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# Stress and Teacher Burnout: The Impact of Mindfulness Strategies

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**Stress and Teacher Burnout: The Impact of Mindfulness Strategies**

by

Kelsey A. Milne

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

in Educational Administration and Leadership

December, 2019

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## Abstract

Teaching is a high-risk profession considering the impact it has on a teacher's mental health (McLean & Connor, 2015). Since work-related stress can lead to job burnout, it is important for teachers to develop effective coping strategies to alleviate the high degree of burnout in the teaching occupation (Steinhardt, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011). Numerous studies pointed out the effectiveness, the ease of implementation and the cost-effective factor of mindfulness techniques to address stress and potential burnout (Abenavoli, Harris, Katz, Jennings, & Greenberg, 2014; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012; Stanley, 2011; Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999). Mindfulness techniques have been linked to decreased levels of distress and increased job satisfaction (Friedman, 2000; Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013; Roeser et al, 2013; Luken & Sammons, 2016).

The purpose of the study was to examine the level of stress reported by a select group of Minnesota elementary teachers and to determine their awareness and use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stress. Additionally, the study examined teachers' exposure to mindfulness strategies through training\professional development and their reported likelihood of using mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress. Select voluntary teachers reported their beliefs on the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers regarding the use of mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress.

Most study respondents, 82.9% (n = 208), reported that they either frequently or always experienced stress at work, illustrating a high stress level for this group of elementary school teachers. Of the 250 participants, 98.4% (n = 246) had at least some knowledge or awareness of mindfulness strategies while 14.4% (n = 36) reported using mindfulness strategies frequently to reduce their work-related stress.

According to all four voluntary teacher interview participants, they used mindfulness strategies to reduce their work-related stress and discussed mindfulness techniques they used in their classrooms with students; they all believed mindfulness was helpful in their classroom with their students and for themselves. Additionally, all four participants said they would recommend mindfulness strategies to other educators. Participants identified time as a barrier to their practice of mindfulness techniques. The study results indicated that district administrators and school leaders can increase retention and efficacy by seeking out ways to support teachers' self-care and learning of mindfulness techniques.

### **Acknowledgements and Dedication**

I have learned so much throughout this process and there have been many helpful people along the way. I would like to first thank my chair, Dr. Kay Worner, who was always available, encouraging, and a great mentor to me. Dr. Worner, I very much appreciate you! I'd like to thank Dr. Plamen Miltenoff, Dr. David Lund and Dr. Roger Worner for being on my committee and for always providing support and believing in me.

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I wish to thank my family, especially my mother and father Elizabeth and Paul Milne, for always being there for me and helping me stay motivated. I love you guys so much and am thankful for your endless support, humor, patience, and love.

I dedicate my dissertation to Phyllis Johnson, my late grandmother. She has always been an inspiration to me who provided endless laughs, love, and support. She taught me that I can do and be anything. She was an extraordinary woman and I know she would have been proud to know that I reached my goal.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

### Introduction

Teaching is a high-risk profession considering its impact on a teacher's mental health (McLean & Connor, 2015). Elder, Nidich, Moriarty, and Nidich (2014) identified school teachers as "professionals who may experience a tremendous amount of stress in their work environment" (p. 19). According to Franco, Manas, Cangas, Moreno and Gallego (2010), teaching is one of the professions most impacted by psychological issues with numerous teachers experiencing significant distress due to requirements at work.

The work of a teacher is "uncertain and emotionally demanding," making it important to develop the skills necessary to meet the needs of students (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). McLean and Connor (2015) described teaching as a profession with numerous factors, such as difficult students and parents and pressure on student testing and teacher performance, resulting in chronic stress. Napoli (2004) drew attention to the challenges faced by teachers in the last 2 decades; their role shifted from strictly teaching cognitive development to helping students emotionally. Teachers are still required to teach despite the lack of necessary tools to meet the emotional challenges of their students (Napoli, 2004).

In 1974, Herbert Freudenberger first coined the term "burnout" as severe, on the job stress (Williams & Dikes, 2015). As cited by Aloe, Amo, and Shanahan (2014), Maslach (1976) identified the dimensions of burnout as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and (lowered) personal accomplishment. Goddard, O'Brien, and Goddard (2006) stated that "the burnout phenomenon is a chronic state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion that arises in personnel from the cumulative demands of work" (p. 857). When teachers are emotionally

exhausted, the likelihood of burnout increases and can have negative consequences for students, including contributing to damaging learning environments (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Luken and Sammons (2016) stated, “burnout is a serious risk among people working in emotionally demanding professions” (p. 7). Most would agree that teaching is an emotionally demanding profession as teachers strive to educate all students in highly diverse classrooms. In education, there is a correlation between the well-being of a teacher and the same teacher staying in the profession (Fisher, 2011). Efforts to decrease burnout and increase job satisfaction can reduce teacher stress and improve teacher retention (Friedman, 2000). A teachers’ ability to regulate their emotions may be a predictor of their capacity to handle stress in the classroom and, thus, may impact their feelings of accomplishment and job satisfaction (Brackett, Palomera, Mojsa-Kaja, Reyes & Salovey, 2010). Additionally, stress has an impact on the performance of teachers (Banerjee & Mehta, 2016).

The prevalence of physical and mental health problems associated with work-related stress provides the inspiration to equip employees with support and resources (Poulin, Mackenzie, Soloway, & Karayolas, 2008). The proven impact of stress on the performance of teachers urged Banerjee and Mehta (2016) to recommend: “appropriate job resources should be provided to the faculty by the institutions, which can help fight stress and can boost performance” (p. 18).

Mindfulness training was identified as an area for teacher professional development due to its ability to help future teachers manage their stress levels (Dorman, 2015; Miller & Nozawa, 2005; Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999). In addition to helping teachers cope with stress, learning coping strategies allows teachers to model socially appropriate emotion regulation to their students (Poulin et al., 2008).

Meditation and mindfulness are two helpful strategies to foster well-being among individuals and help them develop skills to regulate their emotions (Fried, 2011). Mindfulness is a flexible skill and can be taught in a variety of ways (Luken & Sammons, 2016). People practicing mindfulness meditation have a goal of changing the way they see themselves, through being aware of their body, their emotions, and the attention of their mind (Hölzel et al., 2011).

Studies have found benefits for students in the classrooms in which teachers have received training in mindfulness strategies (Abenavoli et al., 2014). Those benefits include greater engagement, less classroom management concerns and greater efficacy in classroom instruction (Abenavoli et al., 2014). Teachers can use mindfulness as a resource to self-regulate emotions resulting from job stress, thereby increasing their ability to focus on the students and their performances in the classrooms (Roeser et al., 2013).

Mindfulness strategies improve job satisfaction and help people working in emotionally taxing jobs avoid burnout by improving their emotional exhaustion levels (Hülshager et al., 2013). Mindfulness strategies can be used as a general stress reliever and aid individuals in coping with stress (Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, & Walach, 2004). Winzelberg and Luskin (1999) determined meditation to be a straightforward, economical method used to help teachers manage their stress levels.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teachers experiencing significant stress have a higher likelihood of missing work, being dissatisfied with their work, and eventually “burning out” causing them to leave the profession (Roeser et al, 2012). For those and other reasons, Vanderslice (2010) recommended school leaders to support teachers in reducing their stress to retain quality teachers in the classroom.

Burnout impacts the health of the teacher, student achievement, and teacher attrition, therefore, administrators are encouraged to provide stress-relief assistance for teachers (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014). Since the well-being of teachers can also determine their employment longevity, administrators should be concerned with seeking methods for decreasing burnout and increasing job satisfaction (Fisher, 2011).

Numerous studies demonstrate the effectiveness of mindfulness strategies. Mindfulness techniques have been linked to lowering levels of distress and increasing job satisfaction (Friedman, 2000; Hülshager et al., 2013; Luken & Sammons, 2016; Roeser et al, 2013). However, little is known with regard to the number of teachers aware of and/or use mindfulness strategies to reduce their work-related stress.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed data method study was to examine the frequency with which a select group of Minnesota elementary school teachers reported their experienced work-related stress and to determine their awareness of and/or use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stress. Additionally, the study examined teachers' exposure to mindfulness strategies through training/professional development and their reported likelihood of using mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress.

The results of the study intend to furnish school administrators with an understanding of teachers' usage of mindfulness strategies and those teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of those strategies to reduce job-related stress. The findings of the study may reveal select strategies for mitigating work-related stress experienced by Minnesota elementary school teachers.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. How frequently did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report they experienced work-related stress?
2. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress?
3. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of training/professional development on mindfulness strategies?
4. How did select Minnesota elementary school teachers rank their likelihood of using specific mindfulness strategies to reduce stress in the work environment?
5. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in their use of mindfulness strategies?

## **Assumptions of the Study**

According to Roberts (2010), assumptions in a study are the parts presumed to be true. The study was based on the opinions and viewpoints of the teachers who responded to a survey and who volunteered to participate in an interview. The following are assumptions made by the researcher while conducting the mixed methods study:

- It was assumed that study participants answered survey questions honestly.
- It was assumed that study participants understood the term “mindfulness strategies” and had received some level of training or exposure to mindfulness strategies.

- It was assumed that at least four to six participants would self-identify for the follow-up interview questions.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations result from the design and execution of the study, choices that the researcher made (Simon & Goes, 2013). Delimitations in the study include:

- The convenience sample used in the study included the opinions of select elementary school teachers in Minnesota. These opinions were not representative of all elementary school teachers in Minnesota or elementary school teachers' opinions elsewhere.
- The researcher specifically selected only those elementary school districts known to have some level of mindfulness training available to teachers. It was not known, however, the exact mindfulness training each building or teacher had received.
- The survey questions were kept brief to encourage a higher response rate and focused results from respondents.
- The online survey allowed participants to skip questions instead of requiring an answer to each question.

### **Significance of the Study**

Teaching is a high stress profession (Elder et al., 2014). Teachers practicing mindfulness techniques showed a decrease of psychological distress compared to their colleagues in the control group (Franco et al., 2010). Teachers presented with an opportunity to learn stress management practices could offset the work-related stress of teaching. Mindfulness strategies improve job satisfaction and help people working in emotionally taxing jobs avoid burnout by improving their emotional exhaustion levels (Hülshager et al., 2013).

Mindfulness has become popular in a short amount of time and studies in a variety of fields of work and concerning various conditions have increased (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Mindfulness strategies can be used as a general stress reliever and help individuals cope with stress (Grossman et al., 2004). Teachers can use mindfulness as a resource to self-regulate emotions resulting from on the job stress, thereby increasing their ability to focus on the students and their performance in the classroom (Roeser et al., 2013). The number of educators employing mindfulness strategies, or the extent they view them as an effective stress-relief method, is unknown.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined to assist the reader:

**Burnout:** Burnout is described as severe, on the job stress (Freudenberger as cited by Williams & Dikes, 2015). Burnout is typically viewed as a three- part occurrence which includes exhaustion, depersonalization, and un-accomplishment (Friedman, 2000)

**Meditation:** Meditation is a practice has existed for over 5,000 years and is used for both healing and contemplative reasons; the word meditation is derived from the Latin “meditari,” which means “to engage in contemplation or reflection” (Chiesa & Malinowski, 2011, p. 407).

**Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is a way for people to reduce suffering and increase their well-being by being in the present moment (Germer, 2004). Germer (2004) promoted the use of mindfulness as a method to reduce suffering by allowing people to be in the moment and less reactive; instead of being “caught up” in the past or future, the goal was to remain in the present

and accept that moment without judgement. Kabat-Zinn (2013) described mindfulness as a method to change the way people see and respond to situations.

**Mindfulness Strategies:** Include but are not limited to body scan, tai chi, mindful breathing, yoga, walking meditation, meditation, mindful eating, and loving kindness meditation (Kabat-Zinn & Hanh, 2009).

**Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):** In 1979, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) came into being at the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Kabat-Zinn (2013) described his program of MBSR as an eight-week program, which meets once a week but encourages people to practice meditation daily; including mindfulness practices and mindful breathing (sitting for a specified number of minutes and focusing on your breath).

**Stress:** “a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation” (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.).

### **Organization of the Study**

The study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, assumptions, limitations and delimitations of the study and definition of terms. Chapter II features a review of related literature including the history and development of MBSR, mindfulness in education, teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction, and explanations of mindfulness and meditation. Chapter III presents the methodology employed during the collection of the data and provides a synopsis of the participants, instrumentation, data



collection and analysis. Chapter IV reports the results of the study and Chapter V establishes the summary, conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this mixed data method study was to examine the frequency with which a select group of Minnesota elementary school teachers reported their experienced work-related stress and to determine their awareness of and/or use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stress. Additionally, the study examined teachers' exposure to mindfulness strategies through training/professional development and their reported likelihood of using mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress.

The review of related literature focused on the following themes: (a) the history and development of Mindfulness Based Stress Relief (MBSR), (b) studies of mindfulness practices and (c) mindfulness studies in education, (d) teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction, (e) stress management with mindfulness, and (f) explanations of mindfulness and meditation.

### **History and Development of MBSR**

In 1979, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was constructed at the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). It was first called stress reduction and relaxation. Later, it was changed to MBSR title to highlight the awakening and attention aspects of the program (Kabat-Zinn, 1982 as cited by Buttle, 2015).

Kabat-Zinn (2003) created the program and described the original intentions of the program as twofold, the first designed to relieve suffering. Patients needed to learn mindfulness meditation strategies as a way to help explore the mind/body connection and decrease the stress, pain and illness in their lives. The second intention was to create a model to be replicated and used in hospitals, clinics and eventually other avenues (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In 1990, Kabat-Zinn published a book titled *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to*

Face Stress, Pain, and Illness. This book was based on the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program (SR-RP) now MBSR Program at UMASS Medical and the book included a full description of Kabat-Zinn's program as summarized below (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Kabat-Zinn (2013) described MBSR as an eight-week program of once-a-week meetings with the end goal of exposing participants to various techniques and encouraging them to incorporate the ideas in their lives and to find a daily mindfulness practice. Examples of mindfulness techniques that participants learn in the program included: body scan meditations, being fully present, hatha yoga postures, sitting meditation, yoga, walking meditation, mindful eating, and loving kindness meditation. The class ends by encouraging participants to continue their own practice in their lives (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Kabat-Zinn's MBSR program described above has been adapted and revised in various studies. Mindfulness is something people can practice in formal or informal ways; they can practice on their own, with a partner, or in a group. Sometimes people learn mindfulness techniques by researching on their own and developing an individual practice. In other instances, people participate in a formal training class or program, spiritually based or secular (Luken & Sammons, 2016). The MBSR program serves as the base for a significant number of the formal programs currently offered. The exact format of MBSR is often adapted based on the needs of the people in the group or time constraints (Luken & Sammons, 2016).

The literature review of literature revealed a slow start of mindfulness as a discipline; until the late '90s, research on mindfulness was sparse. According to Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn (2008), mindfulness, research specifically involving the therapeutic uses of mindfulness, has increased in recent years. Mindfulness has become popular in a short amount of time and studies in a variety of fields of work and concerning various conditions have increased

(Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). “The enormous interest in mindfulness theory and practice within western science, medicine, healthcare and education will continually bring new challenges, and also new opportunities” (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 16).

The Center for Mindfulness released the following information with regard to clinics and graduates in 2011: more than 18,000 graduates of the 8-week MBSR program at UMass (since 1979), more than 500 clinics are around the world, and more than 9,000 graduates of Oasis-the Center for Mindfulness’ institute for professional training (Cullen, 2011).

Additionally, according to the American Mindfulness Research Association in 2014 alone, 535 papers were published on mindfulness meditation (Schlanger, 2015).

Cullen (2011) explained the popularity of mindfulness as an antidote to the current multi-tasking and constant connectivity lifestyle of most people. In addition, mindfulness has the potential to help with numerous ailments and has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety (Praisman, 2008).

With over 250 stress reduction clinics now established at hospitals and medical centers worldwide and hundreds of peer-reviewed studies on a wide variety of populations, the MBSR model of mindfulness training for adults can accurately be said to be a proven and accepted intervention for stress reduction and mood problems. (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 13)

MBSR has become popular around the world and “can provide evidence-based rationales for the implementation of contemplative programs in mainstream settings such as hospitals, schools, prisons and businesses” (Cullen, 2011, p. 192).

## **Studies of Mindfulness Practices**

As mindfulness and meditation gained popularity in society, an increasing number of researchers began to study the techniques (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). People can practice mindfulness in a variety of ways, and findings indicate that MBSR is an intervention that is beneficial for a wide range of issues. “Mindfulness is not simply a quick fix for a stressful day. It involves learning leading towards renewable and sustainable health and well-being through greater experiential understanding the interplay between mind, body and emotions” (Poulin et al., 2008, p. 78).

The studies illustrated below prove the impact of mindfulness techniques on the participants’ mental health. In a meta-analysis of studies, researchers examined 64 reports of MBSR or mindfulness techniques used to improve health (Grossman et al., 2003). The findings recognized the MBSR program to be effective for a wide range of issues. Mindfulness benefits people as a general stress reliever and method to help people, both with and without serious distress, cope (Grossman et al., 2003). Along the same lines, Chiesa and Serretti (2009) reviewed studies focused on MBSR use in stress relief in otherwise healthy people. The review suggested “that MBSR has both a non-specific and possibly a specific effect on stress reduction in healthy subjects” (Chiesa & Serretti, 2009, p. 599). According to Marchand (2012), the MBSR program complemented traditional health programs and was beneficial for both healthy individuals and for those with medical or psychological illnesses.

Praissman’s (2008) literature review suggested the MBSR program reduces stress and anxiety in individuals, yielding positive changes. The researcher recommended people to complete the eight-week course in order to enhance their ability to productively cope with their lives, especially with stressors (Praissman, 2008). Shapiro, Brown, and Biegel (2007) reported

that after completion of the MBSR program, graduate students showed enhanced personal mental health. Specifically, students reported being able to better moderate their emotional state as they ruminate less, and as a result their mental health improved.

Looking at randomized controlled studies, Fjorback, Arendt, Ørnbøl, Fink and Walach (2011) studied the effectiveness of MBSR. They saw reduced symptoms/better coping of stress, anxiety, and depression, in people participating in the mindfulness programs (Fjorback et al., 2011). Mindfulness meditation offered a break from people's routines of work and home induced stress and ability to alter the way participants related to these experiences in a positive way. Instead of the brain focusing on automatic thought processes and actions, people learned to "be in" the present moment (Lea, Cadman, & Philo, 2015). Participants learning mindfulness techniques reported two themes: an increase of awareness of both themselves and others and, a greater self-acceptance and recognition of others. They learned to observe and slow their responses instead of automatically reacting (Campbell & Christopher, 2012).

Participants in a mindfulness intervention displayed a marked decrease in the amount of mental stress experienced after using the techniques and as a result they reported less distress in their mental health (Jain et al., 2007). Similarly, participants in a meditation management program learned positive responses to stressful situations and reported feeling less suffering from those situations (Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008).

### **Mindfulness Studies in Education**

According to Williams and Kabat-Zinn (2011), in the United States educational system students learn to think but rarely are taught about exploring and developing awareness within themselves. Roeser et al. (2012) sought to improve public education by studying the quality of teaching. Researchers in this article identified mindfulness as a method teachers could use to

improve their health and well-being. This would lead to multiple benefits including greater job satisfaction and decreased absences. Further, Roeser et al. (2012) presented a logic model suggesting that suggested that mindfulness training among teachers “should lead to greater occupational engagement and satisfaction and lower rates of absenteeism, occupational burnout, health care use and leaving the profession because of stress and burnout” (pp.170-171). Schools are becoming a place for mindfulness to be practiced and studied, and the studies below illustrate the utilization of mindfulness by how those schools are utilizing mindfulness.

The following studies discuss specific schools/teachers who have added mindfulness practices to their curriculum and the results of this addition. Mindfulness training was identified as an area to include in teacher professional development due to its ability to help future teachers manage their stress levels (Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999). In their 1999 study of utilizing a meditation stress relief program in student teaching, Winzelberg and Luskin determined meditation to be a straightforward, economical method used to help teachers manage their stress level.

Miller and Nozawa (2005) also advocated for contemplative practices to be included in teacher education. For over 25 years Miller, a professor in Ontario Institute for Teacher Education, has required meditation from his students. Miller’s results showed meditation as valuable to future educators as they gain more self-awareness, possess increased stress management skills, and engage in less power struggles with students. Overall learning meditation paved the way for better classroom management and experiences (Miller & Nozawa, 2005).

In a 3-year action research project Dorman (2015) taught mindfulness and contemplative strategies to her students studying to become teachers. The majority of students

responded in a positive way to the mindfulness practices and wanted to expand their social-emotional skills (Dorman, 2015). Only six students (4%) of 149 reported negative feelings (frustration or distraction) caused by the mindfulness practices. Examining the evidence, Dorman (2015) concluded the majority of future teachers benefited from the addition of the mindfulness strategies and they were more prepared to handle the stressful and challenging environments faced by modern day teachers. Hartwick and Kang (2013) recommended requirements for future teachers to develop a plan for managing their stress and encouraged school leaders to provide a supportive place in the school where teachers could utilize their plan.

Richard Brady (2007) is a high school math teacher who has taught and studied mindfulness. Brady (2007) encourages with:

an invitation to those educators with some contemplative experience to find ways to share this gift with their students and an invitation to those for whom contemplative practice is a new idea, to explore it as an option for their own well-being and growth as well as for the growth and well-being of their students. (p. 22)

Mindfulness programs in education can vary in length, content, and in their use of incorporating mindfulness techniques; below are examples of how various programs were implemented. Winzelberg and Luskin (1999) taught student teachers the RISE response meditation program. RISE used a straightforward meditation practice and also teaches about mantras, slowing down, and one-pointed attention. The RISE training consisted of four 45-minute weekly training sessions in a small group (Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999).

Gold et al. (2010) offered an 8-week course in mindfulness to include approximately 25 hours of instruction and practice and closely followed Kabat-Zinn's MBSR syllabus. Benn,



Akiva, Arel, and Roeser (2012) surveyed participants at a program similar to the MBSR program by Kabat-Zinn and consisted of 36 hours of training in mindfulness practices. Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonous, and Davidson (2013) adapted the MBSR curriculum to make it accessible for teachers, allowing them to better use it in their classroom. The adapted curriculum is referred to as mMBSR and included such adaptations as length of the guided practices and included specific school related activities and practices (Flook et al., 2013).

Burrows (2011) studied eight participants in a 10-week program consisting of six 90-minute sessions. The sessions included information about mindfulness, as well as mindfulness meditation. Participants were also encouraged to journal about a difficult student or colleague, and they “were asked to practice body sensing and grounding meditation each week in the group and at other times” (Burrows, 2011, p. 2). As revealed in the literature above, mindfulness programs in education vary in length and content in their use of incorporating mindfulness techniques.

The studies listed below focus on the results of the study and how the participants felt and what they learned when and/or after participating. In Napoli’s (2004) study, teachers learning mindfulness reported their experiences at school improved. If teachers are more aware and focused, they are better prepared to handle stressors and their teaching improves. The mindfulness techniques helped improve their curriculum, address anxiety and conflict in a more productive manner, improve their life outside of the classroom, and helped their students learn from their own experiences (Napoli, 2004). “The gift of being in the moment can create harmony amidst the many challenges and stresses teachers and children face today” (Napoli, 2004, p. 40).

In McLean's (2001) interviews of teachers practicing meditation, the staff presented themselves as calm and they seemed to cope with stress easily. During the interviews, all of the teachers identified their own meditation practice as the reason they were relaxed amid the demands of the job (McLean, 2001). After completing a mindfulness program, participants reported increased positive behaviors and mindset including positive affect and compassion and decreased depression and negative emotional behaviors (Kemeny et al., 2012).

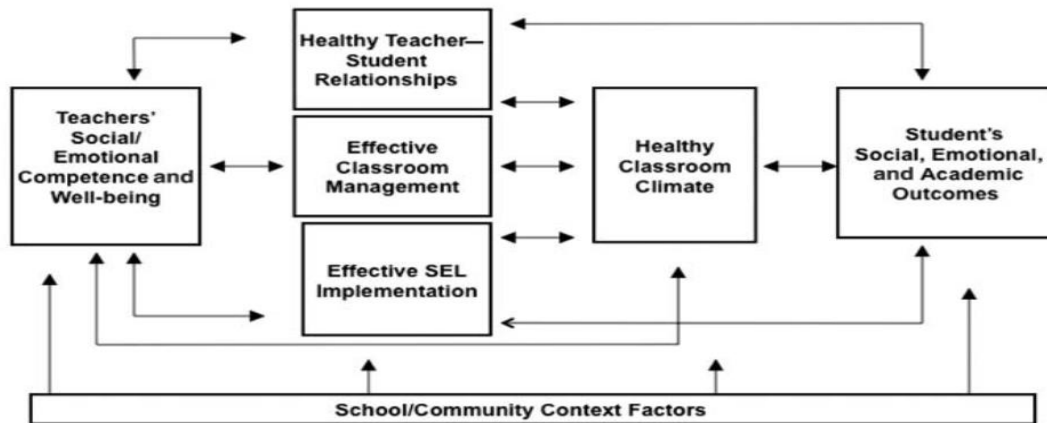
Eleven teachers in emotional distress completed the MBSR course and reported less anxiety, stress, and depression (Gold et al., 2010). They reported an ability to respond not react, accept more and judge less, and the ability to notice their automatic negative thought processes and curb them. One teacher described mindfulness as an "invisible tool box you can carry around with you" which is especially useful in times of crisis (Gold et al., p. 188).

Burrows (2015) discovered through self-reported dilemmas were dealing with complicated situations at work and they were "feeling they were not trained to deal with the level of complexity, and heavy workloads and demands" (p. 131). The teachers learned simple mindfulness techniques and journaled about their experiences. Through the journaling, they reported their self-awareness of the body sensations experienced from the stress and as these teachers were able to feel the sensations inside their bodies, they learned to slow down instead of automatically reacting (Burrows, 2015). Participants eventually started to feel freer when they let go of the dilemma and began to have distance between themselves and the situation they were facing. In addition, they reported feelings of calmness, peacefulness, happiness, and clarity from learning the mindfulness techniques (Burrows, 2015). With little time and simple approaches, participants in that study were able to interrupt their automatic thoughts and experience mindfulness (Burrows, 2015).

Through self-reported journal entries, Burrows (2011) found all participants “reported changes in their felt experience of thoughts, feelings, listening, observing, slowing down, being grounded, self-awareness, and their own and others’ reactions” (p. 3). The researcher concluded “relational mindfulness can help educators address the management, teaching and emotional challenges of classroom and school environments” (Burrows, 2011, p. 5).

Meiklejohn et al. (2012) examined three mindfulness training programs for teachers and 14 for students believing K-12 teachers, and students, need supports to balance the increased pressures in education. Identified potential benefits for students include: “fostering prosocial behavior via strengthening self-regulation and impulse control; alleviating the effects of stress that obstruct learning; and providing a skill set that promotes brain hygiene, and physical and emotional well-being across the lifespan” (Meiklejohn et al., 2013, p. 304). Researchers suggested the benefits to students would be greater if programs focused on both helping teachers improve their resilience and emotional intelligence in addition to bringing the practices to students in the classroom. Numerous programs focus on one of these areas or the other but the idea is integrating both would yield more powerful results (Meiklejohn et al., 2013).

Researchers proposed the model below to promote a classroom environment is more conducive to student learning (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009, p. 494).



*Figure 1.* The prosocial classroom: A model of teacher social and emotional competence and classroom and student outcomes.

Using the model above researchers acknowledged that the teacher's well-being and emotional competence leads to healthy relationships, productive classroom management, a healthy climate and in turn more positive outcomes for students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The model focused on a teacher's social and emotional competence (SEC) and highlighted the possible positive impact on the classroom environment in three ways. The teacher can now understand and respond to a student's individual emotion, which allowed the teacher to respond with empathy and compassion, rather than punitive means (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Second, the teacher's classroom management skills are more effective with their SEC skills. Third, teachers with high SEC skills can serve as role-models for students as they demonstrate the social and emotional behaviors they want to see from students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Employees from a live-in school focused on students who showed behavioral issues participated in a meditation program called Transcendental Meditation (TM). The participating employees experienced a decrease in burnout and in their suffering of depressive symptoms and

stress (Elder et al., 2014). Researchers inferred as the mental and physical health of teachers improved their classroom teaching would be impacted as well.

Training in mind-body techniques may have the potential to counter the effects of employee stress and burnout. Such techniques could, in theory, provide employees with a pragmatic tool for mitigating or reducing the impact of ongoing stimulation of the ‘fight-or-flight’ response in the fact of chronic psychosocial stressors. (Elder et al., 2014, p. 19)

Employees armed with these techniques should be able to manage their stress and any potential negative health effects and would be able to operate more efficiently in their stressful workplace (Elder et al., 2014). Flook et al. (2013) found the mMBSR program helped teachers reduce their stress level as well as their psychological symptoms, and they experienced an increase in their own teaching efficacy. Teachers not receiving the intervention were prone to stress in a greater degree and a decreased sense of accomplishment; those with access to the mMBSR curriculum observed increased student learning in their classrooms (Flook et al., 2013).

Stanley (2011) studied teachers’ ability to maintain their effectiveness while under great amounts of stress. He discovered that participants learning to respond in lieu of reacting were able to not take students’ behaviors personally. Instead they realized skills to handle their stress and were able to maintain their skills as a teacher and build positive relationships with students. Abenavoli et al. (2014) studied teachers using mindfulness at the beginning of the school year. They questioned their effectiveness regarding student engagement, classroom management, and their instructional practices for the school year. Their evidence suggested the teachers who practiced mindfulness reported more efficacy, further suggesting that mindfulness does influence the teacher’s emotional competence (Abenavoli et al., 2014).

As illustrated in the research above, numerous studies use rating scales and other self-reporting methods to study stress and mindfulness techniques. There are multiple studies that measure physiological effects of mindfulness. One such study examined the brain electricity of people after taking the MBSR class. The study noticed a positive difference in brain and immune function of the participants (Davidson et al., 2003). Since this type of study is more difficult to find, researchers suggested the necessity of further studies modeled after theirs (Davidson et al., 2003).

Researchers studying mindfulness noted the limitations in their data and authors encouraged further research and the use of larger samples, longer time periods and to further inquire about the effects of the MBSR program (Chisea & Serretti, 2009). Additionally, it was suggested to be aware of potential negative outcomes of educators' using mindfulness.

### **Teacher Burnout and Job Dissatisfaction**

Napoli (2004) highlighted the numerous stress-producing challenges from the last two decades, particularly affecting teachers.

Historically, teachers focused primarily on the cognitive development of children, more specifically, the “three R’s” of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Today’s society has set new norms for family life, therefore, restructuring the role of the teacher...Teachers are now expected to be aware of the emotional challenges children face and are required to have the tools to deal with them. (p. 31)

Teachers are required to teach even if they do not have the necessary skills to combat these challenges (Napoli, 2004).

Teaching is a profession with a possibility for long-term stress as a side effect. This can impact the overall mental health of the teacher. Teachers have little opportunity to self-regulate

their emotions as they are required to stay in the classroom; additionally, they are faced with stressful situations such as managing difficult students and parents, and pressure related to their own and their students' performance (McLean & Connor, 2015). According to Franco et al. (2010), teaching is one of the professions most impacted by psychological issues; significant numbers of teachers experience considerable distress due to demands at work. Elder et al. (2014) identified school teachers as “professionals who may experience a tremendous amount of stress in their work environment” (p. 19).

Teaching is often described as an emotionally demanding profession, the stress and exhaustion associated with teaching can lead to professional burnout (Roeser et al., 2013). As a result, teachers may leave the profession or they may cope by staying but operating in a stressed state, often accompanied with decreased teaching performance (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teacher burnout can have negative consequences for students as well as the district and community (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In addition, teachers experiencing a large amount of stress have a higher likelihood of absenteeism, dissatisfaction with their work, and exiting the profession altogether (Roeser et al., 2012).

In 1974, Herbert Freudenberger coined the term “burnout” as severe, on the job stress (cited in Williams & Dikes, 2015). Christina Maslach and colleagues discovered the term during the same time period while conducting interviews with workers in the human services field (Schaufeli, Leiter & Maslach, 2009). Schaufeli et al. (2009) explained burnout as a metaphor “smothering of a fire or the extinguishing of a candle” further using the illustration of a burning candle becoming extinguished if no replenishment of resources is available (p. 205).

Goddard et al. (2006) explained the burnout phenomenon as a result of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion due to intensifying demands of work. As cited by Aloe et al.

(2014), Maslach (1976) identified the “specific dimensions of burnout as being emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and (lowered) personal accomplishment” (p. 103). According to Friedman (2000), a person experiencing burnout may feel overloaded and/or emotionally drained and may distance him or herself from the stressful situation. Such a condition can eventually result in a confidence loss and impact a person’s belief in making a difference (Friedman, 2000). The consequences of burnout can be severe for the workers, the clients, and the organizations employing them. Burnout has been linked to a variety of consequences including lowered level of job performance, higher turnover, increased absences as well as debilitated functioning in a staff’s personal life (Banerjee & Mehta, 2016; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996).

In education, “stress, burnout and teacher attrition have reached alarming levels, threatening quality education and subsequent student achievement” (Steinhardt et al., 2011, p. 420). According to Bauer et al. (2006), over half of the 408 participants in German high schools were at risk for developing health issues related to stress and burnout.

Numerous factors can provoke stress and lead to teacher burnout. Teachers identified the size of their class and difficult student behavior as being two pervasive causes of stress (Bauer et al., 2006). Similarly, Haberman (2005) identified classroom management and discipline as having the greatest influence on teacher burnout with perceived lack of administrative support as second. Teacher perceptions, values and attributes influence their experiences: one teacher may be able to manage a classroom while another has trouble, a student may be disruptive in one class but work diligently in another teacher’s classroom (Haberman, 2005).

The mental health of the teacher can impact the classroom learning environment as teachers struggle to manage their own emotions as well as the students in their classrooms



(Brackett et al., 2010, McLean & Connor, 2015). Several studies draw attention to the interconnection between the health of the teacher and of the students, linking both teacher/student stress level and/or achievement (Banerjee & Mehta, 2016; McLean, 2001; McLean & Connor, 2015; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). “Because emotions have a significant effect on learning and because schooling is an emotional process, there are times when students and teachers need to implement emotion regulation strategies in the classroom” (Fried, 2011, p. 123).

### **Stress Management with Mindfulness**

Teachers’ ability to regulate their emotions may also be a predictor of their level of stress and thus may impact their feelings of accomplishment and job satisfaction (Brackett et al., 2010). By their own report, teachers can become better in the classroom by learning to manage their emotions (Sutton, Mudrey-Camino, & Knight, 2009). Teachers with the ability to regulate their own emotions and help those around them do the same tend to have more positive interactions with students (Poulin et al., 2008). Furthermore, teachers with high ability to regulate their emotions tend to create welcoming relationships and a classroom with acceptance and warmth (Brackett et al., 2010).

As work-related stress can lead to job burnout, it becomes important to develop effective coping strategies to alleviate the degree of job burnout in the teaching profession (Steinhardt et al., 2011). Brunsting et al. (2014) also emphasized the importance of providing resources to teachers to help them address work-related stress and burnout. Latifoglu (2016) found a relationship between the amount and quality of support for beginning teachers and their stress level. Workload and work-life balance were identified as key concerns; school leaders who address the workload stress were more likely to retain beginning teachers (Latifoglu, 2016).

Banerjee and Mehta (2016) suggested for institutions to provide resources to lower stress and increase teacher performance. They recommended for teachers to take advantage of these resources and look into personal resources to manage their work-related stress and job performance. Mindfulness strategies can improve job satisfaction. When people use the strategies their emotional exhaustion levels can improve and this helping them to avoid job burnout (Hüshegar et al., 2013). Learning mindfulness can help teachers cope and in addition, allow teachers to bring their learning of mindfulness strategies to the students (Poulin et al., 2008). Additionally, teachers can pass their mindfulness learning to students, teaching students to regulate their emotions using healthy strategies (Fried, 2011).

Kabat-Zinn (2013) described mindfulness as a method to change the way people see and respond to situations. The goal is to lower stress and improve an individual's coping mechanisms and overall health. According to Luken and Sammons (2016), the majority of literature on mindfulness and job burnout was originally focused on professionals in the health-care field and their usage of mindfulness. However, there is growing evidence supporting the use of mindfulness techniques for employees in the educational field (Luken & Sammons, 2016).

Recent research suggests that building teachers' social-emotional competence, including via mindfulness training, can improve teachers' overall effectiveness and well-being, help equip them with the tools needed to respond to the unique stressors of the teaching profession, and potentially reduce burnout and attrition. (Dorman, 2015, p. 103)

Teachers practicing meditation and mindfulness exhibited a decrease of psychological distress. Such results suggest an opportunity to offset the stress and distress of being an educator (Franco et al., 2010).

In a systematic review of literature on mindfulness practice and the ability to reduce job burnout, researchers found “a limited but growing body of literature has assessed the application of mindfulness as a mitigation tool for job burnout” (Luken & Sammons, 2016, p. 2). Fore, Martin, and Bender (2002) studied teacher burnout in special education. Their recommendations included teaching of stress management techniques, mindfulness, and change of participants’ negative thought processes. Richard Brady (2004) taught high school math for 30 years before he discovered mindfulness and he has presented about the topic at student and educator workshops. Brady (2004) introduced mindfulness and explained the mind’s role in a person’s well-being, he encouraged students and staff to pay attention to their thoughts, sensations, and emotions, embracing them with breath and thus experiencing less stress.

Mindfulness training helped teachers learn to self-regulate their emotions and allowed the teachers to more effectively cope with the demands of the profession (Roeser et al., 2013). Teachers practicing meditation and mindfulness reported a decrease of psychological distress compared to their colleagues in the control group. People aware of their stress and potential burnout were able to identify their experiences and receive support; they were less likely to leave the field due to job burnout (Friedman, 2000). Teachers with an opportunity to learn stress management practices could potentially offset the strain and distress of being an educator (Franco et al., 2010; Roeser et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 2013).

Teacher job burnout can impact personal health, job attrition, and the achievement of students in the teacher’s classroom (Brunsting et al., 2014). Additional support for teachers by

using mindfulness strategies would help teachers to decrease burnout, increase job satisfaction, and decrease stress, thus allowing a greater number of teachers to stay in the profession (Brunsting et al., 2014; Fisher, 2011).

School leaders are encouraged to make it a priority to support and retain quality teachers in the classroom (Vanderslice, 2010). Administrators can utilize mindfulness training strategies as one method of offsetting the stress associated with the education profession, because mindfulness techniques have been linked to decreased levels of distress and increased job satisfaction (Elder et al., 2014; Friedman, 2000; Hülshager et al., 2013; Luken & Sammons, 2016; Roeser et al., 2013). Employees who were trained in mind-body techniques had tools to use to help them overcome stress and burnout (Elder et al., 2014).

Poulin et al. (2008) explained, “human service professionals are a critical population for mindfulness training because as they begin to embody this learning, and experience benefits in their own lives, they also bring this education to the people they are working with” (p. 78). Teachers practicing mindfulness techniques experienced an increase in their own teaching efficacy and increased student learning in their classrooms (Flook et al., 2013).

### **Explanations of Mindfulness and Meditation**

Siegel, Germer and Olendzki (2009) described humans’ relentless strive to feel better throughout their lives, their quest to discover and eradicate the causes and feelings of suffering. Mindfulness is an ancient concept and a personal journey designed for humans to learn awareness and remain in the moment in an effort to reduce suffering (Siegel et al., 2009). Germer (2004) promoted the use of mindfulness as a method to reduce suffering by allowing people to be in the moment and less reactive; instead of being “caught up” in the past or future, the goal was to remain in the present and accept that moment without judgement.

“Mindfulness is an elusive, yet central, aspect of the 2,500-year-old tradition of Buddhist psychology” (Siegel et al., 2009, p. 17). The concept of mindfulness originated from an “English translation of the Pali word *sati*” which “connotes awareness, attention, and remembering” (Germer, 2004, p. 25). Over time, the Western definition of mindfulness has expanded to include a broader definition than the original ancient roots (Siegel et al., 2009).

Although the concept has been around for a long time, mindfulness is a word difficult to define (Chisea, 2013). Chisea (2013) believed that to understand the concept of mindfulness, an in-depth training was needed. Siegel et al. (2009) described mindfulness as a concept best understood if you experience it. Harris (2014) simplified and defined mindfulness as acknowledging the mind’s process without assigning value. This creates space for people to respond rather than react to situations; although people cannot control their feelings, they can control their behavior (Harris, 2014). Bishop et al. (2004) proposed a two- part definition of mindfulness:

The first component involves the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment. The second component involves adopting a particular orientation toward one’s experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance. (p. 232)

Germer’s (2004) definition of mindfulness included: “(1) awareness, (2) of the present experience, (3) with acceptance” (p. 26). Mindfulness is a method of awareness, in which a person chooses to pay attention to the present state. Mindfulness does not mean emptying the mind of thoughts and emotions; instead, it helps people regulate their emotions (Teper, Segal, & Inzlicht, 2013). Brown, Ryan, and Creswell (2007) described the relationship of awareness to

people's response to stimulus. People give labels to stimulus including good, bad, or neutral and these labels are usually based on past experiences. Most people see objects and events through filters thereby risking distorted pictures of reality).

Mindfulness encourages keeping a receptive state of mind, whereas the goal is to observe facts and to "be present" to reality rather than to react to it (Brown et al., 2007, p. 212). Instead of people experiencing an emotional reaction, mindfulness encourages people to feel the initial emotion and then mobilize the regulatory emotions needed to control the emotion (Teper et al., 2013).

Mindfulness practices usually involve meditation. The word meditation is derived from the Latin "meditari," which means "to engage in contemplation or reflection" (Chiesa & Malinowski, 2011, p. 407). The meditation practices are aimed at removing the harmful automatic thought processes and patterns people can experience thereby promoting personal wellness (Siegel et al., 2009; Vago, 2014). Meditation as a practice has been in existence for over 5,000 years used for both healing and contemplative reasons (Dakwar & Levin, 2009).

Mindfulness and meditation are skills. Once learned such skills allow the practitioner to use them in a variety of situations in lieu of an emotional response (Bishop et al., 2004). The Mayo Clinic Health Letter defined meditation as a method to train one's mind, comparing it to aerobic exercise increase of the heart's strength. An untrained mind has more of a tendency to be restless, not fully engaged, and focused on the negative (Mayo Clinic, 2009).

Chiesa and Malinowski (2011) noted "mindfulness" and "meditation" are two words often used for multiple processes, making the true meaning difficult to capture with one definition. Kabat-Zinn (1982) described "mindfulness meditation" as detached self-observation. People practicing mindfulness meditation have a goal of changing the way they see themselves,

through being aware of their body, their emotions, and the attention of their mind (Hölzel et al., 2011). Mindfulness meditation practice teaches people to observe their thoughts, all thoughts are treated as equal and people are taught to simply note thoughts as they come. “Mindfulness meditation is an integrative form of meditation that aims to cultivate awareness of the participant’s current experience (notably their thoughts and feelings), as well as an attitude of non-judgement towards this experience” (Lea et al., 2015, p. 53).

### **Summary**

Teaching is a high-risk profession considering the impact it has on a teacher’s mental health (McLean & Connor, 2015). Since work-related stress can lead to job burnout, it is important for teachers to develop effective coping strategies to alleviate the high degree of burnout in the teaching occupation (Steinhardt et al., 2011).

Numerous studies pointed out the effectiveness, the ease of implementation and the cost-effective factor of mindfulness techniques to address stress and potential burnout (Abenavoli et al., 2014; Roeser et al., 2012; Stanley, 2011; Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999). Mindfulness training was identified as an area to introduce to teacher professional development due to its ability to help future teachers manage their stress levels (Dorman, 2015; Miller & Nozawa, 2005; Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999).

Mindfulness is a method for people to combat the “automatic process of appraisal that gives rise to disturbing emotions in the first place” (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009, p. 569) defusing the situation before the ingrained reaction. Mindfulness is a flexible skill and can be taught in a variety of ways (Luken & Sammons, 2016). People practicing mindfulness meditation have a goal of changing the way they see themselves, through being aware of their body, their emotions, and the attention of their mind (Hölzel et al., 2011).

In Napoli's (2004) study, teachers learning mindfulness reported the mindfulness techniques helped improve their curriculum, address anxiety and conflict in a more productive manner, improve their life outside of the classroom, and helped their students learn from their own experiences. Mindfulness techniques have been linked to decreased levels of distress and increased job satisfaction (Friedman, 2000; Hülshager et al., 2013; Luken & Sammons, 2016; Roeser et al, 2013). Teachers can use mindfulness as a resource to self-regulate emotions resulting from on the job stress, thereby increasing their ability to focus on the students and their performance in the classroom (Roeser et al., 2013). School district administrators and school leaders can increase retention and efficacy by seeking out ways to support teachers' self-care and learning of mindfulness techniques.



## **Chapter III: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to examine the frequency with which a select group of Minnesota elementary school teachers reported they experienced work-related stress and to determine their awareness of and/or use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stress. Additionally, the study examined teachers' exposure to mindfulness strategies through professional development trainings and their reported likelihood of using mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress. Chapter III provides the details of the mixed-methods study, including methodology, participants, instrumentation, and the procedures and timeline.

### **Brief Overview of Literature**

Teaching is a high-risk profession considering the impact it has on a teacher's mental health (McLean & Connor, 2015). According to Franco et al. (2010), teaching is one of the professions most impacted by psychological issues; many teachers experience significant distress due to requirements at work. Often, teachers must manage both their own and their students' emotions in the classrooms (Brackett et al., 2010). Since work-related stress can lead to job burnout, it is important for teachers to develop effective coping strategies to alleviate the high degree of burnout in the teaching occupation (Steinhardt et al., 2011).

Mindfulness techniques have been linked to decreased levels of distress and increased job satisfaction (Friedman, 2000; Hülshager et al., 2013; Luken & Sammons, 2016; Roeser et al., 2013). Mindfulness strategies improved job satisfaction and helped people working in emotionally taxing jobs to avoid burnout by improving their emotional exhaustion levels (Hülshager et al., 2013). Teachers can use mindfulness as a resource to self-regulate emotions

resulting from on the job stress, thereby increasing their ability to focus on the students and their performance in the classroom (Roeser et al., 2013).

Mindfulness strategies can be used as a general stress reliever and help individuals cope with stress (Grossman et al., 2004). One such strategy is meditation, Winzelberg and Luskin (1999) determined meditation to be a straightforward, economical method used to help teachers manage their stress level.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teachers experiencing significant stress have a higher likelihood of missing work, being dissatisfied with their work, and eventually “burning out” and leaving the profession (Roeser et al., 2012). For those and other reasons, Vanderslice (2010) recommended school leaders to support teachers in reducing their stress in order to retain quality teachers in the classroom. Burnout impacts the health of the teacher, student achievement, and teacher attrition; therefore, administrators are encouraged to provide stress-relief assistance for teachers (Brunsting et al., 2014). Since the well-being of teachers can also determine their employment longevity, school administrators should be concerned with seeking methods for decreasing burnout and increasing job satisfaction (Fisher, 2011).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness strategies. Mindfulness techniques have been linked to lowering levels of distress and increasing job satisfaction (Friedman, 2000; Hülshager et al., 2013; Luken & Sammons, 2016; Roeser et al., 2013). Nonetheless, research on the number of teachers aware of and using mindfulness strategies to reduce work related stress is limited.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. How frequently did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report they experienced work-related stress?
2. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress?
3. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of training/professional development on mindfulness strategies?
4. How did select Minnesota elementary school teachers rank their likelihood of using specific mindfulness strategies to reduce stress in the work environment?
5. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in their use of mindfulness strategies?

### **Participants**

Participants in the study were Kindergarten through grade five licensed teachers. The teachers were employed in a Minnesota school district in the metropolitan area. Of the 1,212 potential participants, 265 chose to participate in the study yielding a 21.9% response rate. The district's Director of Elementary Education approved the study, allowed participation, and assisted with communication regarding the survey.

The list of potential participants was generated by the school district's Human Resources department. The researcher was informed about their being a possibility for email duplication due to a teacher being a specialist in multiple buildings. The teachers were invited to participate in the study through an email message distributed by the school district's Communications Director on behalf of the Director of Elementary Education.

Following the online survey, study participants were able to identify themselves to participate in a follow-up interview. Thirty-eight participants provided their information for a follow up interview. The researcher randomly contacted participants until four responded and committed to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted on May 14, 2019 and May 22, 2019 over the phone.

The sample group was selected using homogenous sampling “to focus on the precise similarity and how it relates to the topic being researched” (Eitkan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016, p. 3). School districts were identified as possible research sites if the district had had some type of involvement with mindfulness training. The researcher used district websites, newspaper articles, information from school district contacts, and websites of organizations who provided mindfulness training to identify potential districts. The researcher further refined possible districts by selecting only those school districts within a 75-mile radius of her home.

Convenience sampling was used as:

The participants are consecutively selected in order of appearance according to their convenient accessibility (also known as consecutive sampling) the sampling process comes to an end when the total amount of participants (sample saturation) and/or the time limit (time saturation) are reached. (Martínez-Mesa, González-Chica, Duquia, Bonamigo & Bastos, 2016, p. 327)

It was assumed that not all teachers in the selected districts had access to professional development or workshops about mindfulness, or practiced mindfulness strategies in their classroom. However, it was known that trainings regarding mindfulness strategies were offered and many teachers in the district were practicing mindfulness strategies in their classrooms.

### **Human Subjects Approval**

Once the researcher's committee approved the study proposal, the researcher completed and submitted the required application to the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to gain authorization and conduct the study. In the IRB application, the researcher outlined the details of the study, permission documents, consent forms, the study procedures, any ethical implications, data collection and security procedures. Participant identities were not collected except in the case of the voluntary interviews. Anonymity was assured in the research study as names and any identifying information were changed. Data were securely stored and destroyed after 1 year. Participants did not receive any benefits for taking part in the survey, and the researcher did not influence the results. There was minimal risk involved with participation in the study.

### **Research Design**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach. Mixed methods research was defined by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study" (p. 17). The goal was to allow researchers to expand and use multiple approaches to answer the research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined if used to complement each other as the methods can measure different aspects of the research questions (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002).

### **Instruments for Data Collection and Analysis**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach and included the use of close-ended survey response questions and open-ended interview questions. The questions of the survey

were developed by the researcher after reviewing the literature and using the guiding research questions of the study. The survey was designed with the assistance of the St Cloud State Statistical Center using the online survey tool, SurveyMonkey.

Participants were asked to complete the survey using a link they received through email. If a respondent reported the use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stress, the respondent was asked if they would voluntarily participate in an interview. If the participant provided contact information after the survey, this was considered consent to be contacted for the follow-up interview. The interviewer asked five open ended questions (qualitative questions) to four randomly selected respondents as a follow-up to the survey responses.

The researcher's original goal was a 50% response rate as Baruch and Holtom (2008) identified the average cumulative response rate for participants to be about 50%. The researcher worked with the St Cloud Statistical Research Center to develop the survey and with the district to distribute the survey. A cover letter was included with the survey, explaining to participants the reason for the research, the nature of the survey, informed consent, researcher contact information and the link to the online survey. Once the survey window closed the researcher worked with the St Cloud Statistical Research Center to obtain and analyze the results.

The study included the use of close-ended survey response questions and open-ended interview questions. The first part of the study (close ended, quantitative questions) was completed online through SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>). Participants were asked to complete the 2-3-minute survey using a link they received through email. If a respondent reported the use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate stress, the respondent was asked to voluntarily participate in an interview. In the second part of the study method, interviews with four voluntary participants were conducted. The interviewer asked five open

ended questions (qualitative questions) as a follow-up to survey responses. The interview lasted approximately 15 minutes for each participant.

While completing the survey, participants responded using a different scale for each of the first three questions. In the first survey question: how often do you experience work-related stress?—the response descriptions were: “Never, Sometimes, Frequently, Always.” This survey question correlates to the first research question: How often did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report they experienced work-related stress?

For the second survey question; How would you describe your awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress? participants selected responses from the following options: “I don’t know what it is; I am somewhat aware but do not practice these strategies; I practice mindfulness strategies on occasion to reduce work-related stress; I practice mindfulness strategies frequently to reduce work-related stress.” This survey question correlates to the second research question: What did select Minnesota elementary teachers report as their awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress?

The third survey question: How would you describe your training/professional development on mindfulness strategies asked respondents to select from the following: “None, Minimal, Extensive.” This survey question correlates to the third research question: What did select Minnesota elementary teachers report as their level of training/professional development on mindfulness strategies?

In the next section of the survey, participants were asked to rank order four mindfulness strategies according to the likelihood of using them to reduce work stress. The four mindfulness strategies were: mindful breathing; guided meditation; movement (examples: yoga, walking,

stretching); and sensory experiences (examples: listening to music, calming smells, mindful eating). The survey section was developed to answer the fourth research question: How did select Minnesota elementary teachers rank their likelihood of using specific mindfulness strategies to reduce stress in the work environment?

Lastly, participants were provided an opportunity to provide contact information if they voluntarily decided to participate in a follow-up interview. Only participants who reported using mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress were included in the interviews.

The interview questions provided data to answer the fifth research question: What did select Minnesota elementary teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in using mindfulness strategies? The interview questions were:

1. What is your training/professional development regarding mindfulness strategies?  
Please describe.
2. How do you use mindfulness strategies to reduce your work-related stress?
3. What benefits in your work-related stress can you attribute to the use of mindfulness strategies?
4. Have you experienced barriers regarding your use of mindfulness practices? If yes, what kind?
5. Would you recommend mindfulness to other educators and if so, which strategies?  
If not, why not?

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participants were identified using numbers to keep their anonymity and any identifying information was removed. The interviews were coded and analyzed to determine themes. The method for coding included: read the



transcript, divided data into segments, labeled the segments with codes, combined the codes to reduce overlap, and grouped the codes into themes (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015 adapted from Creswell, 2008).

### **Procedures and Timeline**

A request for permission to conduct the study was sent to the Director of Elementary Education. Once permission was granted, the researcher sent the Director of Elementary Education the link to the survey along with an introduction email. The email was sent to 1,212 elementary teachers. The link to the survey was issued by the St. Cloud State University Statistical Research Center and researcher and included a cover letter indicating details about the survey as well as consent-to-participate.

Participants were initially sent an invitation to participate on April 8, 2019 and the survey closed on April 19, 2019. The invitation contained the explanation to participants and outlined the reason for the research, the nature of the survey, informed consent, researcher contact information and the link to the online survey (Appendix A).

Following the online survey, study participants were able to identify themselves for participation in a follow-up interview. The contact information for these participants was provided to the researcher by the St. Cloud Statistical Center and 15- minute follow-up interviews were scheduled using email. Thirty-eight participants provided their information for a follow up interview. The researcher randomly contacted participants until four responded and committed to the interviews. The interviews were conducted on May 14, 2019 and May 22, 2019 over the phone.

## **Data Analysis**

Once the survey results were collected by the survey application, SurveyMonkey, the researcher utilized the services in the Statistical Center at St. Cloud State University to analyze the results. The data were downloaded from SurveyMonkey as Excel spreadsheet format and imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 to analyze the data. The Statistical Center at St Cloud State University computed (relative) frequency distributions of each question of the survey responses. The qualitative interviews were conducted over the phone and were recorded. The researcher then transcribed and coded the responses, identifying and analyzing the emerging themes.

## **Summary**

The purpose of the study was to examine the level of stress reported by a select group of Minnesota elementary teachers and to determine their awareness and use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stress. Additionally, the study examined teachers' exposure to mindfulness strategies through training\professional development and their reported likelihood of using mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress. Select voluntary teachers reported their beliefs on the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers regarding the use of mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress.

The results of the study intend to help school and district administrators understand teacher usage and their perception of effectiveness of the use of mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress. The study results may assist these administrators in identifying professional development opportunities for their teachers in the use of specific mindfulness strategies.

## Chapter IV: Results

### Introduction

Teaching is a high-risk profession considering the impact it has on a teacher's mental health (McLean & Connor, 2015). According to Franco et al. (2010), teaching is one of the professions most impacted by psychological issues; many teachers experience significant distress due to requirements at work. Often, teachers must manage both their own and their students' emotions in the classrooms (Brackett et al., 2010). Since work-related stress can lead to job burnout, it is important for teachers to develop effective coping strategies to alleviate the high degree of burnout in the teaching occupation (Steinhardt et al., 2011).

Mindfulness techniques have been linked to decreased levels of distress and increased job satisfaction (Friedman, 2000; Hülshager et al., 2013; Luken & Sammons, 2016; Roeser et al., 2013). Mindfulness strategies improved job satisfaction and helped people working in emotionally taxing jobs to avoid burnout by improving their emotional exhaustion levels (Hülshager et al., 2013). Teachers can use mindfulness as a resource to self-regulate emotions resulting from on the job stress, thereby increasing their ability to focus on the students and their performance in the classroom (Roeser et al., 2013).

Mindfulness strategies can be used as a general stress reliever and helped individuals cope with stress (Grossman et al., 2004). One such strategy is meditation. Winzelberg and Luskin (1999) determined meditation to be a straightforward, economical method used to help teachers manage their stress levels.

The purpose of this mixed data method study was to examine the frequency with which a select group of Minnesota elementary school teachers reported their experienced work-related stress and to determine their awareness of and/or use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their

work-related stress. Additionally, the study examined teachers' exposure to mindfulness strategies through training/professional development and their reported likelihood of using mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress.

To secure a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' applications of mindfulness strategies, four voluntary participants were asked open-ended interview questions. These questions provided respondents with opportunities to express their beliefs about the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for employing mindfulness strategies in education.

The results of the study are intended to furnish school administrators with an understanding of teacher usage of mindfulness strategies and those teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of those strategies to reduce their job-related stress. The findings of the study may reveal select mindfulness strategies for mitigating work-related stress experienced by Minnesota elementary school teachers.

## **Research Methods**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach. Mixed-methods research was defined by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study" (p. 17). The goal in employing the approach is to allow researchers to expand and use multiple techniques to answer the research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined if used to complement each other as the methods can measure different aspects of the research questions (Sale et al., 2002).

Chapter IV reports the findings of the study. Survey questions employed in securing responses from study participants were developed by the researcher after reviewing the

literature. The data were analyzed, and findings reported by each research question. The study's research questions are as follows:

1. How frequently did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report they experienced work-related stress?
2. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress?
3. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of training/professional development on mindfulness strategies?
4. How did select Minnesota elementary school teachers rank their likelihood of using specific mindfulness strategies to reduce stress in the work environment?
5. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in their use of mindfulness strategies?

### **Data Analysis**

Once the survey responses were collected, the researcher utilized the services of the Statistical Center at St Cloud State University to analyze the data. The data were downloaded into Excel spreadsheets, and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used to analyze the data. The analysis was completed using quantitative descriptive statistics. The Statistical Center at St Cloud State University computed (relative) frequency distributions on the survey responses for each question.

While completing the survey, participants responded using a different scale for each of the first three questions and a rank order for the fourth question. For the fifth question,

participants were provided an opportunity to provide contact information if they voluntarily agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. Only participants who reported using mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress would be considered for an interview. The researcher used a random sampling technique to obtain four voluntary interview subjects.

The qualitative interviews were conducted by telephone, recorded and transcribed. Participants were identified using alphabetical letters to assure anonymity. The interviews were coded and analyzed to determine themes and meanings. The method for coding included: read the transcript, divided data into segments, labeled the segments with codes, combined the codes to reduce overlap, and grouped the codes into themes (Clark & Creswell, 2015 adapted from Creswell, 2008).

### **Study Sample**

The study sample consisted of 1,212 elementary school teachers from a suburban school district. The possible participant list was generated by the school district's Human Resources department; a few participants' emails were duplicates since they served multiple buildings. Of the 1,212 potential participants, 265 chose to participate in the study yielding a 21.9% response rate.

### **Study Results**

**Research question 1.** How frequently did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report they experienced work-related stress?

Table 1 presents the data obtained from the first survey question: how often do you experience work-related stress? The response options were: "Never, Sometimes, Frequently, Always."

Table 1

*How Often Do You Experience Work-related Stress?*

	Frequency	Percent
Always	66	26.3
Frequently	142	56.6
Sometimes	43	17.1
Never	0	0
Total	251	100

There were 251 valid responses to the first survey question of which 56.6% (n = 142) of participants reported frequently experiencing stress and 26.3% (n = 66) reported always experiencing stress. There were 17.1% (n = 43) of participants who reported sometimes experiencing stress. None of the participants reported never experiencing work related stress.

**Research question 2.** What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress?

Table 2 presents the data from the second survey question: How would you describe your awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress? For this question, participants selected responses from among the following options: “I don’t know what it is; I am somewhat aware but do not practice these strategies; I practice mindfulness strategies on occasion to reduce work-related stress; I practice mindfulness strategies frequently to reduce work-related stress.”

Table 2

*How Would You Describe Your Awareness and Use of Mindfulness Strategies as a Means of Reducing Work-related Stress?*

	Frequency	Percent
I practice mindfulness strategies frequently to reduce work-related stress.	36	14.4
I practice mindfulness strategies on occasion to reduce work-related stress.	139	55.6
I am somewhat aware but do not practice these strategies.	71	28.4
I don't know what it is.	4	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

There were 250 participants who answered the survey question two. For those participants who were aware of and practicing mindfulness strategies, 55.6% (n = 139) reported they practiced on occasion and 14.4% (n = 36) reported using mindfulness strategies frequently to reduce their work-related stress. Additionally, 28.4% (n = 71) of participants reported being somewhat aware of but not practicing mindfulness strategies, and 1.6% (n = 4) reported not being aware of or practicing mindfulness strategies. Of the 250 participants, 98.4% (n = 246) had at least some knowledge or awareness of mindfulness strategies.

**Research question 3.** What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of training/professional development on mindfulness strategies?

Table 3 presents the data from the third survey question: How would you describe your training/professional development on mindfulness strategies? Participants were asked to select from among the following options: “None, Minimal, or Extensive.”



Table 3

*How Would You Describe Your Training/professional Development on Mindfulness Strategies?*

	Frequency	Percent
Extensive	35	13.9
Minimal	174	69.3
None	42	16.7
Total	251	100

Responses to the question were received from 251 participants. The most frequent response from participants was they had training/professional development on mindfulness strategies (69.3%;  $n = 174$ ). The respondents who reported they had received no training/professional development totaled 16.7% ( $n = 42$ ), while 13.9% ( $n = 35$ ) reported they have had extensive training/professional development on mindfulness strategies.

**Research question 4.** How did select Minnesota elementary school teachers rank their likelihood of using specific mindfulness strategies to reduce stress in the work environment?

In the next section of the survey, participants were asked to rank order four mindfulness strategies according to their likelihood of using them to reduce work stress. The four mindfulness strategies were as follows: mindful breathing; guided meditation; movement (examples: yoga, walking, stretching); and sensory experiences (examples: listening to music, calming smells, mindful eating). The ranking for the four mindfulness strategies are presented in Tables 4-7 below: mindful breathing (Table 4); movement (Table 5); sensory experiences (Table 6); and guided meditation (Table 7). A mean weighted rank score was calculated for each mindfulness strategy, Table 8 illustrates the results of the mean weighted rank score for each mindfulness strategy.

Table 4

*Mindful Breathing*

	Frequency	Percent
1	112	46.7
2	39	16.3
3	76	31.7
4	13	5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>

According to Table 4 data, of the 240 participants who completed the question for mindful breathing, 46.7% (n = 112) of participants ranked this strategy as the one they would be most likely to use to reduce their work-related stress.

Table 5

*Movement (examples: yoga, walking, stretching)*

	Frequency	Percent
1	68	28.3
2	102	42.5
3	56	23.3
4	14	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>

According to Table 5 data, respondents selected mindful movement as the highest ranked second choice strategy at 42.5% (n = 102) and the second highest ranked first choice strategy at 28.3% (n = 68) of participants.

Table 6

*Sensory Experiences (examples: listening to music, calming smells, mindful eating)*

	Frequency	Percent
1	45	18.8
2	89	37.1
3	80	33.3
4	26	10.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>

As reported in Table 6, respondents cited sensory experiences as the highest ranking for third choice strategy at 33.3% (n = 80) and the third highest ranked first choice strategy at 18.8% (n = 45).

Table 7

*Guided Meditation*

	Frequency	Percent
1	15	6.3
2	10	4.2
3	28	11.7
4	187	77.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>

As reported in Table 7, guided meditation was ranked lowest among the four strategies with 77.9% (n = 187) ranking guided meditation as their fourth choice for the strategy they would use to reduce their work- related stress, while only 6.3% (n = 15) ranked the strategy as their first choice as a mindfulness technique.

Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Mindful breathing	240	1	4	1.9583	1.00122
Guided meditation	240	1	4	3.6125	0.83582
Movement (examples: yoga, walking, stretching)	240	1	4	2.0667	0.86526
Sensory experiences (examples: listening to music, calming smells, mindful eating)	240	1	4	2.3625	0.90896

Table 8 reveals that the first-choice rankings align with rank mean scores of 1.96 for mindful breathing, 2.06 for mindful movement, 2.36 for sensory experiences, and 3.61 guided meditation. In both measurements, mindful breathing and movement were ranked as the most likely preferences for participants to use to reduce their work-related stress.

**Research question 5.** What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in their use of mindfulness strategies?

There were four volunteer participants for research question five. The interview questions were:

1. What is your training/professional development regarding mindfulness strategies?  
Please describe.
2. How do you use mindfulness strategies to reduce your work-related stress?
3. What benefits in your work-related stress can you attribute to the use of mindfulness strategies?

4. Have you experienced barriers with regard to your use of mindfulness practices? If yes, what kind?
5. Would you recommend mindfulness to other educators and if so, which strategies? If not, why not?

Prompts were utilized in certain interviews, based on how interviewees responded to questions (Appendix B).

The first interview question was, “What is your training/professional development regarding mindfulness strategies? Please describe.” Three of the four participants reported that they did not have formal training at school for mindfulness strategies. One participant reported having formal training at school. Participant A reported having completed three trainings at school during staff meetings. On another occasion someone had come to the classroom to work one-on-one regarding mindfulness practices. One of the trainings was conducted during a professional development opportunity, and the other two were attended by choice. Participant A reported having found the training sessions to be useful:

The more comfortable I get with it (mindfulness), the more I try and bring it in and I just find it really helps during transitions. Just an example, we had art adventure, kids were wound up. I went right into 5 calming breaths, and then we are going to put legs up on our chair, close our eyes and take time. It just changed the room. I wouldn't be comfortable doing that 2 years ago, so I feel like every training I get helps increase that and gives me more tools in my toolkit to reach in and pull out.

Participants B, C, and D reported they did not have formal training at their school regarding mindfulness practices. Participant B described practicing yoga for personal stress management and reading about mindfulness in magazines or books and then stated, “I just try

and practice it in my own life and incorporate it into my classroom too.” Participant C participated in district training district and learned about various stress management techniques in college classes which included mindfulness. Participant C talked about how mindfulness came to them, “naturally on my own with my interests is how it came to be.” Participant D also reported that mindfulness has been a personal journey. This respondent had been involved in yoga for 25 years and as a certified yoga instructor has taught and is currently teaching yoga to a variety of levels (kids to adults).

The second interview question was, “How do you use mindfulness strategies to reduce your work-related stress?” All four participants reported they used mindfulness strategies to reduce their work-related stress. Additionally, all four participants mentioned mindfulness techniques they used in their classrooms with students. They all believed mindfulness was helpful in their classroom with their students and for themselves.

Participant A explained trying to take the strategies used at school and applying them for use in their personal life as well. This respondent also an app on their phone for mindfulness strategies and was considering incorporating mindful movement exercises into their routine at home. Participant A said, “I find any of it (mindfulness) really helps the kids and it helps me.”

Participant B practices meditation and yoga at home and affirmed a preference for practicing yoga before school because it makes days go better. In talking about mindfulness in relation to managing stress Participant B stated, “I am mindful of when I need a break and I know what to do to get myself back on track.”

Participant D stated “I would say for me, ultimately, understanding the importance of your breath and how powerful that is, to be able to take that pause.” In the classroom, the respondent utilized sound, light and movement techniques as well as teaching students about

breathing stating, “part of it is just showing up, for the kids to understand how much it means to me, when you really do value it, they know it’s part of you and they really just take it on.”

Participant C emphasized the incorporation of mindfulness into the classroom to insure the respondent was also practicing the strategies, “when I am calm, the whole day is a little bit calmer.” Each day after lunch, the participant and students do their meditation together. Additionally, they add mindfulness exercises as needed, “throughout the day if me or any of the students are getting worked up, we kind of all come back together and breathe together slowly. It’s just a lot of breathing we are able to do.” The respondent described how the students were very much a part of the teacher’s mindfulness practice.

The third interview question was, “Have you seen benefits in your work-related stress that can you attribute to the use of mindfulness strategies?” All four teachers reported positive changes in their work-related stress due to mindfulness strategies.

Participant A described how the Yoga Calm curriculum was personally used, “when I get them (students) calm, I feel better after trying something like that because I feel like I am not nagging at them, I don’t have to try ten different strategies to get them to focus on me, it’s usually the one strategy that usually works really quickly.” The respondent went on to describe how the strategies that were used, set the tone for the day and helped in relaxing and sleeping better at night. Participant A also talked about having less stressful dreams about school and seeing other positive changes in overall stress level.

Participants B and C both revealed how mindfulness strategies have helped them with managing challenging behavior in students. Participant B said, “I don’t get as frustrated with my students, like if they are misbehaving. I can take a calmer approach in dealing with it and even help them come up with strategies to get them back on track.” Participant C stated that

practicing meditation at home and at school helps them personally in slowing down and taking a breath before responding to situations.

Participant C described:

I find it's (mindfulness) most beneficial when you are in those almost crisis moments and you need to get control of yourself before engaging with the students. Thinking through what I am bringing to the situation, it's definitely helped a lot with behavior management or connecting with students when they are escalating.

Participant D answered this question with a yes and no, stating that the job (teaching) is just so intense and went on to explain:

I just think, unfortunately, that our students and our society are in such a different state and that is much more dire and we need to start doing something. I think for myself, I have had to seek for myself, my own ways of knowing that I need that mental break away from work, whether it's meditation or mindfulness after work hours. And figuring out ways that I can handle it.

Overall, Participant D identified the practice of being present as the most helpful part of mindfulness.

The fourth interview question, "Have you experienced barriers with regard to your use of mindfulness practices? If yes, what kind?" All four participants identified time as a barrier to their practice of mindfulness techniques. Participant C, who practices mindfulness activities with the students because there wouldn't be time otherwise a preference for having time built into the school day. The respondent wanted mindfulness to become something that "of course" everyone (teachers) would be doing, instead of "what's going on in there?"



Participant C continued:

It really would be nice if there was just a formal expectation that at some point in the day we are all going to need to take time to breathe and relax and get ourselves centered. If that was more of the culture, you wouldn't feel so strange to sit at your desk looking like you're not doing anything. It is, it feels funny to do that without students here. I feel like people would walk by and wonder what I'm doing, it would feel odd."

Participant B expressed how the training is offered, but since it's on your own and with all the other required trainings, the respondent felt trained out and, thus, hasn't yet participated. Specifically, a desire was expressed for wanting to incorporate additional mindfulness strategies into the classroom, but the respondent lacked the confidence given a lack of training and practice with certain mindfulness strategies. Participant B felt there was not enough time in the day to incorporate all the desired strategies. Participant D also talked about time being a barrier:

The time that is expected and that is put on teachers, if you kind of graph how often the teacher gets to be off and how often on. That's tricky. I've taken my prep and walk, my prep might not look as productive as maybe some other people but I think I am doing it to regulate for the afternoon and what's to come.

Participant A described how not all students are comfortable with doing the mindfulness strategies like meditation. They felt this was a barrier, making sure that students knew they did not have to participate, they could instead sit quietly. Participant A thought that time was a perceptual barrier and explained: "when you actually do it (mindfulness), it takes less time than you thought. The kids calm down faster, and you can get to what you wanted to get to sooner."

The final interview question was, “Would you recommend mindfulness to other educators and if so, which strategies? If not, why not?” All four participants said yes, they would recommend mindfulness to other educators. Participant D answered: “I would say yes, 100%, I think it’s something that I’ve become really passionate about just due to where our society is at.”

Participant A described:

Any of it that brings them, centers them and helps them focus. I mean in this day and age when they are so attuned to videos and games and the stuff they play which is moving at such a fast clip, when you get them to slow down and breath and focus, I think it is hugely helpful. I would tell anyone to do it.

Participant B discussed how, in teaching, there is a lot of multi-tasking and how mindfulness helps her get focused again and re-centered on the task on hand. Mindfulness strategies were also recommended by Participant C:

Yes, I absolutely would and I know I would love if there was some sort of training brought into the school to kind of guide some of that. Like I said, I just go off of my personal past experience or hobbies. I would say breathing is the quickest and easiest to incorporate into the day. But I guess my personal favorite would be more like that progressive muscle relaxation. I feel like we just carry so much tension in our bodies. So when I am home that’s more what I focus on how to fully let that go and I think as teachers I see all of us walking around all hunched over and how to purposely let that go we carry so much in our bodies.

Participant B commented:

Yes, I would recommend it...I guess sometimes you've got to work on yourself and then you can deal with the rest of life. Whether you've been trained to do it with kids or not, I definitely see a benefit of my stress relief while at school and with my family too. In my personal life. I would definitely recommend it, going to class, you don't even need training, you can learn as you go.

Participant D illustrated:

I read a great quote the other day. The list just keeps growing and no one is asking us to take anything off. And so, it's hard enough being a parent with one child or if you have a family with 3-4...like this year, for instance, I have 28 (students), so to remain in the level of calm on top of the academics and social-emotional...I've really tried to focus on energy. When I don't have it, I use up so much more energy that it's not worth it. I come home so depleted.

Participant C went on to describe a belief that, if staff practiced mindfulness strategies together, it would help with the morale and bring the staff together.

### **Summary of Results**

Data from 265 kindergarten through grade five licensed Minnesota select elementary school teachers were collected regarding work related stress and their awareness of and/or use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate work-related stress. Additionally, the study examined teachers' exposure to mindfulness strategies through training/professional development and their reported likelihood of using mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress.

Chapter IV reported the findings from the five research questions.

The data for the first research questions revealed that 82.9% (n = 208) of respondents reported they either frequently or always experienced stress at work, illustrating a high stress level for this group of elementary school teachers.

The data from the second research question on respondents' knowledge of mindfulness strategies found of the 250 participants who answered the survey question, 98.4% (n = 246) had at least some knowledge or awareness of mindfulness strategies.

Data for the third research question identified that respondents had minimal training/professional development on mindfulness strategies (69.3%, n = 174).

The fourth research question results revealed that 112 of the 240 participants or 46.7% identified mindful breathing as the strategy they would be most likely to use to reduce their work-related stress. Additionally, 28.3% (n = 68) reported mindful movement, 18.8% (n = 45) identified sensory experiences, and 6.3% (n = 15) guided meditation as the mindfulness strategies they would be most likely to use to reduce their work-related stress.

Interviews were conducted to secure a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' application of mindfulness strategies. Four voluntary participants were asked five open-ended interview questions. The interview questions provided data to answer the fifth research question: What did select Minnesota elementary teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in using mindfulness strategies? These questions provided respondents with an opportunity to express their beliefs about the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for employing mindfulness strategies in education.

According to all four voluntary teacher participants, they used mindfulness strategies to reduce their work-related stress. Additionally, all four participants discussed mindfulness

techniques they used in their classrooms with students. They all believed mindfulness was helpful in their classrooms with their students and for themselves.

Participant A explained trying to take strategies used at school and incorporate them into their personal life as well. The participant offered, “I find any of it really helps the kids and it helps me.”

Participant D stated “I would say for me, ultimately, understanding the importance of your breath and how powerful that is, to be able to take that pause.”

All four participants identified time as a barrier to their practice of mindfulness techniques. Participant C described practicing with students would be undertaken because there would not be time otherwise, describing, “when I am calm, the whole day is a little bit calmer.”

Participant A described the initial shyness by students and observed this as a barrier for the implementation of mindfulness practices. The participant alleviated the discomfort by assuring students about the voluntary participation and if they wished, they could just sit quietly. Further, the participant pointed out the importance of the perception of time on attitudes and in terms of class schedule. According to Participant A, when one actually does the mindfulness exercises, it takes less time than perceived. It was explained how the exercises assist students to calm down faster and then the teacher can accomplish classroom goals sooner.

All four participants said yes, they would recommend mindfulness to other educators. Participant D highlighted, “I would say yes, 100%, I think it’s something that I’ve become really passionate about just due to where our society is at.”

Participant C also said yes, mindfulness strategies were recommended and expressed a desire for mindfulness training be brought into their school.

Participant B commented that mindfulness training would be recommended because benefits were observed in their own stress relief at home and at school.

A recommendation was made for more training by two of the participants. Participant A reported finding the trainings in which participation had occurred to be useful: “the more comfortable I get with it (mindfulness), the more I try and bring it in and I just find it really helps during transitions.”

Participant B expressed finding time and training to be barriers in the usage of mindfulness strategies in the classroom. Participant C suggested mindfulness activities to be incorporated into the school day. It was recommended mindfulness to become a regular practice, something everyone (teachers) would be doing, instead of “what’s going on in there?” In the opinion of the same respondent, if staff are expected to practice mindfulness strategies, it will bring staff together as a collective and improve morale.

### **Summary**

The majority of respondents, 82.9% (n = 208), reported that they either frequently or always experienced stress at work, illustrating a high stress level for this group of elementary school teachers. Of the 250 participants, 98.4% (n = 246) had at least some knowledge or awareness of mindfulness strategies while 14.4% (n = 36) reported using mindfulness strategies frequently to reduce their work-related stress.

According to all four voluntary teacher interview participants, they used mindfulness strategies to reduce their work-related stresses. Additionally, all four participants discussed mindfulness techniques they used in their classrooms with students. They all believed mindfulness was helpful in their classroom with their students and for themselves. All four

participants said they would recommend mindfulness to other educators. All four participants identified time as a barrier to their practicing mindfulness techniques.

Chapter V includes the conclusions, discussion, limitations, and recommendations. Findings in Chapter V are based on the study conclusions as well as correlations to the literature review. Additionally, the researcher presents recommendations for future research into mindfulness strategies in education.

## **Chapter V: Conclusions, Discussion, Limitations, and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

According to Franco et al. (2010), teaching is one of the professions most impacted by psychological issues with numerous teachers experiencing significant distress due to requirements at work. Teaching is often described as an emotionally demanding profession. The stress and exhaustion associated with teaching can lead to professional burnout (Roeser et al., 2013). The work of a teacher is “uncertain and emotionally demanding,” making it important to develop the skills necessary to meet the needs of students (Roeser et al., 2012).

Numerous studies demonstrate the effectiveness of mindfulness strategies. Mindfulness techniques have been linked to lowering levels of distress and increasing job satisfaction (Friedman, 2000; Hülshager et al., 2013; Luken & Sammons, 2016; Roeser et al, 2013). However, little is known regarding the number of teachers aware of and/or use mindfulness strategies to reduce their work-related stress.

The purpose of the study was to examine the frequency with which a select group of Minnesota elementary school teachers reported they experienced work-related stress and to determine their awareness of and/or use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stress. Additionally, the study examined teachers’ exposure to mindfulness strategies through training/professional development and their reported likelihood of using mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stress.

To secure a more comprehensive understanding of teachers’ application of mindfulness strategies, four voluntary participants were asked open-ended interview questions. These questions provided respondents with an opportunity to express their beliefs about the benefits of, challenges with, and recommendations for employing mindfulness strategies in education.



The results of the study were intended to furnish school administrators with an understanding of teacher usage of mindfulness strategies and those teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of those strategies in reducing their job-related stress. The findings of the study may reveal select mindfulness strategies for mitigating work-related stresses experienced by Minnesota elementary school teachers.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How frequently did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report they experienced work-related stress?
2. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress?
3. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of training/professional development on mindfulness strategies?
4. How did select Minnesota elementary school teachers rank their likelihood of using specific mindfulness strategies to reduce stress in the work environment?
5. What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in their use of mindfulness strategies?

This chapter includes the conclusions, discussion, limitations and recommendations for further research. Findings in this chapter are based on the study conclusions as well as correlations to the literature review.

## Conclusions and Discussion

This section presents the results and related literature for each research question. The researcher also provides their feedback about the outcomes of the study.

**Research question 1.** How frequently did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report they experienced work-related stress?

The research question was answered through responses to the first survey question: how often do you experience work-related stress. The response descriptions were: “Never, Sometimes, Frequently, or Always.” There were 251 valid responses to the first survey question. Of that total 82.9% (n = 208) of the respondents reported that they either frequently or always experienced stress at work, illustrating a high stress level among this group of elementary school teachers.

The findings affirm the research. Elder et al. (2014) identified teachers as “professionals who may experience a tremendous amount of stress in their work environment” (p. 19). Teaching is often described as an emotionally demanding profession, the stress and exhaustion associated with teaching can lead to professional burnout (Roeser et al., 2013).

According to Franco et al. (2010), teaching is one of the professions most impacted by psychological issues; significant numbers of teachers experience significant distress due to demands at work. As a result, teachers may leave the profession, or they may cope by staying but operating in a stressed state which is often accompanied with decreased teaching performance. In either case, teacher burnout can have negative consequences for students as well as the district and community (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In addition, teachers experiencing a large amount of stress have a higher likelihood of absenteeism, dissatisfaction with their work, and exiting the profession altogether (Roeser et al., 2013).

Participants in the interviews were not directly asked about their stress levels at work, although they were asked how mindfulness impacted their stress level at work. Participant D talked about how the job (teaching) was just so intense.

I just think, unfortunately, that our students and our society are in such a different state and that is much more dire and we need to start doing something. I think for myself, I have had to seek for myself my own ways of knowing that I need that mental break away from work, whether it's meditation or mindfulness after work hours. And figuring out ways that I can handle it.

In a later interview question, Participant D described:

Where teachers are it... the list just keeps growing, and no one is asking us to take anything off. And so, it's hard enough being a parent with one child or if you have a family with 3-4...this year, for instance, I have 28 (students), so to remain in the level of calm on top of the academics and social-emotional, all of those parts, I've really tried to focus on energy. When I don't have it, I use up so much more energy that it's not worth it. I come home so depleted.

Participant A talked about having stress dreams about work and went on to describe how doing mindfulness strategies has caused the dreams to decrease.

Prolonged stress at work can lead to burnout. Goddard et al. (2006) explained the burnout phenomenon as a result of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion due to intensifying demands of work. The consequences of burnout can be severe for the workers, the clients, and the organizations employing them. Burnout has been linked to a variety of consequences including lowered level of job performance, higher turnover, increased absences as well as debilitated functioning in a staff's personal life (Banerjee & Mehta, 2016; Maslach et

al., 1996). As the literature suggested, teacher work stress left untreated can have negative consequences for the teacher, students, and community.

**Research question 2.** What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress?

The survey question stated: How would you describe your awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress? For this question, participants selected responses from among the following options: “I don’t know what it is; I am somewhat aware but do not practice these strategies; I practice mindfulness strategies on occasion to reduce work-related stress; I practice mindfulness strategies frequently to reduce work-related stress.”

Of the 250 participants who responded to this survey question, 98.4% (n = 246), reported they had at least some knowledge or awareness of mindfulness strategies, indicating that most of the responding elementary school teachers were aware of mindfulness strategies. Additionally, 70% (n = 175) of the respondents reported they practiced such strategies on occasion or frequently to reduce their work-related stress.

Kabat-Zinn (2013) described mindfulness as a method to change the way people see and respond to situations. The goal is to lower stress and improve an individual's coping mechanisms and overall health. There is growing evidence supporting the use of mindfulness techniques for employees in the educational field (Luken & Sammons, 2016). Mindfulness strategies improve job satisfaction and help people working in emotionally taxing jobs avoid burnout by improving their emotional exhaustion levels (Hülshager et al., 2013). Teachers with an opportunity to learn stress management practices could potentially offset the strain and

distress of being an educator (Franco et al., 2010; Roeser et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 2013).

Learning mindfulness can help teachers cope and in addition, allows them to bring their learning of mindfulness strategies to the students (Poulin et al., 2008).

Although many survey respondents knew what mindfulness was and practiced those strategies at times, 14.4% reported using the strategies frequently to reduce their stress levels. This suggests potential for growth in allowing teachers to learn and/or practice mindfulness strategies. All four participants in the follow-up interviews reported that they used mindfulness strategies to reduce their work-related stresses. Additionally, all four participants talked about mindfulness techniques they used in their classrooms with students. They all believed mindfulness was helpful in their classrooms with their students and for themselves.

Participant A described how using the mindfulness strategies set the tone for their day and resulted in a decrease in their personal stress level. Participant B practices meditation and yoga at home and revealed a preference for doing yoga before school because it resulted in making days go better. Participant B commented that mindfulness helps in managing stress, “I am mindful of when I need a break, and I know what to do to get myself back on track.”

There are numerous factors provoking stress and leading to teacher burnout. Teachers identified the sizes of their class and difficult student behaviors as being two pervasive causes of stress (Bauer et al., 2006). Similarly, Haberman (2005) identified classroom management and discipline as having the greatest influence on teacher burnout with perceived lack of administrative support as second. Participants B and C both mentioned how mindfulness strategies have helped them in managing challenging behavior. Participant B explained, “I don’t get as frustrated with my students, like if they are misbehaving, I can take a calmer approach in dealing with it and even help them come up with strategies to get them back on track.”

Participant C stated that practicing meditation at home and at school helps in slowing down and taking a breath before responding to situations.

Participant C further described:

I find it's (mindfulness) most beneficial when you are in those almost crisis moments and you need to get control of yourself before engaging with the students. Thinking through what I am bringing to the situation, it's definitely helped a lot with behavior management or connecting with students when they are escalating.

Participant C emphasized that incorporating mindfulness into their classroom was a way to make sure of personally practicing the strategies, "when I am calm, the whole day is a little bit calmer." In a later question, all four teachers identified time as a barrier in their practicing mindfulness techniques.

**Research question 3.** What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as their level of training/professional development on mindfulness strategies?

The survey item related to the research question was as follows: How would you describe your training/professional development on mindfulness strategies? Response options were as follows: "None, Minimal, or Extensive." This question had 251 valid responses. The respondents most frequent response 69.3% (n = 174) was that they received minimal training/professional development on mindfulness strategies. Respondents who reported no training/professional developed totaled 16.7% (n = 42) while 13.9% (n = 35) reported they had extensive training/professional development on mindfulness strategies.

The findings were consistent with the interview responses of three of the four participants who reported they did not have formal training at school on mindfulness practices. One participant reported having formal training at school.

Participant A described having participated in three trainings at school (one of the trainings was during a professional development opportunity, and in two instances, teachers were invited to join by choice). Participant A also had someone come to the classroom and work individually with them on mindfulness practices. Participant A found the trainings useful, “the more comfortable I get with it (mindfulness), the more I try and bring it in and I just find it really helps during transitions.”

Participants B, C, and D reported they did not have formal training at their school regarding mindfulness practices. Participant B described practicing yoga for personal stress management and reading about mindfulness in magazines or books. Participant B expanded, “I just try and practice it in my own life and incorporate it into my classroom too.” Participant C participated in training in a previous district and also learned about various stress management (including mindfulness) techniques in college classes. Participant D reported that mindfulness had been a personal journey, first as a yogi and then as a yoga teacher.

Hartwick and Kang (2013) recommended requirements for future teachers to develop a plan for managing their stress and encouraged school leaders to provide a supportive place in the school where teachers could utilize their plans. Miller and Nozawa (2005) also advocated for contemplative practices to be included in teacher education. Results showed meditation as valuable to future educators as they gained more self-awareness, possessed increased stress management skills, and engaged in less power struggles with students (Miller & Nozawa, 2005). Mindfulness training was identified as an area to introduce through teacher professional development due to its ability to help future teachers manage their stress levels (Dorman, 2015; Miller & Nozawa, 2005; Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999).

**Research question 4.** How did select Minnesota elementary school teachers rank their likelihood of using specific mindfulness strategies to reduce stress in the work environment?

In this section of the survey, participants were asked to rank order four mindfulness strategies according to the likelihood of using them to reduce work stress. The four mindfulness strategies were as follows: mindful breathing; guided meditation; movement (examples: yoga, walking, stretching); and sensory experiences (examples: listening to music, calming smells, mindful eating). Of the 240 participants who completed the question, 46.7% (n = 112) of participants ranked mindful breathing as the strategy they would be most likely to use to reduce their work-related stress, and 28.3% (n = 68) reported mindful movement as most likely to be used to reduce work-related stress.

As revealed in the literature, mindfulness programs in education vary in length and content in incorporating mindfulness techniques. Kabat-Zinn (2013) described MBSR as an 8-week program with once-a-week meetings to encourage participants' practice of daily meditation including mindfulness practices and mindful breathing (sitting for a specified number of minutes and focusing on breathing). At the program's completion participants are encouraged to continue their own practice in their lives (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Mindfulness can be practiced in a variety of ways. People can practice in formal or informal ways; they can practice on their own, with a partner, or in a group. Sometimes people learn mindfulness techniques by researching on their own and developing an individual practice. In other instances, people participate in a formal training class or program, spiritually based or secular (Luken & Sammons, 2016).

This research question findings indicate that administrators who desire to support mindfulness practices in their school could begin with mindful breathing since that was the most



highly ranked strategy by study participants. Mindfulness is very adaptable and can be used in a variety of ways and tailored to meet the needs of staff at a specific school building.

**Research question 5.** What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in their use of mindfulness strategies?

The interview questions provided data to answer the fifth research question: What did select Minnesota elementary teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in using mindfulness strategies?

Benefits: All four participants reported that they used mindfulness strategies to reduce their work-related stress. Additionally, all four participants talked about mindfulness techniques that they used in their classrooms with students. They all felt mindfulness was helpful in their classrooms with their students and for themselves.

Participant A described using YogaCalm, “when I get them (students) calm, I feel better after trying something like that because I feel like I am not nagging at them. I don’t have to try ten different strategies to get them to focus on me. It’s usually the one strategy that usually works really quickly.” Participant A explained trying to employ the mindfulness strategies used in school in the participant’s personal life as well. “I find any of it really helps the kids and it helps me.”

Participant D stated “I would say for me, ultimately, understanding the importance of your breath and how powerful that is, to be able to take that pause.” In the classroom, the participant utilized sound, light and movement techniques as well as teaching students about breathing. Participant C emphasized the incorporation of mindfulness into the classroom as a way to make sure they practiced the strategies. “When I am calm, the whole day is a little bit

calmer.” Each day after lunch, the teacher and students do a meditation together. Additionally, this interviewee added mindfulness exercises as needed. “Throughout the day if me or any of the students are getting worked up, we kind of all come back together and breathe together slowly. It’s just a lot of breathing we are able to do.” Further describing how the students are very much a part of the mindfulness practice.

**Challenges.** All four participants identified time as a barrier to their practicing of mindfulness techniques. Participant C, who practices with the students because there would not be time otherwise, expressed that it would be desirable to have time built into the school day. Participant C wanted mindfulness to become something that “of course” everyone (teachers) would be doing, instead of “what’s going on in there?”

Participant C continued:

It really would be nice if there was just a formal expectation that at some point in the day we are all going to need to take time to breathe and relax and get ourselves centered. If that was more of the culture, you wouldn’t feel so strange to sit at your desk looking like you’re not doing anything. It feels funny to do that without students here. I feel like people would walk by and wonder what I’m doing. It would feel odd.

Participant B expressed that mindfulness training is offered on your own time and with all the other required trainings, teachers feel trained out. Therefore, the participant has not yet participated in the formal training. With more time and training, Participant B wanted to incorporate additional mindfulness strategies into the classroom but found time and training to be barriers.

Participant D also mentioned time as a barrier as:

The time that is expected and that is put on teachers, if you kind of graph how often does the teacher get to be off and how often on, that's tricky. I've taken my prep and walk, my prep might not look as productive as maybe some other people, but I think I am doing it to regulate for the afternoon and what's to come.

Participant A described how not all students are comfortable with mindfulness and believed that could be a barrier. Participant A made sure that students knew they did not have to participate and could just sit quietly instead. In terms of time, Participant A thought that was a barrier in terms of the perception of time, stating "when you actually do it (mindfulness), it takes less time than you thought. The kids calm down faster and you can get to what you wanted to get to sooner."

**Recommendations.** All four participants said they would recommend mindfulness to other educators. Participant D, "I would say yes, 100%, I think it's something that I've become really passionate about just due to where our society is at."

Participant A described:

Any of it that brings them, centers them and helps them focus. I mean in this day and age when they are so attuned to videos and games, and the stuff they play which is moving at such a fast clip, when you get them to slow down and breath and focus, I think it is hugely helpful. I would tell anyone to do it.

Participant B said there is a lot of multi-tasking in teaching and mindfulness helps students to stay focused and re-centered on the task on hand. Participant C also recommended mindfulness strategies:

Yes, I absolutely would and I know I would love if there was some sort of training brought into the school to kind of guide some of that. Like I said, I just go off of you

know my personal past experience or hobbies. I would say breathing is the quickest and easiest to incorporate into the day. But I guess my personal favorite would be more like that progressive muscle relaxation, I feel like we just carry so much tension in our bodies. So when I am home that's more what I focus on how to fully let that go and I think as teachers I see all of us walking around all hunched over and how to purposely let that go we carry so much in our bodies.

Participant B commented,

Yes, I would recommend it. I think that, I guess sometimes you've got to work on yourself and then you can deal with the rest of life. Whether you've been trained to do it with kids or not, I definitely see a benefit of my stress relief while at school and with my family too. In my personal life. I would definitely recommend it, going to class, you don't even need training, you can learn as you go.

Another recommendation made by participants was for more training. Participant A reported they found the trainings they have participated in to be useful: "the more comfortable I get with it (mindfulness), the more I try and bring it in and I just find it really helps during transitions."

Participant C believed that if staff were supported and practiced mindfulness strategies together, it would help with the morale and bring the staff together.

### **Limitations**

Limitations in a study are factors which the researcher cannot control, "particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect the results or your ability to generalize" (Roberts, 2010, p. 162). Limitations for the study included:

- The survey was open for a period of 12 days. Extending the window for responses and sending additional reminders would likely have increased participation.

- The researcher did not attain a 50% response rate as originally planned but due to the number of teachers (1212 teachers) who received the survey, the researcher deemed there was an acceptable number of teachers who responded to the survey (265 teachers).
- The small sample size, 21.86%, in the online survey and four participants in the interviews limit the ability to generalize the study's findings to all teachers in the district.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Recommendations for future research include:

- It is recommended that at least a few more questions could be added to the study survey to be able to increase the amount of data gathered from the survey results for analysis. One example would be to add survey questions to answer Research Question 5: What did select Minnesota elementary school teachers report as the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for other teachers in their use of mindfulness strategies?
- It is recommended to allow survey participants an opportunity to comment on their responses after each survey question; add a blank space for comments after the question and response.
- It is recommended that the study be replicated with secondary teachers.
- It is recommended that a case study be conducted on a school that has provided staff members with mindfulness training/strategies in order to ascertain their perceptions of their stress level and usage of mindfulness before and after the training.
- It is recommended to conduct a replication of the study but increase the number of

interviewees to six or more to further the understanding of interviewees' views on the benefits, challenges and recommendations of mindfulness strategies.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The following recommendations are based on information gained from the related literature review as well as the study results. Recommendations for practitioners and administrators include:

- From the study data, the researcher concluded that the teachers in the study were experiencing a high level of stress while at work with no respondent reporting no stress at work. It is recommended for administrators or districts to survey the stress levels of the teachers at their own buildings.
- Based on the literature suggesting that mindfulness techniques are a strategy to lower teacher stress and time being a factor in terms of teachers practicing the techniques, the researcher suggests that districts or administrators incorporate mindfulness into the school day to support teachers and thus students.
- Conclusions from the literature suggested that administrators and school leaders can increase retention and efficacy by seeking ways to support teachers' self-care and learning of mindfulness techniques. It is recommended that school district leaders should consider allowing time and space for teachers to practice mindfulness strategies on their own.
- It is recommended a specific mindfulness program be implemented in a school and to administer pre-test and post-tests to staff participants to identify their perceived value of the mindfulness program in reducing work-related stress.

- It is recommended that school district leaders identify professional development opportunities on mindfulness strategies that may be made available to teachers for use in their classrooms.
- It is suggested that teachers explore with their administrators/professional development committees the possibility of offering mindfulness trainings in their school districts and schools.
- It is recommended for educational leaders to survey staff members regarding their work stress levels and identify mindfulness strategies that staff members would utilize, if offered.

### **Summary**

The purpose of the study was to examine the frequency with which a select group of Minnesota elementary school teachers reported they experienced work related stress and to determine their awareness of and/or use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stresses. Further, the study examined teachers' exposure to mindfulness strategies through training/professional development and their reported likelihood of using mindfulness strategies to reduce work-related stresses.

From the study data, the researcher concluded that study participants had experienced high levels of stress while at work with none of the respondents reported no stress at work. Although many survey respondents knew what mindfulness is and practiced it at times, only 14.4% reported using mindfulness strategies frequently to reduce their stress levels. This suggests potential for growth in allowing teachers time and space to learn and/or practice mindfulness strategies.

If teachers were provided the resources (especially time) to practice and incorporate mindfulness strategies into their school days, they could experience positive results in reducing their stress levels in their classrooms as they target and managed student behavior. Mindfulness is very adaptable, can be used in a variety of ways and tailored to meet the needs of the specific school employees. It is recommended that educational leaders survey their employees concerning their work-related stress levels and identify those mindfulness strategies they would utilize. One teacher interviewee believed that if staff members were supported and practiced mindfulness strategies together it would strengthen staff morale and contribute to staff cohesion.



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## Appendix A: St. Cloud State University IRB Approval Form



### Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

**Name:** Kelsey Milne  
**Email:** kamiine@stcloudstate.edu

## IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: **Exempt Review**

**Project Title:** Stress and Teacher Burnout: Impact of Mindfulness Strategies

**Advisor:** Kay Worner

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email [ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu) and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

**IRB Chair:**

Dr. Benjamin Witts  
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis  
Department of Community Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy

**IRB Institutional Official:**

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan  
Interim Associate Provost for Research  
Dean of Graduate Studies

#### OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 1870 - 2398	Type: Exempt Review	Today's Date: 2/19/2019
1st Year Approval Date: 2/19/2019	2nd Year Approval Date:	3rd Year Approval Date:
1st Year Expiration Date:	2nd Year Expiration Date:	3rd Year Expiration Date:

## **Appendix B: Survey Consent Form**

### **Informed Consent for Participation in this Survey Stress and Teacher Burnout: Impact of Mindfulness Strategies**

You are invited to participate in a research study intended to better understand teacher stress and teacher use of and perceived effectiveness of mindfulness strategies.

The information on this page is required to inform you of the background, potential risks and the voluntary nature of the survey. By clicking on "next" and answering the survey questions, you are agreeing to participate in the study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to examine the level of stress reported by a select group of Minnesota elementary teachers and to determine their awareness of and/or use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stress level.

**Procedures:** If you participate, you will complete a four-question online survey through the tool SurveyMonkey. The survey will take approximately 2-3 minutes. No names or identifying information is collected in this survey

**Benefits:** The results of the study are intended to furnish school administrators with an understanding of teachers' usage of mindfulness strategies and their perceptions of the effectiveness of those strategies to reduce job-related stress. The findings of the study may reveal select strategies for mitigating work-related stress experienced by Minnesota elementary school teachers.

**Risks:** There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The survey is confidential.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participants will be free to withdraw from the survey at any time.

**Research Results and Contact Information:** This research project is being conducted by Kelsey Milne to satisfy the requirements of a doctoral degree in Educational Administration and Leadership at St. Cloud State University. If you are interested in learning the results of study or have questions regarding the survey, please contact the researcher Kelsey Milne at [kelseyamilne@gmail.com](mailto:kelseyamilne@gmail.com). The advisor for this study, Dr. Kay Worner of St. Cloud State University, can be reached at [ktworner@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:ktworner@stcloudstate.edu).

Your completion of the survey indicates that you consent to participate in this survey. Thank you in advance for your participation.

If you choose to provide your contact information at the end of the survey, you may be chosen to participate in an interview. The interview will consist of five open ended questions as a follow-up to survey responses and the interview will last approximately 30 minutes.

## Appendix C: Survey

### Stress and Mindfulness Survey

For the purposes of the study, mindfulness strategies are any of the following activities: mindful breathing, guided meditation, mindful movement (yoga), and mindfulness through sensory experiences (eating, smelling, listening).

**Please select the item that best describes your response to the three questions listed below.**

1. How often do you experience work-related stress?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Always

2. How would you describe your awareness and use of mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress?

- I don't know what it is
- I am somewhat aware but do not practice these strategies
- I practice mindfulness strategies on occasion to reduce work-related stress
- I practice mindfulness strategies frequently to reduce work-related stress

3. How would you describe your training/professional development on mindfulness strategies?

- None
- Minimal
- Extensive

**Please rank the following strategies in terms of your likelihood of using them to reduce your stress level at work: (1-4 ranking scale: 1= most likely to use)**

\_\_\_ Mindful breathing

\_\_\_ Guided Meditation

\_\_\_ Movement (examples: yoga, walking, stretching)

\_\_\_ Sensory experiences (examples: listening to music, calming smells, mindful eating)

**Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.**

I would like to conduct a limited number of follow up interviews (approximately 30 minutes) with respondents who identify that they use mindfulness strategies as a means of reducing work-related stress. If you would be interested in participating in the follow-up interview, please fill out the following information: your personal information will not be used as part of the study and will be destroyed right after the interview.

Name:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

## **Appendix D: Consent Form for Interview**

### **Informed Consent for Participation in this Study Stress and Teacher Burnout: Impact of Mindfulness Strategies**

Thank you for providing your contact information and agreeing to be interviewed. The purpose of this interview is to secure a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' application of mindfulness strategies. The questions asked as part of the interview will provide respondents with an opportunity to express their beliefs about the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for employing mindfulness strategies in education.

The information on this page is required to inform you of the background, potential risks and the voluntary nature of the interview.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to examine the level of stress reported by a select group of Minnesota elementary teachers and to determine their awareness of and/or use of mindfulness strategies to mitigate their work-related stress level.

**Procedures:** You will be asked five interview questions regarding your experiences with mindfulness strategies. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

**Benefits:** The information gained in this interview will add depth and understanding to the research related to teacher usage of mindfulness strategies by a select group of Minnesota elementary school educators. The results of the study are intended to furnish school administrators with an understanding of teachers' usage of mindfulness strategies and those teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of those strategies to reduce job-related stress. The findings of the study may reveal select strategies for mitigating work-related stress experienced by Minnesota elementary school teachers.

**Compensation:** There is no monetary compensation per participant.

**Risks:** There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:** This is a confidential interview. Individuals will be identified by letters in any published materials (example: Teacher A, Teacher B). Direct quotations from individual interviews may be used in the dissertation and will be de-identified. No information that could identify an individual will be reported.



**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in the interview is voluntary. If you decide to complete the interview and there are any questions that you are not comfortable in answering, you do not need to answer them.

**Research Results and Contact Information:** This research project is being conducted by Kelsey Milne to satisfy the requirements of a doctoral degree in Educational Administration and Leadership at St. Cloud State University. If you are interested in learning the results of study or have questions regarding the survey, please contact the researcher Kelsey Milne at [kelseyamilne@gmail.com](mailto:kelseyamilne@gmail.com). The advisor for this study, Dr. Kay Worner of St. Cloud State University, can be reached at [ktworner@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:ktworner@stcloudstate.edu).

**Informed Consent for Participation in this Interview: Acceptance to Participate**  
Your completion of the interview indicates that you consent to participate in the interview.  
Thank you in advance.

### **Appendix E: Interview Questions with Prompts**

1. What is your training/professional development regarding mindfulness strategies? Please describe.
  - a. Was this mandatory training? or opportunities you sought out personally or professionally?
  - b. Were you encouraged to pursue the training?
  - c. Did you find any of the trainings useful for you professionally?
2. How do you use mindfulness strategies to reduce your work-related stress?
  - a. Do you use the strategy for yourself at work? or at home?
  - b. Do you use the strategy with students?
3. Have you seen benefits in your work-related stress that can you attribute to the use of mindfulness strategies?
  - a. What benefits have you seen?
  - b. Have you noticed a different in your mood, teaching, or overall health?
  - c. Do you have ideas for a mindfulness strategy that could be beneficial?
4. Have you experienced barriers with regard to your use of mindfulness practices? If yes, what kind?
  - a. Is the barrier something that you are able to overcome?
  - b. What support could you get to overcome the barrier?
5. Would you recommend mindfulness to other educators and if so, which strategies? If not, why not?
  - a. What made you pick that strategy as your recommendation?
  - b. Could you see your colleagues benefiting from using that strategy?