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SAMANTHA L. EVANS

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BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Vickie Lake, Chair

Dr. Elizabeth Ethridge

Dr. Diane Horm

Dr. Chan Hellman

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DEDICATION

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the water to create many ripples.”

-Mother Teresa

I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Breklyn and Crew. May you always remember how even the smallest act of service, kindness, and love can be life-changing to someone.

I love you both with my whole heart.

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I feel incredibly blessed to have had so many people support me throughout this journey. Beau, I do not have words to describe the love and support I have received from you. Every time I left for class, you always said, “We’re proud of you.” Thank you for everything and for demonstrating to our children how important it is to support each other. Breklyn and Crew, thank you for being so proud of me, even when you found out mommy wasn’t going to be a doctor like Doc McStuffins. Thank you for all your love and hugs. Mom and dad, thank you for teaching me at a young age that I can do anything if I worked hard enough and made sure education was always a priority. Growing up watching how hard you both worked to provide us with a wonderful life has always made me want to do the same for my family. Barbara, thank you for always supporting me as an educator and sharing your teaching stories with me. Traci, thank you for your friendship and mentorship over the past four years. I will always cherish our daily morning meetings in your office talking about life. My committee members, Dr. Ethridge, Dr. Horm, and Dr. Hellman, thank you for sharing your knowledge and expertise over the past four years. My amazing chair, Dr. Lake, thank you for countless hours of brainstorming ideas, reading my work, and helping me grow as a person and a scholar. My classmates and Owls, thank you for the laughs and support inside and out of the classroom.

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PROLOGUE

This dissertation adheres to a journal-ready format. Three journal articles prepared for submission to refereed journals comprise the first part of the dissertation. Manuscript I, Mindfulness: The Sequence of Self-Efficacy, Self-Determination, and Hope for Finding Happiness in Teaching is prepared for the journal *European Journal of Psychology of Education*. Manuscript II, Meditation and Gratitude Practice for Early Childhood Teachers is prepared for the journal *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. Manuscript III, Mindfulness in Early Childhood Classrooms: How to Make it Work is prepared for the journal *Young Children*.

Dissertation Abstract

Many early childhood educators are experiencing an increase in stress, affecting their self-efficacy well-being (Hue & Lau, 2016). Mindfulness, which is the awareness, openness, and receptiveness of one's present life (Seema & Sare, 2019), has been used in the classroom to help decrease stress and anxiety for students and teachers (Harris, 2017). Previous research has examined the use of mindfulness primarily as part of the student's curriculum, but there has not been a focus on the teachers' use of mindfulness. More research is needed on the benefits of teachers using mindfulness practices, specifically, meditation and gratitude, when practiced regularly (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Combining self-efficacy, self-determination, and hope theory, a new theoretical model, Mindfulness Sequence Model (Evans, 2020), first illustrates how mindfulness is practiced. Next, A multiple case study design was used following five teachers during an eight-week intervention. Through daily audio recording reflections after meditation and gratitude practices, weekly interviews, and pre-post-surveys, the study explored the teachers' experiences with meditation and gratitude and connections to their self-efficacy and hope. Teachers reported increased teacher self-efficacy, hope, decreased stress, and an increase in classroom community after practicing meditation and gratitude daily. Last, based on the theoretical model presented and the lived experiences, teachers are provided with a guide on how implementing a daily morning meditation and afternoon gratitude practice in their classroom.

MANUSCRIPT I

Mindfulness: The Sequence of Self-Efficacy, Self-Determination, and Hope for Finding
Happiness in Teaching

This manuscript is prepared for submission to the peer-reviewed journal *European Journal of Psychology of Education* and is the first of three manuscripts prepared for a journal-ready doctoral dissertation.

Abstract

This article introduces a conceptual theory to practice model for how mindfulness benefits individuals who practice it regularly. The model continuously follows a sequence of benefits as it progresses through self-efficacy, self-determination, and hope to find the motivation to move through the cycle continuously. There is no outcome with mindfulness, as it is a state of being. The desired goal is to remain in a mindful state of happiness. By using this model to better understand how mindfulness combines theory to practice and how the practices can be beneficial, teachers can reflect on their well-being and how incorporating mindfulness into their daily routine can help them find happiness in teaching.

Keywords: *Self-efficacy, Self-determination, Hope, Teaching, Mindfulness*

Mindfulness: The Sequence of Self-Efficacy, Self-Determination, and Hope for Finding Happiness in Teaching

Individuals seeking happiness, well-being, and the meaning of life can be traced throughout history. For example, the Greek philosopher Aristippus (c. 435-356 BCE) taught the benefits of hedonic pleasure and the happiness it provided for individuals. Aristippus believed that happiness stemmed from experiencing the maximum amount of pleasure in one's life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Aristotle (384- 322 BCE), an ancient Greek philosopher, also spent his life finding ways to live a meaningful and fulfilled life. While seeking the pursuit of happiness, Aristotle determined happiness to be an activity used to better an individual's life if they believed in the reasons behind the happiness (Burton & Perina, 2013). Therefore, the process of finding happiness should provide as much joy and happiness as the outcome.

Aristotle deemed the key to a good life was knowing your true self. To “know thyself” was called Eudaimonia, and the Greeks were confident that it was what every human needed to do to be the best version of themselves. Convinced that individuals needed to know themselves and their innate potential to live in excellence; therefore, to be your best self, you needed to become what you are. Today, the same ideas are true about psychological well-being. To become the best version of yourself, you need to truly know yourself first (Ryff, 2018).

Looking within oneself to find what matters in life has vastly impacted many fields, including psychology and education (Ryff, 2018). Combining the body, mind, and soul has led people to use mindfulness to know themselves better, become more aware of themselves and others, and increase their well-being (Dorman, 2015; Hue & Lau, 2016;

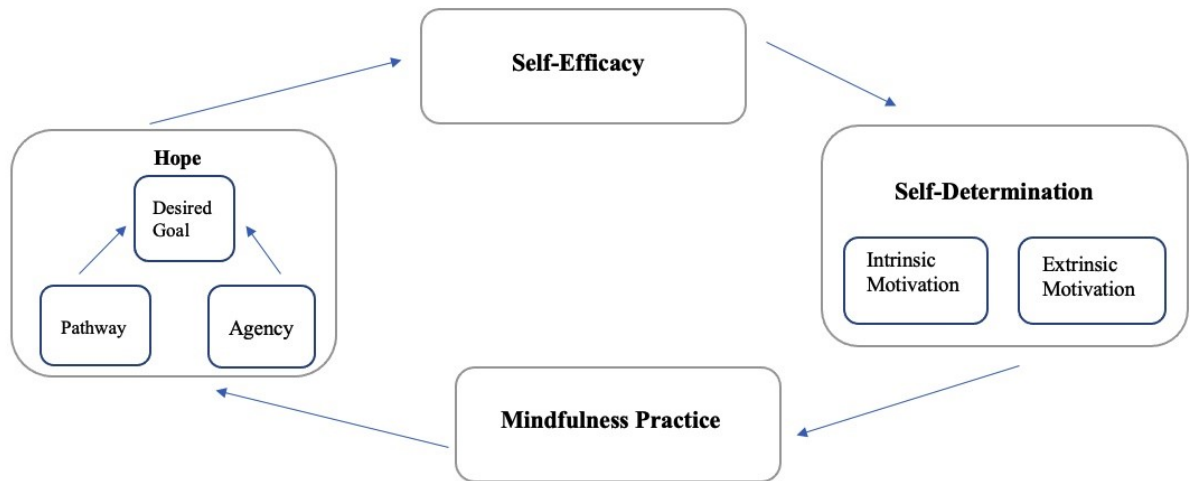
Taylor, 2018). Mindfulness is described as the awareness, openness, and receptiveness of what is presently taking place in an individual's life (Seema & Sare, 2019). This practice positively connects the mind and body by responding to an individual's positive and negative inner experience (Lee & Himmelheber, 2016; Taylor, 2018). Being aware of internal feelings can help individuals recognize triggers and maintain a calm state when they arise (Aguilar, n.d.). Mindfulness is not a magical fix with a snap of the fingers. It takes effort, practice, and time to implement it into one's life to reap the benefits. The specific components of mindfulness and how it can be viewed as a sequence of self-efficacy, self-determination, and hope have not been explored. Thus, this paper aims to analyze each individual component of mindfulness and then synthesize them to better understand how mindfulness can benefit teachers' well-being.

Mindfulness Sequence

Mindfulness should be viewed as a continuous practice through the Mindfulness Sequence of self-efficacy, self-determination, and hope theory. The goal is to repeatedly move through the cycle instead of in a binary direction. When educators continuously move through this mindfulness sequence, they will be creating a positive classroom environment for student learning (Evans, 2022). As teachers begin to see the benefits for themselves and their students, they will become more hopeful which motivates them to continue using mindfulness practices. Analyzing each part of the sequence helps one to understand why mindfulness is beneficial for educators. Figure 1 shows the Mindfulness Sequence Model (Evans, 2022) that illustrates the sequence flows. Each sequence component will be thoroughly defined, followed by how the model works in unison.

Figure 1

Mindfulness Sequence Model (Evans, 2020)



Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an element of Bandura’s (1977) social cognitive theory and explains the origins of efficacy beliefs, the function of self-efficacy, the process of producing effects from self-efficacy, and the possibility of change in one’s self-efficacy. Influenced by social relationships, self-efficacy is the result of the learning process. Through social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is the “belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce attainments” (Bandura, 1977, p. 3).

Bandura (1997) first defined *efficacy* as a belief that can determine how environmental challenges are perceived by an individual and how they react to the obstacles. Therefore, individuals with strong beliefs about their ability to complete a task will be more likely to stay motivated and focused on the task at hand. The theory explains how individuals develop self-efficacy and how they can increase it based on personal well-being, accomplishments, and behavioral changes (Paech & Lippke, 2017). Having a high degree of self-efficacy and using positive self-talk is vital to one’s level of hope.

Individuals who use positive self-talk remain motivated to achieve their goals and create multiple pathways toward their desired goals (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006).

Encouraging growth in one's self-efficacy will continue to build the pathway and agency components for when barriers interfere with goals and those goals seem unreachable.

Self-efficacy enables new pathways to stay motivated while reaching desired goals (Rand et al., 2011).

An individual's self-efficacy is constructed from four sources of information: mastery experience, learning experiences, verbal persuasion, and psychological arousal (Bandura, 1997). The enactive mastery experience is based on a performance accomplishment and influences self-efficacy the most. When an individual is successful at an activity, they will believe they can complete the same task in the future. The opposite is also true, failing to perform an activity will lead to beliefs of failure again in future activities. For example, teachers who completed a meditation with their students before instruction found they were more engaged and prepared to learn (Evans, 2022). The teachers continued the meditation practice daily because it increased student learning and impacted the teachers' self-efficacy. Had the meditation practice not heightened student learning, there would have been no effect on the teachers' self-efficacy, and they would be unlikely to continue using the practice. Also, highly influential on self-efficacy is vicarious learning experiences or modeling. Evaluating the ability to complete a task by observing others doing the same task allows individuals to compare themselves to others in the same situation.

Verbal persuasion and psychological arousal are not as influential on one's self-efficacy as mastering the experience or vicarious learning experiences (modeling), but

they can significantly impact self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Verbal persuasion is receiving feedback from others who were observing. When feedback is provided after reaching a goal, self-efficacy beliefs are strengthened and there is an increased desire to achieve more. For example, when practicing meditation, teachers can provide feedback to students such as “I liked the way you used your deep breaths instead of getting angry,” “I am glad you feel comfortable enough in the classroom to close your eyes during our meditation,” or “I am proud of you for trying a new meditation today.” Psychological arousal refers to the negative experiences associated with doing a task, which can prevent positive thinking of the capability to complete the task at hand.

Teaching is a profession that requires many responsibilities, long hours, and is highly stressful. Believing that one can handle the job tasks and navigate difficult situations in the classroom demonstrates teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Teacher self-efficacy influences the teacher’s behaviors with goal setting through cognitive processes, motivational processes, affective processes, and controlling negative feelings (Bandura, 1993; 1997). Having a solid teaching self-efficacy affects teachers’ choices, the effort they put into their work, and the goals they establish for themselves making self-efficacy highly important (Bandura, 1997). It is one of the essential belief systems for determining teachers’ behaviors based on the expectation of producing the desired outcome (Bandura, 1977; Collier, 2005; Malandrakis, 2018). Therefore, it is important to nurture and maintain a high level of self-efficacy to be an effective teacher.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory is a complex macro theory that involves several types of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The theory conceptualizes an individual's ability to manage their own life, live a healthy life, and increase their well-being by having the ability and control over making decisions for themselves (Cherry, 2019). Motivation comes from this ability and control over people's choices due to feeling they control the outcome (Cherry, 2019). In addition to autonomy over decision-making, self-determination contributes to regulating behaviors, using self-knowledge and awareness to advocate for others, problem-solving, and achieving personal goals (Cho & Kim, 2014).

The theory has two assumptions that must be met: the need for growth and autonomous motivation (Cherry, 2019). Individuals need to actively work towards growing and bettering themselves and finding the motivation within themselves to keep growing without extrinsic rewards (Cherry, 2019). The theory explains how growth can happen when an individual takes control of their actions. Additionally, the theory explains how motivation encourages growth through autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Schulte, 2020). Schulte (2020) defines *autonomy* as the ability to control and choose in one's actions, competence to feel achievement, and relatedness as the need to create and hold meaningful relationships with others. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are all considered necessary for well-being and living a healthy life (Ryan, 2009).

Self-determination influences what type of motivation an individual will use throughout their mindfulness practice journey towards well-being. Motivation is powered by external and internal rewards that lead an individual to the desired goal. When

external rewards are used for motivation towards the desired goal, it is possible that the goal will be accomplished. In contrast, when the cycle is repeated and there are no external rewards left, it is unlikely the goal will be reached a second time. When internal rewards are used and the desired goal is reached, accomplishing the goal multiple times is achievable if it is worth it to the individual. When an individual is invested in their personal internal rewards and the desired goals are considered highly valuable, the effort to accomplish the goal becomes worthy of using internal rewards. For instance, practicing mindfulness only when others are around for validation does not necessarily mean an individual is highly invested in the internal benefits mindfulness provides. However, the individual who practices mindfulness without praise from others understands that the practices bring them value and are worth the effort. Additionally, having a high level of hope will support the individual in reaching the desired goal (Snyder et al., 2003).

Self-determination theory states that autonomy and confidence are necessary for motivation in addition to high self-efficacy (Cherry, 2019). Without believing in oneself first, an individual will not feel confident in their ability to be autonomous. Teachers lacking confidence and autonomy in the classroom can cause damaging effects to their students' emotional success and academic potential. Students are consistently observing their teachers and how they handle difficult situations. Therefore, teachers need to model how to handle situations positively. Challenges and obstacles are inevitable for teachers, which can cause them to doubt their teaching ability and have complete autonomy, but it is critical for teachers to feel they can grow and be autonomous in the workplace by being a part of the decision-making process (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Growth and autonomy,

combined with high-efficacious beliefs, will motivate continued long-term success personally and for the students being served.

Snyder's Hope Theory

Hope theory explains how individuals perceive their ability to visualize a goal they would like to accomplish, generate the necessary pathways to reach the goal, and then work towards achieving that goal through motivation (Snyder et al., 2003). Goals can vary significantly on how they are used and described; they can be short-term, long-term, life-changing, or have minimal results (Bashant, 2016; Gwinn & Hellman, 2019; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2003). The common factor for the wide range of goals is the desire that drives the goal. A desire is necessary before an individual can create something new or make changes to their current state (Snyder et al., 2003). Therefore, for an action plan to start, the goal needs to be large enough to ensure motivation and to be attainable (Bashant, 2016; Snyder et al., 2003). When individuals establish a goal they are unlikely to reach, their level of hope will decrease, knowing the chances of succeeding are significantly lower compared to a more attainable goal (Bashant, 2016). For example, having students receive a perfect score on every exam during the school year is unlikely to be achieved. Failing at this unreachable goal would cause the teacher and students to lose hope in their abilities. Creating more attainable goals, such as seeing small academic gains throughout the school year, will help instill hope in the teachers and students. Individuals with higher levels of hope have been found to report better life satisfaction when achieving their goals, are less likely to internalize problems, and are more capable of handling difficult situations when they occur (Rand et al., 2011; Valle et al., 2006).

Snyder's hope theory holds two main ideas that must work together to reach the desired goal (Snyder et al., 2003). The first idea, pathways, describes the belief that individuals have in their ability to carry out the goal (Bashant, 2016; Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Without a clear goal, there is no pathway or desire to accomplish the goal, and without a pathway or desire, a goal will only be a thought. Pathways act as a GPS, providing a roadmap towards accomplishing the goal (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). The number of pathways it takes to complete the goal is unlimited, and an individual with a higher hope score is more likely to use multiple pathways or routes to reach the desired goal (Rand et al., 2011).

The second idea is agency, which is the part of the hope theory model that accounts for an individual's motivation, or will power, behind carrying out their goals (Bashant, 2016; Rand, 2009). Willpower allows mental energy to help push an individual towards their goal (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Positive self-talk and affirmations keep individuals motivated to reach their goals even when barriers present themselves along the journey (Bashant, 2016; Rand, 2009).

Creating attainable goals as a teacher, personally and for students, helps further develop high hope (Zakrzewski, 2012). Working with students to prioritize and strategize desired future goals and then determining the multiple ways to accomplish the goals will encourage hopeful beliefs. Having hopeful beliefs predicts short- and long-term positive outcomes in one's life (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019), making it a vital skill teachers should continue to develop themselves while teaching their students to do the same.

Students who had an increase in hope were found to be more open and accepting of positive responses from peers, showed less anxiety, and were more optimistic when

responding to peers, thus, leading to stronger and supportive peer relationships (Van Ryzin, 2011). Van Ryzin (2011) found the presence of hope in peer relationships to also be true for relationships between students and teachers.

Moving from Theory to Practice

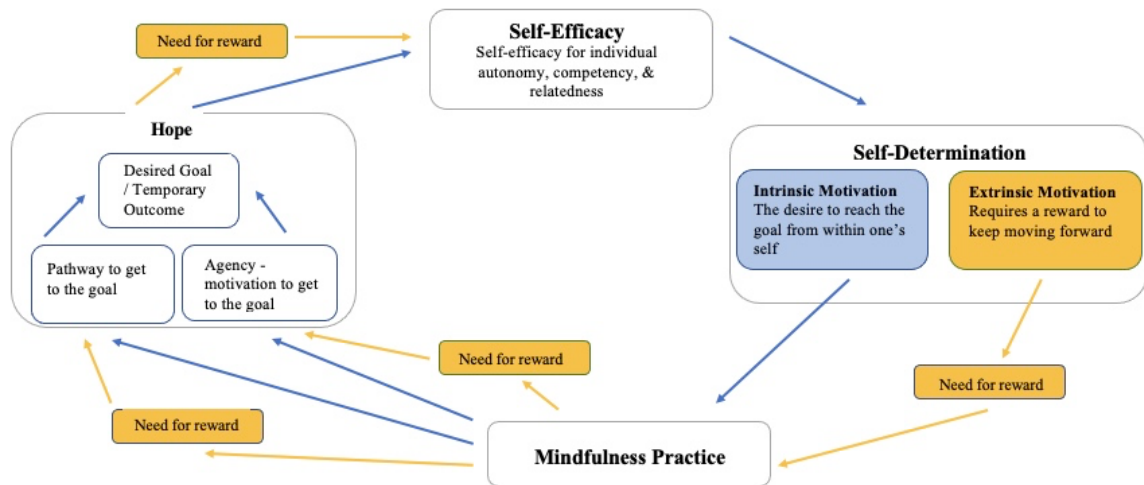
When individuals practice mindfulness, they follow the sequence of events in Figure 2, which is the detailed version of the Mindfulness Sequence Model (Evans, 2020). Each of the three theories (self-efficacy, self-determination, and hope) integrate together when practicing mindfulness and contributes to the individual's overall well-being when the practice is determined to be worth their time and effort. Following the Mindfulness Sequence Model (Evans, 2020), practicing mindfulness begins to increase the individual's self-efficacy, and they become more confident about their actions. This confidence demonstrates that they believe in themselves and in their ability to complete the set task or goal. As the sequence progresses clockwise, intrinsic (internal) motivation encourages the individual to practice mindfulness after recognizing internal benefits such as an increase in self-efficacy. The internal feelings of confidence and self-worth are considered the reward or the motivation to keep moving forward. Once motivation is determined, the brain identifies the agencies and pathways necessary for motivation to remain until the goal is accomplished.

Accomplishing the desired goal is only a temporary outcome, maintaining a stable and calm state of mind requires having confidence in one's ability to have autonomy, competency, and relatedness, which will bring them back to the need for a high self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Maintaining confidence in accomplishing a task or goal is a vital factor for intrinsic motivation. When an external reward (from self-determination) is

used for motivation, it becomes difficult to become motivated without the constant need for an additional external reward. If an external reward is required to complete each of the following steps in the cycle, the individual will likely lose motivation to achieve the goal.

Figure 2

Mindfulness Sequence Model (Evans, 2020)



Mindfulness practices can increase an individual's social and emotional well-being, decrease stress, and create positive mental health habits (Dorman, 2015; Hue & Lau, 2016; Taylor, 2018). Jennings (2018) found that mindfulness practices such as meditation, can be used to reduce the high amounts of stress many educators face daily. In a study by Bernay (2014), teachers who implemented mindfulness practices when experiencing stress could regain their focus, concentrate on the task, and make better decisions based on insight. Without a clear mind, the brain cannot develop additional pathways for achieving previously established goals (Snyder, 1994). Teachers who use mindfulness in the classroom have reported an increase in their ability to manage stress, provide a calm environment, and be effective teachers, all of which impact student

learning and success (Flook et al., 2013; Harris, 2017). Stronger student and teacher relationships resulted after teachers engaged in daily mindfulness practices in a study by Evans (2022). Stronger relationships developed from class discussions of what everyone was grateful for and feelings that arose after meditation practices. Learning from each other fostered a sense of community within the classroom filled with confidence, hope, and positive attitudes (Evans, 2022).

Mindfulness practices provide the opportunities for students to share their personal experiences with mindfulness strategies with their peers and teacher (Evans, 2022; Harris, 2017). Sharing feelings that arise during mindfulness practices will encourage kindness by being a respectful and mindful listener, although this does not happen initially (Evans, 2022). During an eight-week mindfulness intervention, teachers were also found to have an increase in teacher self-efficacy, an increase in hope, decrease in stress, and created a positive classroom community by forming strong relationships with their students. Teachers reported seeing the benefits unfolding in their classroom after four to five weeks of consistent practice, demonstrating that intrinsic motivation and hopeful feelings are necessary to continue practicing mindfulness when there are no immediate benefits (Evans, 2022).

Conclusion

This article provides a model of mindfulness that conceptualizes theory to practice. Without a deep understanding of the three theories that follow in sequential order (i.e., self-efficacy, self-determination, and hope), the practice of mindfulness cannot be thoroughly understood, nor can one understand the benefits of mindfulness. Mindfulness combines self-efficacy, self-determination, and hope to positively impact

mental and emotional well-being by calming the mind of distractions (Bernay, 2014). A clear mind increases clarity and awareness, which helps individuals self-regulate and remain calm when triggered by stressful events (Dorman, 2015). Additionally, mindfulness helps strengthen confidence and hopeful thoughts, promoting positivity and well-being (Hue & Lau, 2016).

Individuals have been searching for ways to increase happiness and promote well-being since the early Greek philosophers (Clark, 2020). Changes are inevitable as time goes on, but the desire for happiness will always remain the same. As the profession of teaching evolves and challenges arise, mindfulness can help teachers struggling to find happiness in the classroom. Happiness is the internal reward that motivates teachers to show up as effective and confident individuals day after day and make a difference in the classroom.

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MANUSCRIPT II

Meditation and Gratitude Practice for Early Childhood Teachers

This manuscript is prepared for submission to the peer-reviewed journal *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* and is the second of three manuscripts prepared for a journal-ready doctoral dissertation.

Abstract

The current study examines the benefits of daily meditation and gratitude practices in the classroom for early childhood teachers and the connections to teacher self-efficacy and hope. A multiple case study design was used following five teachers during an eight-week intervention. Through daily audio recording reflections after meditation and gratitude practices, weekly interviews, and pre-post-surveys, the study examined the following research questions: (1) How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing meditation? (2) How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing gratitude? (3) Exploring if self-efficacy and hope increases for teachers practicing meditation and gratitude? Teachers reported an increase in teacher self-efficacy, increase in hope, decreased stress, and an increase in classroom community after practicing meditation and gratitude daily. This study demonstrates that using meditation and gratitude practices in early childhood classrooms to be beneficial for the teacher and the students they serve.

Keywords: mindfulness, early childhood, self-efficacy, hope

Meditation and Gratitude Practice for Early Childhood Teachers

Many early childhood educators are experiencing exhaustion mentally, physically, and emotionally from the high amount of work-related stress associated with their position (Bermejo-Torro et al., 2016; Jennings, 2018). With the increased number of responsibilities and tasks placed on teachers, it is not surprising that many begin to doubt themselves as experts. When work-related stress is increased, having a healthy self-efficacy is necessary to support positive attitudes regarding one's personal beliefs and work performance (Cascico & Charbonneau, 2021; Huang et al., 2019; Hue & Lau, 2016). Hue and Lau (2016) further explain that a high level of work-related stress is associated with increased burnout and a desire to leave the profession. However, feelings of self-efficacy can mediate the pressure teachers feel and potential burnout (Cascico & Charbonneau, 2021; Yu et al., 2015). Although personal and work-related stress can never be entirely eliminated (Garner et al., 2018), engaging in mindfulness strategies can help decrease stress and burnout (Berdik, 2019; Craimer, 2017).

Mindfulness, described as the awareness, openness, and receptiveness of what is presently taking place in an individual's life (Seema & Sare, 2019; Vago & Silbersweig, 2012), has been a trending practice in early childhood settings. In the last twenty years, mindfulness has been used in the classroom to decrease stress and anxiety while improving classroom quality and well-being in students and teachers (Harris, 2017; Hartigan, 2017; Meyer & Eklund, 2020; Montgomery et al., 2019). In a study examining the effects of mindfulness and classroom climate, the early childhood teachers who implemented mindfulness strategies with their students reported increased positive classroom climate and decreased negative climate (DiCarlo et al., 2019). One reason for

the positive classroom climate after implementing mindfulness was due to teachers modeling their awareness of internal stress, which resulted in their ability to regulate it better. Practicing mindfulness can help regulate emotions when stressful feelings emerge by understanding what triggers stress. In a similar study, teachers who practiced mindfulness in the classroom saw their students manage conflict better, regulate emotions and stress, and use positive words more frequently with their peers (Hwang et al., 2017).

Prior to studying mindfulness in educational settings, mindfulness research was primarily focused on the fields of mental health (Flook et al., 2013). Within education, most social and emotional curriculums target students (not the teachers) and they focus on measuring an individual's emotional state (Garner, 2010; Garner et al., 2018; Flook et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). As necessary as it is to nurture students' emotional well-being, it is equally important to do the same for teachers (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020). Teachers need to understand the importance of their well-being and believe in the mindfulness strategies they are teaching students. How can teachers be expected to teach social and emotional curriculums if they do not have a healthy social and emotional mindset? More research is needed to show the benefits of mindfulness and social-emotional learning practices when practiced regularly by teachers (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Meyer & Eklund, 2020). Additionally, teachers must handle many job-related responsibilities, further increasing stress and burnout in the workplace (Berdik, 2019; Cascico & Charbonneau, 2021). It is vital to find tools, such as meditation and gratitude practices, to use in the workplace to reduce stress, burnout, and increase emotional well-being for early childhood teachers (Berdik, 2019; Jennings, 2018). These mindfulness practices can be a resource that educators use to manage personal and work-related stress,

enhance their well-being, and model to students the importance of caring for one's mental state and mindset.

Studies show there are many benefits to teacher well-being when teachers engage in mindfulness, yet it is still an understudied construct and area of education (Cook et al., 2017; Lomas et al., 2017). Additionally, Bernay (2014) stated that very few preservice teacher programs promote or teach any form of teacher well-being. Promoting, encouraging, and supporting preservice and practicing teachers in finding ways to enhance and nurture their well-being should be a priority for education programs and districts alike (Bernay, 2014; Cook et al., 2017). Regarding the connections between mindfulness, teacher self-efficacy, and hope, the research is scant. Each area has been studied as independent constructs, but a research gap exists related to increased teacher self-efficacy and adult hope scores as outcomes when teachers use mindfulness strategies in the classrooms. Therefore, this qualitative research study on early childhood teacher's participation in a mindfulness intervention will provides more in-depth literature on the benefits of mindfulness from the teachers' perspective.

Conceptual Framework

The *Mindfulness Sequence Model* (Evans, 2020) serves as the theoretical framework for this study (see Figure 3). Mindfulness may be its own construct, but it is deeply rooted in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2008), and Snyder's hope theory (Snyder et al., 2003). A solid theoretical framework helps bridge self-efficacy into current mindfulness practice and provides future practice pathways. A healthy self-efficacy level demonstrates that the individual believes they are worth investing in themselves by using mindfulness practices. However, the type of

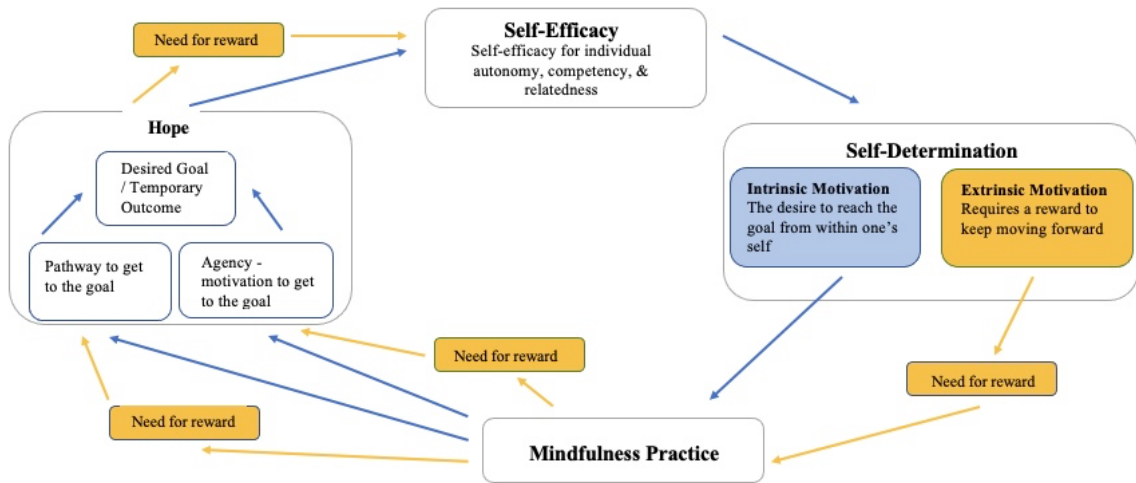
motivation drives self-efficacy beliefs and a hopeful mindset. Self-determination theory categorizes this motivation into either intrinsic motivation (motivation within oneself) or extrinsic motivation (motivation stemmed from an external reward), making it a multi-optional construct in the theoretical framework's cycle.

Using mindfulness practice for improved self-efficacy is a continuous cycle. Starting with a high level of self-efficacy that shows a belief in the ability to complete the task or goal and followed by self-determination where motivation is determined to come from within (intrinsic) or external rewards (extrinsic). For mindfulness practices to be beneficial to the individual, the motivation needs to be intrinsic. To reap the benefits of mindfulness, one must believe they are worthy and engage in the practice to enhance their well-being to complete the Mindfulness Sequence Model cycle (Evans, 2020). The benefits of improving one's inner self will serve as the motivation to continue and provide hope for future motivation.

If the mindfulness practice was done only for external reasons, the motivation to continue would only come if there was a reward. For instance, if a person engages in mindfulness practice to get a golden star reward, that reward would be needed for every step in the cycle and would always be needed to move to the next step. The need for a reward would make the likelihood of completing the cycle unlikely.

Figure 3

Mindfulness Sequence Model (Evans, 2020)



Review of Literature

Beginning in early 2000, mindfulness has been a part of social-emotional learning curriculums for students where the role of the teacher was to introduce and teach it, but recently more curriculums are encouraging the teacher to practice mindfulness along with students (Flook et al., 2013; Semple et al., 2017). Early childhood teachers can use mindfulness to engage their emotions, body, and mind to work together without leaving the classroom or interrupting instruction time. Two strategies were used in the current study: meditation and gratitude. Meditation is a common mindfulness practice that relies on self-determination theory for reflecting and awareness. The purpose of meditation is to become more aware and present while ridding the mind of distractions (Tobin, 2018). Practicing gratitude is a mindfulness practice that can increase an individual's self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and provoke hopeful feelings (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). The practice allows for one to express what they are grateful for daily to stimulate

positive feelings towards themselves or others (Frank, 2015; Isik & Erguner-Tekinalp, 2017).

Increased Awareness

A common theme throughout many mindfulness practices includes pausing, taking three deep breaths, and assessing the situation critically, which can allow teachers to respond to stressful situations calmly instead of reacting impulsively (Jennings, 2018). Practicing mindfulness allows individuals to slow the cognitive thought process, acknowledge their feelings, and becoming aware of how they perceive the present situation internally and externally (Fonow et al., 2016).

Mindfulness practices have also been found to contribute to the well-being of teachers who have high Adverse Childhood Experience scores (ACEs) (Aguilar, n.d.). ACEs are traumatic life events an individual experienced as a child that have affected their life, including overall well-being (Aguilar, n.d.; Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Practicing mindfulness strategies allows individuals to become more aware of how they respond to current or past traumatic events or stressful situations. Bringing more awareness to one's feelings by acknowledging and reflecting on those feelings while practicing breathwork during meditation has been shown to help individuals cope when triggered by a traumatic experience or stressful situation.

Decreased Work-Related Stress

Stress, defined as the mental or emotional strain that arises from adverse circumstances (Curbow et al., 2001), is prevalent in education from various expectations placed on teachers at any given time (Abenvoli et al., 2014; Roberts et al., 2020). These expectations include delivering high-quality instruction, facilitating student learning,

managing student behavior and engagement, as well as managing the classroom (Abenvoli et al., 2014; Jennings, 2018). On top of the multiple expectations, teachers are also held accountable for students who are not achieving academically, which can add to work-related stress (Friedman, 2003). Additionally, an increased work-related stress level is associated with burnout and a desire to leave the profession (Bermejo-Torro et al., 2016; Hue & Lau, 2016; Jennings, 2018).

To help with work-related stress, practicing mindfulness can increase one's social and emotional well-being, creating positive mental health habits (Dorman, 2015; Hue & Lau, 2016; Taylor, 2018). Jennings (2018) found that breathing practices can reduce elevated amounts of stress many educators face daily. In a study by Bernay (2014), teachers who implemented mindfulness practices when experiencing stress were able to regain their focus, concentrate on the task, and make better decisions. Furthermore, teachers with high self-efficacy reduced their work-related stress by active problem solving, social and emotional support from co-workers, and reorganizing and changing teaching strategies in teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Teachers with low self-efficacy are more vulnerable to stress and depression (Bandura, 1993). Additionally, low efficacy is associated with depersonalization (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Friedman, 2003), emotional exhaustion (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Jennett et al., 2003), and burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). *Depersonalization* is defined as feeling detached from those around you and having negative responses to people one interacts with frequently (Maslach & Jackson, 1993). In an early childhood setting, if the teacher has feelings of depersonalization, they might feel detached from the students and respond to them in a negative tone. *Emotional exhaustion* occurs when

teachers feel they have nothing left to give of themselves emotionally and feel their resources are depleted (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Jennett et al., 2003). Frustration, strain, and fatigue are all emotional exhaustion signs felt by teachers (Maslach & Jackson, 1993). Brouwers and Tomic (2000) state that *burnout* is a combination of being emotionally exhausted, depersonalized, and lacking personal accomplishments for an individual working with a group of people. Burnout occurs when teachers feel hopeless and cannot control work-related stress (Jennett et al., 2003).

Increased Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be studied as general or situational (Scherbaum et al., 2006; Shain, 2017). *Teacher self-efficacy* is a specific situational way of researching self-efficacy and is focused on teachers and pre-service teachers' feelings of competency (Capa et al., 2005; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). This concept is defined as a "teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998 p. 233) and as "individual teachers' beliefs in their own ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities required to attain educational goals" (Skallvik & Skaalvik, 2007 p. 612).

Teacher self-efficacy is not a way to measure teacher effectiveness objectively; it is the self-perception of the expectations of their ability to complete an activity or performance (Bandura, 1986; Ross & Bruce, 2007). Additionally, self-efficacy is context-specific; therefore, the perceived ability to change depends on the specific situation or task one is facing (Tschannen-Moan et al., 1998). Teachers need to believe in their ability to effectively handle the tasks they are given to believe they can be successful (Skallvik

& Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Increased self-efficacy was associated with responding more positively when stressed from challenging situations (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Wilcox & Lawson, 2018).

Teachers who believed they can perform well at work were also found to have higher work self-esteem and higher self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2004; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Shain, 2017). High self-efficacious teachers were found to use a variety of strategies, methods, and resources for managing their classrooms and creating a quality learning environment (Chacon, 2005; Ciyer et al., 2010; Cobbold & Boateng, 2016; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2011; Guo et al., 2011; Pan, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Furthermore, teachers with high self-efficacy were more likely to demonstrate professional behavior while at work than teachers with lower self-efficacy (Henson, 2002; Matteucci et al., 2017; Pan, 2014; Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). Sought after professional behaviors such as motivation, positivity, and the ability to regulate emotions were seen in teachers with high self-efficacy.

The reduced sense of personal accomplishments from perceiving oneself as an inadequate teacher leads to a lower self-efficacy level (Jennett et al., 2003) which can cause teachers to avoid tasks they do not believe they would have succeeded at (Bandura, 1993; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Furthermore, when teachers doubt their ability, they are less likely to correct the problems affecting their teaching practice (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Chacon, 2005; Cobbold & Boateng, 2016; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Ultimately, teachers with low self-efficacy struggle to create positive changes for success in their personal and work life.

Increased Hope

In the classroom, early childhood teachers can enhance their own hope development by setting attainable and clear goals, developing and talking through numerous ways to achieve the goals, and continuing to motivate themselves and their students in reaching the set goals (Zakrzewski, 2012). When establishing a goal, it needs to be what the individual deems important, not based on what an outside source thinks is important. If the goal is not important to the individual it is unlikely they will accomplish it. After goals are established, creating multiple ways to achieve them is critical to success. The amount of hope an individual carries with them will predict the short and long-term positive outcomes in their life (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Teachers can follow the same goal setting process with their students. While goal setting as a class, teachers should encourage their students to set goals that will achieve something in the future instead of avoiding something in the present moment. Teachers and students will face obstacles while achieving their short and long-term goals, making them difficult to achieve. Having multiple pathways or strategies to achieve the goals will improve their chances of being successful.

When obstacles present themselves as teachers and students work towards their goals, practicing mindfulness will help them to remain hopeful their goals will be achieved (Bashant, 2016; Rand, 2009). Mindfulness practices, such as meditation, allow individuals to decrease stress and calm their mind (Tobin, 2018). Having a clear mind allows the brain to develop more pathways to achieving the set goal (Snyder, 1994). Obstacles will always be present but being hopeful and using mindfulness strategies to overcome them will help individuals succeed (Munzo et al., 2018). For this reason,

examining how early childhood teachers use mindfulness strategies, such as meditation and gratitude, in their classrooms will contribute to the growing literature of mindfulness. The purpose of this case study was to better understand the use of meditation and gratitude practices by early childhood teachers working in primary-age classrooms (pre-kindergarten through third grade).

Method

This eight-week intervention examined two mindfulness strategies, meditation and gratitude, used by certified early childhood teachers to understand how teachers benefited from using the strategies. Additionally, examining if there were connections to teacher self-efficacy and hope and in what ways students benefited from them. Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher worked directly with early childhood teachers offering instruction on two mindfulness strategies and recorded their lived experiences (Bazeley, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through daily audio recordings of meditations and gratitude practices, weekly interviews, and surveys, the study examined the following questions:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing meditation?
2. How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing gratitude?
3. Exploring if self-efficacy and adult hope score increase for teachers practicing meditation and gratitude?

Participants

Purposeful and selective two-tier sampling was used to select five participants for this case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014; Shenton, 2004). Participants included certified classroom teachers (first-tier) serving pre-kindergarten through third-

grade students from public and private schools in the Midwest (second-tier). The second tier still used purposeful sampling to depict the normal or typical early childhood teacher and classroom experience.

The study's sample included five female teachers: Debora (Pre-Kindergarten), Elaina (Kindergarten), Ashley (first grade), Beth (second grade), and Chelsey (3rd grade). Participant's names are pseudonyms to protect their identity. All participants were at different school sites, and four different school districts. Four of the five participants identified as Caucasian, and one identified as Native American. Three of the participants were certified in Early Childhood Education and two held certifications in Elementary Education. Participants had an average of 12.2 years of teaching experience and two of the five participants held master's degrees. On average, each classroom had 20.2 students and two of the five classrooms also had a teachers aid in the room. The data collection for the study took place entirely online; however, the teachers' use of the mindfulness was completed in their respected classrooms.

Prior to participant recruitment, the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The principal investigator posted the initial recruitment flyer on social media communicating basic information including participation criteria, time commitment for participants, purpose of the study, and the principal investigators contact information. Potential participants emailed the principal investigator if interested in participating.

Data Sources and Procedures

Data sources used in this study included a demographic survey, pre and post-teacher self-efficacy scale, pre and post-adult hope scale, daily meditation and gratitude

practice and discussion audio recording, weekly interview, and field notebook. Starting dates were established by the researcher based on the scheduled starting work date for teachers and the first day of school specified on the instructional calendars from multiple large school districts in the area.

Demographic Survey

All participants completed a demographic survey before starting the case study using Qualtrics, an electronic survey creator. Questions included: age, gender, race, education level, type of teaching certification, years of teaching experience, current grade teaching, number of students in their class, name of school and district, co-teacher teaching in the same classroom routinely, and if the participant has used mindfulness strategies before the intervention (in their personal life and/or the classroom).

Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale

The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998) asked questions pertaining to the field of education, such as, “I know that I can maintain a positive relationship with parents even when tension arise, I am confident in my ability to be responsive to my students’ needs even if I am having a bad day, and I know that I can motivate my students to participate in innovative project”. A 4-point Likert scale is used to complete the measure with (1) being not at all true, (2) being barely true, (3) being moderately true, and (4) being exactly true. The Teacher self-efficacy scale has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties. A Cronbach’s alpha was between .76 and .82 across samples and a test-retest reliability between .65 to .76 (Schwarzer et al., 1999).

All teachers were asked to complete the scale twice, once before the start of the 8-week intervention and again after the 8-week intervention. Due to the small number of participants, the researcher was looking for an increase in the mean from pre to post. Additionally, the pre-post means were used to triangulate with other data.

Adult Hope Score

The Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) measures an adult's overall disposition of hope. The scale consists of 12 questions using an 8-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*definitely false*) to 8 (*definitely true*) (Snyder, 1995). Within the scale, items 2, 9, 10, and 12 focus on the agency (willpower), and items 1, 4, 6, and 8 examine the pathways (waypower). Items 3, 5, 7, and 11 are filler reverse questions. Higher scores indicate an overall higher hope seen in an individual. The Adult Hope Scale has been found to have acceptable psychometric properties with a Cronbach's α ranging from 0.81 to 0.91 (Dixson, 2019; McDermott et al., 2016; Vela et al., 2017). Snyder et al., (2002) found the measure to be stable with a test-retest score of 0.85, inter reliability scores of 0.74 to 0.88, and Cronbach's α of 0.86. The validity of the scale was demonstrated by using convergent construct validity.

All teachers were asked to complete the scale twice, once before the start of the 8-week intervention and again when it is over. Participants additionally completed the survey again post-intervention. Like the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale, the researcher was looking for an increase in the mean from pre to post and used the scores to triangulate with other data.

Daily Meditation and Gratitude Practice Audio Recordings

During the 8-week intervention, participants were asked to begin each class day with a morning meditation followed by a class discussion of the practice. Then, teacher's audio recorded their reflection and described the practice and discussion and emailed each recording to the researcher. At the end of each school day, teachers conducted a gratitude practice alongside their students. The class discussion included the students and teachers sharing what they were grateful for and how gratitude made them feel. Again, after the practice and class discussion, the teacher emailed the researcher an audio recorded reflection. All audio recorded reflections were transcribed verbatim and uploaded to Dedoose (n.d.). Transcripts of each audio recording were recorded and logged in chronological order to ensure internal validity, credibility, and reflect on changes over time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After the researcher received the participants' audio recordings and transcribed them verbatim, the researcher shared the transcripts for member checking to ensure trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Weekly Interviews

Interviews served as the primary source of data collection for this case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Miles et al., 2014). Semi-structured questions allowed the researcher to gather data aligned with the stated research questions while allowing flexibility to explore participants' lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview questions were designed by the researcher based on previous literature relevant to the current study.

Participants were interviewed weekly. The first through seven interviews were approximately 15-minutes with the eighth lasting 45-minutes and was conducted online

using Zoom.com. Interviews were audio recorded on Zoom for the purpose of being transcribed using Otter.ai. Participants had the opportunity to member check the interview transcriptions at the end of the study to ensure trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interview transcriptions were uploaded to Dedoose (n.d.).

Field Notebook

The researcher used a field notebook to keep a highly descriptive record for the duration of the study (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The notebook contained the researcher's ideas and thoughts, connections to theory, data collection notes such as impressions when coding themes, and checked for biases. Dedoose (n.d.) served as a digital field notebook during data analysis. The coding process, thoughts, and reactions were documented in the memo section along with any changes and deletion or merging of codes during the analysis process (Bazeley, 2013). Additionally, the field notebook served as a place for the researcher to record impressions, thoughts, and interpretations from collected data. Due to the large number of data, the researcher also used a data accounting log throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was on-going and took place simultaneously with data collection (Miles et al., 2014). Analyzed data from daily audio recorded meditation and gratitude practices and discussions, weekly interviews, and the field notebook were categorized into codes connecting the data to the research questions. First and second cycle coding were used, with first cycle coding categorizing large chunks of data together, followed by second cycle coding grouping those chunks into smaller groups based on themes or constructs (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2016). Second cycle coding provided an overall

picture and how the codes from the first cycle of coding fit together to form themes (Miles et al., 2014). Data analysis was conducted within case and across-case (Bazeley, 2013). Data analysis was separated based on data sources.

Daily Meditation and Gratitude Audio Recordings, Interviews, and Field Notebook

First cycle coding was broken up into two parts based on the forms of data collection, then pieced back together for second cycle coding to form themes. In Vivo and simultaneous coding were applied to the first cycle analysis for participants' daily meditation and gratitude reflection audio recordings, weekly interviews, and the researcher's field notebook. These data sources were analyzed for answering research questions one, two, and three. A priori list of potential key words found in the literature was used as first cycle codes during data collection and analysis.

Second cycle coding used the first cycle codes to conceptualize the participant's views of using meditation and gratitude in the classroom (Saldana, 2016). Focus coding was used for the second cycle following In Vivo coding during the first cycle coding. During second cycle coding, cross-case analysis was done to explore any themes and connections by recognizing commonalities and differences (Bazeley, 2013). A network model helped visually display coding for cross-case analysis (Bazeley, 2013; Saldana, 2016).

Participant Surveys

Participant surveys included the demographic survey and pre / post Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale and Adult Hope Scale. Due to the small number of participants, the researcher used the scales to see if there was an increase in the mean for triangulation. The mean score from the two scales aided in answering the three research questions.

Trustworthiness

The purpose of this case study was to understand the phenomenon of a mindfulness intervention used by early childhood teachers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research, the focus is on the four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

The use of multiple data sources including daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings, weekly interviews, and surveys as research methods for collecting data on early childhood teachers' use of mindfulness in classrooms and the benefits of using mindfulness practices for their sense of efficacy and hope established credibility for this qualitative research study and offered triangulation (Shenton, 2004). Participant selections were purposeful, as stated in the participant section. During the interviews, the roles of the participant and the researcher was established from the start and used iterative questioning. Participants had the opportunity to member check interview transcripts to check for accuracy and clarification (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher also used work groups and peer reviewers throughout the study to frequently debrief, discuss approaches, and develop ideas. Additionally, debriefing sessions between the researcher, her chair, and other doctoral students were conducted weekly for debriefing and peer scrutiny. The field notebook allowed the researcher to also reflect on the process of the study and check bias while monitoring emerging themes.

Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

The research methodology has been included in the methods section that provides a rich description of the contextual fieldwork. An in-depth description of the multiple

data sources (i.e., daily audio recordings of meditation and gratitude practices and discussions, weekly interviews, surveys, field notebook) and procedures used in the study are also included.

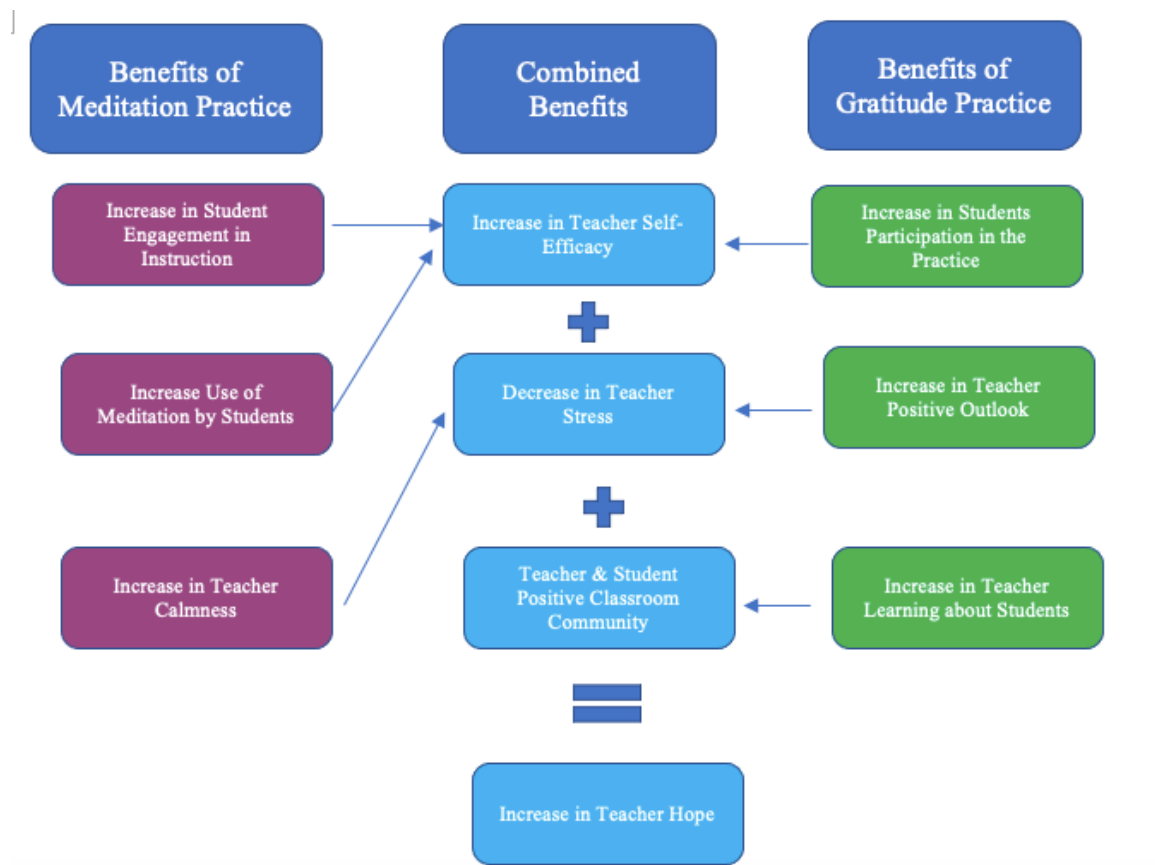
To validate data and ensure dependability and confirmability, a field notebook was used to track data and information pertaining to the study. The researcher also uploaded all information to Dedoose (n.d.) as part of the data-oriented approach to track and gather the proper information (Shenton, 2004).

Findings and Discussion

The results revealed that, although there were benefits for practicing meditation and gratitude individually, the practices together contributed to major over-all teacher benefits that were difficult to separate. The following section presents the findings organized by discussing the four major benefits from the meditation and gratitude practices combined (see Figure 4): an increase in teacher self-efficacy, a decrease in teacher stress, an increase in a positive classroom environment, and an increase in hope.

Figure 4

Benefits of Mindfulness Practices



Increased Teacher Self-Efficacy

Starting in the middle of the figure, there was an increase in teachers' self-efficacy from the mindfulness intervention for all teachers. Based on interviews and daily audio recordings, meditation practices increased student engagement in instruction which impacted teachers' self-efficacy. The students and teachers felt calm, focused, and ready to start their day after meditating, which increased student engagement in instruction. Teacher self-efficacy was increased after seeing students have an increase in engagement and were focused on the instruction. Additionally, self-efficacy was increased when teachers recognized their students using the meditation and gratitude practices more

throughout the day, thus demonstrating that students were invested in the practices. The Teacher Self-Efficacy scale (Schwarzer et al., 1999) also showed an increase in the mean for participants from preintervention to postintervention.

Increase Student Engagement

Teachers reported an increase in student engagement in the instruction immediately following meditation practices. Beth began noticing changes during the first full week of school, “I felt they were ready to start the day and move right into the curriculum.” By the second week of the intervention, she noticed an increase in focus for her and her second-grade students, which improved the amount of instruction and learning taking place in the classroom. Meditating at the beginning of the school day has been found to help students prepare to learn by decreasing stressful feelings which had previously made it difficult to concentrate (Hartel et al., 2017).

At the beginning of the intervention, Elaina firmly believed it was important to explain to her kindergarten students how the meditation practice could benefit them when practiced daily, “we talked about the reasons why it’s important to take deep breaths and that it helps feed our brains.” She believed explaining and modeling the practices alongside her students helped make the practice successful. This strategy is supported by Jennings (2019) and Montgomery et al., (2019) who state that teachers should take the time to explain what meditation is, what it looks like, and why it is important to their students. The act of explaining what meditation is and how it can help them models to students that the teachers believe it to be a valuable part of the day, and they should as well. The more the practices are valued and used in an intentional way, the more likely the individual will be to use them throughout their day (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Increase of Students Using the Practices from Teacher Scaffolding and Modeling

Teachers used scaffolding to teach students how to use the practices, modeled using them throughout the day when they were feeling stressed and overwhelmed, and had class discussions about the benefits of mindfulness practice. The class discussions provided the opportunity for teachers to explain why it was important to become self-aware of internal feelings and how to use the newly learned meditation strategies when needed (Vago & Silbersweig, 2012). Seeing students use the meditation practices independently throughout the day without being directed contributed to an increase in the teachers' self-efficacy, confirming their teaching ability to support students on the new skill, which also strengthened motivation for continued student growth (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Teachers need to feel confident in their ability to guide their students through mindfulness practices to remain highly self-efficacious (Ciyer et al., 2010; Shain, 2017).

Participation during the gratitude practices also showed the teachers how comfortable students felt sharing their feelings with the class, which increased student participation. Chelsey described how her students began to feel more comfortable when they sat on the floor in a circle for the afternoon gratitude, instead of at their desks, "I was shocked how many hands went up for who wanted to share, and they were very specific this time. It was a good day today." Creating an environment where students feel safe and welcomed, especially at the beginning of the school year, can help them share their feelings without fear (Perry, n.d.). Furthermore, teacher behaviors such as smiling, eye contact, supportive language after students discuss feelings, modeling behaviors, and comfortable seating on the floor can help students feel safe and secure (Knapen & Renard, 2018; Perry, n.d.). Teachers led the discussions, often providing their responses

first and modeling how to express feelings and share personal information. After the teachers' examples, they encouraged their students to share also. Throughout the discussions, the students witnessed their teachers offering support and responding positively to what was shared, which increased the likelihood of more students sharing and responding (Knapen & Renard, 2018). Similar to the increase in students using meditation throughout the day, the increase in participation during the gratitude practice contributed to an increase in the teachers' self-efficacy after confirming their ability to teach and guide students how to use these practices effectively. Confidence in one's ability to teach the material and connect with students is critical to a healthy self-efficacy for teachers (Cascico & Charbonneau, 2021).

Decrease in Teacher Stress

Teachers felt their stress level decreased when meditating due to an increase in calmness and positive outlook. Previous literature supports that mindfulness helps reduce teachers' stress, burnout, and anxiety by calming and refocusing the mind (Bernay, 2014; Tobin, 2018).

Increase in Teacher Calmness

Participating in a morning meditation created calmness for the teachers as they began the school day. "At least for a moment I get to calm down because for me the mornings are stressful, and I get a little anxious starting my day," expressed Chelsey. It is not uncommon for teachers to bring their personal anxiety and stress to work with them, making morning meditation a strategy to implement when anxious feelings become overwhelming (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020). Reflecting how the morning meditations had the same effect on her class as they did on her, Ashley said, "it allowed us to center our

emotions, take deep breaths, and focus on the day...[and be] more intentional and aware of things throughout the day.” Feeling relaxed and ready to start the day were common descriptions of how the teachers felt after participating in the meditation and why they were motivated to continue practicing. Meditation practice has been found to increase the white matter in the brain which enhances how different parts of the brain communicate (Craimer, 2017). Increased brain communication from long-term meditation practice can help individuals self-regulate their emotions better and decrease their stress level, leaving the individual feeling calm.

Knowing when to use a meditation practice after being triggered by stressful events is a helpful way to find calmness in stressful situations (Bernay, 2014; Fonow et al., 2016). Further, when teachers use mindfulness practices to respond to work-related stressors calmly, they can decrease the desire to leave the profession from burnout (Dorman, 2015; Jennett et al., 2003). Consistent with the literature, the teachers paused and meditated when they began to feel their stress levels elevate, helping to keep them calm, which contributed to more self-acceptance and confidence as an educator (Bernay, 2014). For example, after doing assessments with her class, Chelsey recalled how practicing meditation helped her rising stress level, “I have been glad that it [meditation] has a place in my classroom. It helps remind me to slow down and don’t be frustrated with them.” Had Chelsey not used meditation to stay calm when she felt stressed, she might not have recognized when she needed to use the strategy which helped her regain and maintain her calmness. The ability to regulate stress can help individuals remain calm and recognize the positive things around them (Frank, 2015). However, when an

individual's stress level is raised, it can become difficult to shift from a negative outlook on life to a positive mindset.

Increase in Teacher Positive Outlook

Reflecting on the daily gratitude conversations helped the teachers focus more on the positive things that happened during the school day. For example, Elaina elaborated on how easily small negative things could become problems, "I'm finding that it really helps me re-center and rethink some things so I don't get hung up on these little things because they can get so big." Similarly, Ashley stated that the practice "has really helped me to just have another opportunity to stop and re-shift my focus. There are still days where it's a really busy day, but my attitude is different." Gratitude helps shift an individual's mindset to recognize the positive in the world around them, and in turn, stimulates more positive feelings towards oneself or others (Frank, 2015; Isik & Erguner-Tekinalp, 2017). When individuals focus on the good things happening in their lives, they are less likely to be worried about the negative things. Consistent with the literature, practicing gratitude can contribute to life satisfaction by decreasing anxiety and stress while increasing happiness (Smith, 2021).

Daily gratitude practice helped Debora combat stress and frustration that she said would have left her burnt out like many other teachers in her building. To her, the gratitude practice was a way to maintain a positive mindset and not let the stress of teaching negatively affect her, "on the days where it is hard, remembering that it isn't so bad." Even by the second week, she recognized the impact of the practice:

It helps put everything into perspective. It's allowed me to be a little bit more forgiving for myself and to them. And allowing my expectations to be okay and

meeting them where they are, because I'm taking the moment to realize I'm grateful for where they're at.

Finding gratitude, even during difficult times, can reduce work-related stress and increase positive emotions (Isik & Erguner-Tekinalp, 2017). In a study by Emmons and McCullough (2003), individuals who consistently practiced gratitude were more likely to offer emotional support to the people they spent time with to help them have a more positive outlook on life. In addition, the positive outlook in teachers and students created an environment where everyone felt safe and comfortable to have class discussions on gratitude, which created a healthy classroom environment.

Increase in Positive Classroom Climate

Participating in a class gratitude practice and discussion created a better sense of classroom community among the students and teachers throughout the eight-week intervention. Additionally, the discussions provided an opportunity for teachers to learn more about the students' personal lives and build a more meaningful relationship with them. Beth described how the gratitude discussions helped her learn more about her students:

It helps me look at the students more as a community-verses just the kids I'm teaching, because I think some of the things that we're talking about has really helped me get to know them from the get go. I feel like I have a personal connection with them from what they have shared. That's different because normally that takes a while in the school year. I do feel I know them on a personal level.

Consistent with previous research, mindfulness practices with teachers and students can create a positive classroom environment (DiCarlo et al., 2019; Hwang et al., 2017).

Furthermore, teachers who are intentional about their well-being are more likely to create an environment that fosters the well-being of the students they serve (Huang et al., 2019).

Thus, demonstrating how class gratitude discussions can build positive relationships between the teacher and students to create a positive environment where students and teachers are comfortable sharing their feelings.

Teachers also described how the discussions gave them an insight into how the students felt about themselves. Chelsey recalled one gratitude discussion that left her encouraged:

She [third grade student] said she was proud of herself, she said she was a kind person. That gave me perspective on how she feels about herself and what makes her feel good. It's nice to know what people think of themselves to help me understand them better.

Jennings (2015) states that trust and respect are crucial to building strong relationships between the teacher and students, which then creates feelings of a community in the classroom. Students need to feel heard and have their opinions valued by the teacher and peers. Class discussions on gratitude allowed students to practice expressing their feelings, show kindness and respect towards others, and be mindful listeners, all of which contribute to a positive classroom community (Harris, 2017; Jennings; 2015). Positive classrooms are communities of people filled with hope that encourage each other to continue forming habits of kindness and respect (Shade, 2006). Although all teachers believed the intervention to be successful and reported benefits for themselves and their

students, teachers stated they did not recognize these benefits until weeks 4 and 5. The delayed success demonstrates the importance of making mindfulness a consistent priority in the classroom to be beneficial (Roeser et al., 2012).

Increase in Teacher Hope

All teachers described feelings of fear and defeat about starting the school year with so many unknowns and challenges caused by the prolonged pandemic and the impact it has had on academics, the learning environment, and student social and emotional development. However, the teachers communicated hopefulness for improved personal well-being and their students' well-being after seeing the benefits of practicing mindfulness unfold. Additionally, the teachers had an increase in the mean for overall hope, agency, and pathways after completing the Adult Hope Survey (Snyder et al., 1991) pre and post-intervention. Beth expressed that these hopeful feelings were based on how successful the practices were for her students, "I feel more hopeful because I feel like they are using them [mindfulness practices]. I'm hopeful that they're going to carry over what we have done and what we are doing." Ashley spoke of feeling hopeful for future use after having similar results in her classroom, "I see the fruits of it, and I know it works. I am hopeful with increased practice there will be an increased awareness and self-control." Feelings of hopefulness were also conveyed as motivation to continue when teachers felt frustrated. Without hopeful feelings, teachers can become unmotivated to continue working towards their current or future goals (Snyder et al., 2003), such as creating a positive classroom community and increasing their self-efficacy. Practicing mindfulness can help promote motivation when individuals are faced with challenges by

lowering their stress level and increasing calmness (Bashant, 2016; Rand, 2009; Tobin, 2018).

Conclusion and Implications

Studying teachers' use of mindfulness in the classroom revealed that small changes during one's day can have a positive ripple effect for themselves and the students around them. After the eight-week intervention, results showed that teachers increased their self-efficacy and hope, decreased their stress level, and formed a positive classroom community. Additionally, the teachers had an increase in pre-intervention to post-intervention scores for the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer et al., 1999) and the Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991). Thus, demonstrating that when early childhood teachers become active participants in practicing meditation and gratitude with their students, everyone in the classroom benefits. Previous studies support teachers practicing mindfulness with their students, suggesting that modeling healthy habits of kindness and respect can help build better peer relationships and feelings of a community (Cascico & Charbonneau, 2021; Harris, 2017). The benefits experienced by the teachers were a result of the student benefits the teachers perceived. These included increased student engagement, frequent use of the meditation practice by students, and in increased teacher calmness from the morning meditation. In addition, the gratitude practice and discussion led to an increase in the students' participation in the practice, an increase in the teachers' positive outlook, and more personal connections between teachers to students. Collectively, these practices can help early childhood teachers block work-related stress that is causing emotional exhaustion and burnout in many educators (Bermejo-Torro et al., 2016; Jennings, 2018). Forming healthy habits such as daily meditation and gratitude

practices and adding them into a classroom routine can be the difference between an over-stressed classroom environment and a hopeful, confident, and positive classroom climate.

Limitations

While previous literature has shown that an eight-week intervention is acceptable, it can still be a limitation. Based on other studies using mindfulness interventions, associations were found on the benefits of using mindfulness strategies during an 8-week intervention (Garner et al., 2018; Hue & Lau, 2015; Hwang et al., 2019; Kerr et al., 2017; Krieger et al., 2019). All participants believed the eight-week intervention was sufficient to perceive changes internally and in the classroom in the current study. However, future studies examining teachers' use of mindfulness could stretch across a school year for longitudinal research purposes.

A second potential limitation is generalizing results while conducting a case study. However, Yin (2018) states that generalization is possible using a case study but is better supported in a multiple case study. It is important to note that all participants identified as Caucasian except for one, who identified as Caucasian and Native American, in addition to selecting female for gender. Diversifying race and gender should be considered for participants in the future.

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MANUSCRIPT III

Mindfulness in Early Childhood Classrooms: How to Make it Work

This manuscript is prepared for submission to the peer-reviewed journal, *Young Children* and is the third of three manuscripts prepared for a journal-ready doctoral dissertation.

Abstract

In this article, five early childhood teachers reflect on their experiences implementing an eight-week intervention using a morning meditation and afternoon gratitude practice with primary-age children where the teacher is an active participant. The article also describes how to incorporate the practices into one's daily classroom routine and how the practices have benefited both the teachers and students.

Mindfulness in Early Childhood Classrooms: How to Make it Work

Mindfulness has recently become a buzz-worthy word in education, with teachers encouraged to incorporate the practice into their curriculum as part of social and emotional learning for their students (Bullock, 2019). Described as the practice of being internally aware of oneself and surroundings for the purpose of being more present (Seema & Sare, 2019), mindfulness can benefit everyone. Yet many teachers only lead their students through mindfulness practices instead of actively participating alongside them. Carving out time during the school day for mindfulness has been beneficial for students, so why have more teachers not jumped on board with the practice?

This article describes the experiences of five early childhood teachers (Ashley, Beth, Chelsey, Debora, and Elaina) who incorporated two mindfulness practices into their daily Pre-K through 3rd grade classroom routines. Their mindfulness routines consisted of daily morning meditations and afternoon gratitude practices. These teachers actively participated in the meditation and gratitude practice with their students and followed up each practice with an open class discussion. Additionally, all teachers had weekly individual check-ins with the researcher for mentoring and were provided strategies to use throughout the intervention. The article will provide a guide for how you can implement the practice into your classroom and highlight the benefits for you and your students.

How to Incorporate the Practices into Your Daily Classroom Routine and the Benefits

Although there are many mindfulness practices early childhood teachers can use in the classroom, this article focuses on meditation and gratitude. Being prepared ahead

of time will help set your classroom up for success with both practices. Remember to be flexible and give yourself grace. As in every early childhood classroom there are many things that are out of your control, such as the school announcements going off right as you begin your morning meditation! Take a deep breath, smile, and start again.

Morning Meditation Practice

Morning meditations can easily be incorporated into your daily classroom routine. To begin, spend time looking at the different kinds of meditations and familiarize yourself with them. There are many online resources with age-appropriate guided meditations to use in the classroom, such as gonoodle.com, pbskids.org, and headspace.com. These websites were suggested by participating teachers and students as the best guided meditations that the students and teachers found enjoyable and beneficial. Additionally, the websites offer numerous age-appropriate meditations, so students will never be bored with doing the same ones. Among students, a few favorite meditations included rainbow breathing, bee breathing, elephant breathing, and flower breathing.

Once you become familiar with different meditations, you can begin using them in your classroom with your students.

- Pick a time and stick with it daily to build a routine for you and your students.
- Include what meditation (i.e., flower breathing, rainbow breathing) your class will use in your lesson book. Additionally, add a star next to the

meditations the students seem to enjoy, so you remember to use them again later.

- Give the morning meditation its own spot on your classroom daily schedule. This demonstrates that it is an important part of their daily routine.
- For the first few weeks, begin each morning meditation by explaining to the students why you are having the class meditate and how it can benefit them. You might say: “Meditations helps us calm our bodies and minds” and “Practicing meditation helps us prepare for our day.”
- Turn off the lights during the meditation to help reduce distractions and increase calmness. This will allow everyone to focus on themselves instead of everyone else around them.
- Use your SMARTboard or interactive whiteboard to show the meditation video so students can visually watch and engage in the practice (see Figure 5).
- After each meditation, ask the students how they felt during the practice, how they felt after, and if they liked the practice. These discussions do not have to be lengthy, but they should help guide you on what is and is not working during the meditation.

Starting your day off with a morning meditation can help everyone center themselves and prepare for the day (Shah, 2020). “They’re more focused, which puts me more focused,” said Beth. This focus helped increase student engagement in the instruction that followed the meditation. Students can focus more on the instruction after

the meditation because of decreased stressful feelings that may have made it difficult for them to concentrate (Hartel et al., 2017). For the teachers, the meditation helped reduce their level of stress and increased calmness throughout the day. When you are no longer worried about disruptions and behavior problems from students, it is easier to have less stress and a positive attitude throughout the day (Bernay, 2014).

Afternoon Gratitude Practice

Like the meditation practice, being consistent with daily gratitude practice is necessary for success. Forming habits such as daily meditation and gratitude practices demonstrate to the students that the teacher values the time spent doing the practice as a class (Hart, 2021). Ending the school day expressing gratitude is a great way to hear what the students enjoyed and have everyone leave feeling positive. Use the following information to help incorporate the practice into your day:

- Pick a time for the afternoon gratitude discussion where you will not feel rushed to finish the discussion quickly. The point of the activity is to have

positive and happy feelings when it ends, not that you checked something off your to-do list.

- Write out the daily prompts in your lesson book. Examples of prompts are: “Who are community helpers we are grateful for?” and “Why are we grateful for our school?”
- Give the afternoon gratitude discussion its own spot on your classroom daily schedule. This demonstrates that it is an important part of their daily routine.
- In the first few weeks, explain to the students why it is important to express gratitude and set expectations - be respectful and kind listeners.
- Make sure to offer your full-hearted response. You are modeling the type of response you want the students to give.
- Write the responses on one section of the whiteboard or large notepaper and leave the responses visible for multiple days (see Figure 6). This can be the class Gratitude Board. Again, this demonstrates to the students that their responses are valued.

Taking the time to have class discussions about gratitude created an opportunity for students to expand their vocabulary and practice feeling comfortable expressing their emotions in front of others (Care for Kids, 2020). Practicing gratitude through conversations helped the students learn more about their peers and teachers; the teachers in the study stated that they learned about their students more quickly than in previous years. Beth described how the discussions built stronger relationships with her students, “I feel like I have personal connections with them from what they have shared, and that’s

different because normally it takes a while within the school year.” Chelsey reflected on how the gratitude practice helped her connect with her students and build empathy between students, “I asked them what they were most proud of about themselves. It was good for me to hear what they were proud of.” During one gratitude conversation, Elaina recalls a student expressing gratitude for another student being nice to them that day, leading to a deeper conversation about how gratitude makes them feel, “They talked about loving one another, being kind to one another, taking care of one another. And it was such a wonderful conversation to hear the compassion that these five-year-olds had in their hearts.” When students practice gratitude together daily, it can help them manage their conflict better and increase the positive words they use in the classroom (Hwang et al., 2017).

Overall Benefits of Using Meditation and Gratitude in The Classroom

Mindfulness practices, such as meditation and gratitude, can make a difference in the lives of early childhood teachers and students when the teacher is intentional about actively participating and makes it a priority in the classroom. All the teachers in the study agreed that mindfulness should be used in every early childhood classroom. More importantly, the teachers believed it to be an essential life skill for children after seeing how it benefited their students. Beth summed up what the other teachers agreed on:

mindfulness helps with building those relationships, it helps with those tools of getting along with others, and I think that’s a life skill they need. I think the

earlier you start with those tools for them, the more they will carry over with them throughout their schooling and into life.

For the teachers in this study, mindfulness helped them find happiness in their classroom after much uncertainty from the pandemic. For Elaina, adding in daily meditation and gratitude practices to the school day was life-changing:

It's made my classroom a better place. It's just made me a better teacher. I said this morning the best thing that happened to me this year was the [mindfulness] project because I was desperately looking for something to help my kids, and I found it.

As the pandemic continues to change what teaching looks like, having healthy habits such as daily meditation and gratitude practices can help ease the increased anxiety, exhaustion, and stress from being overworked (Katella, 2020; Cardoza, 2021).

Remember, your students are modeling everything you do: your emotions, your reactions, your body language, and your words. So let your students model hope, happiness, and positivity that comes from your new healthy habit, mindfulness.

Figure 5

Guided Meditation Video with Audio and Visuals



Figure 6

Gratitude Board



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APPENDIX A: PROSPECTUS

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

MEDITATION AND GRATITUDE PRACTICE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD
TEACHERS

A PROSPECTUS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By
SAMANTHA L. EVANS
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MEDITATION AND GRATITUDE PRACTICE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD
TEACHERS

A PROSPECTUS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC
CURRICULUM

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Vickie Lake, Chair

Dr. Libby Ethridge

Dr. Diane Horn

Dr. Chan Hellman

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Abstract

An increased number of responsibilities are being placed on early childhood teachers causing exhaustion mentally, physically, and emotionally from a high amount of work-related stress (Bermejo-Torro et al., 2016; Jennings, 2018). Mindfulness strategies such as meditation and gratitude practices are being used in the classroom to decrease stress and anxiety while improving classroom quality and well-being in students and teachers (Harris, 2017). Despite this, the literature is lacking connections between mindfulness and early childhood teachers, specifically teacher self-efficacy and adult hope score. Using meditation and gratitude practices, the purpose of this case study is to understand how early childhood teachers benefit from using the strategies, if there are connections to teacher self-efficacy and hope, and in what ways the teacher perceives students are benefiting from them. Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy, self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2008), and Snyder's hope theory (Snyder et al., 2003) will serve as the theoretical framework for the study. Through daily audio recording of the meditation and gratitude practices and discussions, weekly interviews, and pre and post surveys, the case study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing meditation and gratitude for themselves?
2. How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing meditation and gratitude for students in their class?
3. 1. Exploring if self-efficacy and adult hope score increase for teachers practicing meditation and gratitude?

Keywords: meditation, gratitude, mindfulness, self-efficacy, hope, self-determination, early childhood

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Mindfulness has been described as the awareness, openness, and receptiveness of what is presently taking place in an individual's life (Seema & Sare, 2019). This practice positively connects the mind and body by responding to an individual's positive and negative inner experience (Lee & Himmelheber, 2016; Taylor, 2018). In the last twenty years, mindfulness has been used in the classroom to decrease stress and anxiety while improving classroom quality and well-being in students and teachers (Harris, 2017; Hartigan, 2017; Meyer & Eklund, 2020; Montgomery et al., 2019). However, previous research focuses on mindfulness strategies taught to students as part of a curriculum instead of teachers mastering the strategies first and then engaging in the mindfulness practices with the students (Flook et al., 2013).

A large number of early childhood educators are experiencing exhaustion mentally, physically, and emotionally from a high amount of work-related stress (Bermejo-Torro et al., 2016; Jennings, 2018). With the increased number of responsibilities and tasks placed on teachers, it is not surprising that many begin to doubt themselves as experts. According to the 2017 Educator Quality of Work Life Survey (American Federation of Teachers, 2017), teachers need to feel supported, respected, and empowered as experts for the school to flourish. These feelings of support, respect, and empowerment aids in an increase in teacher well-being, which has been found to help teachers provide the same feelings for their students (Herrmann, 2017). Through similar experiences, teachers and administrators who share mutual support and respect for each other empower one another, leading to more collaboration within the school. Without

support from coworkers and administrators, teachers are more likely to have increased stress, burnout, and poor mental health (Mindful Schools, n.d.). Although it is important to note, personal and work-related stress can never be entirely eliminated (Garner et al., 2018). Engaging in mindfulness strategies allows the mind to be focused and reflective when making decisions (Bernay, 2014; Tobin, 2018). In a study examining the effects of mindfulness and classroom climate, the early childhood teachers who implemented mindfulness strategies with their students reported increased positive classroom climate and decreased negative climate (DiCarlo et al., 2019). One reason for the positive classroom climate after the implementation of mindfulness is due to the teachers being more aware of internal stress which results in the ability to regulate it better. In a similar study, teachers who practiced mindfulness in the classroom saw their students manage conflict better, regulate emotions and stress, and an increase of positive words to peers (Hwang et al., 2017).

The well-being of classroom teachers also impacts the students they serve. Huang et al. (2019) point out that teachers who were focused on nurturing their well-being were more likely to focus on increasing their students' well-being and development. Additionally, teacher autonomy is associated with teacher well-being (Kaynak, 2020). When teachers feel a high amount of self-efficacy in their teaching ability, they experience an increase in autonomy, leading them to feel empowered in selecting the most appropriate curriculum for students and further encourage their academic growth (Foley & Murphy, 2015; Kaynak, 2020). Teacher self-efficacy is also connected to student achievement and motivation (Huang et al., 2019). Increasing self-efficacy supports positive attitudes about personal beliefs and work performance when work-

related stress increases (Huang et al., 2019; Hue & Lau, 2016). Hue and Lau (2016) further explain that a high level of work-related stress is associated with increased burnout and a desire to leave the profession. However, feelings of self-efficacy can mediate the pressure teachers feel and potential burnout (Yu et al., 2015). Professional support from co-workers and administrators have been found to encourage teacher self-efficacy, demonstrating how mentorship and professional support can increase work engagement (Lipscomb et al., 2021).

Early childhood teachers who form supportive and mentorship relationships with their students further strengthen their development of hope (Sulimani-Aidan et al., 2019). Increasing and supporting one's hope is an essential factor for motivation (Snyder, 2000). Hope is created from positive energy that is added to an established plan necessary to achieve a desired goal (Snyder, 2000). Mindfulness provides strategies that decrease stress and distractions by calming the mind, thus, allowing for hopeful intentions to enter the mind that focus on more favorable pathways (Snyder, 1994).

Research Problem

Using mindfulness practices has only recently gained attention in early childhood education, with previous research focused on the mental health care field (Flook et al., 2013). Within education, most social and emotional curriculums are focused on the students (not the teachers) as well as measuring an individual's emotional state (Garner, 2010; Garner et al., 2018; Flook et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Teachers need to gain an understanding of the importance of their personal well-being in order to believe in the mindfulness strategies they are teaching to the students. How can teachers be expected to teach social and emotional curriculums if they do not have a healthy social

and emotional mindset? More research is needed to show the benefits of mindfulness and social-emotional learning practices when done regularly by teachers (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Meyer & Eklund, 2020). The number of work-related responsibilities placed on teachers will only increase over time, making it vital to find tools such as meditation and gratitude practices to use in the workplace to reduce stress (Jennings, 2018). These mindfulness practices can be a resource that educators can use to manage personal and work-related stress, enhance their well-being, and model to students the importance of caring for one's mental state and mindset.

Literature has described many benefits of teacher well-being, yet it is still an under-studied construct and understudied area of education (Cook et al., 2017). Bernay (2014) stated that very few preservice teacher programs promote teacher well-being. However, promoting, encouraging, and supporting preservice and practicing teachers in finding ways to enhance and nurture their well-being should be a priority (Bernay, 2014; Cook et al., 2017). Research is also lacking connections between mindfulness, teacher self-efficacy, and adult hope score or theory. Each area has been studied as independent constructs, but a research gap exists related to increased teacher self-efficacy and adult hope scores as outcomes when teachers use mindfulness strategies in the classrooms. Using a qualitatively design to research early childhood teacher's participation in a mindfulness intervention will provide more in-depth literature on the benefits of mindfulness from the teachers' perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study is to understand how early childhood teachers can benefit from implementing mindfulness strategies into their teaching practice. Early

childhood teachers focus on teaching social and emotional learning with young children as a way to increase students' social and emotional competence (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Much of the previous literature has examined students' social and emotional well-being using mindfulness, but there are scant studies focused on teachers (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Without a healthy social and emotional mindset, teachers are prone to have more negative emotions, can become unable to process those emotions, and are more likely to punish students for expressing their emotions (Ersay, 2007). The lack of research on early childhood teachers using mindfulness poses the question: How effective are educators at teaching social and emotional curriculum to young students without the proper tools, such as mindfulness? How can teachers be expected to help students learn to be calm, reflective, and aware if they are unable to do it themselves. More attention needs to be directed to providing teachers with the necessary tools to care for their personal mindset before they can do the same for their students.

Mindfulness will increase teachers' ability to understand their own emotions better and become better communicators (Jennings, 2015). Students and coworkers will also redeem the benefits of those teachers using mindfulness to create healthy relationships, foster positive learning environments, and create a sense of community in the classroom and school site. These benefits have also been found in high self-efficacious teachers (Chacon, 2005; Guo et al., 2011). Therefore, exploring if teacher self-efficacy means will increase for teachers using mindfulness practices in the classroom.

Teachers who take an interest in their students' goals, in addition to their own is a characteristic of having high hopes (Snyder et al., 2003). However, to accomplish this

interest in set goals, teachers need to have a healthy self-efficacy and believe that they can accomplish the desired goal or help their students accomplish their set goals (Bandura, 1977). Mindfulness practices require individuals to believe in the power of mindfulness and stay motivated when barriers present themselves (Bashant, 2016; Rand, 2009). Thus, exploring if having high adult hope score means will increase for teachers using mindfulness in the classroom.

Purposing the use of meditation and gratitude practices to enhance teachers' mindset, two mindfulness strategies will be used: meditation and gratitude journaling to explore the benefits and connections to teacher self-efficacy and adult hope score while examining the simultaneous mindfulness practice teachers are doing with their students. A qualitative research design will explore teachers' experiences and understanding of using mindfulness in the classroom (Bazeley, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014). Using the phenomenological case study approach, the researcher will work directly with early childhood teachers offering instruction on two mindfulness strategies and recording their lived experiences.

Research Questions

1. How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing meditation and gratitude for themselves?
2. How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing meditation and gratitude for students in their class?
3. Exploring if self-efficacy and adult hope score increase for teachers practicing meditation and gratitude?

Definition of Terms

The following operational definition of terms will be used in this study:

1. Hope: Intentional mindset leading to goal-oriented actions (Snyder, 2000).
2. Meditation: The practice of intentionally directing and self-regulating attention (Goleman & Schwartz, 1976).
3. Mindfulness: Intentionally focusing on the present and consciously awareness of one's actions and experiences without judgement (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).
4. Teacher Self-Efficacy: "Teacher's belief in his or her own capability to organize and execute courses of action required to accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998 p. 233) and as "individual teachers' beliefs in their own ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities required to attain educational goals" (Skallvik & Skaalvik, 2007 p. 612).

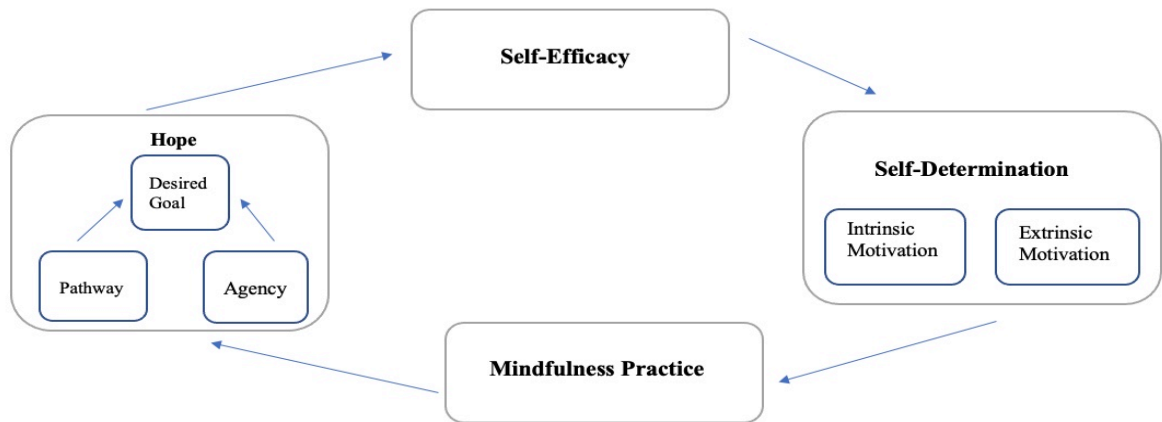
Theoretical Framework

Mindfulness may be its own construct, but it is deeply rooted in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2008), and Snyder's hope theory (Snyder et al., 2003). A strong theoretical framework helps bridge self-efficacy into current mindfulness practice and provides the pathway for future practice. Having a healthy self-efficacy level demonstrates that the individual believes they are worth investing in themselves by using mindfulness practices. However, it is the type of motivation that drives the self-efficacy beliefs and a hopeful mindset. Self-determination theory categorizes this motivation into either intrinsic motivation (motivation within oneself) or extrinsic motivation (motivation stemmed from an external reward), making it a multi-optional construct in the theoretical framework's cycle. By obtaining a better

understanding of self-determination and hope as constructs from their theoretical perspectives, the robust possibilities of using mindfulness-based practices for self-efficacy will become more apparent.

Figure 1

Mindfulness Intervention Model Based on Self-Determination, Self-Efficacy, and Hope Theory (Evans, 2020).



Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an element of Bandura’s social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977). It explains the origins of efficacy beliefs, the function of self-efficacy, the process of producing effects from self-efficacy, and the possibility of change in one’s self-efficacy. Influenced by social relationships, self-efficacy is the result of the learning process. Through social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is the “belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce attainments” (Bandura, 1977, p. 3).

Bandura first defined *efficacy* as a belief that can determine how environmental challenges are perceived by an individual and how they react to the challenges (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, individuals with strong beliefs about their ability to complete a task

will be more likely to stay motivated and focused on the task at hand. The theory explains how individuals develop self-efficacy and how they can change it based on personal well-being, accomplishments, and behavioral changes (Paech & Lippke, 2017). Having a high amount of self-efficacy and using positive self-talk is vital to one's level of hope.

Individuals who use positive self-talk remain motivated to achieve their goals and create multiple pathways toward their desired goals (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006).

Encouraging growth in one's self-efficacy will continue to build the pathway and agency components for when barriers interfere with goals and those goals seem unreachable.

Self-efficacy enables new pathways to stay motivated while reaching desired goals (Rand et al., 2011).

An individual's self-efficacy is constructed from four sources of information: mastery, experience, learning experiences, verbal persuasion, and psychological arousal (Bandura, 1997). The enactive mastery experience is based on a performance accomplishment and influences self-efficacy the most. When an individual is successful at an activity, they will believe they can complete the same task in the future. The opposite is also true, failing to perform an activity will lead to beliefs of failure again in future activities. Also highly influential on self-efficacy is vicarious learning experiences or modeling. Evaluating the ability to complete a task by observing others doing the same task allows them to compare themselves to others in the same situation.

Verbal persuasion and psychological arousal are not as influential as mastering the experience or vicarious learning experiences (modeling) but can significantly impact self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Verbal persuasion is receiving feedback from others who were observing. When feedback is provided after reaching a goal, self-efficacy beliefs are

strengthened, and there is an increased desire to achieve more. Psychological arousal refers to the negative experiences associated with doing a task, which can prevent positive thinking of the capability to complete the task at hand.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory is a complex macro theory that involves several types of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The theory conceptualizes an individual's ability to manage their own life, live a healthy life, and increase their well-being by having the ability and control over making decisions for themselves (Cherry, 2019). Motivation comes from this ability and control over people's choices due to feeling they control the outcome (Cherry, 2019). In addition to autonomy over decision making, self-determination contributes to regulating behaviors, using self-knowledge and awareness to advocate for others, problem-solving, and achieving personal goals (Cho & Kim, 2014).

The theory has two assumptions that must be met, the need for growth and autonomous motivation (Cherry, 2019). Individuals need to be actively working towards growing and bettering themselves and finding motivation within themselves to keep growing without extrinsic rewards (Cherry, 2019). In addition, self-determination theory explains how motivation is used to encourage growth through autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Schulte, 2020). Schulte (2020) defines *autonomy* as the ability to have control and choice in one's actions, competence to feel achievement, and relatedness as the need to create and hold meaningful relationships with others. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are all considered necessary for the well-being and living a healthy life (Ryan, 2009).

Self-determination influences what type of motivation an individual will be using throughout their mindfulness practice journey towards well-being. Imagine two trains, and one train is full of external rewards leading up to the desired goal, and the other is an internal desire to make it to the desired goal. The train with external rewards might make it to the desired goal, but when it is time to repeat the cycle, the rewards will be gone or no longer desired, making the likelihood of the train making it to the end unlikely. The train with an internal desire to keep pushing forward will forever have that internal desire if the desired goal is worth it to the individual. Therefore, when the individual reaches the goal, and the cycle repeats itself, it is likely that the desired goal can be reached multiple times. However, having a high level of hope will support the individual in reaching the desired goal (Snyder et al., 2003).

Snyder's Hope Theory

Hope theory explains how individuals perceive their ability to visualize a goal they would like to accomplish, generate the necessary pathways to reach the goal, then continue to work towards achieving that goal through motivation (Snyder et al., 2003). Goals can vary significantly on how they are used and described; they can be short-term, long-term, life-changing, or simple (Bashant, 2016; Gwinn & Hellman, 2019; Snyder, 1995; Snyder et al., 2003). These set goals will aid in creating an action plan. Therefore, goals need to be large enough to ensure motivation and be attainable (Bashant, 2016; Snyder et al., 2003). When individuals establish a goal they are unlikely to reach, their level of hope will decrease, knowing the chances of succeeding are significantly lower compared to a more attainable goal (Bashant, 2016).

Snyder's hope theory holds two main ideas that must work together to reach the desired goal (Snyder et al., 2003). The first idea, pathways, describes the belief individuals have in their ability to carry out the goal (Bashant, 2016; Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Without a clear goal, there is no pathway or desire to accomplish the goal, and without a pathway or desire, a goal will be a thought. These pathways act as a GPS, providing a roadmap towards accomplishing the goal (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). The number of pathways it takes to complete the goal is not limited, and an individual with a higher hope is more likely to use multiple pathways or routes to reach the desired goal (Rand et al., 2011).

The second idea is agency, which is the part of the hope theory model that accounts for an individual's motivation, or will power, behind carrying out their goals (Bashant, 2016; Rand, 2009). Willpower allows mental energy to help push an individual towards their goal (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Positive self-talk and affirmations keep individuals motivated to reach their goals even when barriers present themselves along the journey (Bashant, 2016; Rand, 2009).

Mindfulness Practice Theory Integration Model

As mentioned earlier, the theoretical framework for mindfulness is important for understanding how beneficial the practice can be. Self-determination theory can be applied to individuals' personal lives or careers. Deci and Ryan (2008) believe self-determination theory works when individuals can reflect and have an awareness of themselves and their surroundings. Mindfulness practices, which are defined as having awareness and bringing attention to what is happening around them, work alongside self-determination theory (Tobin, 2018). The belief one has about their well-being is closely

linked to self-determination theory and subjective vitality (feeling alive and energetic) by being reflective and aware (Martela, n.d.).

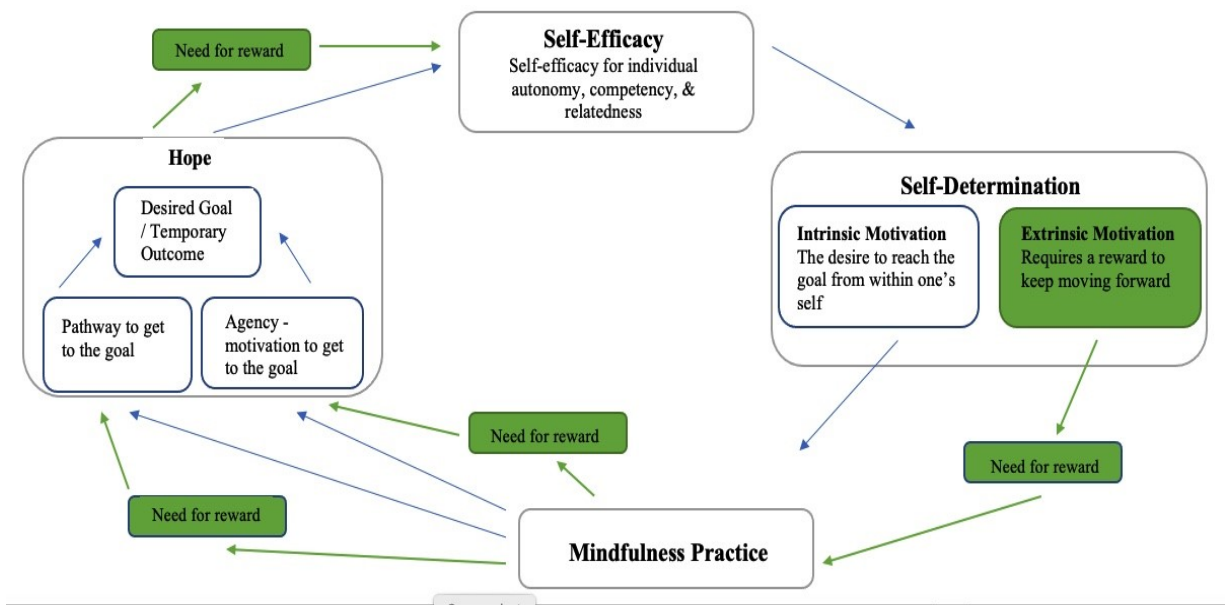
Using mindfulness practice for improved self-efficacy is a continuous cycle. It starts with the level of self-efficacy in autonomy, competence, and relatedness. A high level of self-efficacy shows belief in the ability to complete the task or goal. Followed by self-determination, where motivation is determined to be coming from within (intrinsic) or external rewards (extrinsic). If internal motivation is determined, the mindfulness practice can occur and, their agency and pathways from hope theory are followed through to help them reach the desired goal or task. This desired goal in hope theory is the temporary outcome because to maintain a stable and calm state of mind, the individual needs to continue to have confidence in their autonomy, competency, and relatedness, which will bring them back to self-efficacy. If an external reward is needed to continue moving on from self-determination, an external reward will most likely be needed to complete each of the following steps in the cycle, making the likelihood of completing the cycle unlikely. Figure 1 shows how mindfulness interventions can be beneficial based on whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation is used.

In a study investigating teachers' mindfulness practices (meditation and moving one's body) during highly stressful situations (i.e., parent-teacher conferences, student assessments), teachers began to gain more self-acceptance, self-confidence in their role as an educator, and believed themselves to be more of a professional in the field (Bernay, 2014). To grow one's self-confidence, or self-efficacy, first an individual needs to determine where the motivation is stemming from. Intrinsic motivation will allow them to increase efficacy in their autonomy, competence, and relatedness without the need for

an external reward, making the mindfulness practices more meaningful and truthful (Cherry, 2019). Fonow et al. (2016) stated that for people to become more empathetic and self-compassionate, they need to allow themselves to first see the world through other's eyes. Based on these studies, allowing oneself to become more aware of those around them and being open to their point of view will allow for a better understanding of where others are coming from, which is a goal of mindfulness practices.

Figure 2

Mindfulness Intervention Model Based on Self-Determination, Self-Efficacy, and Hope Theory (Evans, 2020).



Chapter 2:

Review of Literature

Meditation and Gratitude Practice for Early Childhood Teachers

Practicing mindfulness in the classroom has not been common until the past twenty years, even though it has been used throughout history. Greek philosophers used mindfulness to find happiness from life's experiences, which further lead to psychological beliefs on well-being and mindset (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Past and present mindfulness practices require intentionality, being present, open-minded, and conscious awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Early childhood teachers using mindfulness strategies in the classroom can increase their awareness while decreasing stress and distractions. (Tobin, 2018). Furthermore, classroom interventions using mindfulness strategies have been shown to benefit students along with the teachers when used regularly (Flook et al., 2013).

The following literature examines the history of mindfulness and how the practice has influenced religious beliefs and the field of psychology before being used in education. Once introduced into the field of education, the primary use of mindfulness was part of socioemotional curriculums for children's well-being with no influence on teachers' well-being. There is limited research on mindfulness for teacher well-being, as it is a developing area of research, but the small amount available suggests it is a beneficial tool for educators.

History of Mindfulness

Greek Philosophers

Finding happiness, well-being, and the meaning of life can be traced throughout history. Greek philosopher Aristippus (c. 435-356 BCE) taught the benefits of hedonic pleasure and the happiness it provided for individuals. Aristippus believed that happiness stemmed from experiencing the maximum amount of pleasure in one's life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Aristotle (384- 322 BCE), an ancient Greek philosopher, also spent his life finding ways to live a meaningful and fulfilled life. While seeking the pursuit of happiness, Aristotle determined happiness was an activity that can be used to better an individual's life if the individual chooses to believe in the reasons behind the happiness (Burton & Perina, 2013). Eudaimonia was defined by the philosopher to describe the happiness that would lead to a meaningful life (Kaynak, 2020).

Having an activity within the soul was believed to be the most important thing a human could do for themselves (Burton & Perina, 2013). Therefore, Aristotle deemed the key to a good life was knowing your true self. To "know thyself" was called Eudaimonia, and the Greeks were confident that it was what every human needed to do to be the best version of themselves. Convinced that in order to live in excellence, individuals needed to know themselves and their innate potential. Therefore, to be your best self, you needed to become what you are. Today, the same ideas are true about psychological well-being. To become the best version of yourself, you need to truly know yourself first. (Ryff, 2018).

Aristotle supplied the groundwork for what well-being would look like for the field of psychology. Having a look within oneself to show what matters in life has had a vast impact on many fields, including psychology and education (Ryff, 2018). Combining

the body, mind, and soul together has promoted many cultures to find their own version of mindfulness, such as meditation and breathwork (Sockolov, 2015).

Religious Practices

Many mindfulness practices have been traced back to religious groups, mainly Hinduism and Buddhist (Bernay, 2014; Selva, 2020). The more common and more mainstream version of mindfulness practiced today comes from Buddhist practices (Barnes, n.d.). During these practices, mindfulness is done by meditating and bringing awareness to the current situation, finding clarity and calmness within the current state, and allowing oneself to find a place of non-judgment and acceptance (Barnes, n.d.).

Mindfulness practices came into western cultures in 1979 by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who studied mindfulness under multiple Buddhist teachers (Selva, 2020). Kabat-Zinn founded the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. The program focused on holistic approaches, such as mindfulness to help individuals with mental and physical concerns (Barnes, n.d.).

Many other religions have ideals rooted in gratitude which is a mindfulness practice. Emmons and McCullough (2003) described gratitude as a highly sought-after personal characteristic for people who identify with the following faiths: Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, and Hindu. The need to express gratitude after receiving a religious-related benefit is viewed as a moral obligation.

Field of Psychology

Eudaimonic and hedonic perspectives have influenced philosophers and psychologists for years while studying well-being (Kaynak, 2020). Eudaimonic perspective comes from Aristotle's teachings, saying that happiness comes by living a

good and fulfilled life (Kaynak, 2020). The hedonic perspective believes nature will supply pleasure and pain, both of which will motivate individuals (Kaynak, 2020). From this perspective, the greatest happiness will come when individuals experience their highest pleasure and their lowest pain. Kaynak (2020) explains that psychologists who hold a hedonic perspective believe well-being is all about subjective happiness and achieving a higher pleasure. The psychologist who holds a eudaimonic perspective believes individuals find happiness when they believe in their true selves.

Mindfulness in the Classroom

Beginning in the early 2000, mindfulness has been a part of social-emotional learning curriculums for students where the role of the teacher was to introduce and teach it, but recently more curriculums are encouraging the teacher to practice mindfulness along with students (Flook et al., 2013; Semple et al., 2017). Klassen et al. (2012) explains that elementary teachers develop deeper relationships with students than secondary teachers based on the number of hours spent together during a typical school day. Thus, demonstrating the impact that learning mindfulness strategies can have on students in elementary school compared to secondary, based on the amount of time spent with one teacher.

Early childhood teachers work in a fast-paced profession, conducting numerous activities with students and coworkers, which leaves many hesitant to add yet another task (such as mindfulness practices) to their workday (Hatton-Bowers et al., 2020; Kane, 2018). Educating teachers on how to incorporate mindfulness strategies into the activities they are already doing will provide tools to become more aware and intentional in their teaching. Often, teachers find themselves working on autopilot and reacting to situations

that cause distress (Jennings, 2015). When mindfulness is practiced in the classroom, teachers recognize emotions and pause when necessary to better handle difficult situations in the classroom. Pausing also allows teachers to enjoy special moments in the classroom they would have missed had they been on autopilot trying to accomplish necessary tasks throughout the school day.

Strategies used in Early Childhood Classrooms

Early childhood teachers can use mindfulness to engage their emotions, body, and mind to work together without leaving the classroom or interrupting instruction time. Two strategies will be used in the current study: meditation and gratitude journaling. Practicing these strategies in the classroom will allow teachers to have more awareness and presence, which will promote a positive classroom environment, manage student behavior, and build a better sense of community in the school site (Jennings, 2015).

Meditation

Meditation is a common mindfulness practice that relies on self-determination theory for reflecting and awareness. The purpose of meditation is to become more aware and present while ridding the mind of distractions (Tobin, 2018). Increasing an individual's awareness of the present moment allows for autonomy to create new goals and lowers stress levels (Dewhirst & Goldman, 2020; Montgomery et al., 2019; Tobin, 2018). Studies have shown that teachers (both practicing and preservice) do not realize how restless their bodies and minds are until they are asked to sit with their thoughts and be still, demonstrating the importance of self-awareness involved in mindful practices (Dorman, 2015).

Meditation can be practice in multiple ways to redeem the associated benefits. All education majors at the University of Toronto participated in a meditation practice during an introductory education course, becoming familiar with the practice and how to use it in the future (Hartel et al., 2017). The guided practice was used in the classroom at the beginning of the class period after the instructor had welcomed the students. The classroom lights were dimmed, and for three minutes, students were asked to direct their attention to the present and focus on their feelings and thoughts along with the smells and sounds during the meditation. Students participating in daily meditation study reported more joy, peace, and insight into their lives and in relationships they form with peers. An increased ability to learn followed by increased concentration on the learning material was also found in participating students (Hartel et al., 2017).

Gratitude Journal

Practicing gratitude is a mindfulness practice that can increase an individual's self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and provoke hopeful feelings (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). A gratitude journal is a place for one to express what they are grateful for daily to stimulate positive feelings towards themselves or others (Frank, 2015; Isik & Erguner-Tekinalp, 2017). Easley (2005) states that journaling can change teacher's focus, allowing for a more positive outlook on the world. One of the most appealing benefits of practicing gratitude is how easily accessible it is (Isik & Erguner-Tekinalp, 2017). Easley (2005) believes the act of writing down what a person is grateful for is important to the process, but post-it notes or scratch paper can be used instead of a formal journal. The benefit comes in the act of writing down what they are grateful for and the ability to review the information later.

Students will also expand their vocabulary by using language to express their feelings and emotions (Care for Kids, 2020). The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill conducted the Raising Grateful Children Project examining gratitude with children and their families and concluded that gratefulness is more than just being thankful (Hussong, 2017). Gratitude should be viewed as a four-part experience that focuses on noticing, thinking, feeling, and doing. Practicing gratitude will allow students to notice all there is to be thankful for in their lives, to think and reflect on why they were given those things to be grateful for, how they feel how it, and what they do to express their appreciation. The study found that younger students, who are learning gratitude, may only experience one of these experiences at a time. As children age and continue to practice gratitude, they will begin to use all four gratitude experiences.

A recent study found a positive association between gratitude practice and subjective well-being, showing the importance of practicing gratitude in schools for students and teachers (Renshaw & Olinger-Steeves, 2016). Isik and Erguner-Tekinalp (2017) studied the effects of gratitude practice with preservice teachers and found it to be a protective factor for students when faced with stress and challenges in addition to increased well-being. Additionally, adults practicing gratitude have been found to have healthier social relationships, decrease stress, and decreased mental health illnesses (Hussong, 2017).

Classroom Intervention

Mindfulness interventions used in early childhood classrooms benefit both teachers and students (Flook et al., 2013). Spending time during the school day to practice mindfulness should also include the opportunity for students to share their

personal experiences with mindfulness strategies with their peers (Harris, 2017). Sharing feelings that arose during mindfulness practices will encourage kindness by being respectful and mindful listeners. Students are also encouraged to help one another while participating in mindfulness strategies. Harris (2017) suggests using collaborative learning approaches or peer-buddy programs to create a community of mindful learners in the classroom.

Teachers using mindfulness in the classroom have reported an increase in their ability to manage stress, provide a calm environment, and be effective teachers, all of which impact student learning and success (Flook et al., 2013; Harris, 2017). Primary aged students participating in mindfulness interventions were found to have an increase in student engagement (Carboni et al., 2013; Felver et al., 2014), social competence (Flook et al., 2015), and student behavior (Black & Fernando, 2014).

In order to see positive student results from an intervention such as mindfulness, teachers need to be intentional about creating healthy habits for classroom success (Roeser et al., 2012). Habits are formed when individuals generate their energy towards completing successful activities by doing all the necessary actions. These actions create habits that will change the current circumstance and are modified to create new circumstances (Shade, 2006). When individuals decide on a habit that they want to create, the habit needs to be significant enough and have a conceptualized final product. Being hopeful and mindful of the desired habit will create further meaning for a fulfilled life (Shade, 2006).

Benefits of Mindfulness

There are many situations when teachers' stress level increase throughout the school year and they begin to doubt themselves as the expert. According to the 2017 Educator Quality of Work Life Survey, teachers need to feel supported, respected, and empowered as experts for the school to flourish (American Federation of Teachers, 2017). Otherwise, teachers are more likely to have increased stress, burnout, and poor mental health (Mindful Schools, n.d.). In a study investigating teachers using mindfulness practices (meditation and moving one's body) during highly stressful situations (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, student assessments), teachers began to gain more self-acceptance and self-confidence in their role as an educator and believed themselves to be more of a professional in the field (Bernay, 2014). For confidence in oneself to grow (increasing one's self-efficacy), an individual first needs to determine from where the motivation is stemming. Intrinsic motivation will increase efficacy in their autonomy, competence, and relatedness without the need for an external reward, making the mindfulness practices more meaningful and truthful (Cherry, 2019). Furthermore, teachers that are hopeful and having a positive outlook can stay intrinsically motivated with little need for external rewards (Rand, 2009). Fonow et al. (2016) stated that for people to become more empathetic and self-compassionate, they need first to see the world through other's eyes. Based on these studies, allowing oneself to become more aware of those around them and being open to their perspectives will allow for a better understanding of where others are coming from, which is a goal of mindfulness practices.

Increased Awareness

A common theme throughout many mindfulness practices includes pausing, taking three deep breaths, and assessing the situation critically. These techniques allow teachers to respond to the situation first instead of impulsively reacting (Jennings, 2018). Practicing mindfulness allows individuals to slow the cognitive thought process, acknowledge their feelings, and become aware of how they perceive the present situation internally and externally (Fonow et al., 2016).

Mindfulness practices have also been found to contribute to the well-being of teachers who have a high Adverse Childhood Experience scores (ACEs) (Aguilar, n.d.). ACEs are traumatic life experiences or events an individual experienced as a child that have affected their life, including overall well-being (Aguilar, n.d.; Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Practicing mindfulness strategies allows individuals to become more aware of how they respond to experiencing current or past traumatic events or stressful situations. Bringing more awareness to one's feelings by acknowledging and reflecting on those feelings while practicing breathwork during meditation has been proven to help individuals cope when triggered by a traumatic experience or stressful situation.

Decreased Work-Related Stress

Stress, defined as the mental or emotional strain that arises from adverse circumstances (Curbow et al., 2001), is prevalent in education from various expectations placed on teachers at any given time (Abenvoli et al., 2014; Roberts et al., 2020). These expectations include delivering high-quality instruction, facilitating student learning, managing student behavior and engagement, as well as managing the classroom (Abenvoli et al., 2014; Jennings, 2018). On top of the multiple expectations, teachers are

also held accountable for students who are not achieving academically, which can add to work-related stress (Friedman, 2003). Additionally, an increased work-related stress level is also associated with increased burnout and a desire to leave the profession (Bermejo-Torro et al., 2016; Hue & Lau, 2016; Jennings, 2018)

Mindfulness practices are also used to increase an individual's social and emotional well-being when faced with everyday stressors and creating positive mental health habits (Dorman, 2015; Hue & Lau, 2016; Taylor, 2018). Jennings (2018) found breathing practices to reduce elevated amounts of stress many educators face daily. In a study by Bernay (2014), teachers who implemented mindfulness practices when experiencing stress were able to regain their focus, concentrate on the task, and make better decisions based on insight. Furthermore, teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs can reduce the work-related stress felt by active problem solving, seeking social and emotional support from co-workers, and reorganizing and changing teaching strategies (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Decreased Burnout

Teachers with low self-efficacy were more vulnerable to stress and depression (Bandura, 1993). Additionally, low efficacy was found to be associated with depersonalization (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Friedman, 2003), emotional exhaustion (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Jennett et al., 2003), and burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). *Depersonalization* is defined as feeling detached from those around oneself and having negative responses to people the individual frequently interacts with who (Maslach & Jackson, 1993). In an early childhood setting, if the teacher had feelings of depersonalization, the teacher would feel detached from the students and respond to

students in a negative tone. *Emotional exhaustion* occurs when teachers feel they have nothing left to give of themselves emotionally and feel their resources are depleted (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Jennett et al., 2003). Frustration, strain, and fatigue are all emotional exhaustion signs felt by teachers (Maslach & Jackson, 1993). Brouwers and Tomic (2000) state that *burnout* is a combination of being emotionally exhausted, depersonalized, and lacking personal accomplishments for an individual working with a group of people. Burnout occurs when teachers feel hopeless and feel as if they cannot control work-related stress (Jennett et al., 2003).

Increased Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy can be studied as general or situational self-efficacy (Scherbaum et al., 2006; Shain, 2017). *Teacher self-efficacy* is a specific situational way of researching self-efficacy and is focused on teachers and pre-service teachers feeling competent (Capa et al., 2005; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). This concept is defined as a “teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998 p. 233) and as “individual teachers’ beliefs in their own ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities required to attain educational goals” (Skallvik & Skaalvik, 2007 p. 612).

Self-efficacy is context-specific; therefore, the perceived ability to change depends on the specific situation or task one is facing (Tschannen-Moan et al., 1998). The same is valid for teacher self-efficacy since teachers are asked to do many tasks and teach different subjects (Bandura, 1997; McCormick et al., 2006). Throughout a typical day of teaching, an early childhood teacher develops and enforces daily routines and schedules, maintains a safe and welcoming environment, creates and implements age-

appropriate curriculums, addresses cultural differences and special needs of students, and communicates constantly with parents, specialist, staff, and administration (Measom, 2018). Thus, teachers need to believe in their ability to effectively handle the tasks they are given to believe they can be successful (Skallvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Holding the belief that one can handle the current job and difficult future situations in the classroom demonstrates teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Teacher self-efficacy influences the teacher's behaviors with goal setting through cognitive processes, motivational processes, affective processes which all controls negative feelings (Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 1997). It is one of the essential belief systems for determining teachers' behaviors based on the expectation of producing the desired outcome (Bandura, 1977; Collier, 2005; Malandrakis, 2018). Teacher self-efficacy is not a way to measure teacher effectiveness objectively; it is the self-perception of the expectations of their ability to complete an activity or performance (Bandura, 1986; Ross & Bruce, 2007).

Having a solid teaching self-efficacy affects teachers' choices, the effort they put into their work, and the goals they establish for themselves, making self-efficacy highly important (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, having firm self-efficacy beliefs are associated with successfully handling the emotional weight that goes with feeling personally responsible for student learning (Bandura, 1977; Ciyer et al., 2010). Teachers are often asked to take on multiple responsibilities outside of the classroom, such as mentorship and involvement in clubs and organizations. Self-efficacious beliefs in the ability to handle multiple responsibilities would increase the effort that goes into these

responsibilities and the possibility of them being successful. However, research has been concerned for decades on the effects of work-related stress teachers feel when taking on student learning responsibility (Curbow et al., 2001). Inside the classrooms, teachers are faced with the heavy weight of responsibility for students succeeding academically, which is increased with high stakes assessments (Hatch, 2015).

Teacher self-efficacy was associated with higher confidence (Ciyer et al., 2010; Shain, 2017), higher ability to self-regulate (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003), and more optimism (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). Additionally, increased self-efficacy was associated with responding more positively when stressed from challenging situations (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). Focusing on the teacher, those who reported having high self-efficacy were found to set more challenging future goals and stick with them (Bandura, 1993; Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). As previously mentioned, teachers face multiple daily challenges from students, specialists, staff, parents or caregivers, and administration regarding student achievement or work-related performance. Without the ability to self-regulate and respond positively from a high level of self-efficacy, work-related stress could over-power teacher motivation.

Teachers who believed they can perform well at work were also found to have higher work self-esteem and higher self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2004; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Shain, 2017). High self-efficacious teachers were found to use a variety of strategies, methods, and resources for managing their classrooms and creating a quality learning environment (Chacon, 2005; Ciyer et al., 2010; Cobbold & Boateng, 2016; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2011; Guo et al., 2011; Pan, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik,

2007). Furthermore, teachers with high self-efficacy were more likely to demonstrate professional behavior while at work than teachers with lower self-efficacy (Henson, 2002; Matteucci et al., 2017; Pan, 2014; Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). Sought after professional behaviors such as motivating, positive, and the ability to regulate emotions were seen in teachers with high self-efficacy.

The reduced sense of personal accomplishments from perceiving oneself as an inadequate teacher leads to a lower self-efficacy level (Jennett et al., 2003) which can cause teachers to avoid tasks they did not believe they would have succeeded at (Bandura, 1993; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Furthermore, when teachers doubted their ability, they were less likely to correct the problems affecting their teaching practice (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Chacon, 2005; Cobold & Boateng, 2016; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008).

Factors Impacting Teacher Self-Efficacy

The teaching profession is much more complex than just the interactions between the teacher and students situated in one classroom. Teachers balance multiple job-related tasks and multiple relationships with students, co-workers, administration, and parents among others. Organizational support (Friedman, 2003; Klassen et al., 2012), the resources available for teachers (Wilcox & Lawson, 2018), and a positive environment (Bradley et al., 2018) are work-related factors that impact early childhood teachers' self-efficacy.

Organizational support. Organizational support comes from building site administration as well as support from the school district. Teacher self-efficacy is enhanced when building and upper-level administration support their teachers by

encouraging feelings of autonomy, job security, and professionalism (Friedman, 2003; Klassen et al., 2012). When administrators provide negative feedback only to teachers regarding their teaching ability or professionalism, it can damage their perceived self-efficacy (Akpan & Saunders, 2017). Lack of support can create feelings of burden from the responsibilities and expectations placed on them which negatively affects their teacher self-efficacy (Akpan & Saunders, 2017; Friedman, 2003). Offering resources such as increased collaboration and professional development opportunities can increase teacher self-efficacy and encourage individual growth (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Guo et al., 2011).

Resources for teachers. Providing space and the opportunity for collaboration and professional development can increase personal and professional growth for early childhood teachers (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Professional development should always be designed to increase teachers' self-efficacy by improving their teacher effectiveness and increasing future student achievement (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Chen et al., 2004; Swackhamer et al., 2009). By building positive experiences during collaboration and professional development opportunities, teachers' efficacy will manifest in their behaviors and tasks performed (Wilcox & Lawson, 2018). In-service professional development, done during work hours, can further lead to higher self-efficacy feelings by creating and exploring learning strategies for future student learning within the classroom environment (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Chacon, 2005; Guo et al., 2011).

Positive work environment. Administrators should create a positive work environment where teachers feel they are doing their job well while enjoying their daily work (Jennings, 2018; Kaynak, 2020). For a teacher to contribute to building a positive

school environment, they need to feel valued for their work and as an individual by their colleagues. Huang et al. (2019) also believes building trust between teachers and administrators creates a more favorable climate for teachers. A positive school climate is an environment where work stress is not felt by everyone who walks into the building, which Jennings (2018) believes has an impact on student learning. Creating a positive classroom atmosphere for students is a responsibility that falls on the teachers and an environment where students and teachers feel emotionally, socially, and physically safe, and engaged, respected, and supported (Bradley et al., 2018).

Increased Hope

In the classroom, early childhood teachers can enhance their hope development and their students' by setting attainable and clear goals, developing and talking through numerous ways to achieve the goals, and continuing to motivate each other in reaching the goals that were set (Zakrzewski, 2012). Prioritizing what goals are important is a strategy teachers can do alongside students to determine what is important to the students. To successfully set goals, goals need to be what the individual or group deems important and not based on what an outside source thinks is important. While goal setting individually or as a class, teachers should encourage students to set goals that will achieve something in the future instead of avoiding something in the present moment. After goals are established, creating multiple ways to achieve them is critical to success. The amount of hope an individual carries with them will predict the short and long-term positive outcomes in their life (Gwinn & Hellman, 2019). Teachers and students will face obstacles while achieving their short and long term goals, making them difficult to

achieve. Having multiple pathways or strategies to achieve the goals will set teachers and students up for success.

When obstacles present themselves when working towards goals, teachers and students will remain hopeful for achieving them if they are practicing mindfulness (Bashant, 2015; Rand, 2009). Mindfulness practices, such as meditation, allows individuals to decrease stress and calm their mind (Tobin, 2018). Having a clear mind will allow the brain to develop more pathways to achieving the set goal (Snyder, 1994). Obstacles will always be present but having a high hope score and using mindfulness strategies to overcome them will help individuals succeed (Munzo et al., 2018).

Benefits for Students

Similar to the idea of use it or lose it, students who observe teachers practicing mindfulness are more likely to practice as well (Lyons & DeLange, 2016). By building positive relationships with students, teachers will become mentors to students which can have positive (Jennings, 2019). Teachers who greet students into the classroom with a negative mood and communicate the number of tasks that must be accomplished before the day is over can cause stress and anxiety for students. However, when a teacher greets students with calm and joyfully express the activities the class will be doing, the students will be more likely to show excitement and have a positive attitude.

Conclusion

The current literature demonstrates that early childhood teachers can benefit from mindfulness strategies, specifically meditation and gratitude journaling, in primary-aged classrooms. Through the theoretical framework of self-efficacy, self-determination, and hope theory, mindfulness should be viewed as a continuous practice where the goal is to

repeatedly move through the cycle instead of in a binary direction. When early childhood teachers continuously move through the theoretical framework practicing mindfulness, they will be creating a positive classroom environment for student learning (Jennings, 2012). As teachers begin to see the benefits in themselves and students, they will become more hopeful, motivating them to continue using mindfulness practices with their students and coworkers outside of their classroom.

Young children have been said to construct knowledge from the information and behaviors from those around them. Teachers play a vital role in students' social and emotional development and can significantly influence their developmental process positively or negatively based on the teacher's mindset when they walk into the classroom every morning. Practicing mindfulness offers teachers tools to calm the mind, bring more awareness to the present moment, increase self-efficacy and hope, and live a happier life. These should be characteristics primary-aged children are soaking in while at school; and the tools teachers should be providing their young students.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Overview

The purpose of this case study is to better understand the use of meditation and gratitude practices by early childhood teachers working in primary-age classrooms (pre-kindergarten through third grade). This eight-week study aims to examine two mindfulness strategies: meditation and gratitude, used by certified early childhood education classroom teachers to understand how teachers benefit from using the strategies and if there are connections to teacher self-efficacy and hope, and in what ways students benefit from them. A phenomenological case study research design was selected to understand further the phenomenon of using meditation and gratitude practices in the classroom by early childhood teachers and students and their perceived lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using the phenomenological approach, the researcher will work directly with early childhood teachers offering instruction on two mindfulness strategies and recording their lived experiences (Bazeley, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Conducting a case study provides the researcher with the opportunity to dive deeper into the participants' experiences (Yin, 2018). Through daily audio recordings of meditations and gratitude practices, weekly interviews, and surveys, the study will examine the following questions:

1. How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing meditation and gratitude for themselves?
2. How do early childhood teachers describe the benefits of practicing meditation and gratitude for students in their class?

3. Exploring if self-efficacy and adult hope score increase for teachers practicing meditation and gratitude?

Participants and Setting

Participation in the study will be purposeful and selective using the two-tier sampling method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2014; Shenton, 2004). Participants in the study will include certified classroom teachers serving pre-kindergarten through third-grade students from public schools in the Midwest. Certification requirement is based on the teacher holding a current state teaching certification (traditional, emergency, or alternative), which will be asked for distinction early during data collection. Using two-tier sampling is common in case studies, where the case being studied is determined first (early childhood teachers using meditation and gratitude in the classroom), then select the cases that best meets the established criteria (certified early childhood classroom teachers). Participant selection in the first tier will be based on meeting three characteristics: a teacher holding an early childhood teaching certificate, teaching in a pre-kindergarten through third grade in person classroom, and personal access to a smart phone or device for audio recording purposes. Second tier criteria will include participants from different school districts, grade level currently teaching, and years of teaching experience. The second tier still uses purposeful sampling to depict the normal or typical early childhood teacher and classroom experience.

Five teachers meeting the above study requirements will be purposefully selected for participation for the case study, where each participant will be an independent case (Yin, 2018). The anticipated number of participants is based on previous case studies on mindfulness interventions and teachers. One study examining

mindfulness intervention with seven teachers focused on raising student academic achievement and social-emotional function (Meyer & Eklund, 2020). A mindfulness intervention assessing five teachers showed an increase in emotional response to students and enhanced wellbeing (Bernay, 2014). Other studies have inquired how early childhood teachers using a mindfulness intervention impacted their classroom climate, studying one teacher's experience (Capel, 2012) and three teacher's experiences (DiCarlo et al., 2019). Thus, studying five participants for this study is justified from previous studies. Each participant will be asked to complete a demographic survey to obtain basic information at the start of the study to confirm participant criteria. All participants will be asked to create their own pseudonyms to protect their identity. The data collection for the study will take place entirely online; however, the teachers' use of the mindfulness strategies will be conducted in their classrooms.

Ethical considerations during the length of the study will be taken by the researcher for all parties involved. The study will be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). The researcher should respect, understand, and hold the highest ethical consideration for sensitive topics that may arise from conducting a qualitative study (Sanjari et al., 2014). Participants will be informed that participation in the study is voluntary, and they have the right to withdraw at any time for any reason. Additionally, participants will be informed of their rights and the study's purpose, procedures, and goals (Miles et al., 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that interviews can have unexpected effects for participants and that the interviewer will need to remain neutral without offering judgment or opinions. Without judgements or

opinions, the researcher can reflect participant's lived experiences through rich and thick description.

The principal investigator will have her professor post the initial recruitment flyer to the programs closed alumni Facebook page on July 26th, 2021 (see Appendix B). This initial recruitment flyer will communicate basic information about participating in the study including participation criteria, time commitment for participants, purpose of the study, and the principal investigators contact information. Potential participants will be asked to email the principal investigator if interested in participating.

After potential participants contact the principal investigator by email, she will distribute the recruiting email (see Appendix C) from her office on a university's campus to provide a secure setting while maintaining the privacy of participants' contact information. The recruitment email individually asks participants if they would be interested in joining the research study while stating relevant information pertaining to the study. A link will be embedded in the email that will direct participants to the Qualtrics consent (see Appendix D). If the participant selects no, they will be directed to the end of the survey thanking them for their time. If the participant selects yes and completes the consent form, data collection will begin. A record of all potential participants will be recorded using a running log (see Appendix E).

All potential participants who send an email to the researcher asking for information on participating will be sent the recruiting email with the consent form and demographic survey. Those teachers that complete these two items between July 26th, 2021 and August 6th, 2021 will be considered for participation (assuming they meet the

participant criteria). The researcher will select the five participants who will become the cases for the study based on two-tier sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The researcher will notify selected participants by email between August 9th - 13th, 2021. Before starting the 8-week intervention, all participants will individually meet with the researcher using Zoom.com to discuss the study's protocol, participant expectations, and establish an understanding of how to perform the mindfulness strategies. The pre-intervention meeting will take place between August 16th - 20th, 2021.

Data Sources and Procedures

Data sources used in this study will be demographic survey, teacher self-efficacy scale, pre and post adult hope scale, daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recording, weekly interview, and field notebook. A detailed timeline of the study's procedure can be found in appendix F. The timeline is contingent on IRB approval and will be adjusted if necessary. Dates were established by the researcher based on the scheduled starting work date for teachers and the first day of school specified on the instructional calendars from multiple large school districts in the area.

Demographic Survey

All participants will be asked to complete a demographic survey before starting the case study (see Appendix G) using Qualtrics, an electronic survey creator. Personal questions include age, gender, race, education level, and type of teaching certification. Questions regarding teaching experience on demographic survey include years of experience, current grade teaching, number of students in their class, name of school and district, a co-teacher teaching in the same classroom routinely, and if the participant has used mindfulness strategies before the intervention (in their personal life and/or the

classroom). The survey will also include questions asking teachers their initial impression of their class at the beginning of the year.

After consenting to participate in the study, potential participants will be directed to the demographic survey using Qualtrics to be completed between July 26th, 2021 and August 6th, 2021 in order to be considered for participation (assuming they meet the participant criteria). The demographic survey will aid in confirming the potential participants meet the study participant requirements. Selected participants will be notified by email from the researcher with study details, timelines, the link to pre-intervention survey packet on Qualtrics, contact information, and suggested times and dates for an informal meeting using Zoom.com to discuss the study's protocol between August 9th - 13th (see Appendix H).

Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale

The Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale asks questions that pertain to the field of education, such as, "I know that I can maintain a positive relationship with parents even when tension arise, I am confident in my ability to be responsive to my students' needs even if I am having a bad day, and I know that I can motivate my students to participate in innovative project" (see Appendix I). A 4-point Likert scale is used to complete the measure with (1) being not at all true, (2) being barely true, (3) being moderately true, and (4) being exactly true. The Teacher self-efficacy scale has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties. A Cronbach's alpha was between .76 and .82 across samples and a test-retest reliability between .65 to .76 (Schwarzer et al., 1999). The 10-item scale is a shortened version of the original 27 question measure, but it has been found to be a more accurate predictor of self-efficacy than a general scale (Holzberger et al., 2013).

Data collected from the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale will lead to a better understanding of the difficulties early childhood teachers experience daily while performing school activities (Schwarzer et al., 1999).

All teachers will be asked to complete the scale twice, once before the start of the 8-week intervention and again after the 8-week intervention. Once participants have been notified of their participation, the researcher will email a link to Qualtrics with access to the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale and ask the participant to complete the survey between August 16th - 20th, 2021. Participants will complete the survey again post-intervention between October 18th - 22nd, 2021. Due to the small number of participants, the researcher is looking for an increase in the mean from pre to post. Additionally, the pre-post means will be used to triangulate with other data.

Adult Hope Score

The Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991) measures an adult's overall disposition of hope (see Appendix J). The scale consists of 12 questions using an 8-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*definitely false*) to 8 (*definitely true*) (Snyder, 1995). Within the scale, items 2, 9, 10, and 12 focus on the agency (willpower), and items 1, 4, 6, and 8 examine the pathways (waypower). Items 3, 5, 7, and 11 are filler reverse questions. Higher scores indicate an overall higher hope seen in an individual. The Adult Hope Scale has been found to have acceptable psychometric properties with a Cronbach's α ranging from 0.81 to 0.91 (Dixson, 2019; McDermott et al., 2016; Vela et al., 2017). Snyder et al., (2002) found the measure to be stable with a test-retest score of 0.85, inter reliability scores of 0.74 to 0.88, and Cronbach's α of 0.86. The validity of the scale was demonstrated by using convergent construct validity.

All teachers will be asked to complete the scale twice, once before the start of the 8-week intervention and again when it is over. Once participants have been notified of their participation, the researcher will email a link to Qualtrics with access to the Adult Hope Scale and asked to complete the survey between August 16th - 20th, 2021. Participants will complete the survey again post-intervention between October 18th - 22nd, 2021. Like the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale, the researcher is looking for an increase in the mean from pre to post and will use the scores to triangulate with other data.

Daily Meditation and Gratitude Practice Audio Recordings

Participants will be asked to audio record their morning meditation practice and discussion and the afternoon gratitude practice and discussion daily during the 8-week intervention. Asking participants to email audio recordings of the practices and discussions will allow the researcher and participants to reflect on discussions taking place amongst the teacher and students. During the discussions, teachers and students explore different feelings that were felt while meditating. Without discussing the feelings students may be experiencing, they may be unaware of what the feelings mean or how to handle them (Tatter, 2019). Discussing feelings will help the class build a sense of community and better understanding and compassion for one another. Additionally, the audio recording will act as a running log for participants and researcher to monitor activity as well to monitor fidelity of implementation. Furthermore, daily recordings of the two practices and discussions will demonstrate a chain of events making connections between the previous literature, procedures, and research questions (Yin, 2018). After the researcher receives participants' audio recordings and transcribes them verbatim, the researcher will share the transcripts on a shared Google Document (see Appendix K).

Only the principal investigator and the participant will have access to the Google Document, which will serve a running record for both to reflect on and for member checking to ensure internal validity and credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Once participants are selected, the researcher will email participants directions and resources for the meditation and gratitude practices along with discussion prompts to use with their class (see Appendix H). Additionally, the researcher will create a shared Google Document for each participant that has the mindfulness practice and discussion transcripts (see Appendix K). The Google Document will serve as a way for the teacher to reflect on perceived changes during the intervention and serve as a fidelity check.

During the 8-week intervention, participants will begin each class day with a morning meditation followed by a class discussion of the practice. Teachers will audio record the meditation practice and class discussion, then email the recording to the researcher. At the end of each school day, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers will have a class discussion on what the class is grateful for while the teacher records the responses on a white board, chalk board, or large piece of paper for the class to visually see. First through third grade teachers will begin the school year modeling the afternoon gratitude practice of writing down what they are grateful for but will transition to the students writing their own gratitude journals when deemed appropriate for their students. A class discussion will take place where the students and teachers will share what they are grateful for and how being grateful makes them feel. Again, the class discussion will be audio recorded and then emailed to the researcher. All meditation and gratitude practices and discussions will be transcribed verbatim and uploaded to Dedoose (n.d.). Transcripts of each practice and discussion will be shared between the participant and

researcher on a Google Document to ensure internal validity and credibility and primarily for the purpose of reflecting on changes occurring over time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Weekly Interviews

Interviews serve as the primary source of data collection for phenomenological studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Miles et al., 2014). The purpose of using interviews as a data source is to gain an understanding of teachers' experiences with and feelings about using meditation and gratitude in their classrooms. Semi-structured questions will allow the researcher to gather data aligned with the stated research questions while allowing flexibility to explore participants' lived experiences (see Appendix L) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview questions were designed by the researcher based on previous literature relevant to the current study.

Participants will be interviewed individually weekly during the study. The first through seven interviews will last approximately 15-minutes and will be conducted online using Zoom.com. The eighth interview will last approximately 45-minutes and occur online using Zoom.com at the end of the 8-week intervention and after the participants have completed the Self-Efficacy and Adult Hope scales. Interviews will be audio recorded on Zoom for the purpose of being transcribed later using Otter.ai. Participants will have the opportunity to member check the interview transcriptions throughout the study to ensure internal validity and credibility via the shared Google Doc (see Appendix K) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interview transcriptions will be uploaded to Dedoose (n.d.).

Field Notebook

The researcher will use a field notebook to keep a highly descriptive record for the duration of the study (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The notebook will contain the researcher's ideas and thoughts, connections to theory, data collection notes such as impressions when coding themes, and to check for biases. Dedoose (n.d.) will serve as a digital field notebook during data analysis. The coding process, thoughts, and reactions will be documented in the memo section along with any changes and deletion or merging of codes during the analysis process (Bazeley, 2013). Additionally, the field notebook will serve as a place for the researcher to record impressions, thoughts, and interpretations from collected data. Alignment of research questions to data sources are listed in Appendix M. Due to the large number of data, the researcher will use a data accounting log throughout the study (see Appendix N).

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be on-going and will take place simultaneously with data collection (Miles et al., 2014). Analyzed data from daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussions, weekly interviews, and the field notebook will be categorized into codes connecting the data to the research questions. First and second cycle coding will be used, with first cycle coding categorizing large chunks of data together, followed by second cycle coding grouping those chunks into smaller groups based on themes or constructs (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2016). Second cycle coding will provide the overall picture and how the codes from the first cycle of coding fit together to form themes (Miles et al., 2014). Data analysis will first be conducted within cases, prior to examining cross-case connections (Bazeley, 2013). Data analysis is separated based on data sources.

Daily Meditation and Gratitude Audio Recordings, Interviews, and Field Notebook

First cycle coding will be broken up into two parts based on the forms of data collection, then collectively pieced back together for second cycle coding to form themes. In Vivo and simultaneous coding will be applied to the first cycle analysis for participants' daily meditation and gratitude audio recordings, weekly interviews, and the researcher's field notebook. These data sources will be analyzed for answering research questions one, two, and three. In Vivo coding will be used for the first cycle of coding data to understand better the participants' use of mindfulness strategies in an early childhood classroom (Miles et al., 2014) and allow them to share in a more authentic voice (Saldana, 2016). This form of coding was selected based on the ability to use the participants' own language to describe their personal views, feelings, and experiences. Simultaneous coding will also be used when there are overlaps in coding data (Miles et al., 2014). Often during analysis, two or more excerpts may have multiple meanings and can justify being connected to more than one code. This coding will be used when participants describe how mindfulness is beneficial to their teaching and how the students are benefiting from the meditation and gratitude practices taking place in the classroom. A priori list of potential key words found in the literature will be used as first cycle codes during data collection and analysis (see Appendix O).

Second cycle coding will use the first cycle codes to conceptualize the participant's views of using meditation and gratitude in the classroom (Saldana, 2016). Following In Vivo coding, focus coding will be used for the second cycle to follow up from In Vivo coding during the first cycle coding. The use of memos throughout the data analysis process will help track themes and make connections to the literature. A codes-

to-theory model will visually display first and second cycle coding for each individual case during the data analysis stage (Bazeley, 2013; Saldana, 2016).

After second cycle coding is finished for each individual case, cross-case analysis will be done to explore any patterns or connections (Bazeley, 2013). Cross-case analysis using a case-based matrix will look for commonalities and differences while trying to identify themes or concepts. Additionally, the researcher will use cross-case analysis to look for what teachers described as helpful for successfully using meditation and gratitude in their classroom or what should be changed in the future for a more beneficial experience from the practitioner standpoint. This data will be highly valuable if common themes are found in multiple cases.

Participant Surveys

Participant surveys include the demographic survey and pre / post Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale and Adult Hope Scale. Due to the small number of participants, the researcher is using the scales to see if there is an increase in the mean for triangulation. The mean score from the two scales will aid in answering research questions one and three.

Trustworthiness

The purpose of this case study is to understand the phenomenon of a mindfulness intervention used by early childhood teachers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In qualitative research, the focus is on the four criteria of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and not the validity and reliability.

Credibility

The use of multiple data sources including daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings, weekly interviews, and surveys as research methods for collecting data on early childhood teachers' use of mindfulness in classrooms, the benefits of using mindfulness practices for their sense of efficacy and hope, and the influence of mindfulness practices with students establish credibility for this qualitative research study and offered triangulation (Shenton, 2004). Participant selection is purposeful, as stated in the participant section. During the interviews, the roles of the participant and the researcher will be established from the start and will use iterative questioning. Participants will have the opportunity to member check interview transcripts to check for accuracy and clarification (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher will also use work groups and peer reviewers throughout the study to frequently debrief, discuss approaches, and develop ideas. Additionally, debriefing sessions between the researcher, her chair, and other doctoral students will be conducted weekly for debriefing and peer scrutiny. The field notebook will allow the researcher to also reflect on the process of the study and check bias while monitoring emerging themes.

Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

The research methodology has been included in the methods section that provides a rich description of the contextual fieldwork. An in-depth description of the multiple data sources (i.e. daily audio recordings of meditation and gratitude practices and discussions, weekly interviews, surveys, field notebook) and procedures used in the study are also included. These methods include interviews, participant logs, Qualtrics surveys, demographic surveys, and the use of a field notebook.

To validate data and ensure dependability and confirmability, a field notebook will be used to track data and information pertaining to the study. The researcher will also upload all information to Dedoose (n.d.) as part of the data-oriented approach to track and gather the proper information (Shenton, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

Conducting a multiple case study requires a large amount of data collection, therefore the researcher will ensure the data is collected and stored in a safe, secure, and organized fashion to protect the confidentiality of participants. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participant's confidentiality.

Potential Limitations

While previous literature has shown that an eight-week intervention is acceptable, it can still be viewed as a limitation. Based on other studies using mindfulness interventions, associations were found on the benefits of using mindfulness strategies during an 8-week intervention (Garner et al., 2018; Hue & Lau, 2015; Hwang et al., 2019; Kerr et al., 2017; Krieger et al., 2019). A second potential limitation is generalizing results while conducting a case study. However, Yin (2018) states that generalization is possible using a case study and is better supported in a multiple case-study.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval



**Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01**

Date: July 30, 2021

IRB#: 13601

Principal Investigator: Samantha Evans

Approval Date: 07/29/2021

Exempt Category: 2

Study Title: Meditation and Gratitude for Early Childhood Teachers

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Aimee Franklin'.

Aimee Franklin, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Appendix B

Facebook Recruiting Flyer

Calling all early childhood educators teaching pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade interested in learning more about mindfulness in the classroom. My name is Samantha Evans and I am a doctoral candidate in Early Childhood at OU-Tulsa. As part of my dissertation research, I am conducting an 8-week case study to better understand the benefits of meditation and gratitude practices in the classroom for teachers and their students.

I am currently recruiting teachers teaching in a prek-3rd grade classroom, that hold an early childhood teaching certification (traditional, Emergency, or alternative), and have access to a smart phone or devise for audio recording purposes. Teachers will be asked to practice gratitude and meditation in their classrooms daily approximately 10 minutes each), have weekly interviews for approximately 15 minutes with me using Zoom.com (time based on your schedule), and complete two short surveys before and after the 8-week case study.

Please email Samantha Evans at Samanthaevans@ou.edu if interested.

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

You are invited to participate in an 8-week intervention research study for early childhood teachers using meditation and gratitude practices. The study aims to explore the benefits of using daily meditation and gratitude practices for early childhood teachers, the impacts of practicing meditation and gratitude for the students in the classroom, and if there are connections to teacher self-efficacy and hope. Participants will receive guidance and resources on practicing meditation and gratitude practice.

If you are a certified teacher currently teaching in a pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade classroom and have access to a smart phone or other digital recording device, you are eligible for participation.

Your participation will include doing a morning meditation and afternoon gratitude practice along with a discussion of each with your class daily (approximately 10 minutes each), weekly interview with me (approximately 15 minutes each with the exception of the last interview lasting approximately 45 minutes) conducted via Zoom.com, and two ten-minute surveys completed prior to the intervention and after the 8-weeks.

If you agree to participate, please complete this online questionnaire. <Insert link here>

The questionnaire will also ask for your contact information so I may contact you.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Samantha Evans

(405)740-7915

Samanthaevans@ou.edu

Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study for early childhood teachers using meditation and gratitude practices in an 8-week study. The study aims to explore the benefits of early childhood teachers use of meditation and gratitude, the impacts of practicing meditation and gratitude for the students in the classroom, and the ability to impact of meditation and gratitude practices sustain internal validation when stressors arise in the classroom.

If you are a certified teacher currently teaching in a pre-kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd grade classroom and have access to a smart phone or device for audio recording purposes, you are eligible for participation.

Your participation will include doing a morning meditation and afternoon gratitude practice and discussion with your class daily that will be audio recorded and emailed to the researcher, weekly interview (approximately 15 minutes each with the exception of the last interview lasting approximately 45 minutes) conducted with Zoom.com, and two ten-minute surveys completed prior to the intervention and after the 8-weeks.

If you agree, you will complete this online questionnaire. The questionnaire will also ask for your contact information so the researcher may contact you.

There are no risks or benefits to participating. Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will only be shared with the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity in the final reports. We will not share your data.

Even if you choose to participate now, you may stop participating at any time for any reason.

Data are collected via an online survey system that has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. No assurance can be made as to their use of the data you provide.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Samantha Evans

(405)740-7915

Samanthaevans@ou.edu

If you cannot reach the researcher, you may contact the faculty advisor

Dr. Vickie Lake

(918)660-3984

Vlake@ou.edu

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus Institutional Review Board at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu with questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant, or if you don't want to talk to the researcher.

Please print this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in the research.

Are you 18 years of age or older? Yes No (if no-cannot participate)

Are you a Pre-K-3rd grade classroom teacher? Yes No (if no-cannot participate)

Are you a certified teacher? Yes No (if no-cannot participate)

Do you have access to a smart phone or digital device for audio recording purposes?
 Yes No (if no-cannot participate)

Appendix E

Potential Participant Log

Last name	First name	Email address	Recruiting email sent	Consent complete	Consent Yes / No	Demographic complete	Meets participant criteria
<i>Example:</i>							
<i>Evans</i>	<i>Samantha</i>	<i>Samanthaevans@o u.edu</i>	<i>08/27/21</i>	<i>08/29/21</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>08/29/21</i>	<i>Y</i>



Appendix F

Study Timeline (Timeline provided to participants)

Date	Task
PRE-STUDY	
08/09 - 08/13	Tasks to be completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent form • Demographic survey
8/16 - 08/20	Tasks to be completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoom meeting with researcher (date & time TBD) • Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale • Adult Hope Scale
WEEK 1	
08/23 - 08/27	Tasks to be completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily meditation practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • Daily gratitude practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • 15 minutes Zoom interview (date & time TBD)
WEEK 2	
08/30 - 09/03	Tasks to be completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily meditation practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • Daily gratitude practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • 15 minutes Zoom interview (date & time TBD)
WEEK 3	
09/07 - 09/10	Tasks to be completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily meditation practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • Daily gratitude practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • 15 minutes Zoom interview (date & time TBD)
WEEK 4	
09/13 - 09/17	Tasks to be completed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily meditation practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • Daily gratitude practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • 15 minutes Zoom interview (date & time TBD)
WEEK 5	
09/20 - 09/24	Tasks to be completed:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily meditation practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • Daily gratitude practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • 15 minutes Zoom interview (date & time TBD)
WEEK 6	
09/27 - 10/01	<p>Tasks to be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily meditation practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • Daily gratitude practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • 15 minutes Zoom interview (date & time TBD)
WEEK 7	
10/04 - 10/08	<p>Tasks to be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily meditation practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • Daily gratitude practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • 15 minutes Zoom interview (date & time TBD)
WEEK 8	
10/11 - 10/15	<p>Tasks to be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily meditation practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • Daily gratitude practice and discussion, send audio recording to researcher. • 15 minutes Zoom interview (date & time TBD)
POST-STUDY	
10/18 - 10/22	<p>Tasks to be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale • Adult Hope Scale • 45-minute Zoom interview (date & time TBD)

Appendix G

Demographic Survey

Please answer the following questions about yourself.

Personal Questions -

Age:

Gender:

Race:

Highest level of education:

Bachelor Masters Doctorate

How did you obtain your certification? (Please circle one):

Traditional Alternative Emergency Other (Please explain)

Please list all your teaching certifications?

Do you practice mindfulness strategies in your personal life (not in the classroom)?

If yes, what strategies were used:

Yoga Meditation Breathwork Gratitude Other (explain)

How often?

Teaching Related Questions -

Current grade teaching:

PreK Kindergarten 1st 2nd 3rd

Years teaching current grade:

Total number of years of teaching:

Number of students in your class for the 2021/2022 school year:

Name of school site:

Name of school district:

Number of years teaching at current school site:

Do you have a co-teacher teaching in the same classroom routinely?

Yes No

Have you previously used mindfulness strategies in the classroom?

If yes, what strategies were used:

Yoga Meditation Breathwork Gratitude Other (explain)

How often?

What were your first impressions of your class for the 2021/2022 school year?

Study Related Questions -

What are you hoping to gain from participating in this study?

Do you have any concerns about the study?

Appendix H

Study Protocols (to be given to participants)

Thank you for participating in my dissertation study. The purpose of the study is to better understand how early childhood teachers can benefit from using meditation and gratitude practice in their classroom with their students.

You will select a pseudonym for the study, so all your personal information and data will be kept confidential.

You will be given a detailed personalized schedule for the 8-week study. Your participation will include:

- Daily morning meditation practice and discussion with your class
 - You may select any guided meditation of your choice. Here are some resources for guided meditation:
 - *USCD Center for Mindfulness*
<https://medschool.ucsd.edu/som/fmph/research/mindfulness/programs/mindfulness-programs/MBSR-programs/Pages/audio.aspx>
 - *UCLA Mindfulness Awareness Center*
https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/body.cfm?id=22&iirf_redirect=1
 - A class discussion will take place immediately following the practice where the students and teachers share how the meditation practice made them feel.
 - You will audio record the practice and discussion using your smart phone or device and email the audio recording to the researcher.
- Daily afternoon gratitude practice and discussion with your class
 - Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers will have a class discussion on what the class is grateful for while the teacher records the responses on a white board, chalk board, or large piece of paper for the class to visually see.
 - 1st - 3rd grade teachers will begin the school year modeling the afternoon gratitude practice of writing down what they are grateful for but will transition to the students writing their own gratitude journals when deemed appropriate for their students.

- A class discussion will take place immediately following the practice where the students and teachers share what they are grateful for and how being grateful makes them feel.
- You will audio record the practice and discussion using your smart phone or device and email the audio recording to the researcher.
-
- Weekly interview using Zoom.com
 - A reoccurring day and time will be established based on the participant's schedule for the weekly interviews.
 - Weeks 1-7 interviews will last approximately 15 minutes.
 - Week 8 interview will last approximately 45 minutes.
- Pre and post study surveys
 - 2 ten-minute surveys completed prior to the start of the study and the 8-weeks.

You are welcome to contact me with questions, concerns, or if you need more support during the study.

Samantha Evans

Samanthaevans@ou.edu

405-740-7915

Appendix I

Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale

Response format:

(1) not at all true

(2) barely true

(3) moderately true

(4) exactly true

1. I am convinced that I am able to successfully teach all relevant subject content to even the most difficult students.
2. I know that I can maintain a positive relationship with parents even when tensions arise.
3. When I try really hard, I am able to reach even the most difficult students.
4. I am convinced that, as time goes by, I will continue to become more and more capable of helping to address my students' needs.
5. Even if I get disrupted while teaching, I am confident that I can maintain my composure and continue to teach well.
6. I am confident in my ability to be responsive to my students' needs even if I am having a bad day.
7. If I try hard enough, I know that I can exert a positive influence on both the personal and academic development of my students.
8. I am convinced that I can develop creative ways to cope with system constraints (such as budget cuts and other administrative problems) and continue to teach well.
9. I know that I can motivate my students to participate in innovative projects.
10. I know that I can carry out innovative projects even when I am opposed by skeptical colleagues.

Appendix J

Adult Hope Scale

Directions: Read each item carefully. Using the scale shown below, please select the number that best describes YOU and put that number in the blank provided.

1. = Definitely False
2. = Mostly False
3. = Somewhat False
4. = Slightly False
5. = Slightly True
6. = Somewhat True
7. = Mostly True
8. = Definitely True

- ___ 1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
- ___ 2. I energetically pursue my goals.
- ___ 3. I feel tired most of the time.
- ___ 4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
- ___ 5. I am easily downed in an argument.
- ___ 6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me.
- ___ 7. I worry about my health.
- ___ 8. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
- ___ 9. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
- ___ 10. I've been pretty successful in life.
- ___ 11. I usually find myself worrying about something.
- ___ 12. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

Appendix K

*Shared Google Document for transcription of meditation practice, gratitude practice,
and interviews*

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CIIwLBum7M-6c7Cb9LDNkQyvtTOspWbfyZjNqjJ5MvQ/edit>

Participant Name:

Week 1 Transcripts

Monday Meditation

Date: 08/23/2021

Monday Gratitude

Date: 08/23/2021

Tuesday Meditation

Date: 08/24/2021

Tuesday Gratitude

Date: 08/24/2021

Wednesday Meditation

Date: 08/25/2021

Wednesday Gratitude

Date: 08/25/2021

Thursday Meditation

Date: 08/26/2021

Thursday Gratitude

Date: 08/26/2021

Friday Meditation

Date: 08/27/2021

Friday Gratitude

Date: 08/27/2021

Interview

Date: TBD (based on each participant's schedule)

Appendix L

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Weeks 1-7

- Tell me about practicing meditation in your classroom?
 - How has it made you feel?
 - How are your students responding to it?
 - What is working?
 - What is not working?
 - Where has your guided meditation practices come from? (UCLA, UCSD, etc.)
- Tell me about practicing gratitude in your classroom?
 - How has it made you feel?
 - How are your students responding to it?
 - What is working?
 - What is not working?
- Do you think these practices have impacted your students or classroom this week?
- What challenges have come up this week with practicing meditation and gratitude?
- How can I further support you with practicing mindfulness?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions – Post Intervention (Week 8)

Benefits of Mindfulness Strategies for Teaching

- Tell me about the use of mediation at the beginning of the day. How have you been using it in your teaching practice and in the classroom?
 - How has it made you feel?
 - Have you noticed any changes in your teaching since using it?
 - Have you noticed any changes in your students since using it?
 - How has the students responded to it?
 - Is it enjoyable?
 - What do you like about meditation?
 - What do you not like about meditation?
 - What about the time, at the beginning of the day? Is this a good time for meditation, or do you think there is a better time for ECE to use it in the classroom?
 - Have you shared the practice with other teachers in your building?
- Tell me about the use of gratitude at the end of the day. How have you been using it in your teaching practice and in the classroom?
 - How has it made you feel?
 - Have you noticed any changes in your teaching since using it?
 - Have you noticed any changes in your students since using it?

- How has the students responded to it?
- Is it enjoyable?
- What do you like about gratitude?
- What do you not like about gratitude?
- What about the time, at the end of the day? Is this a good time for gratitude, or do you think there is a better time for ECE to use it in the classroom?
- Have you shared the practice with other teachers in your building?
- How have both of these strategies affected you as a teacher?
- What are the challenges to practicing mindfulness as an early childhood teacher?
- Do you believe the mindfulness strategies are helping you to become more present and aware? Explain.

Mindfulness Strategies and Teacher Self-Efficacy

- Have you felt any change in your stress level while teaching after using the mindfulness strategies? Explain.
- Have you felt any change in the way you react or respond to stressful situations? Explain.
- How has using mindfulness strategies helped when things do not go as planned? Explain.

Involving Students in Mindfulness Strategies

- How are your students reacting to the mindfulness strategies?
 - Have you had any resistance from the students?
 - Are students excited to meditate or practice gratitude when it is time to do so?
- Have you noticed any changes in the classroom climate after students have been using the mindfulness strategies? Examples?
- Have you noticed any changes in student's self-confidence after using the mindfulness strategies? Examples?
- Have students shown interest in using the mindfulness strategies on their own, without being directed by the teacher? Examples?

Future Use of Mindfulness Strategies

- Have your views on mindfulness changed after the intervention? Please explain
- Are you planning on continuing to use meditation and or gratitude in your classroom? Explain.
- Do you think mindfulness should be a tool every teacher uses?
- Do you plan on sharing your new knowledge from the intervention with other early childhood educators?

Appendix M

Table 1

Alignment of Research Question to Data Collection

Research Question (RQ)	Data Source and Questions
<p>RQ 1: In what ways do early childhood teachers believe using mindfulness strategies to be beneficial for themselves?</p>	<p>Daily meditation practice and discussion audio recordings. Daily gratitude practice and discussion audio recording.</p> <p>Weekly Interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Tell me about practicing meditation in your classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How has it made you feel? ○ What is working? ○ What is not working? ▫ Tell me about practicing gratitude in your classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How has it made you feel? ○ What is working? ○ What is not working? ▫ Do you think these practices have impacted your students or classroom this week? ▫ What are the challenges have come up this week with practicing meditation and gratitude? ▫ How can I further support you with practicing mindfulness? <p>Post- Intervention Interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Tell me about the use of mediation at the beginning of the day. How have you been using it in your teaching practice and in the classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How has it made you feel? ○ Have you noticed any changes in your teaching since using it? ○ Is it enjoyable? ○ What do you like about meditation? ○ What do you not like about meditation? ○ What about the time, at the beginning of the day? Is this a good time for meditation, or do you think there is a better time for ECE to use it in the classroom? ○ Have you shared the practice with other teachers in your building?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Tell me about the use of gratitude at the end of the day. How have you been using it in your teaching practice and in the classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How has it made you feel? ○ Have you noticed any changes in your teaching since using it? ○ Is it enjoyable? ○ What do you like about gratitude? ○ What do you not like about gratitude? ○ What about the time, at the end of the day? Is this a good time for gratitude, or do you think there is a better time for ECE to use it in the classroom? ○ Have you shared the practice with other teachers in your building? ▫ How has both of these strategies affected you as a teacher? ▫ What are the challenges to practicing mindfulness as an early childhood teacher? ▫ Do you believe the mindfulness strategies are helping you to become more present and aware? Explain. ▫ How has your views on mindfulness changed after the intervention? ▫ Are you planning on continuing to use meditation and or gratitude in your classroom? Explain. ▫ Do you think mindfulness should be a tool every teacher uses? ▫ Do you plan on sharing your new knowledge from the intervention with other early childhood educators?
<p>RQ 2: In what ways do each childhood teachers believe using mindfulness strategies to be beneficial for students?</p>	<p>Daily meditation practice and discussion audio recordings. Daily gratitude practice and discussion audio recording.</p> <p>Weekly Interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Tell me about practicing meditation in your classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How are your students responding to it? ▫ Tell me about practicing gratitude in your classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How are your students responding to it? ▫ Do you think these practices have impacted your students or classroom this week? ▫ What are the challenges have come up this week with practicing meditation and gratitude? <p>Post- Intervention Interview:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Tell me about the use of mediation at the beginning of the day. How have you been using it in your teaching practice and in the classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you noticed any changes in your students since using it? ○ How has the students responded to it? ▫ Tell me about the use of gratitude at the end of the day. How have you been using it in your teaching practice and in the classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you noticed any changes in your students since using it? ○ How has the students responded to it? ▫ How are your students reacting to the mindfulness strategies? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you had any resistance from the students? ○ Are students excited to meditate or practice gratitude when it is time to do so? ▫ Have you noticed any changes in the classroom climate after students have been using the mindfulness strategies? Examples? ▫ Have you noticed any changes in student’s self-confidence after using the mindfulness strategies? Examples? ▫ Have students shown interest in using the mindfulness strategies on their own, without being directed by the teacher? Examples?
<p>RQ 3: Does practicing mindfulness influence early childhood teachers’ self-reported levels of teacher self-efficacy and hope?</p>	<p>Weekly Interviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Tell me about practicing meditation in your classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How has it made you feel? ▫ Tell me about practicing gratitude in your classroom? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How has it made you feel? <p>Post-Intervention Interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Have you felt any change in your stress level while teaching after using the mindfulness strategies? Explain. ▫ Have you felt any change in the way you react or respond to stressful situations? Explain. ▫ How has using mindfulness strategies helped when things do not go as planned? Explain. <p>Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (Pre & Post):</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ I am convinced that I am able to successfully teach all relevant subject content to even the most difficult students. ▫ I know that I can maintain a positive relationship with parents even when tensions arise. ▫ When I try really hard, I am able to reach even the most difficult students. ▫ I am convinced that, as time goes by, I will continue to become more and more capable of helping to address my students' needs. ▫ Even if I get disrupted while teaching, I am confident that I can maintain my composure and continue to teach well. ▫ I am confident in my ability to be responsive to my students' needs even if I am having a bad day. ▫ If I try hard enough, I know that I can exert a positive influence on both the personal and academic development of my students. ▫ I am convinced that I can develop creative ways to cope with system constraints (such as budget cuts and other administrative problems) and continue to teach well. ▫ I know that I can motivate my students to participate in innovative projects. ▫ I know that I can carry out innovative projects even when I am opposed by skeptical colleagues. <p>Adult Hope Score (Pre & Post):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ I can think of many ways to get out of a jam. ▫ I energetically pursue my goals. ▫ I feel tired most of the time. ▫ There are lots of ways around any problem. ▫ I am easily downed in an argument. ▫ I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me. ▫ I worry about my health. ▫ Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem. ▫ My past experiences have prepared me well for my future. ▫ I've been pretty successful in life. ▫ I usually find myself worrying about something. ▫ I meet the goals that I set for myself.
--	--

Appendix N

Data Accounting Log

Participant Name:

Case Number:

		Complete	Transcribed	Coded				
PRE STUDY	Consent							
	Demographic survey							
	Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale							
	Adult Hope Study							
	Zoom Meeting							
		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded
WEEK 1	Monday Meditation				Monday Gratitude			
	Tuesday Meditation				Tuesday Gratitude			
	Wednesday Meditation				Wednesday Gratitude			
	Thursday Meditation				Thursday Gratitude			
	Friday Meditation				Friday Gratitude			
	Interview							
		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded
WEEK 2	Monday Meditation				Monday Gratitude			
	Tuesday Meditation				Tuesday Gratitude			
	Wednesday Meditation				Wednesday Gratitude			
	Thursday Meditation				Thursday Gratitude			
	Friday Meditation				Friday Gratitude			
	Interview							
		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded
WEEK 3	Monday Meditation				Monday Gratitude			
	Tuesday Meditation				Tuesday Gratitude			
	Wednesday Meditation				Wednesday Gratitude			
	Thursday Meditation				Thursday Gratitude			
	Friday Meditation				Friday Gratitude			

	Interview							
		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded
WEEK 4	Monday Meditation				Monday Gratitude			
	Tuesday Meditation				Tuesday Gratitude			
	Wednesday Meditation				Wednesday Gratitude			
	Thursday Meditation				Thursday Gratitude			
	Friday Meditation				Friday Gratitude			
	Interview							
		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded
WEEK 5	Monday Meditation				Monday Gratitude			
	Tuesday Meditation				Tuesday Gratitude			
	Wednesday Meditation				Wednesday Gratitude			
	Thursday Meditation				Thursday Gratitude			
	Friday Meditation				Friday Gratitude			
	Interview							
		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded
WEEK 6	Monday Meditation				Monday Gratitude			
	Tuesday Meditation				Tuesday Gratitude			
	Wednesday Meditation				Wednesday Gratitude			
	Thursday Meditation				Thursday Gratitude			
	Friday Meditation				Friday Gratitude			
	Interview							
		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded
WEEK 7	Monday Meditation				Monday Gratitude			
	Tuesday Meditation				Tuesday Gratitude			
	Wednesday Meditation				Wednesday Gratitude			
	Thursday Meditation				Thursday Gratitude			
	Friday Meditation				Friday Gratitude			
	Interview							
		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded		Audio recording	Transcribed	Coded
WEEK 8	Monday Meditation				Monday Gratitude			
	Tuesday Meditation				Tuesday Gratitude			
	Wednesday Meditation				Wednesday Gratitude			

	Thursday Meditation				Thursday Gratitude			
	Friday Meditation				Friday Gratitude			
	Interview							
		Complete	Transcribed	Coded				
POST STUDY	Teacher Self- Efficacy Scale							
	Adult Hope Scale							

Appendix O

Coding Key Terms

TEACHERS	TEACHERS VIEWS OF STUDENTS
Stress	Calm
Calm	Aware
Aware	Happy
Happy	Pausing before reacting
Reflection	Positive classroom feelings
Pausing before reacting	Decrease behavior concerns
Feeling present	Sense of community felt in classroom
Sense of community	Increase engagement in instruction/ learning
Positive outlook	
Focused on “what’s important”	
Increase self-worth / confidence / efficacy	
Increase hopefulness / motivation towards goals	

Dissertation Timetable

- July 2021
 - 14th - Defend Prospectus
 - 15th - Submit IRB for approval
 - 26th - Facebook recruiting flyer posted on private OU Tulsa ECE alumni page by Dr. Lake
 - 26th – Send Recruiting email with consent and demographic survey to potential participants.
- August 2021
 - 6th – Deadline for accepting potential participants.
 - 9th - 13th - Case study participants selected and notified.
 - 16th - 20th - Pre intervention meeting with participants, demographic surveys, pre teacher self-efficacy scale returned, and pre adult self-efficacy scale returned.
 - 23rd - 8-week study begins.
 - 23rd - 27th -Week 1 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
 - Data analysis of week 1 data.
 - 30th - September 3rd - Week 2 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
- September 2021
 - August 30th - September 3rd - Week 2 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
 - Data analysis of week 2 data.
 - 7th - 10th - Week 3 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
 - Data analysis of week 3 data.
 - 13th -17th - Week 4 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
 - Data analysis of week 4 data.
 - 20th - 24th - Week 5 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
 - Data analysis of week 5 data.
 - 27th - October 1st - Week 6 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
- October 2021
 - 27th - October 1st - Week 6 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
 - Data analysis of week 6 data.
 - 4th - 8th - Week 7 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
 - Data analysis of week 7 data.

- 11th - 15th - Week 8 data collection: daily meditation and gratitude practice and discussion audio recordings
- Data analysis of week 8 data.
- 18th – 22nd - Completion of post teacher self-efficacy scale and post adult hope study scale
- Data analysis of pre and post surveys
- Data analysis of case studies
- November 2021
 - Data analysis of case studies
 - Data analysis of cross-case studies
- December 2021
 - Data analysis of case studies
 - Data analysis of cross-case studies
 - Begin Article 1 (Theoretical)
- January 2021
 - Finish Article 1 (Theoretical)
 - Begin Article 2 (Empirical)
 - Finish Article 2 (Empirical)
- February 2021
 - Work on defense PowerPoint
 - Begin Article 3 (Practitioner)
 - Finish Article 3 (Practitioner)
- March 2021
 - Submit dissertation to committee.
 - Submit degree check.
 - Submit request for authority to defend.
 - Work on Dissertation defense PowerPoint.
 - Practice defense with Owl group.
- April 2021
 - Complete dissertation defense
 - Submit dissertation defense to SHAREOK
 - Close IRB
- May 2021
 - Go to Disney World with my kids!

Publishable Articles

Empirical Article:

Early Childhood Research Quarterly
IF: 2.316 (2019), 5 year IF: 3.709
Published: Quarterly

Aim & Scope:

ECRQ published predominantly empirical research on issues of interest to early childhood development, theory, and educational practice (birth through 8 years of age). Topics of interest includes children's social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, program quality, best classroom practices and effective early childhood curricula, and professional development and training for early childhood practitioners.

The empirical article will be addressing the three research questions: understanding how teachers benefits from using the strategies and if there are connections to teacher self-efficacy and hope, and in what ways students benefit from them from using case studies and cross-case studies. Due to the multiple topics covered in this paper, the ECRQ is a good fit based on the topics covered in their empirical articles.

Theoretical Article:

European Journal of Psychology of Education
IF: 1.247 (2019), 5 year IF: 1.782
Published: Quarterly

Aim & Scope:

Content is not confined to the expression of any specific school of thought or perspectives; it is open to a wide diversity of areas of research in psychology of education. Journal serves as a tool for integration of diversities in the main fields of research and offers an opportunity for exchange and discussion. Authors are strongly encouraged to employ a variety of theoretical and methodological tools developed in the psychology of education in order to gain new insights by integrating different perspectives. EJPE is open to all papers reflecting findings from original psychological studies on educational processes, as well as to exceptional theoretical and review papers that integrate current knowledge and chart new avenues for future research.

My paper will combine Self-efficacy, self-determination, and hope theory to demonstrate the continuous cycle of how teachers need to focus on internal validation to maintain a high level of self-efficacy and how having hope will motivate them to do so. This theoretical framework is one way to bridge theory into practice. Using mindfulness practices can help an individual avoid distractions such as external validations and focus on the internal ones to maintain a healthy self-efficacy and level of hope. EJPE is a good fit for the theoretical paper since it is not specific to one school of thought, demonstrating

that mindfulness can be used by everyone. It is also integrating psychology and education, both of which are equal partners in this study.

Practitioner:

Early Childhood & Development
IF: 1.504 (2019), 5 year IF: 2.09
Published: Quarterly

Aim & Scope:

EE&D is a professional journal for those involved in education and research related to children and their families: early education supervisors, school psychologists, administration, child development specialist, etc. EE&D is a connecting link between the research community in early education and child development and school district early childhood programs, daycare systems, and special needs preschool programs.

The practitioner article will serve as a resource for teachers who are interested in practicing meditation and gratitude with primary aged students. It will include strategies for what worked best from the participants in the study and the benefits of practicing meditation and gratitude for the teachers and students. Submitting an article to EE&D is a good fit because it is inclusive to anyone at the school site that would be working with primary aged students and that the goal is to link the research with practice.