Embodied Leaders and Student-Centered Practices: Experiences of Middle School Teachers in a Mindfulness Community of Practice

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ABSTRACT

I designed this study to understand the experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle school. My goal was to understand how they shared a concern around mindfulness and how they developed best practices. I grounded this study in Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice as a theoretical framework, and I used a basic interpretive approach to design the study and gather data. The theory of constructivism guided my methodology. I gathered data through on-site observations and a series of three interviews with each of three participants. Once all interviews were completed and transcribed, I analyzed the data through two-cycle coding. The first cycle I coded by hand, and for the second cycle I used MAXQDA to organize, combine, and collapse codes to construct themes and subthemes. I constructed two themes, each with subthemes. The first theme describes the participants' domain and community: how the faculty shared a concern around mindfulness. Subthemes include 1) training and resources provided teachers with a strong domain, 2) embodied leadership established a unified culture, and 3) tensions arose between consistency and change. The second theme described the community's practice: how faculty learned to do mindfulness better for student-centered practice. In the words of the participants, subthemes include 1) "Student-Led," 2) "Meeting Kids Where They're At," 3) "Invitational," and 4) "Fun." My findings indicate that training and resources provided a solid foundation for developing mindfulness practices with students. Findings also suggest that members of a mindfulness community of practice must work together to navigate the tension between consistency and change which is fundamental to any community of practice.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my stepfather, Ed Zieminski, who made this endeavor possible. Without your love, encouragement, and support, I would never have been able to achieve this accomplishment. Thank you for being the rock of our family.

And in loving memory of my mother, Kathy. She continues to be my inspiration for how to be a good human; she is in everything I do and everything I accomplish.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of the smartphone and the proliferation of social media, children and adolescents have been experiencing a marked increase in depression and anxiety, as well as a consistent decline in overall well-being (Twenge et al., 2022). Generational psychologist Jean Twenge (2017) warned that this generation "is on the verge of the most severe mental health crisis for young people in decades" (p. 93). Adolescents themselves appear to concur, as a survey conducted by researchers at Pew Research Center revealed 70% of teens reported depression and anxiety as "a major problem" among their peers (Horowitz & Graf, 2019). Furthermore, adolescents currently spend an average of eight hours a day looking at screens, not including time spent for educational use (Nagata et al., 2022). Twenge (2017) noted that "8th graders who spend ten or more hours a week on social media are 56% more likely to be unhappy than those who don't" (p. 78). While correlation does not equal causation, the author cited three studies that suggest a causal link (see Kross, et al., 2013; Shakya & Christakis, 2017; Tromholt, 2016).

The purpose and function of smartphone platforms and applications exacerbate the problem of excessive time spent on social media. Social media companies' present business model focuses on the *attention economy*, meaning that time spent on the app leads to increased profit; this business model has led to the creation of addictive features and content, placing the user in a state of compulsion if not addiction (Harris, 2017). Children and adolescents are growing up with a personal device that, by design, competes

for their attention (and wins) for hours a day to make a few tech companies the richest businesses in the history of humanity (Zuboff, 2019). Furthermore, research has indicated that screen time is linked to a decrease in happiness and well-being and an increase in anxiety and depression, especially in young girls (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Twenge et al., 2018; Twenge et al., 2022).

As a teacher, I question what educators are doing to help students in this crisis of attention, focus, and well-being. Are educators giving students the tools to cope? Many schools have turned toward social and emotional learning (SEL) as a potential strategy for addressing these concerns in the wake of published research on its efficacy (Durlak, et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2017). SEL is a focused instructional framework that includes five areas of student development: social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, and self-management (Zins et al., 2004). Durlak et al. (2011) found in a meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL programs that such interventions "demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance" in over 270,000 K-12 participants (p. 405).

To promote attention, well-being, and resiliency in students, school-based programs such as SEL are increasingly including *mindfulness* practices (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). Kabat-Zinn (1994) established the most widely accepted definition of mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (p. 4). Lawlor (2016) constructed a conceptual framework to explain how "mindfulness-based initiatives in education are aligned with the goals of SEL" and "how mindfulness practices may deepen SEL within K-12 educational contexts" (p. 65).

On the contrary, screen time—or more specifically, time spent engaged in social media and texting—represents the opposite of mindfulness. Smartphones and their apps take the viewer out of the present moment, away from their physical surroundings, and into a virtual world that is rife with judgement, as users fixate on getting approval measured in "likes." In fact, Diefenbach and Anders (2022) found a significant relationship between Instagram users' low self-esteem and high importance placed on follower feedback. This relationship grew stronger with increased use and with the choice to make profiles public. Researchers within Facebook (the owners of Instagram) confirmed the platform's harm on teens, especially young girls (Wells et al., 2021). Considering this research, counselors and educators are seeking positive interventions to help children and adolescents mitigate the negative effects of screen time.

The most commonly employed mindfulness practice is mindfulness meditation (MM), which consists of sitting in silence, stillness, and present-moment awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Since Kabat-Zinn first published his now universally acknowledged definition of mindfulness, researchers have reported that MM offers people many benefits (Valosek et al., 2019; Waldemar et al., 2016; Wisner et al., 2010). The early 1990s ushered in a boom in research on mindfulness meditation's benefits in the medical and mental health fields (Alexander et al., 1994; Miller et al., 1998). Soon afterward, educational research followed. Many researchers conducted studies to investigate mindfulness in schools. They found that mindfulness improved academic achievement (Colbert, 2013; Nidich, et al., 2011), social and emotional learning (SEL) (Valosek et al., 2019; Waldemar et al., 2016), emotion regulation (Broderick & Metz, 2009; Hutchinson et al., 2018; Kiani et al., 2017; Vickery & Dorjee, 2016), impulse control (Crescentini et

al., 2016; Li et al., 2021; Moreno-Gómez et al., 2020), stress reduction (Mendelson et al., 2010), and focus (Signh et al., 2016).

Findings in all these studies indicated that school-based mindfulness programs provided an effective intervention to help students with various issues, including their mental health and well-being. However, despite the evidence for such school-based mindfulness meditation programs (Mendelson et al., 2010), few schools have adopted them. Wang et al. (2019) reported that, although the number of children and adolescents who meditate is increasing, only 7.4% currently meditate.

Statement of the Problem

Mental health affects students' abilities to perform, and American adolescents are growing up less happy, more depressed, and more anxious than any previous generation on record (Twenge, 2017). Before the Covid-19 pandemic, adolescents suffered from depression and anxiety at increasingly higher rates each year (Geiger & Davis, 2021). Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers and parents are even more concerned for the emotional well-being of students, and many schools have begun to train teachers in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) to address students' mental health needs (Walker, 2020).

In addition, the percentage of students diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) has nearly doubled since 1997 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edition, ADHD impairs students' ability to focus, in turn negatively impacting academic achievement (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). Moreover, students in American schools underperform academically compared to

their counterparts in other developed countries (Desilver, 2020). According to the Pew Research Center, students in the United States ranked 24th in both reading and science among 71 countries and 38th in mathematics (Desilver, 2020). School administrators and other officials look for sound, research-based solutions that approach these issues' root causes to promote students' well-being, increase their ability to focus, and close the achievement gaps.

Research has demonstrated that mindfulness meditation programs can help students improve in each of the following previously identified areas: academic achievement (Colbert, 2013; Nidich et al., 2011), social and emotional learning (SEL) (Valosek et al., 2019; Waldemar et al., 2016), emotion regulation (Broderick & Metz, 2009; Hutchinson et al., 2018; Vickery & Dorjee, 2016; Waters et al., 2015; Wisner et al., 2010), stress reduction (Costello & Lawler, 2014; Edwards et al., 2014; Gouda et al., 2016; Mendelson et al., 2010; Sibinga et al., 2013; Zenner et al., 2014), and focus and impulse control (Crescentini et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021; Moreno-Gómez et al., 2020; Wisner, 2010;) including students with ADHD (Chimiklis et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2018; Kiani et al., 2017; Santonastaso et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2016).

As student success and well-being are at stake, researchers and scholars must study school-wide mindfulness programs further to better understand how teachers can use mindfulness to help students thrive.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle

school. My goal was to understand how they share a concern around mindfulness and how they develop best practices.

Research Question

For this study, I used the following question to guide my research: What are the experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle school?

Significance of the Study

Students suffer from stress, resulting in depression, anxiety, and inability to focus (Bitsko et al., 2022). Furthermore, mental health and well-being affect students' abilities to meet national academic standards (DiLeo et al., 2022). Mindfulness meditation has the potential to address all these issues (Waters et al., 2015).

I designed this study to understand teachers' experiences engaging in mindfulness practices with students. My research site was a private middle school going into its sixth year where faculty and staff had integrated mindfulness-based practices into its school culture from the beginning. This study may inform federal, state, regional, and local education policymakers on teachers' strategies and practices to incorporate mindfulness meditation practices fully into the school culture, providing optimal benefits from the program (Cheek et al., 2017; López-González et al., 2018). School leaders and teachers responsible for teaching mindfulness meditation skills may benefit from this study's results and adapt their schools' methods, resulting in improved student mindfulness meditation skills.

Conceptual Framework

Because I sought to understand the experiences of teachers in this study, I selected a basic interpretive research methodology using a constructivist epistemology. For my theoretical framework, I used Lave and Wenger's (1991) *communities of practice* as a lens through which to view the participants' experiences.

Constructivism

Bogdan and Biklen (2016) explained that the goal in qualitative research "is to better understand human behavior and experience" and that researchers "seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are" (p. 40). Likewise, Merriam (2002) explained how basic interpretive researchers seek to explore "the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (p. 37). Merriam specified three areas of interest for a researcher conducting a basic interpretive qualitative research study: "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 38). In addition, Crotty (1998) stressed that participants construct meaning as they interact with each other and the environment rather than discover meaning. In this study, teachers engaging in mindfulness with students was the phoneomenon under invesitgation. I used a basic interpretive research approach to understand the experiences of teachers at a school where mindfulness practices have been foundational from the school's opening. I sought to understand how teachers constructed meaning around their mindfulness practices with students.

Communities of Practice

In their study of apprenticeships, Lave and Wenger (1991) first conceived the theoretical framework of communities of practice and described it in *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) defined communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (para. 4). Not every organized group of people is a community of practice; for a group to be considered a CoP, it must have three required characteristics: *domain*, *community*, and *practice*. The group must share a domain, or an area of competence all members have in common. The group must also be a community, i.e., the members interact, support, and learn from one another. Finally, members do not simply share an area of interest but one of practice; they "develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger Trayner, 2015, para. 9).

For this study, I used communities of practice for my theoretical framework as I am interested in the participants' experiences with the students and each other to develop their mindfulness practices. Therefore, teaching mindfulness serves as the *domain* or area of competence. The research site (school) where teachers employ mindfulness practices with their students forms the *community*. Finally, improving their mindfulness practices with students constitutes the *practice* in this community of practice.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Definitions

In this section I will address the delimitations of the study and why I made those decisions. Next, I will explain the limitations of the study. Finally, I will provide definitions for key terms.

Delimitations

I delimited this study in two ways: first, by the student age of the site, and, second, by the participant criteria. Although the concerns and issues described in the introduction affect students of all ages, and mindfulness-based programs have been studied across K-12 classrooms, this study focused on a middle school (grades 6-8). Twenge (2017) noted that "the youngest teens" suffer most from the negative impact of social media, and that "as vulnerable middle schoolers," they find themselves "still developing their identities" during these years, whereas older teens "are less likely to bully one another and more confident in themselves" (p. 78). Having taught in two middle schools for a total of 11 years, I observed this phenomenon, as well. Therefore, due to this age group's crucial development and heightened vulnerability as well as my own familiarity with the population, I decided to select a middle school as my research site.

I delimited this study by participant criteria as I wanted prospective participants who had been teaching at the site school for at least one prior school year. I also delimited prospective participants to teachers or other implementers who were currently employing mindfulness practices with students at the time of the study. Lastly, I only selected participants who were currently full-time staff members. Using these

delimitations, I was able to maintain consistency among participants and gather sufficient data about their experiences implementing mindfulness in the school.

Limitations

Due to the small size of the school that served as my research site, the faculty, staff, and administration were aware of my research. Therefore, the participants' may have believed their identities would have been known at the site. As such, this belief could have affected what was shared and to what extent participants felt comfortable sharing. In addition, because participation was voluntary, participants may have been more likely to embrace mindfulness meditation than randomly selected participants.

Definitions

The following is a list of key terms used in this study.

*Community of Practice (CoP)—"*groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, para. 4). CoPs must include the characteristics of *domain*, *community*, and *practice*.

Community—one of the criteria for a community of practice, a community is a group of people who interact, support, and learn from one another (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Contemplative Practices—activities in which the participants are intentionally aware of physical and mental exercise (Cook-Cottone, 2017). Contemplative practices provide an opportunity for individuals to cultivate personal development, intellectual growth, and compassion.

Domain—one of the three criteria for a community of practice, the domain is the area of competence that defines the identity of the group (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Emotion regulation—a person's ability "to modulate an emotion or set of emotions" through techniques such as "conscious monitoring" that allow the individual "to construe situations differently in order to manage them better, changing the target of an emotion (e.g., anger) in a way likely to produce a more positive outcome" (American Psychological Association, [n.d.], para. 1).

Equanimity—a balance of emotions resulting in a state of calmness and alertness. A goal of meditation is to achieve this even composure to foster intention and awareness.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation—Lave and Wenger (1991) define this term as "a way to speak about relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice" and it explains "the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice" (p. 29).

Mindfulness—Kabat-Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (p. 4).

Mindfulness Meditation—a meditation, usually sitting, in which the meditator notes any thoughts or feelings that arise with awareness and attention but free from attachment or judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs)—programs that train participants in practices, such as meditation and yoga, that promote mindfulness.

Practice—one of the three criteria for a community of practice, the term practice describes the ongoing actions of the groups' members to improve in their domain or area of competence (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

School-Based Mindfulness Program—for this study, a school-based mindfulness program is one in which all students in a school have access to research-based meditation training and practice.

Secularity—neutral or unrelated to religion. In mindfulness practices, secularity means refraining from any rituals, objects, words, or practices that connote a religious observance (Cook-Cottone, et al., 2019).

Dissertation Overview

In this chapter I presented an overview of my study, a basic interpretive study of the experiences of teachers engaging in mindfulness practices with students in a private middle school. I stated the problem, explained the purpose of the study, and provided my research question. Next, I explained the significance of the study and the conceptual framework of the study. Finally, I discussed the study's limitations, identified the delimitations, and provided definitions of key terms.

In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of the literature, starting with the benefits of mindfulness to students, then the effect of mindfulness programs on school climate, and finally the feasibility of such programs including potential barriers and facilitators to implementation. Chapter 2 concludes with an explanation of communities of practice which provided the theoretical framework for the study. In Chapter 3 I present the methodology for this study and includes the design and approach, the site and participant selection, the data gathering procedures, and the data analysis process. I introduce

participants and present findings in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 includes my discussion of findings, recommendations for future research, and my concluding thoughts on my study.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

I conducted this study to understand the experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle school. My goal was to understand how they share a concern around mindfulness and how they develop best practices. In this literature review, I summarize the benefits of mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) in schools. Next, I discuss the impact of mindfulness practices on school climate. In addition, I examine the feasibility of mindfulness programs in schools, including potential barriers and facilitators to successful implementation that have been identified in the literature. Finally, I present the theory of communities of practice that forms the conceptual framework for this study.

The Benefits of Mindfulness and Meditation

Mindfulness programs can provide both psychosocial and cognitive benefits to students (Wisner et al., 2010; Zenner et al., 2014). Psychosocial benefits of school-based mindfulness programs for students include stress reduction (Costello & Lawler, 2014; Edwards et al., 2014; Gouda et al., 2016; Mendelson et al., 2010; Sibinga et al., 2013; Zenner et al., 2014), increased emotion regulation (Broderick & Metz, 2009; Hutchinson et al., 2018; Vickery & Dorjee, 2016; Waters et al., 2015; Wisner et al., 2010), and enhanced social and emotional learning (SEL) (Valosek et al., 2019; Waldemar et al., 2016). Cognitive benefits include improved focus and attention (Crescentini et al., 2016;

Li et al., 2021; Moreno-Gómez et al., 2020; Wisner et al., 2010;), including students with ADHD (Chimiklis et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2018; Kiani et al., 2017; Santonastaso et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2016); higher academic achievement (Colbert & Nidich, 2013; Nidich et al., 2011; Waters et al., 2015); and improved working memory (Li et al., 2021; Quach et al., 2016). In this section of the literature review, I present a summary of the research in each of these areas.

Psychosocial Benefits

Kabat-Zinn (1994) pioneered the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) method to help patients reduce stress at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, paving the way for contemporary psychological research on the physical and mental health benefits of mindfulness meditation, including stress reduction and faster healing (Kabat-Zinn, 2018; Miller et al., 1998). Educational research soon followed, and scholars noted similar psychosocial effects in student populations, such as stress reduction (Costello & Lawler, 2014; Edwards et al., 2014; Gouda et al., 2016; Mendelson et al., 2010; Sibinga et al., 2013) and increased ability to regulate emotions (Broderick & Metz, 2009; Hutchinson et al., 2018; Vickery & Dorjee, 2016; Waters et al., 2015; Wisner et al., 2010).

Stress Reduction. Students today experience more anxiety than any previously studied generation (Twenge, 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Twenge et al., 2018). For students in high-stress environments due to poverty or societal marginalization, this anxiety can be even more marked, seriously impeding their ability to learn (Mendelson et al., 2010). Studies have demonstrated that mindfulness programs can help students learn

to reduce adverse reactions to stress and perceived stress (Costello & Lawler, 2014; Edwards et al., 2014; Gouda et al., 2016; Mendelson et al., 2010; Sibinga, et at., 2013).

Originally designed for hospital patients, the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) has been shown to reduce stress in children and adolescents in school settings as well (Edwards et al, 2014; Goudaet al., 2016; Sibinga, et at., 2013). Sibinga et al. (2013) found that a 12-week MBSR program resulted in significant reductions in anxiety ($p = 0.01$) and rumination ($p = 0.02$) among 7th and 8th grade boys compared to a control group as measured by the Multidmensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC). Similary, Gouda et al. (2016) noted a significant reduction in perceived stress among 11th grade students after an 8-week MBSR program as measured by changes on the Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ) compared to a control group ($p = 0.047$). Using an adapted form of the program, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Teens (MBSR-T), Edwards et al., (2014) found a significant reduction in stress among students in a rural after school program as measured by the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) from pretest to posttest ($p < 0.05$).

In a mixed methods study, Mendelson et al. (2010) found that a 12-week mindfulness program resulted in significant reduction of three subscales of adverse reactions to stress in 4th and 5th graders: rumination ($p < 0.01$), intrusive thoughts ($p < 0.05$), and emotional arousal ($p < 0.01$) as measured by the Involuntary Engagement Coping Scale. In follow-up focus groups, participants reported that they used mindfulness strategies to navigate high-stress situations. One 5th grade girl remarked that mindfulness practice "helps you relieve stress when you feel stressed out or you're really mad and focus on what's inside of you and just make sure that you stay calm," and a 5th grade boy

reported, "the most important thing I learned in the program is that it's all different ways to deal with your stress" (p. 989).

Costello and Lawler (2014) found similar results in a mixed-method exploratory study. Using the PSS, semi-structured interviews, and reflective journals, researchers noted a significant reduction in stress from pretest to posstest ($p < 0.001$) and identified five major themes among the data: conceptualization of stress, awareness, self-regulation, classroom relations, and addressing future stress. In addition to a better conceptualization and awareness of stress, students reported how a heightened awareness of their thoughts and feelings, mind-wandering, and emotional reactivity led to better emotion regulation and classroom relationships.

Furthermore, participants mentioned how they would use mindfulness techniques to mitigate future stress, using revealing similes to describe the effect of meditation on their feelings. For example, one participant said, "it's like holding a bag of stones and they turn into feathers" (Costello & Lawler, 2014, p. 29), and another remarked, "I felt as if I was lying down on a cloud floating around in the sky with the sun beaming down on top of me! I felt as if I was Peter Pan floating around" (p. 35).

Emotion Regulation. Emotion regulation describes a person's ability "to modulate an emotion or set of emotions" through techniques such as "conscious monitoring" that allow the individual "to construe situations differently in order to manage them better, changing the target of an emotion (e.g., anger) in a way likely to produce a more positive outcome" (American Psychological Association, [n.d.], para.1). In addition to helping students reduce and manage stress, mindfulness practices may also enhance emotion

regulation (Broderick & Metz, 2009; Hutchinson et al., 2018; Kiani et al., 2017; Vickery & Dorjee, 2016).

One measure of emotion regulation is the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) for which higher scores indicate greater difficulty in regulating emotion. Researchers in two studies employed the DERS, finding significant reductions in participant scores after mindfulness program interventions (Broderick & Metz, 2009; Kiani et al., 2017). Piloting a study on the Learning to Breathe program, Broderick and Metz (2009) found a significant reduction in DERS scores for 104 female high school seniors compared to a control group from pretest to posttest ($p < 0.01$). Kiani et al. (2017) found similar results from their 8-week mindfulness program intervention, with significant reductions in DERS scores from pretest to posttest compared to a control group ($p < 0.05$). At the conclusion of their study, Broderick and Metz conducted program evaluations; nearly 65% of participants reported extending their practice outside of school while participating in the program.

Two studies on the Paws b mindfulness program found a link between mindfulness and emotion regulation (Hutchinson et al., 2018; Vickery & Dorjee, 2016). Vickery and Dorjee (2016) administered several questionnaires, including the Child Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM) to measure mindfulness, and the Emotion Expression Scale for Children (EESC) to measure emotion regulation, with higher scores indicating "poor emotional awareness and a greater reluctance to express emotion" (p. 4). Measures were taken at baseline, after completion of the 8-week program, and at follow-up three months after program completion. Researchers found that children in the intervention group had a significant negative correlation between changes in CAMM and

EESC scores from baseline to post intervention (p = 0.038) and from baseline to follow-up (p = 0.033), suggesting that results have some lasting effect.

In a qualitative study on the Paws b mindfulness program in schoolchildren, Hutchinson et al. (2018) explored the experiences of 15 students who had been participating in the program. The researchers gathered data through focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires from the children, aged 10-11 years. Researchers identified the use of mindfulness as a tool for emotion regulation as the overarching theme in the data. They identified four main themes:

1) processes of emotion regulation
2) dysregulation prompt to apply mindfulness
3) challenges and strategies
4) the conditions that support or hinder mindfulness use (p. 3935)

The questionnaire results showed that participants practiced mindfulness to avoid worry. One participant said,"[Mindfulness] doesn't make you focus on the future, you focus on the now" (p. 3941). Another reported, "It brings your mind away from what's happening and it comes to your body in the here and how and your breathing, so you don't have to worry about things" (p. 3941). The authors noted that the mindfulness program appeared to heighten the student's sense of awareness, and this awareness gave them the perspective to choose how to respond to emotional triggers.

Offering students training in mindfulness practices may provide a valuable tool to help them with emotion regulation, which could improve behavior and discipline in schools. As school administrators seek out more proactive methods for reducing

discipline problems in schools, mindfulness meditation shows promise as a preventative method.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). Many schools have begun teaching students social and emotional learning (SEL) to increase their well-being and resiliency (Durlak, et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2017). SEL is a focused instructional framework that includes five areas of student development: social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, and self-management (Zins et al., 2004). Mindfulness practices can work to enhance these core competencies; in fact, Lawlor (2016) constructed a conceptual framework to explain how "mindfulness-based initiatives in education are aligned with the goals of SEL" and "how mindfulness practices may deepen SEL within K-12 educational contexts" (p. 65). Researchers have investigated how meditation impacts SEL (Valosek et al., 2019) as well as how the two programs can work in tandem (Waldemar et al., 2016).

Valosek et al. (2019) conducted a study on the effects of a meditation program on 101 sixth grade students using the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment Mini (DESSA-Mini) to measure five competencies aligned with SEL before and after intervention. Compared to the matched control group ($n = 50$), the intervention group ($n = 51$) showed a significant improvement in areas of SEL ($p < 0.001$). Waldemar et al. (2016) investigated the impact of a combined mindfulness and SEL program (M-SEL) on 132 fifth grade students, administering the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for Children (SDQ-C) at baseline and post-intervention. The researchers found the intervention groups showed significant improvements in four of five areas on the SDQ-C: emotional ($p = 0.004$), conduct ($p = 0.001$), relationship ($p = 0.009$), and prosocial ($p =$

0.015). Whether used alone or within an SEL program, mindfulness meditation shows promise in enhancing the core competencies of SEL in school-based programs.

Cognitive Benefits

While many studies have focused on mindfulness practices' psychosocial and mental health impact, other studies have linked these practices to cognitive benefits, such as attention (Crescentini et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021; Moreno-Gómez et al., 2020), even in students with ADHD (Chimiklis et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2018; Kiani et al., 2017; Santonastaso et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2016); academic achievement (Caballero et al., 2019; Colbert & Nidich, 2013; Nidich et al., 2011) and working memory (Li et al., 2021; Quach et al., 2016).

Focus and Attention. Focus is defined as "the concentration or centering of attention on a stimulus" (American Psychological Association, [n.d.], para. 1). Attention is defined as "a state in which cognitive resources are focused on certain aspects of the environment rather than on others and the central nervous system is in a state of readiness to respond to stimuli" (American Psychological Association, [n.d.], para. 1). Attention is an essential factor in learning because of its impact on memory and trait mindfulness (Li et al., 2021).

Researchers have found that mindfulness is positively related to attention in students (Crescentini et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021; Moreno-Gómez et al., 2020). Li et al. measured the relationship between mindfulness, as measured by the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), and attention, as measured by a traditional digital cancellation test in 216 middle school students. Results demonstrated a significant correlation between trait mindfulness and attention $r\,(215) = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$.

Li et al. (2021) found a relationship between the traits of mindfulness and attention. Moreno-Gómez et al. (2020) found that a mindfulness program could directly increase students' ability to focus attention. In a randomized control trial, researchers measured "attention problems" with the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) and "lack of attention and symptoms of hyperactivity" with the Screening of Emotional Problems and Child Behavior (SPECI) in 114 primary school students before and after a six-month mindfulness program, Mindkinder (p. 138). Researchers performed an ANCOVA posttest, and results showed "a significant decrease in favor of the experimental group in attention and hyperactivity problems, with a small effect size (η^2 = 0.072)" (p. 140). Changes in dimensions of attention problems (p = 0.014) and attention/hyperactivity (p = 0.034) both showed statistical significance.

Similarly, Crescentini et al. (2016) measured attention in primary school students using the Child Behavior Checklist Teacher Report Form (CBCL-TRF) and the Conners Teacher Rating Scale-Revised (CTRS-R) before and after students completed the mindfulness-oriented meditation program (MOM). The intervention group showed a significant reduction in inattention compared to the control group. Because researchers were measuring multiple dimensions in this study, they performed a MANOVA with results. The students in the MOM group showed a significant reduction in scores on the Cognitive Problems/Inattention scale [$F(1.29) = 8.63$, $p = 0.001$].

These studies suggest a relationship between trait mindfulness and attention; furthermore, mindfulness programs have shown efficacy at reducing attention problems in students. Given the connection between attention and learning (Li et al., 2021), the

mediating effect of mindfulness on attention provides further support for the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions in schools for all students.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Although my study did not focus on ADHD specifically, one of my participants did mention having students with ADHD in their classroom. Given that inattention is a primary symptom of ADHD and 11% of students are diagnosed with ADHD (CDC, n.d.), I included in this review a description of the diagnosis and prevalence of AHDH as well as a brief overview of the research on mindfulness and ADHD in schools.

ADHD is defined as "a behavioral syndrome characterized by the persistent presence of six or more symptoms involving (a) inattention…or (b) impulsivity or hyperactivity" (American Psychological Association, [n.d.], para. 1). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the prevalence of ADHD in the US among 3-17 year-olds is 9.8% and continues to climb (CDC, n.d.). The symptomatic behaviors must negatively impact the patient's life, such as relationships, work, and/or school performance (APA, 2013). Indirectly, ADHD can hinder academic achievement because the symptoms prohibit sustained cognitive functioning (APA, 2013). Since 2016, 62% of those diagnosed have used medical interventions; nearly 5% of all-American children aged 2-17 are medicated for ADHD (CDC, n.d.). Given the side effects that often accompany these drugs, many parents and practitioners have begun exploring non-pharmaceutical treatment options. Mindfulness practices have demonstrated an ability to improve ADHD students' academic achievement (Singh et al., 2015) and decrease hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity (Chimiklis et al., 2018; Kiani et al., 2017; Santonastaso et al., 2020).

Academic Achievement. Researchers have demonstrated a relationship between mindfulness practices and academic achievement by examining test scores, (Caballero et al., 2019; Nidich et al., 2011), GPA (Caballero et al., 2019; Colbert & Nidich, 2013), as well as graduation rates and college acceptance rates (Colbert & Nidich, 2013). Consistently, research demonstrates a connection between mindfulness and academic achievement.

Caballero et al. (2019) measured trait mindfulness in middle school students using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and analyzed the relationship of MAAS scores to GPA and standardized test scores. Researchers found that higher mindfulness scores correlated with higher GPA ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) and higher standardized test scores *(*$r = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$). The researchers urged "further development of school-based MBIs [mindfulness-based interventions] that foster mindfulness because greater mindfulness relates to better academic outcomes for diverse middle school students" (p. 165).

Other researchers measured the effects of an intervention, the Quiet Time meditation program. Nidich et al. (2011) analyzed the impact of the program on math and English standardized test scores in 189 at-risk middle school students and found that students in the intervention group ($N = 125$) showed significant improvement over controls in both English ($p = 0.002$) and math ($p = 0.001$) scores. In a meta-analysis by Waters et al. (2015), the researchers declared the Nidich et al. study the best evidence to date for meditation's beneficial effect on academic achievement.

Colbert and Nidich (2013) also reported academic benefits from the Quiet Time program. Researchers analyzed graduation rates and college acceptance rates for all 235

seniors at an urban high school, 142 of which were enrolled in the program during their senior year, and the remaining 93 serving as a control group. Researchers analyzed student data as a whole and within subgroups based on high, medium, and low GPA. Meditating students graduated at higher rates overall (87.1%) as compared to non-meditating students (66.7%), a significant difference ($p < 0.001$). In the low GPA group, 73.8% of students in the meditation group graduated as opposed to only 47.9% of those in the non-meditating group ($p = 0.012$). Results for college acceptance rates showed similar trends, with 59.3% of meditating students gaining acceptance as opposed to only 33.3% of the non-meditating participants ($p = 0.002$).

The research has consistently shown positive impacts of MBIs on academic performance, providing a rationale for widespread implementation in schools. Mindfulness programs offer the potential to enhance learning for all students and help close educational deficits for those most at risk.

Working Memory. Researchers have investigated the relationship between mindfulness and working memory. In their study on mindfulness, attention, and working memory, Li et al., (2021) reported that trait mindfulness and working memory were significantly correlated, $r(215) = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$. Quach et al. (2016) measured the impact of a mindfulness meditation program on working memory in adolescents ($n = 54$) compared to a hatha yoga intervention ($n = 65$) and a waitlist control group ($n = 53$). Researchers used mixed-design ANOVA to interpret the changes in working memory within and among the three groups. The intervention group demonstrated an increase in working memory [$F(1,50) = 15.71$, $p < 0.001$] with higher significance than the hatha yoga intervention [$F(1.59) = 3.85$, $p = 0.11$] and waitlist group [$F(1,51) = 0.50$, $p =$

0.46]. Quach et al. noted that working memory is closely related to executive functioning, a crucial factor in learning, so educators should consider implementing interventions that enhance working memory, particularly for at-risk students.

Educational research poses several challenges, such as the inability to control the setting of school-based studies (unlike clinical trials), the difficulty in applying random assignment with pre-existing classrooms, and the sensitivity of conducting ethical research on children and adolescents. As a result, some of the studies I reviewed lacked uniform program delivery, adequate samples, or randomized controls. However, results demonstrate the potential for mindfulness-based interventions to promote cognitive factors in students.

Impact on School Climate

The positive effects of meditation on students' well-being and achievement tend to improve school climate (Wisner et al., 2010). In their analysis, Wisner et al. (2010) reported that "meditation resulted in a calmer school community with a more positive school climate and less stressed, happier, more engaged students" (p. 155). The authors postulated a possible causal relationship as students' improvement in peer relationships, better emotion regulation, and strengthened ability to cope led to a more positive and cohesive school climate. Furthermore, based on the research of López-González et al. (2018), improved classroom climate leads to enhanced academic achievement.

The Feasibility of Program Implementation

As with any new program in schools, educators may have concerns about the feasibility of implementation, especially for a school-wide program. However,

researchers have identified potential barriers and facilitators to successful implementation, including possible remedies for the barriers.

Potential Barriers

In this section, I will present research on the primary barriers to implementation: *lack of space and time*, *student engagement*, *religious conflict: the case for secularity*, and *lack of understanding*. I included any possible remedies researchers suggested for addressing these barriers.

Lack of Space and Time. In their case study on implementing mindfulness training in seven high schools, Wilde et al. (2019) stressed the participants' need for adequate time and space in the curriculum. One participant stated, "We've got 1,600 children to put through an eight-week time-table, and I'm not sure that we have got the capacity to do that for every child" (p. 383). Wigelsworth and Quinn (2020) also presented teacher-identified concerns about sufficient time and space to include MBIs in schools. Teachers expressed reluctance to give up personal time for training, and they reported having limited instructional time to give up for practice. Participants suggested that MBIs should be embedded into the curriculum if they were to be successful. The researchers also noted teacher concerns about limited space in schools and whether they would have a suitable space for mindfulness practice. The authors said that most MBIs are adaptable to classroom implementation.

Other program delivery factors, including aspects of scheduling and physical environment (such as cluttered spaces or lack of privacy), also proved to be a concern among teachers (Dariotis et at., 2017). To prevent physical environmental barriers, Dariotis et al. suggested covering door windows with paper to promote privacy and

clearing and cleaning the room "to ensure program participants have an optimal experience" (p. 65). In addition, to mitigate time concerns, the authors suggested that such programs be integrated into the health or physical education curriculum for consistency and convenience.

To solve space issues, implementers can deliver MBI programs in an online modality, as recent research during the Covid-19 pandemic supports (Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2021). Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al. reported that online delivery did not impact the meditation leaders' ability to lead meditation, nor did teachers or leaders need to adapt materials for the online learning environment. Children and parents were appreciative of the program and accepted it well.

With flexibility in MBI delivery, including the option to practice in the classroom or even online and anytime during the day, concerns of time and space need not be a deterrent for successful implementation of mindfulness practices in schools.

Student Engagement. Researchers have found that students' reluctance to participate has been a concern of program implementers of MBIs (Erbe et al., 2019; Wiglesworth & Quinn, 2020; Wisner & Starzec, 2016; Wisner et al., 2010). In their literature review, Wisner et al. (2010) noted that qualitative studies revealed several challenges to meditation program implementation, including some students' initial negative preconceived notions. To better understand factors influencing students' attitudes towards meditation, Erbe et al. (2019) gave 115 high school students five scales to measure their attitudes, intention, behavior control, perceived norms, and self-regulation after brief instruction on meditation. Students' attitude toward meditation and their perceptions on whether meditation is normative showed the most vital determination

of students' intentions to meditate. These findings align with normal adolescent psychological development and suggest that program designers must be aware of adolescents' psychosocial needs to ensure program success. Cook-Cottone et al. (2019) explained that students want a meaningful connection, a purpose, and transcendent experiences; meditation can be a pathway to those learning goals. If students understand the potential for meditation programs to meet these intrinsic needs, they will more likely embrace such programs with fidelity.

Focus groups and other qualitative data can illuminate some challenges of program implementation and successful strategies to overcome or prevent them, including student engagement. In a qualitative study, Wisner and Starzec (2015) explored the experiences of 19 high school students participating in a 7-month meditation program in a rural alternative school. Gathering data from questionnaires, journals, and interviews, the researchers reported that students considered the program a transformative experience and noted that the ongoing nature of the program proved vital to the growth they experienced. In addition, researchers attributed part of the program's success to its use of student input, giving participants a degree of power over the program's evolution. These findings suggest that student agency is key to student engagement in MBIs.

Religious Conflict: The Case for Secularity. Much of the resistance to MBIs comes from fears they may violate the establishment clause. Although mindfulness meditation incorporates methods rooted in Buddhist practices, its implementation in schools remains (and should remain) wholly secular (Cook-Cottone et al., 2019). The scientific discoveries of the benefits of this ancient practice support its widespread adoption to promote health and well-being. However, objections that accuse program

instructors of "stealth Buddhism" (Brown, 2015, 2019; Engle, 2019) threaten to prevent schools from implementing meditation programs because it may be seen to constitute an establishment of religion.

To establish precedence against the use of meditation in schools, Engle (2019) cited several supreme court cases which struck down practices of school officials requiring students to read bible quotes or pray at graduations or football games. However, meditation itself is a secular practice, whereas prayer and reading of religious scripture are not. Brown (2015), an evangelical Christian and professor of religious studies, claims that Christians often "misunderstand practice-oriented, embodied religious traditions in which practice is itself essential to expressing and instilling religious devotion" (Brown, 2015, p. 6). Cook-Cottone et al. (2019) addressed these concerns of constitutionality by pointing out (a) the secular nature of meditation, (b) the lack of religious goals in a meditation program's purpose, and (c) the lack of government involvement with religion as it pertains to meditation in schools.

In *Sedlock v. Baird*, a school system with a yoga program faced accusations of violating the establishment clause. Still, the courts ruled in favor of the school system due to the lack of any religiosity in the program. Upper courts upheld the ruling. In the appeal's ruling, the court addressed Brown's (2015) concerns of (historically) religious traditions promoting devotion. They said: "the record in this case contains abundant evidence that contemporary yoga is commonly practiced in the United States for reasons that are entirely distinct from religious ideology" (*Sedlock v. Baird*, 2015, p. 28). Furthermore, the authors declared that "it is clear that while yoga *may* be practiced for religious reasons, it cannot be said to be *inherently* religious or overtly sectarian"

(*Sedlock v. Baird*, 2015, p. 30). The same claim can be applied to meditation practice as used in secular medical practices for purely physiological benefits (Davidson et al., 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Miller et al., 1998). Considering this ruling, mindfulness program implementers should make every effort to keep practices secular.

Cook-Cottone et al. (2019) stressed the importance of keeping any artifacts or terms with possible religious connotations out of these programs and promoted the concept that secularity leads to inclusion, one of the primary goals of any meditation program. Further suggestions included eliciting community input when considering program design and seeking student and faculty involvement in the planning phases. With proper guidelines in place, meditation programs can benefit all students without violating the establishment clause.

Lack of Understanding. The secular nature of mindfulness practices is not the only aspect of MBIs that stakeholders can misunderstand; students, teachers, parents, and other community members often lack a clear definition of mindfulness meditation, mistaking it for "clearing the mind" or daydreaming. Furthermore, without adequate information about its many benefits to students, stakeholders may be reluctant to support implementation. In their qualitative study, Wigelsworth & Quinn (2020) noted that "a fundamental lack of understanding and awareness regarding MBIs could be a significant barrier to implementation" (p. 306). This potential barrier applied to students, teachers, and other stakeholders. The authors reported two significant findings: first, that MBIs should be integrated into the students' curriculum and not require extra time for teacher training, and second, that "the benefits and processes of MBIs should be robustly demonstrated to all stakeholders to ensure accurate understanding" (Wigelsworth &

Quinn, 2020, p.307). Wilde et al. (2019) found that misconceptions and generalizations about mindfulness among the school staff or community likely contributed to unsuccessful implementation. In fact, just as important as what mindfulness *is* was the understanding of what it was *not*, such as notions of "stealth" Buddhism, forced facing of trauma, or therapy.

Potential Facilitators

In addition to remedies for the barriers, researchers have discovered several facilitators for program success which participants perceived as having a positive impact on MBI implementation in their schools.

Leadership. Among the factors which impacted implementation success, perhaps none stood out as much as the importance of strong leadership (Hudson et al., 2020; Norton & Griffith, 2020; Wilde et al., 2019). A qualitative study from the United Kingdom supported the importance of administrator support for a successful program. Norton and Griffith (2020) examined how people conducted MBIs and explored their experiences with implementation. The authors interviewed seven teachers and one counselor and discovered four major themes, one of which regarded implementation issues. Participants reported that supportive administrators helped make implementation more accessible and more successful. Some participants had negative or unsupportive administrators, making it challenging to implement the practice. In contrast, the majority reported feeling supported by their superiors, particularly those leaders who practiced mindfulness meditation themselves and understood its benefits firsthand.

Wilhelm et al. (2021) identified ten constructs that proved useful in determining high from low implementation programs. Five constructs showed particularly effective

distinguishing ability. Of these, leadership proved to be a strong distinguishing factor between the high and low implementation schools. Strengthening the evidence for the importance of leadership, Wilde et al. (2019) emphasized, "In some schools, diminishing enthusiasm resulted from departure of a key person or key people who had been actively involved in promoting [MBI] within the school" (p. 383).

Whole School Approach (WSA). The question of whether mindfulness practice should be universal or voluntary elicits a mixed response from researchers. On the one hand, Dariotis et al. (2017) found that students and teachers reported a preference for voluntary participation in the school's yoga program, that it should not be forced. However, the authors noted that a curriculum designed to promote student well-being is usually compulsory (such as physical education and health class). Furthermore, voluntary participation introduces several problems: "having a subset of students participate in the program may create conflicted feelings about program attendance, increase logistical challenges related to student drop-off and pick-up, and complicate efforts to engage teachers" (Dariotis et al., 2017, p. 66). Most of all, the lack of universal participation might undermine the attempts to create shared mindfulness strategies to mitigate stress and may prevent the widespread positive effects on school climate (Cheek et al., 2017; López-González et al., 2018).

Researchers offer conflicting advice about where MBIs are best placed in the school curriculum. A literature review by Erbe and Lohrmann (2015) suggested that, due to its impact on mental and physical well-being, meditation should be taught as part of a school's health curriculum and that at-home practice should be encouraged. Going even further, Cheek et al. (2017) suggested that meditation techniques and skills should be

fully integrated into school culture, rather than relegated to short practice sessions in a static environment.

While researchers may debate the method of optimal implementation, the evidence so far supports the feasibility of school-wide meditation programs. Semple et al. (2017) evaluated ten mindfulness programs, including supporting research, feasibility, efficacy, strengths, limitations, and suggestions for each program. The authors reported that the programs were feasible and acceptable with solid effectiveness and sustainability. Teachers, students, and administrators rated them favorably. Among others, the Mindful Schools program received high ratings: "Qualitative data showed that 92% of teachers endorsed gaining personal benefits and 84% of students endorsed an intention to use mindfulness techniques in the future" (Semple et al., 2017. P. 42). These findings align with results from other qualitative studies (Costello & Lawler, 2014). To promote MBIs as a systemic aspect of the school's culture, program implementers should consider a whole school approach in implementation.

Information to Stakeholders. Lack of understanding can hinder a program's success, so implementers should provide information to teachers, students, and the community, including parents, as a preventative measure. Researchers conducting qualitative studies found that adequate and appropriate communication with all stakeholders proved crucial to a program's success (Dariotis et al., 2017; Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020; Wilde et al., 2019). Dariotis et al. (2017) identified four themes related to facilitators and barriers in their interviews and focus groups with nine teachers and 22 students. Of those four, the second theme researchers identified was *quality, detail, and timeliness of communication*. The authors explained how communication with

administrators and teachers proved challenging as they sought a delicate balance between consistent and regular contact and burdensome communication.

Teacher Training. A consistent theme in many studies was the importance of adequate teacher training for program success (López-González et al., 2018; Mendelson et al., 2010; Norton & Griffith, 2020; Vickery & Dorjee, 2016). Mendelson et al. (2010) conducted student and teacher focus groups as part of their study to determine the feasibility of a 12-week meditation program in four Baltimore public elementary schools. From the gathered data and the ease with which they could secure study participants from the community, the researchers concluded that teachers, students, and administrators responded favorably to the program. The authors suggested that future program implementors must train teachers effectively to ensure uniform program delivery; for example, teachers should not withhold program participation as a form of punishment.

Other researchers suggested that teachers deliver the meditation instruction to better integrate the learned skills and strategies into the classroom environment (López-González et al., 2018). Vickery and Dorjee (2016) used classroom teachers trained in Paws b as mindfulness leaders rather than outside instructors or teachers with extensive mindfulness credentials. The authors noted, "This makes our study more naturalistic by reflecting realistic challenges to implementing mindfulness and in schools and possible outcomes" (Vickery & Dorjee, 2016, p. 8). The positive outcomes of their study on emotion regulation in primary school children suggested that programs with teachers as implementers can be feasible and successful.

Participants in Norton and Griffith's (2020) study reported that providing courses and introductory sessions for teachers had established the groundwork for a smooth

introduction to the program for students later. The participants recommended a slow process of rolling out an MBI in the school. They cautioned that rushing implementation could be detrimental to its success. Of one participant, they said: "Patricia urged care when schools are introducing mindfulness, noting that a hurried approach might 'Dilute its impact' because 'There'd be a temptation perhaps to bring people on board who are not ready to teach'" (Norton & Griffith, 2020, p. 2631).

School officials interested in implementing a school-based MBI must consider who will train the students, if the teachers will participate, whether the program will be part of the health curriculum or integrated into the school day, and how much time will be devoted to the practice. Current research provides support for administrators to make these decisions based on their school community's needs. School leaders implementing MBIs should provide adequate training, include community input, roll out the program at a reasonable pace, develop an understanding of student perceptions, and formulate a plan that works best with their student population's age, background, and needs.

Communities of Practice

According to Bandura (1977), social learning theory posits that learning is interactive and socially constructed through observing and modeling the behavior of others. Furthermore, Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasized how "learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world" (p. 50). Lave and Wenger's *communities of practice* provided the foundation for the theoretical framework for this study.

In their study of apprenticeships, Lave and Wenger (1991) first conceived the social learning theory of *communities of practice* (CoP) and described it in *Situated*

Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) defined communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (para. 4). Not all groups are necessarily communities of practice. In fact, Wenger (1999) explained "practice defines a community through three dimensions: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire" (p. 152). Thus, he provided three required characteristics for a group to be considered a community of practice: *domain*, *community*, and *practice*. The members "share a concern," so the group must have a *domain*, or a "joint enterprise." The group must "interact regularly" in "mutual engagement," so they must be a *community*, i.e., the members interact, support, and learn from one another. Finally, members do not simply share an area of interest but one of *practice*; they "learn how to do it better" through a "shared repertoire."

Researchers have conducted scant research on mindfulness communities of practice in education. Some researchers have found that communities of practice employed in education have demonstrated ability to foster connection among teachers during professional learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017). In addition, Borg (2012) noted the natural development of communities of practice in educational settings, and other researchers have investigated the cultivation of communities of practice in schools (Mak & Pun, 2015; Popp & Goldman, 2016).

Hwang et al. (2021) studied mindfulness communities of practice in their study of teachers in an 8-week mindfulness-based training program, *Reconnected*. The authors summarized their findings about how mindfulness can foster connection among colleagues:

> The findings provided some evidence showing how mindfulness meditation that is highly individual in its nature can reduce a sense of isolation and promote a sense of connectedness among heterogenous school members and how processes of communal mindfulness practice can contribute to evolving a community of practice at schools. (p. 2966)

In Hwang et al.'s study, mindfulness was not the domain itself, but a method for enhancing the community's sense of connection. Furthermore, the authors noted, "It is yet to be investigated whether and how a community of practice evolves from practicing mindfulness with diverse school members in a school setting" (p. 2968), indicating a gap in the research that my study may address.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented research on the benefits of mindfulness programs in schools as well as potential barriers and facilitators to program implementation. I also explained communities of practice which I employed as a theoretical framework for this study. In the following chapter, I explain the methodology I used, including strategies for site and sample selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle school. My goal was to understand how they share a concern around mindfulness and how they develop best practices. The following research question guided this study: What are the experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle school?

In this chapter, I discuss the Conceptual Framework more fully, including the methodological premises, epistemological premises, and theoretical premises. Moreover, I engage in my own reflexivity and subjectivity as they relate to this study. I also present the methods of sampling, data collection, and analysis, as well as address issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns.

Conceptual Framework

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017) "a conceptual framework is an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous" (p. 5). Furthermore, Maxwell (2013) described the conceptual framework as including "the actual ideas and beliefs that you hold about the phenomena studied" (p. 39). For the purpose of this study, three premises comprise the conceptual framework: for the methodological premise, I used a basic interpretive approach; for the epistemological premise, the study is grounded in constructivism; and for the theoretical premise, communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) provided the theoretical lens through which to interpret data.

Methodological Premises

In this study I used a basic interpretive approach (Merriam, 2002) to understand teachers' experiences with teaching mindfulness to students in a private middle school. As Merriam (2002) explained, basic interpretive seeks to explore "the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (p. 37). The participants' experiences teaching mindfulness practices constitute the phenomenon under study.

Epistemological Premises

The theoretical orientation that guided this study was constructivism. Bogdan and Biklen (2016) explained that the goal in qualitative research "is to better understand human behavior and experience" and that researchers "seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are" (p. 40). Likewise, Merriam (2002) explained how basic interpretive researchers seek to explore "the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (p. 37). In addition, Crotty (1998) stressed that participants construct meaning as they interact with each other and the environment rather than discover meaning.

Theoretical Premises

I used Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice as a theoretical framework for this study. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) defined communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (para. 4). As I am interested in the participants' experiences with the students and each other to develop their mindfulness practices, communities of practice provided a theoretical lens through which to view participants' stories, experiences, and perspectives. In my study, teaching

mindfulness serves as the *domain* or area of competence. The research site (school) where teachers employ mindfulness practices with their students forms the *community*. Finally, improving their mindfulness practices constitutes the *practice* in this community of practice.

Thus, a basic interpretive design provided the most suitable qualitative approach for answering the research question, constructivism provided the epistemological orientation, and communities of practice provided the theoretical framework.

Researcher Positionality

I explored Peshkin's *I*'s to provide a system to understand and monitor my subjectivity through various identities that may influence my study (Maxwell, 2013). In this section, I explain my Meditator I, my Teacher I, and my White Woman I.

Meditator I

I have been practicing meditation for more than 25 years, but I only started meditating as part of a community in 2009, when I joined a meditation group at The Georgia Meditation Center in Atlanta. In this group, I learned a Thai Buddhist meditation technique called Dhammakaya, a form of concentration meditation. In this form, one sits in a half-lotus position (both knees bent, one leg folded on top of the other, not crossed), with a straight back, eyes closed, and hands cupped in the lap. The meditator focuses on the breath and centers their awareness on the center of the body (determined as the place two finger-widths above the navel and central to the torso—the center of imagined cross-hairs through the midsection). In addition to the focus on the breath, the meditator may chant a mantra (*samma araham*, meaning "enlightened being"), visualize a crystal ball, or any combination of the three. Meditation at the Georgia Meditation Center typically

lasted an hour, sometimes longer. Although I regularly attended for two years, I eventually returned to full-time teaching and could no longer make the long commute during the week.

I meditated on my own for the next several years until 2018 when I found a local group called One Breath at a Time, which focused on *Vipassana* (insight) and *metta* (lovingkindness) meditation techniques. In the Dhammakaya group, I discovered the importance of a sangha, or spiritual group of people who give one a sense of belonging and refuge. The One Breath group reinforced this concept for me, reminding me that people are all connected, and there is more power in group meditation than in one's solo work.

Both groups have benefitted me in profound and lasting ways. From the Dhammakaya group I learned stamina and the importance of longer sits for deeper concentration and more profound insight while meditating. From the One Breath group, I have developed connections with others who share my practices and who help me deepen my practices through mutual encouragement. As one member always says about the relationship between our sitting on the cushion and how we interact with others as a result of our practice, "What we do in here [group meditation] is homework; what we do out there [beyond this group] is field work." In other words, our meditation practice is individual work that brings awareness to how we interact with others. The more we practice (homework), the better we get at relating to others (fieldwork). In addition to these two group practices, I have also consistently meditated on my own for many years, and I now practice daily.

Teacher I

I have been an educator for nearly 18 years, teaching for six years at the college level before moving to middle school in 2011. Besides teaching at five colleges and universities in Georgia and Alabama, I taught at both a Title I middle school and at a STEAM-certified middle school before transferring to a magnet high school, all in the northern Atlanta suburbs. While teaching sixth grade at the Title I school, I started a voluntary morning meditation group with some students. I was surprised by how quickly they adapted to sitting in silence and quieting the mind and how much they reported enjoying the practice. That experience showed me that children can learn how to meditate successfully and enjoy the benefits of the practice.

Three years later, when I offered to lead a similar morning practice at the STEAM-certified middle school, my principal granted me reluctant and highly qualified permission with a word of caution. Because of a previous controversy over teaching mindfulness in the district, she required parental consent for students to attend optional morning sessions and my avoiding any use of the word "mindfulness." I explained that the concept of mindfulness was at the heart of the practice; without it, the students would just be sitting, caught up in their thoughts, not receiving any of the benefits of the practice. This setback was my first experience with resistance to mindfulness practices in the classroom, and it informed my continued research into school-based mindfulness programs. I wanted to find out how other program implementers dealt with this barrier. I learned that when other schools had faced similar resistance, maintaining the secularity of the practice offered legal protection and helped assuage concerns among the community (Cook-Cottone, 2017).

White Woman I

Another identity that affects how I approach this study is that I am a White woman from a lower middle-class background who has traveled extensively. My parents divorced when I was seven. My father was an Air Force pilot who retired to become a child therapist for the State of California, and my mother was a housewife who became a nurse to support her two children after the divorce. Before the divorce, we lived in many different places in the US and abroad, affording me an unusually broad worldview for a seven year-old. I was rasied to be open-minded and to approach other cultures with respectful curiosity. Later, I married a man who worked for an airline, and we traveled abroad several times a year. My experiences have guided me to embrace new ideas, practices, and viewpoints. As such, I have been receptive to learning about the benefits of mindfulness meditation.

In addition, my race also has an impact on how I view mindfulness. Although mindfulness meditation practice originated in Asia, the concepts that form the foundation of Western Buddhism and Buddhist Psychology that foster regular mindfulness meditation as orthopraxy were imported in the 1960's and 1970's primarily by White academics, such as Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Susan Salzberg, and Richard Alpert (a.k.a. Ram Dass). As such, the approaches and practices have been both viewed and presented through a lens of Whiteness. Recently, BIPOC practitioners of mindfulness, like Angela Rose Black have sought to essentially decolonize mindfulness to make it more accessible across cultures ("Disrupting Systemic Whiteness," 2017) and researchers like Rhonda Magee promote the use of mindfulness as a means of healing from racial injustice (Magee, 2019). As a White woman, I must be aware of these developments and

how mindfulness might be perceived and practiced differently by people of color and other marginalized groups.

One of my motivations for undertaking this study was to become more well-versed on the latest peer-reviewed research on mindfulness meditation. I am passionate about mindfulness practices, and I wanted a solid knowledge and understanding of the research that supports its implementation in school-wide programs. Another reason I chose this area of study was to contribute to that body of knowledge and provide students with access to the evidence-based benefits of meditation practice. I hope my work may provide support for school-based programs so that all children and adolescents may have the opportunity to increase their well-being.

Meditation holds special meaning for me. I have positive connotations with meditation and with the people and places I associate with it. My practice helps me make better decisions, responding (by considered choice) rather than reacting (on impulse). It helps me be mindful of being in the present moment rather than getting caught up in creating stories that lead to imagined anxiety, fear, or regret. It helps me sleep better. It also helps me with interpersonal relationships, reminding me to maintain kindness and equanimity—a balance of emotions that results in calmness and alertness—in the face of conflict.

With such favorable attitudes and beliefs about mindfulness practices, I had to check my biases throughout this study. I read and included literature by scholars who do not support meditation programs in schools from a religious standpoint, and I did my best to represent their viewpoint fairly. When participants mentioned student resistance to mindfulness practices, I listened and included those challenges in my initial analysis.

Based on my experiences with resistance on religious grounds, I expected to hear evidence of parental push-back in the interviews I conducted. My assumption proved incorrect. Through continuous memoing, I examined these sugjectivities throughout the process of conducting this study.

My role as a researcher was critical, as I was the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Creswell, 2007). As a visitor from another state, I observed, took notes and photographs of the site to aid my descriptions, and met with the school's academic architect. (Actual participant interviews were conducted over Zoom after the site visit.) I was aware of the observer effect, the change in phenomenon that occurs when a researcher interacts with the system being observed. To mitigate this effect, I remained as inconspicuous as possible during observations to gather the most accurate data possible about the participants' experiences.

I had no professional affiliation with the school, and I had never met any of the staff before the inception of this study. Only one indirect connection tied me to the school: my cousin’s son attended the school, and she recommended it for my research because it was uniquely appropriate for my area of study. I refrained from observing any classes in which he was enrolled. I had no relationships at the school that would create any power differentials.

To manage any potential biases this connection might have created, I have refrained from discussing the research study with my cousin. Anything I might have shared with her could have elicited a response from her that could have potentially skewed my interpretation of the data.

Method

I applied for and received IRB approval for this study before visiting the research site to begin collecting data (see Appendix A). I also received a letter of permission from the Head of School at the research site (see Appendix B). I visited the research site for a week to observe classes and other student meetings (morning meetings, council meetings, forums, and advisements). After participant recruitment and selection, I conducted a three-interview series with each of my three participants over Zoom, recording and transcribing all interviews. I implemented member-checking of every interview after transcribing.

Research Site

The setting for this study was a small, private, urban middle school on the West Coast to which I assigned the pseudonym, Eudaemonia. Enrollment at Eudaemonia included 95 students in 6th through 8th grades with 37% students of color. The faculty consisted of 20 full- and part-time teachers (referred to as *guides*), 39% of whom were people of color and 35% were multilingual. After three years of research and development, the school opened in 2016 as a STEM-centered lab school with its founding class of 6th graders. Scholarships are available, and Eudaemonia actively recruits a diverse student body.

I selected this setting because its founders have integrated mindfulness practices into the curriculum right from its inception as a foundational principle, rather than adding a mindfulness program later as an *ad-hoc* strategy or a solution to a problem; therefore, mindfulness is part of the school culture. I learned about the school from my cousin who lives in the area and whose son went there. She put me in contact with the leadership

team, and I discussed my research with them over a Zoom meeting in June of 2021 as I was working on my proposal. I shared my completed proposal with them via email on August 20, 2021, and the head of school responded on August 25th, inviting me to visit and recruit participants for my study and providing me a letter of permission for the IRB (see Appendix B).

Eudaemonia provided an ideal setting for exploring the experiences of teachers who engage in mindfulness practices with students regularly. The school's unique design eliminated many of the barriers that prevent many schools from implementing a mindfulness program, such as lack of teacher training (López-González et al., 2018; Mendelson et al., 2010; Norton & Griffith, 2020; Vickery & Dorjee, 2016), lack of understanding (Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020), religious conflict (Brown, 2015, 2019; Cook-Cottone et al., 2019; Engle, 2019), or lack of time and space (Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020; Wilde et al., 2019). Teachers reported having plentiful access to professional development and training with the Mindful Schools program, research-based intervention (Semple et al., 2017), and fully paid-for retreats at a renowned meditation center nearby whenever they wanted. The parent community fully supported the school's mindfulness practices. The administrative staff had constructed a schedule that provided opportunities for regular student practice. In my four days of observations, I attended daily morning meetings with a variety of meditation techniques (such as silent, guided, and accompanied by a singing bowl, guitar music, or drums). I witnessed regular mindfulness moments throughout the day; in all classes, students engaged in mindful practices such as journal writing, meditation to music, a mindful listening activity with rhythm and sound, and student-led guided visualizations. Therefore, Eudaemonia

provided almost a vacuum in which to study the experiences of teachers implementing mindfulness practices in a fully integrated school-based program.

Overview of Participants

I interviewed three participants for this study. Each participant chose a pseudonym (Hilde, Annabel, and Daryl) that I used in all stages throughout the study to protect their confidentiality: recordings, transcriptions, analytic memos, data analysis, and reporting. (Any other names mentioned in the findings are also pseudonyms I assigned to protect the confidentiality of anyone associated with the school.) All three participants identified as White, two identified as women, and one identified as a man. One woman identified as gay. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 41, and experience at the research site ranged from three to six years. Table 1 displays information on each participant's age, position, years of teaching experience, education level, and years at the research site.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Position	Experience	Education	Years at Eudaemonia
Hilde	29	Teacher	7 years	Bachelors	4
Annabel	41	Academic Architect	9 years	Masters, post-graduate certificate	3
Daryl	38	Teacher	12 years	Doctorate	6

Note: Annabel taught science at Eudaemonia prior to her promotion to academic architect. At the time of the study, she was implementing the school mindfulness practices through her leadership of an advisory group of ten students each day and a forum of ten students weekly.

Sampling

Once I received IRB approval in September 2021, I set out to conduct observations and recruit participants. First, I sent an introductory email to all faculty members before my site visit, introducing myself, explaining my research goals and selection criteria, and outlining my research design along with a proposed timeline. Then, I visited the site from September 27th to October 1st to conduct observations and meet the teachers in person. At the conclusion of my visit, I sent out a participant recruitment email the following week (see Appendix C) to the head of school who forwarded it on to faculty who met my criteria. In the email, I asked for volunteers and assured that all data would be kept secure and that all participants' identities would remain confidential. In addition, I explained how my findings might be of use to them and how my research might benefit other schools, teachers, and students. I received emails back from four participants within the next three days.

In qualitative research, participants are selected from a carefully chosen segment of potential candidates to increase the accuracy of the research outcome (Patton, 2002). Therefore, participant selection was an essential aspect of my research. For this study, I used *purposeful selection* to recruit teachers as participants. Maxwell (2013) described this strategy as "particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can’t be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 97). The teachers at Eudaemonia were uniquely suitable to answer the research questions for this study due to the school's culture of mindfulness. Eligible participants had to meet the following criteria:

1. Must have had at least one year of teaching experience at Eudaemonia School

2. Must have been a full-time teacher or other program implementer at Eudaemonia School
3. Must have been implementing mindfulness practices in the classroom at the time of the study

Furthermore, the type of purposeful selection I used was *typical case sampling*, in which the participants represented the population as closely as possible. To be sure, the small population and resulting sample made this challenging. The population consisted of 17 full-time teachers (12 identified as women and five identified as men), most with advanced degrees. The teachers were majority White with six BIPOC teachers. Four teachers volunteered (two men and two women), three of which identified as White and one male teacher identified as White-Hispanic. These volunteers constituted a sample that somewhat reflected the faculty's ethnic diversity; however, the teacher who identified as White-Hispanic later dropped out before the interview process.

Patton (2002) suggested that the typical case sample "is illustrative not definitive" (p. 236). Therefore, I used this sample selection strategy to offer insight into the experiences of a typical teacher at Eudaemonia. With a full-time faculty of 17, three teachers represent nearly 18% of the population. As Seidman (2013) pointed out, "in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (p. 59). As I later achieved data saturation in the analysis process, this sample proved sufficient as a sound representation of the population.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data generation instrument (Patton, 2002). Qualitative researchers collect data themselves by observing behavior and interviewing participants.

Site Visit. I conducted a week-long site visit at the end of September during which I met the faculty members in person and took copious fieldnotes (which I later transcribed) and photographs of the site solely used to aid in rendering my setting descriptions. I did not take any photos of faculty, staff, or students. I visited the school for four days, and during that time I observed the following:

1) four morning meetings which included the entire staff and student body for mindfulness, appreciations, and announcements
2) nine classes, including two humanities, book club, computer coding, two math classes, STEM, Spanish, and art
3) one council meeting, which included the entire 7th grade students and faculty in which they watched a video about neurodiversity and held a group discussion
4) the opening of one forum with ten 7th graders and one faculty member in which they continued discussing the topic of neurodiversity in a more private setting (I was not present for their discussion, only the mindfulness practice at the beginning)
5) two advisements, in which about 10 students read and discussed an article on a current topic

I used the Summary Guidelines for Fieldwork (see Appendix D) to guide and focus my field notetaking on site (Patton, 2002, p. 331). Each evening, I went back over my daily

field notes to fill in any missing data, including descriptive details and interpretive responses (Patton, 2002).

Observations. Patton explained that "[e]ach observed event or activity can be thought of as a mini-case write-up of a discrete incident, activity, interaction, or event" (p.285). Keeping this in mind, I took notes on each event on a separate observation checklist I created (see Appendix E). In this study, I designed specific instruments to collect data through observations and interviews, such as an observation checklist and interview guides. My observation checklist included space on one side for time, date, location, setting description, and other sensory details; the other side included space for observing people's appearance, verbal behavior and interactions, and physical behavior and gestures. My on-site observation provided data for thick, rich descriptions of the setting, allowing me access to robust data for transferring the participants' experiences and their constructed meaning to the reader.

Interviews. I also conducted interviews to gather data on participants' experiences. Nine interviews took place from November 2021 to January 2022 and ranged from 35 to 85 minutes in duration. At the first interview for each participant, I recorded the participant reading the Research Statement (see Appendix E) which had been emailed to them in advance with an invitation for them to ask any questions. All interviews were recorded in the Zoom application with the participants' knowledge.

Merriam (2002) specified three areas of interest for a researcher conducting a basic interpretive qualitative research study: "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 38). Seidman's (2013) three-interview series protocol best met these three criteria by

allowing me to spend time with participants to gather their description of their experiences, the context for those experiences, and their reflective meaning. Interviewing offered the best opportunity for the participants to convey their experiences through telling their own story in their own words. Seidman suggested scheduling interviews about one week apart to allow "time for the participants to mull over the preceding interview but not enough time to lose the connection between the two" (p. 24). However, due to participants' scheduling conflicts, some of the interviews were more than one week apart but not more than three weeks apart. Conducting three interviews spaced one to three weeks apart allowed time between sessions for me to transcribe interviews and construct follow up questions, and for participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. After the study, I offered optional Zoom conferences with each participant to debrief them and answer any questions.

I developed open-ended interview guides consistent with Seidman's (2013) three-series interview model and Patton's (2002) examples of a general interview guide (see Appendix E). Having participants reconstruct their experiences is a vital part of the first interview in Seidman's (2013) three-interview series. These narratives help the researcher to "put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time" (p.21). I adhered to this three-interview series because "each interview provides a foundation of detail that helps illuminate the next" (p. 23).

The purpose of the first interview guide (see Appendix F) was to gather background information on the participant in a focused life history. Sample questions from this interview included:

- Tell me about your background as a teacher. (How did you decide to be a teacher? Where did you go to college? Have you taught anywhere else before coming to [name of school]?)
- Tell me about your experiences with mindfulness practices before coming to [name of school].

The purpose of the second interview guide was to gather the details of the participant's experiences. Sample questions from this interview in the series included:

- Tell me about your experiences with mindfulness practices with the students at [name of school].
- Reconstruct a day from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep.

The purpose of the third interview in the series was to reflect on the meaning. Questions in this interview were constructed based on participants' earlier responses from the first two interviews, so questions varied from one participant to another.

Rapport Building

In interviews, my role was to elicit the stories and experiences from the participants through a general interview guide, allowing the freedom "to explore, probe, and ask questions" to "build conversation within a particular subject area" (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Thus, some degree of participation with the participants occurred during the interview portion of data collection. After all, building a rapport is a critical aspect of the interviewing process (Seidman, 2013). On occasion, I briefly shared similar experiences. For instance, I related to Hilde's stories of growing up in an area heavily influenced by religion and told her that I, too, visited a lot of friends' churches growing up. I nodded in recognition when she described how journal writing sometimes became informal prayer,

"talking to God." She remarked with a laugh, "That's so funny, that you know what I'm talking about."

Analytic Memos

I maintained a research journal in hardcopy, audio, and digital formats to record events related to my research. I used an EVISTR 16GB Digital Voice Recorder to record each interview as a backup and to capture my thoughts and observations after gathering data and during data analysis. I also kept a hardcover journal as a backup in case the recorder was not available, and I entered any handwritten entries into MAXQDA as memos. Not only did memo-writing aid my data analysis process, but the reflexivity of memo-writing helped me recognize and check my biases and assumptions as I analyzed the data (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016).

Data Analysis

I transcribed each interview within a few days using Otter.ai, a free software program that converts an mp3 recording into a written transcript using artificial intelligence. Roulston (2021) asserted that "whether [she has] transcribed interviews [herself], employed a transcriber, or used a voice-to-text application, transcriptions always need further editing to ensure the accuracy of content" (p. 161). Therefore, after the initial Otter.ai application transcription was complete, I listened to each interview while reading the transcription to make necessary corrections and edits. Also, to ensure accuracy of the data and participant intent, I sent each transcription to the respective participant for member-checking, in which I invited participants to edit the transcript, if needed. I made very few changes based on their feedback, such as clarifying an

unintelligible word with Hilde and double-checking a place name with Daryl (that was later omitted for confidentiality).

First Cycle Coding. I began familiarization with the data by reading and editing the transcriptions after each interview. After transcription and editing, I continued the familiarization process by reading over the transcriptions twice each before marking anything. Then, I began Initial Coding by marking directly on hardcopies of the transcription. Saldaña (2016) defined Initial Coding as "a first cycle, open-ended approach to coding the data with some recommended general guidelines" that "can employ *In Vivo* or Process Coding, for example" (p. 113). I chose to perform Initial Coding of the transcripts on paper by "marking what is of interest in the text" (Seidman, 2013, p. 120). Braun and Clarke (2021) suggested "tagging all segments of the text where you notice any meaning that is potentially relevant to your research question with an appropriate code label" (p. 53). The authors also stated, "Sometimes, your code applies to just a few words in a data item; other times, you might affix a code to a whole paragraph, or an even longer segment of text" (p. 53). I bracketed words, phrases, sentences, and larger sections, labeling them according to how they answered my research question. Not everything in the transcription received a code because, as Braun and Clarke assert, "some segments of data will not be tagged with any codes, because there isn't anything of relevance to the research question" (p. 53).

In Vivo Coding, in which the researcher uses the language of the participants to label codes, is "appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies" but especially "studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106). I wanted to understand the experiences of teachers who engaged in mindfulness practices in the

classroom as part of a community of practice, so I used their voices wherever possible. In the Initial Coding cycle, I identified *In Vivo* codes that came up repeatedly from all three participants and were relevant to the research questions. I also noted that some open codes reflected the participants' "values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspective or worldview" so I identified some of these as representing Values Coding, which is applicable in studies that "explore cultural values and belief systems" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131-132).

Eudaemonia was founded on principles of educating the whole child, including mind, body, heart, and spirit; mindfulness proved an integral part of the school's philosophy toward that goal. Therefore, Values Coding the experiences of teachers at this school regarding mindfulness practices proved appropriate. However, as most of the Values Coding used the language of the participants, considerable overlap occurred between Values Coding and *In Vivo* Coding.

Second Cycle Coding. The first cycle of coding involved "data reduction" which is the process of "applying codes to the data or elimination of repetitive or irrelevant data" (Roulston, 2021). In the second round of coding, I categorized and reorganized the data (Roulston, 2021) by using Pattern Coding which allowed me to organize the data and "attribute meaning to that organization" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 235). For this stage of the data analysis process, I employed the use of MAXQDA to help me organize the data and search for excerpts for each code.

After entering all codes into the transcripts in MAXQDA, I was able to sift through the results of my coding process, eliminating codes that produced too few examples to warrant the code as a theme. Through this iterative process, I combined some

codes into categories, omitted others, and constructed a clear set of categories to make meaning of the participants' experiences and perceptions. For example, I omitted the codes "nature," "need for consistency," and "return to inspirational leadership" because there were too few excerpts to warrant this code's development into a theme or subtheme. In addition, I absorbed some of the sections labeled "student agency" into the "invitational" subtheme and others into the "student-led" subtheme. Other codes I combined into one, such as "diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) lens" and "trauma lens" s participants almost exclusively discussed them in tandem. However, I refrained from choosing one phrase to encompass both codes, as each idea had a distinct identity from the other. During this part of the process, I used the code matrix browser to note the strength of each code to determine whether to include it as a theme (see Fig. 2.)

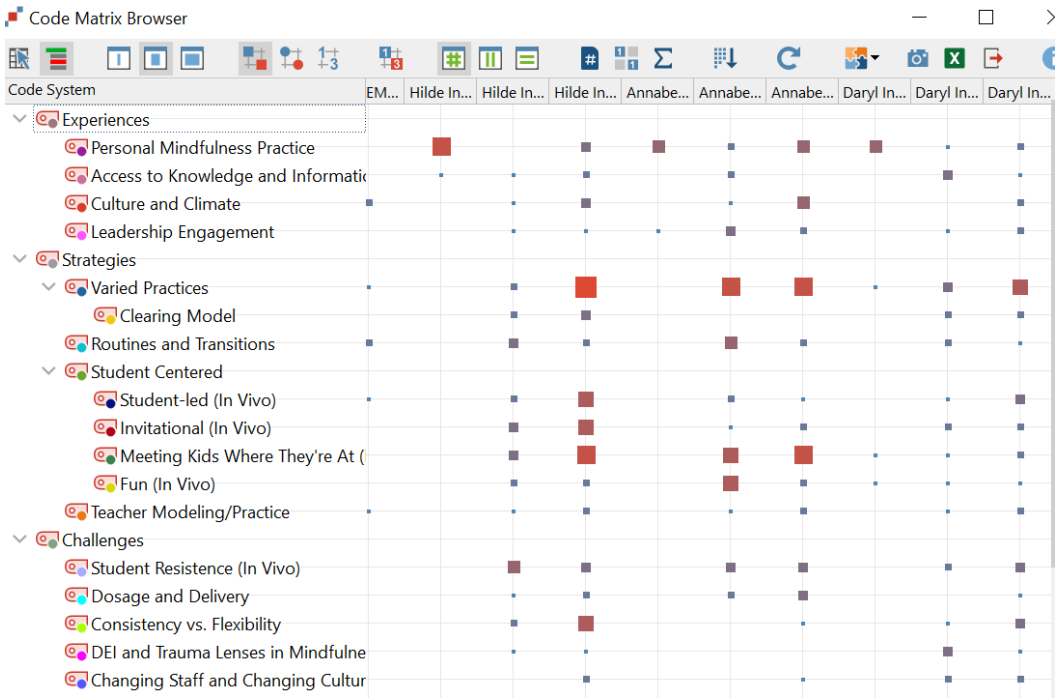

Figure 2.
Code Matrix Browser in MAXQDA
Note: The size of the colored box indicates the number of coded segments for that code.

I also used MAXQDA to organize, search for, and identify segments that illustrated these themes to develop my findings (see Fig. 3).

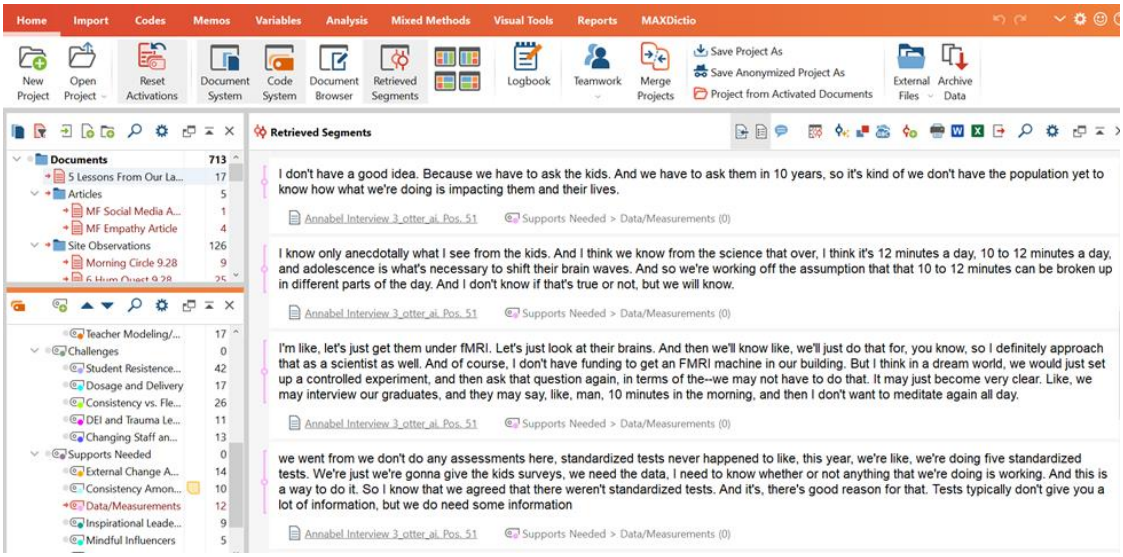

Figure 3.
MAXQDA Retrieved Segments for "Data/Measurements" in All Documents

My first cycle of coding produced over 50 codes that I organized into four main categories: foundation, practices, challenges, and needed supports. Through iterative refinement using the research question as my lens, I eventually constructed the two main themes with subthemes for each.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Patton (2002) established three elements of credibility in any qualitative study: 1) *rigorous methods*, 2) *credibility of the researcher*, and 3) *philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry*. To ensure that I employed *rigorous methods*, I designed a study using sound, established design theory to provide the best methods available to gather accurate data to answer my research questions through rigorous analysis. I used first and second cycle coding techniques to further strengthen my study's credibility (Saldaña, 2016). During the iterative process of coding, I remained open to all possible

interpretations. Patton advised that "being able to report that you engaged in a systematic search for alternative themes, divergent patterns, and rival explanations enhances credibility" (p. 553). With any discrepant cases appearing in the data, I avoided the inclination to ignore them. On the contrary, I must "try to understand their importance in the face of the other data" I have gathered (Seidman, 2013, p. 129). Including such cases was crucial to my study's integrity, to a full understanding of the phenomenon, and to my trustworthiness as a researcher. Another strategy I used to enhance credibility was member checking. After transcribing the data, I shared my transcriptions of each participant's data with the participant to check for accuracy. After I analyzed the data, I emailed each participant a copy of my analysis of their data for member checking as well. All three participants responded. Annabel reported no requested changes. Hilde had two very minor suggestions, such as correcting a geographical location and the number of students in an advisory group. Daryl also had a few minor changes related to geographical locations and time frames. I made all corrections in the data analysis as requested.

To establish and maintain the *credibility of the researcher*, I demonstrated reflexivity. To that end, I memoed extensively, exploring Peshkin's Subjective I's (Maxwell, 2013) throughout the research process. Iterative memoing served me in two ways: first, to help me discover what was going on and what I noticed in the data, and second, to check my own biases and question my assumptions and perspectives. In addition, I have shared my professional background, personal knowledge and experience with the topic, and my limited connection to the site.

Finally, I do indeed possess the "fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking" necessary to establish a "philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 571). Coming from an English language arts background, I have been analyzing texts for decades. I understand and value the process of analyzing text for patterns and themes. I have been teaching students these skills for years. When I began this doctoral program, I learned what qualitative research entails and how it adds to our understanding of phenomena. In my qualitative research classes, I had the opportunity to engage in qualitative research through interviews and observations, transcription, initial coding, and data analysis. I enjoyed the process so much that I would often lose track of time while working on my research projects. One such project conveyed the meaning that meditation had brought to the participant throughout various stages of his life as a meditator for over fifty years. After finishing this narrative inquiry project in my qualitative research design class, I shared the final paper with the participant, who then shared it with his son. He wanted his son to understand what meditation had meant to him, and my work conveyed that for him. Seeing its value firsthand, I knew then that I wanted to conduct more qualitative research.

To establish content validity for the interview questions, I adhered to several criteria explained by Patton (2002). First, I acknowledged my own subjectivities and identified my own biases through memoing before creating the guide, and I continued this practice throughout the interview process. Second, I established and maintained trustworthiness and authenticity with my participants through all communication before,

during, and after the interview series process. Third, I asked for elaboration or clarification as needed to make sure I understood my participants' stories.

Ethical Procedures

In conducting all phases of this study, I adhered to the highest ethical standards put forth by the Valdosta State University IRB and the Georgia Code of Ethics. I took the initial and refresher courses for CITI training and hold a valid certificate. I applied for IRB approval (see Appendix A) and obtained all permissions before proceeding with my recruitment, sample selection, and data collection. All participants had the opportunity to ask questions before giving informed consent and understood the minimal risk of harm and possible benefits of their participation. I informed them that their participation was voluntary and that they could have discontinued their participation at any time without repercussions.

To provide confidentiality, I protected the participants' identities by using pseudonyms throughout the process, including field notes, interviews, transcripts, data analysis, and the final dissertation. I also used an alias for the school's name and limited my description to its size, type, philosophical approach, and general geographic location. All participants received a copy of my purpose statement and research questions, and the head of school received a copy of my research proposal to ensure complete transparency. In advance of garnering informed consent, I informed participants that I would record and transcribe their interviews and destroy the recordings. I stored all electronic data in a password-protected file on my computer. Photos of the research site were stored in a password-protected web-based drive.

Furthermore, I kept all hard copy data (interview transcripts, field notes, observational data, researcher memo journals) in a locked safe at my home. After successful defense of the dissertation, all remaining data will be deleted or destroyed.

Summary

To answer my research question about teachers' experiences participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle school, I conducted a qualitative, basic interpretive study using fieldwork observations and participant interviews. I selected the site because the school had been implementing mindfulness practices since its inception in 2016 and was uniquely suited to provide data on mindfulness as a community of practice. After visiting the site for observations, I procured volunteer participants for the study through an email to the faculty and staff. I used purposeful and typical case sampling to select participants. I scheduled three interviews with each participant, approximately one to three weeks apart. After transcribing the data, I began to look for categories, codes, and themes using both hard copy manual coding techniques in first cycle coding and MAXQDA in second cycle coding to help me organize the data. To enhance the validity of my study, I employed member checking and reflexive memoing. Ethical procedures included informed consent, voluntary participation, the confidentiality of participants by use of aliases, and destruction of all data after the study. I applied for and received IRB approval before I began recruitment, sample selection, and data collection.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle school. My goal was to understand how they share a concern around mindfulness and how they develop best practices. The research site (referred to in this study by the pseudonym, Eudaemonia) was a private middle school that had been in operation for six years; Eudaemonia had been implementing mindfulness practices since its opening. The following research question guided this study: What are the experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle school? In this chapter, I introduce the participants through their narratives and present the themes using the participants' own words to support them.

Participant Profiles

In each participant profile, I describe the participant, their background as a teacher, and their experiences with mindfulness, using the participant's own words wherever possible.

Hilde

On a Thursday morning in late September, 2021, I entered a long, narrow classroom with blue walls and palladium windows for Hilde's computer coding class. Sunlight filtered through a translucent shade drawn low, stopping short of the windowsill where a small electric fan blew outside air into the room. Most of the 16 sixth graders, all

wearing masks, sat around a boardroom-style configuration of trapezoid tables. A few others sat at one of two solo trapezoid tables on opposite diagonal corners of the room. Hilde knelt next to some students here and there, speaking quietly to them as they wrote in their journals. The prompt on the screen read: "What do you appreciate about yourself and why? If it's helpful, you can think about what you appreciate about your… Mind / Body / Heart / Spirit." Also masked, Hilde wore jeans, running shoes, and a heather grey t-shirt with an otter on the front, playing with a Rubik's Cube. When the time was up, she got their attention by ringing a soft meditation chime before calling on students to share. She asked if anyone found this journal prompt hard to write about, and several hands went up. Hilde said that was understandable: "That's totally normal. We think of ourselves in society as trying to be humble, but we don't always love on ourselves enough."

At 29, Hilde had been teaching for seven years, and this was her fourth year at Eudaemonia, a private school in a major city on the West coast, a far cry from where she grew up in a small midwestern town. In our first Zoom interview she told me, "I could drive 10 minutes and get to cows and cornfields, or I could drive 10 minutes to get to, like, a mall and shopping district in the other direction."

When asked what kind of student she was in school, she smiled. She said:

> I was like a model student, like a goody two-shoes, did everything I was told and went above and beyond. I was labeled as gifted and ended up like, you know, getting A's in all my classes and positive report cards home and all that stuff.

I responded that her parents (both graduates of the same prestigious liberal arts college

she ultimately attended) must have been very proud of her. Her response was unexpected: "Yeah, in fact they wanted us [she and her sibling] to *fail* more." Then she laughed before explaining further:

> I remember having arguments with my mother at like, 11:00 pm when she was like, 'Just go to bed, the essay doesn't matter.' And me being like, 'No, I have to get an A. Like, I need to stay up and work more.' She told me at one point she would pay me money to fail a test. But I couldn't do it.

Then she laughed again. She said her parents were "intellectuals…but anti-perfectionists, if that makes sense, and very incredibly supportive."

With so much parental support and so many interests, Hilde found zeroing in on just one college major a challenge, so she created her own. Combining classes in mathematics, computer science, biology, psychology, philosophy, and linguistics, she earned a BA degree in cognitive science. At the time of the interview, her grandparents were professors, and her parents were teachers: "That was the other reason I was successful in school. My dad was a science and math teacher, and my mom was an English and language teacher." Asked if she always knew she wanted to end up in the classroom, she said, "Nope, I took zero education classes." Instead, "it was only sort of like, oh, yeah, I might do that…but the other high priority thing was like, doing like, field research, like being a wildlife biologist somewhere."

Eventually, she worked at an aquarium in Florida in the education department, serving as a guide and teaching the guests about the wildlife. This experience inspired her to consider teaching. She explained, "I found that what I loved just as much as like, discovering a new snail species was like, watching somebody *else* discover a new snail

species for the first time, you know? Even though we've known about it forever." The repetition of teaching and being a guide did not bother her: "I could say the same thing to a visitor like a thousand times in a day and then go back and say the same thing again a thousand times and like, every time was exciting."

Hilde's first teaching job was at a private all-girls school in New England, which was ideal in some respects, yet frustrating in others. The following vignette captures her teaching experience at the private school:

> I didn't experience anything that a first-year teacher experiences because I was at a very well-resourced school with very well-behaved children who, you know, would basically be kicked out if they weren't well-behaved…I didn't have to learn classroom management for the first three years. I taught one to two 50-minute blocks per day and had the rest of the day to prep and plan, like, and help out…it was a first-year teacher's dream…I taught computer science classes to fifth graders, and then the next year to fifth and sixth graders, and then the next to fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. So, it was an ease-into-the-world thing.

Although it seemed ideal in many ways, Hilde ultimately left after three years because she felt that the school was not a good fit for her teaching philosophy or her values:

> It was really good on the surface, and like 90% of the way down, you know, and then there was like that 10% at the bottom that was not in alignment with my values or, or spirit, that sort of thing.

Hilde made two very close friends while teaching there with whom she remained in touch after leaving, but the other faculty and staff were not willing to tackle real-world issues with the students: "The other people who I trusted, who are the people older than me,

who are in positions of power had, you know, decided that we weren't gonna mess with the status quo too much." When asked to elaborate on the issues with the status quo she wanted to take on, Hilde replied, "Um, like not being able to talk about anything serious with the kids." She noted that teachers were told "you can't talk about gender and sexuality…can't talk about your personal life…you should just be a teacher robot that is there to teach them computer science and nothing else." Because it was an all-girls school, Hilde and her like-minded colleagues were "trying to figure out what that meant for gender inclusivity and for sexual inclusivity for the kids, but also for the staff."

Hilde identifies as gay. She anticipated that her sexual orientation might be problematic at a school in "the whitest, wealthiest suburb of the whitest, wealthiest state." She laughed as she said, "I went in bracing for, you know sort of like being closeted again." She grew up in a midwestern state, so she "knew what it was like to follow a certain set of rules." However, Hilde was pleasantly surprised to find this was not necessarily the case: "And then I was like, oh wow, the school has a GSA [Gay Straight Alliance]. Like, my high school didn't even have a GSA. So, like, this is wildly progressive. I think I didn't realize that the whole country was shifting."

Despite its progressiveness, the school's philosophy leaned toward insulating the students rather than enlightening them about current issues. After the 2016 election, the administration at the school was reluctant to discuss the outcome with the students and its implications for society. Middle school teachers espouse values like kindness, respect, inclusivity, and good manners, instilling them as expectations in the classroom and in society at large, but the country's new leader took pride in flouting such conventions. The

situation seemed like it warranted a discussion. Yet, while the high school students "had some acknowledge of it [the election results]," Hilde said:

> The middle school ethos was very much like, middle school is hard enough, let's not weigh these kids down with any real-world problems or like, any talk of their own like, social and emotional well-being because…we might make them sad.

Even when Hilde tried to offer some useful activities from her days as a camp counselor to use in advisory, the leadership was hesitant. She lamented:

> And they were really happy that I have all this energy and wanted to do all these things. But there was a very clear message of like, let's just make sure we keep it light and fun. Like, let's not get too dark or depressing or heavy.

She decided that three years at the all-girls private school was enough. She applied to a teacher placement agency which gave her several options, but Eudaemonia stood out as the best fit.

Before coming to Eudaemonia, Hilde did not report having an extensive mindfulness practice. She said she only had about three prior experiences with mindfulness, starting with her mother's attempts to help her calm down and sleep at night when she suffered from fits of insomnia:

> My mom brilliantly thought mindfulness might help. She'd play me these boring-ass tapes that would like, go so slow, and they were just like, about nothing. And I was so bored and angry. She tried to get me to do yoga once, and I was like, this is like, painful stretching in boredom. So, I was left with a negative taste in my mouth about mindfulness.

In high school, Hilde said she used prayer as a sort of mindfulness: "[T]he ability to like be still and check in with God and with myself through God, and with God speaking though me or whatever was, I think, like a positive experience." On her own, she discovered a basic tenet of mindfulness, breath awareness. She said, "I figured out that taking deep breaths helped me to calm down when I was stressed." In fact, she fabricated an answer in a camp counselor interview that became a regular practice for her later:

> [T]hey asked me a question of what do you do when you're really stressed…and I said, 'Well, there's always time for ten breaths, I mean, just take ten deep breaths and then go on with your day.' I think it might have been an answer I bullshitted on the spot, but I immediately incorporated it into life, and I still do it to this day. Like, that sounds like a good answer.

Hilde also found strength in nature to develop a mindfulness practice. For instance, her regular bike trail rides to work ultimately led her to another experience with mindfulness. The following vignette captures her experience with biking to work:

> I had a bike ride to and from the aquarium every day that was like a 30-minute bike ride. Through nature, it was amazing. And it's a very contemplative time, I think, the beginning and end of every day. And it passed…like a Zen meditation center that sort of advertised, 'Come try meditation'…So I decided to walk in and see what it was about and did a meditation or two there.

Her last experience with mindfulness before coming to Eudaemonia was at her East Coast prep school job when one of her colleagues held a "mindfulness in schools" workshop. She said, "I was like, well that sounds interesting. I'm like, eating up all the

PD, like any opportunity, so I'm like, sure." She found it interesting but difficult to implement: "So I went and had some like, we did some mindfulness and talked a little bit of mindfulness in schools…but it was clearly not something that I could implement in my computer science classes."

Part of the allure of coming to Eudaemonia was its novelty and its open-minded philosophy. She said:

> It like literally was not just 'sure, you can talk about these things.' It was like, *'please* talk about all of the things that are real about things in the world'…it just plays like, come as your full self and let these kids be their full selves. And I was like, that's awesome.

However, the focus on teachers having their own mindfulness practice intimidated Hilde at first. She said:

> And the mindfulness thing I was like, I don't know if I'm going to be able to sit still for long enough to be like, a good teacher at this school. I heard some of the onboarding was you have to like, go to a day-long or week-long like, silent retreat, and I was like, definitely that was like the roadblock for me, actually…Can I do this? But sure, I'll try. Why not?

Teachers at Eudaemonia attended spiritual retreats at a local meditation center, one of the most well-known in the nation. Events ranged from one-day workshops to week-long silent retreats. The school paid for each new teacher to select a workshop or retreat and attend as a form of onboarding before the school year began. The school encouraged teachers to attend the meditation center on an ongoing basis and paid for these continuing PD sessions. Asked which retreat she tried, she smiled. "I did a day

long," she said. "That's all I could handle." She noted that it was an outdoor retreat, set in nature, so she wouldn't get bored.

Despite her enjoyment of being in nature, Hilde reported some of the familiar boredom and discomfort she had experienced with prior mediation experiences:

> I enjoyed parts of it. I was starting to understand it more. But most of my memories of that day were being like, kind of hot and uncomfortable. And like, wondering if it was over yet. And having good moments in between of like, walking meditation, and we did a focus on a leaf mediation.

When the agency found the job at Eudaemonia, Hilde applied, received an offer, accepted, and moved across the country to a new and unfamiliar city, but she has no regrets. She said: "I thought it was a really good fit and like, sort of a scary leap into the next chapter, and into the unknown, but the right one. And I haven't looked back."

Annabel

A former science teacher at Eudaemonia and now the school's academic architect (an administrative curriculum designer), Annabel, age 41, had nine years of official teaching experience, three of which were at Eudaemonia. However, more accurately, Annabel had been teaching since she was in first grade. In fact, there had rarely been a time in her life that she was not teaching in some capacity. The following vignette captures her early experiences with teaching:

> My first teaching job I was seven. So, I used to teach karate to younger kids to like, pay for my classes. There was this very strong work ethic instilled in my family. So, my mom worked at the dance studio front desk to pay for dance classes, and I worked with my dad, and I would go every weekend and I would

> teach the younger classes and then I would take class. And I remember working with a neighbor who was distributing educational materials. It was like my first [paid] job as a kid. I was probably like nine, and I was sorting educational materials then. I taught dance when I was like, 15 to younger kids… I was a TA [teaching assistant] in high school. I like taught an anatomy and phys to younger students or… help grade papers, like I just always have taught. It's kind of just something I've always done.

Her teaching continued into college, where her professors saw her teaching potential, placing trust in her to take over some responsibilities early on. Annabel relayed the following story which illustrates her experiences teaching in college:

> I went to community college after high school. And I got really close to some professors. So, they asked me to be an adjunct, when we had a colleague go out sick, and I thought they were kidding. I was like, I'm a student, like, I can't teach this class. I'm like, in the advanced version of this class, and they said, "Wear a lab code, it'll be fine." And so I would teach this anatomy and physiology lab, and it was illegal. The dean of math and science would sit--he was like the real professor--and he would sit behind the classroom wall, to listen and make sure that I was like, managing the classroom. And he told me during that time, like, you should teach, this is something that you're good at.

Her professor helped her to get scholarships, and she worked briefly teaching with a high school teacher in a high school classroom during her undergraduate years.

Eventually, however, she decided she wanted to study biology. After graduating with her BS degree, she worked in a lab for two years before attending a prestigious

university for a master's in biology. Still, her inclinations toward teaching kept her tethered to the practice even as she tried to "pursue this academic path." The following vignette captures her experiences in college and graduate school:

> I worked for two years in a cancer lab, always teaching still, like still TA-ing. I would teach all my friends… I would go to the office hours. I remember I went to a professor's office hours, and he was like, he just gave me the whiteboard pen. And was like, you can just tell them. So, it was like really constant, but I didn't really get it. And then I went to… grad school… I'm just going to pursue this academic path…You know, I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And I got there. And I was just like, miserable in lab every day. And it was so isolating and so different from what I loved about science. And so, I told my advisor I was gonna leave… So, my advisor, sat me down and said, "Okay, here are some options… I see that you love teaching. Have you thought about doing that?"

At his encouragement, she applied for teaching jobs and did a residency for teaching. After completing her master's degree, she went right into a residency program for teaching, followed by a fellowship for math and science teaching.

The school where she completed her fellowship eventually hired her. She described her first job: "It was sixth through 12th, and I worked there for six years. My first year, I taught all ages, sixth through 12th. It was completely overwhelming." Asked how one teacher managed to cover so many different grade levels, she explained the school's blended grade level philosophy:

> They hadn't had a science teacher, so there was a gap. And so they had me combine the grades. So, I taught sixth and seventh together, eighth alone, and then

nine through 12. And it was awesome. It was so hard. My first year teaching was so difficult.

I asked her what kinds of science she was teaching to so many students of different grade levels. She explained:

> The sixth and seventh grade class was called Doing Research in Math and Science. So, it was all about inquiry and like research, setting up research studies, and so it was basically learning the process. So, we connected with like, Forestry Research Institution, [a local university], and we like did some research for them and made posters. It was fun. So, that was sixth and seventh. Eighth grade was marine science and algebra. So, it was combined math and science. Then the ninth through 12th was a human biology, so like more anatomy and phys. So, it was wild. Big year. [Laughs]

Annabel tried once again to break away from teaching and pursue another career path, this time in the arts when she "took a gap year and got another degree in science illustration." Yet again, the lure of teaching pulled her back to education. The following vignette captures this experience for her:

> And I thought, Okay…I'm gonna commit to this art thing. I'm really gonna do science illustration, this is great. And the whole time I was in class, all I could think about was what it felt like to be a novice in an advanced class, like, what does it feel like to be a student who's actually behind? Like, there are kids in my cohort who…they would put their paintings on the wall, and I would like weep, they were so beautiful. And, you know, my first sketch was sort of like a circle with some eyelashes. I was like, I'd gotten into the program somehow, so I had

> some basic skills, but it was it was a rough go. And I really learned like, what kind of support I needed. And I learned that it wasn't for lack of trying, you know, like sometimes there are just skills that need to be built through practice and like, what kind of coaching would I need and what how could this teacher have structured this lesson differently? Or like, what would have propelled me to reach for challenge? And it just was a very cool lens to be a teacher and to be put into that place. So, I ended up just, like I thought about teaching non-stop. And when we applied for internships, I did apply for internships, but I also applied for teaching jobs.

She tried to finagle a situation in which she could work in a school part-time and enjoy her internship the rest of the time, unsure if the internship would result in a job offer later. In addition, she just wanted to continue teaching. She explained the ups and downs of the job search: "I took a bunch of calls at different schools, and like, sometimes I would not be into them. Sometimes they wouldn't be into me, you know, it just it's like online dating." She laughed.

Before long, she landed both a job offer at Eudaemonia and an internship with *National Geographic*. Annabel described the experience of trying to juggle both options:

> So, I had an internship lined up with *National Geographic*…And I was like, [laughter] Okay, here I go, science illustration really doing it hard, determined… And I, um, I got a call from [founder of Eudaemonia]… I think he cold called me or emailed me without even having a full letter.

She went through a three-interview series before he offered her the job. Although she had originally thought about splitting the positions, 75% teaching and 25% internship, once

she visited the school, she was all in, 100%. Coincidentally, she got news about her internship that made the decision even easier. She said:

> And then the *National Geographic* internship just totally fell out of the picture. They called me and they said that since I didn't have a master's from the science illustration program, they were no longer going to offer it to me. And I was like, really? And they were like, yeah, sorry. It's a new change. They just got bought by Disney. So, like, all of their policies were changing. And the guy was so apologetic, like I had done everything but sign the contract. And he was just like, sorry, we can't. I was like, that's cool. Don't worry about it.

When she came to Eudaemonia, Annabel had a history of various mindfulness practices, rooted in her early experiences with dance. She had been involved with dance for most of her life: "So, from the time that I was three until I was 21. And I still dance, although less and less well." The following passage captures her description of her spiritual background:

> I started to go to a church actually, just as a way to like, connect with friends...And so I started to go to like, church camps with friends and like a weekly church service…Later on, I found the Quaker Church, which was really meditative in practice, like a lot of reflection and open time. And, like, that was very, very supportive for me. And I continued to go for years. So, I think I started going there when I was 17. And ended up going through when I started to study molecular biology. So, I had some difficulties, like, maintaining the discrepancies between the biblical teachings and what I was learning and evolution, so I ended up not staying.

Although she left the Quakers, her interest in meditative practices and mindfulness continued to grow. She eventually began a formal practice in graduate school.

Today, she has settled into a routine that works for her lifestyle and her spiritual needs. The following vignette describes her current mindfulness practice:

> I now I have a really short mindfulness practice. Every day, I do just like a short sit in the morning and a short sit at night. And they're pretty structured…it's like a guided meditation, as well as the sits that I do with the students. And…there have been times in my life where I'm like, doing yoga, or sitting for an hour every day. And there have been times where it's like, you know, when's the last time that I sat? But this seems to be the right fit for now. It's like an appreciation and gratitude practice before bed and kind of like a heart, body, mind, spirit check-in when I wake up. And then now I feel like I have mindful practices often in that like, in my daily life, I'll be like, I'm eating something. I'm going to do this *mindfully*.

I asked her to describe what she got out of her mindfulness practices. Why did she give up time each morning and evening, not to mention throughout her day when eating or doing any sort of routine actions, to sit and engage in these practices? She explained:

> I think mindfulness for me is about like, alleviating that secondary pain in a way that feels actually more important to me than biological pain. Like we're all gonna get sick and die, at some point… just guaranteed, like can't get around it. Death and taxes. And so like, how do you then live in a way that feels grounded and loving? And to me, like, the only way to do that is through mindfulness. I've not

> really found other practices that support it. I think even religion like when I see people who are very religious, it's still through prayer…It's still mindfulness.

Annabel was very attracted to the mindfulness aspects of Eudaemonia, and their integration of mindfulness into the curriculum excited her. She acknowledged that middle school years are difficult ones for kids to navigate, and they need emotional supports in place to help guide them. She said, "as a kid, I would have really loved to have mindfulness practice as a way to process and talk about the experiences that I was having."

Although Annabel no longer taught science at Eudaemonia, she did, like all the adults at the school, lead an advisory group with her forum, consisting of 9-10 students in the same grade, who stay with their forum all three years at Eudaemonia. The forum met at the end of the day most days, and on Wednesday mornings after the students met as a grade level to discuss various topics each week. Like many classes and gatherings at Eudaemonia, the advisory groups and forums began with mindfulness practice, sometimes student-led, but always overseen by the advisor. Annabel continued to implement the mindfulness practices at the school through these forums and advisory meetings, bringing mindfulness into her daily life throughout the week. She explained how this differed from her meditation practices at her previous school, which were only "once a week for 20 minutes." She elaborated:

> And that's been a big shift…When I was at [previous school], I thought about mindfulness or meditation as this like thing I would do, and then I would go to my life. And so, it's been nice to feel like, Oh, I'm not doing it as long as I thought I needed to. And yet I'm doing it now all the time. Like, I'm bringing that into my

life. It's no longer this like, separate thing to calm me. It's more like a way that I am.

Daryl

I entered a narrow, rectangular room with yellow walls and high ceilings and large, open windows on the far end. As I slipped into the corner and took my seat, I surveyed the 17 students sitting in groups of three or four at blonde wooden tables in plastic white bucket chairs. They wore mostly casual, comfortable clothing: jeans, sweatpants, athletic shoes, t-shirts, pullovers, and hoodies. Their teacher, Daryl, wore jeans and athletic shoes with a teal pullover shirt and a navy cardigan sweater; he walked around the room, monitoring the students as they settled into their writing. On one long wall hung a plastic colorful banner of snowflake-style cutout flags in purple, turquoise, orange, green, yellow, and red. It blew gently in the breeze from the fan running in the open window. The overhead lights were off, and natural light filtered in through the windows and translucent shade, drawn halfway down. Daryl and all the students wore masks to prevent the spread of Covid. One student's nose was exposed, but he quickly pulled up his mask to cover it, without prompting. Traces of marijuana scent wafted in through the windows from the street below and then dissipated. The electric pencil sharpener whirred in the background along with the occasional car sounds outside the window. Soft meditation music played from the computer as students worked on their journal prompt.

Daryl, 38, had been at Eudaemonia the longest of all my participants, since its first year. His experience with meditation was also the most extensive, going all the way

back to his preschool years. The following vignette conveys his family background that included meditating from such an early age:

> My mom and my dad split when I was quite young. And actually, part of why they split was because my mom had gotten involved with a church called Self Realization Fellowship... And it was founded by an Indian yogi who had come from India in the 1920s, I think. And she had gotten involved in transcendental meditation when they lived in New Orleans years before that, but she sort of shifted to SRF, as it's called, in the last couple years before I was born. My dad's a jazz musician and was very like, in the LA nightlife music scene, and they were just totally on different wavelengths and going in different directions and paths at that point. So anyway, my mom moved to [a southwestern city] partly because there was a SRF church there. And I grew up going to Sunday school and learning to meditate from the time I was like three or four years old.

I wondered what that was like for him, to learn to sit still and be present at such a young age. However, the meditation method Daryl practiced differed greatly from mainstream mindfulness practices. His religion's form derived from a very "rigid" and secretive lineage. He described it:

> Well, it was Sunday school, you know? So, it was pretty rigid. And, you know, the first thing they tell you is like, you basically sit with your feet flat on your floor, your hands on your lap, and your back straight. And you close your eyes, and you look up at what they call the spiritual eye. And, you know, there are breathing techniques. There are some sort of visualization things. But I just kind of remember the language of like God and guru, and stuff like that, and just being

> told, like how to do it. There was a youth program camp that we would go to, too, so I went to the boys' camp. And we did a little bit more… advanced techniques there. And they would tell us, like you're being initiated into this technique, you can't share it with anyone, like you have to keep it secret, you know, at like, 10 years old. [Laughs]

I asked him if this secretive aspect created any sort of mystique around meditation for him as a child and how he felt about it in general. On the contrary, his family's religious practice made him feel different from other kids. The following description captures his feelings about his religious practice as a child:

> This was like the early 90s. So, I was not at all aware of any kind of like, pop culture resonance of meditation. You know, it didn't have any mystique. It was just this sort of weird thing that my parents did. Sometimes I feel like it's the equivalent of almost like being Jewish, you know, maybe like a couple generations before. Like I just felt very different from other kids. They would come to our house and see like these giant posters of like Indian yogis on the wall. You know, and for my parents and for the sort of SRF community, it was totally normal. But in [his hometown] at that time, it was not normal. So, I didn't have any sense of like, Oh, we're doing something cool. It was more like, Oh, this is just kind of a weird thing that makes us different.

When asked what he was like as a student, Daryl said he was "a pretty mediocre high school student." He credits his mother for encouraging him to do well enough to keep his options open for college later on, although it was more through coercion than

motivation. The following vignette capture his mother's extrinsic influence on his educational performance:

> Like my mom said I needed a 3.5 GPA in order to drive the family car. So, I got exactly a 3.5 GPA to drive the family car. I don't think I would have like, gotten it together to apply to college if she hadn't really been nudging me along. But I was I was intellectually curious. You know, I didn't get much out of out of school up to that point.

Given that he described himself as "intellectually curious," I asked why he was not motivated in school. He offered the following explanation:

> I guess just a lot of it I thought was busy work. Um, you know, just the kind of transactional nature of classes and assignments and tests and all that. Yeah…I think I was, like, seventh and eighth grade, I was getting really curious. And there's a period where I thought, oh, maybe I'll apply to some, you know, fancy private high school, but I was just very socially driven, you know, and kind of wanted to be where my friends were.

That all started to change in high school. Daryl took a creative writing class and "started to feel some passion around it." He had always liked writing. Even history papers and other non-fiction writing inspired him, and he remembers "feeling this kind of verve." He said, "But it was definitely in college…actually my freshman comp class, which was taught by sort of a creative writing teacher. And she had us read Dave Eggers' book, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*." He explained the effect that book had on him and his desire to be a writer:

> And that was kind of the like, his approach to creative nonfiction and like, writing about his own life, but doing it in a very literary kind of interesting way. That just really grabbed me, you know, I wanted to do that kind of writing. And I think that became like my linchpin, like, I'm going to be a writer. I'm going to do this.

However, this passion for writing eventually parlayed into a career in teaching. When I asked how that happened, he laughed and said, "Haphazardly, I guess." The following vignette captures his experiences that led him to teaching:

> I started working with kids, pretty soon after college… I did an after-school tutoring program. And I remember working in a Montessori school, just…for a summer…I still felt interested in that kind of approach and kind of early education. But I started teaching writing in 2010. So as a grad student, like, working for the college writing program was like one way of you know, having a…fellowship, after my four-year history department stipend ran out. So, yeah, I started in 2010, and just taught for the writing program for the next six years…teaching my own kind of seminar style classes. It was pretty sweet. There's only like, 15, 16 kids in the class. I could basically decide the curriculum…I learned a lot about teaching through that, you know, and kind of found this love for Socratic discussions. Just finding ways of talking about ideas and connecting with texts and, you know, engaging students that way.

When asked how he ended up at Eudaemonia, Daryl had a quite a serendipitous story. He was taking a week-long conference at a training center for educators in the city where Eudaemonia is located. The following vignette captures the experiences that led him to Eudaemonia:

> So, I was doing this [training program] as a new PhD, but not working at a school and not, you know, having a clear kind of direction in terms of where I wanted to go in education. At that point, I was not even sure I wanted to be in education, I thought maybe I was going to be in journalism. But I connected with the education director who was kind of leading the conference, and she turned out to be another Eudaemonia advisor. And believe it or not, like, a couple weeks after the conference, I was in a cafe in [the same city]. And she rode by on her bike, which is really weird, because she actually lived in [a neighboring town]. So, she just happened to be in [town] when I happened to be in this cafe. And we were chatting, and I said, "Oh yeah, I'm actually substitute teaching in a couple schools and getting interested in…like, middle school age group." And she said, "You should work at Eudaemonia school." I was like, "What's Eudaemonia?" And she was like, "Oh, it's this school that's just starting up. And you know, they actually wanted to hire me. They pay really well. I'll put you in touch with [head of school] and [founder]." So that was how it started.

He had been there ever since, going into his sixth year at the time of my interviews.

No doubt the school's mindfulness approach was one of the aspects that attracted him, and he has been a leader in the school's mindfulness program and its development since the school's inception. His own mindfulness practice being so extensive, Daryl was well-suited to take on this leadership role. However, as with many who practice mindfulness, the experience often developed in fits and starts. Daryl described how he became disillusioned with his mother's rigid and strict meditation tradition:

> Very different from what I kind of discovered later…meditation was always what they called it, and it definitely felt rigid and serious. And all this heaviness around, you know, self-realization, you know, so the idea is that, like, we're all these original souls. And by doing this intense meditation practice, you sort of connect with your true nature and become self-realized. It lost its appeal for me by the time I was 16 or so. So, I kind of stopped and just didn't have any religion or spirituality, til about 10 years later.

Although he lost interest in the SRF religion as he grew up, he rediscovered meditation in his 20s. Suffering from anxiety, he sought out a therapist at his university who suggested he give it a try. Daryl described his re-entry into meditation practice, and how he discovered the mindfulness tradition that he now uses as the focus of his practice:

> I was having a lot of issues with anxiety, especially when I was in grad school. And that's when I started meditating again. And I used the same techniques that I had learned as a kid for a couple years…I had this kind of introduction to Buddhism at [retreat center]. I came and did a weekend workshop at [retreat center] in 2016. And that's when I kind of found out about *vipassana* [insight meditation] and you know, more just like open awareness meditations or mindfulness practice. And that was kind of a turning point for me… And I think, actually, that's where I first heard the word mindfulness, in some therapy context.

Daryl expressed a desire to make mindfulness more fun for the students, perhaps because his own mindfulness practice as a child was so rigid, and he believed that music could be one way to bring more fun and spontaneity to mindfulness practices at Eudaemonia. He explained his beliefs about music as a form of meditation:

> I think of it as a mindfulness practice. Like when I sit, you know, with [another teacher] and she plays guitar, and I play the tabla [a type of drum] at morning meeting…I try to really connect with the moment in that way. I love using…music…like with the students like you saw. I think that's a great way for them to drop in and be present. Improv games, you know, that include music, I think can be a lot of fun too. And that's all about being in the present. So yeah, I guess it's just, like a very different approach.

In addition to music, surfing provided another mindfulness practice for Daryl. Jon Kabat-Zinn, creator of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) method, is known for his quote, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf." Daryl stumbled upon surfing as a mindfulness practice when he was living at a Zen center. He described the experience of being exposed to and trying many different mindfulness practices at that time:

> I got really involved in mindfulness, and meditation practice, like when I moved here, a little over five years ago, and went through all kinds of, you know, experimental avenues and modalities and stuff just absorbing. Like going to a café…and seeing a tea list with, you know, 100 different choices. It was kind of like that when I arrived, and a few things have sort of stayed consistent, like Zen practice is probably the main one. But surfing I discovered three years after I moved [here]. So, I have access to a beach. And I started surfing in 2019.

Asked how he got involved with surfing and what he got out of it that made it a mindfulness practice, Daryl explained his experiences, referring to Kabat-Zinn's famous quote:

So, there are like four or five different spots that you can go to around here. I just kind of learned, just got involved in it and pretty devoted to it. It's kind of a great workout for me too like, I just kind of love it on multiple levels. But it is absolutely like a fantastic spiritual mindfulness practice. And just a metaphor for life. You know, like Jon Kabat-Zinn says.

Data Analysis

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) defined a community of practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (para. 4). Using the communities of practice theoretical framework as a lens through which to view the data, I constructed two themes from the data, each with subthemes. The first theme centered around the first part of the definition of communities of practice: *how the faculty shared a concern around mindfulness*. Subthemes include 1) *training and resources provided teachers with a strong domain*, 2) *embodied leadership established a unified culture*, and 3) *tensions arose between consistency and change.* The second theme focused on the latter part of the definition of communities of practice: *how faculty learned to do mindfulness better for student-centered practice*. This theme included the following *In Vivo*-coded subthemes: 1) "student-led," 2) "meeting kids where they're at," 3) "invitational," and 4) "fun." Together, these themes provided a way to understand the experiences of teachers in a community of practice that centered around mindfulness.

Theme 1: How Faculty Shared a Concern around Mindfulness

The three participants I interviewed for this study shared a concern—perhaps even a passion—for mindfulness. Because Eudaemonia is a private school, its leaders

have the advantage of being able to selectively hire faculty who support mindfulness in schools and who, in most cases, already have a practice of their own. All three participants had prior experience with mindfulness and regular personal mindfulness practices. While the form of practice varied from one participant to another, they all valued mindfulness enough to engage with the practices outside of school. Hilde reported the least experience with mindfulness, yet she demonstrated an openness and a curiosity that has led her toward implementing it in her life. On the other hand, two participants, Daryl and Annabel, followed a structured routine each morning, and Annabel also practiced each night.

When asked about their present practices, both Annabel and Daryl follow scheduled mindfulness practices at the beginning of the day, the end of the day, or both. Annabel described her practice:

> Every day, I do just like a short sit in the morning and a short sit at night. And they're pretty structured…it's like a guided meditation, as well as the sits that I do with the students. I do appreciation and gratitude--it's very quick and structured--and do some journaling. But it's usually just three things I appreciate and three things I'm grateful for…It's like an appreciation and gratitude practice before bed and kind of I like a heart body mind spirit check in when I wake up.

Similarly, Daryl starts his day with a prescribed regimen. He described his current daily practices:

> I usually wake up around sunrise, and I have like a yoga practice and a sitting practice. And lately, I've been doing more Qi Gong as well. I just really like to have like some physical movement that's also kind of mindful in the morning.

> And yeah, my Zen sitting practice has been pretty constant for the last five years or so.

When asked where they saw their practices going in the next few years, both Annabel and Daryl had clear goals. Annabel confessed a "wild dream to do a vipassana 10-day silent retreat." She also mentioned some unconventional mindfulness practices using social media. She explained how she uses the platforms to stay current with popular thought leaders:

> I tend to take in a lot of mindfulness-based teachings on social media. Like other people follow, you know, the Kardashians, or TikTok dance videos. And mine is like, Tara Brach and Ram Das and Jack Kornfield and Corey Muscara and like just these people who are thinking about their lives through a lens of mindfulness and offering teachings and affirmations and suggested practices.

As for her own personal goals, she expressed the desire to use her practice to improve her personal relationships. She said, "I hope that my personal practice will just continue to grow, and help me show up in my life with my family and my friends, and in better ways that are more connected and meaningful."

Daryl also had clear ideas about his goals and continued commitment to personal mindfulness practice and even questioned his motivations. He explained:

> I feel pretty committed. I've been practicing Zen consistently for…five and a half years now. And it definitely feels like a lifelong practice. I sometimes wonder…am I just getting hooked on this one approach and tradition…just like, kind of addiction to routine or something? But I find…there's enough of a of a balance between the form which holds stability, and the inquiry and the kind of

openness of it…that it seems like it could occupy me for a really long time. I don't see myself departing from that practice.

On the other hand, Hilde had the least experience with mindfulness, so her personal practices were still very much in progress. In her third interview, she claimed, "I'm not even going to say I have a mindfulness practice, because I still don't, but my own relationship to mindfulness has changed." After a negative childhood experience with "boring-ass tapes" that her mother played to help her fall sleep, she nevertheless retained an open mind about mindfulness. The following passage illustrates her willingness to try meditation at a Zen Center on her bike route to work, despite the "negative taste in [her] mouth about mindfulness" after her childhood experience:

> I had a similar experience before of like, this is my body's in pain sitting for this long, and I'm kind of bored. But I was also able to, like, relax and slow down in a way that I wasn't as a kid that helped me see the value in it.

At the time of her interview, she reported that she now appreciated mindfulness and meditation: "As time has gone on…I've found myself more able to disconnect to quiet that voice and to experience a mindfulness practice on my own. I found myself more likely to want to do mindfulness." One way she practices outside of Eudaemonia is on her ultimate frisbee team because they meditate before each practice. She said she found this much easier than her practice at school "because I'm a participant, I'm not leading it." Hilde liked that all she had to do was "go out on a field and find your own spot, and sit down, close your eyes, there's no middle schoolers around. Like, it's also easier for me to experience it." Despite saying she had no mindfulness practice, she closed her vignette by saying, "So that's how my own practices are evolving."

The participants' personal practice seemed to inform their leadership of student mindfulness practices in school as they used their own experiences to support and guide the students. In addition, the teachers' authenticity in leaning on their own experiences helped to promote a culture that valued mindfulness in personal growth.

Subtheme 1: Training and Resources Provided Teachers with a Strong Domain. For all teachers, especially those with limited experience with mindfulness, like Hilde, Eudaemonia provided onboarding retreats at a renowned meditation center on the West Coast. Hilde told me, "The school sent me, and I think sends all new employees, to a meditation at [center]...and will always pay for professional development, if I personally ever want to go back." She explained how she found this opportunity intimidating at first. She said she thought, "I don't know if I'm going to be able to sit still for long enough to like, be a good teacher at this school." When she heard about the retreat they provided, she said:

> Definitely that was like the roadblock for me actually…Can I do this? But sure, I'll try it. Why not? And I chose the one…that was in nature. Because I won't get bored. If there's like a tree to look at or something.

Annabel and Daryl both mentioned the same center, and they also included another training offered by Eudaemonia's leadership. Daryl said, "Some of the resources are helpful. I did a really intense workshop called the Hoffman method." Annabel also mentioned this resource and elaborated on it somewhat: "I actually use something through the Hoffman process, which is a sort of professional development spiritual retreat that Eudaemonia paid for. And there's an app associated with that. And they've got some mindful practices on it as well."

Daryl offered a list of resources the school provides, including extensive mindfulness training and even special certifications to interested faculty. He said the school was excellent at "devoting PD time on a regular basis" and that "talking about our mindfulness program has been helpful, supporting actual PD programs." In addition, training was not limited to PD sessions in the schools. The leadership advocated "going to workshops and doing any kind of training we want." Daryl himself was engaged in a "year-long certification program with Mindful Schools, the Mindful Teacher Certification Program." The leadership team at Eudaemonia provides multiple opportunities for professional development to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed for ongoing improvement in their regular mindfulness practices.

In addition, the leadership team had brought in consultants to facilitate the integration of mindfulness practices into the school curriculum and culture: the organization Mindful Schools and a consultant, "Thomas." Hilde explained:

> We've partnered with Mindful Schools. And we have a representative from them that works with us, and leads one staff meeting per term, and led a lot during the retreat that asks us to reflect on our mindful practices and to maybe practice something new and then prepare...a like, mindfulness lesson, a pure mindfulness lesson for a 60-minute counsel once per term…the school does provide that.

Daryl also mentioned Thomas as proving quite helpful to the school's program development. He said:

> We've wisely drawn on this outside consultant, Thomas, who was originally connected to Eudaemonia through Mindful Schools, but is now kind of working

> independently with us to develop our mindfulness program and kind of clarify it. I think it's like a three-year plan with him.

Annabel concurred that Thomas' assistance had been vital to the program's success. She said, "I think ultimately, I need people who are in the know, who've been doing that research for years…like Thomas." When asked about what the school has done to make her job easier, she brought up Thomas again:

> The biggest shift structurally has been inviting Thomas in. And Thomas is developing our council lessons on mindfulness and is meeting with our staff. He meets with me regularly, and we talk about some of these things…So I think making the space and inviting in the individuals who can help has been the biggest support. It's something that we're all really aligned on it feels like now. And so that's a really helpful place to be.

Between Mindful Schools and Thomas, teachers at Eudaemonia have access to multiple experts for guidance, suggestions, and even troubleshooting students' resistance issues. These resources, training opportunities, and outside consultants gave the teachers a shared foundation for a strong domain of mindfulness.

Subtheme 2: Embodied Leadership Established a Unified Culture. Several key leaders helped shape the mindfulness culture from the beginning, and participants repeatedly used the word "embodied" to describe the leaders' influence on the staff and students. These leaders include the co-founder and current CEO of the school, Jack; the co-founder and original head of school, David; and one of the original humanities teachers, Doug, who passed away a year prior to these interviews. These three original leaders embraced mindfulness as a foundational principal of the school from its

inception, establishing mindfulness practices as part of the school culture from its beginning.

When asked how the school developed its culture of mindfulness, Hilde said bluntly, "Well, it was founded by people who are obsessed with mindfulness." Then she laughed. Daryl's response offered a similar yet more explicit assessment:

> I think modeling [mindfulness], you know, like the fact that when Jack and David, the two founders of the school were, like, very clearly committed to mindfulness practice that created a culture. You know, where it's important that the adults practice from the beginning.

Annabel described the hands-on approach of Jack, the school's CEO and co-founder, which strengthened the depiction Daryl provided of leaders who believed in "modeling" the practices they advocated. She described the 6th graders' introduction to mindfulness on the school camping trip prior to the first day of school in which he takes them on a journey through the woods to a secret place with a treehouse where he guides them through their first meditation. The following vignette from Annabel illustrates Jack's embodied leadership style and its effect on the students:

> Jack, who is the co-founder of the school, really attends this part of the camping trip and tries to make this first mindfulness experience part of an adventure. So, he will introduce the students to mindfulness in a pretty elaborate way…. And then the students lay down and he'll prompt them through a series of instructions, but it's always about in this first introduction, it's about this like, magical adventure. And it's a really fun experience because it's so immersive and it's so

different from what you might expect from this co-founder of the school or what you might expect on a camping trip. And so, the students are pretty excited.

In addition to the guided meditation, Annabel said that Jack offered "a very elaborate fun ceremony" to present the students with their Eudaemonia journals and to introduce how the staff intended for students to use them. She narrated the ceremony in the following vignette:

> Jack told this elaborate story around what the journal could be used for, self-exploration. "You're navigating your own terrain and determining what your gifts are. And it's a space for you to write down all your thoughts and feelings. It's sacred, no one will read it…" And then [students] get to step over this log, shake Jack's hand, take the journal, and then in front of all [their] peers, you know, smile and giggle and walk back to [their] seat. And so it ends up being something that the students remember… Jack seems to create that sense of excitement and newness around mindfulness.

Participants also described David, co-founder and the original head of school, as a leader who embodied mindfulness and inspired the staff. Daryl described his influence in the following description:

> The original Head of School was very much a kind of exemplar of mindfulness, you know. He had never been a head of school before, so he was much more of like, that self-work kind of guy. And that's just how he came across, you know, in pretty much any setting. So, I think that that was certainly, you know, leadership embodying that mindset and those values.

Annabel nostalgically recalled her first interaction with David when he reached out to discuss her possible employment at the school. Her enthusiasm about his inspiring leadership comes through in the following narrative of that interaction:

> I got a call from David. He just like, I think he cold called me or emailed me without even having a full letter. Like, he didn't ask for all the things that all the other schools were asking for. And he just was like, I saw your experience and your bio, and like, let's get on the phone. So, one of the very first things he said to me was about Brene Brown and vulnerability and mindfulness and creating your own curriculum and questions about yourself in the world. And I was just like, okay, David, when can I come up? We'll just start this interview right now.

The third inspirational leader participants mentioned was Doug, a founding Humanities teacher who died about a year before these interviews took place. Daryl considered Doug a mentor, and he described the profound effect Doug had on the staff and the culture at Eudaemonia:

> I think about my mentor, Doug, who was the first humanities guide here, we often talk about him that's just totally embodying and kind of modeling, you know, "the Eudaemonia way," in quotation marks, you know, and he just, he had this embodied presence, that was sort of obvious to almost anybody who's around him, or saw him teach, you know, and I work with him, I was in a classroom with him for my first year here. And I think it was a combination of him and David, who was the first head of school that also really kind of embodied a mindful approach.

Hilde had similar comments about Doug, again using the term "embodied" to describe his leadership and his impact on the staff:

> One of our founding teachers, his name was Doug, was fully embodied in this mindful way, all the time. And he was definitely somebody I would want to learn from. Sadly, he passed away of cancer a year ago. So, he's not here to learn from except in memory and in spirit. But I still find myself thinking like, oh, what would Doug do? Or how would Doug approach this?

Daryl summed up these inspirational leaders and their impact on the school through their modeling of mindfulness practices:

> The value was, they [David and Doug] just came across as so open and present and available and loving, that it made being with them safe, you know, it created trust. And I think it also helped grow this culture where those same kinds of values and behaviors are something that we all wanted to, to model.

All participants mentioned these three *embodied leaders* in their interviews, demonstrating the profound effect they each had on them as individuals and on the school. These embodied leaders helped establish the school culture by serving as inspiring models of mindfulness.

Subtheme 3: Tensions Arose between Consistency and Change. Participants reported an ambivalence between embracing a variety of approaches and establishing some sense of standardization of practice. However, participants were open to growth and change in the school's approach to mindfulness practice regarding sensitivity to trauma and issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Nevertheless, they also reported a shift in the culture as staff changed.

On one hand, leaders at Eudaemonia encouraged teachers to engage students in a variety of mindfulness practices and to be creative in "meeting the kids where they're at," but the school leadership did recognize the importance of some degree of standardization to provide structure and clarify expectations. Daryl put it this way: "There is this funny tension that often comes up. We've talked about this a lot [among the staff] … but between allowing diverse approaches, but then having so much diversity that it becomes sort of inconsistent and squishy." Striking that balance between freedom and flexibility without being "squishy" and a standardization that did not feel oppressive was a struggle. Hilde encapsulated this theme when she said, "It's interesting, as much as there's a sense of freedom and invitation, it's also becoming a sense of standardization."

Participants agreed on the importance of viewing mindfulness through a trauma lens and a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) lens. I discuss these two manifestations of a similar challenge together because they indicate what exactly defines mindfulness and how it should be adjusted when it becomes exclusionary or even a trigger. Participants often talked about them in tandem.

While most people might find sitting in silence and noticing thoughts relaxing, others who have experienced trauma may experience mindfulness quite differently. Hilde explained:

> For some students…silence and stillness is a very dysphoric, or traumatic experience…From a trauma sensitive lens, it can be really triggering, really difficult for people who have experienced some kinds of trauma, to just sit in silence and not have a panic attack, or people who have high anxiety. People who have misophonia. There's like, if there's a repetitive like tapping or clicking noise,

> or whatever it is that is their trigger, again, it can send them into a full-blown panic attack during those two minutes of silence.

Daryl was also cognizant of how mindfulness practices might affect students with trauma backgrounds. He noted, "We've evolved a lot, even just in the past year, like thinking about trauma sensitivity, and, you know, awareness of tightness in the chest, how that could connect with breathing." Being sensitive to the different needs of each student often further confounded the need for standardization in practice.

Just as participants expressed concern about how to engage students without triggering anxiety, they also elaborated on concerns about how to establish a mindful culture in the school without being ethnocentric or exclusionary. As Daryl expressed, the school staff were trying to "integrate social justice concerns…you can call it diversity, equity, lens trauma sensitivity." Hilde elaborated on this evolving challenge at Eudaemonia and how, in their attempt to hire teachers with mindfulness practices, they may have been exclusionary. She explained:

> One of the interview questions is "what is your mindful practice? And how do you engage with mindfulness?" And that was enough of an interview question to… disqualify candidates, if they didn't already have…at least an interest in mindfulness. I do want to say that early on that was flagged as a problematic interview question, that there is a certain level of class privilege and whiteness that goes into the specific kind of mindfulness that we expect. When we asked that question, when we're asking about a yoga practice, or… a seven-day silent retreat like that, there's a sort of lifestyle that affords that.

This problem of definition led to a lack of diversity in staffing, and the school philosophy supposedly embraced diversity and inclusion. Hilde described this undesired outcome and how the school leadership reframed the idea of mindfulness to be more inclusive:

> All of the founding staff were White, and it continued to be an almost entirely White teaching faculty for the first few years. And so, there was some pushback internally…we can't be disqualifying people just because they haven't gone on a seven-day ayahuasca retreat like we have. We have to be open to people whose mindfulness is running or…who experienced mindfulness by jamming out to music…or else we're not going to have a diverse and inclusive staff. And I myself was a perfect example of somebody who was hired without a strong mindfulness background. So, I had the appetite, but I did not have a practice.

Now that they were more aware of the issue, the school leadership was making a concerted effort to expand both their definition of mindfulness and their hiring practices. Daryl said:

> I do think it's becoming more inclusive, and, you know, aware of maybe some of the whitewashed blind spots that have been present because of the way that mindfulness has kind of developed in the US…Just institutionally and culturally, like, we know that it's from a particular group, and that is this upper middle-class white group, white male probably in many cases.

He summed up the current situation and the prognosis for the future with the following explanation:

> The tree is being shaken right now. I think in a helpful way. Like, you know, interrogating, what really are students' experiences? And how sensitive are we to students with learning differences and students with trauma? Kind of questioning basic assumptions, like that's something that I see happening more and more.

However, participants also admitted feeling ambivalent about the shift in faculty. Now that the makeup of the staff was changing to become more diverse and inclusive, a new challenge arose. The original school faculty and staff, under the inspirational leadership of Jack, Doug, and David, had established a strong school culture of mindfulness through a shared definition and common practices. As Hilde mentioned, teachers meditating in the courtyard were not an uncommon sight. New teachers came aboard without having had the benefit of learning from the departed embodied leadership models; as a result, that established culture experienced a shift.

Whether the shift has been for better or for worse is a toss-up. The participants welcomed the new faculty and staff members and certainly valued the diversity. However, participants admitted missing some aspects of the original culture and the cohesiveness of the school under the old leadership. Hilde explained the complexity of the issue:

> I think the culture is changing. I don't necessarily want to say for the worse because I do think part of what we asked for in diversity and inclusion--and true in *all* categories of diversity and inclusion--is diverse approaches to mindfulness and diverse approaches to what it means. You know, who can learn? Who can teach mindfulness? But I notice more so this year than any year in the past, that

> our new faculty are like, very unprepared to teach mindfulness… Nobody meditates in the courtyard anymore during the break.

Daryl also noted the change in culture under new leadership and with new staff. He said:

> The staff has grown, which makes any kind of alignment harder, you know, to ensure. And there's also a lot of new people who were not part of the original kind of founding experience of Eudaemonia and don't feel connection to that. So, I wouldn't say that it's as clear in terms of shared mission around mindfulness, now, as it was a few years ago. I think if you ask every Eudaemonia guide, what mindfulness is and why it's important, you hear a lot of different answers.

Hilde believed that the change was largely due to change in key inspirational leaders in addition to the change in staff. She explained:

> A lot of it has to do with the departure of the founding head and the one of our founding teachers passing away. So those two held a lot of the mindfulness culture. And the other person who held a lot of it is Jack, who's our CEO of the whole organization…He's just not on the ground as much. And our new head of school doesn't have as much experience with mindfulness.

Daryl's responses aligned with Hilde's, that changing leadership trickled down to an overall culture change. He too recalled the two founding members and their impact. He said:

> I think modeling it, like the fact that when Jack and David, the two founders of the school, were very clearly committed to mindfulness practice, that created a culture…where it's important that the adults practice from the beginning. I think that's winnowed a bit, as the staff has grown, and some people have left, and a lot

> of new people are here. It's not as clear now, how aligned we are. And how aligned we need to be, I guess.

Annabel believed that professional development was the solution and that the school leadership implemented this strategy to bring new hires up to speed. She said:

> It's in the water, right? And so, it's just something that's really expected. And there have been hires more recently where—with our faculty—don't have mindfulness practices to start. And we send them to [meditation retreat center] or our PD's are all about mindfulness.

Synthesizing the elements of this theme, Hilde noticed the inherent conflict between being open to change and not wanting to veer too far from the original vision. She said, "Even though I like, appreciate the ways in which we're being more invitational and being more open to different kinds of mindfulness, we're also losing some of the built-in culture pieces that were there when I got here."

Striking a balance between expanding the staff and maintaining the established culture challenged participants to reconsider what values the school should hold onto, which ones they might relinquish, and how to foster a sense of culture without the continuity of inspirational leadership.

Theme 2: How Faculty Learned to Do Mindfulness Better for Student-Centered Practice

Participants in this study provided numerous examples of student-centeredness and teacher-student collaboration not only as part of mindfulness practice, but throughout the school culture.

The founders of Eudaemonia established the school with a focus on the whole child, including mind, body, heart, and spirit. Rather than just transferring information to

students or teaching them strictly academic skills, teachers at Eudaemonia believe their job is to help each child grow and develop in ways that affirm their individuality. Hilde explained this philosophy, what it means and how it manifests in her class:

> We think Eudaemonia in general is more student-focused than a lot of schools. And by that, I mean like, specifically student voice and choice, like if they don't want to do it, let's not force them to, whatever it is, and let's figure out what's gonna motivate them or what they do want to do that also gets the same goal.

One goal teachers had for their students was to use mindfulness as a method for developing a sense of identity. Annabel explained how mindfulness helps students separate their thoughts from who they are:

> You know, middle school is just this particular place where they become who they will be as adults. They're trying different things on, and this gives them the freedom not to say like, "Oh, I am this type of person, because I have this type of thought." It's just like, you have thoughts, your brain is just making them, and they come and go.

This theme of student-centeredness comes through in four subthemes, all of which are *In Vivo* codes, using the words of the participants: "*student-led*," "*invitational*," "*meeting kids where they're at*," and "*fun*."

Subtheme 1: "*Student-Led*." The faculty and staff at Eudaemonia approach every problem or issue related to the students by including the students in the problem-solving process, often taking their lead from the students themselves. For instance, faculty and staff let the students lead the way regarding smartphone use at the school. In my site observation, I noted, "Time passes as students all read Daryl's piece on their

Chromebooks. The room is silent except for the ambient meditative music and the fan blowing in the window. No students appear to have smartphones." When I asked about the lack of devices (other than Chromebooks), one of the school leaders told me the students decided they were a distraction, and the school held a counsel on what to do about them. After a discussion, the students agreed to put them away upon arrival each morning and retrieve them at the end of the day. The solution was their idea, not the faculty's.

This practice of enlisting students to lead extended beyond norms and consequences; students were regularly invited to lead mindfulness activities as well. While I observed the opening of Daryl's forum meeting, I noted one such invitation:

> Daryl: "Who wants to lead us in mindfulness?"
>
> One nominates another student, B. Several others concur. B takes the meditation bell and begins leading the group.
>
> B: "I invite everyone to close their eyes…Relax into a comfortable position…Notice any distracting sounds…and if you don't hear any distracting sounds…notice that….If your mind wants to wander, that's okay. Just bring it back to your breath…. When I ring the bell…sink into your mindful space."
>
> He gently rings the bell, and the sound lingers in the quiet room for several seconds.
>
> After a few minutes, B leads the students out of mindfulness practice.
>
> B: "Start to exit your mindful place…and open your eyes."
>
> The students clap and thank B for leading them.

The student was clearly well-practiced at leading such meditations for the group. The students' participation in guiding mindfulness even extended to their home life in some cases. Hilde reported that she thought this was "cool." She said, "We just had our student-led conferences. So, I heard about some of them who lead their families in mindfulness practice at night, or who do it every morning before they come to school."

One area the faculty would like to improve upon regarding student leadership is the morning meeting. Due to the school going online during the Covid pandemic, they lost continuity in the community. Sixth and 7th graders no longer watched and learned from 8th graders leading the meeting, and as Hilde said, they have "lost that institutional knowledge." Annabel explained that they were in the process of figuring out a way to give more leadership to the students while providing adequate guidance in how to do that. She said, "We just had a conversation today about the morning meeting and mindfulness practices. I'm sort of with another colleague, Daryl, working to try to get more student leadership in that morning practice." Daryl elaborated on the process:

> We've actually just come up with a new protocol that we're going to start implementing next week, I think, where each week, a forum…is going to be kind of responsible for leading morning meeting for the week…And so it'll be up to those students and those guides, the advisors, how they plan the week. We have some scripts that we got from our Mindful Schools consultants, and basically, they'll have like a theme, so one is like, paying attention on purpose, or mindfulness of thoughts or mindfulness of the body…And then basically, they'll have four or five days to lead a practice. They'll have a script that they can use at least once, and different students in the in the group can kind of take turns. They

> can also sort of make it their own. So, we're hoping that this is a new model, that's going to be like a pretty significant departure from the past one. But also, like, maybe a step on the way to this becoming a part of student culture…So they can decide how they approach the practice…All that will be kind of up to them.

When I asked about how they came up with this idea for passing the torch to the students but with scripts and themes, he said it came from the students. He explained:

> Annabel and I just sort of offered a space at lunch last week for students who are interested to come and share their ideas about mindfulness and morning meeting and two sixth graders who were in Annabel's forum showed up. And actually, we kind of got the idea from them.

Hilde expressed strong feelings about whether the student leadership of morning meeting should be compulsory or voluntary, a topic of concern and conversation among the teachers at the time of the interviews. She leaned heavily toward compulsory participation with less guidance. She elaborated on her opinion:

> I think there's something really special and magical about saying every member of our community is so valued, that we want you to lead our community at least once during the school year…Going back to the compulsory thing. But I still think there's value in every student, by the time they left Eudaemonia could say that they know how to lead a mindfulness and that feels like a valuable thing. And I've…yeah, so I'm still…my own personal judgment or reaction is that some of this, like standardization, is less helpful, like, I think there is something magical about just leaving it to the students.

Hilde also expressed an enjoyment of participating in student-led mindfulness practice. She said, "I also really value it when the students lead, and I get to participate. That's really cool."

Hilde's concern about compulsory versus voluntary leadership pointed to another factor in Eudaemonia's student-centered culture, one that was sometimes at odds with fostering leadership and compulsory participation in routine practices: the belief that mindfulness practices should be "invitational."

Subtheme 2: "Invitational." In my observations and interviews, I kept hearing the word "invitational" pertaining to meditation and other mindfulness practices. Invitational describes a practice that allows for differentiated methods and voluntary participation. The teachers "invite" the students to join the activity rather than order or direct them to participate. Hilde explained that this was a growing trend in the school culture, again focusing on students' individuality, a cornerstone of the student-centered philosophy. She said:

> We're pretty big right now into that. You know, that invitational and try different postures, see what's right for you. And we're not going to tell you there's one right way to do it. Just notice the difference when you try different things.

Later in the interview she reinforced this notion when she said:

> Over the years, I think we've become better at making it specifically invitational. So, saying, "You can do whatever feels right for you in this moment. But the invitation is we're going to do a body scan, and you can join…if that feels right for you. With the only rules being that you can't look at each other, or distract each other or make noise," which those are hard rules for middle schoolers.

She mentioned it yet again, this time stating that she liked this shift. She said:

> I do like our really intentional shift towards being invitational and started saying like, "This is the time that those of us who want to engage in mindfulness are going to do it. And the only rule is that everybody else has to not distract or be quiet." And being able to use language like, "If this doesn't work for you. You can do your own practice, but I'm going to lead you and…I'm going to lead a loving kindness practice for anybody who wants it. Feel free to do whatever is going to help center you." And language like you know, in a body scan, like "going at your own pace."

I recognized this phrase from an observation I conducted in Hilde's coding class, when she led a brief mindful body scan. She said, "Choose your mindful position… Scan from the tip of your toes to the top of your head…go at your own pace…just noticing every part of your body."

The belief among the faculty is that making practices invitational eliminates any sense of coercion, something adolescents typically resist. Daryl explained the rationale for this focus on being invitational:

> I think it has to be sort of centered in whatever, however we want to label compassion, humanistic respect for individual differences and an autonomy so that it's invitational. It's based on consent, you know, I think anytime there's a whiff of coercion, it's more detrimental probably than it is helpful.

I heard this term used again and again throughout the observations and interviews, and it tended to come up as class would begin a mindfulness practice or when a participant was

explaining a mindfulness practice. Daryl explained in an interview how he uses invitations with his students. He described:

> Sometimes I let students do this during quest… like, "You can lie on the floor, you can stand, you can sit,"…giving them the option to kind of find a posture that works for them. Sometimes I let them draw. Sometimes I give them some invitations about using an anchor, like the breath or sounds.

Hilde also made similar invitations in her classes. In an interview she explained:

> I often will say for the visualization, "I'm going to lead a visualization now. It's probably going to be more impactful for you if your eyes are closed, but you know, you do you." And the students sometimes take that invitation.

As to be expected with middle school students, sometimes students refused these invitations, something the teachers had to accept. However, they discovered ways to appeal to students so that they were more inclined to participate. When it came to inviting students to lead meditation, Hilde found she could invite students in ways that encouraged shyer students to participate without using coercion. She explained:

> There's, you know, three or four people who always want to do it, and the others who are happy to sit by and never do it again. I think it's a little harder. But I do find that if I say, "Is there anybody who hasn't led mindfulness in a while, who might lead it for us today?" Then I'll get a hand I don't expect.

Like Hilde mentioned when she described her advisory group's fascination with the meditation bell, Annabel also used the bell to lure students into voluntary participation. She said:

> The students get to ring the chime. And it feels like a lot of power for a sixth grader to have over their eight peers. And I think it's also an *invitation* for them to play with mindfulness in different ways.

Teachers supported being invitational as part of the overall focus on being student-centered. At the heart of this belief lies an understanding that each student is at a different place in their development, and their comfort levels will vary widely from one child to another. This varying level of development contributed to another factor that I identified, in the words of the participants: "meeting kids where they're at."

Subtheme 3: "*Meeting Kids Where They're At*." Annabel claimed in her second interview, "I think that any practice that we do, that *meets the kids where they're at,* tends to be more successful." This phrase and various iterations of it appeared several times in the data. Often the phrase was used explicitly, such as in the following example from Hilde's second interview:

> Sometimes, I do not want to sit up straight. Every fiber of my body wants to dissolve. But I have a knowledge from past mindfulness experiences that if I do sit up straight, I will feel better. My students don't have that, so I want to give them that…But I also want to say, "Check in with your body. And if step one is notice that my body wants to dissolve, like if that's *where you're at* right now, maybe that's okay."

In addition, Daryl used it when he suggested ways to combat resistance. He said, "Maybe some sort of like video program too, where we can kind of *meet the kids where they are*." Annabel said something similar about using videos "that ground things, that *hook kids where they are*." She also expressed a belief that adolescents should engage in more

movement in school. She explained, "There's not enough physical activity for them. There's a lot of expectancy around sitting and being still. And that's not *where they are* developmentally." These examples show the concept expressed explicitly, but there were many instances in which participants described this phenomenon in less explicit language.

Annabel described her initial expectations when she came to Eudaemonia, and how those expectations changed when she encountered the kids and realized *where they were at*, even if she did not use that phrase in this passage which illustrates her evolving expectations of students:

> I had this idea that when I joined that Eudaemonia that I would be teaching 90 Buddhas. Oh, this is great. They've got mindfulness practices. They're gonna be like, quiet, zen, I don't know what. (laughter) I love middle school adolescents. I don't want to stifle their liveliness at all, but I did have this sense of maybe they would bend spoons with their minds or, you know, silently sit together for long, 20-minute blocks and ponder the meaning of life. And I have really just necessarily adjusted my expectations and my hopes. Like, I hope that a student gains some capacity to be a responder instead of a reactor in their lives, that they have some sense of, "I am anxious right now. I have the power to do something differently. I think it has to do with my breath. Okay." You know, I think just a little bit of growth is enough at this age and can set the stage for them to explore for the rest of their life.

Likewise, Hilde noted that her students were growing (physically, mentally, and spiritually) at different paces and that she must be willing to work with that reality. She explained:

> There's that moment when you have a mindfulness practice that is impactful, when you're experiencing it for the first time as being something that's like, "Wow, I feel a change, I feel a shift here." And if you haven't had that experience, then it just looks like silent time. And my students, I noticed, will have that experience at different times.

Daryl pointed out that these practices would be a challenge for most adults in our Western culture, so with adolescents, *meeting the kids where they're at* becomes even more critical. He elaborated on mindfulness and our receptivity to it:

> We know, based on the research, that there's tremendous benefits. It's also a kind of complete reorientation from many of our like, Western cultural values to slow down to be present with your felt body or mental or emotional experience. All of that just has so many layers of newness, you know. I think for any person who's raised in this culture, it takes a while for them to gain any level of familiarity and comfort to open up to it. That's true for adults. And it's obviously more true for adolescents.

Subtheme 4: "*Fun*." Of all the In Vivo codes under student-centered, the word *fun* came up more than any other, illustrating the importance teachers placed on intrinsic motivation and authentic engagement in mindfulness at Eudaemonia. Many examples of the word's explicit use showed up in the data. For example, Annabel remarked, "So we just had this conversation in our meeting, about including student voice and making

meditation *fun*." She later stressed the importance of "getting student voice in making it *fun* enough that they want to continue doing it." Daryl echoed a similar value placed on fun when he said, "We've been having this debate lately, actually, like, how do we make mindfulness more fun, you know? Like less austere and serious all the time, which is how it often feels, at morning meeting at least." He also used the term when describing his rationale for using music and improv in mindfulness practices. He said, "Improv games, you know, that include music, I think can be a lot of *fun* too." In a later interview, he reiterated this notion of improv and music as enjoyable ways to learn to focus when he said, "I think that's like a helpful way for students to focus and also feel like it's *fun*." When asked to elaborate on this concept, he gave the following explanation:

> I think it's essential, because that's how they get related to it…and actually want to do it. I think that's where a lot of the motivation comes from [in] middle schoolers. It's got to at least be *fun* sometimes…not mutually exclusive from *fun*. I think improv games have tons of application and possibility for this. Because they do get so present, but there's also often this, either like silliness aspect or game aspect. That just really engages students.

Annabel also used the word frequently, especially when describing the introduction to mindfulness at the beginning of sixth grade and the journal presentation ritual which she called "a very elaborate, *fun* ceremony." When asked to elaborate on the ceremony in a later interview, she narrated the experience in vivid detail. Then she said, "It's a really *fun* experience because it's so immersive... And so, the students are pretty excited… So that's the way that it was introduced to me, with the students and it felt really *fun* and really powerful." She later added, "I think that early introduction is my

favorite thing. It's just that always goes really well because it has all the ingredients for creating a new memory for the kids. And it's exciting and feels *fun*."

Along with the prolific and explicit use of the word fun, the participants also described instances of students engaged in mindfulness practices and having fun. The following is one example from Hilde in which she narrated an experience she had with a student-led visualization practice:

> One day, one of our students led a really silly mindfulness. It was like a visualization. It was like, "And now imagine that you're climbing on Ari's water bottle, and then you fall in, and then…there's sharks in there. But the sharks are also made of marshmallows." And it was like a 15-minute guided visualization in which everybody was like cracking up and interjecting like, "Wait, can I eat the sharks?" and I was just letting it happen. Because you know…that was a non-traditional mindfulness, but also like, it's okay to laugh and…like, be silly, like mindfulness is just about awareness that we can be present with our own feelings of giggly-ness…That's, you know, a valid part of mindfulness.

In addition to hearing lots of talk about fun from participants, I witnessed students laughing, using humor and jokes, and smiling, indicating that fun is clearly part of Eudaemonia's climate. The following example shows students using humor after my observation of their mindfulness opening practice in forum (note: I left after the opening to respect the students' privacy, as forum is a confidential safe space at Eudaemonia):

> Daryl: "That went *really* smoothly. I *wonder* if it had anything to do with having a guest present."

Students all vocalize that yes, it did. Giggles erupt around the circle. One student looks at me.

Student: "You made us better."

After students explained the forum, its procedures and purpose, I got up to leave. My notes read:

On my way to the door, the students say goodbye and thank me for coming.

Student: "Thank you for making us be better. It's all going to fall apart the second you leave!"

I smile and leave, the sounds of their laughter cutting out as the door shuts behind me.

Chapter Summary

Through interview transcripts and classroom observations, I constructed two themes from the data: *how the faculty shared a concern around mindfulness* and *how faculty learned to do mindfulness better for student-centered practice*. The first theme focused on the faculty's domain of practice and included the following subthemes: *training and resources provided teachers with a strong domain*, *embodied leadership established a unified culture*, and *tensions arose between consistency and change*. The second theme focused on the faculty's use of best practices and included the following subthemes, all using the words of participants: "*student-led*," "*invitational*," "*meeting kids where they're at*," and "*fun*." I presented the themes and sub-themes in the participants' own words. In the next chapter, I link the findings to existing literature and view them through the lens of the communities of practice conceptual framework. I also explain the

implication of this study, make suggestions for further research, and offer final reflections on my study in the conclusion.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 4, I presented my findings from analyzing the data from observations and interviews. In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings as they relate to the research question and the literature. I also offer discussion on the implications of my study and suggestions for further research on mindfulness programs in schools. Finally, in the conclusion I reflect on how my study addresses the problem and its significance.

Major Findings

My site observations and participants' interviews provided data to answer the research question: What are the experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice centered around mindfulness in a private middle school? Using the communities of practice theoretical framework, I constructed two themes: "how the faculty share a concern around mindfulness," and "how faculty learned to do mindfulness better for students centered practice." Under the first theme, "how the faculty share a concern around mindfulness," I constructed the following subthemes: 1) "training and resources provided teachers with a strong domain," 2) "embodied leadership established a unified culture," and 3) "tensions arose between consistency and change." Under the second theme, "how faculty learned to do mindfulness better for student-centered practice," I constructed the following subthemes to describe the participants' strategies, using the words of the participants: 1) "Student-led," 2) "Invitational," 3) "Meeting Kids Where They're At," and 4) "Fun."

Theme 1: How the Faculty Share a Concern Around Mindfulness

In the language of Wenger (1999), I constructed an understanding of how the faculty at Eudaemonia "share a concern" around mindfulness. This first theme pertains to two aspects of the community of practice required characteristics: 1) the *domain*, or shared enterprise, of the participants around which the community of practice is centered, in this case, teaching mindfulness, and 2) the *community* itself and how it is constructed by its members.

Subtheme 1: Training and Resources Provided Teachers with a Strong Domain. Participants described the training and available resources which helped them build competency in teaching mindfulness, their shared domain. The domain of any community of practice includes resources, training, and other elements of the culture, known as the *repertoire* (Wenger, 1998). In fact, Wenger listed many aspects of the repertoire, including "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts" (pp. 82-83). Wenger used the term repertoire "to emphasize both its rehearsed character and its availability for further engagement" (p. 83).

Teachers at Eudaemonia had access to resources and training through retreats at the local meditation center, access to professional development both at the local school and through Mindful Schools, and with outside consultants like Thomas, as Hilde discussed. Research suggests that adequate teacher training in mindfulness practices is essential for program success (Goldberg et al., 2019; Mendelson et al., 2010; Norton & Griffith, 2020). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of teachers as mindfulness program implementers (López-González et al., 2018; Vickery and Dorjee 2016). In addition, Barry et al. (2017) noted that a scarcity of resources for program

implementers can lead to program failure. The leadership at Eudaemonia provided teachers with training and resources to support them in implementing mindfulness practices in the classroom.

Subtheme 2: Embodied Leadership Established a Unified Culture. Lave and Wenger (1991) discussed the importance of leaders in their communities of practice theory. The authors posited that newcomers learn by watching old-timers in any community of practice through legitimate peripheral participation in the shared domain. According to the authors, in legitimate peripheral participation "a learner participates in the actual practice of the expert, but only to a limited degree" (p. 14). They further explained it as "the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice" (p. 29). Specifically, legitimate peripheral participation gives newcomers and old-timers shared "activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice" (p. 29). At Eudaemonia, routine mindfulness activities such as faculty retreats, pre-term camping trips, and daily morning meetings formed the "activities" in this definition. In addition, the foundational nature of mindfulness in the school served as an "identity," as Hilde expressed, "Well, it was founded by people who are obsessed with mindfulness." Finally, Mindful Schools provided the school with the "community of knowledge" described by Lave and Wenger.

All three participants described the inspiring influence of three leaders who fostered the culture of mindfulness at Eudaemonia through "embodied" leadership. These findings are consistent with those of Norton and Griffith (2020), who reported that participants preferred a leader who had their own mindfulness practice. In addition, researchers consistently identify leadership engagement as one of the most important

requirements for program success (Barry et al., 2017; Hudson et al., 2020; Norton & Griffith, 2020; Wilhelm et al., 2021). Wenger (1991) even used the word "embodied" when describing the elements of practice which included "embodied understandings" (p. 47).

Subtheme 3: Tensions Arose between Consistency and Change. Lave and Wenger (1991) reported that in any community of practice, a fundamental tension exists between old-timers who provide an establishment of practice and newcomers who represent change. This tension was evident at Eudaemonia, as participants described ambivalence about the changes they saw in the culture, particularly because of the departure of the embodied leaders and staff turnover. This finding is consistent with the literature, as Wilde et al. (2019) found that the departure of an inspirational leader had a profound impact on the program's implementation. In their discussion on the importance of leadership engagement, the authors noted that "a diminishing enthusiasm resulted from departure of a key person or key people who have been actively involved in promoting [MBI] within the school" (Wilde et al., 2019, p. 383). This finding might explain the shift in culture as the newcomers did not have access through legitimate peripheral participation to the old-timers and their expertise before they departed, that is, before "the process by which newcomers become old-timers" had occurred (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 114).

Furthermore, Lave and Wenger pointed out:

> A major contradiction lies between legitimate peripheral participation as the means of achieving continuity over generations for the community of practice,

and the displacement inherent in that same process as full participants are replaced (directly or indirectly) by newcomers become old-timers. (p. 114)

Although Lave and Wenger described this contradiction as fundamental, based on participants' stories, this process may have been arrested due to the young age of the school and the rate of turnover. Perhaps the school lacked old-timers to carry on the unified culture in a way that satisfied the participants who had been there since the founders started the school.

Despite the tensions that arose over some changes, participants did not view all change as negative. They reported a desire to implement more trauma-informed practices with students after learning that sitting in silence can be problematic for people who have suffered trauma. Wilde et al. (2019) stressed that there must be "a clear perception of what mindfulness was *not*," and that included "requiring young people to confront pain and distress in an unsafe way" (p. 384). Furthermore, Zhu et al. (2019) found predictive power of trauma on negative experiences during mindfulness meditation and urged that "that mindfulness meditation-based therapy for persons with trauma-related mental health problems should be trauma-informed" (p. 1). Participants appeared aware of and concerned about this research enough to warrant changes in practice wherever needed.

Another more welcomed change at Eudaemonia pertained to hiring a more diverse staff and embracing a varied interpretation of what constitutes mindfulness practice. Using the term "diversity, equity, and inclusion" or DEI, participants expressed concern over the Eurocentricity of mindfulness practices as they are defined in the West. As a result, they were open to redefining what constitutes mindfulness to embrace diverse interpretations. This finding is congruent with Lave and Wenger (1991) who explained

that "participation is always based on situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world" (p. 51). In addition, Wenger (1999) stressed that a repertoire "remain[s] inherently ambiguous" (p. 83). Faculty at Eudaemonia appeared to embrace that renegotiation as they sought to redefine their practices for more inclusivity.

Wenger's (1998) list of elements of practice also included "specific perceptions," "well-tuned sensitivities," and "underlying assumptions" (p. 47). Participants at Eudaemonia demonstrated attention to all these elements as they navigated the shift toward a more trauma-informed, DEI-informed practice.

Theme 2: How Faculty Learned to Do Mindfulness Better for Student-Centered Practice

The second theme I constructed focuses on the practice itself, teaching mindfulness to students, and how the participants attempted to "do it better." The concept that came up most often in the data was a desire for more student-centered practice. Wenger (1999) asserted that practice includes language and other explicit representations of a community's practice. On the other hand, he explained that it also includes more implicit aspects, such as "well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions, and shared world views" (p. 47). One of these implicit "underlying assumptions" at Eudaemonia was that mindfulness practice should be student-centered, which was expressed explicitly in the language participants used. In fact, I identified all the subthemes under this theme using the language of the participants: "Student-led," "Invitational," "Meeting Kids Where They're At," and "Fun." Participants all expressed a desire to maintain a student-centered philosophy in practicing mindfulness at Eudaemonia. As these subthemes are closely connected and overlap considerably, I discuss them here together rather than separately.

The participants all shared a belief that students should lead mindfulness, a common practice in small group gatherings such as forums, advisory, or in classes. Annabel and Daryl had met with students to gather input about how to shift their (whole school) morning meetings to be student-led. All participants reported a desire to move in the direction of more student leadership. This approach is supported by the literature, as Wisner and Starzec (2015) stressed the importance of soliciting student input when implementing a mindfulness program. In their study, the researchers involved the students in decision-making and acted upon student suggestions. They found that "this approach gave the students some sense of control and ownership of the situation, as opposed to having the meditation sessions imposed on them by adults and completely controlled by adults" (p. 250).

In addition to the focus on student-led mindfulness, participants appeared genuinely concerned with keeping meditation practice invitational, meaning that students have agency deciding how and if they will participate. Participants also sought to "meet kids where they're at" a phrase that demonstrates the desire to differentiate the practices to meet the needs of the students. Finally, participants expressed a concerted effort to make mindfulness "fun" for the student. The teachers' attention to the needs of the students was abundantly apparent in the data.

Faculty at Eudaemonia reported a shared belief in a student-centered approach to mindfulness practices. They also demonstrated this belief in their practices, as I noted in my observations. Strategies they used to move toward a more student-centered approach included eliciting feedback from students directly, seeking advice from Mindful Schools and outside consultants, and discussing the goal among the faculty. These strategies are

congruent with the elements of practice described by Wenger (1999), especially "well-tuned sensitivities…underlying assumptions, and shared world views" (p. 47). Participants demonstrated a well-tuned sensitivity to the needs of students, especially those who may have experienced trauma. They clearly held a unified underlying assumption that they should move toward more student-led activities. Finally, the participants expressed a shared world view about teaching the whole child, and mindfulness practices were a vital part of that process.

Implications

I have gleaned three implications from this study that may benefit teachers and administrators at schools with mindfulness programs or practices. First, leadership must provide adequate and ongoing training and access to resources. Second, because staff turnover can be unpredictable, leadership should make every effort to train mindfulness leaders, or "newcomers-become-old-timers" quickly. Finally, communities of practice around mindfulness should consistently renegotiate what constitutes mindfulness practice to avoid Eurocentric definitions and practices.

Training and Resources

Communities of practice centered around mindfulness require ongoing and adequate access to teacher training and resources. In addition, training should also include trauma-informed practices to ensure the emotional safety of the students. Participants were aware that some forms of mindfulness could be triggering for students who had experienced trauma. Their strategy of making mindfulness invitational provided a foundation for allowing students to opt out of a practice if they did not want to

participate. Alternative trauma-informed practices should be made available for any student who prefers not to sit in silence, which may be a trigger for anxiety.

Understandably, in many schools and districts, ongoing training and resources might be difficult to provide within budget constraints. Eudaemonia is a small, well-funded private school. Public schools and larger systems may struggle to provide access to consultants and meditation retreat centers. Therefore, educational funding should be increased to promote equity and access for all students in both public and private schools.

Furthermore, much of the cohesiveness of the community of practice at Eudaemonia may be attributed to the selective hiring for mindfulness-embracing teachers and the school's smaller staff, which provided an ideal foundation for the program. Nevertheless, participants all reported the importance of their training and access to resources, describing them as instrumental to the strength and development of their mindfulness practices with students. Well-funded and ongoing training and access to adequate resources should therefore be available for educators in all schools.

Facilitate the Development of Newcomers

Using the principle of legitimate peripheral participation, embodied leaders should facilitate the development of newcomers rather than rely on the inspirational example of key individuals to promote a unified culture. Practices should become universal, rather than remain dependent on leaders.

Wenger (1999) explained that membership in a community of practice is not fixed, as people join and leave over time. The introduction of newcomers is "an essential aspect of any long-lived practice" (p. 98). He warns, "As long as membership changes progressively enough to allow for sustained generational encounters, newcomers can be

integrated into the community, engage in its practice, and then – in their own way – perpetuate it" (p. 98) Because the rate of turnover can interfere with this progression, mindfulness communities of practice must foster leadership in new members from the start. When Hilde remarked, "no one meditates in the courtyard anymore," a reasonable response might be, "Why don't you meditate in the courtyard and see if others follow your lead?"

Perhaps the community of practice is going through a natural phase. In *Cultivating Communities of Practice,* by Wenger et al. (2002), the authors describe five stages of community development that can be seen in evolving communities of practice: potential, coalescing, maturing, stewardship, and transformation. They explain how a community might progress through the stages:

> They typically start as loose networks that hold the potential of becoming more connected and thus a more important part of the organization. As members build connections, they coalesce into a community. Once formed, the community often grows in both membership and the depth of knowledge members share. When mature, communities go through cycles of high and low activity, just like other living things. During this state, communities often take active stewardship of the knowledge and practices they share and consciously develop them. (p. 67)

Because the school had only been in operation for six years, perhaps the community of practice had not yet progressed to the stewardship stage before losing two of its key embodied leaders. However, if the community were situated in the maturing stage, they may very likely be experiencing the customary "cycles of high and low activity" described above by Wenger et al. (2002).

Continually Renegotiate What Constitutes Mindfulness

Finally, communities of practice around mindfulness should consistently renegotiate what constitutes mindfulness practice to avoid Eurocentric definitions and practices. Hilde pointed out, "We have to be open to people whose mindfulness is running or…who experience mindfulness by jamming out to music…or else we're not going to have a diverse and inclusive staff." Mindfulness should remain secular, accessible to all, and culturally relevant. In fact, in *The Inner Work of Racial Justice: Healing Ourselves and Transforming Our Communities Through Mindfulness*, author Rhonda Magee argues that mindfulness may serve as a strategy for promoting social justice and a method for healing one's own trauma from racism. Her guided meditations help the reader focus on inner healing through body awareness. If mindfulness is broadly defined as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4), then surely mindfulness can take many forms.

Recommendations for Future Research

In this study, I interviewed three teachers at a private middle school who participated in a community of practice centered around mindfulness. I recommend that other researchers replicate this study in different school settings: both private and public; high school and elementary; urban, suburban, and rural; and schools of various sizes. Further studies in which researchers sample more diverse participants may obtain first-hand accounts and more revealing data on DEI in mindfulness.

Since I finished gathering and analyzing data for this study, one participant has updated me on some of the developments at the research site, prompting me to suggest

studies that follow a community of practice for a longer period than I have in this study. Longitudinal data may provide more understanding of the complexities of a mindfulness centered community of practice.

In addition, I recommend that researchers continue to investigate the impact of mindfulness programs on students by measuring the social and emotional well-being of students enrolled in such programs.

Conclusion

Mindfulness programs have the potential to provide students with many needed skills and benefits, both psychosocial and cognitive. Yet, as demonstrated in the literature review, many schools still have not embraced mindfulness-based interventions, perhaps due to barriers such as lack of time and space (Dariotis et al.,2017; Wigelsworth and Quinn, 2020; Wilde et al., 2019), religious resistance (Brown, 2015, 2019; Cook-Cottone, 2017; Engle, 2019), lack of understanding (Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020), and lack of adequate training (Mendelson et al., 2010; Norton & Griffith, 2020; Vickery & Dorjee, 2016). After conducting this study and observing a school where mindfulness is fully embraced and embedded into the curriculum, I am convinced that students everywhere can benefit from these practices. I saw students spending their entire school day without smartphones, engaging with lessons, connecting with their teachers and peers, and taking mindfulness breaks throughout the day, in virtually every class. Students everywhere could benefit from learning in such an environment so dedicated to supporting their well-being. Mindfulness could be an important part of the solution to the increasing anxiety and depression, inability to focus, and dwindling academic achievement that plague children and adolescents today.

However, before such programs can be provided on a large scale, we must understand best practices for teaching students how to "pay attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). The participants in this study demonstrated a dedication to that purpose, and educators could learn much from them. As Annabel remarked in her second interview, middle schoolers are learning to assert themselves and can be resistant to coercion, so the focus on student-centeredness and the faculty's decision to keep practices invitational demonstrate that they are indeed "meeting kids where they're at."

In addition, participants' dedication to their own personal practice indicated not only a desire to continuously improve, but a passion and an authenticity that surely students respond to; the faculty sincerely modeled the mindfulness practices and behaviors themselves. In addition, faculty reported that their personal mindfulness practices improved their quality of life and their connections to students. Furthermore, participants demonstrated attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion in their mindfulness practices, as evidenced by Daryl's less conventional use of music and movement as a mindfulness activity.

Although resources and training require investments of time and money, small steps toward mindfulness practices can be relatively inexpensive and brief. Schools with limited resources could start small and build up a shared repertoire over time. Educators have an obligation to help students cope, even if only with small changes in the right direction, like taking some time to sit, breathe, and be still for a moment. As a popular saying in meditation circles goes, "Don't just do something, sit there."

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04217-2021 **Responsible Researcher(s):** Krista Lou Wilson

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Rudo Tsemunhu

Project Title: *Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Schools: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Program Implementers.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations **category 2**. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of the research study collected data must be securely maintained (locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a minimum of 3 years. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*
- *Exempt protocol guidelines permit the recording of interviews provided recordings are made to create an accurate transcript. Upon creation of the transcript, the recorded interview session must be deleted immediately from all devices. Exempt guidelines prohibit the collection, storage, and/or sharing of recordings.*
- *As part of the informed consent process, interview recordings must include the researcher's reading of the consent statement, confirming participant's understanding, and establishing willingness to take part in the interview. Participants must be offered a copy of the research statement.*
- *Participant payment log must be securely maintained and up-to-date at all times. The log is subject to an audit.*

☒ ***If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.***

Elizabeth Ann Olphie *09.21.2021*
Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.

Revised: 06.02.16

Appendix B

Research Site Permission Letter

[redacted]

August 25, 2021

Dear Ms. Wilson,

Thank you for your interest in completing your mindfulness research at our school. You have our permission to complete your doctoral research project, "Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Schools: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Program Implementers," at the[redacted]as outlined in your research proposal and contingent on IRB approval from your university. Any deviation from the research proposal requires separate approval. We look forward to supporting this work!

Thank you,

[redacted]

[redacted]
Head of School
[redacted]

Appendix C

Participant Recruitment Email

From: Krista L Wilson
Sent: Tuesday, October 12, 2021 6:10 PM
To: core_staff@[redacted].org>
Subject: Research Participant Recruitment

Hi everyone!
First, I want to thank [redacted] for allowing me to conduct my research at [redacted]. I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University, seeking my Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction. Currently, I am gathering data for my dissertation, "Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Schools: A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Program Implementers." I selected [redacted] for its unique dedication to integrating mindfulness practices into the curriculum since its opening in 2016. These are the research questions that drive my study:
1. What are teachers' life and career experiences at a recognized private school that implemented a mindfulness meditation program from its inception?
2. What strategies and practices did teachers use at a recognized private school that implemented a mindfulness meditation program from its inception?
3. What obstacles or challenges did teachers face (if any) at a recognized private school that implemented a mindfulness meditation program from its inception?
4. What supports did teachers need to overcome the perceived obstacles or challenges at a recognized private school that implemented a mindfulness meditation program from its inception?
How will this all work?

I am looking for 4-6 guides (or former guides on staff) to be the participants in the study.

If you want to be one of those 4-6, please reply to this email or email me at klmastrangelo@valdosta.edu and let me know. Each participant will be provided with the research statement. This will be emailed to you, and you will have the opportunity to ask me any questions before you decide to participate. If more than six people volunteer, I will select six participants who best represent the diversity of the faculty at [redacted] to provide a typical case sample.
Next, I will schedule three 80-minute interviews with each participant, preferably about a week apart, at the participant's convenience. Interviews will be conducted and recorded over Zoom, transcribed, and then destroyed. All data will be kept confidential, and names of the school and participants will be replaced with pseudonyms.
Participants will have the opportunity to read the sections of the results that pertain to them, to check for accuracy and support the internal validity of the study. Finally, at the conclusion of the study, each participant will have the option to set up a debriefing meeting with me over Zoom. During this time, participants can ask me any follow-up questions and/or offer any feedback.
Thank you,
Krista Wilson, M.Ed.
Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Krista Wilson at klmastrangelo@valdosta.edu. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Appendix D

Summary Guidelines for Fieldwork (Patton, 2002)

EXHIBIT 6.6 Summary Guidelines for Fieldwork

1. Design the fieldwork to be clear about the role of the observer (degree of participation); the tension between insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspectives; degree and nature of collaboration with coresearchers; disclosure and explanation of the observer's role to others; duration of observations (short vs. long); and focus of observation (narrow vs. broad). (See Exhibit 6.1.)
2. Be descriptive in taking field notes. Strive for thick, deep, and rich description.
3. Stay open. Gather a variety of information from different perspectives. Be opportunistic in following leads and sampling purposefully to deepen understanding. Allow the design to emerge flexibly as new understandings open up new paths of inquiry.
4. Cross-validate and triangulate by gathering different kinds of data: observations, interviews, documents, artifacts, recordings, and photographs. Use multiple and mixed methods.
5. Use quotations; represent people in their own terms. Capture participants' views of their experiences in their own words.
6. Select key informants wisely and use them carefully. Draw on the wisdom of their informed perspectives, but keep in mind that their perspectives are selective.
7. Be aware of and strategic about the different stages of fieldwork.
   a. Build trust and rapport at the entry stage. Remember that the observer is also being observed and evaluated.
   b. Attend to relationships throughout fieldwork and the ways in which relationships change over the course of fieldwork, including relationships with hosts, sponsors within the setting, and coresearchers in collaborative and participatory research.
   c. Stay alert and disciplined during the more routine, middle phase of fieldwork.
   d. Focus on pulling together a useful synthesis as fieldwork draws to a close. Move from generating possibilities to verifying emergent patterns and confirming themes.
   e. Be disciplined and conscientious in taking detailed field notes at all stages of fieldwork.
   f. In evaluations and action research, provide formative feedback as part of the verification process of fieldwork. Time that feedback carefully. Observe its impact.
8. Be as involved as possible in experiencing the setting as fully as is appropriate and manageable while maintaining an analytical perspective grounded in the purpose of the fieldwork.
9. Separate description from interpretation and judgment.
10. Be reflective and reflexive. Include in your field notes and reports your own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Consider and report how your observations may have affected the observed as well as how you may have been affected by what and how you've participated and observed. Ponder and report the origins and implications of your own perspective.

Appendix E

Observation Checklist

Observational Checklist

Date_____Location_____

Appearance	Verbal behavior and interactions	Physical behavior and gestures

Observation Checklist

Date_____Location_____

Description of location	Other sensory details

Appendix F

General Interview Guide (Seidman, 2013)

Interview One: Focused Life History

First, tell me about yourself.

- Where did you grow up?
- What was your family like?
- What were you like as a kid?

Tell me about your background as a teacher.

- How did you decide to be a teacher?
- Where did you go to school? Why did you choose it?
- Have you taught elsewhere before coming here? If so, where? How was that for you?

How did you come to teach at [school name]?

Tell me about your experiences with mindfulness practices before you came to [school name].

Interview Two: The Details of Experience

Tell me about your experiences with mindfulness practices with the students here.

Reconstruct a day from the time you wake up until the time you go to sleep.

Tell me about any of the ways you have seen mindfulness practices working in the school.

Still thinking about mindfulness practices, tell me about any challenges you may have faced.

What would you like help with? From whom?

[Probe for further details on specific events and relationships to students, other faculty, parents, and the community that came up in the narrative.]

Interview Three: Reflection on the Meaning

[Note: Interview Three will be specific to each participant based on their responses in the first two interviews. The questions posed here provide a general idea of where the researcher will go in exploring the meaning in each participant's experiences.]

Given your experiences here with mindfulness practices such as [mention specific details that came up in interview two], how do you understand student mindfulness practices in your life? What sense does it make to you?

[Probe for further detail based on responses. E.g. "Earlier you said _____. Tell me more about that." "What did you mean when you said _____?"]

Given what you have said in these interviews, where do you see yourself going with these practices in the future?