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## Abstract

### Teacher Narratives and Coping with Stress: The Role of Mindfulness

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Formal mindfulness-based wellness education (MBWE) and related practices are being increasingly used in a variety of human services as interventions for individuals and groups susceptible to stress related problems and burnout. A growing body of research literature supports the use of MBWE training programs and practices in the field of education. This qualitative study focuses on the value of MBWE in pre-service education programs as a tool for emotional regulation, stress management and achievement of educational goals. Data is drawn from narratives provided by eight University of Toronto teacher trainees, four of whom had received formal mindfulness-based wellness education. Journal entries and interview-generated narratives document teacher perceptions about the potential of mindfulness training and practice in facilitating professional and personal goals. Interview responses and journals provide narratives which give voice to pre-service teachers' concerns about stress management related to teaching, and professional roles, as well as interpersonal skills with colleagues, students, parents, and administrators. This paper suggests that for teachers who are seeking strategies for coping with stress, mindfulness may have a role to play in increasing teachers' resilience by promoting internal resources to buffer the emotional aspects of their work. These narratives provide evidence that mindfulness training can be used as a coping mechanism. Participants who had enrolled in "Stress and Burnout: Teacher and Student Applications" expressed a readiness and openness to learn more about stress, as well as strategies to reduce it. Insights are provided for curriculum planning for teacher education programs. Narratives and teacher journaling are recommended for further

inquiries into factors for support of introduction and implementation of mindfulness-based wellness education programs for teachers, as well as for offering similar strategies for use by students in the classroom.

Key words: Self-efficacy, Wellness, Stress, Resilience, Interpersonal Skills

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, Dad and Mom.  
To all future teachers, you are  
the change.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction and Research Questions

#### Introduction

In modern daily life many people are faced with an overwhelming workload, with a seemingly perpetual lack of time to attend to the responsibilities of each day. When the result is high stress levels and feelings of defeat, it is important to explore avenues to manage and reduce these symptoms. In educational settings, the phenomenon of stress is common for teachers as well as for students. The need to respond to the occurrence of teacher stress lies in the evidence that stress affects teacher behavior and in turn can influence the classroom environment and the positive learning experience for students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2008). Therefore, it is important for teacher training programs to equip teachers with skills and strategies that help them become more skilful and mindful in their teaching practice, and as well, to enable them to assist their students to deal with stress.

The stress response is the nonspecific response of the organism to any pressure or demand, and is usually triggered by our automatic reactions to situations, also known as our habitual appraisals (Poulin, 2009). Siegel (2010) has demonstrated how stress affects brain function, resulting in sub-optimal processing capacity, and a deteriorated capacity to take in information. The practice of mindfulness, on the other hand, works to bring greater awareness to these automatic reactions, breaking the chain of habitual response. It is responsive, flexible, active, and introspective. Mindfulness practice includes sitting,

guided and walking meditation, body scan techniques, and various movement traditions such as yoga and tai chi (Prattis, 2008). The presentation of mindfulness, and mindfulness practice in this thesis is primarily based on research and strategies developed by Kabat-Zinn (2009).

The benefits of mindfulness practice are best understood experientially, enabling one to first experience its effects personally, before teaching it effectively to others. In the Mindful Schools, the key to successfully teaching the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program (MBSR) is having had an experienced and qualified teacher as a guide (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Much earlier research has focused on the educational outcomes for students without addressing the importance of mindfulness for the teacher educator, both as a practitioner and as the deliverer of the learning technique. However, wellness promotion interventions that endorse mindfulness for individuals working in human services professions associated with a high prevalence of stress-related health and mental health problems, including burnout, are increasing in number (Maslach, 2003). While recognizing that many institutional problems need to be addressed in order to reduce the incidence of stress-related problems in our society, effective interventions that equip individuals with enhanced coping skills and support them in cultivating a sense of well-being in their lives, offer a means to address the issues of stress and burnout.

### **Research Questions**

The primary aim of this research was to explore how teachers negotiate stress both with and without formal mindfulness training. Furthermore, I was interested to see if formal mindfulness training could act as a stress buffer and concerned with whether the

use of strategies learned in mindfulness training can enhance the teaching experience. I began my research by asking the question: Can mindfulness training aid and improve the practice of teachers through facilitating their capacities of self-efficacy, adaptive interpersonal abilities, and resilience to stress?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The literature review will cover the following areas: Mindfulness, teacher stress, burnout and other outcomes, related concepts of resilience to stress, self-efficacy for teachers, adaptive interpersonal capacities as well as theoretical considerations of Social, Emotional Learning (SEL), Formal Mindfulness Based Wellness Education (MBWE) and the demand for a Teacher Stress and Burnout Prevention Course.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness in health care is developed to provide an alternative to the limitations of the biomedical model in patient treatment, and became popular due to financial support from medical research institutions. Kabat-Zinn et al. (1992) developed and evaluated the first structured mindfulness-based program, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, (MBSR). Lieberman and Langer (1997) as well as Shapiro and Walsh (2003), found that dispositional mindfulness was related to several indicators of emotion regulation.

In an fMRI study with college students, Creswell, Way, Eisenberger and Lieberman (2007) found that those students with higher MAAS-measured dispositional mindfulness showed less reactivity to emotionally threatening visual stimuli, as indexed by lower amygdala activation, as well as stronger prefrontal cortical (PFC) activation, suggestive of better executive control. Mindful students also showed a stronger inhibitory association between the PFC and amygdala, suggesting better regulation of emotional Reactions (p.497).

Further research by Broderick (2005) “has shown that induced mindful states can produce a quicker recovery from negative mood states, in comparison to other, common regulatory strategies like distraction and rumination” (as cited in Shapiro, Brown & Astin, 2011, p. 500). Mindfulness training strengthens the capacity to pay attention, without judgment, to one’s thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, thereby promoting a more skillful response to life’s challenges. Kabat-Zinn et al., (1992) argues that “mindfulness practice is believed to lead to a felt sense of trust and closeness with others and an enhanced ability to approach stressful interpersonal events as challenges rather than threats, perhaps by promoting a capacity to witness thought and emotion so as not to react impulsively and destructively” (Broderick, 2005, as cited in Shapiro et al., 2011).

Since 1990, a growing body of empirical evidence supports the efficacy of MBSR programs in reducing stress and improving physical and mental health outcomes (Grossman, 2008; Epstein, 2003). Mainstream educators and the public have both accepted evidence for the efficacy of mindfulness. According to Shapiro, Brown and Astin (2011), several recent studies with adults have demonstrated evidence in support of meditation for enhancing attentional capacities and attention-related behavioral responses. Jha, Krompinger and Baime (2006) found enhanced alerting attention effects in participants after a month-long mindfulness meditation retreat. Shapiro et al., (2011) noted increased orienting attention in adults receiving MBSR mindfulness training. Jha, Krompinger, and Baime (2006) examined three overlapping subsystems: alerting, orienting, and conflict monitoring. At pre-test, participants in the retreat group demonstrated improved conflict monitoring performance relative to those in the MBSR and control groups. At post-test, participants in the MBSR course demonstrated

significantly improved ability to orient attention in comparison with the control and retreat participants, while retreat group members demonstrated heightened alerting relative to control and MBSR participants. However, the groups did not differ in conflict monitoring performance at post-test (Shapiro et al., 2011).

### **Teacher Stress and Burnout**

Since burnout is seen as a multidimensional phenomenon, there is a lack of extensive quantitative research that situates the phenomenon of the rising rate of teacher burnout in Canada. The lack of extensive quantitative research on the rising rate of teacher burnout in Canada has been attributed to the multidimensional nature of the burnout phenomenon. Nonetheless, several variables shown to contribute to teachers' stress leading to burnout have been studied. Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment, the hallmark indicators of burnout outlined by Maslach et al.'s (1996) Burnout Inventory (MBI), have been empirically reported for teachers at the elementary, intermediate, and secondary levels (Friesen, Prokop & Sarros, 1988). Farber and Miller found that teachers demonstrate signs of emotional exhaustion when they perceive themselves as being unable to give of themselves to students, as they did earlier in their careers; of depersonalization when they develop negative, cynical, and sometimes callous attitudes toward students, parents, and/or colleagues; and demonstrate signs of diminished personal accomplishment when they believe themselves unable to help students to learn, or failing to fulfill other school responsibilities (Farber & Miller, 1981, as cited in Byrne, 1994, p.646). Byrne (1994) further examined other determinants of stress such as role conflict, role ambiguity, work overload, classroom climate, decision

making, social support within the school organization, and the personal factors of locus of control, and self-esteem. A study of 3,044 Canadian teachers (i.e., 1,203 elementary, 410 intermediate, and 1,431 secondary) suggested a link between teacher emotional exhaustion and classroom climate. As the social climate of the classroom deteriorates, teachers become emotionally exhausted and develop negative attitudes toward their students and the teaching profession in general (Byrne, 1994). At every grade level, the factor of classroom climate was a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion. In turn, emotional exhaustion was a significant predictor of depersonalization. Consequently, Farber and Miller noted that teachers who experience burnout are likely to be less sympathetic towards students, be less apt to prepare adequately for class, and feel less committed and dedicated to their work (Farber & Miller, 1981, as cited in Byrne, 1994).

Although the literature on stress and burnout has clearly indicated that teachers' perceptions mediate the experience of stress, and that emotionally challenging situations are frequent sources of stress for teachers (Hargreaves, 2000; Kyriacou, 2001; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), there is limited research directed towards effective stress intervention. At the same time, there is evidence that teachers who do not experience an overwhelming number of stressors exhibit high levels of social and emotional competence as well as a strong sense of self-awareness (Jennings & Greenberg, 2008, p. 495). In other words, these teachers "appear to recognize their emotional strengths and weaknesses, giving them the ability to generate joy and enthusiasm to motivate learning" (Jennings & Greenberg, 2008, p. 495). Recent studies have proposed that the ability to regulate intense emotions in response to these stressors may prevent burnout (Sutton, 2004). Emotional regulation can be seen as a skill that promotes resilience through enabling an

ability to adapt. Further research indicated that individuals able to show adaptation in challenging circumstances had greater resilience to stressful experiences (Hurlington, 2010).

### **Resilience to Stress**

Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) defined resilience as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p.425). Further definitions expand on the importance of resilience in enhancing the emotional and social well being of individuals. Knight (2010) suggests that resilience “involves the ability to be flexible and adaptive in response to a problem, the ability to ‘bounce back’ after a negative experience and the ability to empathize with how others feel. It recognises that relationship skills are as important as self-awareness skills...” (p.67). Hurlington (2010) states that a resilient child had a particular psychological trait that allowed the child to mitigate the experience of stress. Researchers tried to identify this character trait, in order to promote the trait in children who had poor coping practices. Research suggested that the children’s high functioning in adversity was not due to a single trait but rather, to a combination of character traits and external protective factors (Hurlington, 2010).

Further research by Rutter (1979), Masten and colleagues (1980) had indicated the characteristics that distinguish resilient from non-resilient teachers are referred to as protective factors and have been noted to be both internal and external. When teachers experience protective factors, they report less stress. According to authors such as Rutter (1979) as well as more contemporary researchers such as Masten, internal protective factors for preservice teachers would consist of the internal resources teachers use to

manage the emotional aspects of their work; external protective factors would include access to mentorship, and collegial and administrative support, pedagogical skills and content knowledge (Rutter, 1979, and Masten, 2006, as cited in Hurlington, 2010).

Hurlington (2010), suggested that resilience enables individuals to manage difficult episodes, events, or chronic challenges in their lives as well as the ability to manage the emotional aspects of their work. In effect, resilience as a characteristic moderates the experience of stress and promotes feelings of self-efficacy.

### **Self-Efficacy for Teachers**

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation. This construct has been studied in work settings through examining the relationship between stress and strain and career self-efficacy in relation to stress and career adjustment (Matsui & Onglatco, 1997). Hoy and Woolfolk (2003) stated that teachers with a higher sense of efficacy are more motivated, set higher goals, and are less afraid of failure, and find new strategies when other are not successful.

Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy suggested that efficacy may be the most malleable early in learning, thus the first years of teaching could be critical to the long-term development of teacher efficacy. He further suggests that self-efficacy operates as a cognitive mechanism through which perceived controllability reduces stress reactions. In a meta-analysis Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) found that there is a strong relationship between self-efficacy and work performance. Moreover, Jex and Bliese (1999) found that self-efficacy moderates the relationship between certain stressors, such as number of hours worked, work overload or task meaning, as well as some of their consequences. Further, in a correlation analysis, self-kindness, an indicator of mindfulness correlated

positively with self-efficacy and control belief for learning; self-judgment, isolation, and over-identification were found to be negatively related to self-efficacy (Iskender, 2009). Another related concept that has received considerable attention is the importance of developing teachers' interpersonal relationship skills.

### **Adaptive Interpersonal Capacities**

Eisenberg et al., (1989) found that pro-social behaviors and positive interpersonal relations reduce work stress, whereas negative social relations might both increase stress and create secondary problems by diminishing social support. Similarly, Bobek (2002) found that new teachers' resilience to stress was enhanced when they had positive and productive relationships with people who understood the challenges of teaching and reinforced the value of what teachers did. Shapiro, Brown and Astin (2011) examined the effects of meditation and mindfulness on teacher stress, suggesting that those practices aid positive interpersonal functioning by not only fostering healthy learning climates for students, but also by enhancing the ability to approach stressful interpersonal events as challenges rather than threats (Goleman, 1995; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992). Indeed, Kabat-Zinn et al. (1992) theorized that mindfulness promotes a capacity to witness thought and emotion so as not to react impulsively and destructively, and that meditation may foster not only day-to-day interpersonal functioning but also adaptive responses to social conflict.

Additional studies examining the effects of the MBSR program, and adaptations of it, have demonstrated positive effects on interpersonal qualities and relationships; in a study conducted by Tloczynski and Tantriella (1998), the effects of Zen breath meditation on adjustment to college were examined in 75 undergraduates who self-reported heightened anxiety. Participants were randomly assigned to a control group, or

to a treatment group for either meditation or relaxation. The two treatment groups were instructed to practice their assigned technique at least once daily for 20 minutes. The meditation group demonstrated significant positive change in self-reported interpersonal relationship quality, and anxiety and depressive symptoms decreased significantly in both the meditation and relaxation groups (Tloczynski & Tantriella, 1998, as cited in Shapiro et al., 2011). Mindfulness-based interventions have shown positive effects on interpersonal qualities. As noted by Shapiro and colleagues (2011), research in mindfulness intervention outcomes and social stress, reported that dispositional mindfulness is measured with the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Research by Capel (1997) suggests that a combination of cognitive strategies assists student teachers to focus on skills for the self-management of anxiety, including: raising awareness of stress as a common aspect of the practicum experience; providing information on stress management techniques; encouraging students to identify and develop a range of personal coping strategies including self-reflection, lesson planning and rehearsal techniques, and forming support networks. Bolstering resilience, self-efficacy and adaptive interpersonal through mindfulness practices may be key in helping teachers become more confident and committed to teaching in the long-run.

The literature regarding Mindfulness, teacher stress, burnout, related concepts of resilience to stress, self-efficacy and adaptive interpersonal capacities demonstrated that these concepts relate to each other and further build on Social, Emotional Learning (SEL) and Formal Mindfulness Based Wellness Education (MBWE) and the demand for a Teacher Stress and Burnout Prevention Course (see Appendix A.)

### **Formal Mindfulness Based Wellness Education (MBWE)**

Mindfulness is being used as a reflective self-study practice in teacher education programs. Over the last 15 years, more than 1,200 novice student teachers as well as experienced teachers in University of Toronto graduate teacher education courses have practiced mindfulness and recorded their experiences in journals (Miller, 2004). Miller's findings, including evaluations from the graduate students support the notion that practicing mindfulness has increased: awareness of the student teacher's presence, contemplation of the student teacher's self-efficacy and the student teacher's own psychological well-being (Miller, 2004). Increasing contemplation through mindfulness of teacher self-efficacy beliefs is suggested to benefit social emotional competencies as well. In a study conducted by Winzelberg and Luskin, eleven teachers participated in eight formal 45-minute mindfulness practice sessions that involved focusing attention and other mindfulness strategies that could be used throughout the day to reduce stress. As a result, the intervention group teachers reported significant reductions in emotional, behavioural, and gastronomic stress symptoms as measured by the Teacher Stress Inventory to the control group without an intervention (Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999, as cited in Jennings and Greenberg, 2009).

### **Social Emotional Learning (SEL)-Theoretical Considerations**

Although decades of research have provided insights that promote and cultivate social and emotional awareness in teachers, as well as aiding the development of these competencies, until recently there have not been many interventions (Eisenberg, 1989). Jennings and Greenberg (2009) state that "neither teacher pre-service nor in-service

programs have used this rich source of material to help promote these social–emotional processes in teachers” (p. 491).

Social Emotional Learning theory (SEL) posits that individuals can develop the skills required for optimal social and emotional functioning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). These skills include recognizing and managing our emotions, developing caring and concern for others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and handling challenging situations constructively and ethically. They are the skills that allow individuals to calm themselves when angry, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices. The assumption is that if teachers have an awareness of their stressors or potential stressors and ways to manage them, it would increase their resilience by promoting more adaptive responses to the challenges. The research on teacher stress and emotions is still in its infancy but has become increasingly important since high levels of emotional stress can adversely affect job performance and may eventually lead to burnout.

### **The Demand for a “Stress and Burnout: Teacher and Student Application” Course**

In 2006, the elective course entitled “Stress and Burnout: Teacher and Student Application” debuted at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/UT) in the initial teacher education program as a pilot course. This Mindfulness-Based Wellness Program intended to address the problems of stress, burnout and attrition among beginning teachers, many of whom decide to leave the profession early in their career due to their inability to cope with the increasing complexity and emotional demands of the classroom (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). The three course authors, Dr. Corey Mackenzie,

Ph.D., Geoffrey Soloway, M.Ed and Dr. Patricia Poulin, Ph.D., went on to teach MBWE for the first time in a nine-week, 36 hour, elective course at OISE/UT. The course was developed for initial teacher education students interested in the phenomenon of teacher stress and not only meant to support and improve teachers' own ability to cope with their demanding jobs, but also to help them be more effective in the classroom and in their personal life. Course author Poulin (2009) noted that "while the causes and consequences of stress and burnout on teachers in general are well-known... little has been done in terms of finding solutions to this issue" (p.21). Since teachers' self-efficacy beliefs appear to be most impacted in the early years of teaching (Hoy & Woolfolk, 2000), the program's goal was to develop a curriculum that would help beginning teachers to gain competencies for coping with the demands of being a teacher. To address this goal, a program of study was created with mindfulness training at its core. Rather than simply providing teacher candidates with a traditional MBSR program, the program was adapted in two ways. First, a formal wellness component was added to emphasize not only the need to reduce stress but also to enhance well-being. Second, methods of practicing mindfulness in the classroom were incorporated, to introduce strategies for infusing mindful wellness education as a direct benefit to their students.

The core curriculum created for the Stress and Burnout course was called Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE). The first objective is to introduce mindfulness via both formal and informal practices. Formal mindfulness practices are twenty minutes in length and are similar to those used in MBSR programs, including the body scan, mindful yoga, and mindful sitting meditations focusing on the breath. Teacher candidates participate in formal mindfulness practices in class and also at home four days

per week for twenty minutes; teacher candidates receive a guided version of each practice on a CD to support their homework practice. It is suggested that course participants seek to bring mindfulness to life by incorporating their present moment awareness into everyday activities such as eating, speaking, and listening, and by paying particular attention to emotions and thought patterns. The course is highly experiential, which creates a practice-based body of experience for teacher candidates to use both within the classroom and throughout their lives.

Practice-based learning is now emphasized within teacher education (Ball & Forzani, 2009) because it addresses the problem of enactment that arises in the space between theory and practice. Darling-Hammond (2006) notes that “learning how to think and act in ways that achieve one’s intentions is difficult, particularly if knowledge is embedded in the practice itself” (p. 37). Therefore, by cultivating capacities for mindfulness and wellness during their training, teacher candidates perceived it to be an effective means of transferring knowledge into practicum experiences and future professional practice. In Chapter Two, I will describe the research design including the methods used to gather and analyze the data in response to the specific research questions as outlined in Chapter One.

### **Chapter 3:**

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **The Value of Gaining Insight from Narratives**

“Stories have the power to direct and change our lives”

(Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.157).

In the past 20 years the substantial increase in narrative research publications indicates that narrative research has become increasingly accepted and used in the Social Sciences and Education fields. Using narrative research brings academics and educators together to collaboratively document school experiences (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). A narrative approach will be used in this study for its methodological strengths, and because it is rich in its descriptive qualities to examine aspects of experience that are key to this inquiry (Landridge, 2007). Ashworth et al., (1986) suggests that many qualitative psychologists adopt the idea “that people formulate their own reality” (Ashworth, Giorgi, & de Koning, 1986, as cited in Smith, 2003, p.11), more importantly that “dealing with experiences and their meanings cannot be done by methods which are not suitable and certainly should not lead to the dismissal of research which attempts to come to grips with meanings in order to increase knowledge” (Ashworth et al., 1986, p. ix). It is therefore emphasized that researchers should approach the study of human phenomena with “methods consistent with the approach as well as the content” (Ashworth, Giorgi, & de Koning, 1986, as cited in Smith, 2003).

## **Recruitment of Participants**

In order to allow for a rich and thorough analysis (Smith 2003), eight participants were recruited, with four teachers who have training in mindfulness practice and four teachers who do not. The mindfulness trained teachers recruited from Geoffrey Soloway's course participants at OISE/UT had completed the Stress and Burnout Course and had already received a credit. The four other teachers who had no formal training in mindfulness were recruited via University of Toronto alumni groups. Seven teachers were practicing in Ontario schools and one in Quebec. The eight teachers (i.e., seven females and one male) ranged in age from 19 to 30 years old, and in the grade level taught; they had diverse cultural backgrounds, and one to seven years of teaching experience. Each participant provided a detailed narrative of their experience (see Appendix D). The participants all experienced varying degrees of stress and coping mechanisms. All participants had graduated from OISE/UT within the past six years. None of the participants had children. With the exception of M-Mandy, who resides in Cornwall, and Annette, who resides in Montréal, all participants reside and teach in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). In all narratives, teachers' years of experience, additional training, level of social support, grade level taught, and type of student taught were examined to see what factors played a role in their appraisal and experience of stress.

Originally, I had recruited two teachers who had completed the MBWE course at OISE/UT between the months of July and September 2011. Of the four teachers interviewed individually, two had taken the Stress and Burnout elective course. These two participants were assigned to the 'formal mindful' group, because they had

completed the Stress and Burnout course. To recruit OISE graduates who had not taken the course I contacted the supervisor of Co-Curricular Programming and Teacher Employment of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), who sent out my recruitment letter in an alumni newsletter. After receiving the participants' consent forms and journal responses, I noted whether they listed the course "Stress and Burnout: Teacher and Student Application (i.e., mindfulness) as a development course for their teaching practice. If a participant had not taken this course I grouped him or her in the comparative group, which was comprised of individuals without formal mindfulness training from OISE/UT.

Although participants three and four, who were initially grouped as non-mindful, had not listed the Stress and Burnout course as an influential course in their journal, I learned through the initial interview conversation that both had in fact taken the stress and burnout course, and had found the course, content and practice of mindfulness meaningful. Therefore, those two participants were reassigned to the mindfulness group; and consequently, I still needed a comparative group. To recruit a comparative group I contacted a communications officer of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) responsible for an e-mail newsletter to teachers in the Toronto area. I also got in touch with several colleagues who knew OISE/UT teacher graduates. Four individuals contacted me, and before sending out the letter of consent I directly asked them if they had taken the Stress and Burnout course. All four responded that they had not taken the course. My sample size thus increased to eight participants, four who had learned formal

mindfulness practice and four who had not. Due to time constraints and the inability to coordinate personal interviews with the four new recruits for the comparative group, their interviews were conducted via Skype.

Utilizing University of Toronto alumni in the sample was a strategy to reduce confounding variables by selecting only teachers who had gone through similar mindfulness training. Initially I had difficulty recruiting participants without any formal mindfulness training. Other participants dropped out because they could not commit to the time requirements of the study. The study participants are a demographic of young teachers, a possible factor in the decision whether to participate in a research project without remuneration.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected through a journaling exercise followed by individual interviews with each teacher participant (see Appendix D). After demonstrating their understanding of the nature of the study and signing the consent form, all eight teachers were given a guide for journaling, and requested to complete and return their individual journals within two weeks. To capture the participants' experiences, I attempted to understand their lived experience through their own words. First, by providing journal questions I was able to get detailed answers on aspects of their teaching experience I was planning to examine. I was selective in constructing my questions to bring out the strategies and emotions they negotiate as a new teacher.

The interviews were scheduled after receiving the journals from each teacher.

The interview questions were semi-structured and open ended (see Appendix D). In order to allow the interview to be organic and fluid, interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended. Participants were given the choice of using a pseudonym. Each interview was tape-recorded for later analysis. Interviews lasted between 45-120 minutes. During the interviews, I remained attentive and receptive to the narrative of their experience. I also clarified my understanding of their experience by paraphrasing their responses periodically, and asking for examples or elaborations.

The journal questions were created after reviewing the literature and inventory scales on the topics of burnout, self-efficacy, interpersonal skills and stress resilience. I reviewed influential work in the area carried out by Christina Maslach et al. (1996), which includes a set of 19 items from the latest version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory Form ES (MBI) (Maslach et al., 1996). The MBI focuses on measures of the phenomenon of burnout through three dimensions, namely, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is a feeling of exhaustion not explained by excessive physical activity. Depersonalization is a reduction of concern for the well-being of other persons.

The personal accomplishment dimension of burnout which relates to being effective and making a difference has been studied through the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (Hoy & Woolfolk 2000), a global measure of teachers' sense of

efficacy in their classroom teaching which includes three subscales: Efficacy in Student Engagement, Efficacy in Instructional Practices, and Efficacy in Classroom Management. The short form of the measure has 12 items and had high internal consistency ( $\alpha > .85$ ) and strong convergence with the long form of the scale. Studies have shown that beliefs about good teaching include perceptions of the characteristics that make teachers effective in influencing student performance. In many studies, pre-service teachers have been described as having a tendency to emphasize the academic dimension (i.e., content knowledge) of teaching much less than the personal, social, and affective characteristics of teaching in defining what a good teacher is (Collins, Selinger & Pratt, 2003). Due to the great variation in the qualities of a good teacher, as reported in the literature, I decided to have participants report qualities they perceived made a good teacher.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

Data collection began with the teacher's journals that were sent and responded to through e-mail. Although offered the choice of responding through mail, e-mail, or fax, all participants chose to respond through e-mail. Data gathering through journals took place from July 2010 and September 2010. An interview followed to clarify emerging themes and thoughts from their written journal to ensure clarity of meaning. In order to accurately represent the participants' lived experiences, I was mindful of using their own words in the collection of personal narratives. It should be noted that the transcripts of the recorded interviews and participant journal entries have been edited only to facilitate

understanding by the reader.

The use of an MP3 audio-recording device allowed me to focus on visually observable data throughout the personal interviews, including non-verbal cues and body language. My observations were recorded after the interview so that I could focus on listening to the participants. I also wrote down the challenges I experienced during the interviews to acknowledge my personal discomforts in bringing up questions without hesitation. In order to improve my questions for the next interview, I wrote additional observations in my journal. After each interview, I reviewed my field notes and recorded them digitally, making sure to include any other additional comments while the data was still fresh in my mind. As a formal mindful practitioner, I attempted to maintain awareness of my own perceptions and how they influenced the conduct of my interviews.

Once the data collection phase ended, the interviews and audio-recordings were transcribed. All data was coded for emerging themes, each of which will be discussed in Chapter 5. A brief biographical sketch in the data presentation section describes and introduces each participant.

## **Chapter Four: Teacher Narratives**

This chapter is based on eight teacher narratives. The narratives are based on their journals based on a questionnaire and interviews conducted afterwards to further probe their answers as reported in the journals. The narratives of the four teachers that have taken the “Stress and Burnout: Teacher and Student Application” course are presented at the beginning of the chapter. The teachers who have taken the MBWE course are identified by the following notation: M-name; these are followed by the narratives of four other teachers who had not taken the MBWE course.

### **Narratives of the Mindfulness Trained Teachers**

**M-Kayla: Intermediate/Senior teacher.** M-Kayla recently graduated from the University of Toronto Initial Teacher Training program with a focus on at-risk populations, and has been teaching since August 2010 in the Public School Board in Toronto. In her first semester of teaching she taught at a year-round alternative school. M-Kayla is qualified to teach intermediate and senior level Mathematics and Science, with a primary focus on Biology. Her strong desire to teach stems from working with children, adolescents and adults in an aquatic setting, during which she recognized that she enjoyed being part of the experience of someone else’s learning. She felt it was also rewarding seeing students become passionate about a subject and their own learning was

also rewarding. M-Kayla enjoys the constant challenge of teaching, and stated that although it is hard work, it is never something she could be tired of because it is not mundane. Through the challenges of teaching she learned a lot about herself. Although she describes her teaching philosophy as a work in progress, she views the subject matter of Math as valuable and practical, and she tries to explain Math concepts with applications.

She maintains a positive outlook when faced with students' refusal to learn something, stating that "it is not personal, but there might be a background story or a prior experience with the subject that makes them feel an adversity to the class, the subject, or school itself." For M-Kayla, a good teacher is someone who is caring and considerate.

When M-Kayla encounters difficulties, she first recognizes the signs and feelings that signal the onset of stress. Symptoms of stress may vary for her, but during a lesson examples of symptoms might include changes in her breathing pattern, her tone of speech or her pace of speech. Counting numbers sometimes helps her decompress during a lesson. She will do this in her head before she starts a lesson, while giving students the opportunity to take out their classroom materials, or during the wait-time given to students after a question.

Depending on the grade and lesson itself, she might introduce a break, quiet work period, or group work period. These periods create time to deal with her emotions, attend to her lesson, or to return her sense of calm. Moreover, the switch in gears of the lesson or pace of the unit also allows her to interact with students in a smaller setting. In an applied grade nine Math class, she may call for a quiet five-minute, "put-your-head-down

moment.” The students get the opportunity to calm down and focus, or to form their questions individually before the lesson continues.

**M-Justin: Adult English as a second language (ESL).** M-Justin switched his undergraduate program to Psychology after three years of engineering studies. He has been teaching for a little over one year, Math is his subject specialty (i.e., teachable) and he later picked up French as a second specialty. He spent one year in Korea teaching ESL to middle school students and is currently teaching English as a Second language (ESL) to adults. The ESL school is relatively small with five other teachers each teaching at different levels. He is by far the youngest teacher, so he feels isolated at times, “stranded on [his] own little island [his classroom]” with all the students looking to him for guidance. However, he recognizes that the other teachers have the same professional goals, and tries his best to integrate himself into the school system. Teaching adults makes this experience easier because they are much more independent and motivated to learn than younger students. Justin took the Stress and Burnout course because he knew that he gets stressed easily and was worried about getting burnout in teaching. He acknowledges that he “thought it would be important to find ways to counteract that stress.” He did not know about mindfulness but thought the course sounded interesting. Courses that focused on becoming a thoughtful and caring teacher helped him create a positive classroom environment. At the same time, he values instructional classes designed to teach content well.

M-Justin enjoys teaching because he finds it highly rewarding to see students succeed and grow over time. Teaching gives him the opportunity to make a meaningful impact on many peoples’ lives because he can help people achieve their goals. His

teaching philosophy is “treat students the way you’d like to be treated.” He tries to model respect at all times and believes that “all students can learn, and all students learn differently.” He practices the first part of his philosophy by modeling the proper use of friendly tone, smiling, greeting, talking to students as equals, always saying please and thank you, and inviting questions from students. He assumes that students are capable of learning, and that it is the teacher’s job to help students succeed. This may mean differentiating classroom instructions for students’ ability levels, employing teaching strategies which engage multiple intelligences, and stimulating different learning styles in class. He makes a conscious effort to vary the types of activities, through a combination of independent, paired, group and whole class work during a day. This allows students to experience a variety of different methods of instruction, and increases the likelihood that the students will enjoy the class and learn.

M-Justin regards a good teacher as someone who is able to bring out the full potential in students. In his view this ideal can be achieved if the teacher commands respect in the students, is instructionally intelligent, and has good knowledge of the content being taught. According to Justin, the combination of caring, leadership, instructional knowledge and content knowledge are what make a good teacher. In his view, the process of becoming a good teacher never ends; he believes that he is a good and caring teacher because he is knowledgeable in a variety of instructional techniques, and has a decent ability to command respect and discipline in the classroom. He also continues to develop his competence in content knowledge.

M-Justin acknowledged several challenges that he faces in his career at the moment. One was his lack of teaching experience. He thinks that his lack of experience

affects the quality of teaching in his class. He is convinced that if he had more experience, he would have more content knowledge as well as practice dealing with everyday situations and classroom management issues. Due to his lack of experience he has more self-doubt about his teaching, and questions at times whether his doubts are visible while he is teaching, and whether they affect his performance or the students' confidence in him as a teacher. The way he addresses these problems are with logical counter-arguments, which he finds are extremely helpful. For example, he tells himself that he does the best job that he can do, and that as a first-year teacher he needs to temper his expectations with reality. When he is experiencing stress in the classroom he will first try to remain calm and not get too stressed out. When he is overwhelmed he observes a tingling sensation in the back of his neck, which indicates that his stress level is rising. He tries to take calming breaths and to focus on how to get the lesson back on track. Since taking the MBWE course he believes that he can feel the fight or flight response, breathe, take a step back and do a bit of positive self-talk. I'm more aware of what the breath can do , I try not to think about anything, not to dwell on the negative event and just be present so I don't get caught up in that negative cycle of negative self-talk. I think if I didn't take the course I might still be doing the actions but I wouldn't be aware of it.

M-Justin states that the course gave him insight about how to recognize it and how to decompress. He also recalls that in the course we talked about the techniques of meditation and how you can implement it in the classroom; was presented. One of the assignments during the practicum was a journal assignment "where we had a chance to apply concepts and practices". In the aftermath of a stressful experience in class, he tries not to dwell upon the lesson too much, and puts more focus on how he could improve it.

personally, but rather analyze the situation logically and critically.

**M-Mandy: Intermediate/senior teacher.** M-Mandy has been teaching for four years. She wanted to teach because she loves how passionate teenagers are about life, love, music, art, sports and anything else that they are discovering. She finds it infectious to be around their enthusiasm and feels she has the empathy and compassion necessary to connect with youth. In her own experience as a high school student she felt isolated as a teenager partly due to the lack of creativity and understanding from her teachers. She was lucky to have very supportive and forward thinking parents who exposed her to many exciting ideas. She hopes to bring that same excitement to her classroom to show her students the world of possibilities that exists for them.

M-Mandy is an art teacher and has taken professional development courses such as print making for educators, video art and activism in the classroom, and teaching art criticism. Two other courses that informed her teaching were Differentiated Instruction and Mindfulness Practices for Teachers. Differentiated Instruction focused on providing options for different learning styles and was helpful in approaching learning in a holistic way, by engaging the learner's mind, body and soul. She considered Mindfulness Practices for Teachers as the most useful course she has taken. The idea that "the best way to teach is to model the behavior you expect" was a revelation for her. By learning to eat properly, exercise, meditate, do yoga, and generally focus on her wellbeing, she found a healthy frame of mind which made her a more energetic, calm and patient teacher.

For M-Mandy, a good teacher should be passionate, enthusiastic, engaging, caring, patient, a clear and concise communicator, prepared and organized, resourceful, creative, understanding, fun, and respectful. She likes to think that she possesses all these qualities but that her strengths are her passion, her energy, her creativity as well as her sense of humor, organizational ability, strong work ethic and ability to understand and empathize with her students. She would like to cultivate more patience, especially when things do not go according to plan. The philosophy of teaching by modeling the behavior, attitude, skills, and execution that the teacher hopes to cultivate in her students is what she tries to teach. She states that if a teacher wants to create patient, kind and engaged citizens, then she needs to be patient and kind with her students and be an engaged citizen herself.

M-Mandy practices yoga twice a week, meditates regularly, exercises three times a week, walks her dog, takes relaxing baths, cooks, writes and reads for pleasure to maintain a balance in her life, and relieve her stress. She makes art and has tea or a dinner with her mother every week. These are the practices that keep her calm, connected and energized.

As a supply teacher she finds it difficult to engage students and maintain motivation. Students do not have an established relationship with supply teachers; they know that the supply teacher cannot assign homework or administer the same consequences as their regular teacher does. Accordingly, she tries her best to be clear about classroom expectations, but when their own teacher has not been clear about expectations or consequences she experiences difficulty. Classroom management, along with engaging students with low motivation or specialized learning plans, are major

challenges for a supply teacher. In the majority of supply assignments there are no instructions to modify lessons. She tries to make modifications as needed, but sometimes finds it impossible to give students the extra attention they require. When a lesson is not going well, she tries to assess the situation by asking herself, “is the material too difficult? Are the students excited or tired due to an event or distraction? Do I need to approach this material differently?” She will ask the students questions to determine which option it is more likely to be and then improvise. If the material is too difficult, she will re-teach, starting from the last point that the students understood. If they are simply distracted, she will take the time to address the event that has caused the distraction, and then scrap the lesson and do a fun activity. If her approach is not working she will try whatever is necessary to gain their attention. Some attention strategies she has used include drawings to illustrate concepts instead of talking, turning the lesson into a game, giving characters nicknames and asking students to teach her or each other. M-Mandy attempts to preserve what she can in a lesson plan but also recognizes when something is not working and tries to be flexible.

When she faces a difficulty at school, she takes a walk at lunchtime. This helps her gather her thoughts, breathe, decompress and consider a solution. She recognizes that in the heat of the moment, things can seem daunting or hopeless and has learned that taking the time to step away and regroup allows her to come back and approach the situation with greater clarity.

M-Mandy does not experience isolation at school, but also does not feel like part of some school communities because she is an occasional (i.e., supply) teacher. She acknowledges that this is due to the fact that she is not at the same school on a regular

basis and does not have a consistent relationship with the staff or students, although some staff members make her feel very welcome. She also remarked that at schools with only one large table in the staff room she is more likely to sit or be invited to sit with staff and become part of the conversation, whereas at schools with multiple tables, she feels that she has to sit at the “other” table. When she held a regular placement in Toronto, she felt much more connected and valued because she was an art teacher and many other staff members were constantly asking for her help or advice with projects. She was involved with extra-curricular projects such as prom, graduation, the school play, pep rallies, yearbook, and murals. M-Mandy finds Art can bring together many people and create a sense of community, which was one of the reasons she became an art teacher in the first place. However, she admits that there are some challenges to creating this sense of community.

One of these challenges cited by M-Mandy is the possibility of parents being disagreeable toward her teaching methods or some aspect of their child’s learning. That being said, M-Mandy believes that if parents get angry during a parent-teacher interview, that it is due to a lack of communication, or a feeling of not being understood or heard by the teacher. In talking with parents, she tries to remain calm and to restate clearly what she thinks they are expressing. Once she and the parents understand each other, there is room to clearly communicate the actions it would take to resolve the issue, or to suggest steps they might take to resolve it themselves.

More generally, M-Mandy finds being proactive is important when it comes to communication with parents. She states that calling home on a regular basis or providing regular updates for both positive and negative behavior is a good practice, noting that

it's tough when you hear nothing from a teacher and all of a sudden there is a negative report card or an expulsion. Chances are there was behavior that should have been pointed out earlier.

For younger learners, she thinks that daily agendas with regular notes home are an effective way to communicate. For teenagers she finds once a month updates or phone calls are a better choice.

Fortunately, M-Mandy teaches Art and most students who take Art do so by choice. When she had a regular placement she had few reluctant learners. Students who were procrastinators learned very quickly how long the artistic process takes; bad marks and unfinished projects were enough of a motivator to curb this habit. As an occasional teacher she sees reluctant learners often, and her first instinct is to figure out why they are reluctant. She asks herself, "is the material too difficult? Is there an emotional or personal issue distracting them from their work? Do they need an alternative environment?" If she has a reluctant learner she attempts to assess the category to which they belong, and make modifications or changes as necessary and see if there are improvements. Sometimes simply allowing a student to go to the library or resource room can produce positive results. If she is aware of a more serious issue, such as a detrimental family environment, she would contact the appropriate resource personnel (e.g., support worker) and with them options on how to approach the situation.

When she is with a class for a period of time, she likes to start with a personal "get to know you" questionnaire. She states that, "it gives them a chance to tell me a bit about themselves and I will use the information to plan lessons. I also like to do a personal presentation, on their favourite artist or the role Art plays in their life." These

activities give students a chance to share not only with her but with their peers as well.

Lastly, she likes to do a postcard activity where she asks them to choose an image from her boxes of postcards to represent their mood or how they feel about an upcoming or past event. It gives her a chance to see how they are feeling, and how well they can use visual elements to represent emotions or ideas. Sharing in this way builds a stronger sense of community in the classroom.

M-Mandy feels most engaged when she is talking directly to students, asking questions, being asked questions, discussing concepts, writing or drawing on the board. This is also the case when talking to students one on one. M-Mandy feels insecure about her abilities when she cannot maintain quiet or order in the classroom during a work period. She acknowledges that, as a supply teacher, classroom management can be very difficult. Asking students to pay attention to her is normally quite easy, but getting them to pay attention to their work and be productive is more difficult for her, which makes her feel insecure in her abilities. She also feels insecure when there is an incident between two students either in the hall or in the classroom that requires the involvement of outside support. Although she recognizes that it is not her responsibility she believes that she has failed as a teacher if she cannot resolve conflict between her students, even if, as a supply teacher, she might not be responsible for these students for an extended period of time.

**M-Caitlin: Primary/junior teacher.** M-Caitlin completed her undergraduate degree in Biology, and taught her own grade five and six class for three years. Prior to this experience, she was a supply teacher for six months. She felt unprepared after graduation and recognizes that there is a sizeable gap between theory and practice. She specialized in reading and has taken an Additional Qualification (AQ) in Special

Education. She met with a Math coach, and attended several demonstration classrooms and one day workshops including: Arts, Physical Education, Differentiated Instruction, Maintaining a Positive Class Culture, Mathematics and Literature. She took part in counselling through her English Academic for Purpose (EAP) and discussed her teaching at length with a mentor-counselor. She completed an OISE option, in the elementary program that focused on community. She explains that, “there was another course called mindfulness or something that was really unique, and different from any of my courses; it really got me interested in meditation and yoga and I just started to do it on my own.” M-Caitlin uses mindfulness in her Grade One classroom, stating, “I actually do meditation with my kids at school every day. It’s an alternative school so I’m able to do it; the parents are into it.”

M-Caitlin’s teaching philosophy is to respect every student regardless of his or her age. To be kind and giving and to make sure that every child’s voice is heard and that everyone has the opportunity to be successful comes from that philosophy, as does nurturing self-esteem and a sense of self in her students. She practices this in her classroom by making time to listen to everyone’s ideas. She directly teaches the students how to listen to each other attentively. Moreover, she strives to remain positive as much as she can. M-Caitlin assigns her students work at which they will likely succeed, making sure she is supportive so that they can complete it well. She creates a positive culture in the class so that each child is given opportunities to use their strengths (e.g., helping others on the computer, telling a creative story, helping an injured friend, etc.).

For M-Caitlin a good teacher is patient, creative, nurturing, organized and self-reflective, as well as a good team player, risk taker, and good communicator. She

believes she is patient, nurturing, and very self-reflective. Self-reflection is important because as a teacher one is constantly taking risks. M-Caitlin emphasizes this point in stating, “you are always trying new things. I find that being self-reflective is just part of who I am, it’s not really formal or anything. I just do it.” Throughout her studies at OISE she wrote many reflective journals and considered attempting an action-research project.

When M-Caitlin encounters challenges she often panics and criticizes herself. She acknowledged that these behaviors prevent her from attending to the current situation. At times, she thought that the challenges she encountered meant she was not a very good teacher and attempted to decompress her stress by eating sweets at work. However, she also kept a journal to write about the experiences that were causing her stress.

### **Narratives of the Non-Mindfulness Trained Teachers**

**Kelly: Intermediate/senior teacher.** Kelly wanted to teach because she wanted to have a positive impact on her students, and is now in her second year of teaching. She feels very fortunate to have had strong female role models as teachers when she was in Grade 5, 6, 7 and 8 in her Science and Technology classes. These role models encouraged her to pursue her interests in Science and Math and inspired her give to her students what her mentors had given to her. She is active with professional development courses, and participated in the Radical Math Study group at OISE. Members of the group were teachers of varying years of experience and school experiences. They worked together to design and implement classroom-based action research projects that focused on social justice. Kelly invited graduate students working with the study group into her classroom at various points during the study group, and they videotaped her interactions with the

class. One of these video recordings involved Kelly conducting a focus group with four boys in her class.

Kelly also attended the New Teachers Institute day sponsored by Ontario secondary school teacher's federations (OSSTF) public schools District 12, which educated her on the collective agreement, professional boundaries with students, and the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP). In February 2011, she attended the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Eureka! Conference for Science teachers, and took part in sessions on the Canadian Space Resource Centre and differentiated instruction for Grade 10 Optics.

Kelly believes that good teachers need to empathize with their students, while at the same time maintaining professional boundaries. Good teachers must be patient, able to keep their word and maintain order in the classroom. The ability to adapt to change is another important skill. She thinks that she is patient and believes in warning students when their behaviour in class is inappropriate or becoming disruptive. She has stopped lessons to ask students what they need from her to be able to better understand the material.

Her philosophy in her practice is that "with great power comes great responsibility." As a teacher, she recognizes that she is in a position of authority and wants to use that power to expose her students to many ideas and to provide them with the skills they need to critically examine the world around them and to make sense of it. While she promotes general literacy and numeracy in her classroom she also specifically promotes scientific literacy and media literacy because she believes that these skills are powerful critical thinking tools. She finds that in the "real world" there are very few

opportunities to dialogue with media and media representations, so in her classrooms she tries to work with students to deconstruct media representations and have a meaningful dialogue with them on this topic. A strategy that she often uses is think-pair-share because it involves students working on a variety of levels. First, students are asked to think and write ideas on a given topic independently. Then Kelly asks students to share these ideas with a partner, which affords students an opportunity to discuss their ideas with someone familiar. Kelly enjoys seeing her students' realize when other people had the same thoughts as they did. She also finds that this teaching strategy gives her students an opportunity to develop their ideas further before sharing them with the class.

When Kelly experiences stress in the classroom she reminds herself that she is not perfect and that she is doing the best that she can. She has a very close friend who is a teacher, and she finds that talking to her about some of the stress she experiences helps her to decompress. Another way to decompress is to watch television episodes of *Wonders of the Solar System*. She explains specifically that seeing how enthusiastic Professor Brian Cox is about Astronomy helps her realize that if she is enthusiastic about Science she can inspire her students.

The Science and Business departments share an office at her school, so she mostly feels connected to the members of her department, as well as to other teachers from the Business department. However, the layout of the school sometimes contributes to feelings of isolation as she very seldom has to walk through any of the other hallways. As a result she only sees teachers from other departments when she is in the office or at a staff meeting. Female teachers go out for dinner together several times throughout the school year, but the school has very few social events for teachers.

When Kelly is tired or frustrated, or if students perform poorly on a quiz that she thought was easy, she is more likely to experience feelings of insecurity about her abilities as a teacher. When navigating challenges in the classroom Kelly tries to deal with problems on her own first before presenting the situation to parents or administration a method she calls “progressive discipline.” She also tries to ensure that her students know her expectations for classroom behavior from the beginning of the school year so that there are not any surprises as the year progresses. She attempts to find out why the student is not cooperating or completing work, and if it seems due to stress. She will then let the student know of available options. If a student misbehaves in her class, unless the behaviour threatens the safety of others, she issues a verbal warning to the student. After that warning, she will ask him or her to stay after class or step into the hall to discuss the issue without the other members of the class listening. She does not believe in singling out students in front of their peers or embarrassing them, so she will try to give them time away from a situation to change their behaviour.

**Jessy: Intermediate/senior teacher.** Jessy has been teaching for seven years in the Toronto district school board (TDSB). Before that she taught for two years in Japan as an ALT, or “Assistant Language Teacher”. She wanted to be an educator because she had a very positive high school experience at a small private school in Toronto. After being bullied in elementary school and junior high, her parents sent her to a small private school from Grade Eight onward. In that school, she felt visible in the classroom for the first time. She felt love and support from her teachers, and in this smaller environment she stopped being the victim of bullying. Jessy became more confident and excelled academically; she also loved the enriched curriculum and felt passionate about her

studies.

Another factor which influenced her interest in teaching was that her brother dropped out of school. Her parents had been told by teachers not to worry about her brother and that boys learned a little more slowly. By the time he was 16 the teachers finally recommended that he should be assessed and it was discovered that he had several learning disabilities. Academically, school had been a difficult and humiliating experience for him. He is now a musician and works at a hotel for a living. He struggles financially and lives with his parents. Her interest is in creating a positive learning environment that is infused with “character education.” She loves getting students excited about learning and replicating that same passion for learning she had in her own high school classes. Her experience led her to find ways to build her students’ sense of confidence and self esteem by helping them achieve extraordinary results and through building caring relationships with her students. Jessy is committed to helping the less academically proficient students experience success, although she admits that this ideal has proven to be much more difficult to realize than she thought it would be when she first went into teaching.

Jessy states that the professional development day offered to her through the school board was of little use. She feels lucky that she has been practicing yoga, breathing and meditation for the last 10 years through the Art of Living Foundation and found that taking these courses for her own development and teaching them to children and teens has been instrumental in her development as a teacher. Jessy feels invested in her students’ emotional well-being, and believes that her own emotional strength has increased year by year through the experience of teaching as well as her dedication to her

practices. She finds that the area in her teaching for which she needs the most support comes from dealing with the emotional intensity of 90 students who come from difficult backgrounds, act out and create “classroom management issues”, have serious problems, get arrested, and occasionally stab or shoot others. Jessie thinks that many teachers need support in coping with these kinds of problems and that little support is provided. This leads to a pattern of complaining about students and administrators, which only serves to create a culture where people are not motivated towards excellence. It is helpful to Jessie that she decompresses at home with yoga, breathing, and meditation, and by practicing compassion.

Jessie is very interested in Holistic education and attempts to engage the whole student including their body, mind, emotions, and spirit. She also believes in experiential education. According to Jessie, good teachers are highly organized and recognize the importance of flexibility; they are also punctual, responsible, caring, lifelong learners, role models, perceptive, insightful and have an awareness of the positive or negative dynamics in a classroom. In terms of dealing with official policy, good teachers will sometimes set the curriculum aside to deal with issues in the class or community. Such teachers, according to Jessie, represent many prosocial traits (e.g., calm, diplomatic, positive, constructive, patient, capable of commanding and earning respect, able to maintain a sense of humor, etc.) and are thus able to make a meaningful connection with each student they teach. Jessie believes that she has many of these qualities, but has some areas for improvement. For example, she recognizes that she is not always punctual or good with routines and works extra hard at improving those habits. In terms of relating to students, Jessie feels that she has recently developed a teaching presence that elicits the

kind of respectful attitude she desires from her students. She feels she has always been good at giving respect and making students respect each other but was not effective in the area of getting respect for herself as a teacher. Since she sees herself as very gentle and soft, she never wanted to rule the class with a harsh attitude.

Jessy sometimes asks the students to sit in a circle and praise each other one by one when she feels the classroom atmosphere is becoming negative. This strategy is quite successful. She has also used meditation practices in her class when she has felt the students were too tired or too harried to learn and this has also been successful. Students often ask to do this again. In Civics class she has taken her students to a church, a mosque and a synagogue.

Last year while she was teaching an Art class, she had a difficult experience with a group of unmotivated students whom she was trying to get on task. Her verbal requests resulted in one of the students insulting her clothes and appearance and laughing at her. She maintained her composure, but she felt she probably said things that were not at her professional best. That situation made her feel that she was maybe not suited to a career in teaching. Fortunately, in the end, Jessy became the disruptive student's favourite teacher, and she came to like him too. It is very important for Jessy not to be a dictator in the classroom, but this attitude occasionally leaves her open to situations that she thinks a teacher with a tougher approach would not have to face. When she teaches Art, she believes that she can dramatically improve her students' abilities. However, Jessy feels that cultivating academic improvement is much harder to do in English classes, and she wishes she knew more in order to be able to be successful with her own approach.

**Annette: Intermediate/senior teacher.** Annette has been teaching in Quebec since October 2010 and is currently in her second full time contract. She has wanted to teach for as long as she can remember. She teaches so that she can encourage children to be the best they can be, to have a positive relationship with education and to achieve their dreams. As a new teacher, she has taken part in all board-sponsored meetings on new evaluation and plans on attending a conference at Concordia University. She thinks that good teachers are flexible, organized but open to change, quick on their feet, well-educated in their subject as well as dedicated to the profession. She believes that she possesses all of the above, but can always improve. She recognizes that she lacks the level of proficiency in her subject she would like to have, but works hard to keep up. In her teaching practice she attempts to build bonds with students, to relate to them on their level while maintaining a professional relationship. She does this by trying to find class time to have short conversations about matters relevant to their lives, or to incorporate media or Facebook postings, or jokes into her teaching to make it seem more real. She brings in popular media and news items. These methods sometimes seem to give a better understanding because students can relate to them; yet at other times this approach can be disruptive, causing students to become, as Annette states, “riled up”. She often brings in a news topic to introduce a new lesson, or tries to link something in the media to each topic. Her students find her attempts to connect very amusing. If a class stresses her out too much she will stop what she is doing, proceed to her desk, sit down and put her head on the desk. This gives her a chance to catch her breath and the students quickly know they are not behaving appropriately and will become quiet and apologize. Her primary challenge is a lack of knowledge of the subject. Since she is always learning the teaching

material just one or two days ahead of her students, it is difficult for her to respond to complex questions students may ask, or to inform a parent who wants to know what is coming up in the next unit. When students ask questions she is unable to answer, she feels insecure.

Annette is confident that she will know the course material better in future years, but she currently feels like she is scraping by. When a lesson is not going well she will either change pace, or assign students seat work while she quickly reworks the lesson. After a lesson, she reflects on what went wrong. She often seeks advice from colleagues about what they would do differently. Her colleagues provide support and Annette believes they are a strong source of her feelings of self-efficacy and ability to deal with challenging situations.

**Ashley: Primary/junior teacher.** Ashley is in her fifth school year of teaching. She chose to become a teacher because she enjoys working with children and seeing them succeed. She finds it extremely rewarding and likes the challenge it offers. She has taken a number of courses to further her expertise, and has three additional qualifications: Reading Part 1, Kindergarten, and Special Education Part 1. She has also taken the Ministry of Education summer institute courses in Critical Literacy and Literacy Assessment, as well as various courses offered through the union (ETFO) local. These included Assessment, Gifted Education and Drama.

In Ashley's view, a good teacher is flexible, understanding and a life-long learner. She believes she has these qualities. Her philosophy is embedded in the belief that every student can learn, and will learn, if given the appropriate support and conditions. She also believes in equity over equality and that students need different

things to give them the opportunity to succeed at school. She also does not believe that her job as an educator ends with the curriculum. Accordingly, when she teaches she uses differentiated instruction to ensure that every student has access to the information that she is teaching and an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding. Her students are provided with the same information, but in different ways, and are given choices when asked to demonstrate their learning. She uses this every day in class and provides instruction in a number of formats including large groups, small groups and individual instruction. Students can select from a number of appropriate tasks to demonstrate their understanding. She tries to meet the needs of a variety of learning styles. She has learned that there is less anxiety in the classroom when students feel they have choice, and she finds that allowing additional support and time helps struggling students, and enables more advanced students to work independently and with greater expectations. When she feels that she needs to stop everything and restart she asks students return to their seats and sit quietly while she redirects the lesson. Outside of the classroom, she finds that seeking the advice and support of colleagues and friends is helpful when she is feeling overwhelmed or frustrated. Sometimes behaviour management makes teaching quite stressful for her. Sometimes poor communication within the school leads to stressful situations. As an occasional teacher she finds it stressful not to know the students well, and not to know where to find support in a particular school. If a lesson is not going well, she will stop instruction and regroup. Sometimes students are not ready and the lesson needs to wait for background instruction, or at other times she finds that her method of instruction is not effective. She will change it, perhaps by providing information in a different way, or by supporting her instruction with anchor charts,

videos, or other visual aids.

However, Ashley acknowledges that she is not a perfect teacher and is continuously learning. She seeks advice from others, such as her colleagues and her mentor teacher or grade-level team, and also from friends outside of school. She considers the teachers she works with on a regular basis an excellent source of support, and that there are opportunities for team building. She believes if she did not have their support she would be more stressed and feel as though she was going through challenges alone. She thinks it is important to have supportive administrators (e.g., principal, vice-principal, etc.) and perhaps a mentor teacher who is there to answer questions and provide help to beginning teachers. She knows that she also can speak to her union representative or union president (ETFO) when she experiences serious challenges.

When she communicates with difficult parents at parent teacher interviews she tries to express to them that they both have the same goal; they want the child to succeed. She likes to offer proof of any grades, and to show their child's progress in a number of ways. She also likes to include students in interviews so they can speak to their performance and progress, and so she can explain to their parents why they are getting the marks they are. If a parent is irrationally angry and she feels as though she cannot resolve the matter on her own, she seeks the support of the principal or SERT (special education resource teacher). She uses a class website and regular newsletters to keep parents informed. In addition to meeting parents at curriculum night in September, she sends home information so that parents know who she is, what her goals are, and how they can reach her. Ashley attempts to address concerns in a timely manner, and she also makes "sunshine" calls which are calls for "no reason" to let parents know that she is still

on top of things and that their child is still on the right track. By providing parents with a survey at the start of the school year, asking them for insight into their child's interests and learning capabilities, she is better able to plan effective lessons, as well as to avoid communication challenges from parents.

She aims to make learning fun, and to help students develop a desire to learn. Providing a variety of learning opportunities helps to engage the reluctant learners, so she tries to find their areas of strengths and interest. Helping students see the practical application of what they are learning, to make it seem more relevant, is also effective. Her reluctant learners may simply be bored, or not challenged, or they may be overwhelmed due to learning difficulties. In order to identify learning disabilities, she reads OSRs (Ontario Student Records) and views old report cards, any Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and notes from previous teachers. For some students she may seek more information from their previous teachers. All students complete a learning style inventory, and a questionnaire similar to the one completed by their parents, which tells her where they feel their strengths and weaknesses lie, what they are looking forward to, and what they are dreading about the coming school year.

Ashley states that she has feelings of insecurity whenever she has an observer in the classroom, or when she is being evaluated. She feels as though perhaps she is not efficient in her teaching, and is not doing a "good enough job." In a situation when a student refuses to cooperate she will use progressive discipline, but if the situation escalates, she may seek support from the principal or vice-principal. In general, she has zero tolerance for disruptions and interrupting the learning of others; the student causing the disruption is asked to step out of the classroom while the lesson continues. She also

recognizes that behaviour contracts are useful, as are class rules about completing homework or assignments on time.

In summation, the narratives of the eight teachers provided insight into their background and unique experience. Teachers expressed sources of stress as well as the strategies they used to cope with challenges. In the next chapter I will report the key findings of this study by discussing the themes that emerged from the teacher narratives and interviews, in order to address my research question: Can mindfulness training aid and improve the practice of teachers through facilitating their capacities of self-efficacy, adaptive interpersonal abilities, and resilience to stress?

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Analysis of Emerging Themes**

The primary aim of this research was to explore how teachers with formal mindfulness training handle stress compared to teachers who have not had mindfulness training. I wanted to see if formal mindfulness training could have some relationship both to a teacher's ability to deal with stressors as well as his or her ability to achieve educational goals.

#### **Analysis of Narratives**

The analysis involved identifying emergent themes in the participant narratives which were based on interviews, journaling and correspondence. Each phrase contained within participant journals and interview transcriptions were coded according to these themes. The stories of the eight participants were coded similarly, and arranged into categorical themes. In-depth accounts of the students' experiences were analyzed repeatedly, to ensure that the statements derived from the data and those included in the analysis were analogous. I repeated this process until I had arrived at a comprehensive list of mutually exclusive themes, which are discussed in detail below.

#### **Emergent Themes**

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy is a belief in one's ability to succeed in a particular situation. In a classroom setting there are constantly challenging and novel situations, along with roles and social relationships to navigate through. Several aspects of cognitive and social functioning were reported by the participants as central to meeting the

challenge of these experiences, including the ability to focus attention and to process information quickly and effectively. Participants described strategies and insights that they learned and acquired during their teacher education. During the data analysis, I identified the following sub-categories embedded within this category: adaptability and emotional regulation.

***Adaptability.*** Byrne (1994) suggests that role conflict compromises a concurrent experience of two or more sets of expectations and high demands that seem to be incommensurable. The complex nature of the teaching role was a major stressor for teachers. Teachers are often challenged with the task to perform roles that may seem contradictory (i.e. caregiver and disciplinarian). When teachers are unable to meet demands in the classroom or an expected role, they experience stress that can often compromise their self-efficacy; however when they are able to negotiate the demands successfully, they demonstrate adaptability.

M-Caitlin described the complex and conflicting roles that caused stress and challenged her abilities:

And because you are new and expectations are so high, it's so stressful. I think people around you, like principals, forget, how multifaceted the job has become so complex, we have to plan, mark, make class look beautiful, meet parents, have good peer relationships with our colleagues and deal with really disruptive behavior get evaluated by principal and then there's all this paper work for special needs...[I] feel like it's a lot. There's just so many fields like dealing with a child who is crying, maybe I'm really good at that, but like organizing paper work, that's really different but we are supposed to do both successfully and maybe that's really challenging for me.... And it's not a complaint it's only a comment...umm, when like if you're really new at doing something...it's really stressful.

What is stressful is when parents don't like what I'm doing and they want me to do things differently, micromanaging principals, jealous/sneaky colleagues, too much to do without enough time, expectations that are too high, children's behavior, trying to teach in exciting and engaging ways all the time

M-Caitlin took the Stress and Burnout course in its pilot year and stated that mindfulness has been an integral and important tool to develop her teaching practice. Although she admits that it took her two years to integrate mindfulness practices into her teaching. She now takes yoga as a result of the course, and practices meditation every day with her class. M-Caitlin thinks the course should be a core part of teacher education because the concepts she had learned helped her to successfully adapt to situations and deal with many of the difficult emotions that accompany the role.

Ashley, who did not have any formal mindfulness training, also demonstrated her skills of adaptability as well as self-efficacy through addressing challenges she encountered in the classroom from different perspectives:

If a lesson is not going well, I will stop instruction and regroup. Sometimes students are not ready and the lesson needs to wait for background instruction, or other times I find my method of instruction is not effective and will try changing things up— perhaps providing information in a different way, or supporting my instruction with anchor charts, videos, or other things.

Ashley did not feel pessimistic or defeated when she had difficulty managing her students. She was flexible and ready to try different methods to gain her students attention during a lesson.

Participants who took the formal mindfulness training demonstrated adaptability and referenced feelings of self-efficacy when they were able to let go of rigid expectations they had of themselves to be a perfect teacher. They found this gave them more presence in the classroom, which allowed them to navigate situations more skilfully. The key strategy that was mentioned by teachers in different scenarios was to let go.

M-Mandy recalled how the concept of “letting go” of the need to be a perfect teacher relieved her of the demands she placed on herself and provided an enhanced feeling of self-control.

I remember my first class I was so stressed out. I wanted to really impress the students and would spend up to 8 hours planning my lessons. I would literally go to bed everyday after 1 am, consequently I wasn't eating very well, just grabbing cafeteria food and would literally come home crying some days from the stress. I never cried in the classroom though. My second practicum experience was the complete opposite. I applied the core concepts from the mindfulness course and would spend just under an hour planning. I put more of my energy into making sure I went to bed on time. It didn't matter if I wasn't completely done, I just made the decision that I do know the content and that everything will be fine. I also began to eat better and scheduled time to do things that would feed my spirit. I found my energy level got much better and my teaching was great, I just had more enthusiasm and energy in my delivery.

By letting go of the necessity to be perfect, M-Mandy reduced her psychological distress and gained a different philosophy of teaching and a “better way” to relate to her students through “accepting things that were not in [her] control.”

Adaptability was facilitated for M-Kayla through acceptance and letting go of situations. For M-Kayla, by learning patience, acceptance, non-judgment from her mindfulness practice(s), she was able to apply it towards herself and her students. This helped to maintain focus on her teaching priorities. Perhaps as a result of her mindfulness training, M-Kayla makes the distinction between “letting go” and “giving up”:

A challenge I have frequently, especially with students ‘at risk’ and past midterm reports is that I find that I try harder than students for their success. It's hard for me to admit or see that I've done all I can on my part and it must be up to them at that point or even before I feel that way. Sometimes there is a very fine line between...it's up to them to build their own repertoire of life skills and prioritize properly versus I'm giving up on them and don't care anymore. But I find I do need to take that step often, to see what I've done for them (teach, tutorials, phone calls, make up tests/assignments), what they have done for me (hand in work, come in for extra help, improve attitude, focus in class, etc)... I have to accept that, if not I find I stress myself out and lose focus of my own priorities.

M-Kayla's account highlights the fine line between letting go and giving up. When participants described letting go, they believed that they had done everything they could in their ability to help another succeed or conversely realized that their behaviour or attachment to a certain belief was not promoting positive teaching outcomes for the student or the teachers personal well being. M-Mandy credits the MBWE program with helping her develop these positive emotions instead of the negative emotions associated with failure.

Let's say the previous teacher practicum prior to learning the tools in the Stress and Burnout course, you know I was spending 5, 6, 7, 8 hours just planning my lessons. This time I was maybe doing 1 ½ to 2 hours and yet my lesson plans were just as good and my delivery was much better because I was more energetic; I could get through the whole day; I was more pleasant in general. Those particular practices were extremely useful. And some of ...like some of the...I don't know the word...some of the teachings like 'let it be' and 'you're a beginner; you're learning' like some of those teachings like he made us read through. I kept those in the back of the mind. "Give yourself a break; you don't have to be perfect."

For M-Mandy applying the tools she learned in MBWE fostered a greater sense of self-efficacy, by having more self-compassion, acceptance and self-care she was able to plan and deliver her lessons for efficiently.

The participants who did not have formal mindfulness training also spoke of stressful situations that challenged their sense of efficacy in the classroom. Annette remarked that,

I'd like to think that I don't make it stressful, that I try to keep myself as calm and cool and collected as I can and if a student asks me something and I don't know it then I just don't know it. So I don't lead the kids to think that I'm perfect I just do and say what I can to get through. Obviously I try to be as powerful as I can; I try to get my information across as well as I can; I do my homework the night before; I like work my butt off.

Annette had not taken MBWE course but recognized stressful situations in her practice. Her teaching position this year is particularly demanding. Her appraisal of her challenges did not seem to diminish her abilities in the classroom, and she describes a strategy she uses in her classroom, which involves employing technology to answer students' questions.

If a teacher, [when] we were kids, said I don't know, we would of thought they were a bozo, but kids are kinda getting to the point where there's so much media there's so much technology that they know we can't always answer just hoping we can provide a base for it...Like I had a kid today that asked me, " Miss, where do migraines come [from]?" and I was like holy man (hahaha). I don't know, like he wanted the physiology of it and I couldn't give him that now, and so I go slow and [say I'll] give the answer to them tomorrow and they're okay.

Additionally, she turned questions she could not answer into opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning:

Or if I feel I've said I don't know in the last couple of days I will say what a great question, what a great opportunity. How about we make that a homework question and let's see who comes up with the best answer tomorrow. That way they think it's really cool and they think I know but I just don't tell and that I just want them to find out for themselves. Then I go home and do the exact same thing they would do... umm, that way it gives them authority as well shows them that's exactly what I'm going to do; they just don't know that.

Compared to the mindfulness participants Ashley was less compassionate with herself when she experienced obstacles of growth and 'failing' in her learning process. Although she described herself as 'a life long learner' she had more difficulty learning recognizing and navigating challenging emotions that accompany failure. Ashley discusses with concern her process of learning to be a better teacher:

I try to take it all in stride. I'm not a perfect teacher; I'm still learning. I try to seek advice of others who have been there: my colleagues and my mentor teacher or grade-level team.

Jessy credited the benefits of the adoption of her yoga and meditation practice to her improved classroom management skills:

And even my first year when I hadn't quite got the hang of it, I like occasionally got really upset. I had really rough classes my first year. I think one time I walked right out of the classroom and one teacher replaced me. I think I just couldn't take it anymore; they all knew like I was given one of the worst classes possible in my first year; it was unfair. But yeah, I definitely through doing a practice been able to handle really tough situations much better...it took a little while for me to hit my stride but I have a lot of success with my approach to classroom management. So...umm and that is definitely something that I think my practice has cultivated...that ability to stay calm.

Jessy was able to apply the patience and calm she cultivated through the process of practicing yoga and meditation. She found by transferring the skills of negotiating challenging emotions from her personal practice she was able to better navigate the stress in her life. As a result because she was calmer she had a greater ability to respond to behavioural challenges in the classroom. This diminished the feelings of frustration and stress she experienced as a new teacher.

### **Summary**

A common belief of the formally trained mindfulness participants as well as those who had no training was a tremendous sense of acceptance; the belief that they cannot know everything and that they are continually learning promoted a stronger sense of self-efficacy and a diminished experience of stress for all of the individuals in this study. For example, Annette felt more competent in the classroom when she exercised her skills to adapt, which promoted her confidence and self-efficacy.

In terms of challenges to this sense of self-efficacy, the inability to perform either an assigned or self-imposed role was a significant source of stress for the teachers.

Participants described role expectations as challenges as well as significant determinants

of their stress experience. The demands of providing high level learning instruction, effective classroom management, and ethical and emotional support to a child all at the same time were other stressors. The one exception in this group was Jessy, who had not taken the Stress and Burnout course, but who had independently taken up yoga and meditation practices similar to some of the practices introduced in the course, and who had more than 10 years of experience with those strategies. Jessy was also the most experienced teacher, since she had been teaching for seven years.

The formally mindful trained and the remaining non trained participants discussed stressors they experienced as well as strategies they used in class or in teaching to mitigate stress and feel more confident and effective. Participants who had taken the MBWE course demonstrated more self-compassion towards their learning process than their counterparts. This formal training seemed to have promoted a faster rebound effect when these teachers encountered challenges or failure.

***Emotional regulation.*** Emotional regulation is the ability to stay calm and manage impulse under stress. This requires ability to recognize emotions as well as a skill to control or manage them. M-Justin became more skilled at reading his own emotions and recognizing when his level of stress was increasing. This was a marker of interpersonal intelligence and self-efficacy. For M-Justin, employing the cognitive strategy of positive thinking, breathing and re-focusing he learned from the Stress and Burnout course, he was able to deliver a lesson by diminishing feelings of helplessness and negative self-talk. Just by briefly noticing his stress response and taking deep breaths he re-focuses:

Well, I can describe the feeling of being stressed out. But I really, wouldn't really know how to deal with it much. I think before I would be more in a panic mode,

just like not really knowing what to do with it, but now I can kinda sense when I'm getting stressed out and I can kinda feel that fight or flight response coming on and now I know how to deal with that a little better; I can kinda take a step back and breathe and do a bit of positive self-talk I guess...I think if I didn't take the course (mindfulness), I might still be doing the action but I wouldn't be aware of it. Like the course made me a lot more aware of what you can do to not be stressed out or to decompress.

M-Kayla described her use of mindfulness practices to ensure emotional regulation, but also to the alternative scenario in which she uses it:

I think he [the MBWE instructor] encouraged us to put it into practice from the beginning and I think for me it [mindfulness] wasn't really there because I was so focused on the content and curriculum...[now] those things I just do like the breathing before I teach or before I step out of my office to go to my class or a short practice on the bus before I get to school or taking a moment. My other part-time job is swimming so taking a moment to myself, I don't care if I look weird and I'm the only [person] on deck or cause I'm early class doesn't start yet and I may look weird but I will do that for myself. I'm still aware of those emotions of my own or someone else or for me putting in someone's shoes...and bringing it back trying not to be stuck and letting things go.

In the MBWE course M-Kayla learned the pausing method that helped her to regulate challenging emotions and be more skilful in her speech. She relates how this method has helped her in stating,

One week the MBWE instructor taught us how to pause...umm, so it was like pause in your thoughts when you're thinking, then pause when you talk, then pause in your replies. I think that was a big thing. That I don't pause, I can talk forever on one breath. I think when you pause like, one I speak better and I don't like stumble but also in the classroom that pace of talking translates.... Umm are your kids picking it up and are they going to respond that quick [sic]? It would be great if they are responding as fast as I'm talking but if you're learning something new it really doesn't work that way...the pausing after question concept is something that I felt in the second semester. I forgot in the classroom and that made a big difference because it's always going to be like the smart kid gets the answer and everyone else has no clue if they're following along, or they may think they are too slow, so I think the pause is a big thing to give others an equal chance to reflect.

M- Kayla found that the pausing method gave her time to digest and be more reflective with her instruction and content delivery. It further provided moments of

silence for her students to do the same. At times this contributed to a calmer atmosphere in the classroom.

When Annette felt overwhelmed in the classroom she had a more dramatic method of responding to the situation at hand. She describes this method as a first and last resort to manage student behavior:

In the classroom I'd have to say I would just halt the class. I will stop the class I will just drop to the floor, and they will all kinda pause and wonder and that gives me a minute to just breathe and get their noise out of my head. And it settles them down as well because they worry. I will just put myself on the floor and really breakdown... take some deep breath and it shuts them up right away because they panic. It's dramatic.

The MBWE practice she learned emphasized the value of patience and pausing during thought, articulation and after speech while she taught. She found that when she paused more often in her thoughts and delivery of them her direction in class was more positively received; she also gained a different perspective into how to create a more inclusive classroom just by acknowledging that students process at different speeds. She found that by encouraging and modeling pausing, others were able to participate in discussions. Although M-Kayla spoke enthusiastically when recalling the method of pausing she mentioned that she did not practice it as much as she would like and mentioned how it takes some time to fully integrate into her practice.

M-Kayla linked her patience to emotional regulation skills stating that she takes a moment to unwind and to evaluate her speech and understandings when faced with a frustrating encounter. For both M-Justin and M- Kayla, pausing was a means of emotional regulation that provided emotional awareness and understanding of one's own or another's emotional state. Annette ,who did not have MBWE training, discussed her

inability to manage high stress situations, as a result she would effectively break down in front of her students to receive their attention.

### **Summary**

All teachers cited in this study agreed that the expectations and high demands that are placed on them, not only by others, but also by themselves, are sources of stress that affect their success as teachers. Participants who had taken the MBWE course reported a wider range of coping strategies than their counterparts who had not taken the course. They also employed more internal resources such as positive self-talk, pausing and emotional awareness cues when navigating through challenging situations and overall felt more self-efficacious than their counterparts. When they experienced an uncomfortable situation or met with failure their self-compassion towards the learning process acted as a buffer to stress for M-Justin, M-Mandy and M-Kayla. This insight along with that of not dwelling on negative emotions was introduced in the Stress and Burnout course. Whether through personal quiet time, breathing, and practices they learned in their training, mindfulness trained participants reported self-efficacy through having choice and control in how their management of a perceived stressor.

With the exception of Jessy, the participants without formal mindfulness training, Kelly, Annette and Ashley described similar sources of stress but differed in the way that they managed them. In comparison to the participants who had formal mindfulness training' Annette and Ashley had more difficulty managing high stress environments and emotions of failure.

***Adaptive interpersonal skills.*** Interpersonal skills may be defined as an ongoing development for teachers' meaningful relationships with students, co-workers and others that emphasize problem-solving, decision making ability, conflict management and resolution skills, self-awareness, and empathy, as well as being able to interact sensitively with others' needs and interests. Teachers must be able to form trusting and harmonious relationships with parents, colleagues, students and administrative bodies in order to succeed. Markers of adaptive interpersonal skills include the ability to handle stress, negotiate emotions and confront challenges with optimism. In the narratives presented in this study, teachers document a wide range of interpersonal experiences. The following themes were considered embedded within the concept adaptive interpersonal skills: collegiality and social support, mentorship, reflection and authentic communication. All eight participants report that a major source of stress comes from feeling isolated from colleagues. Participants also support the argument that peer support is crucial to alleviating job stress.

***Collegiality and social support.*** Colleague support was described as the perceived help, reassurance, friendship, mentorship and guidance offered to the teachers by other teachers, administrators, instructors or fellow students. Support that teachers received during pre-service and in-service was strongly associated with how they experienced and dealt with stress, as Ashley describes the relief and importance of having a strong support system:

I think I would be a lot more stressed [without support] and feel as though I were going [at] it alone....it's important to have supportive administrators (principal, vice-principal) and perhaps a mentor teacher when first starting to work who is there to answer questions and provide help and support. A good support system outside of school is important, too.

M-Caitlin works in an alternative school setting, where at the forefront of teaching and learning is a core emphasis on the value of community. M-Caitlin emphasized the importance of positive colleague relationships by comparing her last year's teaching experience with her current position at the alternative school:

Last year was particularly difficult; this one teacher was excluding me in a really covert way that led to feelings of isolation. My significant other also went back to school in another city. I ended up feeling pretty isolated at first, but I feel more connected when I make a point of seeing friends and family during the week and when I make a point of saying "hello" to all my colleagues in the hallway. Currently at this school I feel really connected with my new colleagues; they are really genuine and kind and I chat with them often.

M-Caitlin felt a greater sense of self-efficacy and contentment in her teaching environment when she had positive relationships at school. M-Caitlin did not make any reference to how the MBWE course provided tools to create a more positive environments at school. M-Justin also described feelings of isolation at school and how it invoked feelings of insecurity and disconnection at school:

I sometimes feel isolated from those who have more experience or are older, especially those who are nearing retirement. Sometimes there is an isolation from administrators, as I'm not always sure what their expectations are of me....People who might judge me or not understand what I'm trying to do. I felt isolated in my first school, when it was so small in both teacher and student population. I feel connected to younger coworkers that are open to new partnerships that share resources and time and experience.

Although connections with colleagues at school seemed to be of importance for M-Justin, he struggled with feelings of isolation. He did not reference the MBWE course as being useful to teach strategies to develop stronger and more connected relationships at school. M-Caitlin also had experienced isolation as well as a lack of mentorship at her first school. Although she currently works with an "amazing group of teachers" she

believes the lack of support in her previous teaching environment made the transition from pre-service to in-service extremely challenging:

If there is someone new, especially if it's an LTO (Long term occasional teacher), you know this person is only here for 6 months so they don't want to invest in them. Again, the principal won't always invest in a person that is only there for a short period of time. And some schools have a warmer climate than others. But some like, more experienced teachers, like they don't want to...they don't want to help the new teacher. They want to just like.... the union stuff right. Like they want to do their whatever number hours then they can get out....there is a lot of like exclusion at schools that happens between teachers with other teachers. There is a lot of bullying. I've seen horrendous bullying between a teacher and a student teacher even.

Annette describes her heavy work-load as a teacher but attributes her teaching success and readiness to confront challenges to the fact that she has such a positive support system.

The social support at that school is beyond out of this world. Umm, they are just a really wonderful group of people.... And because I was new to the math, they were extremely helpful; one of the co-teachers gave me every material he had, and so for any new teacher that is god sent. And that happened again this year, a co-worker just handed over her hard-drive and said "hey, make your own copy." All of her material. So it takes a lot of pressure off....it made the transition to teaching out of this world. I'm not sure I would have such a positive attitude second year in, nor would I have taken a heavy load this year if I had not thought someone was going to help me.

M-Justin recalled the valuable support he received from colleagues in the Stress and Burnout course:

The course had a day of mindfulness where we came in on a Saturday and I mean it's Saturday so most people didn't want to go. By the end of it I think most people realized that it was actually really nice to go somewhere on a Saturday. But being in a group of people that you had been with consistently and spend two hours relaxing, not talking and not have to really think about anything. Like to force yourself to not really think about anything so I think that was a big turning point for a lot of people. I think people saw that it had a lot of value to help really reduce a lot of stress.

For Justin learning mindfulness practices with his colleagues was an anchor of support. He mentioned at the beginning of the course that many students were resistant to the ideas in the course and found some of the practices “hokey” because they were so different from anything they were learning in the teachers’ education program. Colleague support encouraged him to integrate the tools he learned in the MBWE course, into his teaching.

Similarly Kelly recounts the benefit of meeting with her support group on a regular basis to share insights and resources:

I think it helped that it was an ongoing thing and I got a lot of suggestions from the teachers...and just knowing, especially as a first year teacher I found that I was always trying the same strategies because I couldn’t think of anything else and I was like well maybe it will work today and then I was just like no, like try doing this next time and like then trying something I hadn’t really thought about before.

Kelly found it very helpful to learn new strategies and have peers follow-up on the outcome at the meeting. She recounts how she was able to get through a semester of teaching due to the colleague support network she found outside her school:

Well for me the group basically ended up being like my support group because it was my first year teaching and I was teaching grade nine math...I really think that being part of the radical math study group helped because we did spend a chunk of time I mean our meetings were three hours and we did spend maybe 15-30 minutes just taking about our experience in our classroom in the last month... umm, how the action research project we were trying to implement went and it was really interesting because we would talk about like a teacher would mention I had this problem with a certain group of students and they did this and this and [I]tried this but they didn’t respond to it and people would say like I had that issue and I tried... just hearing how people have tried different things with different problems in the classroom...like we met once a month and sometimes that was the only thing that got me through the day, knowing that I was going to go to that study group.

Through fostering productive and supportive relationships with other teachers who understand the challenges of teaching, the group not only provided support, but also gave her access to resources to deal with the challenges of answering parent concerns. In learning that many teachers experience similar challenges and discussing possible interventions to conflict and challenges, Kelly would leave these meetings with stronger feelings of self-efficacy.

Jessy feels that she has become a wellspring of support for her colleagues by sharing the tools of yoga and meditation:

So at this school I teach yoga to my colleagues after school on Tuesday so they, they can make a donation or they can come for free or whatever and they love it. They realize they need something like that to be able to deal with teaching and I also taught board wide professional development (PD) organized by Art of Living to a few hundred teachers at a time. And that's always really well received and I think there is general awareness that teachers need to be...umm, doing something for the mental and emotional stress and the physical stress of the job but there is definitely... also you make yourself really vulnerable if you admit that as a teacher because you know [you] have to be number one in the classroom; you know you have to be tough and there is reticence among teachers to acknowledge that they are under stress and they can't handle it; you know it's a threat to the ego and stuff like that so it's... umm, hard for people. I think for people in general and certainly for teachers that they need something like this.

Jessy's experience with meditation and yoga greatly improved her skills as a teacher; she felt compelled to share these tools with her colleagues at school.

## **Summary**

Collegiality and social support was mentioned as a significant mediator of stress for all teachers in the study except for Jessy. What was particularly interesting in this group of teachers was their common claim of strong support from colleagues. All of the

teachers shared the value of maintaining caring networks of family and friends outside of school and both MBWE trained and non trained experienced isolation. Although M-Justin and M-Caitlin emphasized the importance of maintaining relationships with other colleagues, they did not suggest that the MBWE course or practices influenced their interpersonal skills or in developing greater feelings of connection with their colleagues. M-Justin and M-Caitlin expressed that learning mindfulness in a group context was particularly encouraging for them and both Annette and Kelly benefited from supported mentors and peers. Jessy, who has an established yoga and meditation practice provided a system of support at her school.

***Mentorship.*** Mentoring was described as the process of guiding, providing constructive and specific feedback, engendering feelings of efficacy and confidence, teaching and support the new teachers experienced from another teacher colleague. The perceived support teachers experienced during their practicum or at school influenced how well the teachers integrated mindfulness into their own practice as well as confidence in handling situations. M-Caitlin spoke of the importance of having a good mentor:

Yeah it's not fair to the teachers; it's not fair to the kids. Like I know in some countries you have more of an opportunity to practice teaching for a longer period of time....Because you are kind of at the mercy of who you get as a mentor, so before you become a teacher and they give you a license and they give you your own class. You only have to do basically three months of practice teaching. Three months isn't that long and one of the months at OISE is mid October to mid November and one is basically the month of March to the beginning of April, and one is basically the month of May....Like you are brand new, and often the teacher, and being a teacher myself now I understand this, doesn't really want to give up their class to you and their routine to you because you're only there for a month and it's their class and they build something up with these kids and then they are not really ready to hand that over to you completely. So they let you do some stuff on the periphery but you never really get the kind of experience which

is anything that really comes close to what you get when you graduate.

M-Caitlin felt that she did not have adequate experience handling a classroom and consequently felt ill-prepared after graduation, because she had not had a mentor who promoted extensive practice on her own during the practicum. This influenced her self-efficacy and further emphasized the importance of having supportive mentorship to mitigate feelings of stress.

Kelly had positive and beneficial mentoring experiences overall with a practicum associate teacher:

I was really fortunate for one of my practice internships that I had a supervisor that let me go with things they let me do stuff and they really took a back seat role and let me manage the class they were like you know what you'll have to do this yourself at some point; "I'm here if you really need me but I'm not going to step in unless I really notice something is up or like if you're really off the mark"; whereas my first practicum associate was, I think she was trying to help me by saying that she would deal with all the classroom management part so that I could focus on the teaching but then I wasn't really able to work on how to do both.

Yeah and also having the freedom from an associate teacher that was just like, "you know what just go with the lesson we'll talk about it afterward but I'm not going to stop you during it, I will just let you go."....For me I felt that was the biggest thing just to being able to try things, and feel them out.

During her practicum she found her mentor supported feelings of self-efficacy by providing feedback and confidence by allowing her to develop strategies on her own.

M-Kayla recounts the traumatic emotions she experienced when encountering a negative mentoring incident involving a substitute teacher:

Actually I had an incident during my first placement. So I had an incident with a substitute she basically told me off that I was disrespectful to her and that I should switch professions. Yeah it was very much in the moment without my associate there ....I like bawled my eyes out at school because it was.... Like especially when you are just getting into it and I'm in my first placement; it was a small school but it wasn't an at risk area.... But it was still like, yeah it shook my foundation cause being open works both ways like you're open to good things

like happiness and positivity but at the same time I was so open to like feedback and wanting to be better. So I was thinking this person was giving me feedback so I was very open when she said all those things, so it shook me and I bawled my eyes out at school. I don't know how I ended up like teaching the next 2 periods but I ended up supervising a field trip so I had the weekend to recover; my associate was very supporting and said should never have happened and I should have just walked away but like my feet didn't move and she was between me and the door and like the positioning threw me really off.

M-Kayla had just started taking the Stress and Burnout course at the time the incident happened, and felt that she had not yet internalized strategies from the course, which might have helped her deal with the unexpected criticism from the substitute teacher. This negative incident upset her and made her feel anxious about working with substitutes so she decided to consult the instructor of the “Stress and Burnout: Teacher and Student Application” course. M-Kayla describes the steps in the process to let go of the negative impression:

The instructor just reminded me to be aware of the moment when certain things kick in and I found that it does help. Like I try to remind myself when possible you know just like be really honest. Like ok I need a moment or, I can't finish this conversation, like just be really honest with the person. So I think I'm more honest with myself now. I'm aware when I recognize what I'm feeling but I do find, it's a very fine line between being mindful and aware, recognizing and trying to remember.

M-Kayla further developed her ability to reflect, which is an important aspect of mindfulness, by questioning important distinctions in her experience, regardless of whether her awareness was prompted by her conversation with the course instructor-mentor and through her own contemplation. The course gave her a space to question different avenues, or choices, for her responses; moreover, it gave her a vocabulary to express herself, as well as a tangible strategy (e.g., taking a moment away from the situation) to handle the problem.

## Summary

Mentorship was an important interpersonal relationship that had strong links to self-efficacy. From these accounts and narratives, links and reciprocal relationships between self-efficacy and interpersonal skills are clear. Negative effects from these relationships were thought to contribute to stress and burnout. For both M-Kayla and M- Caitlin, rejection by and disapproval from mentors or other colleagues proved stressful. M-Caitlin cited poor mentorship as a major factor in her vulnerability to stress, lower confidence and poor skills in the classroom environment at the beginning of her teaching career. She returned to her mindfulness practices after two years, when, although she “was no longer in survival mode” and had more experience teaching, she still felt stressed and realized that “there must be another way.” Kelly found that the positive relationship she had with her mentor provided a platform for a better introduction into teaching. With the exception of M-Kayla who used the skills of being present, recognizing sensations of discomfort to reduce stress and recover after a traumatic mentorship experience, the MBWE program did not seem to influence mentorship for the other participants.

**Reflection.** Reflection can be understood as a dialectical process, whereby one suspends immediate judgments and preconceptions to allow for a more thoughtful consideration of one’s decisions and actions (Dewey, 1933). Participants exemplified reflection and were more sensitive to the ways in which their personal needs and needs of their students could be met. All participants agreed that skills of reflection are important to help teachers develop in their practice. M-Kayla notes how her mindfulness practice helps her be more thoughtful and sensitive to her students’ learning:

In the mindfulness course we were encouraged to take a moment before we teach...when I'm teaching and I get all like frustrated because they're not getting it or they get off topic or they're noisy I think, I think I take that moment on my own and I pretend sometimes I'm collecting my papers but I'm just trying to collect myself and start anew even within that class. And I think I'm much more aware or I don't know if it's about being a new teacher but I'm much more open and aware of the kids experiences or sometimes yeah, a question might be totally off topic but the process of getting to that question for that child might be a...yes they were thinking and the only one applying the knowledge but you know and yes the rest of that culmination is in the child head. But like you acknowledge the question; it's a good question in application but some of the other students might not see it right away.

M-Kayla acknowledged that if she had more frequent and formal mindfulness practice she would be more thoughtful when she encountered intense emotions and remember that she has the ability to choose her response before reacting in difficult situations. She further mentions how the MBWE course practices have also encouraged more reflective thinking in terms of her students experiences and processes of learning.

Kelly and Jessy specifically described the importance of reflection, in order to assess the classroom climate, teacher meetings, and students' comprehension or needs.

Kelly discussed the challenge of being able to "gauge" the needs of her classroom.

They don't really teach you in teachers college like when kids listen to his head phones or chewing gum that could give you idea when kid aren't paying attention but to be able to sense it. To know like when they are just being goofballs and they don't want to focus and to know when they're actually like they can't focus because they have so much else going on.

Honestly, sometimes I just have this feeling, like you guys today is not a good day for you and they're kinda like, "yeah you're right" or sometimes I'll talk to them like some of them are hanging around after class and I will talk to them and ask them how or why they thought class went a certain way and it's one of those things like sometimes I think it was a horrible class and a bunch of them are like no we understood everything it was fine. And I'm like "oh ok." So even like sometimes I get it wrong, knowing like how things are going and I think it's like kinda continually talking to the students finding out where they are and getting to know them... It's really hard to pin down sometimes I will be in class I just get

this feeling I mean I'm teaching just fine they're writing their notes down, but they're just not here; I know they aren't going to remember this.

Kelly recognized the importance and value of calibrating the atmosphere to promote teacher and student success but also expresses her struggle to gauge the classroom environment. She further mentions that this skill was not taught in teacher college. Similarly, Jessy described the value of being able to make accurate observations in the classroom to help her to respond to students' needs and her yoga and meditation practice that enabled that skill:

Yeah, having a practice you're able to be more guided in a classroom, like you're able to be calmer you're more peaceful you're more able to be there for your students. Sensitivity like I had that in large quantities before hand and its increased but what I have gained through the practice is my own reserve of strength and calm and stability so when things happen in the classroom I deal with them so diplomatically, with so much confidence and love and it works...

The more calm, the more centered you are the more ready you are to do... umm, to perceive what's going on with other people and to be able to handle it.

I definitely notice more...it's the same when I'm in front of the classroom. I can gauge what's going on in the class also, I know. I can really zoom in on somebody if I can tell they're really having a problem or having an issue... And that is something that I really think just having a practice cultivates.

## Summary

Jessy and M-Kayla found that reflection through mindfulness practices, cultivated a skill of sensitivity that helped them in the classroom. They described enhanced abilities to gauge the classroom climate whereas Kelly that did not have the training wanted to further develop her skill. M-Kayla and Jessy claimed that through reflection they developed an awareness that enhanced the way they responded to stressful situations both inside the classroom.

*Authentic communication with students.* Authentic communication is the ability

to understand, and be understood by others. It implied the idea of being treated, as you would like to be treated, or experiencing things in someone else's shoes.

Jessy did not take the Stress and Burnout course but she has been following yoga and meditation practices on her own for more than ten years. She provides an account of authentic communication in the classroom, and how her calmness and teaching style contribute to her success in working with students:

And in general my students always, always tell me that I'm so calm...I'm really able to work well with the students. I've seen other teachers where just like every moment of instruction is like their barking at them so just definitely that's not my teaching style you know I do have a very relaxed presence...I defuse situations; the kids know that I care about them.

When Kelly was able to tell her students that she was struggling with her day, this realistic and authentic communication allowed her to connect with them and help everyone get through a hard day:

I think one thing that I really found is just being able to listen to what the students are saying and I know for me being able to admit when I'm having a bad day. I'm grouchy the kids just want to go home and for me to just be like, "ok look guys I know you're not thinking about school I've had a bad morning but we need to get through this together and just being upfront with them umm about it and being able to joke with them because sometime they just rally want someone to laugh with them and sometimes they are and sometime they aren't.

And I think being able to do that... umm, really helps and sometimes being able to laugh at a joke can help to lower the stress level in the classroom especially I know we are a non-semester school so the kids are carrying 8 courses all year and in May with all their projects and getting ready for the exams they are at the end of their rope; like they are stressed out so there are just a couple of days where like [I] just look out at them and I'm like you guys what are you guys doing and they are like "we are doing this project all the weekend blah blah blah" and I'm like okay there is some important stuff we have to get through today.

## Summary

Krissy and Jessy did not take the MBWE course but demonstrated an ability to build bonds through authentic communication with their students. In the data collected for the participants that had the MBWE training there was not any indicator that the course had fostered skills of authentic communication for the participants.

**Modeling.** Participants described part of the duty of teaching as modeling character. Being able to model good character and behaviour in the classroom was considered an important part of teaching. M-Justin emphasizes the importance of teaching through modeling behaviour:

I think the course it is just as useful as learning about educational psychology, it's just as important to take care of teachers; I think that's one of the problems. If teachers have techniques to take care of their minds and selves, they could model that to their students. I think that would really change the climate in education.

M-Kayla appreciated that the Stress and Burnout course demonstrated, through experiential learning, the theories that were discussed in the course. M-Kayla's excitement and enthusiasm about learning experientially and being taught as a whole person encouraged her to try to use those methods in her own classroom:

And I think later on in the other course we talked about the student as a whole, especially so because I was in the 'at risk cohort'...So at OISE we have cohorts. It's like a lens in which you learn a course of study or the curriculum. So I was in the 'at risk cohort' might be like new immigrant, language barrier, lack [of] funding area, maybe crime rates high in area, so from the beginning we defined what our cohort was and from the beginning we need to consider their context and the students' history so we touch on that as a cohort but it wasn't [until] near the end when we used the term holistic and I felt like we had it in the beginning in Stress and Burnout; where they tell us to teach to the whole, and I felt they were really teaching to all of me, as a potential teacher and I thought that was really cool.

You're not just teaching the curriculum, you're teaching them how to study, be good classmates, good students and member of the community and how to be a

good person. So yeah, I found I do think it goes beyond curriculum but some things can't be taught and I think in a lot of ways mindfulness has opened the door and is an option and I see a thousand hallways for me to walk down with something like this.

M-Justin and M-Kayla stated that doing mindfulness practices on a regular basis in a peer group encouraged them to keep up with the practice, and they recommended that weekly or daily meetings be scheduled to maintain consistent quality and regularity of their practice, especially in helping them manage on-going stress. M-Mandy discussed how the homework practices made it easier for her to have an experience of mindfulness and further apply it to her life:

...like I was going to commit to it and see if there really was a difference. And I loved how the instructor made us do the actual practices and that was part of our homework because without actually doing the practices you can talk about it and read about it all you want but actually doing practice, you do start to see results and that was what really sold me and I have been sold ever since.

Mindfulness Practices for Teachers was by far the most useful course I have taken. Learning that “the best way to teach is to model the behaviour you expect” was a revelation for me. By learning to eat properly, exercise, meditate, do yoga, and generally focus on my well-being I am achieving a healthy frame of mind which makes me a more energetic, calm and patient teacher.

I model everything I do as a teacher. Teach by example. Model the behaviour, attitude, skills, and execution...that you hope to cultivate in your students. If you want your students to be more organized or write more clearly or paint with greater skill, you need to model exactly how you would approach using an organizer, writing an essay or applying paint to a canvas. It is a philosophy that also speaks to character development. If you want patient, kind and engaged citizens, then you yourself need to be patient and kind with your students and be an engaged citizen yourself.

## **Summary**

All participants emphasized the importance of being a role model and positive interpersonal capacities to strengthen one's teaching abilities. The element of regularity in practice or meetings seemed to alleviate stress in different ways for them; however, it

is not clear as to how formal mindfulness training affected the interpersonal skills of participants.

Participants who took the Stress and Burnout course all mentioned the importance of modeling behaviour and how the course promoted healthy behaviours. M-Mandy and M-Kayla were also more motivated to integrate holistic praxis in their classroom. All participants emphasized the important skill of being reflective and aware of to the environment and the needs of others. However, participants who took the Stress and Burnout course felt more perceptive to the needs of the classroom and to relationships with colleagues, whereas those who did not struggled with the ability to acquire sensitivity. Some participants who were in the Stress and Burnout course described challenging social situations with colleagues and class topics and how they used mindfulness tools and concepts such as letting go to avoid stress, especially in the area of role expectations. Jessy did not take the MBWE course, but her success with mindfulness strategies gained through personal yoga and meditation practice has enabled her to offer classes and provide support for other teachers, as well as to be able to use instructional strategies such as teaching by modeling.

**Resilience to stressors.** Masten, Best and Garnezy (1990) define resilience as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 425). All participants had a different amount of years teaching and taught a different student population. All participants stated that the bridge from teachers’ college to teaching in their own classroom was extremely stressful. For each of the participants, stress affected their interpersonal skills and self-efficacy to varying degrees based on the availability of immediate social support and acquired

coping mechanisms. The following themes were considered embedded within the theme of resilience to stressors: Appraisal of school environment and Openness.

*Appraisal of school environment.* In their narratives and comments, participants described their schools, and the characteristics of the student body, as well as the school's educational emphasis and philosophy, and relationship to the community. Their appraisals of the students and the school appeared to influence an associated stress outcome. For instance, although M-Caitlin found that her students required a lot of attention, she was able to adapt because she valued the philosophy of the school:

So I guess this school is based on three pillars: environmentalism, social justice and community activism. There's a strong sense of community; it's a small school; it's new so it's still kind of trying to iron out all the kinks. There is high parental involvement; its teachers work really cohesively as a team and we all know like, like we've only been together for 15 days as of today but we all really communicate with each other and share how we are doing and how we are feeling and we help each other and support each other.

The kids here are really used to being heard, and a lot of them have parents that are activists so they can often be very disruptive. And teaching them, it's different than like teaching adults. I mean you know that you have provided them with all the opportunities to be successful and if they don't want to that's their choice because they're adults but with children you have this responsibility to keep them safe, emotionally safe, physically safe and that they're actually learning; that you're doing your job and they're learning and there's a big sense of failure if they don't and it's really hard on you.

M-Caitlin expressed the excitement, enthusiasm and commitment to working at a school that has core values of equity, diversity and social justice. It is an alternative public school within the Toronto District School Board and is unique because it offers art-infused, holistic learning, built on the core values of social justice, environmentalism, and community activism. She stated that the children are very perceptive for their age.

Also, since most of them do not have a conventional upbringing and tend to receive a lot of attention at home, as their teacher she has had to adjust herself to their needs. Although her adjustment was described as a source of stress, she was able to adapt. Ultimately, her optimism overshadowed the experience of stress when coupled with the gratification she received from seeing her students grow.

It was interesting to analyze Jessie's description of her school. Although she taught at an inner-city school that is ethnically diverse and hosts an 'at risk' student population, in describing her students she did not make the associative link commonly made by other teachers, viewing the 'at risk' student as deficient, problematic and in need of remedial care. Instead she saw her students as talented and capable of learning as other students.

I'm the Muslim Student Association staff advisor so I take a particular interest in that group; that's why it came up first... 25% sorta mid eastern south Asian Muslim, then other south Asians. There is a strong Tamil population so Hindu Tamil, and Christian Tamil sometimes....then there are within the black population, they're primarily more people of Jamaican Caribbean descent and then some people more African....so then we have a strong (ESL) population....I taught ESL art and saw mostly Chinese, some Korean, and I think I had one Somalian student, and one from Iraq.

She attributes her appreciation for student diversity and difference to the Art of Living initiative, International Association for Human Values (IAHV) and she supports its efforts to enhance the quality of life for all people through the practice of self-awareness, education and outreach programs.

Kelly described her student body demographically as middle-class. In her description she specifically acknowledged that the stressors and challenges she faces with her students are minor and would not be the same for someone who works in an inner-city school with an at-risk population:

For the most part I mean the behaviours that I have to deal with are kids showing up late, talking in class....we don't really have any....There's a lot of things I don't have to deal with that teachers at a more 'at risk' school would have to deal with....the school I teach at is in a fairly affluent neighbourhood, we have just over, there's about 1000 students and most of them are in the area. We do have a French immersion program so we have a wider catchment area for the French immersion program. So one thing I notice teaching math and English, those are some of the core courses like math, science and English we only offer in the English language so I'm seeing a variety of students.

M-Mandy's supply teaching is mainly within the Catholic school board, and she notes differences in the character of students in this school board, when compared to other students:

Well I do notice that the Catholic board has a stronger emphasis on character education than the public board does. The public board is trying to implement more of that. But I think that's always been a strong point for the Catholic board.

So I do find that there are more character values in the Catholic students than public board and it's easier to draw on them and use them. You know what I mean? You can use them as a teacher to your advantage that's I think that's what I'm getting at. You can talk about respect or Good Samaritan and they understand those stories because it's been drilled in them from a young age. And they know exactly "Oh okay, I'm not demonstrating that particular behavior" and they know that's held in high regard. ...So, umm, in that sense that's definitely a main difference. But I mean at the same time there is a loveliness in diversity as well that I don't know, sometimes stronger.

M-Kayla described the challenges and stress she experienced while teaching at a Year Round Alternative Center school that specializes in educating students who were not successful in public school. Her students come from highly stressful backgrounds and are often referred to by staff as having behavioral problems. M-Kayla found the responsibility as a teacher at her school stressful because it was essentially a last chance transitional school for students. The school has the primary aim of helping individuals

“get back on track” and return to a traditional or alternative high school system.

Sometimes simply being a new teacher is a challenge enough. It was difficult in my first semester at an alternative school; every student had a history or a story. Mind you, every student in the traditional school setting has a story and their own experiences. But it was difficult as a new and young teacher; in their shoes and with their experiences they did ‘live’ more than I did. It was challenging also knowing that their placement at that school was a last chance for many of them to catch up or finish or get a few more credits before going to adult school, or getting a job.

I think mindfulness helped me be present like, I’m physically there but I’m not always mentally there, especially when you first start.... But I think I’m more aware of how I am, or what I’m feeling what works for me before I start and if I have a good start at the beginning of my lesson or my day I feel like my class progresses well for myself and for my students; there is less confusion for the kids.

Ashley described her students as ‘ranging’ because she is a daily supply teacher in classes ranging from kindergarten to Grade Eight:

Since I supply daily it can be challenging to get to know students and establish rules and adherences to them because I won’t be there tomorrow. The school is situated in a middle class area and so I would say that most of the students come from well-to-do families.

Jessy did not take the Stress and Burnout course, but she adopted yoga and meditation practices years ago because of personal stress and health issues:

Ok so, yeah, well another thing that I didn’t talk much about in my narrative is that I’ve had some very low-grade health issues. Like I’ve had a parasite in my intestines, probably from living in Asia, umm, whatever so I’ve had stress with not always being my best during my teaching career but hopefully I can heal that. But definitely having the practices I was able to balance that out. I would not be able to do this job, like if there is no art of living, I woulda [sic] quit. I think I would be part of the, I think 20 percent, teachers in TBSD; I think it’s 20 percent drop out within the first five years; I think that’s the statistic. I mean it’s a large number of people; I think I would have been one of them because I was very sensitive but I was also emotional before I took these practices. So now my students are picking up on the fact that I am so calm. That is entirely attributable to the practice.

## Summary

An examination of the journal and interview narratives suggests that each participant described their respective school environment differently. Some descriptions were associated with higher stress and others reflected more desirable schools or student groups to work with for the teachers. These distinctions appeared to affect how participants perceived their teaching environment and relationships. It was also evident that participants who had taken the MBWE course, as well as Jessy, appraised their school and student body with less stress. However, within the framework of the study I was not able to assess if their positive appraisal was directly related to skills or concepts they acquired in the course.

*Openness.* Openness referred to the disposition of teachers who were looking to expand their perspective and for personal and professional growth. When a teacher has an open mind, they are more responsive to trying different methods of teaching. All participants enrolled in the Stress and Burnout course and who had learned stress-reducing strategies had an intention of learning new ways to deal with stress. M-Kayla acknowledges that she took the course for a variety of reasons:

First is my personal reason; somebody in my family got sick and it was just like another added weight on my shoulder and I didn't need that extra workload on my plate even though yes, you're going to school to work but it was just like I had enough on my plate, and if I was very stressed out before going on placement and at the beginning I wish to manage that. And, 'cause I didn't know how long the treatment or sickness would last and I had felt I would be better if I had with me whatever tools I could have taken from this course.

M-Caitlin considers her reasons for taking the course to be related to dealing with personal stressors:

Yeah, I would describe myself as someone who gets stressed easily so I was there the pilot year of that course; it was MBSR stuff and it was a wellness wheel of seven aspects of wellness. Maybe they changed it but when I was there it was mindfulness based stress reduction, so we would always start with yoga and meditation and making sure to balance all seven of those. And both of those are hugely important in my life right now kinda [sic] as a direct result...They are both really important to my life partly because of that course, so it really got me interested. I ended up doing other meditation courses as a result and I do meditation with my class everyday with my students. That was kinda of [sic] an introduction for me.

M-Justin reflects that he decided to take the course due to a personal interest in the topic:

I'm not sure; it just sounded very interesting. I guess that one of the things I was worried about was getting burned out from teaching, like just from getting stressed out because I do feel stressed out sometimes, and I just thought it would be interesting to find ways to counteract the stress.

M-Mandy reflects that she took the course for medical reasons:

I decided to take that course because I had recently started having an anxiety disorder ...and I had never had any issues like that in my life. It was a year prior to getting into teachers college and I hadn't really made any steps to figure out how to deal with it besides for small talk with my doctor. So I thought "hey, I'm in teachers college and this course is being offered; it might be helpful for me and it might help me through teachers college."

I feel very calm and it (anxiety) disappears when I focus. So when I'm teaching I have a focus and it's never been an issue. And my anxiety has been really minor since the past because I'm taking care of myself.

All participants that took the MBWE course had a mentioned demanding level of personal and professional stress in their lives and were all open to seeking strategies to cope with it. This could have influenced the success of mindfulness as an intervention to stress and as well to carrying over into interpersonal and self-efficacy outcomes.

## **Summary**

In all narratives, the participants' perceived vulnerability to stress played a minor

role in their actual experience of stress. The evidence presented in the narratives, points to personal appraisal as a factor that influences resilience to stress. It also helps to explain why teachers in comparable work environments, with similar educational backgrounds, experience and mentorship often respond differently to the same stressors. Teachers described as resilient were those who were able to cope successfully, and who demonstrated positive interpersonal skills and self-efficacy in spite of the same kinds of stressors that appeared to defeat others. Although variables of self-efficacy, interpersonal skills and resilience to stress may overlap, other prominent characteristics of ‘resilient’ teachers were adaptability and personal impulse control and access to support systems and mentors to help them deal with the challenges of teaching. It was evident that MBWE participants acquired and utilized more internal protective factors (self-reflection, positive talk, self-care etc.) when they encountered challenging situations; whereas participants that did not take the course (with the exception of Jessy) relied on external protective factors such as colleague and mentor support.

**Additional development courses.** Participants recalled additional courses that had been influential in developing their self-efficacy, interpersonal capacities and resilience to stress. M-Justin reflects on his own experiences in teachers’ college:

The things that I found useful in teachers college...probably the most useful were differentiated learning, learning instructional strategies, skills and techniques to be an effective teacher and the other one was learning... umm, how to combine the thoughtful caring approach like techniques for building inclusion and caring and respect in the classroom...So that kinda [sic] taught you how to create a positive classroom environment; that was another I liked a lot and the other one was just learning how to teach the content very well.

M-Justin recognized that his self-efficacy is linked to his interpersonal capacities

and experience of stress. He benefited from mindfulness techniques to manage his stress in class, and developed many of his teaching skills from learning instructional techniques.

Participants rated their cohort as an influential component of their teacher training in regards to developing interpersonal, self-efficacy and stress resilience. Cohorts organize students so that they will take three classes with the same group. They also have a specialized perspective (SP) or lens for looking at a subject: SP1 Teaching and Learning for Change in Urban Schools, SP2 International Languages, SP3 School, Community, and Global Connections, SP4 Education and Work, SP5 Peel/Dufferin-Peel Partnerships, SP6 Multilingual & Multicultural Classrooms, SP7 Emily Carr Secondary School, York Region, SP8 The Arts, SP9 Social Justice in Catholic Education, SP10 Regional.

M-Mandy notes that her cohort

was a global cohort. It was school, community and global education. But the lens was a global focus so a lot about diversity about global issues, world issues, like environmental, political. That kind of lens...And I'm really happy I took it. These people were seriously some of the brightest, most well rounded. Like the most in-depth conversations I had in my entire education. Everyone had something to bring to the table, Like, don't forget this, what about this. It was really like a sharing of the mind.

Kelly feels satisfied with her cohort, stating,

I was really glad that I went into that cohort actually, just for me. It was in science and engineering; we lacked global issues but to be able to be in a cohort with people...being in a group with such different backgrounds and their own opinions about things. It was so interesting; I also found it challenging because all of the readings were all about teachers who had done stuff in their classroom, but it was all social science or English and there was not that much science or math with the global connection. Which I think was great and challenging for me as a teacher to try to find that stuff and work it into my teaching., that you could call and say "this kid is doing this thing and I don't know what to do" because that's a big stressor, if something new happens, and you don't know what to do. Imagine if you could call the hotline and there was someone there that you can speak to [and who would say]

“but don’t worry, it’s okay, it’s okay, just breathe and we are going to get through this and think of some strategies for you.” Even a website would do; just something you can go on.

M-Caitlin described the possibility of extracurricular supplements to formal mindfulness instruction:

Yeah, like in the first year or two or three of teaching, have some kind of weekly meetings with new teachers in your area. Where you can exchange ideas and also have someone be there just to like maybe teach meditation. And it’s just a social thing and there’s food. Food will always get people to come. Like if there is food and maybe a place, like a home and it’s cozy and it’s an opportunity to get ideas. Like you make a flyer and you send it out to all these beginning teachers; you give a list to beginning teachers and you invite them in, like, maybe in like four different quadrants in the city or something to come out to this. This ‘meet and greet’, you have a meditation, you have some really healthy delicious food and then you can talk about a balance in your life. You can talk about mindfulness practices, and stress-reduction. You can also have an exchange of ideas between the teachers. To tell each other this is what’s working; this is what isn’t. Then there is someone there to facilitate that. Like an experienced teachers as well as a qualified meditation teacher. I think that would be awesome.

All participants, regardless of whether they had mindfulness training or not, stated that their cohort strengthened and expanded their perspective and strengthened their skills of self-efficacy, interpersonal capacity building, and resilience to stress.

**Participant self-selection.** Mindfulness is not a magic bullet, but can be a beneficial tool for teachers who lack well-developed coping mechanisms. For participants who had taken formal mindfulness training, the course was a good start to giving individuals an awareness of the physical response of stress, and what techniques they could use. The participants with formal mindfulness training all found the course refreshing and helpful in their stressful teaching, and recommended it to be a core course. As noted by Montgomery and Rupp (2005), stress is a complex and highly subjective experience, but for some it can be a motivator and natural outcome of the given situation

and role of the teacher. In fact, how teachers appraise stressful situations can be an important mediator of the experience of stress. Some teachers may have skills to cope and others may not. Mindfulness training can benefit those who express psychological and physical vulnerability. In all cases reviewed, teachers admitted that they were stressed to varying degrees in response to situations commonly encountered by classroom teachers. The participants reported enhanced coping strategies through different elements they took from the course.

The narratives reported how mindfulness training can be used as a tool to improve the practice of teachers through facilitating their capacities of self-efficacy, adaptive interpersonal abilities, and resilience to stress. All the participants who had enrolled in the stress and burn out course recognized stress as an issue and described a readiness and openness to learn more about stress so that they could manage it. The findings of this research suggest that participants who registered in the Stress and Burnout course had certain psychological and physical vulnerabilities prior to taking the course. All of the participants who enrolled either reported that they were under physical or psychological stress, or were anticipating stress and were seeking ways to deal with it. One interpretation of this fact is that participants who take the course may have lower coping skills than student teachers who do not take the course, although such an interpretation would limit the ability to generalize the benefits of mindfulness training for all teachers. That being said, the participants who completed the course felt that they experienced positive results from the course. This perspective suggests the possibility of an alternative interpretation, which is that participants who registered for the course may have had a

greater awareness of the stressfulness they would likely encounter in teaching, and wanted to have resources to deal with the challenges of the modern classroom.

**Participants' conceptualization of mindfulness.** All participants enrolled in the Stress and Burnout course mentioned that the course had affected their personal lives and teaching practice in a unique way. Each participant conceptualized mindfulness in slightly different ways, partly due to whether they were still practicing mindfulness or not. M-Mandy reported maintaining daily meditation, mindful and healthy eating habits, yoga practice, balancing friends and family; all mindfulness practices discussed and emphasized in the MBWE course. She supplemented these practices with ongoing yoga courses. She reported improvements in lesson preparation, improved perception of physical well-being and energy level, as well as diminished feelings of anxiety and personal distress. M-Kayla characterized her current practice as limited, and something she has to return to, because she notices a significant decrease in her calm teaching practice, general psychological well-being, and ability to navigate tensions in her teaching practice, compared to when she was able to formally practice two or three times a week.

M-Justin had a more informal way of conceptualizing mindfulness; he understood it as “these are all things we grew up with people saying, take a breath when you are stressed.” For Justin, the course was like a retreat; it gave him the space to experience choice, so that he could choose how to respond or react in challenging situations. The mindfulness participants all expressed noticeable and useful changes in their lives and classroom teaching, from having taken formal mindfulness training.

Course teachings and practice were adopted by each participant in varied ways. They believed they had greater resilience against stress than they had prior to taking the course.

### **The Importance of Cultivating Internal Protective Factors**

It should be noted that participants who were not trained in mindfulness also demonstrated resilience to stress. With the exception of Jessy, who had taken mindfulness training outside of OISE, participants who did not have the training tended to rely more on external support sources, such as colleague support. It is important to cultivate both internal (e.g., self-reflection, positive talk, self-care) and external protective factors (e.g., colleague and mentor support), but there is an increasing need to foster self-managing resources. The narratives illuminate the personal variability of the experience of stress; both methods seemed to have reduced the experience of stress for all teachers. The specific strategies that differentiated between the groups were the use of internal and external resources. It was not possible, given the framework of this study, to determine whether the teachers who did not have mindfulness training already possessed strong emotional regulation and navigation skills. Perceived self-efficacy affects both the quality of interpersonal capabilities as well as resilience to stress. Stronger self-efficacy not only serves to promote confidence in the classroom but also serves to mediate the discomfort of conflicts between students and teachers.

### **Limitations**

A larger group of participants might have been beneficial to this study in amplifying the narrative power of the study. As Ashworth noted, “it is arguable that the richness of the human condition is such that no one tendency would encompass

the whole” (1986, p.23). In this view, although this method used in this study appeared successful in capturing some teachers’ experience, there is still much more information on this topic that was not discussed by participants. Additionally, the instruments used in this study were self-reporting measures; therefore, the accuracy of the study could be influenced by inaccurate, or inarticulate, self-reports or by participants’ inaccurate perceptions of the situations described in the narratives or journals.

Another limitation was that non-verbal aspects were unaccounted for in the data collection; in this context, non-verbal aspects could include the participant’s mood, the emotive atmosphere, and the subtle and silent insights embedded in the narratives. These forms of communication were almost impossible to adequately convey in this paper. Moreover, a narrative enquiry entails understanding how a person actually lived through an experience and interpreted it, and thus one is often left to the mercy of retrospective analysis of experiences. This reality could be seen as a limitation, as the impact of any experience tends to diminish over time, which can lead to distorted memories and inaccurate emotional recall (e.g., diminished recognition of the emotional impact of a situation). Conversely, there may be accounts of stressful experiences that are exaggerated in the narratives, if they have been repeatedly shared with colleagues or other persons over a period of time.

Finally, my role as both researcher and mindful practitioner came with its advantages, but also proved to be a limitation for several reasons. My experience provided for a deeper level of interpersonal exchange as well as an understanding of the participants’ experience than would otherwise have been possible if I had only studied

mindfulness conceptually. However, my own experience of mindfulness, as well as my experience in being a teacher, may have swayed the manner in which I interpreted the teachers' responses to my interview questions. It is possible that because I had a prior relationship with mindfulness practice, I may have missed important opportunities for data collection and did not gain other information that could have added other dimensions to this study.

### **Conclusion**

Stress and burn out are not endemic to teaching, but the incidence of job stress and burnout in this field should provide support for the usefulness of interventions in this area. This paper suggests that for teachers who are seeking strategies for coping with stress, mindfulness may have a role to play in increasing teachers' resilience by promoting internal resources to buffer the emotional aspects of their work. Teacher journaling and interviews generated narratives of teacher perceptions about the potential of mindfulness training and practice in facilitating professional goals such as satisfactory teaching experience and adaptive interpersonal skills, self-efficacy as well as resilience to stress. The narratives also provided insights into the future of mindfulness practice in education. Narratives and interview responses in this study gave voice to pre-service teachers' concerns about meeting professional goals, stress management related to teaching, and interpersonal skills with colleagues, administrators, and students. Insights are provided for curriculum planning for teacher education programs. Narratives and teacher journaling are recommended for further inquiries into factors for support of introduction and implementation of mindfulness-based wellness education programs for teachers and their students. In summary, this study provided information regarding the

value of mindfulness practice as an intervention for teacher burnout.

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## Appendix A

### Weekly Mindfulness Chart

Weekly mindfulness themes, practices, wellness focuses and teaching strategies.

Class	Focus
1	Mindfulness theme: Being Present Mindfulness Practice: Body Scan Wellness: Physical Teaching strategy: Exploring your risk for burnout
2	Mindfulness theme: Acknowledging obstacles to self-care Mindfulness Practice: Yoga Wellness: Social Teaching strategy: Students' stress
3	Mindfulness theme: Returning to the breath Mindfulness Practice: Yoga and mindful sitting with focus on the breath Wellness: Emotional Teaching strategy: Teacher development
4	Mindfulness theme: Awareness in motion Mindfulness Practice: Mindful sitting with focus on breath and body sensations Wellness: Ecological Teaching strategy: Mindfulness in the classroom
5	Mindfulness theme: Allowing & letting be Mindfulness Practice: Mindful sitting with focus on breath, sensations, sounds Wellness: Vocational Teaching strategy: Wellness wheel as classroom planning
6	Mindfulness theme: Judgment Mindfulness Practice: Mindful sitting with awareness of thoughts Wellness: Mental Teaching strategy: Wellness wheel as integrative curriculum
7	Mindfulness Theme: Inner and outer resources Mindfulness Practice: Mindful sitting – self-guided Wellness: Spiritual Teaching Strategy: Inviting family engagement
8	Mindfulness Theme: Maintaining your own practice Mindfulness Practice: Yoga and body scan Wellness: Maintaining wellness Teaching Strategy: Holistic education

## Appendix B

### Teacher Summary

Name	Gender	Years teaching	Grades Taught	Type of student taught	Courses influential for teaching practice	Sources of Stress	Coping mechanisms
M-Kayla	F	1	11	Alternative school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stress and Burnout course</li> <li>➤ Aquatics and cohort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Administration</li> <li>➤ Lack of colleague(s) /mentor(s) support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Quiet time</li> <li>➤ Mindful breathing</li> </ul>
M-Justin	M	1+	Adult English as a second language (ESL)	Adult English school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stress and Burnout course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lack of subject knowledge</li> <li>➤ Students' perception of his teaching abilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Positive self-talk</li> <li>➤ Quiet time</li> <li>➤ Mindful breathing</li> <li>➤ Colleague support</li> </ul>
M-Mandy	F	4	Primary and Secondary (2, 10, 11 and 12)	Catholic school board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Differentiated Instruction course</li> <li>➤ Stress and Burnout course</li> <li>➤ Cohort specialized perspective (SP)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Anxiety disorder</li> <li>➤ High expectations of self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mindful practice ('yoga, meditation)</li> <li>➤ Proper diet and rest</li> <li>➤ Social support</li> </ul>
M-Caitlin	F	3 years and six months	1	Community centered school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mindfulness course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Administrative demands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mindful practice</li> <li>➤ Eating</li> <li>➤ Colleague support</li> </ul>
Kelly	F	2	9 and 10	French immersion public school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Radical Math group at OISE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Administrative demands</li> <li>➤ Parental perception of his abilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Colleague support</li> <li>➤ Watching inspirational shows</li> </ul>
Jessy	F	7	9 and 10	Inner city 'at risk' school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Art of Living</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Administrative demands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Yoga</li> <li>➤ Mindful breathing</li> <li>➤ Meditation</li> </ul>
Annette	F	1	9 and 10	International baccalaureate program	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Day to day content preparation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Colleague support</li> </ul>
Ashley	F	5	Junior kindergarten to grade 6	Public school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Special Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Student behaviour management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Colleague support</li> </ul>

## Appendix C

### Relationship between Resilience to Stress, Self-Efficacy and Adaptive Interpersonal Skills<sup>1</sup>

<i>Resilience to stress</i>	<i>Self-Efficacy</i>	<i>Adaptive interpersonal abilities</i>
Positive thinking	Capable	Able to manage uncomfortable emotions
Demonstrates positive adaptation in challenging situations	Sees opportunity for	Sees opportunity in
Flexible	Willingness to take	Adaptable
Embraces challenges	Sets challenging goals	Demonstrates initiative in modeling behavior
Able to solve problems	Open to new	Able to develop
Reflective	Reflective	Reflective
Willing to grow	Takes 'risks	Committed
Maintains forms of	Benefits from supportive relationships	Seeks and maintains

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Tait (2008).

## Appendix D

### Teacher Journaling Questions

For how long have you been teaching?

Why do you want to teach?

What personal/professional development courses have you taken that have supported your teaching practice?

What are the qualities of a good teacher? Which of these qualities do you have?

What philosophy(ies) has influenced the way you interact with your students?

If so, what are the different ways in which you use these skills in your teaching practice?

Describe an incident when you and/or your class used these skills. Why did you use them at that time? What was the effect?

Do you use any techniques to decompress when you are experiencing stress in the classroom?

Tell me about the challenges you experience in your teaching practice/career?

Describe a time when a lesson was not going well; what did you do about it?

When you are faced with difficulties on your job, how do you handle them ?

What professional/personal factors contribute to any feeling of connection or isolation that you experience?

What would you do if a parent became angry during a parent-teacher conference?

What are some effective ways to communicate with parents?

What do you do when you must teach students that are reluctant learners?

What are some of the ways you get to know your students personally?

#### Situation:

A student reveals a situation at school that makes you think they may be the victim of some kind of abuse in the home. Describe how you would handle it?

At what moment in the class this week did you feel most engaged with what was happening?

When do you feel insecure about your abilities?

Do you feel you can help most of your students to learn?

Do you think all children can really succeed in school?

How do you handle a situation when a student [refuses to cooperate, calls out, doesn't do assignments, etc.

## Appendix E

### Teacher Interview Question Guide

- ❖ Introduction
- ❖ Clarify questions based on personal narrative to ensure their point of view is represented well (i.e. abbreviations, pedagogic terms and other points that require more elaboration)
- ❖ What courses/workshops have you participated in (or professional day activities)?  
-In what way?
- ❖ Please tell me about them?
- ❖ Were those helpful to inform your practice?  
-How so, in resolving difficult situations?
- ❖ Participants who have taken the “Stress and Burnout: Teacher and Student application”  
-:How was the course/ course content helpful to your practice.?  
  
-If yes, in what way?  
-If not ,why not?
- ❖ Were there any other courses that have been particularly valuable to your practice?  
-In what way?
- ❖ For those who have not taken the “Stress and Burnout: Teacher and Student application”  
\_Was this course offered when you were enrolled in the teacher education/certification program?  
  
-If yes, why didn't you choose to take it?  
-If not, were you aware that this course was being offered?  
  
-Did you have any colleagues who took the courses?  
- If so, what was their feedback?
- ❖ What courses/workshops/professional day activities have been useful to resolving or dealing with stressful situations?
- ❖ Thank you for participating!

## Appendix F Participant

### Consent Form

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

#### *Comparing Four Teacher Narratives Related to Self-Efficacy, Adaptive Interpersonal Capacities and Resilience to Stress*

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Haidee Kaur Thanda of the Department of Education at Concordia University (Tel. 514 834 7919 ;e-mail: [hthan091@uottawa.ca](mailto:hthan091@uottawa.ca)) in partial fulfilment of her MA degree.

#### **A. PURPOSE**

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to gather journal narratives by four teachers about three aspects of their practice: a) self-efficacy; b) adaptive interpersonal capacities and c) resilience to stress.

#### **B. PROCEDURES**

There are two phases to my participation:

1. Answering a series of questions in journal form – A series of questions will guide my journaling. I am expected to complete the journaling phase in five to ten days and return the journal to the researcher.
2. If need be, the researcher will invite me to an interview to clarify some themes emerging from my journaling. This interview should not require more than an hour of my time, may be audio recorded with your permission and will be conducted in a safe place upon mutual agreement.

To protect the confidentiality of my participation, pseudonyms will be used at all times. Only I, the researcher, and my advisor Prof. Arpi Hamalian will have access to reading the journal entries and the interview transcripts. All data will be kept under special lock and key in a specially protected computer file or paper journal.

#### **C. RISKS AND BENEFITS**

There are no foreseeable risks to participants. The participation will provide the

volunteer participants with time and space for reflecting on their practice. It is expected that the results of the study will provide guidelines for better initial teacher education and in service education program development.

#### **D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and confidential (i.e. the research and her advisor will know but will not disclose my identity at any time)
- I understand that the data from this study will be published in the form of an MA thesis in the Department of Education at Concordia University and also in the form of articles. In all cases, my identity and all the information that can be used to identify me will be kept confidential.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**If at any time you have questions about our rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 x 7481 or by email at [areid@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:areid@alcor.concordia.ca)**