

IMPLEMENTING A MINDFULNESS PROGRAM INTO THE
CLASSROOM TO DECREASE STUDENT STRESS AND
INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY: A HANDBOOK FOR
THE SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER

A Project

Presented

to the Faculty of

California State University, Chico

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Master of Arts

in

Education

Curriculum and Instruction Option

by

Sharon Lee Shilts

Summer 2018

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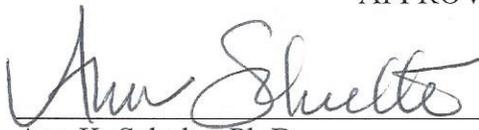
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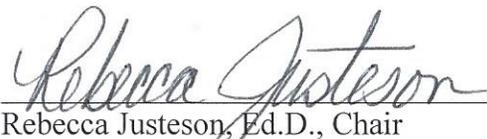
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DEDICATION

My Husband Troi

For being my love, my safe harbor, my encouragement, and my support in the effort to become the best version of myself. You are the reason I was able to push through and achieve this rewarding and challenging educational goal.

My Sons Matthew, Austin and Trey

For your great depth, generosity, and beauty, which have inspired me to achieve more, to be more, and to strive to deserve the honor of being your mom.

My Mom Ann

For your influence, your strength, your amazing generosity, and your example of overcoming extreme obstacles to get an education while prioritizing your family.

My Grandma Vel

For getting a master's degree at a time when women were not expected or encouraged to do so, and for continuing to challenge traditions and boundaries.

My Students

For inspiring me to do this project, and for helping me mold it into something that would work for you. We did this together.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	vii
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction	1
Background	1
Need for Project	3
Purpose of the Project	4
Scope of Project	6
Limitations of Project	6
Theories Informing the Project	7
Definition of Terms	8
II. Literature Review	9
Introduction	9
Mindfulness Practice Defined	10
Population that Benefit from Mindfulness Practice	12
Stress and the Adolescent	17
The Unique Adolescent Brain	19
The Effects of Technology on Adolescent Productivity	21
The Effects of Sleep on Adolescent Productivity	24
Mindfulness Practice: A strategy for Decreasing Stress and Increasing Productivity in the Adolescent Student	26
School as a Place for Mindfulness Training	32
Conclusion	34
III. Methodology	36

CHAPTER	PAGE
IV. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations.....	40
Summary.....	40
Conclusions and Reflections.....	44
Recommendations for Researchers.....	47
Recommendations for Practitioners.....	48
References.....	51
Appendix.....	60
The Project	61

ABSTRACT

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Mindfulness education, when implemented in the classroom, helps reduce stress, improve self-regulation, and increase productivity. In the adolescent student, mindfulness education has the potential to address problems specific to the age group, including heightened stress levels due to changes in brain chemistry and hormonal fluctuations, compromises to mental and physical health due to sleep deprivation and overuse of media platforms, and further hindrances to focus needed for increased academic, social and extracurricular expectations. Research supporting the efficacy of mindfulness in the classroom is examined, and a unit of mindfulness instruction is provided to support the secondary teacher in the implementation of the practice into the classroom.

Key words: mindfulness, adolescent, stress, self-regulation, productivity

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Schools have become a place where students receive care, food, skills for living, and an education. Educators are to act *in loco parentis*, literally *in place of the parent*. According to California law, teachers, vice principals, principals, or other certificated employees of school boards have the right to exercise the same degree of control over children that a parent may legally use and, accompanying that right, they have the duty to protect children from harm (Education Code. Elementary and secondary education. § 44808, 1976). Those who work in the field of education have the duty to anticipate foreseeable dangers and to take steps to prevent such danger. Schools, while acting in place of parents, also have legal duties parents do not have; for example, they have the responsibility to protect the constitutional rights of students.

The rights of students to learn, to attend schools that are free of violence, racism, and unequal access to an education, then, fall under the protection of educators and administrators. In much the same way a parent must provide a safe home environment, and should provide one that allows for optimal growth and development of the child, schools must provide a safe learning environment and should provide an optimal one. In the current climate of fear related to violence and even deaths in school, it is vitally important that schools acknowledge their role in addressing the mental and emotional components of a healthy, safe environment. In doing the best possible job of protecting students, and predicting ways in which they may need support to make sound, safe decisions, every

measure at a school's disposal should be employed. This would include measures that promote a democratic society and teach students not only about rules and consequences while at school; but strategies and guidelines for being productive, loving members of a society outside the boundaries of school.

Mindfulness education is one such measure. Mindfulness programs in the United States came about by Jon Kabat-Zinn's 1979 creation of *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR), and have been effectively incorporated into the classroom, as well as other institutions, yielding beneficial results (Center for Mindfulness, 2017). A large body of research supports that mindfulness education provides tools students can use in school and outside of school as a method of reducing stress, improving self-efficacy and focusing with a clear mind on tasks at hand (Wallace, 2016). Dr. Dzung Vo, a pediatrician specializing in adolescent medicine at British Columbia's Children's Hospital, writes that, because of the positive results seen, "the number of schools offering mindfulness education to their students, and the number of educators seeking to learn about the concept has really exploded over the past five years" (Wallace, 2016, 3). Aside from the more immediate effects of reducing student stress and slowing rapid heart rates associated with anxiety, research has shown that regular teaching of mindfulness and relaxation strategies can improve student mental and physical health, increase student academic focus and assist students in handling difficult relationships (Wallace, 2016).

Mindfulness education, though, includes elements that may be somewhat challenging for a teacher such as leading guided meditation, creating a space for students to relax, and working with curriculum in areas which are not within the teacher's field of discipline. A handbook written for a teacher by a teacher providing multiple ways to allow

students to experience mindfulness practice may provide a door for educators to more easily utilize this effective tool.

Need for the Project

The age group of focus for this project is the secondary student, who is experiencing a time of great challenge. Stress, according to a survey of the American Psychological Association (2014), is particularly problematic for adolescents. The survey reported that 30 percent of teens claimed that they felt sad or depressed because of stress, 31 percent felt overwhelmed by it, and 23 percent said that they had skipped meals because of it. The physiological and emotional responses to stress can include changes in body temperature, changes in breathing, headaches, and difficulty in taking in information (Malow & Austin, 2016).

There are social, physiological and psychological circumstances that create an environment for the adolescent to experience stress differently from other age groups. Socially, adolescents are learning to navigate relationships and find their roles in the new community structures surrounding them. Social pressures tend to keep them in a dependent position, and this dependency on others for support and validation causes them to feel a loss of control over their own happiness (International Child and Youth Care Network, 2001). Physiologically, adolescent students are enduring chemical changes in their brains, which contribute to an increase in the incidence of stress-related dysfunctions such as anxiety, depression and drug abuse (Romeo, 2013). Psychologically, adolescents typically feel a heightened vulnerability, and commonly experience emotional distress because of academic and extracurricular expectations from parents and teachers, relationship expectations,

pressure to consume drugs and alcohol, cyber pressures and bullying, and pressure to uphold a specific physical appearance (Sutter Health Palo Alto Medical Foundation, 2015).

Mindfulness education has been shown to effectively address stress and these stress-related problems (Wisner, Jones, & Gwin, 2010). Studies have shown that mindfulness exercises have helped students learn to create a longer span of time between action and reaction, thereby making them feel more in control of decisions and emotions, and making school a safer place to be (Thomas, 2013). The practice has had positive effects on students with anger management difficulties, leading to better self-regulation, and schools that have implemented mindfulness strategies on a school-wide basis have found decreased incidents of bullying and decreases in the need for student behavior consequences, including suspensions (St. George, 2016). Students participating in mindfulness education courses report feeling more relaxed, better able to sleep, more able to face academic stresses, and more compassionate toward themselves (Marlow & Austin, 2016).

With the plethora of support for the usefulness of mindfulness education, it seems evident that using it as a tool could in the classroom could create a less problematic, more functional, peaceful and democratic atmosphere. The question is, then, what are the hindrances to implementation? Would teachers be more likely to implement a mindfulness program into the classroom if a handbook were made available addressing their concerns, giving them the necessary information, and simplifying the process?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to provide a resource to help teachers gain access to the incorporation of a mindfulness program. Though there are materials available for use online which outline ways in which an educator may utilize mindfulness strategies, the fact

remains that many schools do not have school-wide mindfulness programs, and may not teach relaxation techniques at all. In the Tehama County area, for example, most of our public schools do not institute mindfulness programs at all and those that do have one or two teachers who utilize the practice. Teachers may not understand the abilities they possess to implement a program, and they may not realize the many ways in which individuals and classrooms can benefit from implementation. Further, they have tremendous responsibilities in the classroom, and may hesitate to add another one, especially with the vast amount of information available in books or online that one would have to sift through to come up with a usable program, one that could fit the needs and demands of a given class. This researcher is proposing that a handbook for teaching mindfulness, written by a teacher with the intent of addressing questions and concerns as they arise, may serve as a bridge between the immense amount of information available and implementation.

The purpose of creating a handbook for implementing mindfulness practices specifically for the adolescent population is that studies have revealed that adolescents experience a significant positive change from these programs (Malow & Austin, 2016; Wisner et al, 2010). Studies have also revealed that marginalized adolescent students and those who are at highest risk due to mental health difficulties and socioeconomic disadvantage may stand to gain the most from mindfulness education (Black and Fernando, 2014). It makes sense, then, that secondary teachers in areas where all these factors are present would be interested in and/or willing to work toward incorporating mindfulness in their classrooms.

Teachers, acting *in loco parentis*, can help to predict problems associated with adolescent stress, and can use mindfulness strategies as an intervention before mental and

physical health problems escalate and negative behaviors result (Thomas, 2013). One of the most important roles of secondary schools is to “incorporate prevention and intervention programs to meet the psychosocial, emotional, cognitive and behavioral needs of adolescents” (Wisner et al, 2010).

If teachers find that they are able to utilize a handbook to reduce stress and prevent potential stress-related problems, they are, in essence, creating a society that functions optimally. Perhaps most significant in the potential outcome of the incorporation of a mindfulness program, is that students will learn an important strategy that they can use when dealing with challenges outside of school, and for the rest their lives.

Scope of the Project

The final product created will be shared with teachers at Red Bluff High School, as well as other secondary school teachers in the region who express interest. Though many of the elements presented in the handbook could be used by a teacher at any level, the focus will be on secondary teachers with specific examples of issues and concerns characteristic of that age group. As a rural school in an area with high rates of poverty and other at-risk populations, the implementation of a mindfulness program can present certain place-specific challenges and benefits. Likewise, adolescents have stressors and social contexts that would be different from younger students. Each of these components can be addressed in the creation of a mindfulness program.

Limitations of the Project

The project is limited because it is directed at adolescent students and does not utilize language and examples which would necessarily be useful for elementary students.

Some smaller schools in the area to which this project will be presented have classrooms containing both elementary and secondary students; those educational contexts may not be served by the project. The handbook is developed separately from other core curricula without connection to content-standards, which may provide hindrances to implementation in some classrooms.

Theories Informing the Project

Though there are a variety of educational theories that provide support for some of the concepts inherent in mindfulness practice, three theories are exceptionally well-aligned to its central tenets. The first is the theory of emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman's 1998 model of emotional intelligence has the components of self-awareness, self-regulation, social skill, empathy and motivation (Learning Theories, n.d.). According to Goleman, these areas of emotional intelligence are not innate, but are learned through practice. They must be continually addressed so that individuals may reach their full potential in shaping their own emotional and intellectual growth (Learning Theories, n.d.). Mindfulness practice in the classroom affords students the opportunity to become more self-aware, to regulate emotional reactions, to increase empathy toward the self and others, and to find intrinsic motivation for shaping their own environments (Leland, 2015).

The second theory that supports mindfulness practice is that of positive psychology. Initiated by Seligman in 2002, the theory focuses on identifying key factors that make life enjoyable and worthwhile for individuals (Learning Theories, n.d.). Engagement in activities that allow for the development of well-being, happiness, optimism, resilience, mindfulness and flow (the ability to become lost in an activity and unaware of time) are said to increase overall well-being and emotional health. Positive psychology theory is broken

into three parts: pleasure and gratification, embodiment of strengths and virtues, and the finding of meaning and purpose (Learning Theories, n.d.). Mindfulness exercises allow students to have positive, pleasurable experiences through the senses by way of relaxing the body, listening to soothing music, and becoming aware of other sensory stimuli. It also directs students to value themselves and focus on their strengths, while it provides a path to find more meaning and purpose in their daily lives (Beach, 2014).

The third theory informing mindfulness as a classroom practice is metacognition. American developmental psychologist, John H. Flavell developed the term “metacognition,” which means “thinking about your own thinking.” Flavell identified two elements of metacognition: knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition (Learning Theories. n.d.). As related to mindfulness in a classroom setting, students would first be aware of what they are thinking (knowledge of cognition), and then they may become able to regulate their own thoughts (regulation of cognition). The value of this practice in the classroom, in its connection to the theory of metacognition, is that it facilitates the metacognitive development of students as it promotes the monitoring and self-regulation of their thoughts.

Definition of Terms

Mindfulness: "Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 2015).

Adolescent: "A person between the ages of 13 and 19 . . . the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood" (Psychology Today, n.d.).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As educators seek methods for teaching the whole student, they find that it becomes their job to prepare students to learn. Teaching materials in the subject matter can only be done when a student has the emotional and mental availability to learn (Schwartz, 2014). Mindfulness practice in the classroom provides the teacher with a strategy to help students diminish outside stressors and anxiety so that their minds can become available to learn. It also teaches them a skill that they may be able to use as they undergo challenges accomplishing future educational, relationship and career goals (Leland, 2015).

People have been practicing the discipline of mindfulness and meditation for thousands of years. It is most often said to have its origins in ancient spiritual practices found in Buddhism and Hinduism, though it has been shown to have roots in Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Trousselard et al., 2014). The current popularity of yoga, rooted in Buddhism, has caused concepts and practices of mindfulness to become more mainstream (Baer, 2017). Many proponents of mindful practices in schools, in fact, began cultivating the technique in the classroom because of their involvement in yoga (Schwartz, 2014).

Mindfulness as part of public school curricula has seen some resistance, in part, because of its connection to religious practice. The discipline of meditation—a Buddhist religious practice similar to prayer—is at the heart of mindfulness education. Because the Supreme Court has ruled it unconstitutional to teach religious practices in school, and because many parents are opposed to students receiving religious or spiritual instruction in

school, mindfulness in schools has become “secularized” (Brown, 2014). Sidestepping some of the more religious components of Buddhist meditation, curricula associated with mindfulness has sought to mainstream techniques and carefully use of vocabulary. “Mindfulness,” itself, has been referred to as “heartfulness” in some school programs, and “meditation” has been referred to as “core practice” or “brain breaks”. Some have viewed this use of semantics as trickery, and there has been pushback in what mindfulness promoter Emily Horn labeled “the new American Religion” (Brown, 2017). Because of the consistent beneficial results in the use of such practices, however, and because of the belief that using one’s ability to control her own racing heart and mind does not necessarily have religious implications, public schools have continued to adopt curricula that uses secularized mindfulness strategies (Leland, 2015). The number of students participating in mindful practices in those schools is reported to be above 1.5 million worldwide today (Mindful Schools, n.d.).

Mindfulness Practice Defined

Mindfulness has been defined as “a mental state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting one’s feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations” (*Oxford Dictionary*, n.d.). The practice incorporates breathing techniques, relaxation strategies and guided meditation exercises to help quiet the mind and create such a mental state. The concept of mindfulness as a method of reducing stress is not new, but has newly become more widespread as a technique used in correctional facilities, medical facilities, the workplace, and schools as a successful method for reducing stress and increasing productivity (Davis, 2015).

The emergence of mindfulness as a practice in the United States is attributed to Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor emeritus of medicine and creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (Center for Mindfulness, 2017). In 1979, Kabat-Zinn adapted ancient Buddhist teachings of mindfulness concepts into the practice of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). The name, “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction,” however, replaced the original name of “The Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program” in order to remove connections between Buddhism and mindfulness (Shea, 2016). Giving it a more scientific name enabled a greater public acceptance and extensive use of the strategy.

The English word “mindfulness” is thought to be translated from the Pali term “sati,” or the Sanskrit term, “smṛti” which means to “remember” or “bear in mind” (Shea, 2016). The individual, when practicing mindfulness, is said to be “remembering” that any thoughts or feelings she experiences are connected to the whole world of thoughts and feelings, free from labels as positive or negative. The *Center for Mindfulness* website explains that awareness happens when one intentionally pays attention to the present moment, non-judgmentally (2017). Florence Meleo-Myer, Director of the *Train-the-Trainer Program* at the Institute for Mindfulness-Based Professional Education explains on the website’s introductory video that the three qualities of mindfulness are “attention,” “intention,” and “attitude (Center for Mindfulness, 2015). A person practicing the act of mindfulness, then, is paying attention to the thoughts and feelings of the mind and body, setting an intention to focus and direct the mind, and having an open attitude which is willing to come to a state of meditation.

Populations that Benefit from Mindfulness Practice

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction was originally used in the medical setting to help patients in ways that standard medical care was unable to do. In the words of Saki Cantrell, Executive Director at the Center for Mindfulness, “Medicine can do things for us and to us, but people have to do much healing for themselves” (Center for Mindfulness, 2017). The creation of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction was used to teach patients breathing practices and focus techniques to understand their own control over their thought processes, and the health of their bodies and minds. The intention was to help individuals manage some of their own pain and take charge of their part of the healing process. In an interview with Kabat-Zinn, he explains that his original 8-week MBSR curriculum was designed to “catapult people into taking much more responsibility for their own health and well-being” (Scolara, 2015). It was intended that MBSR be a short intervention that would teach skills to be practiced over the long term, increasing awareness, and decreasing pain and stress. A significant tenet of mindfulness is that stress and pain of the body and mind are unavoidable, and that by being aware of and open to the experience of these uncomfortable feelings, people can begin to manage and diminish them (Scolara, 2015). As people participate in the practice of noticing the present moment, bringing awareness to their own thoughts and feelings, they are engaging in mindfulness as a way of life.

Since Kabat-Zinn’s 1979 development of MBSR, studies using the 8-week course and other similar mindfulness strategies have seen results in improved physical, social, emotional, psychological and cognitive functioning (Wisner et al, 2010). When such programs were instituted in the work environments of high stress jobs, physical and emotional signs of stress diminished. In one study of hospital personnel working in intensive

care units, MBSR intervention resulted in significantly increased resiliency and significantly decreased respiration rates (Duchemin, Steinberg, Marks, Vanover, & Klatt, 2015). While mindfulness has been used in many workplace environments, research has shown it to be particularly effective in jobs that include empathizing with clients. In the social work profession, mindfulness training has helped workers cope with the impact of emotional exhaustion and vicarious trauma (Leland, 2015). Developing habits of deep breathing and taking time to tune into thoughts and feelings rather than ignoring them or allowing them to build has been shown to help individuals through the education process and beyond into the field of social work.

Much like social workers, medical students experience meaningful relationships with patients, emotional fatigue and vicarious trauma. As an element of burnout, medical students reported feeling less empathetic toward patients by the end of their training, and more emotionally numb (Leland, 2015). Those who took part in mindfulness training reported feeling higher levels of empathy and lower levels of stress with their academic program. An increasing number of medical schools are incorporating mindfulness training into their programs because of the consistent positive results (Leland, 2015).

Similarly, the use of mindfulness practice during incarceration has been shown to reduce stress in inmates and improve their ability to manage their own behavior (Prison Mindfulness Institute, n.d.). The *Prison Mindfulness Institute* develops strategies, and explores funding sources and creative methods to bring mindfulness practices to jail sites. One such creative strategy is the use of inmates in teaching one another. Four Washington inmates recently made history by being the first to earn certificates to teach the *Path of Freedom* program to other inmates (Gache, 2017). *Path of Freedom* is an emotional

intelligence program based on the concepts of mindfulness. It incorporates breathing techniques and awareness of emotions as they arise. It has been taught in the United States and Europe for many years, but by community members and professionals; not by inmates. The decision to allow the inmates to take the online course to become certificated, and to present the twelve-week course to fellow inmates, has broadened the potential scope of the program. Studies on the impact of the program have revealed that inmates and guards noticed an increased gap between thought and action (Gache, 2017). Inmates took more time to choose reactions, and reactions diminished in violence level and negativity. Prisoners also reported feeling a greater sense of community with fellow inmates, as well as an increased feeling of well-being with the belief that “doing time” did not have to be without purpose (Gache, 2017).

In addition to using mindfulness practice in prisons and jails, it is being researched as a possible tool to be used after incarceration to help heal the effects of emotional trauma on the brain. During incarceration, people not only lose freedom, choice and dignity, according to Jacobs (2017), but they also lose a considerable amount of cognitive capacity. Inmates often reoffend because of a lack of social and emotional skills, factors which may have contributed to their initial jail time and factors which often are harmed further during incarceration. In a study described in the journal of *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 197 young men between the ages of 16 and 18 who had been incarcerated at Riker’s Prison in New York were randomly assigned to take part in one of two studies: one that incorporated discussion about drug use and violence, and one that combined cognitive therapy with mindfulness practice. The findings were that the adolescent males who participated in the latter group showed some degree of buffering against cognitive decline.

The results indicated that further research in the use of the practice was warranted (Jacobs, 2017).

After the initial use of MBSR interventions in hospitals, the workplace and correctional facilities, mindfulness made its way into the classroom as a way of decreasing student stress and increasing productivity. Socioeconomically disadvantaged and other at-risk students are among the groups of populations that have seen marked advantages in a school setting which practices mindfulness techniques (Black & Fernando, 2014). Black and Fernando (2014) studied a California public elementary school, conducting the largest mindfulness intervention trial for children published as of that date. Students in the school had high populations of lower income and ethnic minority school children, and there were reports of low teacher retention due to stress caused by student behavior. The study conducted incorporated a five-week mindfulness teaching component and a one-hour training of teachers in preparation for the implementation. After the initial five weeks, some classrooms continued to implement seven once-weekly sessions. Immediately following the initial five weeks, teachers reported significant student behavior improvement in all four areas of study: paying attention, self-control, participation in activities and caring and respect for others (Black & Fernando, 2014). The subsequent seven once-weekly sessions did not further improve in any of the areas other than the category of “paying attention.” In the other three areas, the improvements remained, but in reports of students paying attention, improvements continued steadily (Black & Fernando, 2014).

In another low-income school, Coronado Elementary School in Richmond California, mindfulness education was incorporated by teacher Jean-Gabrielle Larochette. He initially began the practice of meditation to help him cope with the stress of working in a

school where student violence and anger were common, and student world views were anti-authority (Schwartz, 2014). He believed the techniques he learned to help calm his own fears would work on his students as well, so he founded the Mindful Life Project (<http://mindfullifeproject.org/>). His stance was that teachers tell students to be quiet, to sit down, to do all the things they need to do in order to focus in the classroom, but they do not teach them how to do that. He talked of supporting a traumatized student by teaching him how to pay attention, stay on task, regulate, and make optimal choices. It is “not that students in underperforming school are unable to learn,” according to Larochette; it is that they are “very often unavailable to learn” (Schwartz, 2014, p. 2). The movement of mindfulness education spread to other schools in the Richmond area and students showed improvement in happiness, optimism and respect for themselves and others. Teachers reported students self-correcting more frequently and students report using their relaxation techniques when confronted with difficult situations (Schwartz, 2014).

Though relaxation techniques and meditation in schools have been used by every age group, a growing body of evidence suggests that mindfulness practice could be specifically beneficial to adolescents (Beach, 2014; Malow & Austin, 2016). As teens endure the hardships of hormonal fluctuations, peer relationships and academic stress, they naturally become “fascinated about how their brains work” (Beach, 2014, p. 2). Through mindfulness instruction, teens can be taught that they are, in effect, receiving “the owner’s manual for their brain” (p. 2). The chatter going on inside the minds of teens is often worry and anxiety, and as they consciously become aware of their thoughts, they can acknowledge that anxiety without getting bogged down in the negative thoughts it creates. Training students to listen to their thoughts, and become aware, rather than stifling them or refusing to acknowledge them,

can be the first step in calming their systems and handling stress. This can lead to many other benefits such as improving cardio health, reducing blood pressure, and improving sleep (Malow & Austin, 2016).

Stress and the Adolescent

The US Department of Education (2008) reports that anxiety disorders, phobias, social anxiety and separation anxiety have become more prevalent among school-age children. It is estimated that rates of stress and depression in young people are as much as eight times higher than they were fifty years ago (Monroe, 2017). Further, according to a survey of the American Psychological Association (2014), stress is particularly problematic for adolescents. The survey reported that 30 percent of teens claimed that they felt sad or depressed because of stress, 31 percent felt overwhelmed by it, and 23 percent said that they had skipped meals because of it. The physiological and emotional responses to stress can include changes in body temperature, changes in breathing, headaches, and difficulty in taking in information (Malow & Austin, 2016).

There are social, physiological and psychological circumstances that create an environment for the adolescent to experience stress differently from other age groups. Socially, adolescents are learning to navigate relationships and find their roles in the new community structures surrounding them. Social pressures tend to keep them in a dependent position, and this dependency on others for support and validation causes them to feel a loss of control over their own happiness (International Child and Youth Care Network, 2001). Some external forces over which they feel a lack of control are school environment, academic and extracurricular expectations from parents and teachers, relationship expectations, pressure to consume drugs and alcohol, cyber pressures and bullying, and

pressure to uphold a specific physical appearance (Sutter Health Palo Alto Medical Foundation, 2015).

Of those stressors, the number one stressor reported by adolescents was academic in nature. In a survey of 124 adolescent students conducted by Becky Beacom, Health Education Manager for Palo Alto Medical Foundation, 55 percent of students reported that grades, tests, finals week, and worrying about college were significant stressors for them (2015). Academic items were mentioned 138 times by students in the survey; the next item, parent and family expectations, was mentioned 37 times. Friends and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships came third, being mentioned 22 times (Sutter Health Palo Alto Medical Foundation, 2015). Similar results were found in a 2013 poll conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health. In this poll, parents were asked what their adolescent children reported to be their greatest stress and homework was given as a leading cause (Neighmond, 2013).

These stresses can cause a sense of panic and paralysis in the adolescent student. They can become physically ill, unable to think clearly, depressed and even suicidal, according to Mary Alvord, clinical psychologist in Maryland and public education coordinator for the American Psychological Association (Neighmond, 2013). Even a student with every advantage who is receiving support from parents and teachers may be reduced to this kind of paralyzing stress during adolescence. For marginalized adolescents who suffer from mental or physical health disorders and/or socioeconomic disadvantages, the typical pressures characteristic of the age group, and the resulting negative effects, are even greater (Biegel, Brown, Shapiro & Schubert, 2009).

The Unique Adolescent Brain

While facing all the pressures associated with the passage from childhood to adulthood can be overwhelming and debilitating alone, there is also a physiological difference in the adolescent brain which effectively amplifies the way adolescents respond to stress. Adolescence is a time of significant shifts in hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis reactivity, which produces an increase in the intensity of stress-induced hormonal responses (Romeo, 2013). The stress-sensitive areas of the brain that are still maturing during adolescence, the limbic and cortical areas, may be particularly vulnerable to the shifts in HPA. The heightened reaction to stress because of this chemical shift may contribute to an increase in the incidence of stress-related dysfunctions such as anxiety, depression and drug abuse (Romeo, 2013). There is a growing body of research on the effects of acute and chronic stress on the adolescent brain that suggest such stress can alter the emotional and cognitive functioning, and that these alterations can persist throughout the individual's lifetime. In an adult brain, acute stress can be reversible, but even months after experiencing acute stress, areas of the adolescent brain continue to be affected. In some cases, areas of the brain can be permanently structurally altered. This is thought to be because of the adolescent brain's state of continued neural maturation, specifically in the stress-sensitive limbic and cortical regions (Romeo, 2013).

Perhaps one of the largest brain-affecting problems resulting from stress is drug abuse. Adolescents try to self-medicate in order to cope with the strong emotions they are feeling, or they feel the stress of peer pressure to participate in drug use, and because of the continuing development of their brains, they are at greater risk of becoming addicted (Science and Management of Addictions (SAMA), n.d.). Even if they do not become

addicted, the adolescent period of life presents a time when any use of drugs and alcohol can affect the brain more severely (SAMA, n.d.). Psychoactive substances can alter or damage the development of the adolescent brain, and can have irreversible effects. Drugs and alcohol affect the function of neurotransmitters, which send messages to nerves, allowing them to communicate. When communication to the nerves is interrupted, the neural connections can be damaged, perception and developing perceptual skills can be altered, and habits of thought, perception and reasoning associated with drugs and alcohol can become deeply wired into the brain (SAMA, n.d.). As a result, habits and perceptions of the adolescent which occur during times of drug and alcohol abuse can remain with the individual for a lifetime.

An opportunity that exists in this time frame is that the habits of the adolescent which encourage logical thought, learning and strategizing can cause the brain wiring for these healthy habits to become stronger (SAMA, n.d.). Pathways are created that remain with a person for life in this instance as well. Areas of the adolescent brain that are in development, the frontal lobe and outer mantle, are responsible for skills such as setting priorities, controlling impulses, processing abstract information and understanding rules and laws. In a school setting, behaviors that reflect these changes in the brain are apparent: developing social circles, creating rules for these circles, strategizing, absorbing large amounts of information, and changing priorities. It is, then, an unmatched time in an individual's life of both vulnerability and opportunity, and overwhelming stress in the adolescent can prevent these natural growth opportunities from occurring (SAMA, n.d.).

The Effects of Technology on Adolescent Productivity

A study conducted by Common Sense Media and reported on Cable News Network (CNN) found that the modern American adolescent spends approximately 9 hours a day using media; more time per day than they spend sleeping, and more time than they spend interacting with parents and teachers (Common Sense Media, 2015). Those nine hours do not include time spent using media at school for academic work, or at home for homework. The report conducted included a national sample of more than 2,600 young people between the ages of 8 and 18. “Tweens” were identified as youth between 8 and 12 years, and they spent an average of six hours per day using media. As they head into the later adolescent years and the drive to socialize increases, so do their hours of media consumption. Television is still the predominant choice medium with youth, spending more than four hours per day, but nearly one third of all television programming is viewed on different media platforms, such as the phone or tablet (American Association of Pediatrics, 2016; Common Sense Media, 2015). As the use of media increases into the teens, homework demands also increase and driving of automobiles ensues, creating an adolescent habit of multi-tasking (American Association of Pediatrics, 2016; Common Sense Media, 2015). Teens commonly use media while driving, while doing homework, and while engaging in other tasks. They believe it does not impede their productivity to multi task in this way, though studies consistently contradict that notion (Common Sense Media, 2015).

The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) has expressed concern over the growing number of hours per day children and adolescents spend with media, and one significant concern revolves around the impeding of productivity in our youth (American Association of Pediatrics, 2016). The AAP further reports that the constant multi-tasking has

harmful potential. Students are fielding text messages during homework time, causing them to increase the amount of time it takes for them to do homework. Even after they have gone to bed for the night, 60 % of adolescents are reported to receive text messages, exacerbating the already common adolescent problem of sleep deprivation and levels of tiredness at school (Lenhart, 2012). It is reported that almost all teenagers in the United States (88%) use text messaging. In the first three months of 2011, adolescents 13 through 17 years of age sent an average of 3,364 texts per month (Lenhart, 2012). The use of mobile phones is not only problematic because of the time it takes and the hindering of efficiency, however; it can also be a safety and health issue when adolescents text or view content while driving.

Cell phone usage, combined with other media platforms, offers a variety of potential risks to young users. In a recent clinical report on the impact of social media on children, adolescents and families, it was found that children and adolescents are expressing online the behaviors seen offline, such as bullying and sexual experimentation, with more frequency (O’Keeffe et al, 2011). It is reported that much of the growth and development of the adolescent is happening online and that disturbing messages and unwanted images may hinder that development (O’Keeffe et al, 2011). Because the adolescent is dependent upon others for social approval, negative widespread messages about a person or sexual images spread among a circle of friends can create mental health issues for students, preventing them from functioning or having the will to attend school (O’Keeffe et al, 2011). There is even a phenomenon referred to as “Facebook depression,” which is defined as depression that develops when pre-teens or teens spend exhaustive amounts of time on Facebook and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression (O’Keeffe, et al, 2011).

Because of the possible ways media can influence or harm a young person's sleep, brain function, emotional well-being, and ability to productively engage in school and other healthy activities, the American Association of Pediatrics has included discussion about the topic of media and children into their well-child appointments (2016). They encourage parents to set limits with children regarding hours of media use, to learn more about the technology their children use, and to supervise online activity (O'Keefe, 2011). The American Association of Pediatrics has also developed a policy that encourages pediatricians to constantly educate themselves regarding digital technology and media so that they may be better informed in working with youth and families regarding this important topic (O'Keefe, et al, 2011).

Much time and attention has been devoted to the negative impacts of today's technology and, specifically, to the addiction adolescents have to media and their phones. Yet the ability to have instant communication and information, and to communicate on a global scale in seconds, provides opportunities for today's youth that can empower and educate them in new ways. Data collected from thousands of iGeneration students (students born in 1990 and beyond) finds that this generation consumes huge amounts of media and that they are particularly adept, in a wholly new way, at using media and technology, even several forms simultaneously (Rosen, 2011). Rosen's report on iGeneration students finds that students know far more about technology than their teachers (2011). He offers that the challenge of American Schools today is to teach with technology; not to attempt to teach technology or to avoid the use of technology as a teaching tool. The potential to tap into student ability using technology is tremendous and unique to this generation (Rosen, 2011).

It has been suggested that if students are not increasing in productivity in schools, it is because schools are not properly utilizing the modern students' interest in and ability with technology (Norris & Soloway, 2015). The authors explain that this "productivity paradox" first occurred when studying businesses during the early days of computers and finding that the introduction of technology did not produce the expected gains in productivity. The problem was that computer implementation of programs reflected past ways of doing business, rather than new ways possible with new technology. As a result; growth was incremental at best. Concerning schools, technology has been used more to teach programs using methods that are decades old (Norris & Soloway, 2015). Using an inquiry pedagogy, the one in which modern students excel and are driven to follow, greater productivity in the student would more likely result (Norris & Soloway, 2015). Though some schools have begun to use such pedagogies, and it is reflected in the new Common Core standards and tests, the restriction of technological platforms and strategies, and the widespread use of older pedagogies as applied to technology remain as potential blocks to productivity.

The Effects of Sleep on Adolescent Productivity

According to the National Sleep Foundation's most recent survey of teen sleep (2006), more than 87 percent of high school students in America get far less than the recommended eight to 10 hours of sleep per night, and that amount of time is decreasing . The potential consequences for sleep deprivation in the adolescent include drowsiness-related driving accidents, poor grades, an inability to concentrate, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts and attempts. While it has been documented that sleep deprivation plagues many

populations in the United States, Nanci Yuan, director of the Stanford Children's Health Sleep Center, it is most acute among adolescents (Stanford Medicine News Center, 2015). William Dement, MD, PhD, and founder of the Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic expresses that high school is the biggest area of risk and problem in terms of sleep deprivation. He further comments that this epidemic is the first of its kind in the world, and it results in no adolescent student performing optimally. He says the arenas detrimentally affected include the sports field, the classroom, roadways, and physical and emotional well-being (Stanford Medicine News Center, 2015).

To blame for the loss of sleep are social and cultural factors, according to Dement, which have collided with the natural biology of adolescence to prevent adequate rest from taking place. Since the early 1990s, it is reported that adolescents have a biologic tendency to go to sleep as much as two hours later than younger individuals. Among pressures for high school students to stay awake when tired are academic expectations, involvement in sports and extra-curricular activities and social communication (Richter, 2015). The use of cell phones after bedtime was a major culprit for sleep loss, as 72 percent of adolescents reported taking their phones into the bedroom with them when retiring to their room for sleep (Richter, 2015). Those who did so were less likely to report getting adequate rest and more likely to drive when drowsy (Richter, 2015; Stanford Medicine News Center, 2015).

In a recent study of sleep perceptions and habits of 384 randomly selected ninth through twelfth grade students in American high schools, 91.9 percent of participants reported obtaining inadequate sleep most school nights (Noland, et al., 2009). Ten percent of students in the study reported getting less than 6 hours of sleep per night and 83 percent said

that the regular inadequate sleep was causing them struggle with paying attention in school. The majority of the study's participants reported sleep deprivation as being directly related to lower grades, increased stress, and difficulty in getting along with others. Other findings were that loss of sleep was connected to drug and alcohol use, as well as weight gain (Noland et al, 2009).

One of the reasons adolescents in the United States are experiencing this large scale sleep deprivation is that their circadian rhythm, or natural biological clock, causes them to have a sleep phase delay, making them less tired as the day goes on (Richter, 2015). This makes it difficult for them to go to sleep at night even if they are severely sleep-deprived. Most schools begin early in the morning and, if students are lacking in sleep, the hours that they are most tired will be the first few hours of the school day when they are supposed to be learning. Dement and Carskadon's conducted a study in 1990 that also found that adolescents do not need less sleep than their younger siblings and, as research has corroborated many times since then, sleep loss is cumulative. All of the expectations of adolescents and the current structure of the educational system are keeping them in a state of sleep deficit, and this deficit will not allow them to produce what they are being expected to produce; at least not without a great cost (Richter, 2015; Stanford Medical News Center, n.d).

**Mindfulness Practice: A Strategy for
Decreasing Stress and Increasing
Productivity in the Adolescent
Student**

The primary goal of mindfulness training is the reduction of stress, as is indicated in the name of its practice of origin, *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*. It has been proven to reduce stress with many populations, but could be particularly beneficial for the adolescent

(Beach, 2014). The brain of the adolescent, experiencing amplified reactivity to stress, is especially in need of strategies to calm that stress (Romeo, 2013). Mindfulness practice has been helpful in reducing the stress that occurs biologically and environmentally with typical adolescent stressors, and it has been found to be even more helpful in adolescent students experiencing extreme or chronic stress (Docksai, 2013). Students in high risk communities, those who have special needs, are marginalized or who cope with poverty, have seen marked improvements in their perception of and reaction to stress (Thomas, 2013).

In a six-week study implementing mindfulness strategies daily with fifteen adolescent students who were diagnosed with emotional and/or behavioral disorder, improvement was documented in all three areas tested (Malow & Austin, 2016). These areas of study were: sense of mastery (MAS), sense of relatedness (REL), and emotional reactivity (REA). MAS indicated the individual's response with the environment. REL indicated the individual's connection to others in a social context, and REA referred to a pre-existing vulnerability to a threshold for tolerance (Malow & Austin, 2016). In the first two (MAS and REL) a higher score indicated feeling of mastery and positive relatedness to others and in the third (REA), a lower score indicated resiliency. Each day of the study, students were presented with a centering exercise while the teacher presented mindfulness curriculum from Patricia C. Broderick's *Learning to Breathe* program (a mindfulness program designed for adolescents). Sessions were fifteen minutes in length daily. In the results of the study, there was a significant increase in the MAS for 12 of the 15 participants, a significant increase in the REL for 9 of the 15 participants, and a significant decrease in the REA for 11 of the 15 participants (Malow & Austin, 2016). Improvement was then seen in self-efficacy, adaptability, perceived support from others, and the ability to maintain equilibrium.

There is a growing body of research that suggests marginalized adolescents, such as the ones in the study by Malow & Austin, are among those who benefit most from mindfulness and meditation practices. Minority students, students who have mental or physical disabilities, and students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged have experienced vast improvements with MBSR training (Black & Fernando, 2014). Educators who implemented mindfulness training with students who have ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), autism, behavioral problems, and disruptive behavior found that students markedly improved their ability to control their actions (Leland, 2015). Specifically, there was a longer span of time between impulses and behaviors (Thomas, 2013). In a group of inner city schools in West Baltimore, the use of the practice has had positive effects on students with anger management difficulties, leading to better self-regulation (St. George, 2016). In one of the participating schools, Patterson High, suspensions were down in one year from 46 to 22; while in Coleman school in the same area, the need for suspensions disappeared entirely (St. George, 2016).

Surveys of adolescents experiencing the pressures characteristic of their age have revealed that academic expectations are among the leading causes of chronic, ongoing stress (Sutter Health Palo Alto Medical Foundation, n.d.), and academically driven students have been found to benefit significantly from mindfulness training. Students who put extensive pressure on themselves and suffer from “test anxiety” have found that mindfulness training enhances memory and concentration, while reducing daydreaming and fears associated with doing poorly on tests (Docksai, 2013). The University of California in Santa Barbara reported that MBSR training was of help to students taking the GRE (Graduate Record Examination), improving scores 16% (Docksai, 2013). Medical school students, who often

suffer from long hours of studying and academic burnout, were also shown to benefit from mindfulness practice. After being trained in breathing techniques and meditation associated with mindfulness, students improved their sense of well-being and increased their ability to manage the high demands of rigor expected of them, while maintaining the compassion required to deal with patients and fellow classmates (Docksai, 2013).

Adolescent students with drug and alcohol addictions have experienced improvements in coping and controlling stress related to substance abuse after participating in mindfulness training (Keck School of Medicine, USC, n.d.). The University of Southern California Adolescent Trauma Training Center (USC-ATTC) utilizes mindfulness training to help adolescents who have endured trauma, and have developed drug and alcohol addictions by providing them with a six-step mindfulness activity that takes 10 minutes per day. In this activity, clients are encouraged to find a quiet, safe place to sit or lie down, to close their eyes if possible, to think about their breathing and only their breathing, to be non-judging of any thoughts should they come up, and to relax in this manner for 10 minutes each day. The activity is meant to be practiced on their own, but professionals show clients how to participate in the practice. Adolescent clients are encouraged to increase the daily time if they should choose. The practice has been helpful in learning to refocus attention away from the need to abuse substances. The training center (USC-ATTC) has termed this *Urge Surfing*. The client is encouraged to compare the urge to drink alcohol or use drugs to riding a wave. The need usually starts small and builds, peaking at around ten to twenty minutes, and then falling away. The mindfulness meditation can be used to “ride the wave” and let it pass. By utilizing this method, the youth can become stronger with each use and can build skills for moderating emotional distress (Keck School of Medicine, USC, n.d.).

Beyond the emotional benefits of mindfulness training, studies have shown that mindfulness training has benefits in goal-setting and academic success (Leland, 2015). Clearing the mind and relieving stress leads to a better ability to concentrate on tasks and complete goals (Leland, 2015). Among groups who have reported this kind of success with MSBR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) are students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The United States Centers for Disease Control reports that 14.7% of school aged children are diagnosed with ASD (2014) and 11 % are diagnosed with ADHD (2013). Students with these disabilities do not only face challenges behaving according to conventional standards imposed on them, but they have significant obstacles to learning because of difficulty with concentration. Mindfulness-based training has led to both behavioral and academic improvements for these groups, curbing impulses and disruptive physical behaviors and allowing for improvement on academic accomplishments (Thomas, 2013). Mindfulness can help students learn problem-solving skills and behaviors in the face of emotional distress, significantly increasing the time between impulse and action (Leland, 2015).

In a study by Beauchemin, Hutchins and Patterson (2008), 34 adolescents diagnosed with learning disabilities were exposed to a 5-week mindfulness meditation training, and significant improvements were found in all measured areas. This pilot study used a pre-post no control design, and measured state and trait anxiety, social skills and academic performance. It was hypothesized that cognitive interference caused by the high levels of stress characteristic of students with learning disabilities could be diminished by mindfulness training, thereby improving social experience and learning. A mindfulness program was instituted for five to ten minutes at the beginning of class five days per week for

a consecutive five weeks. Results discovered by using the State and Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), and informal surveys of students, parents and teachers, were that significant improvements were made in every area. There was a 0 % attrition rate, and of the 88 % of students who answered the question of whether mindfulness meditation helped them feel calm and focused, 100 % of them responded favorably. Further, teacher ratings of academic achievement improved significantly.

Research consistently finds that adolescent students, even those who face significant challenges and those who do not typically comply with authority figures, respond well to mindfulness training. It is thought that it may be the element of mindfulness which allows a student to have control over his own mind (Beach, 2014) that makes him open to following the training. To make the training even more attractive to the adolescent, meditation and mindfulness apps have been developed. Beach (2014) writes about the usefulness of the *Insight Timer* when working with students. The map graphic on the *Insight Timer* allows students to see all the locations worldwide where people are meditating. It has over 4,000 guided meditations students can use on their own time, students can set timers for the length of time they would like to meditate and hear chimes at the end of the meditation, and they can see how many others were meditating at the same time they were (Mindful, n.d.). *Aura* is another app that can be used. It gives personalized three-minute daily meditations based on questions asked. The *Calm* app allows a choice of topic and duration of guided meditation and provides sounds such as rain, fire or white noise (Mindful Schools, n.d.). The use of media to spark student interest in the concept of mindfulness, students may, ironically, be finding a method of controlling the habit of media use for less healthy purposes, thereby diminishing one of the greatest obstacles to their own productivity.

Sleep-deprivation, another primary block to adolescent productivity, may also be addressed with mindfulness practice. Meditation has long been used to assist people in falling asleep, and research has revealed that mindfulness exercises have led to longer spans of higher quality sleep (Britton et al., 2010). In a study of 55 adolescent students with substance abuse disorders (which typically hinder sleep), participants used a mindfulness-based sleep intervention that assessed the contributions of mindfulness meditation in its relationship to sleep quality and self-efficacy as related to substance use problems. Participants used meditation practice for only 5 to ten minutes per day, one to two times per week. The six-session study tested participants at six, twenty and sixty weeks. The explicit therapeutic goals of the clinical trial were stress reduction and sleep improvement; not substance abuse or relapse prevention. Findings were that those who participated in the mindfulness meditation for the duration of the study experienced significant improvements in sleep quality. They also reported decreases in worry and higher self-efficacy (Britton et al., 2010). The study concludes that mindfulness-based stress reduction practice may be a useful technique to promote improved sleep.

School as a Place for Mindfulness Training

The connection between stress and impaired learning, alone, makes it logical that schools would be the appropriate place to teach students how to cope with it (Wisner et al, 2010). Adolescents spend much of their time in school and engaged in school-related activities, and they also experience stressors within school on a regular basis (Leland, 2015). Mindfulness training enhances memory and concentration while allowing students to focus on positive things over which they have control. That, in turn, helps students cope with academic and social stressors (Leland, 2015).

Mindfulness programs may be instituted school-wide, or they may be implemented by individual teachers using any of the many programs available. In some cases, a trained mindfulness specialist may visit schools in the area on specific days of the week. An effective mindfulness program is said to include: direct instruction in meditation, a regular weekly or daily guided meditation time, a focus on breathing techniques and a specific procedural implementation (Mindful Schools, n.d.). Though trainings are available, typically ranging between six weeks to a year in duration for various certifications, mindfulness scripts are also available and they offer sessions designed so that any teacher with “a little knowledge, training and motivation can and should be able to embed them into his/her own classroom” (Malow & Austin, p. 85). In the study conducted by Malow and Austin, yielding very favorable results in student improvement, the teacher was given a script and asked to implement the program without prior training.

On the other end of the spectrum, a clinical trial of 102 adolescent psychiatric outpatients, in which trained mindfulness-based stress reduction professionals implemented the technique over a five-month period, the findings were also significant and beneficial (Biegel, et al., 2009). The study showed that 45 percent of the MBSR patients showed diagnostic change, decreasing in anxiety and obsessiveness, and increasing in self-esteem and sleep quality.

In an analysis of eleven school-based meditation trainings, taught by high school teachers and professionals, all studies yielded a positive change in student self-regulation, emotional coping and self-esteem (Wisner et al., 2010). In one of those studies, student blood pressure was lowered (Barnes et al., 2001), and in another student attendance improved, and

suspensions decreased (Barnes et al., 2003). In all articles and studies reviewed, students benefited from mindfulness education, regardless of the level of instructor training.

Conclusion

In an effort to promote a democratic learning environment, the teacher has the right and the duty to act in place of the parent meeting needs of the student and the class which goes beyond that of learning the specific subject matter assigned. Prior to learning, students must be emotionally and mentally available, yet adolescence presents social distractions and physiological changes which disturb emotional and mental well-being. As a tool to help prepare the minds of students, teachers can utilize the practice of mindfulness education.

Research has demonstrated that mindfulness training is effective in reducing stress, increasing productivity and fostering mental, emotional and physical health (Wisner et al. 2010). As adolescent students endure the emotional and physical changes in their bodies and minds, they may be a population that particularly stands to benefit from the practice of mindfulness (Black & Fernando, 2014). Further, students who typically experience the greatest obstacles to learning— those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, marginalized, or have learning challenges—have displayed marked improvement academically and socially after undergoing mindfulness training (Black & Fernando, 2014).

Major hindrances to adolescent student productivity, such as media use and sleep deprivation, can be addressed by the use of mindfulness education. Apps, websites, and relaxation music are forms of media use which students can use to learn mindfulness strategies to increase emotional well-being and academic productivity rather than detracting

from it (Mindful Schools, n.d.). Better, more sound sleep has resulted from regular, attentive use of meditation and mindfulness (Beach, 2014).

Teachers who use mindfulness techniques in the classroom report a higher degree of student academic involvement, and a lower degree of problematic student behavior (Black & Fernando, 2013). Varying forms of implementation of mindfulness education tends to yield similar, beneficial results (Mindful Schools, n.d.). Though there may be some resistance to the use of the practice within the school setting because of the association of religious practice, the overwhelming positive results experienced by students in documented research warrant the ongoing use of mindfulness education in the classroom.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The project (located in the appendix) was created as a possible solution for the debilitating problem of adolescent stress, and the resulting difficulties. The method employed for addressing the problem was the practice of mindfulness meditation and relaxation. The creation of a handbook for use by the secondary teacher unfolded as information from practitioners, websites, and scholarly articles revealed repeatedly that mindfulness effectively reduces stress and improves productivity.

The project was planned using models of mindfulness teaching found online, as well as information this researcher has gathered over five years of practicing mindfulness with high school students in the classroom. Students regularly provided feedback about what did and did not serve them, and that feedback was used to adjust the practice to fit the needs of each class. The project was designed to supply educators with specific materials and lesson plans, allowing them to gain experience and information which could lead to the development of a customized mindfulness program in their respective schools.

The first two sections of the project explain its purpose and meaning. Addressed in these sections are the needs mindfulness serves, and the definition and history of the practice. A summary of the emergence of mindfulness in the United States is provided, as is the role of Jon Kabat-Zinn, who is credited for the creation of Mindfulness-Based Stress-Reduction (MBSR). The etymology of the word “mindfulness” is covered, and the basic tenets of the meditative intentions are given so that the educator may have a basis for understanding the following lessons.

The next section of the project is dedicated to explaining the need for adolescents to cultivate the practice of mindfulness as a method of coping with stress. A summary of research conducted is provided, revealing that adolescents are particularly susceptible to high levels of stress, and that mindfulness meditation sessions have effectively served to reduce that stress. The research gives examples of mindfulness in schools, and the myriad ways in which stress reduction affects students. Among these effects are increases in self-efficacy and productivity, as well as healthier approaches in relationships. This section was included to prepare educators with sources of support for the effectiveness of presenting the lessons and, potentially, implementing an ongoing mindfulness program into their schools.

Directly before the section containing the lesson plans, there is an introduction to the standard approach of teaching mindfulness in the classroom. In this section, the construct which will be used in the handbook is explained. Best practices are touched upon, including the need for student confidentiality and student choice in sharing experiences associated with all parts of the mindfulness practice. A pre- and post- test is included here to be used by the teacher as a possible measure of effectiveness of the sessions.

The number of lesson plans selected was five, as it gives a one-week cushion to the typical secondary schedule of three six-week grading periods per semester. The unit can be completed in one of the grading periods, allowing room for an initial week of settling into the class or a final week of testing. After completing the given unit, the educator has a model to follow and can create other 5-week sessions using the format provided.

For the format of the handbook, I have broken down each lesson into five parts: intention, preparation, process, follow-up, and classroom discoveries. The intention of every session is different, although all sessions serve the larger purpose of reducing stress,

improving productivity and creating a more democratic and functional learning environment. The preparation component outlines steps the educator can take to become ready to lead each session, and each session builds on the last. The process piece includes topics for discussion and questions to ponder as students prepare to engage in mindfulness practice; the follow-up also includes discussion topics and questions, in addition to a journal prompt for each session. Lastly, classroom discoveries are included so that the educator may benefit from experiences of a class that has already participated in the outlined sessions.

Following each lesson are materials for that lesson. As part of the materials for the initial lesson, a definition of mindfulness and a link for a video explaining mindfulness is given. For that and each subsequent lesson, a title and link for relaxing music is given, as is a script for the guided meditation. The meditations move from light and neutral in subject matter to more personal. The first meditation is a body scan, which enables students to intentionally relax muscle groups and take notice of sensations of the physical body. Each meditation takes components from the previous one and adds another component to the practice. Visualization is employed in lesson two, with images provided by the educator. In lesson three, visualization is repeated, but the student is given creative freedom to develop chosen images. Lesson four introduces the student to consider a world of compassion for others using visualization; lesson five gives the student the opportunity to acknowledge and appreciate the self, incorporating components of all previous meditations. The mediation for lesson five, in giving students a direction of self-appreciation, is done after they become familiar with the practice so that they may be more open to the personal nature of the session.

Listed at the end of the handbook are sources for mindfulness websites and media applications (apps) that educators may use to expand the practice and implement it into their

own classrooms. The websites and apps contain activities, lessons, music, meditations and other resources that can be utilized in a quality program. For each of the apps specified, the cost is listed (though most are free), a brief description is given, and information about the employed media platforms is provided.

The project was organized to provide information and lessons in the order that would best support educators, even if they have no experience in the field of mindfulness. The intention is to make it simple for schools and educators to incorporate a practice that has the potential to transform the way students cope with stress and relate to themselves and others. The project is supported by the philosophy humanism, focusing on human freedom, dignity and potential.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Emergence of the Project

This project was created to facilitate the implementation of a mindfulness program in the secondary classroom. It was structured using models of mindfulness meditation teaching found in mindfulness websites such as *Mindful Schools* and *Mindful.org*, combined with information gained from student feedback over the past five years of my own experimentation with various constructs of the practice. The primary intention of the project was to give the adolescent student a significant tool for stress reduction in the school setting. Use of mindfulness meditation in the classroom, however, presented the more significant potential to provide students with an ongoing strategy for de-escalating anxiety and increasing productivity outside of the school setting on their own time. Discovering a practice that had the power to assist students in gaining control over their own minds and actions was exceptionally valuable to me as an educator, and was something that I felt responsible to share. The project was designed to further that purpose.

At the center of the project's development was the belief that schools have a responsibility to provide all skills and tools reasonably within their power to help the whole student achieve personal and academic goals. As the adolescent student struggles with hormonal fluctuations, brain chemistry changes, social changes, academic stress, and pressures from many directions, their minds can become overwhelmed and unavailable to

learn. The gap between what they are capable of doing and what they are actually doing is one that schools and educators can help close by reducing stress levels through mindfulness practice. It has been found to be a method validated by research as having far-reaching beneficial effects.

The decision to research mindfulness education practices, stemming from personal classroom experience, brought some surprising results. First, though I had been leading guided meditations with students and playing comforting music for years, I was unaware of how vast the mindfulness movement had become. The recent world-wide explosion of the use of the practice in schools was a welcome revelation, bringing with it resources to be used by any educator who desired a program in her own school. Second, it was discovered that almost every form of implementation yielded positive results in areas ranging from the most common—stress reduction—to less obvious effects, such as increased time between action and reaction. It seemed that every level of experience in the educator, combined with nearly every version of a mindfulness program, led to a desired and beneficial outcome. The third discovery, then, was that there were so many sites and so much information available, it became difficult to navigate and specify what would provide the best mindfulness program for the adolescent student. At this point, my emerging goal became providing secondary teachers with a program based on the available information, condensed, and then cross-referenced with my own findings from personal experiences.

Planning of the Project

The first author I found when seeking resources for the planning of the project was Jon Kabat-Zin, the man who is credited with bringing what we now have defined as “mindfulness” to the United States. His name led to videos, books, articles, and the incredible

resource, the *Center for Mindfulness*. The information associated with Kabat-Zinn, alone, was a mountain of research and anecdotal accounts of support for the potential mindfulness practice possessed. His philosophies, including the use of mindfulness as a personal process to be worked on as a lifelong practice, would provide a guiding force for the creation of the project, and for my own implementation of mindfulness in the classroom. Key to his teachings were that meditation cannot be judged or evaluated; therefore, materials and elements related to mindfulness can also not be judged or evaluated. It is important, then, that educators do not assign grades to any activities associated with the mindfulness practice, and that they do not lead students to think that there is a correct way to experience meditation. That can present some difficulty because school activities are accustomed to some form of evaluation or assessment. Giving students the choice to share or not, to become absorbed in a meditation or not, might be uncomfortable for some educators. Yet it is essential to mindfulness teachings. It makes sense that a practice designed to reduce the stress associated with constraints, evaluations, and judgments require that we do not observe strict constraints, we do not evaluate, and we do not judge. The freedom from evaluation, then, became a significant part of the project. It is repeated in some form in each lesson to remind the educator of its importance in the process.

Also helping to shape the content of the project were the many studies of adolescent students participating in mindfulness practice. In a number of the studies, adolescents improved in areas of stress-reduction, self-efficacy, self-compassion, and productivity (Beach, 2013; Black & Fernando, 2014; Malow & Austin, 2016; Thomas, 2013). The results of these studies were found to be similar to those of the Red Bluff High School students who participated in mindfulness meditation sessions. They shared verbally

and in writing that they were able to take a moment to breathe before facing stressful situations, that their stress levels in general were lower, that they were easier on themselves when they made mistakes, and that they felt more confident as both a student and a member of a social group. These repeated results led me to create a project that focused on these areas. The guided meditations created moved between the neutral to extremely personal, asking students to take note of physical sensations, to visualize peaceful surroundings, and finally, to find value and beauty within themselves. The last of these was said to be of significance, in the studies researched, in terms of allowing students to break through areas of emotional paralysis and come to a place of optimal societal contribution. Acceptance of the self was said to be the most difficult, and the most valuable, component of mindfulness. Because of its personal nature and difficulty, it was the last of the guided meditations provided in the handbook.

Another important contribution to the process of creating the handbook was the wide variety of websites outlining mindfulness programs in schools. I looked at many five week and eight week session models, arriving at the five week model for the best fit of the typical high school schedule. The lead-in activities, discussion topics, guided meditations, and activities provided on the websites gave me a valid starting point from which to make choices for the structure of the lessons in the handbook.

Finally, and of greatest value to me as an educator, were the verbal and written words of my own students. Their honest feedback about their experiences with meditation provided the strongest input for the creation of the handbook. They gave useful information that I did not find in any website, book, or article. They shared that they did not like specific time frames given during meditation. They preferred to not hear a number such as, “We will

spend the next five minutes continuing to visualize this ideal place.” The mention of time served as a reminder to them that they were at school, and the journey into meditation was lost. They also shared which kinds of music worked best for them, which sounds were disturbing, which words they preferred I would say (rest, breathe, relax, joy, love, beauty), and which words they wanted me to avoid (let go of *stress* and *anxiety*, do not judge your *mistakes*). Even in the context of telling them not to engage in these activities, the negative words interrupted their relaxation. Each of their contributions made their way into the creation of the project.

Conclusions and Reflections

What Mindfulness is and is Not

Possibly as valuable as gaining a better understanding of exactly what mindfulness is was the gaining of the understanding of what it is not. Research for the project made it clear that mindfulness is not a strategy or an activity one does to achieve a specific, short-term result. Though there are many examples of five week or eight-week sessions and studies, the goal is that it would lead to an ongoing and always evolving use of the practice. Mindfulness is not a lesson plan with well-defined parameters. It cannot be given a value. One cannot control how it is experienced by others or even the self. Mindfulness is also not something that only some people can teach, or only some people can learn. We all have the capacity to facilitate mindfulness learning, and we all have the ability to use the practice to achieve valuable, ongoing results.

The value of mindfulness comes in its ability to serve the human mind in creating room for the mental and emotional noise to become quiet and start to make sense. The notion that it is a practice, a constantly developing skill we can sharpen and grow like a muscle, is

integral to understanding its use. Mindfulness is a habit that can be developed; a way of approaching life and accepting what is as a means to understand our experiences with more patience and purpose. The power it has to allow people to have a richer and productive life experience cannot be underestimated. It is a gift we can give our students and ourselves.

Challenges and Benefits of Facilitating Mindfulness Practice

Considering all the research, information and experience that led to the creation of the project, one of the conclusions that must be addressed is that challenges exist in every mindfulness session. There will be students who are frustrated with the practice because they have a difficult time meditating and letting go of the chatter in their heads. Some students may experience overwhelming emotions and need further support through referral to a counselor or nurse. Some students experience triggers through words or phrases, or even times of the year, and intentionally paying attention to these emotions rather than pushing them down can be painful. Engaging in a practice that works with mental and emotional health carries with it risks and rewards that are unlike other areas of the traditional educational school experience. Finding a way to address each issue as it comes is a large task for the educator, and it requires constant research and restructuring.

The student benefits that reveal themselves as a result of investing in the practice, however, serve as reminders that the endeavor is worthwhile. Teaching mindfulness has the unique potential to give students a coping mechanism that can benefit them in a variety of domains. It can change their perceptions and experiences, causing them to react less severely in the face of adversity. It can give them a tool to use in their lives outside of school. It can affect their self-esteem and self-efficacy. They may see improvements in grades, sleep, and

relationships. These positive effects are documented repeatedly in scholarly research (Beigel et al, 2009; Davis, 2015; Docksai, 2013; Stanford Medical News Center, 2015).

Firsthand experience, though, offers the most convincing proof that mindfulness education provides a true solution for some of the most daunting issues facing the adolescent student. In my experience implementing mindfulness into the classroom, feedback from students was key to the continuing effort to retain and improve the program. Students shared that, on days we had a meditation session, they felt strong and able to face the day. They said that when they received negative messages on social media or confrontational words from others in person, they felt more able to observe it, deal with it, and continue with their regular activities. They used the meditative notion that what is happening at the present moment is a set of actions and feelings to be observed objectively. Students also expressed that they used online guided meditations and/or relaxing music on their own before studying or before an important game to reduce stress and focus on the task ahead of them. Those having difficulty with friendships or family relationships shared that they found themselves responding to others with more love and compassion, and taking less personally things that would have previously been quite hurtful. One student even shared that she stopped taking depression medication as a result of mindfulness training. She said every time she felt depression emerging within her; she would take a few moments to put on deep, resounding music and meditate. That would pull her out of the sadness and anxiety enough to avoid the medication. Not all students were willing to share the effects and results of taking part in mindfulness exercises, but all students seemed to anticipate meditation each week.

Recommendations for Researchers

Teacher Efficacy

One area of research in mindfulness education that was extremely limited was that of teacher efficacy in implementation. Studies conducted using experts in the field of mindfulness and psychology yielded positive results in subjects, as did studies conducted using teachers with no experience who were given a script to follow. While the beneficial results of both teacher populations served to validate the implementation of mindfulness programs regardless of teacher experience, it left a gap in the proof that experience did not have any effect whatsoever. The question remained: Are there levels of experience that lead to significantly better results in mindfulness education outcomes?

No study could be found comparing an expert mindfulness teacher with a novice using the same, or a similar, population of students. Because the project hinged on the notion that all teachers at all levels could potentially successfully teach mindfulness, it would have been useful to have more concrete data on that.

Populations Studied

Another area of research to pursue would be the effects of mindfulness on general education high school students in public school settings. There were many studies on adolescents with mental health concerns and students in outpatient hospital settings. There are somewhat fewer studies on adolescents who were marginalized because of socioeconomic status, minority status, and high-risk demographics. Studies involving whole populations of adolescent students enrolled in general education classes were not easily found and, when they were, they tended to be based on students between the ages of 11 and 13. While research often concluded that high risk adolescents had the most to gain with the

use of mindfulness education, it would be valuable to find research on the degree of benefit to all adolescent students.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Address Student, Parent and Administrative Concerns

Upon implementation of mindfulness training in the classroom, it is recommended that the teacher spend ample time answering questions and explaining the intention of the practice. Students may wonder why they are being asked to relax and meditate in math class or English. Parents may misperceive the practice as having a religious connotation. Administration may wonder why mindfulness should take up time in the curriculum. In the context of my practice, the subject was dance, which lent itself nicely to an activity resembling yoga. The students were open to the idea after some explanation, the school and community were supportive, and when parents had questions, I tried to make sure I was available to answer them. Even though it may have been easier to implement a mindfulness program into a performing arts setting, research shows that teachers of all disciplines have been able to fit mindfulness into the context of their discipline. Setting the foundation for successful implementation by being prepared to spend the necessary energy explaining and fielding questions will help provide a smooth transition into a rich mindfulness program.

Accept Limitations

A mindfulness program, and the results of regular practice, are difficult to measure. That can be problematic for teachers as so much of what we do today in education revolves around measurable data. We are instructed to be certain that lessons taught are

data-driven, and that we should see results in a specific time frame to validate the usefulness of a particular program or teaching style. Benefits of mindfulness happen differently with different students, and can only be documented if students choose to share.

The limitations of documentation and measurability do not have to define the usefulness of the program. It is recommended that the practitioner look to research that has been conducted for initial validation, and that student progress, even incremental growth, be monitored as a reminder that positive results are taking place. It is further recommended that the educator implementing the mindfulness program log noticeable changes in classroom behavior, and administer the pre-and post-test so that some supporting data begins to accumulate. Gathering information from student self-reports, teacher reports and anecdotal information provides valuable qualitative data. Though it is challenging to quantify benefits, it is possible to gather quantitative data after a period of implementation. Changes may be seen in grades, attendance and other measurable evidence.

Allow Students to Guide the Program

The most important components of implementation of the mindfulness program in my experience came from the students. They expressed great interest in the workings of their own minds, and were excited to have the opportunity to help make decisions in a program that was all about their brains, their visions, and their health. Their ideas were counter to what I would have thought in some instances, and it was difficult to give up control when they wanted to go in an unexpected direction, but every time decisions were handed over to them, the program became stronger. When they believed that they had shaped the structure of the sessions, they responded more openly to them. Because mindfulness and meditation must be an internal choice for participants, it is not useful to impose external ideas on them. It is

recommended that students are asked their opinions and suggestions before and after every session, and that there are opportunities for written responses for those who would like to share, but not in front of the class. Adolescent students are in a unique time of life and they value the opportunity to be in charge of decisions affecting them. Educators are in the profession of working with young people because we value them. Mindfulness education as a program continually shaped by the students demonstrates that value, and teaches our youth that their voices matter while it provides them with a valuable coping strategy to employ throughout their lives.

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APPENDIX

THE PROJECT

Project Rationale

This project is designed to be an accessible way to implement mindfulness education in the secondary classroom. The areas potentially addressed by the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom are many, but primary among them are needs for:

- Stress reduction
- Increased productivity
- Academic focus
- A more democratic society

The secondary teacher faces tremendous obstacles in teaching subject matter due to the obstacles students face before entering the classroom. The preparedness of the mind to learn must be addressed before teaching and learning can even occur, much less be optimal (Romeo, 2013). Mindfulness gives students a tool to cope with stress and anxiety, which leads to greater academic focus, self-control, and productivity (Biegel, et al, 2009). These effects of mindfulness training allow students to develop more healthy relationships in and out of the classroom. Healthier relationships, less hostility, and more reasonable reactions to others all contribute to a more democratic society.

Defining Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been defined as “a mental state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting one’s feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations” (Oxford dictionary, 2016). The practice incorporates

breathing techniques, relaxation strategies and guided meditation exercises to help quiet the mind and create such a mental state. The concept of mindfulness as a method of reducing stress is not new, but has newly become more widespread as a technique used in correctional facilities, medical facilities, the workplace, and schools as a successful method for reducing stress and increasing productivity (Davis, 2015).

The emergence of mindfulness as a practice in the United States is attributed to Jon Kabat-Zinn, professor emeritus of medicine, and creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (Center for Mindfulness, n.d.). In 1979, Kabat-Zinn adapted ancient Buddhist teachings of mindfulness concepts into the practice of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). The name, “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction,” however, replaced the original name of “The Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program” in order to remove connections between Buddhism and mindfulness (Shea, 2016). Giving it a more scientific name enabled a greater public acceptance and extensive use of the strategy.

The English word “mindfulness” is thought to be translated from the Pali term “sati,” or the Sanskrit term, “smṛti” which means to “remember” or “bear in mind” (Shea, 2016). The individual, when practicing mindfulness, is said to be “remembering” that any thoughts or feelings she experiences are connected to the whole world of thoughts and feelings, free from labels as positive or negative. The *Center for Mindfulness* website explains that awareness happens when one intentionally pays attention to the present moment, non-judgmentally (2015). Florence Meleo-Myer, Director of the *Train-the-Trainer Program* at the Institute for Mindfulness-Based Professional Education explains on the website’s introductory video that the three qualities of mindfulness are “attention,” “intention,” and

“attitude (2015). A person practicing the act of mindfulness, then, is paying attention to the thoughts and feelings of the mind and body, setting an intention to focus and direct the mind, and having an open attitude which is willing to come to a state of meditation.

Rationale for Focusing on the Adolescent Population

Stress as Uniquely Affecting the Adolescent

The Department of Education (2008) reports that anxiety disorders, phobias, social anxiety and separation anxiety have become more prevalent among school-age children. It is estimated that rates of stress and depression in young people are as much as eight times higher than they were fifty years ago (Monroe, 2017). Further, according to a survey of the American Psychological Association (2014), stress is particularly problematic for adolescents. The survey reported that 30 percent of teens claimed that they felt sad or depressed because of stress, 31 percent felt overwhelmed by it, and 23 percent said that they had skipped meals because of it. The physiological and emotional responses to stress can include changes in body temperature, changes in breathing, headaches, and difficulty in taking in information (Malow and Austin, 2016).

There are social, physiological and psychological circumstances that create an environment for the adolescent to experience stress differently from other age groups. Socially, adolescents are learning to navigate relationships and find their roles in the new community structures surrounding them. Social pressures tend to keep them in a dependent position, and this dependency on others for support and validation causes them to feel a loss of control over their own happiness. Some external forces over which they feel a lack of control are school environment, academic and extracurricular expectations from parents and

teachers, relationship expectations, pressure to consume drugs and alcohol, cyber pressures and bullying, and pressure to uphold a specific physical appearance (Sutter Health Palo Alto Medical Foundation, 2015).

These stresses can cause a sense of panic and paralysis in the adolescent student. They can become physically ill, unable to think clearly, depressed and even suicidal, according to Mary Alvord, clinical psychologist in Maryland and public education coordinator for the American Psychological Association (Neighmond, 2013). Even a student with every advantage who is receiving support from parents and teachers may be reduced to this kind of paralyzing stress during adolescence. For marginalized adolescents who suffer from mental or physical health disorders and/or socioeconomic disadvantages, the typical pressures characteristic of the age group, and the resulting negative effects, are even greater (Biegel et al, 2009).

Hindrances Specific to Adolescent Productivity

Greatly affecting today's adolescent productivity is the use of technology and the, sometimes directly connected, lack of sleep (Stanford Medicine News Center, 2015). The American Association of Pediatrics (AAP) has expressed concern over the growing number of hours per day children and adolescents spend with media, and one significant concern revolves around the impeding of productivity in our youth (American Association of Pediatrics, 2016). The AAP further reports that the constant multi-tasking has harmful potential. Students are fielding text messages during homework time, causing them to increase the amount of time it takes for them to do homework. Even after they have gone to bed for the night, 60 % of adolescents are reported to receive text messages, exacerbating the already common adolescent problem of sleep deprivation and levels of tiredness at school

(American Association of Pediatrics, 2016). It is reported that almost all teenagers in the United States (88%) use text messaging. In the first three months of 2011, adolescents 13 through 17 years of age sent an average of 3,364 texts per month (American Association of Pediatrics, 2016.; Lenhart, 2012). The use of mobile phones is not only problematic because of the time it takes and the hindering of efficiency, however; it can also be a safety and health issue when adolescents text or view content while driving.

Cell phone usage, combined with other media platforms, offers a variety of potential risks to young users. In a recent clinical report on the impact of social media on children, adolescents and families, it was found that children and adolescents are expressing online the behaviors seen offline, such as bullying and sexual experimentation, with more frequency (O’Keeffe et al, 2011). Because the adolescent is dependent upon others for social approval, negative widespread messages about a person or sexual images spread among a circle of friends can create mental health issues for students, preventing them from functioning or having the will to attend school (O’Keeffe et al, 2011). There is even a phenomenon referred to as “Facebook depression,” which is defined as depression that develops when pre-teens or teens spend exhaustive amounts of time on Facebook and then begin to exhibit classic symptoms of depression (O’Keeffe, et al, 2011).

When these habits of media use take place at night and prevent adequate sleep, the adolescent may find that both academic productivity and health suffer. According to the National Sleep Foundation’s most recent survey of teen sleep (2006), more than 87 percent of high school students in America get far less than the recommended eight to 10 hours of sleep per night, and that amount of time is decreasing. The potential consequences for sleep deprivation in the adolescent include drowsiness-related driving accidents, poor grades, an

inability to concentrate, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts and attempts (Stanford Medicine News Center, 2015). While it has been documented that sleep deprivation plagues many populations in the United States, Nanci Yuan, director of the Stanford Children's Health Sleep Center, finds it is most acute among adolescents (Stanford Medicine News Center, 2015). William Dement, MD, PhD, and founder of the Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic expresses that high school is the biggest area of risk and problem in terms of sleep deprivation. He further comments that this epidemic is the first of its kind in the world, and it results in no adolescent student performing optimally. He says the arenas detrimentally affected include the sports field, the classroom, roadways, and physical and emotional well-being (Stanford Medicine News Center, 2015).

Mindfulness Practice as a Path to Decrease Adolescent Stress and Increase Productivity

Though relaxation techniques and meditation in schools have been used by every age group as an effective way of decreasing stress and increasing productivity, a growing body of evidence suggests that mindfulness practice could be specifically beneficial to adolescents (Beach, 2014; Malow & Austin, 2016). As teens endure the hardships of hormonal fluctuations, peer relationships and academic stress, they naturally become "fascinated about how their brains work" (Beach, 2014, p. 2). Through mindfulness instruction, teens can be taught that they are, in effect, receiving "the owner's manual for their brain" (p.2). The chatter going on inside the minds of teens is often worry and anxiety, and as they consciously become aware of their thoughts, they can acknowledge that anxiety without getting bogged down in the negative thoughts it creates. Training students to listen to their thoughts, and

become aware, rather than stifling them or refusing to acknowledge them, can be the first step in calming their systems and handling stress. This can lead to many other benefits such as improving health, reducing blood pressure, and improving sleep (Malow & Austin, 2016).

Research consistently finds that adolescent students, even those who face significant challenges and those who do not typically comply with authority figures, respond well to mindfulness training. It is thought that it may be the element of mindfulness which allows a student to have control over his own mind (Beach, 2014) that makes him open to following the training. To make the training even more attractive to the adolescent, meditation and mindfulness apps have been developed. Beach (2014) writes about the usefulness of the *Insight Timer* when working with students. The map graphic on the *Insight Timer* allows students to see all the locations worldwide where people are meditating. It has over 4,000 guided meditations students can use on their own time, students can set timers for the length of time they would like to meditate and hear chimes at the end of the meditation, and they can see how many others were meditating at the same time they were (Mindful, n.d.). *Aura* is another app that can be used. It gives personalized three-minute daily meditations based on questions asked. The *Calm* app allows a choice of topic and duration of guided meditation and provides sounds such as rain, fire or white noise (Mindful, n.d.). By using media to spark student interest in the concept of mindfulness, students may, ironically, be finding a method of controlling the habit of media use for less healthy purposes; thereby diminishing one of the greatest obstacles to their own productivity.

Communicating with Parents, Administration And School Personnel

Key to the implementation of a successful mindfulness program in a school setting is clear and open communication with parents, administration, and all involved personnel. As a first step to preparing for implementation, it is suggested a meeting is set up with administration and other personnel, such as special education teachers and counselors, who may be able to share insight, and who should be informed. It is appropriate to give them a written definition of mindfulness and its purpose, an outline of what you plan to do in your classroom, and an explanation of how you intend to go about implementation. You may want to cite some of the research available in this handbook, and you may want to find schools in your area or surrounding areas that have successfully engaged in mindfulness practice. I have discovered that most educators have heard of the concept and are open to its usefulness in the classroom. Having the support of your administration and colleagues will help validate your choice to make mindfulness a part of your program.

As you prepare to teach mindfulness practice, be aware that parents may express concern over their son or daughter engaging in an activity which is seemingly unrelated to school curriculum, and which may even seem to have religious implications. In an effort to avoid misunderstandings, it is important to inform parents about mindfulness practice, what it entails, and what it hopes to provide for students, prior to discussion with students. While sending a letter home is one method to achieve this communication, I have found that it is helpful to take the initiative to invite parents to the school so that a two-way communication may ensue. In this way, parents can be assured that mindfulness is not a religion, nor will it infringe on their student's religious rights. I let parents know that mindfulness and meditation have been a part of every religion, and they are a part of the secular world as well. The

practice has consistent, beneficial results in stress reduction, and it allows students a way to cope with issues specific to their age group. Again, you may want to cite research provided in this handbook. You also may want to invite administration and other school personnel to the meeting for additional support and reassurance for parents. In some schools, it has been suggested that a permission slip be signed by all parents before implementation. I have found that many students do not return slips, and a more effective approach has been to provide parents and students with the option to be excused from mindfulness practice if they have a signed parent note. At this point, no student has delivered a signed note that their parent does not want them to participate.

Introduction to Mindfulness Training

Mindfulness, as a practice in the classroom, typically involves a regular time frame daily or weekly in which students participate in a sustained relaxation exercise. There are many implementation strategies a leader could take to achieve similar results. Studies range from school-wide 5-week courses of teacher-led sessions by teachers with one hour of training (Black & Fernando, 2014), to year-long once-weekly programs conducted by a trained teacher who is the sole provider of mindfulness sessions at a given school (Schwartz, 2014). In both of those cases, as well as in many other studies using different constructs of the practice, the results are similarly positive. Students reported a decrease in stress levels, and an increase in focus and self-efficacy.

For this project, we will be following the once-per-week model. Five lessons are provided, followed by suggestions given for molding the practice to fit specific class and teacher needs. The sessions are designed to be about 15 minutes per week, not including

activities leading into or out of relaxation time. In the construct provided, lights are turned down and music is played. Students are given the opportunity to find a comfortable position and the teacher leads them in a guided meditation. At the conclusion of the guided meditation, there is time for students to relax quietly before mentally coming back to the room. Scripts for the guided meditations, sites for music choices, discussion topics and journal prompts related to the meditations are provided. In order to assure that students feel free to journal honestly, journals may be kept in a locked cabinet and only read by the teacher when students desire or give permission.

The five-week unit is designed to provide different styles of meditations in a step-by-step approach so that the classroom teacher may assess what works best for the population of students served. Teachers may use this information and model to continue to implement a mindfulness program into the classroom as a regular part of weekly practice. After each session, student feedback can be logged and used to construct the best possible model of mindfulness practice for the class. A pre- and post- questionnaire form is provided should the classroom teacher wish to evaluate the five-week unit and look for classroom improvements to justify ongoing use of the program. It is suggested that names of students for the pre- and post- questionnaire not be used, and that students respond by choice, so that the most honest classroom feedback results. Instead of a name, a number can be employed to measure results. In the best practices of mindfulness programs, meditation experiences are private and expressions of those experiences are shared only by choice (Mindful Schools, n.d.). Materials and exercises related to mindfulness practice are, then, also preferably carried out anonymously.

Mindfulness Questionnaire

Number _____

Please rate the following on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the highest:

1. How would you rate your level of stress?

1 2 3 4 5

2. How would you rate your academic productivity? (Do you complete homework efficiently, on time, methodically, with minimal stress?)

1 2 3 4 5

3. How satisfied are you with the amount of sleep you get each night?

1 2 3 4 5

4. How confident do you feel that you can de-escalate (bring yourself down) when you are feeling stress and anxiety?

1 2 3 4 5

5. How would you rate your level of happiness and satisfaction with yourself?

1 2 3 4 5

Mindfulness Practice Lesson 1

Introduction to the Practice

Intention: To introduce students to the concept of mindfulness, and to explore ways it can potentially benefit them.

Preparation:

- Be prepared to define mindfulness as a concept of intentionally thinking about the present moment. Listen to video explaining the concept of mindfulness.
- Listen to a variety of music to create an atmosphere of relaxation and focus; select music to be played during the lesson, or use the selection provided.
- Rehearse the guided meditation, knowing it is appropriate to add or change the rehearsed meditation during the class practice if desired.
- Experiment with different kinds of lighting available in the classroom, aiming for a dim, but not completely dark atmosphere.
- Review vocabulary to be used during both the explanation of the practice and the practice itself. Words such as “center, breath, breathe, calm, relax, imagine, allow” are helpful.

Process:

- If possible, have students sit in a circle and discuss what they already know about the words “mindfulness,” “meditation,” and “relaxation.” Allow them to discuss the reasons they might have heard that people have engaged in these kinds of practices across time and culture.
- Explain that you are going to be doing a relaxation activity with them, stressing that they will have an opportunity to relax, but will have nothing expected from them

other than quietness. They may choose to share their opinion of the process afterward, but the degree to which they share will be their choice.

- Tell students to find a comfortable place to be, and a comfortable position to sit or lie down (much depends upon the environment available in the classroom).
- Turn on the selected music and turn down the lighting.
- Always begin with telling students to take a deep breath and fill up their lungs completely before exhaling. After a few breaths, lead them in the guided meditation.
- At the end of the meditation (5 to 10 minutes), allow them a few moments of silence as the lights come slowly up and the music is turned down. Students may be told, for example: “The next few moments belong to you. When the lights begin to come up and the music is turned down, that will be your indication that it is time for you to come to a seated position (put hands on lap, whatever indication the teacher/class selects). When I see that you are all ready, I will sound the chime” (again, indicator is up to teacher and/or class).

Follow up:

- Ask students to respond to the process if they choose. Ask them to discuss what they liked and did not like, reminding them that there is no judgement and they do not have to share.
- Bring their attention to the body and ask them what tensions or relaxation of muscles they noticed.
- Journal prompt: Speculate about ways this kind of practice could potentially benefit you. How might you be able to use it in other areas of your life?

Classroom Discoveries:

- Students expressed that they appreciated the music's soothing sounds, and felt that it helped lead them to a deep state of relaxation.
- Students shared that they did not like any negative words said such as "let go of any stress or anxiety," but preferred instead "relax your body and think about your breathing." The negative words reminded them of anxiety, and they did not like to be told to not feel stress if, in fact, they were feeling it. (An important tenet of mindfulness is that one should cope with unpleasant feelings and acknowledge them.)
- Students asked that no specific time frame be given at the end of the guided meditation. For instance, they did not want to hear the words "The next five minutes belong to you" or "in five minutes, I will turn the lights up and the music down." It did end up being about five minutes, but they wanted to feel as though it were timeless.

Lesson 1 Materials

1. **Mindfulness Definition:**

"A mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations" (Oxford dictionary, 2016).

2. **Video Explaining Mindfulness:**

Jon Kabat-Zinn Video "What is Mindfulness?" (2013)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+HmEo6R14Wvs>

3. **Introductory Music:**

"8 Hours Soothing Music, Stress Relief, Go to Sleep Background Music"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hi1pBMFP9Y>

4. **Guided Meditation:**

Body Scan

Cleansing Breaths

Take a deep breath slowly in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you breathe, think about the sensation of the breath flowing through the nose and into the lungs, and then back out through the mouth. Continue to breathe deeply, creating an even flow of breath.

Count to nine in your mind as you breathe in, and again as you breathe out. Take 10 breaths in this way, bringing yourself to a deeper relaxation with every breath.

Awareness of the Body

- Notice the places where your body is making contact with the floor (or desk). Feel the pressure of those places and notice how they feel.
- Think about any sensations you may be feeling such as the vibration from the music, the air flowing on your skin, and any other physical feelings that you might be experiencing at this moment.
- Become aware of the core of yourself where the oxygen flows deeply into your lungs. Notice the rise and fall of your chest and shoulders. Let the shoulders relax completely.
- Bring your attention to your stomach area and if it is in any way tense, allow that area to soften and rest.
- Notice your arms; feel a warmth and comfort flow from your shoulders all the way to your hands and be aware of any sensations in that area.
- Notice your lower back and hips. Be aware of any tension that resides there and allow it to melt away.
- Moving down the upper legs, into the knees, continue to let those muscle groups and joints relax completely, being aware of your conscious choice to rest and completely let go.
- Coming back up through the body, check to make sure that all parts of the body are in a state of rest and relaxation and finally, relax the head. Imagine your jaw becoming

slack, your neck resting fully and that relaxation flowing over the face and up to the top of the head.

Closure

Breathe deeply in and out, coming back to the awareness of the breath. As you lie comfortably in this place of complete peace and relaxation, the next moments belong to you. I will turn down the music and turn up the lights gradually as an indication that it is time for us to come back to the room.

Mindfulness Practice Lesson 2

Guided Visualization—Environment Given

Intention: To guide students in seeing images they may use to enter a state of relaxation.

Preparation:

- Select music for the meditation using feedback from the last session to guide your choice. Students may request the same music. If they had a positive first experience, the familiarity of the same music can provide comfort, or you may want to use the music suggestion provided.
- Rehearse the guided meditation for visualization.
- Prepare a couple of questions to lead students into their second lesson. Example:
“What have you noticed since the time we last did our mindfulness practice? Did you notice any differences on the day of the lesson, or the days since, in terms of your stress levels or your reactions to people and events?”
- Prepare to share some examples of things you, as the teacher, may have noticed about the students and their interactions/productivity.

Process:

- Have students sit in a circle and discuss the things they have noticed related to the first mindfulness practice. Share teacher findings as well. They may share both beneficial and stressful thoughts, reactions and feelings as the stillness sometimes causes feelings to surface. Encourage students to notice those feelings and not to think of them as bad, but just as reminders that we go through a range of feelings and can manage them as we choose.

- Explain that you are going to be doing another relaxation activity with them, reminding them that they will have an opportunity to relax, but will have nothing expected from them other than quietness. They may choose to share their opinion of the process afterward, but the degree to which they share will be their choice. Let students know the exercise will be like the last, but this time it will incorporate more visual images.
- Tell students to find a comfortable place to be, and a comfortable position to sit or lie down.
- Turn on the selected music and turn down the lighting.
- Tell students to take a deep breath and fill up their lungs completely before exhaling. After a few breaths, begin the guided meditation.
- At the end of the meditation (5 to 10 minutes), allow them a few moments of silence as the lights come slowly up and the music is turned down. Tell them that when they are all ready, you will use your chosen indication to let them know to come back to the room.

Follow Up:

- Have students come back to the circle and ask those who are willing to share experiences on the mountain. Remind them that it is okay if they did not see images clearly this time and that, like all things we learn, we get more adept with practice and time. Be careful to avoid using value terms such as “good” or “negative.”
- Have students speculate about how visualization can be an effective tool in coming to a place of relaxation.

- Journal Prompt: Did you find it easier to come to a place of relaxation when you were given images to think about? How did it work for you as compared to the first exercise in which we did only a body scan of the physical?

Classroom Discoveries:

- Students expressed that they were able to visualize a mountain and that they wanted extra time at the end of this meditation to be on the mountain quietly.
- Some students said they were not able to visualize, or that they were unable to stop their minds from thinking about stressful situations. In this case, remind them not to judge themselves, but to understand that the stress they feel is a normal part of life. We all feel stress and it can help us to get things done or become aware of situations to avoid, but by being aware of our own stress levels and working toward controlling our breathing and focus, we will become stronger in our practice.

Lesson 2 Materials

1. Music:

You may want to keep the music from the first session for continuity if the students responded well to it. Another possible music choice is this one with strong vibrations that go along with the powerful feeling of being on a mountain:

Activate Your Higher Mind for Success Mind/Body Integration #GV128

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pmxO9fHBHk>

2. Guided Meditation:

Visualization—Environment Given

Cleansing Breaths

- Take a deep breath slowly in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you breathe, think about the sensation of the breath flowing through the nose and into the lungs, and then back out through the mouth. Continue to breathe deeply, creating an even flow of breath. Count to nine in your mind as you breathe in, and again as you breathe out. Take 10 breaths in this way, bringing yourself to a deeper relaxation with every breath.

Awareness of the Body

- Notice the places where your body is making contact with the floor (or desk). Feel the pressure of those places and notice how they feel.

- Think about any sensations you may be feeling such as the vibration from the music, the air flowing on your skin, and any other physical feelings that you might be experiencing at this moment.
- Starting at the top of your head, allow your body to relax completely. Let your muscles rest, and allow the breath to become your focus.
- Make your way down your face, into the front of the neck, the back of the neck, and down every vertebrae of the spine, consciously relaxing muscles that surround them.
- Continue to move all the way from your head to your toes. If you feel areas that are tense, allow those areas to soften and release.
- Notice the physical sensations you are feeling. The warmth or coolness, the sounds, the feeling of air entering your lungs.

Visualization

- Bring into your mind a picture of the most beautiful mountain you can imagine. Allow it to be tall and strong, reaching into the sky. As you breathe in, allow that mountain to come into greater focus.
- Let your imagination have full reign and go deeper into the details of your lovely mountain. Consider the majesty of nature, and the beauty of the colors of the trees growing on it, the creatures living on it, and the birds and sky above it.
- Now imagine that you are on top of this mountain, at the highest point, looking down at the vast valleys below. You feel as though you are a part of the mountain and sky. Visualize the wind blowing in the trees surrounding you and the birds calling to you as they fly by. Notice the wonder of all of nature and take in all of the details. Bring your awareness to the colors, the sounds, and the wind on your skin.

- While here, think about your breathing; and let your body and mind rest.
- As you breathe, allow every breath to bring you closer to seeing the vivid images of your place on top of the mountain. Let your senses be filled with all your surroundings, and allow yourself to just be.

Closure

- Breathe deeply in and out, existing on the mountain and enjoying the sights, textures, and sounds as you breathe. With each breath, bring yourself deeper into a relaxed state, and more aware of the environment created in your amazing mind. After you have some space of your own to meditate on the mountain, I will turn down the music and turn up the lights gradually as an indication that it is time for us to come back to the room.

Mindfulness Practice Lesson 3

Guided Visualization—Environment Student-Created

Intention: To guide students in creating images so that they may use their own creative process to enter a state of relaxation.

Preparation:

- Select music for the meditation using feedback from the last session to guide your choice. Students may request the same music. If they found the music from one of the previous sessions effective, you may want to use that, or you may use the one provided with materials for this lesson.
- Rehearse the guided meditation for the student-created visualization.
- Prepare a couple of questions to lead students into their second lesson. Example: “Now that we have had two mindfulness sessions, what have you noticed regarding your own stress levels and reactions? Have you attempted engage in relaxation practice on your own time? If so, how did that work for you?”
- Prepare to share an example or two of things you, as the teacher, may have noticed about the students and their interactions/productivity.

Process:

- Have students sit in a circle and discuss the things they have noticed related to their experiences with the first two mindfulness sessions. Reassure students they may share honestly, understanding that all experiences in this process are helpful to us in allowing us to learn and grow. Share teacher findings as well. Again, encourage students to notice feelings, both stressful and peaceful, and not to think of them as bad or good. We just want to be aware of them, and acknowledge them.

- Explain that you are going to be doing a third relaxation activity with them, reminding them once again that they will have an opportunity to relax, but will have nothing expected from them other than quietness. They may choose to share their opinion of the process afterward, but the degree to which they share will be their choice. Let students know the exercise will continue to build from the last, but this time, they will have a chance to create their own imagined surroundings.
- Tell students to find a comfortable place to be, and a comfortable position to sit or lie down.
- Turn on the selected music and turn down the lighting.
- Tell students to take a deep breath and fill up their lungs completely before exhaling. After a few breaths, begin the guided meditation.
- At the end of the meditation (5 to 10 minutes), allow them a few moments of silence as the lights come slowly up and the music is turned down. By now, they will recognize the class signal that it is time for them to come back to the room.

Follow Up:

- Ask students if they prefer to choose their visual images for their relaxation session, or if they find it more useful to have images provided for them. Have those who choose to share explain to the best of their ability what works and what does not so that you may use this information for future meditations.
- As a possible extension activity, students can draw or paint pictures of either the mountain visualization or their created visualization.

- Journal Prompt: Describe the experience of your third meditation for our sessions together. What kind of place did you create? If your thoughts got in the way, describe your ideal place that you would like to visualize.

Lesson 3 Materials

1. Music:

You may want to use music from a previous session, or the following, which is has water sounds and piano music:

“3 Hours Relaxing Music with Water Sounds Meditation”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luRkeDCoxZA>

2. Guided Meditation:

Cleansing Breaths

- Take a deep breath slowly in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you breathe, think about the sensation of the breath flowing through the nose and into the lungs, and then back out through the mouth. Imagine the breath going deeply into the belly, into the center of the body. Allow your breath to expand your rib cage and notice the rise and fall of your chest and torso. Continue to breathe deeply, creating an even flow of breath. Count to nine, or a number of your choosing, in your mind as you breathe in, and again as you breathe out. Take 10 breaths in this way, bringing yourself to a deeper relaxation with every breath.

Awareness of the Body

- Notice the way your body feels at this moment, taking into account the places you are making contact with objects, such as the floor.
- Take a moment to fully account for all the physical sensations you are feeling at this moment, and adjust your body if necessary to come to your most desired place of comfort.

- Think about any sensations you may be feelings such as the vibration from the music, the air flowing on your skin, and any other physical feelings that you might be experiencing.
- Starting in the center of your body, imagine a light glowing and expanding. With every breath, the light expands outward like water, bringing you deep peace and relaxation.
- Imagine the light reaching toward your shoulders and hips, flowing over you.
- As the light grows and makes its way down your arms and legs, you can feel the muscles releasing and fully resting.
- Finally, allow the light to touch your face, hands and feet until it has covered the top of the head, fingers and toes. Find yourself to relaxing even further as you imagine yourself in this loving light, safely held and ready to create a beautiful space of your own.

Visualization

- Now, imagine that you are in this beautiful place of your own creation. It may be outdoors or indoors, it may be a relaxing beach or mountaintop, or it may be a secluded cottage. Take a moment to think about this place and allow it to appear in your mind.
- Draw your attention to colors, lights and shapes around you.
- What do you see? What do you hear? How do you feel?
- In this place, you may be still, you may explore, you may follow a path. It is your design.

- Let your imagination have full reign and go deeper into the details of your lovely surroundings. Imagine the textures, sights and sounds. Is there wind on your skin? What objects or elements of nature are surrounding you? While here, let your body and mind rest.
- As you breathe, allow every breath to bring you closer to seeing the vivid images of your ideal place, and let yourself just be.
- In this quiet, beautiful place you are creating, the next moments belong to you.

Closure

- Breathe deeply in and out, mindful of your surroundings—the sights, textures, and sounds around you—as you breathe. With each breath, bring yourself deeper into a relaxed state, and more aware of the environment you have created. Feeling peaceful, relaxed and focused, allow yourself to remain in this beautiful space. (This time, there is no need to say “I will turn down the music and turn up the lights gradually as an indication that it is time for us to come back to the room”. The act of doing so will be the adapted signal.)

Mindfulness Practice Lesson 4

Kindness and Compassion for the World Around Us

Intention: To introduce students to the benefits of facing people and issues in our daily life with an attitude of compassion and kindness; to teach the concept of observance rather than judgement.

Preparation:

- Select music for the meditation using feedback from the last session to guide your choice. You may want to incorporate ideas that students give, such as the request for the sound of water or the presence of deep vibrations, or you may use the music provided with materials for this lesson.
- Rehearse the guided meditation for kindness and compassion.
- Prepare a couple of questions to lead students into their second lesson. Example:
“Have you ever thought what would happen if we were to face every person and every situation with kindness and compassion? Do you think most people are facing their own struggles and that might explain why they are sometimes cranky with us? Do we always have a choice of how to respond to others or is it true that they can *make us angry or make us sad?*”

Process:

- Have students sit in a circle and discuss what they have noticed about the results of the last three weeks of mindfulness sessions. Ask them to speculate about how they think meditation and mindfulness might be helpful in casing people to treat one another with more understanding. Share teacher findings and predictions as well. Encourage students to think about what has worked to lead them to the best

- experiences of mindfulness meditation, and what has hindered their experiences. Talk about ways the class can set up the coming session to work best for all students.
- Explain that you are going to be leading them in a meditation on kindness and compassion toward the world around us. They may choose to share their opinion of the process afterward, but the degree to which they share will be their choice. Let students know the exercise will continue to build from the last, but this time, they will be focusing on extending kindness and compassion to everyone and every situation presented to them.
 - Tell students to find a comfortable place to be, and a comfortable position to sit or lie down.
 - Turn on the selected music and turn down the lighting.
 - Tell students to take a deep breath and fill up their lungs completely before exhaling. After a few breaths, begin the guided meditation.
 - At the end of the meditation (5 to 10 minutes), allow them a few moments of silence as the lights come slowly up and the music is turned down and they receive the signal that it is time to come back to the room.

Follow Up:

- Ask students how they felt as they were being compassionate toward others during the meditation. Ask them if they thought of situations they did not wish to meet with kindness. Remind them not to judge their own experience, but to simply acknowledge their thoughts and feelings. Have those who choose to share explain to the best of their ability how they felt when focusing on positive, kind thoughts toward all people

and creatures. Ask them if they would like to identify physical feelings and emotions associated with the meditation.

- Journal Prompt: Do you believe that you can affect others in a positive way by being positive yourself? Explain?

Classroom Discoveries:

- Some students expressed that it felt good to face people and creatures with kindness and compassion. They shared that it was freeing and powerful to think that they always had control over their way of greeting situations and people. They further said that they appreciated having more time of silence at the end of the meditation to focus and dwell on these images and thoughts.
- Some students shared that they were unable to let go of some anger, and they couldn't help but feel that greeting everyone with compassion was not warranted. For these students, remind them not to judge their own experiences, and to remember that if they choose to extend kindness and compassion, it is more for their own well-being. It is an exercise in freedom and independence to refrain from engaging in the negativity others might be experiencing.

Lesson 4 Materials

1. Music:

This music is calming and beautiful, almost other-worldly sounding. No sudden sounds disrupt the smooth flow of notes and vibrations, as it is intended to bring focus and positive energy:

Meditation Music Relax Mind Body, Positive Energy Music, Relaxing Music, Slow Music 3293

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=+music+youtube+meditation+power&view=detail&mid=928D6F1EBF1460360FB6928D6F1EBF1460360FB6&FORM=VIRE>

2. Guided Meditation:

Cleansing Breaths

- Take a deep breath slowly in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you breathe, think about the sensation of the breath flowing through the nose and into the lungs, and then back out through the mouth. Imagine the breath going deeply into the belly, into the center of the body. Allow your breath to expand your rib cage and notice the rise and fall of your chest and torso. Continue to breathe deeply, creating an even flow of breath. Count to nine, or a number of your choosing, in your mind as you breathe in, and again as you breathe out. Take 10 breaths in this way, bringing yourself to a deeper relaxation with every breath.

Awareness of the Body

- Notice the way your body feels at this moment, taking into account the places you are making contact with objects, such as the floor.

- Take a moment to fully account for all the physical sensations you are feeling at this moment, and adjust your body if necessary to come to your most desired place of comfort.
- Think about any sensations you may be feeling such as the vibration from the music, the air flowing on your skin, and any other physical feelings that you might be experiencing.
- Starting in the center of your body, imagine a light glowing and expanding. With every breath, the light expands outward like water, bringing you deep peace and relaxation.
- Imagine the light reaching toward your shoulders and hips, flowing over you.
- As the light grows and makes its way down your arms and legs, you can feel the muscles releasing and fully resting.
- Finally, allow the light to touch your face, hands and feet until it has covered the top of the head, fingers and toes. Now imagine this light expanding as you begin to think about all of the kindness and compassion your heart can hold.

Kindness and Compassion

- Imagine yourself walking through a beautiful forest. Under your bare feet is a path of cool, smooth earth and trees are arching over your head. You can hear the sound of birds and leaves rustling. The sun is shining through in streams around you, you feel the warmth of the sun on your skin. Then you feel the coolness of the shade from the trees. As you walk in and out of the streams of light and the patches of shade, you are filled with a sense of appreciation for the beauty of all that surrounds you. You feel a

- deep connection to the living things around you, and you have an understanding of the value of all life. The joy and peace you feel brings a smile to your face.
- Now imagine a person walking toward you in the distance. The person of your choosing is smiling and welcoming in the same way you are. As you walk toward this person, you feel pure kindness and compassion, and you feel that same kindness and compassion coming from them to you. Imagine how you feel. Imagine the joy of knowing there is only kindness resonating between you and this other beautiful being.
 - You and the other person decide to walk together and the birds and creatures of the forest begin to follow you, as though they can see a positive, warm light surrounding you and they know they are safe to travel by your side.
 - As you walk in the sun, you see other people in the distance looking up and taking notice that a gathering of kind, hopeful creatures is forming, and they also want to be welcomed in to the fold. They smile and walk toward you. Your love and acceptance, your kindness and compassion, has started a movement of peace and beauty and it becomes larger and stronger as you walk.
 - Continue to breathe deeply, bringing this image into focus, feeling the strength and beauty that comes from greeting all living creatures with a smile and an attitude of acceptance.
 - Imagine yourself as a beacon of love and hope to others, and feel all of the things you would feel as people and living creatures surrounding you are drawn in. Envision yourself living in this moment and allow all of the rewards of leading others in kindness and compassion flow through you.

- As you breathe, allow every breath to bring you closer to seeing the vivid images of the magical, kind and compassionate experience of the forest. What images are you seeing? What sensations are you feeling?
- In this place of peace and love, the next moments belong to you.

Closure

- Breathe deeply in and out, mindful of your time in the forest as you breathe. With each breath, bring yourself closer to the vision you are seeing. Feeling peaceful and focused, allow yourself to remain in this beautiful space. (Give the signal when you feel the time is right.)

Mindfulness Practice Lesson 5

Self-Appreciation and Empowerment

Intention: To allow students time and opportunity to appreciate themselves and acknowledge their own strengths,

Preparation:

- Select music for the meditation or use the music provided with materials for this lesson.
- Rehearse the guided meditation for self-appreciation and empowerment.
- Prepare a couple of questions to lead students into their second lesson. Example: “Do you think it is acceptable to discuss and acknowledge your own strengths? Do people tend to minimize their own accomplishments or criticize themselves? Why do you think that might be? What might happen if high school students developed a habit of acknowledging their own strengths? What if they could all be accepting and supportive when hearing about the strengths of others?”

Process:

- Have students sit in a circle and discuss which kinds of meditations work best and what they all seem to have in common. Ask them to speculate about how they think meditation and mindfulness might be helpful in allowing us to appreciate ourselves and our strengths to a greater degree. Share teacher findings and predictions as well. Encourage students to think about what has worked to lead them to the best experiences of mindfulness meditation, and what has hindered their experiences. Talk about ways the class can set up the coming session to work best for all students.

- Explain that you are going to be leading them in a meditation about self-appreciation and empowerment. They may choose to share their opinions of the process afterward, but the degree to which they share will be their choice. Let students know the exercise will continue to build from the last, but this time, they will be focusing on themselves and their strengths. Assure them that they deserve some time every day to appreciate their own accomplishments and strengths.
- Tell students to find a comfortable place to be, and a comfortable position to sit or lie down.
- Turn on the selected music and turn down the lighting.
- Tell students to take a deep breath and fill up their lungs completely before exhaling. After a few breaths, begin the guided meditation.
- At the end of the meditation (5 to 10 minutes), allow them a few moments of silence as the lights come slowly up and the music is turned down and they receive the signal that it is time to come back to the room.

Follow Up:

- Ask students how it felt to give themselves permission to appreciate their own strengths and power. Remind them not to judge their own experience, but to simply acknowledge their thoughts and feelings. Have those who choose to share explain to the best of their ability how they felt when thinking about their own contributions and positive attributes. Ask them if they would like to identify emotional and physical feelings associated with the meditation.

- Journal Prompt: Write a thank-you note to yourself for all that you have accomplished, overcome or created. Point out your best qualities and thank yourself for being able to acknowledge your own strength and power.

Classroom Discoveries:

- This meditation is the most personal and some students found it very emotional. It is intentional that the meditations moved from the less personal body scan to the more personal love and acceptance of the self. The majority of students reported that this session was most helpful for them and they asked to repeat it.
- Some students found it difficult to appreciate themselves because they had done things that, in their minds, they could not forgive. A few shared that they had labeled themselves as “bad kids.” They did not feel comfortable seeing themselves as one who contributes, though they did report that they could appreciate themselves as a child. For these students, remind them that we all have made different choices and every choice that is not optimal can lead us to better choices. Assure them that there is no such thing as a “bad kid.”

Lesson 5 Materials

1. Music:

The selected music for this lesson contains relaxing sounds, keyboard and harp music with some nature sounds in the background:

Relaxing Music for Stress Relief. Calm Music for Meditation, Healing, Therapy, Sleep, Spa, Yoga,

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=relaxation+meditation+music&view=detail&mid=9370BCE8A8C0DB6A20859370BCE8A8C0DB6A2085&FORM=VIRE>

2. Guided Meditation—Self-Appreciation and Empowerment

Cleansing Breaths

- Take a deep breath slowly in through the nose and out through the mouth. Imagine the breath filling up your lungs to fullness and then easily and slowly emptying. Imagine your deep breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth, bringing you closer and closer to a place of deep relaxation. Consciously make your breaths even and effortless, slowing the pace of the body, comforting the heart, and easing the mind. Take ten more breaths in this way, appreciating the beauty and natural ability of the body to breathe and take in life.
- Awareness of the Body
- Notice the way your body feels at this moment. Notice the flow of air, the sounds of music, and all the sensations coming to you through your senses, working for you without effort, giving you so many ways to experience life.
- Take a moment to fully appreciate the workings of your own body and mind. Consider the beating of your heart, the supporting of your body, and the vast abilities

of your mind. What an amazing system of life and nature you are. What unlimited abilities you possess.

- Think about any sensations you may be feeling such as the vibration from the music, the air flowing on your skin, and any other physical feelings that you might be experiencing.
- Starting at the top of your head, imagine the muscles that support you relaxing completely and feeling the peace and love coming from you. With every breath, allow that relaxation to flow through your body, moving from the head, all the way to the toes.
- Imagine that relaxation flowing through your neck, reaching your shoulders and hips, flowing over you.
- As you consciously allow the flow of rest and relaxation to make its way down your arms and legs, you can feel the muscles releasing and fully resting.
- Allow this peace and release to extend into the fingers and toes, until a sense of completely letting go has covered and enveloped you.

Self-Appreciation and Empowerment

- Imagine yourself as a child and thank that child for being such a beautiful, kind and strong person, knowing that you were perfectly made then and you are perfectly made now.
- Take a moment to appreciate all the wonderful things you have contributed to the world around you. Thank yourself for all the times you made good choices, and all the times you took care of yourself.

- As you breathe deeply, thank yourself for learning and growing, knowing that there is beauty in imperfection and that mistakes are gifts to help us all.
- If other thoughts start to emerge, acknowledge those thoughts and the feelings associated with them without judgement, and take your mind back to the breath and back to the understanding that you are a being to be loved and appreciated by others and the self.
- Continue to breathe deeply, and imagine the power that you possess to do anything your heart and mind choose.
- Breathe in that goodness and that power and make it stronger intentionally with every breath.
- Allow all of the sensations that accompany your self-appreciation and empowerment to rise up in you, giving yourself permission to be the strongest version of you. Give yourself permission to enjoy your accomplishments, to appreciate the physical body that supports you, to value the systems of your body and mind that work together to give you what you need. Breathe in the gifts that you bring and that you are giving yourself right now just by acknowledging that you are strong and capable, and that you have much to contribute.
- As you breathe, allow every breath to bring you closer to a real and loving acceptance of the self. What images are you seeing? What sensations are you feeling?
- In this place of love, kindness and acceptance, the next moments belong to you.

Closure

- Breathe deeply in and out, mindful of your own beauty and power as you breathe.
With each breath, bring yourself closer to the understanding that you are a wonderful

being, deserving of kindness and self-acceptance. Feeling peaceful and focused, allow yourself to remain in this beautiful space. (Give the signal when you feel the time is right.)

Making the Practice Your Own

Over the course of the five-week mindfulness unit, students were given the opportunity to provide feedback and let the classroom teacher know what worked best. Using that information, an ongoing program can be created to serve the specific student population in a given place and time. Some students may prefer guided meditations; some may prefer to have more freedom with their own creativity. Some students may request music with running water or nature sounds, and some may desire deep vibrations or piano music. Different styles of meditation and music over the five weeks provide some options for the class to express opinions and take part in the creation of its own program.

Position of the Body

There are different schools of thought regarding the best position of the body during meditation and relaxation. A well-established doctrine of yoga and meditation requires a “wakeful” posture, sitting tall. Some even say that one cannot be meditating if lying down (The Expanding Light, n.d.). Jon Kabat-Zin, father of mindfulness, however, has many on-line mindfulness meditations that are specifically designed to be experienced by one who is lying down (<https://soundcloud.com/devicer23/03-jon-kabat-zinn-lying-down>). His work was originally done for hospital patients who were ill, so that may explain why he began and continues to offer mindfulness sessions in different body positions. The comfort of the individual is the key. For the purposes of a school teacher working with adolescents in a classroom environment, there may be a need for students to sit in desks, they may have space

to find little areas to sit, or they may be given the choice to choose their own body position. For each of these options, there is support that it can work for mindfulness practice. The class may use their experiences of the five-week unit, as well as the environment they have to work with, to make a choice.

Time Frame

Time available to spend on mindfulness sessions may depend on the subject matter taught, expectations of curriculum covered, and the length of the class period. Using the five-week unit as a measuring tool, one can estimate about how much time can be spent on meditation each week. In the studies researched by this author, the typical mindfulness session was about twenty minutes from the moment of set-up to the moment of completion. Some studies gave as little as 10 minutes to mindfulness practice, and all studies reported improvement in student stress levels, as well as various other benefits. Once the best time frame is established for the classroom needs, having a similar time and day of the week for mindfulness is optimal (Mindful.org, n.d.).

Finding Materials

There are myriad sites providing information on mindfulness in schools. So many, in fact, that it can be somewhat overwhelming to sift through all the information. There are apps, websites, online classes, videos, and much more. Digging into those layers of information is much more useful with some direction, experience and knowledge of what it is you hope to find. The purpose of providing the five specific lessons is to give some experience and direction to make future explorations of mindfulness material more approachable. Further, some quality, popular sites and apps are listed below to assist in the creation of a customized mindfulness practice.

Mindfulness Applications (Apps)

1. “Aura”—provides personalized 3-minute daily meditations that never repeat. The user answers questions and logs mood to assist Aura in finding the best meditation. This app has a breath-synchronization feature, allowing the user to take breaths at the pace of an animated circle. Free on IOS and Android devices.
2. “Brain.FM”—uses brainwave training therapy and mindfulness sessions to improve productivity and focus. This app tracks progress. Free on IOS and Android devices.
3. “Breathe”—provides meditations and music for beginning mindfulness participants. 10 minute daily sessions are designed to decrease stress and assist with quality sleep and healthy relationships. Free on IOS devices.
4. “Calm”—uses guided meditation and relaxing music, as well as visual images, to reduce stress, improve sleep, and assist with self-esteem. This app has reminders for meditation times and themed meditations. Free on IOS and Android with purchasable add-ons.
5. “Equanimity”—tracks and logs meditation, and provides a journal writing feature. The user can set up a specific number of chimes to sound at intervals, serving as reminders to come back to the meditation. One-time \$4.99 fee for IOS devices.

6. “Happify”—employs a scientific approach to coping using five essential skills for happiness: aspiring, savoring, thanking, giving and empathizing. The focus is on training the brain using games and activities. Free on IOS devices.

7. “Headspace”—teaches the subscriber about the workings of the mind through images and 10-minute meditation sessions. This app tracks the amount of time spent meditating.
\$12. 95/month on IOS devices.

8. “Insight Timer”—provides meditations and talks by reputable experts in mindfulness, and provides tracking of all those meditating at the same time around the world. Free on Android and IOS.

9. “Omvana”—provides meditation sessions from well-known authors and teachers of mindfulness. Meditations and topics, of which this app has a vast library, can be customized. Free on IOS and Android devices with purchasable add-ons.

10. “Stop, Breathe, and Think”—provides an explanation of mindfulness, including the neuroscience of mindfulness and the physiology of stress. The app features 30 meditation sessions of varying lengths. Topics can be chosen by the user, and sessions are tracked for length and consecutive days of meditation. Free on IOS and Android.

Mindfulness Websites

1. *Center for Mindfulness*—<https://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/>
2. *Learning To Breathe*—<https://learning2breathe.org/>
3. *Mindful*— <https://www.mindful.org/>
4. *Mindful Life Project*—<http://www.mindfullifeproject.org/>
5. *Mindful Schools*— <https://www.mindfulschools.org/>
6. *Mindful Teachers*—<http://www.mindfulteachers.org/p/free-resources-and-lesson-plans.html>
7. *Mind Up*— <https://mindup.org/>
8. *UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center*—<http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations>