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MINDFULNESS PRACTICES IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM SETTING: THE
EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, AND ACADEMIC IMPACTS ON STUDENTS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Education.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My desire to create this capstone project stems from the passion I have to educate the whole person. Teachers are often assumed to teach children academics. But academics is only one branch of a human's development. If we want students to succeed academically than we need to pay attention to their other needs as well, like their emotional and social growth. That is why I present the question: *Does teaching mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting benefit students in their emotional, social, or academic development?* Throughout this project I have explored resources to answer my question and developed a project with the intent to help educate the whole student: emotionally, socially, and academically.

This chapter will delve into my rationale and context for developing this project. It will outline both the personal and professional reasons that have motivated my interest in the topic. It will explain the reasons why it could be implemented into teaching practices and the classroom setting. Finally, I will conclude with a explanation of what will be seen in the second chapter.

Rationale and Context

My motivation to develop this capstone project comes from both personal and professional experiences that I have encountered throughout my life.

Personal motivations. Personally, I have experienced mental health struggles since I was a child. Growing up, school itself caused me stress. Standing up and speaking made my voice shake and my palms sweat. The stress of getting good grades caused me

to study for hours and meticulously check over my work again and again. I washed my hands constantly after a high school chemistry lab, when I knew that there was no acid on me, but it was the only way to calm my fear. I would often stop hanging out with friends and started turning down invites to parties for fear of embarrassing myself or saying the wrong thing among peers. What I didn't know at the time was that I had anxiety.

School taught me many things. It taught me how to solve for the missing variable, read and analyze literature, plan and implement experiments, and recall important and major facts in history. Although school taught me many things; it never taught me how to respond to stress, how to regulate intense emotions, or provide me with coping mechanisms for mental problems. If school would have introduced me to a strategy, like mindfulness, to help with these things, I may have been much more relaxed and enjoyed school a lot more.

Professional motivations. Although this project affects me personally, I have also encountered several professional experiences that have ignited my interest in this topic. I have been lucky enough to see first-hand how mindfulness practices can benefit students. I was trained by my colleague, a school counselor, on how to implement a simple mindfulness strategy in the morning with my students. The procedure is as follows: I have a chime that I ring once the students are still and quiet. When each student can no longer hear the sound, they give me a silent thumbs up. Several students would close their eyes so they could concentrate all their attention on the sound.

This simple two-minute exercise was adored by my students. They practiced focus and concentration, and it allowed them to have a calm and quiet moment before our daily activities began. Several students would come ask me if we could do it again that

day. Some students reported to me that they felt calmer afterward. This positive qualitative feedback sparked my interest in a project on mindfulness practices with young students.

Another professional experience I have had regarding mindfulness is mindful eating. My colleague explained this simple and motivating activity to try with students. You place a small piece of chocolate in your mouth and focus on its taste, texture, etc. The students enjoy the chance to eat chocolate, but it also gives them time to focus on just one thing and take a mental break from all the other thoughts in their mind at the time.

Potential implementation. From both my personal and professional experiences with mindfulness, I have discovered how simple and short the practice could be. This strategy could be implemented into the classroom in as long or as small of a length as the school would allow. For example, in my experience of teaching mindful moments in my own classroom, the activity might take two or three minutes and my class would use them as a “brain break” between subjects.

Another finding sparked my interest as well. A research article stated that, “mindfulness education appears to have a positive impact on academic performance by helping students—even those with learning disabilities—focus, be more organized, plan ahead, perform better on exams, and think critically” (Leland, 2015, p. 23). Mindfulness has the potential to benefit academics as well as emotional and social health.

My rationale for creating this capstone project is to provide young students with the tools they need to manage their emotional needs in order to help them have more success in school: socially, emotionally, and academically. Throughout my school years,

I felt that being as stressed out and anxious as I was, was in fact normal and there was nothing I could change about it. I want other children to learn that there is a way to feel better in school, and other settings.

Although it is clear, my passion for this project is rooted in my personal experience with mental health, my mental health hurdles are not at all unique. In an article titled, *A Depressing Trend: Teenage Mental Illness is on the Rise* written by Scholes, it states that:

“About 11 percent of youths -- about four million -- have a major mental-health disorder that results in significant trouble at home or school or with peers, and only one in five of these children actually get the treatment they need. Left untreated, depression and other mental-health problems set a child up for a potentially long and difficult transition into adulthood” (2007, par. 4).

It sadness me that with so many treatments and positive advancements in the field of mental health, only one fifth of these children are getting help. The news shares stories of violence, crimes, and inappropriate emotional reactions happening in the world every day. I would argue that some of these incidences are due to the fact that these troubled individuals never got help for their emotional turmoil. It doesn't have to be that way and that is the heart of my project. Teachers can be educated in how to provide students with easy and non-invasive coping mechanisms for intense emotions and stress. One current and highly research supported way is the practice of mindfulness.

There is currently a plethora of research that supports this practice for student use. One study said that, “mindfulness education was helpful in some specific ways: minimizing the impact of bullying, helping students with learning disabilities, benefiting

students who are training in careers with high emotion and stress, and coaching” (Leland, 2015, p.19).

One source explained that in various demographic areas of Australian schools, they are petitioning for government funding for wellness programs to address: self-harm, anxiety issues, depression, and lack of student engagement (Albercht, Albercht & Cohen, 2012).

These sources are highly encouraging the use of mindful practices in the classroom for *all* students, not just ones with mental health issues. All people face stress and negative emotions. It is my belief that teachers can start educating students on how to handle these things in a more healthy and productive way.

Mindfulness could help all members of a school community, not just the students but the teachers as well. Research has found that “mindfulness practices have been shown to help teachers: reduce their stress levels; assist with behavior management strategies and improve self-esteem” (Albercht, et al., 2012, p. 11). If teachers participate in mindfulness in order to improve their own wellness, it could benefit their teaching quality as well. Improved teaching quality would provide yet another benefit for student success.

Mindfulness appears to be a practice that would fit in swimmingly with lower elementary grades. Kindergarten, first, and second grade students are taught a lot of social and behavioral skills in school. Mindfulness could provide a great supplemental opportunity for this type of curriculum. For example, research suggests that “At some of the earliest grades, teachers spend a great deal of time helping students develop their abilities to be good classmates and positive members of the school community (Leland, 2015, p. 22).

Mindfulness practices are starting to gain substantial positive recognition in communities and workplaces throughout the world. Research has found that student well-being has taken on a more predominant role in schools. There is a movement to develop schools that focus on a the whole child's needs rather than solely their academic success. Mindfulness practice is a technique that schools are implementing to accomplish this goal (Albercht, et al. 2012).

Summary

In conclusion, my personal and professional experiences have motivated my passion to create a capstone project centered around the research question: *Does teaching mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting benefit students in their emotional, social, or academic development?* In order to seek answers to this question I will be exploring mindfulness throughout the paper.

In the next chapter I will, first, define mindfulness and outline its history. Second, I will identify the positive outcomes of mindfulness use in the classroom by analyzing research and studies. Third, I will explore valuable types of mindfulness to implement in an elementary classroom setting. Mindfulness has a lot of historical roots, but its popularity in western culture is relatively modern.

This is an exciting new form of curriculum to explore and deepen our knowledge about. I am hopeful that this paper will provide a better understanding of mindfulness and its potential positive influences for students.

Every student experiences emotions and stress on some level, so it seems that schools should teach students strategies to manage these feelings in a healthy way. Mindfulness could be a solution for the future.

Mental health problems are becoming increasingly common in the world and more common at younger ages. If schools educate their students on handling these problems appropriately it could have extremely positive results for the communities that we live in.

A group of students responded to how participating in mindfulness practices made them feel. One student responded by saying, “It calms me and relaxes me. It reminds me life can be simple and not to get bogged down with worry. It is useful to gain some daily perspective, and improved my mental wellbeing. Thank you very much. Importance 10/10” (Mindfulness for Students, par. 6). If mindfulness can help more students feel this way, it seems to be worth the exploration of implementing it into the classroom.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the last chapter, I shared my personal and professional experiences that have driven my passion for this capstone project and its central question of inquiry: *Does teaching mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting benefit students in their emotional, social, or academic development?* This chapter will explore beyond my personal influences and now take a look at the research that helps answer this question through a literature review.

This chapter will be broken into four sections that relate closely to this question of inquiry. The first section will define mindfulness by examining various definitions of mindfulness and analyzing these definitions' commonalities. The section will also provide a brief history of mindfulness and its origins, in order to understand how it has developed and is presented in modern society.

The second section will explore the benefits of mindfulness, founded in research. It will explain the emotional, social, and academic benefits that mindfulness has shown to create, through various case studies and highly qualified literature selections.

The third section will delve into the wide array of mindfulness practices and its varying forms. It will outline four central types of mindfulness: mindful breathing, mindful movement, mindful listening, and mindful eating. Each form will be explained with supporting examples of activities that showcase these various forms of mindfulness practices. It will conclude by examining the common concepts these different types of mindfulness share.

The fourth and final section will tie together the first three by explaining the reasoning behind implementing mindfulness practices into the elementary classroom setting and how implementation could occur successfully. This section will be divided into three subsections which will explain the purpose for incorporating mindfulness into the elementary classroom, the challenges for implementing these practices, and the steps for implementing mindful practices into the classroom.

These three subsections will provide research grounded information, in order to grasp a better understanding of mindfulness and its use in the elementary classroom setting.

Defining Mindfulness

Before one can determine the potential value of incorporating mindful practices into an elementary classroom setting, it is essential to understand what mindfulness is at its most basic level. Literature provides a variety of similar definitions for mindfulness. One source states that, “mindfulness is the practice of being attentive in every moment, and noticing what is taking place both inside and outside of you without judgement. It is the practice of purposefully seeing your thoughts, emotions, experiences, and surroundings” (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013, p. 13). Another piece of literature defined mindfulness by explaining its three key aspects, “paying attention on purpose, present moment contact, acceptance and nonjudgement” (Willard, 2016, p. 28). Yet another definition of mindfulness was proposed by the literature, stating, “mindful awareness is the trainable skill of intentionally remembering to pay attention in the present moment without habitual reaction” (Back & Fernando, 2014, p. 1).

After reading the various definitions of mindfulness in literature, I have concluded that most sources mention the main components of awareness, present time, and acceptance. From this I gathered that mindfulness is trying to paying attention to a moment while it is occurring and being at peace with however you feel and whatever is happening during the current experience.

For example, a mindful practice could be engaging in the process of making a cup of tea. The individual would be aware of every step in their process without letting their mind wander into other thoughts, such as the day's to-do list. Instead they would solely focus on smelling the tea, listening to the clinking spoon against the cup, and tasting the hot water on their taste buds. This simple activity would be cultivating awareness of what is happening externally and internally to the individual during a current experience.

Although in Western culture, mindfulness has been gaining popularity in modern times, mindfulness holds deep roots and goes back far into history. Mindfulness comes from Buddhist practices, which includes concentration and mindfulness strategies in order to effectively teach meditation (Wardle & Weinhardt). Some individuals would argue that incorporating mindfulness into the elementary classroom would be promoting specific religious values, but the literature begs to differ when explaining, "mindfulness meditation is a secular practice that anyone can do without accepting any spiritual values or beliefs. It has been designed as such to make it accessible to as many people as possible" (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013, p. 21). Perhaps, it is this modern mindset about mindfulness that society has started to embrace, which is increasing its popularity and sparking such interest in Western cultures.

The history behind this is fascinating and valuable to understand. The first key experience that Western individuals had with the concepts of Buddhism occurred in 1893 at the Parliament of World Religions. Interestingly, this event was intended to display the religious principals of the West in an attractive light to others. The concepts of Buddhism ended up impacting more people than anticipated, intriguing lots of them. The initial spark in interest at this event continued to increase for individuals in the West. Many Westerners went on to discover many Buddhist principals that aligned with science based concepts. This suggests that modern Western ideas might coincide with the roots of mindfulness better than once thought (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013).

Mindfulness is rooted deep in religious history, but it doesn't need to be practiced in any religious way. Literature backs up my own opinion that mindfulness may stand as a separate entity from a religion. Therefore, this practice holds no specific bias or idealization of a particular faith base.

As stated above, one of the key aspects of mindfulness seems to be attention. Teachers expect attention from their students from a very young age, in order to learn the required content being given to them. But of all the things educators teach, paying attention isn't normally one of them. Yet, paying attention is an essential skill to succeed in school. Teachers are often heard asking students to focus on the task at hand, giving them several reminders to look or listen to what is being taught. While teachers are reminding students to pay attention, they are not giving them strategies to do so. Mindfulness could be a strategy to help them pay attention when it is time to do so (Hanh, 2011).

Mindfulness can occur in many forms and with a variety of tools but it also can be done in a normal setting and without anything extra. “Mindfulness does not require that we go anywhere else. We can practice mindfulness in our room or on our way from one place to another. We can do the same things we always do-walking, sitting, working, eating, and talking” (Hanh, 2011, p. 15). Practicing mindfulness can be as simple or complex as an individual would like it to be. The flexibility that the practice allows for, makes it a potentially great resource in schools.

In conclusion, there is not a singular definition for mindfulness but rather a variety of definitions throughout the literature that share similar ideas. I have come to the conclusion that there are three similar elements included in mindfulness: a heightened sense of awareness or intense focus, a current experience one is fully engaged in, and a positive outlook on the experience or acceptance. Mindfulness has a rich and long history but has recently developed a modern popularity within western cultures. With this clearer concept of mindfulness in place, the next section will use research to identify the specific types of benefits that mindfulness provides.

Benefits of Mindfulness

The heart of my research revolves around the central question: *Does teaching mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting benefit students in their emotional, social, or academic development?* Research, certainly thinks it does. The benefits of participating in mindful practices could include closer relationships and more overall happiness in life. This increased life satisfaction improves a person’s overall emotional health. It has been found that certain benefits of mindfulness can take effect right away but others may develop more slowly over time. That is why regular practice in

mindfulness will result in more benefits arising and taking a positive impact on an individual's overall health (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013).

In this section, I will outline the benefits that the literature acknowledges mindfulness has in the following realms: emotional, social, and academic.

Emotional benefits. First, mindfulness has been shown to provide several emotional benefits to humans whom engage in it. It trains people to regulate their emotions in a healthy way. Mindfulness encourages us to tap into our emotions rather than avoid them. Willard demonstrates this point when stating:

“Taking drugs, cutting themselves, and acting out are other ways kids check out of their immediate experience. When we teach children to disconnect from their experience from a young age, it's no wonder they struggle with their emotions. Mindfulness and compassion practices go radically against this cultural conditioning by emphasizing *checking in*-with our experience, with ourselves, and with the world around us-rather than *checking out*.” (2016, p. 3)

Teaching children mindfulness at a young age could be a preventative measure against these more dangerous emotional coping mechanisms that so many individuals end up relying on to handle stress or unwanted feelings.

Mental stress and experiences with severe negative emotions are not a unique phenomena in children. Willard illustrated this point when stating:

“It's heartbreaking to hear a slender seven-year-old girl in the suburbs tell me she is too fat to have friends, or an eleven-year-old boy in the city tell me the only way he will live past twenty is if he's in jail. No matter what background a kid is from, suffering and fear are universal” (2016, p. 9).

Mindfulness could provide a solution to this common problem; it aids in self-regulation and emotional control (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017). The literature has also suggested that mindfulness could be a coping mechanism for individuals with emotional and mental health disorders. One source found that, “a study of thirty-four students ages thirteen to eighteen, diagnosed with learning disabilities, showed significantly decreased anxiety and improved social skills after participating in mindfulness meditation for five weeks” (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017, p. 17). Not only could mindfulness help regulate emotions but it could also lower the emotional distress people with a plethora of mental disabilities face. Research has found just some of the emotional benefits to include decreased anxiousness and stress levels. It has also been found that individuals are able to bounce back more quickly after they have experienced negative emotions (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017). Literature seems to acknowledge a variety of emotional health benefits that stem from participation in mindful practices.

Social benefits. Although emotional benefits play a big role in the positive aspects of mindfulness, it doesn't stop there. Vast quantities of literature have also found several social benefits that come from engaging in mindfulness. Research has found that, mindfulness promotes connections and close relationships. Elementary school is a time when many friendships start to develop and peer interactions occur. Mindfulness could benefit students' ability to have more positive social interactions as they develop. Practicing mindfulness could enhance an individuals ability to interact with other in a positive manner (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017). Teaching students how to work together, share, get along in the classroom, as well as at lunch and recess is a big task for early elementary educators. Mindfulness could be a great way to set students on the right path

to coexisting with peers in a respectful and collaborative manner; being mindfully aware allows people to explain their feelings in a direct manner (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013).

Academic benefits. Beyond the emotional and social benefits of mindfulness, literature has also indicated several academic gains correlated with mindful practices. Research has found that mindfulness can improve the working memory capacity, improve one's executive functioning, and increase a person's attention. These benefits would all improve a student's academic gains. One source explained that practicing mindfulness can improve a person's executive functioning. This aids in people's ability to focus on current tasks, remember details better, and stay organized (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017). Being able to pay attention to learning is a big skill required to achieve academic success. With ADHD being an increasingly common problem for students, it seems that mindfulness could be a great solution to aid students with attention problems. Mindfulness and meditation practices improve attentional behaviors in children. One study described that, "children ages eight to eleven who meditated had the ability to ignore distractions and focus their attention more" (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017, p. 17).

To conclude this section, research seems to suggest that mindfulness provides emotional, social, and academic benefits to individuals who participate in the practices. "Providing students with the tools of mindfulness has the potential to improve their interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, academic achievement, and physical and mental health" (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017, p. 19). It seems that the benefits of mindfulness can help teachers nurture the whole student in their journey through development. After all, society's understanding of brain development has changed. Willard reinforces this point when stating:

“We used to think that the brain we were born with was the one we were stuck with, once it finished growing in our late teen years. But in the last decade, research on *neuroplasticity*-the ability of our brain to change and grow, like a muscle, as a result of our actions and thoughts-tells a different story.” (2016, p. 18)

If our brain can get stronger, like a muscle can with exercise, mindfulness could provide the exercise our brain needs to strengthen.

Now that it has been established that mindfulness makes positive impacts on individuals whom participate in it, it is useful to determine how to engage in the practice. The following section will highlight some forms of mindfulness and what types of activities will encompass these practices.

Varieties of Mindful Practices

Knowing what mindfulness is and understanding its positive impact on children’s emotional, social, and academic development, it would be logical to learn about the various ways one can practice mindfulness. There are several different types of mindfulness and what seems like an endless amount of activities to engage in, in order to practice it. In this section, I will explain and provide examples of four major forms of mindful practices found in the supporting literature: mindful breathing, mindful movement, mindful listening, and mindful eating.

Mindful breathing. One central practice that encompasses the ideas of mindfulness is breath awareness. Mindful breathing may seem very easy but, humans breathe all the time without being aware of it because their attention is on something else

entirely. Yet, the way we breathe (speed, rate, etc.) changes depending on our internal feelings and our external environment.

Mindful breathing teaches individuals to become aware of their breathing process: the length of their in and out breaths, the sensations in their body when they breathe, and how they feel emotionally when they breathe in different ways. One source explained that focusing on breathing can calm down an individual when they encounter uncomfortable feelings, like anxiousness. It can also help students concentrate better in a classroom setting (Hanh, 2011).

An example activity of breath awareness could be as simple as an individual placing a finger under their nose while breathing and noticing any sensations they experience. An activity that encourages students to think about their in-breath and out-breath and how those breaths each feel on their finger (Hanh, 2011). Another way to practice mindful breathing would be to count breaths. The literature described an activity in which students count their breaths to practice concentrating. The source compared this type of practice to practicing to play a sport or musical instrument. With more repetition, the better a person gets at the skill (Greenland, 2016).

Mindful breathing could be made more fun for children by incorporating more creativity into the breath awareness exercises. This has the potential to keep the child motivated to participate in the practice. One source presented an activity titled, *Rock-a-bye*, that explained, “we pretend to rock a stuffed animal to sleep on our bellies to relax our bodies and quiet our minds. As we breathe in, the animal rocks up; as we breathe out, the animal rocks back down” (Greenland, 2016, p. 73). These more kid-friendly breath

awareness activities may provide a child with a more meaningful experience because they will be able to relate more to a game or imaginary play activity.

Mindful movement. A second form of mindfulness is mindful movement. This type of mindfulness has been increasingly gaining popularity in western cultures recently, as it includes the practice of yoga. Although yoga is very popular right now, the practice itself has been around for a lot longer. Yoga incorporates breath awareness into a series of movements or poses. This combines physical stretching with meditation practices. The benefits of mindful movement activities such as yoga, have been well documented in research. The *Journal of Development and Behavioral Pediatrics*, published a preliminary study, which found that high school students who did yoga had less anxiety as well as an increase in positive feelings (Noogole et al. 2012; Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017).

An example of a mindful movement activity would be to have students complete one to three yoga poses between class activities during the day. Throughout a typical school day, it is common that students' ability to focus lessens considerably. Students could spend a short increment of time, approximately three to five minutes, completing a few yoga poses. Only a small space would be necessary to do this type of activity (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017). This source went on to explain, "A teacher could teach the students a new yoga pose like the *sunrise pose* and invite the students to hold the pose while taking some deep breaths" (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017, p. 28). Some student-friendly resources rename the same yoga poses in order to fit them into a class theme (examples: shapes, animals, flowers, etc.). It could be worthwhile to introduce mindful breathing to students and children before mindful movement, since activities like yoga incorporate breath awareness into the practice.

Beyond yoga, another mindful movement activity could be engaging in a guided stretch break. One source of literature explained a stretch break in the following steps, “Have student stretch their arms up high toward the sky. Let them know it’s okay to make stretching noises, such as “mmm” or “ahh”. Ask students to lower their arms back to their sides” (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017, p. 31).

Another example of mindful movement would be moving in slow motion to discover the physical sensations one notices. The literature explained this activity as, “we practice focusing by paying close attention to the sensations in our bodies as we move in slow motion” (Greenland, 2016, p. 89). A teacher could have fun movement prompts for students to complete this activity with such as practicing in slow motion: marching, dancing, running, skipping, etc. Mindful movement could also be engaging in an activity called, *Walking Characters*, described as, “the kids pick their character out of a hat and then walk like that character. Characters could include: an angry bully, a confident businesswoman, a grieving widow, a celebrity walking down the red carpet” (Willard, 2016, p. 112). Not only does this activity motivate children by encouraging imaginary and dramatic play, but it also will increase the practice of empathy and understanding of other people’s emotions. Another simple form of mindful movement could be moving to music. In the activity *Shake it up*, students, “shake [their] bodies to the sound of a drumbeat to release energy and help us focus” (Greenland, 2016, p. 20). This mindful activity not only incorporates movement, but also mindful listening, which is another type entirely to explore in the following paragraphs.

Mindful listening. A third type of mindfulness is mindful listening. This form of mindfulness relies heavily on the sense of hearing and the sensations one experiences

through their ears. One example of this is the activity called *Fading Tone*. In the literature, it explains, “we listen closely to the sound of a tone as it fades away to help us relax and focus” (Greenland, 2016, p. 84). The tone could be a bell, chime, or other type of instrument. Another mindful listening activity with a bell was explained as, “walk or move around the room and when you hear the bell, we will all stop and breathe three times. Then continue moving, but stop and breathe each time you hear the bell” (Hanh, 2011, p. 67). This particular activity builds upon other types of mindfulness because it incorporates breathe awareness, mindful movement, and mindful listening.

Mindful listening could also include listening to music. One activity the literature suggests is titled, *One-Track Mindfulness Practice*. The literature explained this practice by stating, “put on headphones or crank up the volume of your speakers and do nothing but listen to a favorite song. See if you can tune into just one instrument or sample track that runs through the song” (Willard, 2016, p. 127). Listening to music would be highly motivating for students and a great way to illustrate the enjoyment of mindfulness practice to kids.

Children could also play a game to practice mindful listening. “Ask the children to close their eyes and then make a sound with one of the objects. Ask the children to identify the source of the sound” (Hanh, 2011, p. 160).

Mindful eating. A fourth form of mindfulness practice is mindful eating. In so many cultures food is often taken for granted, and eaten without much thought. Often times individuals eat their meals while completing another task, watching television, or engaging in a conversation with someone else. In a world of multi-tasking, mindful eating allows individuals to pay attention to the singular experience of eating and the

multiple sensations that come with it. Mindful eating activities encompass the preparation for a meal, gratitude regarding a meal, and the physical sensations of the eating experience.

An example activity regarding mindful eating focuses active awareness on expressing gratitude for food. One source of literature provided a list of gratitude based mantras to say before eating. Some of these mantras were, “we thank the people who have made this food, especially the farmers, the people at the market and the cooks. We only put on our plate as much food as we can eat.” (Hanh, 2011, p. 143). This type of gratitude fosters a positive perspective towards food as well as encourages the value and appreciation one has for food and eating.

Another mindful eating activity focuses more on the eating experience itself. One activity described by the literature is titled the *Raisin Meditation*. It describes a pre-eating activity, “children should take and hold it without eating it. *Please hold the raisin. Smell it. Notice its color. Feel its texture.*” (Hanh, 2011, p. 147). This source then goes on to explain another activity while the individual is actually eating the raisin, “*Keeping your eyes closed, and in silence, very slowly eat the raisin. Notice all the sensations: Notice how it tastes. Pause. Notice where you taste it on your tongue.*” (Hanh, 2011, p. 147).

This activity encourages a detailed awareness of the sensations eating creates in the body.

Common concepts. After careful consideration of these four types of mindfulness, it seems although they are different they also share a plethora of similarities that categorize them as a mindful practice. Mindful breathing, movement, listening, and eating all share common concepts. A detailed awareness of a particular experience seems to be the at the heart of mindful practices. Whether the individual is focusing on the sense

of sound, taste, touch, sight, or smell, all of these mindfulness activities encourage the participant to use their senses to observe details in their current experience. This detailed awareness heightens the individual's ability to pay attention in the moment. All the activities presented in the literature also shared the commonality of focusing on a simple experience with a higher sense of appreciation and fosters an attitude of positivity and gratitude for what the individual is engaged in at the time.

Now that the practice of mindfulness is understood, it is necessary to determine the value and feasibility of implementing these practices into an elementary school. In the following section, the purpose, challenges, and steps of implementing mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting will be addressed in detail.

Mindfulness in the Elementary Classroom

After reviewing several sources of literature, it can be concluded that research recognizes emotional, social, and academic benefits from participating in the practice of mindfulness. Literature has explained several different forms of mindful practices with a vast quantity of activities individuals can use to engage in mindfulness. As stated above, this section will address the purpose, challenges, and steps of implementing mindfulness into the elementary classroom setting.

Purpose for implementation. Mindfulness activities are not limited to adults. In fact, several of the activities are explained to and meant for children. For these reasons, it seems that the literature supports and recognizes a significant purpose for implementing mindfulness into elementary education instruction. One source described the great benefit mindful practices could have in the public education system. It explained that more

individuals are starting to understand how important it could be for children to learn mindfulness (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013).

Elementary-aged children can specifically benefit from mindfulness practices for a variety of reasons. Research states that, “by the age of nine, children are much more aware of the inner emotional lives of others and are realizing that other people (peers in particular) also have opinions and make judgements” (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013, p. 151). Due to the intense emotional and social development that aged three to nine-year-old children are going through, it makes logical sense that they would benefit the social and emotional benefits of mindfulness.

Beyond the social and emotional benefits mindfulness provides elementary students, it can also play a key role in academics. Today, students are undergoing standardized tests, reaching higher academic standards at younger ages, and expected to achieve much more than before. The literature has found that engaging in mindful practices has the ability to decrease stress in an academic setting. It also has the potential to elevate the academic gains that a student makes. (Bamber & Schneider, 2016; Hall, 1999; Hartel, Nguyen, & Guzik, 2017, p. 113).

Although the reasoning to implement mindfulness into the elementary school system is substantial, there are certainly challenges posed. In the following section, these challenges will be addressed.

Challenges for implementation. The literature recognizes a few key challenges educators face when attempting to implement mindfulness into their classrooms. These challenges include: religious implications of mindfulness, lack of funding, and minimal awareness of mindfulness’ benefits for students.

First, knowing that mindfulness stems from Buddhist traditions, there is controversy about it encouraging or promoting specific religious beliefs. Mindfulness certainly has roots in Buddhist practices but modern mindfulness that is being practiced in Western cultures especially, has little to no religious ties. For example, one source explained, “While Hindu and Buddhist introspective approaches provided the foundation for the use of mindfulness in modern science, medicine, and culture, the version of mindfulness presented in this book is both secular and research based” (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017, p. 9). This source of literature went on to explain that, “In 1979, Kabat-Zinn brought mindfulness to the medical realm by introducing mindfulness as a way to reduce stress, now referred to as mindfulness-based stress reduction” (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017, p. 9). This indicates that a variety of forms of mindfulness have medical ties rather than religious affiliations.

Secondly, although this problem is currently changing, there has been a lack of awareness about mindfulness and its positive impact on student health in the past. In order to build the support of student guardians and principals it is important to educate the community about mindfulness and its benefits for students (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013). Awareness has increased about mindfulness but it needs to continue to do so, in order for it to become more widespread in schools. Administrators could provide professional development opportunities on mindfulness. Teachers could provide informational handouts and after school meetings for parents to come learn more about what a mindful practice looks like and why it is important for their student to participate.

Lastly, schools often lack the funds to train teachers on mindfulness practices and teaching. A source described this challenge when stating, “Possible solutions to the lack

of public school funding include motivating Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), who can fundraise to bring mindfulness training to their schools, finding individual donors who are willing to “adopt” and pay for different teachers” (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013, p. 279).

Although there are obstacles to start carrying out mindfulness lessons in schools, there are also solutions that many schools have found and used in order to be successful. The following section illustrates ways schools and programs are currently implementing mindfulness practices into their classroom in a practical yet valuable way.

Techniques for implementation. Several schools have already been implementing mindfulness into their teaching and have seen great results. For example, Mindfulness Schools are creating a three step-process in achieving this implementation. The first step is in the form of an online course for educators to learn about mindfulness and how to incorporate it into their own lives. The second step includes a multiple hour course that educates the instructor on how to implement the Mindful Schools curriculum. Some of the key aspects in the curriculum include increasing attention as well as an individuals self-awareness which could help them develop more empathy. Another aspect of the curriculum is to teach students how to manage their impulses. The third step allows for participants to have their questions answered (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013).

Another source explained that it is common for teachers to be constantly reminding their students to pay attention as well as sit and listen calmly but this might not be an effective solution. Mindfulness could be a more useful solution because it provides a way for students to be specifically taught how to do the things teachers keep reminding them of. Mindfulness can provide students with resources to help them succeed in school

by improving their focus and emotional control (Iberlin & Ruyle, 2017). Educating the whole child through mindfulness is becoming more sought-out and researched approved method of teaching students. Mindfulness can be done with few resources and a little time commitment, which makes it an easy practice to implement in schools.

Teachers are expected to cover so many academic standards that several may argue that they simply do not have time to teach mindfulness to their students as well. A great solution for this is to use mindfulness as activities during transition times or “brain breaks” for students. A source described that, “the techniques are very brief, lasting between 30 seconds and two minutes, and are designed to be practiced several times a day, especially before or after a transition time” (Jennings, 2015, p. 200).

Early elementary teachers are responsible for implementing some type of character education as part of their classroom management plan. Mindfulness activities can go hand-in-hand with character education, as it promotes awareness, empathy, and other valuable social and emotional skills.

Lastly, literature has provided many practical tips and skills for educators in order to successfully teach mindfulness in a classroom environment. One suggestion was that teachers should lead by example when teaching mindfulness. The literature encouraged teachers to participate in the mindful practices with the children. It described how this would promote the concept of being fully present in a current experience because the teacher would be joining in the present moment activities along with students (Willard, 2016). Yet another tip suggested in the literature was to use words that make sense to children and to modify them when necessary. A tip the literature suggested was, “If the

words of a practice script don't resonate for you, improvise with ones that fit you and your kids" (Willard, 2016, p. 193).

Another practical suggestion from the literature was to thoughtfully plan a valuable space for mindfulness practices. The text stated, "even in your own space, there may be limitations. Maybe the most you can do is create a mindfulness corner" (Willard, 2016, p. 195). Every school and classroom is different. A teacher can use their creativity to work with the resources available to them in order to encourage mindfulness in their classroom setting. Essentially, mindfulness allows for flexibility. A teacher can use their creativity and eye for design to create an inviting yet practical space for students to practice their mindfulness activities.

There are many ways that educators can overcome the obstacles they face and find practical and valuable means to implement mindfulness practices into their teaching and lessons.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have used a literature review to address the inquiry question of my capstone project: *Does teaching mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting benefit students in their emotional, social, or academic development?* Literature has supplied countless research to support emotional, social, and academic benefits mindfulness has for children. Specifically, children in the elementary grades who are already undergoing an intense amount of social and emotional development.

Mindfulness can be seen in a variety of forms. Four overarching types of mindfulness include mindful breathing, mindful movement, mindful listening, and mindful eating. It seems that with more awareness of the benefits mindfulness has,

schools can start to implement these practices into elementary classrooms in simple and practical ways. For example, a daily five-minute mindfulness activity can serve as a transition activity or “brain break” activity in the typical elementary classroom.

This literature review has provided me with valuable information, in order to complete my capstone project. This review has provided me with insights into the history of mindfulness and its development over time, the varying definitions of mindfulness and their commonalities, the benefits of mindfulness in the following realms: emotional, social, and academic. It has also given me insight into the various forms mindfulness can be practiced in and how to implement these practices into an elementary classroom environment, despite the various obstacles educators face. Mindfulness can be implemented in a variety of settings and practiced with few resources and requirements. Mindfulness seems to allow of a flexibility in activities and the option to incorporate more or less academic content into the practice as well as more or less creativity and into the practices.

In the next chapter, I will delve into a detailed explanation of my capstone project. I explain how I chose to develop mindfulness curriculum which is intended for an audience of elementary students, specifically for primary grade levels, that will focus on incorporating mindful practices into the classroom.

My curriculum is a four-week unit. Each week includes engaging activities that encompass one of the four types of mindfulness described in this chapter: mindful breathing, mindful movement, mindful listening, mindful eating. These activities were developed with a busy teacher in mind. They are intended for a twenty-minute lesson for each day of the week. This small-time increment allows for teachers to incorporate them

into a morning meeting or character education lesson. These activities are also thematic, and incorporate two National Health Education standards for preschool through second grade. In Chapter Three, I will outline the details of the project further.

CHAPTER THREE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

After completing a detailed literature review to better understand the inquiry question of my capstone: *Does teaching mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting benefit students in their emotional, social, or academic development?* Chapter Three will provide a thorough description of my capstone project.

This chapter is broken into four large sections. The first section in this chapter outlines the critical components of the project. The details of this curriculum development will be explained. I will discuss the target audience and setting, the curriculum content, and the scope and sequence of the lessons.

The second section will explain the lesson plans' structure and the research that supports this. The third topic will delve into the curriculum writing framework and the supporting literature that guided my curriculum content and development.

The fourth section will conclude the chapter with a timeline for the development and completion of this capstone project. It explains how this project adds to the on-going education based conversations about mindfulness. Lastly, I will end the chapter with a brief summary.

Project Description

Target audience. My capstone project is the development of mindfulness curriculum designed for a target audience of elementary students, specifically geared toward primary grades: kindergarten, first, and second grade. I chose to design a curriculum for younger students because they already engage in a lot of character

development lessons and community building lessons. Mindfulness activities can easily be incorporated into these pre-existing social and emotional skill development lessons. Younger students also routinely participate in small breaks from learning throughout the day. These are often referred to as “brain breaks” in modern society. Mindfulness practices do not take long to participate in and therefore could be a great replacement or use of a “brain break.”

Setting. The implementation of this curriculum is intended to take place in a general elementary education classroom setting. The lessons are intended to be conducted by the general education classroom teacher and preformed as whole group lessons, for all students in the class to participate in at the same time. Young students are rapidly developing social and emotional skills, so introducing them to mindfulness is a healthy way teach them how to manage emotions and cultivate positive social interactions. Due to their rapid social and emotional development, it is a very age appropriate practice for them to regularly participate in. Since it has been supported in the literature review that mindfulness can help a variety of individuals, it seemed appropriate to create a curriculum for a genral education classroom.

Curriculum structure. The curriculum that I created includes four weeks of mindfulness lessons. These lessons are intended to be implemented daily, for the approximate length of twenty minute per lesson. Each week has a theme that focuses on a particular type of mindfulness.

This is intended to expose young students to a variety of mindfulness practices, which will help them determine what type of mindful activities benefits their social, emotional, and academic development the best. The lessons include a formative

assessment to check for understanding of the lesson goals and specific objectives. The project also includes a summative assessment at the end of the unit which is designed to show evidence of learning based on the desired outcomes of the unit.

Scope and sequence. Each set of five lessons focuses on a unique form of mindfulness: mindful breathing, mindful movement, mindful listening, and mindful eating. The first week includes five lessons that expose students to mindful breathing and activities that encompass it. Mindful breathing is introduced first because other types of mindfulness include mindful breathing as well, so it is important to get students familiar with this important backbone of mindfulness practices, which is breath awareness.

The second week focuses on mindful movement. Mindful movement activities typically include movement which is added into breath awareness. The students are introduced to a new yoga pose each day of this week, surrounding the theme of nature.

The third week encompasses activities that center on the topic of mindful listening. This form of mindfulness is implemented in the third week to ensure that students' awareness and practice at attention have been more developed, since listening takes a strong awareness.

The fourth week of lessons are embedded in the theme of mindful eating. Children are highly motivated by snacks and treats, so this set of lessons are intended to be implemented at the end of this month-long unit in order to end the unit on an engaging and highly motivating idea of mindfulness. This is intended to motivate students to continue practicing mindfulness individually or at home.

Lesson Format

All of my lessons were created using a specific lesson plan framework based on the principals of *Understanding by Design Planning (UbD)*. This design format stems from the concept of developing a learning plan based on pre-determined assessments and encourages a backward approach to lesson planning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). I chose this UbD lesson structure because it is the design my school uses and encourages. The three main components in a UbD lesson that are included in my own lessons are: the desired outcomes, the assessment of learning, and the learning plan.

Desired outcomes. First, I chose my overarching goals for the mindfulness unit based off of two National Health Education Standards. Both standards are worked toward throughout the entire unit. They include, “National Health Education Standard: 7.2.1 Demonstrate healthy practices and behaviors to maintain or improve personal health. National Health Education Standard: 7.2.2 Demonstrate behaviors that avoid or reduce health risks” (Center for Disease Control, 2015, par. 2).

Assessment. Then, I created the formative and summative assessments that would provide valuable student evidence of meeting these standards. My formative assessment comes in the form of a workbook I created for students called *My Mindfulness Workbook*. The workbook includes twenty different formative checks which go along with each of the twenty lessons in the unit. I also created a summative assessment, which is intended to be given to the students after teaching the last lesson in the unit. This page long assessment checks for student understanding of the four major forms of mindful practices covered throughout the curriculum.

Learning plan. The learning plan in each lesson is broken down into three parts: a motivational set, a practice/performance task, and a formative check. The motivational

set is approximately five to ten minutes in length and includes a whole group discussion about the topic of the day's lesson to activate prior knowledge and includes an anticipatory set to increase student engagement. The practice/performance task includes the main mindfulness activity of the lesson that students participate in and is approximately five to ten minutes in length. The formative check is approximately five minutes in length at the end of each lesson. The students complete the page in their *My Mindfulness Workbook* that correlates with the day's lesson.

Framework and Supporting Research

The sources that guided my framework for curriculum development come from the same sources used in my literature review. The sources from my literature review provided extensive background information on the definition of mindfulness, the benefits of mindfulness, and the implementation of mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting. Although all sources used in my literature review provided value, there are five specific sources that are strongly influenced my curriculum development and the types of activities within the lessons I created.

First, I used concepts that I learned about from the book *Mindful Games* by Susan Kaiser Greenland. This book includes over sixty mindfulness activities that are child friendly. The book is grounded in research and theories regarding mindfulness. This book includes activities that focus on mindful breathing, mindful listening, and mindful movement. There are a lot of activities on breath awareness in this book, which is a central component of mindful practices.

Another source that supports my curriculum development is titled, *Mindfulness for Teachers: Simple Skills for Peace and Productivity in the Classroom* by Jennings.

This book provides the research that supports the reasoning to implement mindfulness into the elementary classroom setting. The book powerfully states, “While educators and policy makers have struggled over school reform for decades, the skillful application of mindful awareness may help catalyze the transformation education urgently needs” (Jennings, 2015, p. 182). This source also provides many concrete examples and suggestions for how to have students engage in mindful practices. I have incorporated these learnings into my own curriculum.

The book called, *The Everything Parent’s Guide to Raising Mindful Children: Giving Parents the tools to teach emotional awareness, coping skill, and impulse control in children* by Wardle and Weinhardt is another valuable source that I used to help develop valuable lessons regarding mindfulness. This book provides research supported benefits that occur when children practice mindfulness. It discusses academic, social, and emotional benefits that occur, which were outlined in more detail in the literature review. It also includes an entire section dedicated to explaining how mindfulness programs can and have been implemented in the school environments.

The fourth key source that was used in my curriculum development is the book titled, *Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children* by Nhat and the Plum Village Community. This book provides excellent instruction on various mindfulness activities for children. Specifically, this source provides lots of ideas of how to engage children in mindful eating and expressing gratitude.

The last main source providing me framework for my capstone project is the book *Cultivating Mindfulness in the Classroom* by Marzano. This book explains how to engage students in various mindful movement activities, such as yoga. This book helps explain

how to adapt mindfulness activities so that they are suitable and valuable for young children. This source was very helpful when developing age appropriate lessons in my curriculum.

These five sources provided examples of activities for young students and a strong research based framework that guided and inspired my own curriculum development.

Conclusion

Timeline. I started researching mindful practices and the implementation of mindfulness into the elementary classroom setting during my Capstone Practicum Course in the summer of 2017. This is when I started to develop my literature review that would serve as the supporting research for my project. I developed the mindfulness curriculum throughout the capstone course. I took this course in the spring of 2018. In order to accurately display the components of my project for my classmates, professor, and colleagues I created a slideshow. My capstone paper and project were completed in May of 2018.

Contributions to conversations. In conclusion, it is my hope that the curriculum I have developed will be used in elementary classrooms and add to the positive results that mindfulness has been having on children. This project is intended to help educators find simple yet meaningful ways to engage their students in mindful activities in order to support their social, emotional, and academic growth. If more curriculum is developed on the theme of mindfulness, it will allow mindfulness teaching to become a more widely accepted and talked about form of education. I hope that my curriculum will inspire more conversations among educators about the impact mindfulness can have on students.

Now that I have explained the details of my capstone project, the next chapter will reflect on the project itself and its development. In the final chapter, I will provide a detailed personal reflection on my capstone project. I will address what I learned from this process and the new insights that I have gained. I will reflect on the creation of my mindfulness curriculum and its value in the elementary classroom setting. I will discuss any potential challenges of implementing this curriculum and discuss my plan for implementation and use of this curriculum in my future teaching.

CHAPTER FOUR

REFLECTIONS

Introduction

In this fourth and final chapter of my capstone paper, I will provide a detailed personal reflection about my project and experience developing my capstone. Both my capstone paper and project have centered around a central question: *Does teaching mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting benefit students in their emotional, social, or academic development?*

First, I will provide an explanation of the new insights and major learnings I gained from the creation of my capstone project. I also refer back to the supportive literature that provided me with important concepts about mindfulness that I used to help guide the curriculum development surrounding mindfulness. The literature also provided me with examples of mindfulness implementation in a general education classroom setting. Then, I will provide specific examples of the implications of my project as well as any potential limitations one may have while implementing it. The chapter will end with a detailed look at how this project has positively impacted the teaching profession, how I intend to use the curriculum I developed in my future teaching practices, and how I will communicate the results of my capstone with other professionals in the field.

Major Learnings Linked to Literature

Throughout the development of my capstone, I have gained many new insights and moments of learning regarding the topic of mindfulness teaching in a primary classroom. The insights I gained were often linked to the literature I was delving into as

part of my literature review. Two particular insights have impacted me greatly: mindfulness supports students academically, socially and emotionally and mindfulness can be simple to implement in a classroom setting.

Mindfulness supports students. The first major insight I gained from this experience is how many academic, social, and emotional benefits mindfulness can provide to young students. Teachers are under copious amounts of pressure to create large academic gains for their students. Due to these intense academic expectations that are put on schools and teachers, the social and emotional education of children is greatly lacking. As a professional educator, I see first hand how many of my students struggle to regulate their emotions, have anger issues, and conflict problems with peers. If teachers are allowed the time and resources to address this, there is something that will help: mindfulness.

Referring back to the literature used in my literature review it clearly states, “mindfulness practice can enhance overall mood and well-being” (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013, p. 26). Not only does the literature support that mindfulness provides emotional growth but also social growth when stating, “mindfulness practice can have a profound and positive impact on your relationships, not only with friends and family members, but also with total strangers” (Wardle & Weinhardt, 2013, p. 35). So often we hear about the importance of educating the whole child. Mindfulness provides a way to teach social and emotional skills that are lacking in modern schools where the primary focus is on academic skills. This is not to dismiss the positive academic impact that mindfulness can provide for students, though. Literature supports that teaching mindfulness will teach

students how to concentrate and focus better, which will allow them to pay attention to academic content more effectively. The literature by Hanh states:

“Teachers may often ask their students to ‘pay attention,’ but they may not teach them how to do so. The practice of mindfulness teaches students how to pay attention, and this way of paying attention enhances both academic and social-emotional learning.” (2011, p. 19)

Simple implementation. The second major learning is that mindfulness can be very simple to implement in a classroom setting. Many mindfulness activities are incredibly simplistic and require little to no materials. The literature supports this when describing the types of mindfulness practice that can be done with children. In one literature source it described an activity when stating, “Imagine walking in the snow, leaving deep footprints. Imagine walking on thin ice, being very careful not to break the ice” (Hanh, 2011, p. 98). Sometimes all it takes is sparking a child’s imagination; primary students love to engage in imaginative play anyway.

The lessons that I developed carry over the idea of using simple activities to teach mindfulness. For example, one of my mindful breathing lessons invites students to use their hand to trace each finger in order to guide their breaths. I developed a mindful listening activity where students walk in nature and pick out specific sounds they hear in the moment.

The literature linked learning connections I gained through this process allowed me to quite naturally develop my capstone project: mindfulness curriculum for primary students. My curriculum consists of twenty lessons on mindfulness. Throughout these twenty lessons students participate in simple yet engaging mindfulness exercises that

encompass: mindful breathing, mindful movement, mindful listening, and mindful eating. Each lesson is intended to be twenty minutes long. Although the lessons came together easily there are some implications and potential limitations that teachers may face when trying to implement them into their own classroom that I discuss below.

Implications and Limitations

My project certainly includes implications that schools will be given a specific time in their schedule to teach children mindfulness. After doing this project, it has reaffirmed my personal belief that it is important to teach young children not only academic skills, but also social and emotional skills. Mindfulness curriculum would be a great way to help teach the whole child. This will require school policymakers to create schedules and form policies that allow teachers to make time for these types of lessons and activities.

Currently, some schools are embracing the opportunity to teach children mindfulness in school while others are still primarily focused on creating solely academic gains. Depending on the school's philosophy, a teacher may be more limited with the amount of time that they can implement the lessons that I have developed. I have thought about a potential modification teachers may make based on their limitations. While I created these lessons to be twenty minutes long, I have each lesson broken up into three activities (an anticipatory set, a performance task/practice, and a formative check/assessment). If a teacher would only be allowed to incorporate mindfulness for 5-10 minutes a day, they could break each lesson down further and teach a small activity from one lesson over the course of three days. I created these lessons to be able to be modified accordingly to the teachers needs and requirements.

Another implication of my project is that parent and community education will be prevalent when a school starts to engage students in mindfulness practices. A potential limitation surrounding mindfulness is that some people don't know what it is or think it has religious ties. It would be important for schools to offer information sessions and handouts to educate families about what mindfulness is and why it is a positive thing for their child to participate in it at school.

Communicating Results

There has been a huge need at my school for more social and emotional support for our students. I will be communicating the results of my capstone paper and project with my grade level team teachers in the hopes that we can use my developed curriculum and implement it to our grade level next year. I hope that in communicating these results with others, it will help spur an initiative at our school and district to start teaching mindfulness practices to children.

In the future, I plan to use my presentation regarding my capstone results as a way to share the information I gained with all of my colleagues during professional development days. I hope that by communicating my results to other educators, they will become more interested in trying out mindfulness practices in their own classrooms.

Future Projects

After dedicating my time and energies into the development of mindfulness curriculum, my first plan for the future will be to incorporate it into my own teaching practices. I currently teach first grade and plan to implement the twenty lessons I developed in my classroom. After that, I hope to effectively communicate the positive results of this project to my school team members which I outlined in the section above.

Although I have developed a month's worth of mindfulness curriculum, there are so many more possibilities. Ideally, I would love to continue developing curriculum for mindfulness that could last the span of an entire school year. Throughout my research and literature review I found many sources that support daily mindfulness practices. Jennings stated:

“By regularly practicing mindful awareness and applying mindful awareness to our life and work, we begin to recognize that we are not victims of circumstances and that we have the power to change ourselves, our classrooms, and our schools for the better.” (2015, p. 182)

My school has discussed the great amount of emotional and social needs that are being seen in our current student population and brainstorming ways to address them. There has been discussion of creating a specialist class to meet some of these needs. A passion project that has stemmed from my capstone experience would be to teach mindfulness as a specialist course to elementary students! If schools could find ways to allocate the time and resources to make mindful learning a specialist class, than all students would be able to engage in daily mindful practice by a teacher who has extensive experience and knowledge about the topic and how best to implement it to meet the developmental needs of students. It is exciting to think about the future projects that could develop out of my capstone experience and I look forward to continuing my active interest and pursuit to implement mindful practices into the elementary classroom setting.

Benefits to the Profession

Overall, I believe my project benefits the teaching profession because it is providing carefully thoughtout mindfulness curriculum for teachers to implement

themselves. The curriculum is designed so that even if someone has no experience with mindfulness but wants to see the positive impacts it can have in their classroom, they could use my step-by-step lessons. These lessons are all tied to an academic health standard and to supportive literature and research. There is an increased interest in mindfulness and the potential of teaching it to children that is spanning across our schools and society. Although the interest is there many teachers and professionals do not have the time to dedicate to specific research and curriculum develop.

My primary hope is that the time I have dedicated to this project will allow other teachers to feel like they can implement my curriculum more easily and effectively for their students' benefit. My capstone project will provide interested teachers the resources and confidence they need to start implementing mindfulness practices into their own classroom settings. My desire is to activate the interest of teaching professionals who have not thought about incorporating mindfulness into their classrooms.

Conclusion

Throughout my time spent on developing both my capstone paper and project, I learned many new things about mindfulness and how best to implement it in the elementary classroom setting. I found several quality sources of literature that helped me gain more answers to my central question: *Does teaching mindfulness in the elementary classroom setting benefit students in their emotional, social, or academic development?* I developed mindfulness curriculum to benefit the elementary education profession through providing teachers with valuable ideas and resources for implementing mindfulness instruction. I hope to continue my research and implementation of mindfulness curriculum in my own professional practices and never stop seeking out new

and valuable information that will benefit my students socially, emotionally, and academically.

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