus, when it comes to initiatives towards social-emotional wellness in the school setting, teacher wellness should not be overlooked. One way to support educators with developing emotional awareness is through instruction of mindfulness practices. Not only can mindfulness practices provide educators with the skills necessary to navigate through the emotional turmoil and stress that come with the profession, but mindfulness practices can also provide educators with the tools necessary to support their students and even their lives outside of work. Oftentimes, educators suffer from empathy fatigue in that they utilize all of their energy in taking care of and supporting others reserving little-to-no energy for themselves. This creates a conflict between a teacher's intention to truly show up and hold space for his/her/their

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

students against the inability to do so due to the exhaustive nature of the demands of the profession. And now, more than ever, teachers are feeling the weight that comes with a difficult moral conundrum as they are forced to reconcile between supporting their students, colleagues and the community or their family's safety (Goldstein & Shapiro, 2020). By investigating both the root and the impact of teacher burnout, we can begin to link the ways in which mindfulness practices can serve as a tool to mitigate burnout and, in turn, improve school communities.

Providing time and space for educators to engage in mindfulness exercises not only benefits the teachers themselves, but it can also impact students:

What is more, we mirror each other emotionally as well as energetically. If two people are sitting in a room, the electromagnetic energy of one person's heart impacts the other person's, as measured on an EKG. When you begin to become aware of how your body sends messages without you knowing it, you gain insight into the responses of others toward you. (Salzberg, 2013, p. 153)

Thus, when teachers are given the tools to be more self-aware—which can be achieved through mindfulness practice and principles—then they are able to be effective leaders. The growing fear and anxiety that come with a global pandemic which are forcing the career of teaching to look dramatically different can be remedied with proper support. Furthermore, when educators can access a means to understanding implicit bias within their own teaching, they can perhaps be a ripple of change within the growing movement for social justice. Like anything, time and resources need to be in place in order for positive change to occur. When progressive change happens, teachers are able to go beyond purveyors of content; rather, their increased mindfulness and emotional awareness allow them to be the best versions of themselves and become pathfinders for their students.

Teacher Burnout

In understanding the presence of burnout, Guidetti et al. (2019) notes: “The two core dimensions of burnout are (1) emotional exhaustion, which refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources, and (2) cynicism (or depersonalization), which pertains to negative, callous, or excessively detached responses to various aspects of the job” (p. 3). The characteristics of burnout extend far beyond one’s happiness. Throughout Sharon Salzberg’s *Real Happiness at Work*, she explores the role of burnout in deteriorating one’s sense of purpose. She notes,

As many as half of all workers in high-stress occupations suffer from some form of burnout during their career. Although stress, anxiety, and depression may coexist, burnout is a distinct condition of exhaustion characterized by a loss of motivation, fatigue, frustrations, anger, depression, and dissatisfaction that if untended can grow to severe populations. (Salzberg, 2013, p. 106)

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of burnout is no stranger to the career force in the United States. According to a Gallup Study from 2018, “7,500 full-time employees found that 23% of employees reported feeling burned out at work very often or always, while an additional 44% reported feeling burned out sometimes. That means about two-thirds of full-time workers experience burnout on the job” (Wigert & Agrawal, 2020). However, when it comes to longitudinal comprehensive data regarding burnout, it’s not readily available as The Bureau of Labor Statistics does not track such information (Senior, 2006). Nevertheless, Jennifer Senior notes how one of the countries that does keep comprehensive data on burnout is the Netherlands due to the government’s awareness of the citizens’ needs: “Even there, longitudinal surveys

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

show that roughly 10 percent of the workforce is burned out at any given time, with high-school teachers and primary-care health personnel ranking highest” (2006). The “helping” professions like healthcare workers and teachers are often among the top-ranked when it comes to burnout due to the idealistic natures of the professions—this desire to help with the unmatched reality leaves professionals feeling disillusioned and/or worthless.

In 2017, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the Badass Teachers Association (BAT) surveyed AFT members and thousands of other educators with their 30 question Educator Quality of Work Life Survey and found that “[e]ducators and school staff find their work “always” or “often” stressful 61 percent of the time, significantly higher than workers in the general population, who report that work is “always” or “often” stressful only 30 percent of the time” (p. 2). The finding that teacher stress is twofold to the general population elicits a great deal of concern. Senior looks to the growing rate of teacher dropout as a way into understanding the presence of burnout among teachers in the United States: “45 percent of New York City public-school teachers have left their jobs by year five” (2006). Unfortunately, New York’s poor teacher retention is reflective of the broader teaching crisis in the United States. High turnover and low retention “increases a school’s share of inexperienced teachers who are not fully certified or credentialed to teach the subject to which they are assigned, and turnover begets further turnover, substantially weakening the overall quality and ability of the school’s teacher pool” (Garcia & Weiss, 2019, p. 3). The inability to retain teachers creates a vicious cycle that dramatically impacts the school community including the teachers who choose to stick with the profession. In the 2017 survey respondents reported “that they have less enthusiasm now than at the beginning of their careers” (American Federation of Teachers, p. 2). It is no wonder that the passion for the profession dwindles as communities are constantly being

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

reshaped—from shifts in administration and their agendas to witnessing colleagues exit the profession. Thus, the high turnover rates within the schools are not simply reflecting the revolving door of teachers, but also the teachers who are still within the context of the schools that are undergoing change. Many of these teachers take on extra responsibilities like mentorship for new hires or extra duties in their professional learning communities.

The Impact of Teacher Burnout on Students

Not only does high turnover negatively impact the quality of teachers a school retains, but it also “depresses student achievement” (Garcia & Weiss, 2019, p. 3). Klusmann, Richter and Lüdtke (2016) studied the relationship between teachers’ emotional exhaustion and student achievement: “emotional exhaustion, which is defined as a fairly chronic state of being emotionally and physically depleted, resulting from long-term occupational stress. Emotional exhaustion has been studied most thoroughly and is often regarded as the essential dimension of burnout” (p. 1194). In unpacking the implications of their study in which there was a small but statistically significant association between teachers’ emotional exhaustion and student performance, they point out that negative influence on the teacher-student relationship might be in part from frequent teacher absence due to exhaustion, poor instructional quality due to lack of energy from the teacher, and depersonalization which is a common symptom of burnout (Klusmann, Richter & Lüdtke, 2016). The veil that exists between teacher and students under such circumstances inflame the challenges that come with developing rapport—which is a two-way street. How can students be expected to show respect to teachers who are withdrawn from themselves and their teaching practice?

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Zarate et al. (2019) note: “If teachers feel burnt out their student's will as well, and this has the potential to diminish student performance” (p. 1711). However, when educators are burned out, the impact on the students extends far beyond their academic performance.

According to Penn State and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: “Teachers who report greater burnout early in the school year have classrooms with more behavior problems. When teachers are highly stressed, children show lower levels of both social adjustment and academic performance” (Greenberg, Brown, & Abenavoli, 2016, p. 5). The social and emotional impact that teacher happiness has on students is a key component to a classroom environment.

Behavioral issues that might emerge in a classroom can completely throw a class off course by instigating poor behavior among other students and deepening a teacher’s dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, Yong and Yue (2007) note:

Burned-out teachers who do not like their work but continue to stay in the teaching profession do not prepare their lessons conscientiously, behave stiffly toward their students, lack versatility, lower student requirements, are intolerant of student failings, lose interest in their students, display mental and physical weariness, no longer evince enthusiasm for their work, make no more inputs, and feel low self-respect. All these directly affect teacher–student relations and the results of education and prevent students from making progress. (p. 80)

With this in mind, it becomes more apparent that many schools and districts need to re-consider the role of teacher wellness in their students’ success and overall educational experience. Such efforts would benefit the personal and professional lives of teachers, and schools may witness increased engagement and success for their students.

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Not only are students impacted academically and socially by their teachers' presence, but we can perhaps consider the extent to which teachers inspire their students to follow the same career path. According to the Economic Policy Institute the poor rates of teacher retention are severely impacted by the dwindling pool of applicants: "From the 2008–2009 to 2015–2016 school years, there was a 15.4 percent drop in the number of education degrees awarded and a 27.4 percent drop in the number of people who completed a teacher preparation program (Gracia & Weiss, 2019, p. 1). Although the implications are vast when it comes to discerning why experienced teachers leave the profession and why fewer and fewer college students are pursuing the profession, it is safe to theorize that both burnout and the poor reputation of the profession are the largest contributors to the disheartening reality. If students are witnessing their teachers burn out firsthand, it will likely keep them away from the profession. Sadly, many college students who might be interested in the career are driven away from it when faced with the financial reality of rising tuition costs and student loan repayment as a teaching is often recognized as low-earning profession. Unfortunately, a small salary often reflects a culture's way of measuring worth leaving college students striving for more.

The upcoming 2020-21 school year may perhaps mark the highest rate of teacher turnover that the US has seen: "School systems struggling to meet the financial and logistical challenges of reopening safely will need to carefully weigh teachers' concerns. A wave of leave requests, early retirements or resignations driven by health fears could imperil efforts to reach students learning both in physical classrooms and online" (Goldstein & Shapiro, 2020). Furthermore, New York predicts that 1 in 5 of its teachers will be medically exempt from in-person teaching this fall" (Goldstein & Shapiro, 2020). Such numbers could contribute to a shortage of teachers in the building making small class sizes an impossible feat. When

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

considering the potential dangers within the workplace, it is doubtful that there will be a growing supply of qualified candidates as the demand rises. The estimated impact that the COVID-19 crisis might have on school staffing should serve as a wake-up call to school boards and taxpayers regarding the working conditions and the impact of declined community support.

The Roots of Burnout

It is important to consider what about the profession of teaching has created this dissatisfaction. Crain, Schonert-Reichl, and Roeser (2017) outline the key contributors to teacher stress: “workload, lack of collaborative time with colleagues, lack of support from administrators, and encounters with challenging and difficult student behavior in the classroom are among some of the most stressful aspects of their jobs” (p. 138). Time and the way in which it is managed within the profession are often not in the control of the teacher. This control contributes to a lack of autonomy that teachers often face leaving them feeling as if they are not actually professionals. Furthermore, when there is a lack of support from administrators—although seemingly separate—it largely contributes to the discordance in the classroom. The minimal support from above in the presence of behavioral issues can leave a teacher feeling helpless when attempting to manage the classroom—especially if not provided with the tools and professional training necessary to traverse through such challenges. Additionally, Guidetti et al. (2019) explores the many changes that the educational system has underwent in the past decade that has intensified the profession:

[T]eachers face an increasing number of non-teaching-related demands, such as performing administrative work, participating in meetings, and keeping updated with new educational and pedagogical approaches that often reflect in the double bind of being

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

adherent to teaching task and to be committed, at the same time, to the pedagogical mission of students' education. Moreover, teachers have to interact with an increasing number of students per classroom, to whom they bear greater responsibilities. (p. 3)

This theory seems to be more true than ever—especially with the uncertainty that many teachers are facing in the dawn of the upcoming school year. Although districts are providing general blueprints for what learning will look like in the fall, many teachers are not given adequate support in curating curriculum to fit within the variety of formats. Many districts within the country have announced that they will be utilizing a “hybrid” approach, meaning part in-person and part remote which may essentially look like planning two entirely different classes for the same course. Birchinall, Spendlove, and Buck (2019) echo this sentiment by outlining the most stressful components within a profession that is typically ranked among the top three most stressful careers. Some of these stressors include:

[T]he level of detail and duplication of tasks, the over-bureaucratic nature of the work, excessive and depth of marking, unrealistic deadlines, long or irrelevant meetings, too many sources of information to manage, poor or unreliable ICT [information and communications technology], a lack of clarity with observation requirements, and recording, inputting monitoring and analysing data. (Birchinall et al., 2019, p. 2)

The abovementioned stressors coupled with the new demands that teachers are managing in response to COVID-19 pandemic are making an already stressful profession significantly more taxing. Educators are left wondering what their daily schedule will look like along with how they will be evaluated and assessed on their teaching. Whether it is developing new instructional tools for remote learning, or managing a classroom full of students while upholding orders for

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

social distance or wearing a face mask, all of the potential scenarios are unknown. The fear that a poor evaluation could mean the end of the career is a nerve-wracking experience.

Like other careers, there is no denying the presence of stress-inducing situations. Unfortunately, many teachers succumb to these pressures and deem them “part of the job.” An apathetic attitude towards the working conditions does not just sacrifice the well-being of our nation’s educators, but also the well-being of our students. Crain (2017) explores the role of growing class sizes and the pressure that comes with managing many students at once:

[T]eachers’ job stress is due primarily to the inherently social-emotional demands of working with up to 30 or more children or adolescents at once. Others have pointed to the uncertain, attention-intensive nature of teaching during which teachers must flexibly and creatively make hundreds of decisions “on the fly” each day as a key source of teacher job stress. (p. 138)

COVID-19 has intensified the “on the fly” decision making for educators—dating back to when the stay-at-home orders were issued in the spring to planning and preparing for the upcoming school year. Unfortunately, many teachers were blamed when parents were unhappy with how remote learning looked in the spring, but the community was often unaware of the ways in which state orders prevented teachers from hosting synchronous learning and holding students accountable for work completion. Now, with class sizes on the rise—often resulting from either teacher shortages or lack of funding from the state—teachers are faced with managing the demanding tasks of the job in addition to classrooms overflowing with students. Despite efforts to develop 1-on-1 relationships with students in order to effectively instruct students based on

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

their individual needs, it often feels impossible to develop the rapport necessary to do so. This is where the empathetic fatigue sets in:

[W]e are sure to succumb to empathy fatigue. Whether you care for a classroom of young children with special needs, an aging patient, a difficult-to-understand teenager, or a community with no clear resolution to their problems in sight, any skillful caregiving relationship relies on balance: the balance between opening one's heart as much as possible and accepting the limits of what one can do; the balance between compassion and equanimity. (Salzberg, 2014, p. 124)

Unfortunately, despite the right efforts behind the intent of individuals in “helping” professions, they might be toeing the line between empathy fatigue and compassion. Holding onto that control with a tight grip is what often contributes to the shift from passion/compassion to a level of exhaustion that is not sustainable. Thus, when educators let go of control and recognize what is actually within their own power, they are better prepared for the challenges that are often presented in these positions.

However, when trained professionals are unable to uphold their sense of worth, the self-doubt contributes to the breadcrumbs towards burnout. Friedman and Farber (1992) discovered a correlation between teacher self-concept and burnout: “Burnout is more likely to occur if one's self-esteem, one's belief in one's own competence, does not sustain one's efforts in the face of the inevitable frustrations and stresses of teaching” (p. 34). A teacher's perception of his/her/themselves is often a reflection of how they are treated by administrators, colleagues, students and students' parents. Unfortunately, the rising rates of bullying and harassment in the workplace might be to blame when it comes to low self-esteem as 43% of educators reported that

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

they have been bullied, harassed or threatened in 2017 (American Federation of Teachers, 2017, p. 4). More so now than ever we're seeing a growing number of voices name-calling and shaming educators and teacher unions as a way for angry community members to express their unhappiness for alternative approaches to learning during a crisis. Sadly, this bullying is driving a deep wedge between educators and their communities and it's likely that it will worsen as the school year progresses.

The aforementioned stressors are just a general glimpse into some of the many sources of teacher dissatisfaction and, eventually, their burnout. A teacher's experience is largely impacted by their community and the various traumas that they are required to field in their classrooms—whether it's working with students in poverty or in an affluent community where the role of a teacher is often de-professionalized—there are a myriad of contributors to unsurprising outcome of burnout. Like the innumerable list of causes of burnout, there is an equally extensive list of both psychological and physiological effects.

Burnout & Wellness

Some of the major health risks associated with job burnout include type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, gastrointestinal issues, high cholesterol and even death for those under the age of 45 (Salvagioni, 2019). The effects of burnout can take on a psychosomatic role as burnout might actually be the root cause of some life-threatening diseases. Although worker wellness should be any employer's top priority, the effects of burnout could be costing school districts and taxpayers a great deal of money. The AFT (2017) found that: "Teachers reported having poor mental health for 11 or more days per month at twice the rate of the general U.S. workforce. They also reported lower-than-recommended levels of health outcomes and sleep per

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

night” (p. i). The poor quality of mental health and lack of sleep could explain the rise in teacher absence: “In the UK, teacher absence due to mental ill health has increased from 213,000 days in 2004 to approximately 312,000 days in 2017, which equates to a financial cost of over £65 million” (Birchinall et al., 2019, p. 1). Sadly, monetary statistics and discoveries like this might be the data needed to awaken school boards and communities into the need for more emotional support for educators. Stressful working conditions are often culprits to both burnout and poor teacher retention. Moreover, the stress and anxiety can manifest physiologically:

The stressful workload, the feeling of having to be “always on,” the lack of resources, and the burden of ever-changing expectations take a toll on educators, and the health problems educators face are compounded by deficient building conditions, equipment and staff shortages, and insufficient time to prepare and collaborate with colleagues” (American Federation of Teachers, 2017, p. i).

It seems as if the AFT’s conclusions from the 2017 study were forecasting the 2020-21 school year. Despite guidelines regarding the need for precautions like proper air filtration and adequate space to make school buildings safe places for students and staff, many schools likely will not undergo the changes in time for the start of the school year. Goldstein and Shapiro (2020) indicate that more than one-quarter of the nation’s teachers are over 50 years old, yet the Trump Administration is demanding school buildings to re-open as they play a critical role in the economy. This argument is contributing to anger and fear among teachers and “[t]hey point out that so far Congress has dedicated less than 1 percent of federal pandemic stimulus funds to public schools stretching to meet the costs of reopening safely” (Goldstein & Shapiro, 2020). Not only is the motivation for teachers and students to return to in-person learning rooted in concerns for the economy, the health guidelines released by the CDC (Centers for Disease

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Control and Prevention) back in May do not need to be strictly followed according to the president and local school board leaders (Goldstein & Shapiro, 2020). There is no doubt that teachers returning to in-person instruction are experiencing burnout from the abrupt conclusion of the 2019-20 school year followed by a summer filled with unanswered questions and minimal detail on how to effectively plan. This exhaustion is contributing to the anxiety and depression teachers and staff are facing in response to the minimal support and safety procedures during a global pandemic.

Whether school districts have decided whether they're returning fully, remotely, or a blend of the two, what most districts are not talking about is the need for social and emotional support for both students and teachers. Crain et al. (2017) notes:

Unfortunately, teacher education and professional development programs rarely prepare pre- or in-service teachers to address the considerable stress-related dimensions of the teaching profession. Some have posited that this lack of education in stress management strategies may be related to teacher burnout and desistance from the profession. (p. 139)

With that said, there is a growing need for providing educators with emotional training and support. By providing educators with guidance to gain emotional awareness through mindfulness practices, schools may be able to preserve teacher wellness and retain experienced teachers while effectively preparing new teachers who embark on the profession.

Mindfulness Interventions in Education

The Current Conversation about Education in Field of Contemplative Science

When it comes to defining mindfulness in contemporary research, most researchers look to Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition "Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

moment and nonjudgmentally” (Birchinall et al., 2019, p. 1). The field of mindfulness (or contemplative sciences) has been making its way into academic conversations in the past two decades. Notably, when it comes to the existence of research regarding the presence of mindfulness in education, Birchinall et al. (2019) found: “This growth is mirrored in the proliferation of academic papers on the subject; zero papers published in 1980 and 842 published in 2018. Within the field of education, publications emerged at a slightly later date, with just two publications in 2002, rising to 101 in 2017” (p. 1). This data not only helps legitimize mindfulness practices in the sense that mindfulness is being studied and researched, but it also illustrates the urgency for change in the teaching profession and learning communities in the fact that the academic community is seeking out alternative approaches to teaching and learning.

Although the existing data is vast and varied, it is generally found that “when contemplative approaches to mindfulness in education are used, there are improvements in teachers' social and emotional competence and wellbeing, thus creating the ‘pro-social’ classroom with improvements in relationships with pupils, classroom management, ethos, atmosphere, and pupil outcomes” (Birchinall et al., 2019, p.2). These benefits negate the ill-effects of teacher burnout that were previously stated. The engagement in mindfulness practices equips teachers to better connect with their students which is arguably the most critical component in a classroom environment. Furthermore, Klingbeil and Renshaw (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of twenty-nine controlled studies on the impact of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) on teachers. The studies varied from 2 to 36 weeks and the “dosage” of MBIs ranged from 1.67 hr to 74.75 hr with an addition of “homework” being mentioned in twenty-one of the twenty-nine (Klingbeil and Renshaw, 2018). Additionally, “Seven studies reported the recommended length of personal practice and frequency—ranging from 15 to 40

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

min ($M = 28.96$) per session, 6 to 7 days per week. Six studies reported the average number of minutes participants practiced weekly” (Klingbeil and Renshaw, 2018, p. 505). The results of their meta-analysis indicated that MBIs with teachers had a “medium and significant overall treatment effect,” which indicates that such practices are generally effective among the population of educators (Klingbeil and Renshaw, 2018).

The following year, Zarate et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 18 control-trial studies regarding the impact of mindfulness interventions on in-service teachers: “Although interventions ranged in length per session, weeks implemented, and variety of employed methods of mindfulness such as visualizations, meditations, breathwork, and yoga, teachers increased their levels of mindfulness substantially” (p. 1171). They found that mindfulness-based interventions were also successful in decreasing teachers’ feelings of stress, anxiety, depression and burnout (Zarate et al., 2019). Zarate et al. (2019) suggests that teachers who utilize mindfulness practices “may have a better understanding of the challenges of the profession and attempt to take care of their emotions; which in turn improves classroom climate and achievement for students” (p. 1171). Thus, the growing research in the field of contemplative science and the impact on educators is beginning to present trends in the direction of positive outcomes. Although the conversation is still in its early stages, the findings presented from these studies are inspiring researchers in the field to continue the conversation as the search for ways to mitigate burnout among educators continues.

The Benefits of a Mindfulness Practice for Teachers

When it comes to understanding the benefits of mindfulness practices for teachers, Klingbeil and Renshaw (2018) analyze existing research regarding the three core components of

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

mindfulness practices as intention, attention, and attitude along with three benefits: (1) improved teacher self-care and teaching more mindfully, (2) improves teachers' attention and acceptance “which, in turn, facilitates improved attitudes toward students as well as increased self-compassion, empathy for others, and emotional regulation” and (3) “mindfulness training provides a foundation for teachers to deliver MBIs to students—suggesting that teachers who practice mindfulness will be better able to teach mindfulness to students, resulting in a more mindful classroom that promotes learning” (p. 502). The impact of these interventions is not only seen in the workplace; the benefits of mindfulness practices can also improve life at home. Crain et al. (2017) found in their randomized controlled study that teachers who were randomized to WMT (workplace mindfulness training) compared to the control reported increases in mindfulness and “decreases in rumination on their jobs at home; greater improvements in their felt satisfaction and mood at work and at home; greater improvements in sleep quality and the quantity of sleep during weekday nights, improvements in insomnia symptoms, and less sleepiness during the day” (p. 147). They found the results to be consistent with existing research regarding the impact of mindfulness-based stress-reduction interventions (MBSR) offered in workplace wellness initiatives and the positive impact they have on participants both at work and at home:

Mindfulness interventions seem to hold considerable promise for generating such spillover effects from work to home, perhaps due to the learning of domain-general awareness and regulation skills regarding basic mind-body processes (e.g., the stress response, focused attention, emotions in the body) that is the central focus of the intervention. The skills of mindfulness may be more readily transferrable across contexts because they are about basic mind-body processes that occur in every context of our

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

lives. As Jon Kabat-Zinn's (1994) book title puts it: "Where-ever you go, there you are."
(Crain et al., 2017, p. 147)

Thus, the mindfulness training and interventions provided for educators can be beneficial across contexts. If teachers are given the tools to manage stress and develop a deeper sense of emotional awareness through mindfulness practices, it would be no surprise that such skills would be showcased in their classrooms.

The ripple effect of mindfulness training for educators would extend far beyond their personal benefit. Guidetti et al. (2019) expands upon the relevance of mindful teaching and the way in which it aids educators into being more present in their classrooms—allowing more focus to be on the students and less on the external stressors—whether those stem from home or from other aspects of the profession:

In this vein, being able to adopt a compassionate, open-hearted and affectionate orientation to present moment experiences during teaching, represents a fundamental self-regulatory resource that could strengthen the ability to invest in classroom relationships, management and instruction, and sustain rethinking about habitual stressful appraisal of working conditions, such as relations with students and colleagues. (p. 13)

Guidetti et al.'s (2019) study unveiled the importance of mindfulness as a resource "to modify the impact of negative cognitive schemas on the onset of burnout" (p. 13). Based on these findings it shows that providing educators with access to mindfulness resources could potentially prevent burnout from taking over. As teachers gear up for the upcoming school year, the stress they are facing over the inevitable hypothesizing about the logistics of teaching during a pandemic is on the rise. However, when given the tools necessary to turn to a mindfulness

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

practice, teachers may be able to approach the experience with a more grounded and less reactive outlook. Greenberg, Brown, and Abenavoli (2016) show the mental and physical health benefits for teachers who participate in stress management programs:

Mindfulness and stress management based professional development programs foster teachers' ability to focus their awareness in the present moment in a non-reactive manner, connecting to their own experience and to others with ease, patience, and kindness. Skills are taught using sequenced exercises such as body scans, breath awareness, meditative movement, greater emotional awareness, and the cultivation of positive emotions towards self and others. Well-designed studies have shown psychological and physiological benefits as well as improvements in quality of teaching. (p. 10)

Not only are the benefits of the practice abundant, but there are many means to achieving the benefits. Despite the ways in which the media portrays the image of mindfulness—which is often displaying thin, white women sitting blissfully in meditation, effective mindfulness programs not only foster inclusive environments for all races, ages, and genders, but the variety of practices offers options for practitioners to connect to what works best for them. Due to the ways in which Western culture has secularized the practice, there appears to be a greater acceptance of mindfulness-based practices to be non-binary. Mindfulness based professional development programs can provide participants with guidance through practices that are simply new ways of engaging in daily tasks like eating, walking or listening while also providing offerings that might be “new” to the participants like movement-based practices like yoga or qigong. In essence, the invitational nature of mindfulness based interventions—along with the array of options—can be a welcoming and fulfilling experience for most who try it.

Preventing Teacher Burnout with Mindfulness Interventions

The key to fighting burnout is taking the measures necessary in order to prevent its arrival. Hirshberg, Flook, Enright, and Davidson (2020) studied 88 early education pre-service teachers during their standard teacher education or teacher education place a 9-week daily mindfulness-based intervention training. They theorized that because standard teacher education and licensing programs are focused primarily on the development of pedagogy “[w]e contend that what is missing is systematic cultivation of the self-regulatory, attentional, empathic and other skills teachers require to take knowledge about teaching and put it into practice. Mindfulness and connection practices have shown promise as methods for developing these skills” (p. 2). Hirshberg et al. (2020) contribute to the growing field of research through their exploration of the impact of mindfulness practices on pre-service teachers who have not yet been fully exposed to the stressors of the profession. Their findings could inspire the teacher education programs that are witnessing a decline in enrollment to perhaps revamp their dated approaches and truly prepare educators for the profession:

Insofar as difficulty with classroom management is a major cause of stress and burnout among new teachers, the finding that mindfulness training supports preservice teachers’ teaching practices, including practices related to classroom management, suggests that mindfulness training may be one approach to making the transition to professional teaching less stressful by affording higher levels of instructional skill. (Hirshberg et al., 2020, p. 13)

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Thus, early interventions may perhaps serve as a way to prevent new teacher burnout and, in turn, retain educators in the profession. A more proactive approach to truly preparing teachers could help preserve funds and the well-being of school communities.

Although it would be ideal for all pre-service education programs to include mindfulness training for all educators prior to entering the profession, all is not lost for current or veteran teachers. Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, and Greenberg (2013) were trailblazers in their creation of Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE for Teachers). The mindfulness-based professional development program is intended to provide teachers with the skills necessary to help manage and reduce stress while improving performance and learning environments (Jennings et al., 2013). In their randomized control trial, they found that the CARE program participants were able to regulate emotions through mindful awareness with recognition of physical sensations by connecting with the breath (Jennings et al., 2013). Furthermore, the CARE program helped participants reduce stress which could prevent stress-related illnesses (meaning less healthcare needs and less absences which could save districts a considerable amount of money) (Jennings et al., 2013). Overall, Jennings et al. (2013) found that participants in the CARE program witnessed improvements in burnout/time-related stress compared to the controls. The researchers indicate that such improvements within individual teachers largely contributed to improved classroom environments (Jennings et al., 2013). In the same way that a teacher's burnout can impact a classroom environment, it is evident that a teacher's emotional awareness can cultivate a positive classroom environment.

Likewise, in Roeser et al.'s 2013 randomized field trials they found that "Teachers in the mindfulness training condition reported greater mindfulness at post-program and follow-up than did those in the control condition, including greater awareness of sensations, feelings and

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

thoughts; less judgment and reactivity; and greater awareness of one's actions and reasons for action" (p. 799). They also found that teachers in the mindfulness training were more compassionate to themselves and their colleagues and that the training "could plausibly account for the effects of the intervention on reductions in stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression at 3-month follow-up" (Roeser et al., 2013, p. 799). The ability to focus attention in the practice of mindfulness along with increased self-compassion provides teachers with the skillset necessary to mitigate stress and prevent burnout. These are all critical skills in navigating a profession that is constantly undergoing change—especially one where a teacher's efforts in navigating change may be under-appreciated. With proper training, educators may be able to achieved a more balanced approach to both living and teaching while developing more confidence in their personal and professional roles. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) consider the role of self-efficacy and teacher autonomy as a means to combat burnout:

The finding that self-efficacy predicted both engagement and job satisfaction positively and emotional exhaustion negatively supports self-efficacy theory, which claims that self-efficacy beliefs determine how environmental opportunities and impediments are perceived. Also, self-efficacy has been shown in a number of areas, including teaching, to increase motivation and to decrease stress and burnout. (p. 75)

This finding supports the need to empower teachers to confidently lead and participate in practices that will allow them to recognize their abilities. The component of burnout in which sufferers face depersonalization can likely be mitigated with the development of self-efficacy.

Cultivating Inclusive and Anti-Racist Learning Spaces

Teaching is already considered a stressful profession, so when the world is facing a global pandemic while the country is attempting to heal the wounds of racial injustice but facing resistance, both teaching and learning are doubly impacted. Unfortunately, such circumstances might also cause an educator to burn out due to both empathy fatigue and the inability to adapt curriculum to restrictions from administrators and/or being part of a politically and socially divided community. Even in politically progressive communities, progress is difficult to achieve due to unmitigated implicit biases. Despite the obvious forms of racism and stereotyping that run rampant in America in the shape of supremacist groups, discrimination, hate speech, and violent actions, implicit biases are the silent and subconscious belief systems that perpetuate systemic injustices and, in turn, prevent any chance of attaining authentic equity. Polinska (2018) brings in research from Rhonda Magee, an African American professor of law at the University of San Francisco who teaches mindfulness strategies to lawyers, African Americans who are victims of biases, and police officers who need to confront their biases in attempt to transform the criminal justice system. Magee claims mindfulness strategies might directly impact both the offenders and victims of social injustices. Polinska (2018) notes in reference to Magee's theory: "While she recognizes that such strategies will not end racism, 'mindfulness and other contemplative practices do support ways of being in the world that reflect less of the biases that each of us holds, whether we are deliverymen, students, teachers—or men and women with badges, authorized to shoot to kill'" (p. 334). This theory highlights the reality of implicit biases and their omnipresence; however, with practice we can become more aware of such limiting attitudes.

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Mindfulness not only promotes more self-compassion, but the way in which it can help practitioners slow down and not succumb to automatic thinking may help create more compassionate school communities. As Elena Aguilar (2018), educator and author, notes:

If we feel more positive in our school environment, if it's a place where we know other recognize the best parts of ourselves, we will want to be at work. We will then, in turn, be more patient with our students and colleagues. We may speak to each other more kindly. We might listen to each other more deeply. Expressing gratitude allows us to engage in deeper, more positive work together. (p. 294)

With this in mind, we can begin to understand the impact of gratitude and appreciation—skills that can be developed through mindfulness practices—as a means to bettering the school culture and community.

Rationale

When it comes to understanding the state of education in our nation, it is important to look beyond student academic performance or standardized tests scores. Although we live in a day and age in which validity is data-driven, it is imperative that school boards and administrators begin to look beyond the traditional measures of school success and look into the alternative approaches to improving school communities. As teacher retention rates dwindle (and are predicted to dip dramatically as the COVID-19 pandemic forces teachers to exit the career due to unsafe working conditions), it is becoming increasingly apparent that both school districts and university teaching programs need to refocus teacher training and professional development to support the social-emotional wellness of educators. Assisting teachers in preventing or overcoming burnout can contribute to the preservation of a positive school culture

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

through the compassionate relationships that teachers will be able to create with administrators, colleagues, their students, and the surrounding community. Although the academic conversation regarding the impact of mindfulness-based interventions within the school setting—whether for students or teachers—is still growing, the existing data is pointing in a favorable direction. Thus, as researchers continue to fill the gaps in the conversation, we can hope that the sphere continues to broaden in order to reach a wider audience about the urgency of teacher well-being.

Mindfulness Personal and Professional Development Presentation

Due to the unprecedented nature of the current state of our country and, in turn, our learning communities, I aim to provide educators with access to a digital professional development learning opportunity. Since most school boards and committees are still trying to figure out the logistics behind what 2020-21 school year is going to look like as we fit within the state mandated parameters of COVID-19 precautions, many districts may be witnessing a shortage in professional development opportunities or plans for teacher institutes. Zarate et al. (2019) suggest: “School districts may consider purchasing mindfulness apps for their educators as part of their wellness initiative or begin using these tools as part of professional development days. The culture of burnout acceptance needs to stop being the norm within our educational system, and promoting wellness through practices such as mindfulness can and should become commonplace for educators in all settings” (p. 1171). Interestingly, Zarate et al.’s suggestion for digital media professional development came prior to the pandemic. Now, more so than ever, professionals are seeking virtual and innovative ways to engage with content both out of

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

convenience and necessity. Although it would be ideal to deliver the content I've developed in-person, this offering supports the urgency for stress mitigation as I hope to either prevent or eradicate teacher burnout as the upcoming school year quickly approaches. My presentation guides teachers through a foundational exploration of mindfulness while providing guidance and assistance in engaging with mindfulness practices. Additionally, participants will receive a monthly newsletter with Mindfulness practice suggestions and strategies (Appendix). It is my hope that teachers who engage in the process will be empowered to adapt to the changes presented in the future while serving as role models for students who are in need of support more than ever.

Explanation of Offerings

In the screencast presentation, participants will be guided through an explanation of the concept of mindfulness, its roots, and its presence in Western culture. Throughout the presentation, the audience will have opportunities to engage in mindfulness techniques via my video instructions. My experience in the Lesley Mindfulness Studies program along with my 200-hour certified yoga teaching certification have prepared me to instruct the various exercises. By providing a face and voice for these mindful moments, it may encourage participants to be more active in their learning as simply reading a script for the exercises may not facilitate a meaningful experience.

As the presentation begins, I will lead the audience through a progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) which will guide participants through a body scan that involves muscle contraction and release while connecting with the breath. This practice promotes a sense of

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

calm—especially when facing new or unknown circumstances. PMR is a tool that can also aid in sleep while diminishing anxiety—two common side effects of burnout.

Participants will also have the opportunity to try a mindful eating exercise with a raisin. This practice is powerful in demonstrating the ways in which daily tasks can be done with mindful effort. Also, chronic stress and burnout can often cause sufferers to overeat or develop poor eating habits, so this practice can aid in encouraging more awareness in that realm—especially with the abovementioned finding that burnout can lead to type 2 diabetes. With movement towards remote learning, teachers may find themselves eating while working on their device causing distracted eating. The mindful eating exercise is an opportunity for practitioners to slow down and develop a great appreciation for food.

About halfway through the presentation, participants are encouraged to engage in a mindful movement exercise that can be done from the comfort of their desk chair. Whether teachers are returning to remote learning or their classrooms this fall, they will likely be sitting more than they are used to. Opportunities for movement might be limited as teachers might be spending most of their day behind the screen or staying behind their desks to maintain social distancing within the classroom. The series of stretches will encourage the participant to create space both physically and mentally while deepening the connection between breath and movement to heighten awareness.

Participants will also be guided through two forms of breath-work: 4-7-8 breath and alternate nostril breathing. The 4-7-8 breath is a 3 part breath in which the inhale is for the count of 4, there's a pause for the count of 7, and an exhalation of 8 counts. The long, steady exhale can help alleviate anxiety and calm the nervous system. Similarly, the alternate nostril breathing

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

is found to slow down the rhythm of breath and assists in calming the mind as the participant's focus will be consumed by the cycle of breath and the pattern they create.

The final exercise is the lovingkindness meditation (LKM). LKM provides practitioners with the opportunity to cultivate the brahmaviharas (the Buddhist principle of the four prized emotions—lovingkindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*)). The practice of LKM guides participants through wishing safety, health, happiness and peace to themselves, their loved ones, and all other beings in the world. I chose to conclude with this exercise because of the significant impact it can have on a participant's mindset. The practice supports the principle that “energy flows where attention goes.” When bringing attention to the self and others, practitioners may find a deeper energetic connection to those beings. Not only can the practice deepen a practitioner's compassion towards oneself, thus shaping their self-concept, but when guided to think about those who bring happiness into the practitioner's life, sympathetic joy will likely ensue. Furthermore, the practice can even shift one's biases. Equanimity or even-mindedness—the last of the four brahmaviharas—is essential in maintaining a less reactive and more balanced response to what emerges. As Christina Feldman (2017) notes: “One who develops this capacity for empathy is described as one who pulsates with compassion or one who can truly listen to the cries of the world” (p. 64). Although teachers are often in the profession because of their empathic nature, the practice of lovingkindness allows participants to become more compassionate towards themselves which prepares them to support others without depleting their energy.

Current research allows us to see the extent to which mindfulness meditation practices have contributed to individual shifts in automatic thinking—especially in regards to implicit biases. Stell and Farsides (2016) studied how a brief lovingkindness meditation can reduce

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

racial bias: “We found that just 7 min of loving-kindness meditation directed to a member of a racial out-group was sufficient to reduce racial bias towards that out-group” (p. 145). Through their examination of seventy-one white undergraduate students, “we have found support for the possibility that it is the social locus of the positive emotion (whether or not it is other-regarding [emotions that have a direct linkage with positive social aspects of inter-individual functioning]) that is crucial in whether the emotion will decrease bias” (Stell & Farsides, 2016, p. 146). The lovingkindness meditation has the power to not only impact practitioners emotionally, but it taps into the cognitive functioning of how participants perceive themselves and other people (Stell & Farsides, 2016). Such findings support the theory regarding the reversibility of implicit bias through mindfulness meditation. Thus, we can see a possible escape route from the vicious cycle that is created within individual suffering and its impact on the collective well-being through the heightened awareness of the present and sending love, safety, and peace to the self and all beings. Additionally, Lueke and Gibson found in their 2014 study that a brief mindfulness meditation reduced implicit biases in the realm of race and age. After listening to a 10-minute long audiotope that guided the participants to be more aware of thoughts and sensations without judgement they showed “less implicit bias against Blacks and old people on the race and age IATs than individuals who listened to a 10-min audiotope describing historical events and geographical landmarks” (p. 288). This practice is especially moving for educators who are seeking ways to educate themselves and their students on the role of race in American society. Reducing the unseen biases is a critical step in unlearning systemic racism in order to be anti-racist. Even if educators are unable to adapt their teaching to support students in unpacking privilege, they may be able to utilize the lovingkindness meditation to guide students into a more compassionate and less bias mindset.

Conclusion

There is no denying the ever-changing nature of education in America. Oftentimes, change should be celebrated as it can promote progress; however, when change is presented in contexts where educators are not given the time and resources to adequately adapt, stress emerges. Due to the rapidly changing circumstances of a global pandemic coupled with the social unrest within the US, teachers are left to wonder what their classrooms and curricula will look like when returning to work in the fall. Unfortunately, many teachers are also weighing the risks as they determine whether or not they can safely return to in-person instruction. Between the pressure from school boards and government officials along with unhappy communities, there is no doubt that the already growing epidemic of teacher burnout will reach new heights this school year. Although the list of changes that would need to occur in order to eliminate burnout within the profession continues to grow, there are ways in which teachers can mitigate some of the stressors that contribute to their dissatisfaction. The mindfulness practice can provide educators with the means to develop the skills that can help foster a greater sense of calm and equanimity as they navigate through uncertainty.

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Appendix

Monthly Mindfulness Newsletters

September

This month we're going to try out box breathing! This is a great way to help calm your nerves and bring your awareness to the present. One of my favorite things about this breathing technique is that you often become so in tune with the breath and its rhythm that you can't be consumed by anything else.

1. Find a comfortable seat or choose to stand. Take a few cleansing breaths in your space in order to clear out or move stagnant energy.
2. You may choose to bring your hands to the heart and belly in order to feel the depth of your breath. Ideally, you should be filling your belly up in your inhales (not just your chest).
3. Start with an inhale and slowly count backwards from 4.
4. Pause at the top of the inhale while holding the breath for the count of 4.
5. Exhale smoothly and gently to the count of 4. After the brief pause in your breath, some tend to rush the exhale. Stay steady!
6. Pause at the bottom of your exhale. Count backwards from 4.
7. Inhale for the count of 4. Again, be mindful not to gasp for air after this pause. Sip the air in
8. Repeat x10.

Try this out and feel free to adjust as needed. If 4 counts feels too long, shorten it to 3. If you'd prefer longer, deeper breaths and holds, add a few beats! Experiment—maybe if you're a visual person you can draw the boxes as you breathe. Find a way that works for you!

October

I invite you to find meditation in motion this month through walking meditations. This practice can be done outdoors or in your own home. Wherever you choose to practice, try to carve out at least 10 minutes per day to engage. October marks a time of change that may be especially visible depending on your geographical location.

1. Once you've found your location, take a moment to observe your space. Find stillness in your stance at first and just notice how it feels for your feet to be on the ground beneath you.
2. As you begin taking your slow, deliberate steps, notice every action that is going into each step. You might even create a script for the movement "toes lifting, heel lifting, toes planting, heel planting." Observe the muscles in your legs that are making the movements possible.
3. Choose to walk at a pace that feels natural, not forced. Although, try to keep a slower, steadier pace than maybe your typical habits of rushing in the hallway to your next class or hustling to the bus!
4. As you walk, your arms can rest gently alongside you or you may clasp your hands in front of your behind you—comfort is key!

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

5. As you walk, try to focus your attention on one or more sensations that you would normally take for granted, such as your breath coming in and out of your body; the movement of your feet and legs, or their contact with the ground or floor; your head balanced on your neck and shoulders; sounds nearby or those caused by the movement of your body; or whatever your eyes take in as they focus on the world in front of you. Springtime is a great time to observe the natural world around you—take it all in!

6. No matter how much you try to fix your attention on any of these sensations, your mind will inevitably wander. That’s OK—it’s perfectly natural. When you notice your mind wandering, simply try again to focus it one of those sensations or bring your awareness back to your feet.

November

This month is all about giving thanks. Expressing gratitude is a great way to become more mindful of your life’s blessings. This month’s mindfulness invitation will be a gratitude journal or jar!

1. At the end of each day, carve out at least 5 minutes to reflect on the day’s events without judgement or attachment.
2. Acknowledge both the challenges and the celebrations within each day.
3. Either in your journal or on a post-it, write down what you are feeling especially grateful for as your day closes. Try to be as specific as possible. For instance, rather than just saying “family” or “friends”—select one person to dedicate your gratitude towards while highlighting what it is about that person that has lifted you up.
4. At the end of the month, re-read your entries and consider writing a brief note to those who helped brighten your day this month.

December

One of my teachers recently shared a video of [Thich Nhat Hanh on Oprah’s Super Soul Sunday](#) guiding viewers through the practice of a “tea meditation.”

I invite you to incorporate a tea meditation practice in your daily routine this month in order to cultivate a sense of calm on what might feel like a chaotic month. From final exams to gearing up for holidays that might not look like how you’ve expected, taking time to savor the moment each day can hopefully help you deepen your awareness.

Typically, in the morning, after snoozing far too many times, I prepare my tea in a haphazard way—I run to the stovetop to start the tea kettle while brushing my teeth and feeding the dog and waking the baby. Some mornings I’m just happy I’m wearing matching shoes as I hustle to my car and prepare for my hour commute to school. Although I try to take a few sips of tea from my tumbler while driving, it’s usually scalding hot, so I wait until I get to school—careful not to let it spill as I rush into the building in hopes that there’s no line in the copy room. By the time I have the opportunity to drink my tea after teaching 1st and 2nd period, its lukewarm temperature makes it less appealing.

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

When working remotely, I developed a great appreciation for being able to move more slowly and more mindfully in the mornings—I've been able to drink my tea from a mug at an appropriate pace without feeling inclined to scroll through social media or check my email. My full awareness is on my tea and the sensations within my body. With each sip of tea, I'm invited into the present moment.

I invite you to find mindfulness in your morning ritual this month. Whether you're drinking tea, coffee, orange juice, or warm lemon water, you can use the tangibility of your beverage to welcome your awareness to the present.

Remember, meditation doesn't always have to be sitting upright in a cross-legged position in silence and stillness, meditation can happen in moments that might be familiar.

Step 1: Make your tea. Give yourself completely to the entire process. Take in all of the sensations—from the smell of the tea leaves to the sound of the tea kettle.

Step 2: Give thanks. Express gratitude for all the things that make your cup of tea a reality. Let your gratitude seep before sipping.

Step 3: Slowly sip your tea. Find a comfortable place to sit. With each sip, notice the sensations and how the tea makes you feel. Take a few deep breaths in between each sip letting no sip go unnoticed.

Step 4: Give thanks, again. With an empty glass and a full heart, acknowledge your willingness to carve out this mindful moment in your day. Sit with this gratitude and truly savor it for as long as you can!

January

January often marks a time for transformation “new year, new you.” Many of us might be setting some goals and creating resolutions, some more realistic than others. I invite you to find acceptance in your present state. This month's mantra: you are exactly where you need to be—even if it is far from where you expected.

You might find yourself longing for a version of yourself as you leap towards your goals. It is important not to minimize these feelings; they are as real as you. However, it is also important to balance these yearnings with a mindset of acceptance.

As you continue to traverse throughout this journey, notice what you're experiencing with love and compassion. Take the time to pause and remind yourself: you are exactly where you need to be. And don't forget, where you are is not permanent!

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

February

Embrace your inner warrior this month. February is often one of the most challenging months for teachers (although it's the shortest month of the year, it can often feel like the longest). I invite you to move through two yoga poses that together represent effort and surrender. Incorporate these two poses in your morning routine. If you're already practicing yoga on your own, bring more awareness to poses that are familiar—find newness in each shape you create!

Warrior II Pose:

1. Step or lightly jump your feet 3 1/2 to 4 feet apart. Raise your arms parallel to the floor and reach them actively out to the sides, shoulder blades wide, palms down
2. Turn your left foot slightly to the left and your right foot out to the right 90 degrees. Align the right heel with the left heel. Firm your thighs and turn your right thigh outward so that the center of the right knee cap is in line with the center of the right ankle.
3. Exhale and bend your right knee over the right ankle, so that the shin is perpendicular to the floor. If possible, bring the right thigh parallel to the floor. Anchor this movement of the right knee by strengthening the left leg and pressing the outer left heel firmly to the floor.
4. Stretch the arms away from the space between the shoulder blades, parallel to the floor. Soften shoulders away from the ears. Keep the sides of the torso equally long and the shoulders directly over the hips. Turn the head to the left and look out over the fingers.
5. Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Breathe fully and deeply!

Peaceful Warrior (add on to warrior 2):

1. Draw the back arm to the back thigh
2. Inhale, reach the front arm towards the sky
3. Maintain the lunge in the front leg as you continue to reach the fingertips towards the back wall
4. To come out of the pose, root down through the feet and let the top arm guide you back up to Warrior 2.

March

This month, I invite you to engage in a mindful listening practice. Observe the way in which you listen while in conversation today. Whether it's with colleagues, classmates, family or friends. Do you find yourself easily distracted when on the phone or video call? Maybe you are listening to respond instead of listening to hear. Notice what habits you have or in what ways your communication has changed with your changing circumstances. Then, try to listen mindfully. Listen to truly hear that person.

April

With spring comes rain. Let the rainfall be an opportunity to practice mindfulness this month. [Tara Brach's RAIN Meditation](#) is a powerful tool to help you when you're experiencing an overwhelming situation or emotion which I feel most of us can relate to right now.

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Recognize what is happening;

Allow the experience to be there, just as it is;

Investigate with interest and care;

Nurture with self-compassion.

May

This month, I invite you to create a mantra each day. Once you've created words to live by, take a few minutes to sit with that mantra in order to manifest it in your day.

1. Find a comfortable space away from your daily distractions. If you can access a sunny space by your window or on a deck/patio, that might be especially nice in order to feel the new day rising.
2. Take a few deep breaths in order to settle into your space. Check in with how you're feeling in this present moment. Be aware of any sensations (both good and bad) and acknowledge their presence without judgement.
3. Consider what it is that you're seeking today. Maybe a sense of calm or balance. Maybe you want to be more present—especially if your screen time has increased. Maybe you want to be more loving or compassionate to yourself and others. Maybe you're worried about staying healthy and safe. Maybe you want to be less indulgent. The list of possibilities goes on. Although we might want to be all of these things, all of the time, I encourage you to just select one or two qualities that you want to embody for your day.
4. As we stay connected with the breath, you will now incorporate your mantra into your sitting practice.
 - Begin with inhaling and quietly or silently repeating to yourself “I am”
 - On your exhale, quietly or silently state the quality, for example “balanced” or “calm”
 - Keep breathing with the mantra while deeply connecting with the best expression of yourself!

When we take the time to sit with what we desire or what we're aspiring to be, we can begin to see the shift when we acknowledge that the qualities we want to achieve are already within our beings. Remember to treat yourself with the kindness and patience that you would treat a loved one during this practice as it may stir up some doubt. Trust your light within.

I am present.

I am balanced.

I am loving awareness.

I am accepting.

I am resilient.

I am grateful.

I am safe and healthy.

MINDFULNESS INTERVENTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

I am abundant.

I am worthy.