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Mindfulness Practices: Investigating Impacts on Prekindergarten Teacher Perceptions of Classroom Climate Teacher Self-Efficacy and Student Interactions

Marnie A. Aylesworth

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MINDFULNESS PRACTICES: INVESTIGATING IMPACTS ON PREKINDERGARTEN
TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF CLASSROOM CLIMATE, TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY
AND STUDENT INTERACTIONS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

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Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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The purpose of this case study was to explore the impact mindfulness instruction and practice had on an early childhood teacher's perception of classroom climate, student interaction and self-efficacy when working in communities where poverty is prevalent. An analysis of the data was conducted to gain a deep understanding of teachers' experiences with mindfulness and the impacts it may have had on their teaching practices.

A qualitative case study was used to understand a real-life phenomenon deeply, in direct relation to mindfulness practice and teacher perception. Given the small size of the study, the researcher sought to gain a deep understanding of the participant experience. The focus was on understanding the classroom dynamics and teacher perceptions within a very particular setting, one in which all students qualified for state-funded prekindergarten due to family income level in an inner-city school district.

The results of this study suggested that mindfulness practices can have a positive impact on teacher perception of classroom climate, student interactions and self-efficacy when proper supports are in place and teachers embrace the practices personally. Teachers appeared to be more aware of the things that were going right in their classrooms and more accepting of developmentally appropriate behaviors in their students. The practice of self-reflection seemed to increase over the course of the study and teachers reported thinking more about their own behaviors and attitudes.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“I am inviting you to go deeper, to learn and to practice so that you become someone who has a great capacity for being solid, calm, and without fear, because our society needs people like you who have these qualities, and your children, our children, need people like you, in order to go on, in order to become solid, and calm, and without fear.” Thích Nhất Hạnh

Introduction

This study focuses on teachers and classrooms serving children who are eligible for state-funded prekindergarten based on their family poverty level. There were several variables and concerns for the researcher to consider in this study. First, young children in poverty are especially vulnerable in classrooms lacking a positive and supportive climate and an empathetic and compassionate teacher (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Because these students may be experiencing systemic stress at home, their need for compassion from others is high. Developing compassion in oneself can impact others and, in the case of teachers, the impact can be seen in their students. Second, a teacher’s ability to reflect on and manage their emotions plays a crucial role in the success of all students, but especially those in classrooms where poverty is prevalent (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). When adults, and in this case teachers, possess strong social and emotional skills, teacher-child interactions have the potential to be positive and conducive to developmentally-appropriate learning experiences, and the classroom climate can be a positive one. Finally, a lack of compassion may also contribute to the increase in expulsions from prekindergarten classrooms in publicly funded programs across the country (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). Teacher-student relationships are the foundation for effective learning. To facilitate those relationships, the teachers must be resilient and socially-emotionally competent. The Dalai Lama

(2002) stated, “as we become nicer human beings, our neighbors, friends, parents, and children experience less anger.” Achieving this level of compassion and kindness is possible through mindfulness strategies. Mindfulness is learning to concentrate our attention on our experiences, as they are occurring, with curiosity and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Exposing teachers to mindfulness can be an effective way of positively impacting the interactions between teachers and students (Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Karazsia & Singh, 2013).

While social and emotional skill building is high on a teacher’s list of desired training topics, it is rarely offered (Bridgeland, Bruce, Hariharan, Civic, Hart, Research Associates & CASEL, 2013). A gap in teacher preparation and in continued professional development has led to an epidemics of teacher burnout and preschool expulsion (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Mindfulness practices may be a powerful resource to develop one’s social and emotional competence. If mindfulness is the path to developing one’s compassion, and that compassion can positively impact those encountered, an argument could be made that teachers practicing mindfulness could positively impact their students and their students’ interactions.

Social and Emotional Skills

The Prekindergarten Student

Children who possess skills that enable them to manage their behavior and to make and maintain friendships at a young age are more apt to have successful school experiences later in their academic life (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). While all students in early learning settings may at some point experience difficulty with self-regulation or stress in the home, developing these skills is often a challenge in classrooms where poverty is prevalent in their community. Children in these environments are frequently exposed to stressors

beyond their control, such as hunger, poverty, a parent experiencing mental illness, substance abuse, or physical or emotional abuse in the home (Pediatrics, 2014). Although children with higher socioeconomic status (SES) may experience these stressors, too, it may not be as persistent, pervasive, and intense as it is for children with low SES.

Additionally, students in these environments may be faced with teacher bias. While not in all cases, teacher demographics tend to reflect a white, female, middle-class person (Report, 2016). Educator diversity in the United States does not match student diversity (Report, 2016). It is more challenging to express compassion for a group of students with whom a teacher has no common experiences and where the context of student life is unfamiliar. In fact, despite similar academic ability, students with lower SES are often considered less proficient by their teachers than peers with higher SES (Kenyatta, 2012).

Student-teacher interactions affect how students feel about and behave in school, and can yield social and academic imbalances (Kenyatta, 2012). This imbalance of perception can affect the relationship and sets the stage for an unhealthy and unproductive classroom climate. Students can and may perceive these teacher biases, leading to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and lack of trust. Those feelings may also lead to disruptive and maladaptive behaviors in the classroom. Where there is increased calm, caring and respect, there is greater opportunity for teachers to explore their personal level of emotional competence and improve the learning experience for their students and themselves.

In classrooms where there are high levels of positive interactions students are likely to exhibit positive behaviors, while a high level of negative interactions can lead to less positive behaviors (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000). Students in schools where poverty is prevalent in their community can and do show improved performance when school culture is supportive and

positive (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Furthermore, teacher perceptions of students based on socioeconomic status had a significant effect on student performance, not only in that classroom but also in classrooms for years to come (de Boer, Bosker & van de Werf, 2010).

Early Childhood Educators

Expectations for teachers and the responsibilities they undertake continually grow. Not only are they responsible for the academic improvement of their students, they also carry the burden in many cases of imparting moral, ethical and civic responsibility (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). While these tasks may have always been expected, students are coming to the classroom with greater needs. This increase in student needs takes a toll on a teacher's ability to self-reflect, cope with challenging classroom situations, and respond with compassion. Over time, teachers may become reactive rather than responsive, and implore punitive measures that do not teach effective social-emotional skills, leading to a vicious cycle of negative classroom culture (Osher, Sprague, Weissberg, Axelrod, Keenan, Kendziora, et al., 2007; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

A socially- and emotionally-capable teacher is the paragon for his or her students in terms of demonstrating supportive relationships, encouraging cooperation, and serving as a role model for respectful communication and behavior (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Conversely, when teachers struggle with the management of the classroom, the classroom climate can degrade, and students exhibit challenging behavior, which may ultimately result in the teacher resorting to reactive and negative responses, causing a vicious cycle of a disruptive classroom climate (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003). In their meta-analysis of over 100 studies, researchers have found that teachers who had strong relationships with their students reported 31% fewer behavior problems in their classrooms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Marzano et al., 2003).

This new reality indicates a need to focus on the social and emotional wellness of both the teacher and the student. Mindfulness practice has been used in the mental health profession to build social and emotional competence in patients, and is slowly becoming a tool for other industries, including education. While there is research supporting successful social and emotional skill development with students through mindfulness practice (Schonert-Reichl, Oberle, Lawlor, Abbott, Thomson, Oberlander, & Diamond, 2015), focusing on the teacher's training with evidenced-based practices is more cost effective and sensible (Singh et. al., 2013). A teacher with strong social and emotional skills, who can leverage those skills to benefit students, will be able to do so for years, and possibly generations.

Teachers have been aware of the growing disconnect between their own social-emotional competencies and those of their students. Yet, despite the continued call from early childhood educators for more education and training on building competencies in social-emotional skills, that topic is rarely offered (Waajid, Garner, & Owen, 2013). Perhaps a teacher's ability to be reflective about their own emotional competence has not been adequately addressed because of a false perception in society that educators come into the field of teaching in part because they naturally possess a proficient understanding of and ability to act on strong social and emotional skills (Jones, Bouffard & Weissbourd, 2013). Additionally, teachers are underprepared to maintain a healthy social and emotional balance when they are teaching students with very different experiences than their own. Practices and policies that embed social and emotional training into teacher prep programs, as well as in continuing education for current teachers, is imperative. These are skills that can grow and develop through training, mentoring, and coaching (Jones et. al., 2013).

Mindfulness Strategies

Mindfulness may be one of those social and emotional practices that can support teachers and students. Mindfulness is a practice of learning to focus on experiences as they occur, with curiosity and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Instead of placing judgment on what is happening or worrying about what might happen, mindfulness teaches us to be thoughtful about the response and to pay close attention to thoughts and emotions associated with that event (Weare, 2014). This process, if practiced regularly, has the potential to help one recognize one's responses to certain emotions and accept the event and the emotions as temporary, which will pass just as they arrived.

The use of mindfulness practices in teacher prep programs and continuing education may support the development of teachers' ability to recognize their own emotions. Mindfulness has been shown to positively impact social and emotional skills, such as the ability to develop meaningful relationships, to be calm in the face of chaos, to be compassionate, and to manage difficult feelings (Weare, 2012; Baer, 2003; Salmon, Sephton, Weissbecker, Hoover, Ulmer & Studts, 2004). Teachers with strong social and emotional skills recognize their students' emotions and are thoughtful about what is causing them (Zakrzewski, 2013). This helps teachers respond to students with compassion when their student is demonstrating challenging behavior, which helps to form caring and supportive relationships between the teachers and their students (Zakrzewski, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Young children in poverty are especially vulnerable in classrooms lacking a positive and supportive climate fostered by an empathetic and compassionate teacher (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Because these students may be experiencing systemic stress outside the classroom, their

need for compassion from others is high. Teachers who work to develop their capacity for compassion may provide a positive role model for healthy social and emotional skills in their students. A teacher's ability to reflect on their own social and emotional competence is crucial to the success of all students, but especially those in classrooms where poverty is prevalent (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The rate of expulsions in prekindergarten classrooms across the United States quantifies this social crisis. Many times, children from these vulnerable communities attend publicly funded prekindergarten classrooms. The rate of expulsion from publicly funded prekindergarten programs, based on behavior, was reported at one out of every 40 children in a study by Gilliam & Shahar (2006). These statistics are notably higher and disproportionate to K-12 expulsions. Experts suggest that expulsions are high because these programs often have fewer infrastructures to support the teachers and staff than that of their public school counterparts and other more formalized early education programs, like Head Start (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). The fact that the numbers are disproportionately higher for preschool boys and children of color suggests teachers' beliefs about their students may be a contributing factor (Gilliam, 2008; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Samuels, 2014; U.S Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

The empirical evidence is scarce in the early childhood sector regarding the reasons for these disparities; however, research in the public school setting indicates similar disparities and identifies potential root causes (American Psychological Association, 2008; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May & Tobin, 2011; Lamont, Devore, Allison, Ancona, Barnett, Gunther & Young, 2013). Most notably, research found that the schools lacked resources and had deficient education and training for teachers, specifically in self-reflective

strategies that may aide in identifying and rectifying potential biases in teacher perceptions and classroom practices. (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

These biases can have a lasting impact on young students. Teacher perceptions of a student based on socioeconomic status can have a significant and lasting effect on student performance (de Boer et al., 2010). Students in early learning classrooms located in communities where poverty is prevalent are certainly faced with these very dynamics. Conversely, positive teacher bias tended to show higher performance in subsequent years for those students (de Boer et al., 2010). Therefore, an assumption can be made that if teacher perceptions were improved through mindfulness instruction strategies, students may also realize those benefits.

One strategy for teachers to develop their own social and emotional competence is mindfulness. Mindfulness practices are associated with increased compassion and empathy for others (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia & Greenberg, 2013). Mindfulness has the potential to serve as one of many possible supports to teachers. Mindfulness can have an impact both at a school-wide level and with targeted populations like students or teachers (Zoogman, Simon, Goldberg, Hoyt & Miller, 2014). One study suggests that teachers experience improved relationships with their students after completing a mindfulness instruction program even when the students themselves did not receive any mindfulness instruction (Jennings et al., 2013).

Mindfulness has been found to increase empathy, compassion, and social competence, and supports the development of a non-judgmental mind (Weare, 2014; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, Jennings, 2012). If mindfulness is the path to developing one's compassion, and that compassion can translate to those we encounter, it follows that teachers practicing mindfulness could positively impact their students, their classroom climate, and their own feelings of success. Given the interpersonal and intrapersonal nature of teaching, a teacher's social and emotional

competence must be considered and supported to help grow compassionate and equitable classrooms (Lowe, Prout & Murcia, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore the impact mindfulness instruction and practice had on an early childhood teacher's perception of classroom climate, student interaction and self-efficacy when working in communities where poverty is prevalent. The study also investigated early childhood teachers' beliefs and perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of mindfulness practice in their personal teaching practices. Finally, the study explored whether early childhood teachers felt there was a change in their own beliefs about and reactions to their students.

Theoretical Framework

While having a strong relationship with a teacher is important for student success at any age, it is more impactful at younger ages when those relationships set the precedent for future student-teacher relationships (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Social-emotional learning is based on the premise that the most meaningful learning occurs when there are supportive relationships that make learning challenging and captivating (Jones, et al., 2013). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of development sets the stage for this study. The premise of his ecological systems theory was that a person's development can be affected by more than just the physical environment. His theory describes five layers of environment that each play a different role in development. These layers include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The environment plays a critical role for both the students and the teachers in the study.

The microsystem, or the immediate environment, represents the prekindergarten classroom, the teachers, the students, and the interactions between all three (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), this is the most influential layer of the ecological model. The study explicitly investigates the relationship between the teacher and the student as well as the climate of the classroom environment. The mesosystem, or the connection between the elements in the microsystem, may influence one another negatively or positively. When the elements in this study, the teacher and the students, are working together, there can be a positive impact on development. Conversely, when the students and teachers are working against one another, there can be adverse effects on both parties. The aim of this study is to identify strategies to support the former.

The exosystem refers to the indirect environment; while it does not involve the person as an active participant, it still affects the person. The dispositions, beliefs, cultural background, and life experiences of the students affect the teachers, even though the teachers were not active participants in those experiences. Similarly, the teacher's dispositions, beliefs, cultural background, and life experiences have affected their students, yet the students were not active participants in the forming of those elements. The macrosystem, or the cultural and social values, add another layer of the environment that can have negative or positive effects on the person. The political, cultural, and social climate around classrooms and communities where poverty is prevalent can have a direct impact on both the teachers and the students. This layer of the environment is explicitly addressed in both the research questions and the purpose of the study.

Finally, the chronosystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model refers to the changes over time. It defines the influence of both change and stability in a person's environment. This layer of the environment was of particular interest to the researcher in this study. Through the practice

of mindfulness, the researcher hypothesized changes in teacher attitudes, perceptions and behaviors in the classroom. In keeping with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, this change over time should subsequently affect the student's environment and, thus, their development.

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory also plays a role in the study's focus on the teacher-student relationship. Vygotsky noted that a great deal of learning for a child happens through social interaction with a person who serves as a model. In this study, the teacher is the model. The modeling is often referred to as "cooperative or collaborative dialogue" and could be the teacher's behavior or the instruction given to the child (Vygotsky, 1978). This dialogue promotes the cognitive development of the child specific to the context of the modeling. The teacher in this study, through the lens of sociocultural theory, would represent "the more knowledgeable other."

In theory, if teachers practice and model mindfulness practices for students in their classrooms, students will build their own ability to develop those social and emotional competencies. This "knowledgeable other" plays a significant role when children find themselves in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, teachers were working with students who had not learned a number of social and emotional competencies needed to be successful in life. They may lack self-regulation, compassion, empathy, self-confidence, and friendship skills. The ZPD is not a hard and fast line that every child reaches at the same time with each new skill. The learning occurs when the skill is too difficult for a child to master alone, but that can be accomplished with support and direction from a knowledgeable person, like a teacher. This study aims to address the child's social and emotional competence through the skill building of the teacher as the knowledgeable other, during a time when students are in need of the guidance to be successful.

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory also has some implications for this study. Specifically, Bandura investigates the influence of self-efficacy on a person's behavior. Bandura contends that a self-evaluation of people's own abilities can impact their emotional reactions to anticipated and actual events. Individuals who view themselves as ineffective perseverate on their deficiencies and give them more weight than they should (Bandura, 1982). When teachers find themselves in a classroom environment where their students struggle with sociocultural stressors that influence their behavior and the climate of the classroom, and the teacher does not have the skill set to address those challenges, their feelings of accomplishment may be affected. These emotions set the stage for feelings of stress, and negatively affect performance because the teacher is distracted and thus unable to find positive solutions (Bandura, 1982).

Research Questions

When preschool teachers participated in a series of mindfulness professional development sessions (four 3-hour sessions):

1. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of the classroom climate in communities where poverty is prevalent?
2. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of and response to student interactions in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?
3. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of self-efficacy in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?

Significance of the Study

There is a disturbing trend in the United States and in Pennsylvania. The Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2011-12 school year showed that more than 8,000 public preschoolers were suspended at least once (Samuels, 2014). Publicly funded preschools typically serve

children in communities where poverty is prevalent. Boys of all races represented 54% of the preschoolers in the report, yet more than 80% of those were suspended more than once were boys of color (Samuels, 2014). A lack of compassion may contribute to the disturbing increase in expulsions from prekindergarten classrooms in publicly funded programs across the country (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). Young children in poverty are especially susceptible in classrooms lacking a positive, supportive climate and an empathetic, compassionate teacher (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teacher-student relationships are the foundation for effective learning. In order to facilitate those relationships, the teachers must be resilient and socially-emotionally competent. Adding to this troubling trend, teacher burnout and turnover is at an all-time high (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus & Davidson, 2013). Unless these disparities in communities and schools where poverty is prevalent are addressed, no attention to rigor will bridge the achievement gap.

Definition of Terms

Below is a description of basic terms referenced throughout this dissertation. The definitions are frequently used in publications and will provide a foundation for contemplating the components of this research.

1. Attachment is defined as “a system of behaviors aimed at establishing and maintaining closeness and contact with an adult figure who is sensible and responsive to the child’s needs” (Bowlby, 1958).
2. Mindfulness – Kabat-Zinn (1994, p. 4) defines mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.”

3. Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts – Through the General Assembly of Pennsylvania (2007), in House Bill 842, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts was enacted into Pennsylvania School Code through amendment to Act 45 in order to financially support children three and four years old whose families fall at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and are in need of quality preschool.
4. Challenging behavior is defined as “any repeated pattern of behavior or perception of behavior that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in prosocial interactions with peers and adults” (Powell, Fixsen, Dunlap, Smith & Fox, 2007, p. 83)
5. Poverty – Merriam-Webster defines poverty as “the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions” (Poverty. 2017). The participants in this study worked with students whose family income is at or below 300% of the Federal poverty guidelines (Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2017).
6. Expulsion – Expulsion is defined as “the complete and permanent removal of a child from an entire educational system” (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006).
7. Social-emotional learning – Social-emotional learning (SEL) involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2013b).
8. Social-emotional competence – The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning’s (2013b) commonly recognized definition of Social-emotional competence is “a set of five interrelated cognitive, affective, and behavioral competencies that include

self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.”

9. Executive functioning skills – Executive functioning skills “are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully” (Elliott, 2003).
10. Efficacy – Bandura (1994) describes “perceived self-efficacy as people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce identified levels of performance that have influence over events that affect their lives.”
11. School Climate – “School climate is defined as the social and psychological environment of a classroom as it is experienced by the students and staff who are learning and teaching there” (Zullig, Koopman, Patton & Ubbes, 2010).
12. At-Risk – The researcher understands that the term “at-risk” can have negative connotations and may even perpetuate negative stereotypes. However, the term is used in this paper with the intention of shifting the understanding of the term. The intent of this research is accurately captured by Harla Tumbleson’s interpretation, when she poignantly defined at-risk students as those who are at risk of “being failed by one or more adults, or adult-driven systems or institutions” (Tumbleson, 2001).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study, describes the research problem, and delineates the purpose and significance of the study. Additionally, the research questions, theoretical framework, and definitions of relevant terms are included in Chapter One.

Chapter Two encompasses a review of the literature both theoretical and empirical. Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work in developmental psychology and specifically his theory of Ecology of Human Development serves as the springboard for this literature review. Chapter Two also includes reference to Lev Vygotsky's (1978) approach in regard to the Zone of Proximal Development, which supports the notion that children's learning begins very early and that learning and development are closely interrelated. Finally, in terms of theoretical literature, Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Cognitive Theory is reviewed in relation to teacher self-efficacy and teachers as models for their students.

Chapter Two also includes empirical literature related to mindfulness instruction, social and emotional skill development for students and teachers, and neuroscience research describing the changes in the brain and executive functioning skills when mindfulness is practiced. Finally, Chapter Two reviews the literature around teacher perceptions of student ability when working within impoverished schools and communities and the effects those perceptions have on student performance and behavior.

Chapter Three describes the rationale for the methodology used to conduct the case study and defines the sample population. The sampling procedure is detailed in this chapter, as is the data collection process. The instruments used for measurement are described along with the analysis procedures in this chapter. Finally, limitations and assumptions are in this chapter.

Chapter Four reports on the findings related to the collected data. This chapter details the themes uncovered through analysis and the process by which those themes were identified. Chapter Five is a summary and discussion of the results of the case study. Researcher conclusions based on the findings are included in that discussion as well as suggestions for future research.

Summary

A review of the literature suggests that the social and emotional competency development of the teacher and the student in early childhood classrooms is of the utmost importance. The research and theory surrounding developmental practices suggest that young children in poverty are especially vulnerable in classrooms lacking a positive and supportive climate and an empathetic and compassionate teacher (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Yet, despite the continued call from early childhood educators for more education and training on social-emotional competency skill building, that topic is rarely offered (Waajid et al., 2013). This gap in teacher preparation and continued professional development has led to an epidemic of teacher burnout and preschool expulsion (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). This case study contributes to the research suggesting that effective development of social-emotional competence in early childhood educators through mindfulness instruction and practice can positively impact teachers as well as their young students in communities where poverty is prevalent.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

According to a report by the Raikes Foundation (2011), children with strong social-emotional learning (SEL) skills excel in school, not just socially, but academically, supporting the notion that SEL programs are critical in addressing those skills for student success (Social Development Research, 2011). The concept of SEL can be traced back to ancient Greece when Plato discussed education in *The Republic* and suggested that student preparation should include teaching them “to be responsible, productive, caring, and engaged citizens” (Social Emotional Learning, 2011). These descriptions from 380 B.C. have implications today. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was formed in 1994, its mission was “to establish social and emotional learning as an essential part of education,” mirroring Plato’s philosophy (Social Emotional Learning, 2011, para. 16).

It is important to note that children are not the only people in need of social and emotional competence. If society expects children to exhibit strong social and emotional competence, adults must model the desired behaviors, dispositions, and attitudes. To develop these skills in adults and teachers working with young children, strategies must be identified to support that growth. Research involving mindfulness training for teachers indicates some positive effects for teachers themselves, including reduction in anxiety and stress (Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011; Poulin, Mackenzie, Soloway, & Karayolas, 2008). When teachers engage in more positive interactions, the outcomes of their students tend to be positive. Regarding social-emotional development and interventions, research on well-implemented prevention programs provides solutions for improving classroom behavior skills and improving student outcomes (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1998).

Regardless of the socioeconomic status (SES) of the students in a prekindergarten classroom, the teacher is the critical factor in the quest for change. If a teacher lacks strong social and emotional competencies, they may feel inadequate, impeding their ability to model positive strategies for social and emotional well-being. Additionally, research regarding school climate supports the position that students in lower socioeconomic schools can and do show improved performance when school culture is supportive and positive (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Given the research, potential for students to succeed, regardless of their socioeconomic standing, is promising (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Change in classroom climate must start with the teacher and teacher perceptions (Dorman, 2015).

Finally, if a teacher holds biased beliefs about a student's ability based on socioeconomic status or ethnicity, no change will occur for the better. Teacher perceptions of a student based on socioeconomic status had a significant effect on student performance, not only in that classroom but also in classrooms for years to come (de Boer et al., 2010). Students in early learning classrooms located in lower socioeconomic communities are certainly faced with these very dynamics. Conversely, positive teacher bias tended to correlate with higher performance in subsequent years for those students (de Boer et al., 2010). Therefore, a hypothesis can be made that if teacher perceptions were improved through mindfulness instruction strategies, students would also realize those benefits.

Mindfulness practices have promising implications for early childhood educators. Mindfulness is a practice of learning to focus attention on experiences as they are occurring, with curiosity and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). It is considered a social and emotional strategy to accept events as they occur and view them non-judgmentally (Schonert-Reichl, et al., 2015; Weare, 2014; Roeser, et al., 2012). A review of mindfulness programs noted that an emphasis on

increasing teacher well-being reduced teacher stress and improved classroom management strategies (Meiklejohn, Phillips, Freedman, Griffin, Biegel, Roach & Isberg, 2012). While there is no single solution to improving teacher well-being, mindfulness may be one tool in the toolbox in the effort to improve students' social and emotional competencies.

Criteria for Literature Selection

The research questions addressed in this case study were:

When preschool teachers participate in a series of mindfulness professional development sessions (four 3-hour sessions):

1. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of the classroom climate in communities where poverty is prevalent?
2. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of and response to student interactions in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?
3. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of self-efficacy in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?

Information in this literature review was compiled using peer-reviewed journals, books, policy briefs, and other resources. Fields of study included in this review range from education and sociology to developmental psychology, educational psychology, and neuroscience. The literature includes research supporting the importance of social-emotional skills at an early age. Additionally, the literature review addresses the importance teacher perception and attitude play in managing a positive classroom environment. A robust review of the research surrounding mindfulness practices and its uses, successes, and findings in the educational setting is included. Brain research is included in order to frame the argument that the architecture of the brain can

actually be strengthened through mindfulness practice, positively impacting the effects from persistent stressors on children and teachers in communities where poverty is prevalent.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) work in developmental psychology, and specifically his theory of Ecology of Human Development, serves as the springboard for this literature review. While Bronfenbrenner's work is not the sole theory behind this study, the underlying theme that the environment and perception have a significant impact on development provides the appropriate foundation.

The Ecology of Human Development

Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of development sets the stage for this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized "the interaction between the developing person and the environment," thus defining development as "a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment." The premise of his ecological systems theory was that a person's development can be affected by the environment. This environment is not simply the physical environment, but five layers of environment that each play a different role in development. These layers include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The environment plays a critical role in this research for both the students and the teachers. The microsystem, or the immediate environment, in this study represents the prekindergarten classroom, the teachers, the students, and the interactions among all three (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), this is the most influential of all the layers of the ecological model. The study explicitly investigates the relationship between the teacher and the student, as well as the climate of the classroom environment.

The mesosystem, or the connection between the elements in the microsystem, may influence one another negatively or positively. When the elements in this study, the teacher and the students, are working together, there can be a positive impact on development. Conversely, when students and teachers are working against one another, there can be adverse effects on both parties. The aim of this study was to identify strategies to support the former. The exosystem refers to the indirect environment where the person is not an active participant. However, the exosystem still affects them. The researcher proposes that, in this study, the exosystem for the student is the teacher and for the teacher is the student. The dispositions, beliefs, life experiences, and cultural heritage of the students affect the teachers, even though the teachers were not actively participating in the development of those experiences. Similarly, the dispositions, beliefs, cultural background, and life experiences of the teachers have affected their students, even though the students were not active participants in the forming of those elements.

The macrosystem, comprised of cultural and social values, adds another layer of the environment and can have negative or positive effects on participants. This study took place in classrooms that operate in a community where poverty is prevalent. The political, cultural, and social climate has a direct impact on both the teachers and the students. This layer of the environment is explicitly addressed in both the research questions and the purpose of the study. Finally, the chronosystem of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model refers to changes over time. It defines the influence of both change and stability in a person's environment. This layer of the environment was of particular interest to the researcher in this study. Through the practice of mindfulness, the researcher expected changes in teacher attitudes, perceptions and behaviors in the classroom. In keeping with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, this change over time should subsequently affect the students' environment and, thus, their development.

What is striking about Bronfenbrenner's theory of development is the implication that "what matters in terms of behavior and development is the environment as it is *perceived*, rather than as it may exist in reality" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study relied heavily on the perceptions of the teachers, as those perceptions are what may ultimately impact the students in their classrooms. The implications of a child's perception of their experiences having as much, if not more, impact on their healthy development than does the environment alone is profound and worth exploring. As teachers experience mindfulness practice and their perceptions shift, their relationships in the classroom shift and impact student development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests these reciprocal relationships affect one another's development; as one experiences a developmental change, so does the other.

With this understanding in mind, a teacher's mindset, involvement, perception, and behavior in a classroom must be considered when evaluating with the hope of improving the developmental skills of young children. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasizes that the environmental events that have the most profound impact on one's development are often those where others are actively engaged with that person. When children are actively engaged in what their teachers and family members are doing, it may give them the courage to practice those activities on their own, ultimately affecting their developmental growth.

In terms of social policy and its relation to scientific research on human development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) does not take the traditional stance that social policy should be based on scientific understanding. This idea that social policy can actually inform research on development has far reaching implications for the social-emotional skills development of early childhood teachers and thus of their students. Expulsion and suspension policies in early learning settings are on the rise in the United States (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). A scientific understanding

of the phenomenon may lead to policy changes that build a more positive approach to supporting students.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory plays a role in the study's focus on the teacher-student relationship. Vygotsky noted that a great deal of learning for a child happens through social interaction with a person who serves as a model; in the case of this study, the teacher is the model. The modeling is often referred to as "cooperative or collaborative dialogue" and could be the teacher's behavior or the instruction given to the child (Vygotsky, 1978). This dialogue promotes the cognitive development of the child specific to the context of the modeling. The teacher in this study, through the lens of sociocultural theory, would represent "the more knowledgeable other" (Vygotsky, 1978).

In theory, if the teachers practice and model mindfulness practices for their students in their classrooms, the students too will build their ability to develop those social and emotional competencies. This "knowledgeable other" plays a significant role when children find themselves in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study, teachers were working with students who have not learned several of the social and emotional competencies needed to be successful in life. They may lack self-regulation, compassion, empathy, self-confidence, and friendship skills. The ZPD is not a hard and fast line that every child reaches at the same time with each new skill. The learning occurs when the skill is too difficult for a child to master alone, but that can be accomplished with support and direction from a knowledgeable person, like a teacher. This study aims to address the children's social and emotional competencies through the skill building of the teacher as the knowledgeable other during a time when students need the guidance to be successful. When teachers are addressing

important social emotional skills during a time between the **actual** development level of a child and the level of **potential** development under adult guidance or with peers, the most positive impact can be made (Wilcox & Samaras, 2008).

Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory has some specific implications for this study. Bandura's theory describes the influence of self-efficacy on one's own behavior. He contends that self-evaluation of a person's abilities can impact subsequent emotional reactions to anticipated and actual events in the environment. Individuals who view themselves as ineffective persevere on their deficiencies and give them more weight than they should (Bandura, 1982). When teachers who lack the skill set to address challenging behavior find themselves in a classroom environment that includes sociocultural stressors which negatively influence student behavior and classroom climate, their feelings of accomplishment may be affected. These beliefs set the stage for feelings of stress that negatively affect performance because the teacher is distracted and thus unable to find positive solutions (Bandura, 1982).

Unless teachers believe they can have an impact on the classroom climate, and subsequently on the prosocial behaviors of their students, they will not be motivated to engage in activities to that end. Yet if they believe they have the ability to enact change through their actions, they will engage in that behavior (Bandura, 1999). Self-efficacy also plays a role in the student experience. When children feel successful in managing their behavior and self-regulation, they have higher self-efficacy and can envision themselves being successful. Many children, especially in at-risk environments, have few successes upon which to reflect, and struggle to envision themselves making positive choices. As Bandura (1977) suggests, when adults, in this case teachers, model positive strategies for self-regulation, the students have a

place to start. Additionally, the teachers themselves may use mindfulness practice to shift their perceptions of the children who previously challenged them.

Influences of Attachment Theory

The relationship between preschool teachers and their students is the foundation for classroom climate. Ainsworth and Bell (1970) were among the first to put Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory into perspective with research-based evidence. While this work focused primarily on the parent-child attachment, it led to an understanding that attachment is an emotional relationship based on a need to be near others who are kind, compassionate and positive (Ahmad & Sahak, 2009). The bridge to student-teacher attachment is a natural one. Many times, the teacher may be the only adult a young child feels safe with and loved by (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Additionally, the theory of attachment does not propose that only one adult fills the need for attachment. In fact, it may be several adults in a child's life. The empirical work on parent-child attachment was the foundation for future research on the student-teacher relationship and offers the basis for attachment related to a child's early experiences with not just parents, but other adult caregivers (Pianta, Hamre & Stuhlman, 2003; Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

All children develop relationships that involve attachment. The degree to which a child attaches to an adult will depend on the amount and quality of interaction with the adult (Krstić, 2015). Teacher-student attachment plays two roles in the classroom. First, attachment allows the child to feel safe and secure, which in turn allows for a conducive learning environment (Krstić, 2015). Second, attachment is the foundation for developing social and emotional competence in young children (Krstić, 2015). Bretherton (1985) argued that teacher-student attachment may serve as a "secure base" for a child to explore and learn in much the same way parent-child attachment serves as a foundation for emotional security (Krstić, 2015).

Teachers who have a more avoidant attachment style and are dismissive may struggle to notice their unintentional insensitivity or lack of warmth in their interactions with students and its impact on their students (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004; Ahmad & Sahak, 2009). This impact was identified in a study of 242 elementary school teachers in which they were given a series of questionnaires to determine the level of attachment with their students and the subsequent impact on their teaching and on the students (Ahmad & Sahak, 2009). While the primary aim of the study was to determine the relationship between attachment and teacher job satisfaction, the authors suggested that positive teacher-student attachment can be helpful in building a student's self-esteem.

Awareness of one's own attachment style and "triggers" of a negative reaction to a situation is essential for teachers to successfully and intentionally support their students. Adult reaction to an event, situation or another person is often premature, reactive, and based on certain biases (Singh et al., 2013). Shenpa, or the practice of getting caught up in a moment, ultimately leads to a behavior based on that emotion (Chödrön, 2010; Singh et al., 2013; Kongtrül, 2008). Recognizing those triggers and understanding their origins is a first step in shaping one's reaction to them.

Teacher Perception and Poverty

Research suggests that teacher perceptions of a student based on socioeconomic status had a significant effect on student performance, not only in that classroom but also in classrooms for years to come (de Boer et al., 2010). Students in early learning classrooms located in communities where poverty is prevalent are certainly faced with these very dynamics. Conversely, positive teacher bias tended to show higher performance in subsequent years for those students (de Boer et al., 2010). Therefore, the researcher hypothesizes that if teacher

perceptions were improved through mindfulness instruction strategies, students may also realize those benefits.

The critical role of the teacher and teacher perception is quite evident. The preschool teachers participating in this study were serving children and families whose income was at or below 300% of the federal poverty guidelines (Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2017). The reality of the teaching profession is that more white, middle-class teachers are in classrooms where the students are much more diverse culturally, socio-economically, and linguistically than the teachers (Mundy & Leko, 2015). Recent research explored the knowledge of 30 preservice teachers on issues related to poverty and found that, while the majority of teachers had some basic understanding of poverty and the issues their students and their families face, they were missing the intricate understanding of how those issues would directly affect the students or their academic and school success (Mundy & Leko, 2015).

As mentioned, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identified five competencies at the heart of social-emotional learning and self-awareness may be one of the most influential in terms of teacher development (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013; CASEL, 2013b). In terms of teacher perception and poverty, social awareness is the one social-emotional skill most relevant in effecting teacher development. CASEL defines social awareness as “the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports” (CASEL, 2013b; Dorman, 2015, p. 106).

In a longitudinal, action research study, 149 preservice teachers participated in mindfulness practices in their college classroom and reported that the practice influenced their social awareness and brought awareness about the lives of others (Dorman, 2015). In the study,

one preservice teacher stated, “I am going to have a relationship with my students and I need to have compassion for their problems. These exercises help me to develop this empathy and enlightenment” (Dorman, 2015, p. 113). As this study sought to answer the question whether training in and the practice of mindfulness would change early childhood teacher perceptions of and responses to student behaviors in classrooms in high poverty communities, the empirical evidence to date sets the foundation for additional supportive data.

Furthermore, student-teacher interactions affect how students feel about and behave in school and can yield social and academic imbalances (Kenyatta, 2012). Despite similar academic ability, students with lower socio-economic status (SES) are often perceived by their teachers as less proficient than peers with higher SES (Kenyatta, 2012). This imbalance of perception and relationship sets the stage for an unhealthy and unproductive classroom climate. In a field study of 409 students, participants were instructed using a five-week mindfulness curriculum, and teachers reported improved student attention, self-control, caring and respect for others (Black & Fernando, 2014). Where there is increased calm, caring, and respect, there are more opportunities for teachers to explore their own social-emotional skills and improve the learning experience for both their students and themselves.

Second only to parents, teachers are touted as role models for young children and have a profound impact on their attitudes and outlooks (Ahmad & Sahak, 2009; Rose, 2005). Whether intentional or not, a teacher’s social-emotional skills are observed by students every day (Jones et al., 2013). Students pay close attention to how a teacher manages frustration, maintains classroom control, and stays focused (Jones, et al., 2013). A teacher’s social and emotional competence is often an afterthought in teacher preparation programs and in professional development opportunities (Jones et al., 2013). The social-emotional skills of a teacher can

influence students in several ways, but most significantly, they can influence the teacher-student relationship and the teacher's classroom management, which together directly affect the student (Jones et al., 2013).

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a practice of learning to focus our attention on our experiences as they are occurring, with curiosity and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Instead of placing judgment on what is happening or might happen, mindfulness teaches us to respond to the moment in time, and to pay close attention to thoughts and emotions associated with that event (Weare, 2014). This process, if practiced regularly, has the potential to help one recognize one's responses to certain emotions and accept what is as a temporary place; one that will fade just as it appeared.

Researchers (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006) suggest that there are three axioms of mindfulness: intentionality, attention, and attitude (non-judgmental). They theorize these axioms lead to a shift in perspective they have termed "reperceiving," which can lead to positive change and outcomes. A main component of mindfulness practice is a focus on one's breath (Napoli, Krech & Holley, 2005). Mindfulness instruction for teachers has the potential to positively impact interactions between teachers and students (Singh et al., 2013). While the study did not report an increase in positive social interactions, it did find there were fewer negative interactions. Meiklejohn and colleagues (2012) conducted a review of mindfulness programs and noted that an emphasis on increasing teacher well-being reduced teacher stress and improved classroom management strategies.

The Dalai Lama (2002) discusses the mental transformation of the individual practicing mindfulness and suggests that, in the case of a teacher, the transformation of behavior is interdependent with the student's behavior. Recent research (Singh et al., 2013) used a multiple-

baseline design with three preschool teachers to determine the effect on the behavior of their students. The teachers were provided with weekly two-hour trainings on mindfulness practices over an eight-week period. They were also instructed on how to apply their skills in their interactions with the students. The findings of informal teacher interviews, conducted to identify their experiences and perceived outcomes, indicated positive change in several key areas. The data strongly supported the notion that the mindfulness practices with teachers coincided with fewer occurrences of negative behaviors in the students, and that providing teachers with mindfulness instruction changes student behavior (Singh, et al., 2013). While the number of participants in the study was small, which the authors recognize as a limitation, the strength of the study is that it provides data on the potential positive impact mindfulness instruction can have on teachers and their students.

Teaching young children considered at-risk for school failure carries with it high levels of stress. Additionally, preschool teachers are traditionally low-paid, adding to their stress. These variables can impact a teacher's ability to be responsive to students and effective in classrooms (Flook et al., 2013). People who practice mindfulness on a consistent basis report that they incrementally learn to focus and accept their experiences in a more reflective manner and a less judgmental way (Weare, 2014).

The number of studies around mindfulness and young children is increasing as the concept becomes more mainstream. A meta-analysis of mindfulness in schools with young children concluded that mindfulness has an impact at all levels of instruction, with an entire school as well as with targeted groups like teachers or students (Zoogman, et al., 2014). While the frequency of research continues to grow, many in the field caution that teachers and staff should learn and embrace mindfulness prior to introducing it into their classrooms (Albrecht,

Albrecht & Cohen, 2012; Crane, Kuyken, Hastings, Rothwell & Williams, 2010; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Weare, 2014). The researchers contend that teachers need to be able to effectively model flexibility, non-judgment, and acceptance for the students before imparting these practices to them (Weare, 2014). A review of literature revealed several approaches to introducing mindfulness in a classroom: the indirect approach, where the teacher has a personal practice of mindfulness and carries that mindset into the classroom; the direct approach, which involves teaching the students mindfulness skills; and a combination of the two (Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

In addition to increasing empathy, compassion and social competence, mindfulness supports the development of an open, non-judgmental mind that enhances the ability to think clearly and make thoughtful decisions even when under pressure, a skill teachers certainly find valuable (Weare, 2014; Roeser et al., 2012). Teachers are often besieged with the latest tools to manage classroom climate and student behavior, but what if the tool helped the teachers themselves to see their classrooms and their students in a new and strengths-based manner?

In a recent study involving 53 teachers from public and suburban schools, participants took part in the CARE program (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education), which involved three components: emotional skills instruction, mindfulness practices, and compassion practices (Jennings et al., 2013). Results included an analysis of teacher satisfaction surveys where teachers reported improved relationships with their students, improved classroom management, and classroom climate. These results were realized without the students receiving direct mindfulness instruction.

While research on the impact of mindfulness training for adults is more accessible and robust, there are some studies supporting the notion that incorporating mindfulness practices into daily classroom routines can initiate positive behavioral and cognitive changes in children

(Schonert-Reichl, et al., 2015). In this randomized, controlled-trial study, 100 fourth and fifth grade students were introduced to a social-emotional curriculum for four months. The curriculum incorporated awareness of the senses as well as involvement in activities that promote gratitude, acts of kindness, and compassion. Both students and teachers reported improved executive functioning, measured by tools appropriate for ages four through adult, and increased prosocial behaviors in the classroom (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

Social Emotional Connections

Social-emotional learning is based on the understanding that the most meaningful learning occurs when there are supportive relationships that make learning challenging and engaging (Jones et al., 2013). Teachers who are calm and positive are more likely to be able to treat students with respect, even when students exhibit behaviors that are challenging or undesirable (Jones et al., 2013). There is evidence to suggest that attention to a teacher's social and emotional competence is more imperative now than ever before (Jones et al., 2013; Metropolitan Life Insurance, 2011). According to MetLife's Teacher Survey, half (51%) of teachers reported feeling under great stress several days a week, an increase of 15 percentage points since 1985 (Metropolitan Life Insurance, 2011).

There is an increasing level of interest in teaching social-emotional skills during the early childhood years, due in part to longitudinal research showing that the ability to self-regulate in childhood can predict success throughout life (Moffitt, Arseneault, Belsky, Dickson, Hancox, Harrington & Heckman, 2011; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger & Davidson, 2015). Developing compassion in ourselves can translate to others and, in the case of teachers, to their students. The Dalai Lama (2002, p. 5) stated, "as we become nicer human beings, our neighbors, friends, parents, and children experience less anger." If mindfulness is the path to developing one's

compassion, and that compassion can translate to those around us, an argument could be made that teachers practicing mindfulness could positively impact their students and their behaviors.

In a study with parents and teachers of children with special needs, a group inherently in need of more empathy and support, all the participants exhibited increased patience, empathy, and a reduction in stress and anxiety after completing a five-week mindfulness training program (Benn, Akiva, Arel & Roeser, 2012; Weare, 2014). These teachers were more tolerant not only of their students but of themselves. Flook and colleagues (2013) noted that mindfulness training for teachers enhanced awareness of emotions and other external stimuli. In a study using a multiple methods approach, researchers evaluated the effects of mindfulness teacher training by comparing randomly assigned teachers to a control group of teachers and concluded that the intervention increased effective teaching behavior for the treatment group (Flook et al., 2013).

Social emotional competence has a direct relation to classroom management, effective teaching practices, and teacher-student relationships (Jones et al., 2013). A positive teacher-student relationship is critical to a student's success. Teachers who are calm and positive are more likely to treat students with kindness and respect, leading to stronger relationships, which then leads to higher student academic and social achievement (Jones et al., 2013). A socially and emotionally capable teacher is the paragon for his or her students in terms of demonstrating supportive relationships, encouraging cooperation, and acting as a role model for respectful communication and behavior (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Conversely, when a teacher struggles with classroom management, the climate of that classroom degrades and students exhibit challenging behavior, which may ultimately result in the teacher resorting to reactive, negative responses and cause a vicious cycle of a disruptive classroom climate (Marzano et al., 2003). In a meta-analysis of over 100 studies, researchers found that teachers who had strong

relationships with their students reported 31% fewer behavior problems in their classrooms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Marzano et al., 2003).

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of select studies that specifically addressed teacher social-emotional competence, classroom climate, and teacher-student relationships. The authors contended that teachers with higher levels of social-emotional competence have a higher likelihood of having positive classroom management and proactive strategies. Despite the research to support social and emotional competence development in teachers, there has been little focus on providing resources on it; perhaps assumptions are being made that teachers are inherently skilled in social and emotional competence (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

While having a strong relationship with a teacher is important for student success at any age, it is more impactful at the younger ages, when those relationships may set the precedent for future student-teacher relationships (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Social-emotional learning is based on the premise that the most meaningful learning occurs when there are caring relationships that make learning challenging and interesting (Jones et al., 2013). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identified five competencies of social-emotional learning. For the purposes of this study, the researcher has chosen to focus on three of them: self-awareness, self-management, and relationship skills (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013).

Executive Function and Brain Development

Mindfulness practice improves attention as well as executive functioning skills by bringing awareness to a particular stimuli, event, or feeling, such as the breath or a specific emotion (Flook, et al, 2015). In terms of brain development that occurs when mindfulness

practices are routine, research found a positive association between mindfulness frequency and gray matter volume in the amygdala, an area known to effect self-regulation (Murakami, Nakao, Matsunaga, Kasuya, Shinoda, Yamada & Siegel, 2012). Research suggests that mindfulness practices enhance neural plasticity, which translates to prosocial behaviors and school success (Weng, Fox, Shackman, Stodola, Caldwell, Olson & Davidson, 2013; Flook et al., 2015). Research in the fields of neuroscience, medicine, and psychology with adults provide convincing evidence that teachers can realize positive outcomes from the practice of mindfulness (Singh et al., 2013).

Focused reactions in areas of the brain that regulate attention, empathy, and other positive emotions can be linked to mindfulness, and have the potential to positively effect a teacher's ability to self-regulate reactions to students and their behaviors (Flook et al., 2013). In a recent study, researchers investigated the effects of an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction training with 32 participants (Kilpatrick, Suyenobu, Smith, Bueller, Goodman, Creswell, & ... Naliboff, 2011). Using data from MRI scans, researchers concluded that meditation-related changes in specific regions of the brain had increased connectivity within sensory networks in the brain and between areas of the brain associated with attention (Kilpatrick et al., 2011).

While the flexibility and malleability of a young child's brain has been common knowledge for some time, recent innovations in neuroscience reveal that the ability to positively alter the structure and function of the brain does not stop at childhood (Weare, 2014). Just as positive nurturing interactions build neural connections in young children, mindfulness appears to increase the density of neural connections in adults (Davidson & Lutz, 2008; Weare, 2014; Hölzel, Carmody, Vangel, Congleton, Yerramsetti, Gard & Lazar, 2011). While the most profound changes in the brain were seen in those participants who had been practicing

mindfulness long term, those who practiced shorter mindfulness interventions also showed evidence of positive impacts on the brain (Hölzel et al., 2011; Weare, 2014).

In a study of 17 participants who attended eight weekly mindfulness-based stress reduction meetings over the course of six weeks, the results demonstrated long-term changes in brain gray matter, specifically the hippocampus, an area known to regulate emotion (Hölzel et al., 2011). Similarly, researchers reported in a study of 32 women who participated in an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction training that participants experienced enhanced sensory processing and improved attention (Kilpatrick et al., 2011). Finally, the ability to regulate emotion is a key social-emotional competency for teachers working with young children. It is when teachers are pushed to their emotional limits that they find themselves reacting from a place of instinct rather than a place of compassion. Each of these findings has positive implications for teachers as they investigate new ways to improve their learning environments and their own behaviors in the classroom.

Summary

According to a report by the Raikes Foundation (2011), children with strong social-emotional learning (SEL) skills excel in school, not just socially, but academically, which supports the notion that SEL programs are critical to addressing those skills for student success (Social Development Research, 2011). Unless teachers believe they can have an impact on the classroom climate, and subsequently on the prosocial behaviors of their students, they will not be motivated to engage in activities to that end. Yet if they trust that they have the ability to create change through their actions, they will engage in that behavior (Bandura, 1999).

As discussed in this chapter, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasizes the interaction between the developing person and the environment and describes development as a change in

the way a person perceives and responds to their surroundings over time. The attention to perception in his definition is integral for the connection to mindfulness instruction. As children develop social-emotional understanding and skill, influences from their environment and their perceptions of that environment have the continuing potential to shape their development. The teacher is surely an integral component of the classroom environment. What is striking about Bronfenbrenner's theory of development is the implication that "what matters in terms of behavior and development is the environment as it is *perceived*, rather than as it may exist in reality" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This concept has significant impact when researching teacher's perceptions of their students, their classroom climate and their self-efficacy.

Marrying learning theory with neuroscience only strengthens the justification for inquiry into the effects of mindfulness in early learning classrooms. Concentrated and increased reactions in areas of the brain that regulate attention, empathy, and other positive emotions can be linked to mindfulness, and have potential to positively effect a teacher's ability to regulate reactions to students and their behaviors (Flook et al., 2013). The prospect of these positive effects translating to improved teaching and student-teacher relationships is promising.

Mindfulness practice has the potential to provide teachers with a valuable social-emotional learning tool that may positively impact the lives of their young students. In a national survey of teachers, the results indicate that four out of five educators were interested in professional development around SEL, yet only 50% of those teachers actually received SEL training (Bridgeland, et al., 2013).

Research suggests that teacher perceptions of students based on socioeconomic status had a significant effect on student performance, not only in that classroom but also in classrooms for years to come (de Boer et al., 2010). Students in early learning classrooms located in

communities where poverty is prevalent are certainly faced with these very dynamics. Conversely, positive teacher bias tended to show higher performance in subsequent years for those students (de Boer et al., 2010). Therefore, an assumption can be made that if teacher perceptions were improved through mindfulness instruction strategies, students would also realize those benefits.

The purpose of this case study was to explore the impact mindfulness instruction and practice had on an early childhood teacher's perception of classroom climate, student interaction and self-efficacy when working in communities where poverty is prevalent. The study examines beliefs and perceptions of the preschool teachers around the usefulness of mindfulness practices and the effects they feel it may or may not have had on their teaching practices. The review of empirical literature, learning theory, neuroscience, and mindfulness impacts offers a firm foundation for this dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative case study investigated the impact mindfulness instruction and practice may have on early childhood teachers' perceptions, specifically about classroom climate, the student interactions and behaviors, and of the belief in their ability to positively impact their students and the learning environment. An analysis of the data was conducted to gain a deep understanding of teachers' experiences with mindfulness and the impacts it may have on their teaching practices. This chapter will describe the qualitative methods utilized to answer the research questions.

The first section of this chapter provides a brief overview of the recent research on mindfulness and its impacts. The following three sections provide a review of the problem statement, the purpose of this study, and the research questions. In the fifth section, the researcher offers a rationale for use of qualitative methods in this dissertation to answer the three research questions. The study setting, as well as participant identification and selection methods, are described in the sixth section. An explanation of the procedures and data collection methods follows, with details of the use of the interviews, teacher journals, and classroom observations conducted by the researcher. Subsequently, data analysis procedures are delineated and described. The researcher identifies assumptions and limitations surrounding the research and, finally, discusses how credibility and validity were established and maintained.

Review of Relevant Research

Mindfulness has only recently emerged as a promising practice in early childhood education. The number of research studies focused on mindfulness and young children is

increasing as the concept becomes more mainstream. Zoogman and colleagues (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of mindfulness implementation in schools with young children and concluded that mindfulness has an impact at both a school-wide level and with targeted populations of students or teachers. In a recent study involving 53 teachers, researchers reported improved relationships with students after the teachers completed a mindfulness instruction program, even when the students themselves did not receive any instruction (Jennings et al., 2013). Mindfulness practice has been found to increase empathy, compassion, and social competence, and supports the development of a non-judgmental mind (Weare, 2014; Roeser et al., 2012). Given the interpersonal and intrapersonal nature of teaching, a teacher's social and emotional competence must be considered and supported (Lowe et al., 2013).

A recent study found that teachers' social and emotional competencies may affect their ability to develop and sustain positive classroom climate and respectful relationships with students when there are challenges in the classroom (Jennings, et al., 2013). In order for young children to learn appropriate social and emotional skills, they must have effective and positive role models from whom to learn. This case study sought to identify whether supporting early childhood educators' social and emotional competencies through mindfulness practice would positively impact the classroom environments and relationships with their students.

The Problem

Young children in poverty are especially vulnerable in classrooms lacking a positive and supportive climate fostered by an empathetic and compassionate teacher (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Because these students may be experiencing systemic stress outside the classroom, their need for compassion from others is high. Teachers who work to develop their capacity for compassion may have a positive impact on their students as they model positive social and

emotional skills. A teacher's own social and emotional competence plays a critical role in the success of all students, but especially those in classrooms where poverty is prevalent (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The rate of expulsions in prekindergarten classrooms across the United States quantifies this social crisis. Many times, children from these vulnerable communities attend publicly funded prekindergarten classrooms. The rate of expulsion from publicly funded prekindergarten programs, based on behavior, was reported at one out of every 40 children in a study by Gilliam & Shahar (2006). These statistics are notably higher and disproportionate to K-12 expulsions. Experts suggest that expulsions are high because these programs often have fewer infrastructures to support the teachers and staff than that of their public school counterparts and other more formalized early education programs, like Head Start (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The fact that the numbers are disproportionately higher for preschool boys and children of color suggests teachers' beliefs about their students may be a contributing factor (Samuels, 2014; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014; Gilliam, 2008; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006).

The empirical evidence is scarce in the early childhood sector regarding the reasons for these disparities; however, research in the public school setting indicates similar disparities and identifies potential root causes (American Psychological Association, 2008; Gregory, et al., 2010; Skiba, et al., 2011; Lamont, et al., 2013). Most notably, the research found that the schools were lacking resources and had deficient education and training for teachers, specifically in self-reflective strategies that may aide in identifying and rectifying potential biases in teacher perceptions and classroom practices.

These biases can have a lasting impact on young students. Teacher perceptions of a student based on socioeconomic status can have significant and lasting effect on student performance (de Boer et al., 2010). Students in early learning classrooms located in communities where poverty is prevalent are certainly faced with these very dynamics. Conversely, positive teacher bias tended to show higher performance in subsequent years for those students (de Boer et al., 2010). Therefore, a hypothesis can be made that if teacher perceptions were improved through mindfulness instruction strategies, students may also realize those benefits.

One strategy for teachers to develop their own social and emotional competence is mindfulness. Mindfulness practices are associated with increased compassion and empathy for others (Jennings, et al., 2013). Mindfulness has the potential to serve as one of many possible supports to teachers. Mindfulness can have an impact both at a school-wide level and with targeted populations like students or teachers (Zoogman, et al., 2014). One study suggests that teachers experience improved relationships with their students after completing a mindfulness instruction program even when the students themselves did not receive any mindfulness instruction (Jennings et al., 2013).

Mindfulness been found to increase empathy, compassion, and social competence, and supports the development of a non-judgmental mind (Weare, 2014; Roeser et al., 2012). If mindfulness is the path to developing one's compassion, it follows that teachers practicing mindfulness could positively impact their students, their classroom climate, and their own feelings of success. Given the interpersonal and intrapersonal nature of teaching, a teacher's social and emotional competence must be considered and supported to help grow compassionate and equitable classrooms (Lowe, et al., 2013).

Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to explore the impact mindfulness instruction and practice had on an early childhood teacher's perception of classroom climate, student interaction, and self-efficacy when working in communities where poverty is prevalent. In answering the study's research questions, the researcher aims to understand early childhood teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the usefulness of mindfulness practice on their personal teaching philosophies. Additionally, the researcher sought to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences with mindfulness and any challenges they encountered.

Research Questions

The research questions below served as a guide for this case study where qualitative data were collected and analyzed. The research questions were:

1. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of the classroom climate in communities where poverty is prevalent?
2. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of and response to student interactions in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?
3. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of self-efficacy in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?

Methods and Rationale

Case study research can be used to understand a real-life phenomenon in-depth, in direct relation to the context in which the researcher is studying (Yin, 2009; Yin & Davis, 2007). While there are several epistemological frameworks describing the perspective from which a researcher explores the data in a study, this qualitative case study is basic, interpretive research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is intended to delve into and understand how people decipher their own

experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In terms of this case study, because it was a small case and the researcher sought to gain a deep understanding of the participant experience, case study methodology was the most beneficial (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2003). Additionally, this case study includes an intervention hypothesized to have some specific positive outcomes, yet the possibility of other outcomes was unknown. Therefore, this case study methodology was used to “enlighten” the researcher in situations where the intervention has no clear, single set of outcomes (Yin, 2009).

A case study strategy was most appropriate for this research because the focus was on understanding the classroom dynamics and teacher perceptions within a very particular setting, one in which all students qualified for state-funded prekindergarten due to family income level in an inner-city school district (Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989). Teachers’ beliefs, emotional wellness and self-efficacy could have implications for school districts, students, families and the economy. Additionally, this research is intrinsic in nature, in that the researcher has a vested interest in the case study as an early childhood educator and professional for over 25 years; teacher efficacy and emotional well-being are of the utmost importance (Stake, 1995).

When the data from a study are words rather than numbers, and the findings are based on the interpretation and triangulation of those words, the study is inherently qualitative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Clarke & Braun, 2013). In this qualitative case study, the participants’ descriptions based on the context of their experiences, and what meaning they place on those experiences, provide an intimate understanding of the data and allow the researcher to better understand the participant’s perceptions and to conduct valuable observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2003). Insight and understanding of a phenomenon can be obtained most effectively through analysis and interpretation of how people act, feel, and think (Simons, 2009). The researcher

values the perspectives from multiple participants as well as the naturally occurring experiences each participant encounters, making the case study method most advantageous (Simons, 2009).

Case study methodology is especially useful when describing, documenting, and interpreting events as they occur in real-life, and can help to identify factors that were instrumental in the implementation of a program (Simons, 2009). The researcher's aim was to identify factors in this case study that might positively impact a teacher's ability to use mindfulness as a strategy to improve classroom climate and feelings of success.

Setting

The case study began in the fall of 2016 and continued through the 2016-2017 school year in a large, inner-city school district in the northeastern U.S., ending in May 2017. The district operates 20 prekindergarten classrooms within their district buildings and 20 classrooms in child care locations throughout the community. The district is home to over 86% non-white students, where 87.73% of families are considered economically disadvantaged (Pennsylvania School Performance Profile, 2016). Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts is a state-funded program that allows for children whose family income is at or below 300% of the federal poverty level to attend a quality, full day, prekindergarten program. The school district serves over 400 Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts families and their children. The school district regularly offered mindfulness instruction for teachers and students in higher grade levels, but had not previously done so for prekindergarten teachers. Prior to the start of the school year, the district administration surveyed their teachers to assess level of interest in a series of mindfulness trainings. Once the results were obtained, the coordinator received approval from the Superintendent's office to offer the *Wellness Works in Schools* program, a mindfulness program

for educators, to Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts teachers. Because the prekindergarten teachers were able to participate in those trainings, they were eligible to participate in this study.

Wellness Works in Schools

The school district offered the mindfulness instruction through a program called *Wellness Work in Schools*. *Wellness Works in Schools* was created in 2001 by Kinder Associates, LLC. It is a program based on mindfulness principles and practices. The program supports schools in responding to challenges like disruptive classroom climate and teacher stress by helping students develop self-regulation, compassion, and focus. Over the years they have reached over 8,000 students and 1,200 classroom teachers. Research on the Wellness Works program was conducted by Cheryl Desmond, PhD, on the effectiveness of a school-based program of mindful awareness (*Wellness Works in Schools*TM). The findings strongly supported the positive effects mindfulness instruction had on student social behaviors (Desmond, 2009). All Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts teachers were able to participate in the four professional development courses (three hours each) offered by *Wellness Works*, over the course of the school year. The researcher explained to the potential participants that attendance in these sessions was an integral part of participation in the study and the seven participating teachers consented to that.

Participants

Sampling Procedure

Purposeful sampling of the participants assists the researcher in understanding the phenomenon more fully (Creswell, 2014). The following steps were taken in sampling prospective participants:

- After approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board, the researcher contacted a school district coordinator where Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts was being offered to

students in their community and made a formal request to reach out to the Pre-K Counts teachers. The researcher obtained the appropriate site permission to conduct the study within the district-offered prekindergarten classrooms. In a meeting with all prekindergarten teachers, the researcher provided the potential research subjects with an overview of the study as well as a formal, detailed letter (Appendix E) explaining the study and participation requirements. Any questions about the study or about voluntary participation were addressed at that time.

- Once the researcher left the premises, interested teachers were able to complete an informed consent form (Appendix F) and leave it in a secure, discreet location where their involvement in the study would not be known to any person of authority. The envelope was then retrieved by a third party with no connection to the district or the study and delivered to the researcher. Seven of the 40 teachers provided their consent to participate in the study.
- The researcher completed a contact log tracking the submission and communication with each participant.

Teacher Participants

The researcher was able to conduct a single-stage sampling because she had access to Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts teachers working in communities where poverty was prevalent (Creswell, 2009). The teachers working within the prekindergarten classrooms all possessed early childhood education (ECE) certification under the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Their experience ranged from a 2 ½ -year novice teacher to a veteran teacher with 15 years of experience. There was a considerable time commitment for teachers who consented to participate in the study. All prekindergarten teachers (N= 40) were given an in-depth description of the

study and its requirements. There was a possibility that some teachers had concerns about being observed or about the time required to complete the journal. After an initial call for volunteers, the researcher offered consenting participants mindfulness resources, including a book specifically for teachers implementing mindfulness, a book of mindful games for students, as well as a CD with mindful activities and music. Seven teachers provided consent forms to participate. This small population afforded the researcher an opportunity to engage in a more in-depth data collection and analysis. All participating teachers were female. A demographic breakdown of the teachers follows in Table 1. For confidentiality purposes, the researcher coded participants throughout the study and maintained a secure, password-protected location where those codes could not be accessed by any person.

Table 1

Teacher Demographics

Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	Education Level
T1	Female	5 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T2	Female	2 ½ years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T3	Female	10 years	BS El. Ed, N-3 Certification
T4	Female	3 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T5	Female	15 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T6	Female	8 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T7	Female	2 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification

Data Collection

The researcher employed triangulation strategies by gathering data from teacher journals, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. In addition to the triangulated data collection, the researcher maintained both a detailed communication log and a personal journal during the study to ensure a rich description of the phenomenon. Comparing multiple data sets for similarities and themes can increase internal validity and credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tellis, 1997; Stake, 1995). The methods, instrumentation, and procedures used to triangulate the data are described in detail in the following sections.

Stage One

After approval was granted by the Institutional Review Board, the researcher attended the district in-service day where teachers had begun their mindfulness sessions. At that point, the study and its requirements for participation were described in detail. The researcher disseminated the consent forms along with the study description. The researcher left the premises and instructed any interested teachers to leave the signed form with a person who had no connection to the study and no authority over the teachers. The teachers submitted their consent forms and the researcher emailed all participants with instructions for journal entry. A copy of an electronic journal was provided (Appendix A). The journals provided reflection prompts as well as areas for personal reflections. The researcher emailed participants three times throughout the school year to remind them of the journaling process and offer mindfulness resources.

Stage Two

The researcher began scheduling dates for classroom observations through email correspondence individually with each teacher. Once classroom observations were scheduled, the researcher conducted observations for a period of three hours during a mutually agreed upon

time. Observations were discrete and involved neither evaluation of the teachers nor behavior of the children. All protocols of confidentiality were followed. The researcher remained as unobtrusive as possible during the observation. Participants were provided with a copy of the observation rubric before the visit, out of professional courtesy.

Stage Three

After each observation, the researcher contacted each participant the next day and scheduled semi-structured interviews. The interviews typically took place three to four weeks after the observation. Prior to the interview, participants were provided with a copy of the interview protocol (Appendix D). During the interview, the researcher read the instructions and reiterated the confidential nature of the conversation. The interview was recorded with an electronic recording device and participant names were coded. The researcher also took notes during the interview. All participant comments were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and later shared with each participant. Finally, the researcher collected all teacher journals and provided each participant with resources to continue their investigation of mindfulness.

Instrumentation

In order to ensure a triangulated approach, the researcher utilized several instruments for data collection. They included teacher journals, classroom observation notes and teacher interviews. The procedures followed with each instrument are detailed in the following sections.

Teacher Journaling

Reflective thinking and journaling in the context of teaching has been defined as “an inner dialogue with oneself where a person calls up their own experiences, beliefs, and perceptions about an idea” (Lowe et al., 2013; Campbell-Jones & Campbell-Jones, 2002). Journals can provide teachers with personal and documented evidence of professional growth

around a particular skill or disposition (Lowe et al., 2013). A key component of mindfulness is the ability to be reflective. Given the interpersonal and intrapersonal nature of teaching, having the ability to dissect one's own practices and beliefs is essential (Lowe et al., 2013). The journals in this study provided rich, detailed descriptions about the participating teachers' experiences in the classroom and shed some light on their insights about challenges, coping strategies used, and even transformation of their belief systems (Lowe et al., 2013).

Journal Procedures

All participants were asked to record in their journals at least once per week and continue until March 10, 2017 (approximately 16 weeks). Teachers were provided with prompts each week to facilitate their reflections. The prompts were developed by the researcher based on the research questions as well as research that reported specific findings around the impact of mindfulness (Weare, 2014; Zoogman, et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2013; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Albrecht et al., 2012).

The goal of the journaling was to capture teacher beliefs about classroom climate, student interactions and teacher self-efficacy over the course of the study. Participants were instructed not to include specific names or descriptions of students or adults in order to ensure confidentiality protocol. Teachers were given the option of using an electronic journal that was emailed to all participants or printing the document and handwriting their notes. Five teachers used the electronic version. Two teachers used a combination of electronic and handwritten notes. All journals were emailed to the researcher at the conclusion of the study. The researcher used a secure, password-protected email address. As teachers emailed journals to the researcher, the name of the teacher was coded and stored in a secure electronic folder on the researcher's

personal computer. All references to specific classrooms, teachers or students were removed from the transcripts by the researcher.

Researcher Field/Classroom Observations

The classroom observations conducted by the researcher provided the multiple perspectives needed in a case study to strengthen the validity. Additionally, the observations allowed the researcher to make comparisons between the interview data and the teacher journals. The researcher utilized observation as a means of seeing things in the classroom that may have become routine to the teacher and perhaps was not captured in the interview but may have some significance in the context of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through observation, the researcher was able to record behaviors as they were happening and give context to the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher used the observation data as a reference point for subsequent interviews. In several observations, the researcher observed a phenomenon that could have different interpretations. The interview allowed the researcher to “anchor” some questions around that particular phenomenon to gain greater understanding of what the teacher was thinking or feeling at that time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Observation Procedures

In this case study, the researcher reiterated to the teacher participants that the observations were collaborative in nature and meant to be positive rather than evaluative. Observations lasted approximately three hours in each classroom during times when teacher-student interactions were more likely to occur. Naptime was avoided. The researcher was unobtrusive and had minimal interaction with the students or the teacher during the observation.

The observation framework (Appendix B) was developed by the researcher based on documented research involving mindful behaviors and characteristics (Benn et al., 2012; Brown

& Kasser, 2005; Singh et al., 2013; Southerland & Oswald, 2005; Weare, 2014; Zoogman et al., 2014). The researcher listed observable behaviors and characteristics linked to mindfulness that could be looked for and listened for during the observation.

The observations were scheduled in advance to allow the teachers to plan for the visit. Upon arriving in the classroom, the researcher reminded the teacher that the observation was non-evaluative and meant to observe mindfulness strategies and impact in real-time. The completed observation framework provided the researcher with an objective measure of characteristics and behaviors one might find in a classroom where the teacher is more “mindful.” The researcher took the stance of “observer as participant” during the observations, because the act of observing was known to the teachers and others in the classroom, and, while the researcher did not actively participate in the classroom activities, there was interaction between the teacher and researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Field notes taken during the observations allowed the researcher to get a sense of classroom climate, student interactions with one another as well as teacher-student interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Aggregating the field notes with the observation framework enabled the researcher to use a rich, thick description of findings that allows the reader to experience an element of shared experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Utilizing several types of questions in an interview can elicit valuable descriptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study’s interview protocol included questions about background/demographics, experience and behavior, feeling, sensory, and opinion questions. The questions are described in the following section.

The interviews began with background and demographics questions to establish years of experience and educational background of teachers. Experience questions reveal the behaviors or actions of the interviewee (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, “Reflect for me on your personal and professional experience with the mindfulness training this year.” Feeling questions allow a researcher to access the affective components of a participant’s experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, “Do you feel you are successful as a prekindergarten teacher? Why or why not?”

Sensory questions prompt a participant to talk about what they have seen or heard (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). An example from this study is “What comments/reactions regarding your students’ social-emotional skills have you heard from parents, other teachers, or visitors before, during or after mindfulness instruction?” Finally, opinion questions are designed to gain a deeper understanding of what a participant believes about something (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, “To what extent do you think prekindergarten teachers play a role in guiding the social-emotional development of their students?” All interviews concluded with the researcher asking whether the teacher wanted to share anything that was not covered in the interview. Two teachers added comments about the obstacles they encountered as they worked to incorporate mindfulness into their daily routines.

Interview Questions

Interview questions yielded data regarding teacher participants’ background, demographics, experience through behavior, feeling, sensory, and opinion questions. The interview protocol (Appendix D) was organized by research question topics to guide the discussion. The questions were developed based on selected research studies with specific

findings about the impact around mindfulness (Weare, 2014; Zoogman et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2013; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Albrecht et al., 2012).

Validation Study: Validating Interview Questions

After obtaining necessary permissions from the Institutional Review Board, the researcher approached ten early childhood experts to review the interview questions in order to determine appropriateness, clarity, and succinctness. An expert in the field was considered to be any person with five or more years teaching in an early childhood classroom and at minimum a master's degree in early childhood education or related field. Current early childhood teachers and administrators received an informational letter from the researcher detailing the purpose of the study as well as a copy of the draft interview protocol (Appendix C). The letter included directions for providing a response to the researcher on specific matters needing clarity and/or the need to edit or remove a question. Additionally, the letter explained the need for a review of the interview protocol by a panel of experts. Four early childhood professionals who met the expectations to be qualified as experts, returned the interview questions with their contact information and interview protocol feedback. These four participants served as the expert panel.

When asked whether they felt the research questions were appropriate for early childhood educators, all four experts agreed that they were. Two experts made recommendations for rewording two questions to elicit more open-ended answers. The researcher reviewed all feedback, made revisions, and eliminated some questions based on continued communication with the panel until all questions were agreed upon by all panel members.

Interview Procedures

The interviews were scheduled at the teachers' convenience at their place of employment, either in their classroom or in a room in their school building. They occurred three to four weeks

after the observation. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. The semi-structured interviews with participants provided the researcher with in-depth information pertaining to teacher perception and beliefs. The researcher used a semi-structured, open-ended approach to interviewing the teachers. This approach facilitated a comfortable interaction between the researcher and the participant because it allowed the researcher to ask clarifying questions about something a teacher said or something they may have been feeling.

The face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to capitalize on non-verbal communications like gestures, facial expressions, and body language. The interview questions remained consistent across all participants and the responses were recorded verbatim with the participants' permission, to achieve trustworthy data (Creswell, 2014; Eisner, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the researcher encouraged open discussion if a topic warranted further inquiry. Additionally, the researcher considered the classroom observation with each teacher prior to the interviews. If a situation occurred during the observation in which the researcher was unsure of the teacher's feelings or intent, a question may have been added to the interview protocol to help in clarifying that scenario. Comparisons between the interviews were made to uncover similarities and differences among each teacher's context, thus improving the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, in order to determine the accuracy of the findings, the researcher conducted a voluntary member check by emailing participants their transcribed interview notes and classroom observation notes asking for verification of accuracy (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 1995). They were invited to read the notes, comment, and make edits to any text they felt was not an accurate representation of their intent. The researcher received three responses from the seven participating teachers. In all three responses, the teachers indicated that no edits were necessary

and that the transcriptions and observations were reflective of their opinions and feelings. The low response may have been due to the timing of the request, which came near the start of summer. Teachers may have been out of school for the summer or unavailable.

Researcher Communication Log and Journal

As a means of improving reliability and credibility during the data collection and data analysis process, the researcher kept two additional forms of written data, a detailed communication log, and a personal journal. For researchers to determine if their approaches to data collection and analysis are reliable, they should document the procedures of the case study with as many of the steps followed as possible (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009). The personal journal documented any event that involved entering the research locations, and were reviewed to ascertain whether any significant similarities or unforeseen relationships occurred. The journal also documented any insights the researcher may have had or questions that arose during interviews or observations. The communication log served to track all email and phone calls between the researcher and the participants, directors, and the literacy coach who was the main point of contact during the study.

Researcher Journal Procedures

Upon completion of each observation, the researcher exited the location, found a nearby spot to sit, and documented as many details of the class as possible, so as not to forget or misrepresent the findings. The journal was also used after interviews. Again, the researcher exited the location where the interview was conducted and documented insights, thoughts on emerging themes and connections to other interview data previously collected. Journal notes were highly descriptive and organized in a manner that allowed information to be easily identified by the researcher. Additionally, the researcher included reflective commentary that

referenced researcher feelings, reactions, and initial hypotheses. These reflections set the stage for preliminary data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis

Description

Unlike quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis is an interactive process that leads a researcher to orchestrate the next phase of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher may encounter a phenomenon during a classroom observation that warrants further inquiry during the interview, which leads to a revision to the interview questions. Similarly, during an observation, a researcher may reflect on the experience and develop an initial hypothesis around the context of the study, thus guiding the researcher's interpretation of teacher journal data. Rigor in a qualitative study varies from quantitative research as well. In a quantitative study, the validity and reliability are addressed before the research begins, yet the rigor in a qualitative research design must occur throughout the study, where the researcher is deeply embedded in the interactions with participants, with the interpretations made, and with the descriptions provided (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The researcher engaged in simultaneous data collection and analysis for this study, which involved doing preliminary analysis while collecting the data as well as between data collection activities such as classroom observations and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to analyze data as they were collected, the researcher engaged in several strategies. First, the researcher adapted teacher interview questions based on previous observations to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. For example, after conducting a classroom observation, the researcher would document an instance or scenario where the feelings of the teacher or the intent

of the teacher may not have been known to the researcher. In those situations, the researcher would make a note to ask a clarifying question during the interview.

Second, the researcher included reflective comments in all data, as they were initially collected. This included memos and side notes in the observation documentation, as the observation occurred. Hunches and notable perceptions were written in the margins of interview notes and in the researcher's journal after leaving the location and finding a nearby spot to reflect and write. Initial hypotheses were highlighted in teacher journals during preliminary review. Once themes and consistencies were identified in the interview transcriptions and observation notes, the researcher sent initial interpretations to the participants through email correspondence for review and feedback.

After spending time in the field with the teachers during observations and interviews, the researcher revisited the literature surrounding mindfulness and its impact on teachers, students, and classroom climate. The real-time experiences triggered a deeper understanding of the literature. Additionally, the researcher was able to investigate and develop additional insights around mindfulness, its benefits, and its challenges. These insights helped to shape the development of the themes.

Finally, the researcher reflected during the data collection stage about the associations that existed between classroom observations and in the interviews as well as the disparities. The researcher asked herself questions like, "What did this classroom observation remind me of?" or, "When the teacher made that comment, what did it make me think of?" and, "Did that interview have a similar theme as another interview?" Once the initial collection and analysis occurred and all data were obtained, the researcher embarked on a more intensive and comprehensive analysis.

Procedures

The proposition that mindfulness practices can have positive effects on a teacher's perception of classroom climate, student interaction, and teacher efficacy was identified in numerous studies (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015; Zakrzewski, 2013; Singh et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Weare, 2012; Baer, 2003) and was the driving focus for this study. The researcher approached the organization of the data from a phenomenological lens, in that she focused on how the participants experienced the mindfulness approach. Each set of data was coded and, as themes emerged, categories were identified and finally coded into more comprehensive categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher engaged in the following steps to analyze the data:

1. The researcher approached the data from a phenomenological perspective. As data were gathered they were organized based on how participants reportedly experienced the phenomenon of mindfulness instruction and practice, and were cross-organized by research question (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
2. Next, the researcher began the procedure of open coding. This included reading through each piece of data (interview notes, observation notes, and teacher journals) and identifying patterns and insights connected to the research questions. At this point, the researcher was open to all possibilities of themes and patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2009).
3. The researcher initiated axial coding and reviewed all codes of data and grouped them into units, identifying emerging themes as they related to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

4. As each data piece was analyzed in the same manner, the researcher began to identify patterns and consistencies among and between the units. As themes became more evident and substantial, they were then categorized accordingly (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
5. With the themes in mind, the researcher revisited the original data sets and considered whether they indeed mirrored the themes developed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
6. The researcher interpreted the findings, made connections between the study findings and existing research and identified possibilities for future research.

Approaching the data collection and analysis from a comprehensive and simultaneous perspective meant the researcher kept detailed logs of each activity (interviews, observations, journal reviews). In those logs, the researcher organized notes based on the data collection at each point in time. Those notes served as an organizational tool for the subsequent in-depth analysis of each data set.

Assumptions and Limitations

Limitations

Researcher bias. Researcher bias must be accounted for when considering limitations. To address this limitation, the researcher acknowledges that she had been in the field of early childhood education for over 25 years and had personally experienced positive effects from mindfulness practice. This practice of reflexivity may help the reader understand how the researcher came to interpret these data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Generalizability. Qualitative research is not typically generalizable. First, a sample size of seven is small and, second, the classrooms in the study were specifically in an inner city, high poverty school district where the students all received state-funded prekindergarten. These circumstances certainly do not exist in every classroom or community. Therefore, the reader is

encouraged to consider whether the findings from this study could be transferred to a setting in which they wish to apply them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Lincoln and Guba,1985). The researcher's intent for this study was to provide a glimpse into a very specific situation, in a particular context, with no definitive conclusion on how the findings might be applied in another context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Cronbach, 1975).

Timing. A third limitation in this study involved timing. First, the study took place over a seven-month period. Ideally, teachers would have had more time to personally practice and embody mindfulness before implementing similar practices in their classrooms. And, second, while this study did not investigate the effects of mindfulness on the students directly, it did investigate teacher perception of classroom climate and student interaction over the course of seven months, during which time the students were inherently developing naturally. Change in perception may have been related to mindfulness, natural child development, or both. However, this limitation was lessened in that all students were the same age and generally matured at similar rates (Creswell, 2009).

Assumptions

The implications of this study rely on some assumptions. First, mindfulness is a mindset that takes time and a willingness to engage in. An assumption was made that the participating teachers would find value in the concept and practice mindfulness techniques both personally and in their classrooms. A second assumption was that the four professional development sessions that introduced mindfulness practices and techniques for participants were appropriate, informative, and valuable. Finally, an assumption was made that the participants themselves wrote the reflections in their journals and that those reflections truly represented their thoughts and feelings.

Addressing Validity and Credibility

While presenting trustworthy data and findings is important in any discipline, when the research impacts those in applied fields like education, the implications are even more profound and can impact the lives of others in meaningful ways. Therefore, the need for validity and credibility are significant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As described, this case study utilized several strategies to achieve validity and credibility. The researcher used multiple sources of data, including interviews, teacher journals, and observations as a means of triangulation. The researcher journal provided additional sources of evidence and allowed for a rich description of phenomena. Triangulation of these data mitigates any concern that the findings are based on a single source (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, the researcher conducted member checks to strengthen internal validity and credibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher provided initial analysis of the interview transcripts as well as the classroom observation notes to the participants and solicited feedback on whether the interpretations of their comments and actions by the researcher were accurate.

Three additional strategies were employed to assist in credibility and validity and were not explicitly described earlier. They included the process of rich data collection, adequate engagement, and researcher reflection, and are described in greater detail in the following sections.

Rich Data Collection

The researcher was engaged in rich data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Fusch & Ness, 2015) through analysis of teacher journals, interview notes, and observation notes. As the researcher began collecting data, the same themes were heard repeatedly from participants. Additionally, the researcher looked explicitly through the data for evidence of alternative

explanations for some assurance that the reported findings were valid and reliable. The use of reflective commentary in the researcher journal provided insight into the emerging themes throughout the collection and analysis stages of the study.

Adequate Engagement

Adequate engagement involves a level of saturation of the data because enough time was spent collecting it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the researcher spent more time collecting data and began to hear the same or similar things repeated, adequate engagement was achieved. It is important that, during this time of engagement, the researcher is also looking for data contrary to the researcher's beliefs about the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the researcher considered alternative outcomes as the data emerged and made note of those possibilities in the researcher journal.

Researcher Reflection

Through the researcher journal, reflections about the researcher's experiences, assumptions and biases were critically examined and recorded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher considered these factors in the context of the study and the impacts those factors may have on the investigation of the phenomenon.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to explore the impact mindfulness instruction and practice had on an early childhood teacher's perception of classroom climate, student interaction, and self-efficacy in when working in communities where poverty is prevalent. A review of relevant research set the foundation for this study (Weare, 2014; Zoogman et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2013). This qualitative study was used to gain a deep understanding of teachers' experiences with mindfulness and the impacts it may have had on their teaching practices.

Analysis of each teacher's reflective journaling, interviews, and classroom observations equipped the researcher with some insight into the teacher's reality to the extent possible with a human experience. While the researcher delineates limitations with the study, the steps taken to achieve validity and credibility were also outlined. Findings from this analysis are described in detail in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study was to explore the impact mindfulness instruction and practice had on an early childhood teacher's perception of classroom climate, student interaction, and self-efficacy when working in communities where poverty is prevalent. In answering the study's research questions, the researcher aimed to understand early childhood teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the usefulness of mindfulness practice on their teaching practices. Additionally, the researcher sought to gain a deeper understanding of a teacher's experience with mindfulness as well as identify any potential challenges.

The research questions below served as a guide for this case study where qualitative data were collected and analyzed. The research questions were:

1. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of the classroom climate in communities where poverty is prevalent?
2. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of and response to student interactions in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?
3. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of self-efficacy in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?

Intentions of this Study

It is important to note that during classroom observations some significant challenges did arise for teachers. In some cases, mindfulness strategies appeared to support the teacher, and those findings are discussed in this chapter in great detail. However, there were also instances when challenges were evident and those strategies were not employed. It was the intent of this study to identify when positive impacts from mindfulness did occur and investigate the

perceptions of teachers associated with those impacts. It is not the intent of this study to assess teachers or students as to whether mindfulness practices were employed, or how successful those practices might have been. Those situations are not discussed in detail in this study because the researcher approached the analysis of data from a lens through which evidence of the positive impacts of mindfulness could be found, and not an assessment of students or teachers.

Review of Analysis

Three sources of data were used to triangulate the results for this study: classroom observations, teacher interviews, and teacher journals. The researcher engaged in simultaneous data collection and analysis for this study, which involved doing some preliminary analysis while collecting the data as well as between data collection activities such as classroom observations and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to analyze data as they were being collected, the researcher engaged in several strategies. The researcher included reflective comments in all data as they were initially collected. This included memos and side notes in the observation documentation as the observation was taking place. Hunches and notable perceptions were written in the margins of interview notes and in the researcher's journal, after leaving the interview location and finding a nearby spot to reflect and write (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Mindfulness Trainings

Prior to any data collection or analysis, participating teachers attended four three-hour trainings as part of their school district professional development program. The school district offered the mindfulness instruction through a program called *Wellness Work in Schools*, which was created in 2001 by Kinder Associates LLC. This program is based on mindfulness principles and practices. The program focuses on mindfulness as a positive response to classroom stress created by challenging situations. Through mindfulness, the program assists teachers to develop

and leverage their own compassion, which in turn can help them instruct students in self-regulation, focus, and their own compassion toward others. All Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts teachers were able to participate in the four professional development courses over the course of the school year. During the sessions, participating teachers received instruction on the foundations of mindfulness as well as strategies and exercises they could use personally and in their classrooms.

The sessions included hands-on practice of mindfulness exercises, and teachers were provided with a workbook that could be referenced later as they implemented strategies in their classrooms. All participating teachers possessed Bachelor's degrees in early childhood education or related fields with teacher certification in early childhood education. The concept of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is the foundation for early childhood teacher education (Bredenkamp, 1987), and mindfulness practice seeks to align DAP with its core principle of compassionate responses to potentially chaotic and stressful situations in the classroom. Having been exposed to the basics of mindfulness through the training, the teachers were free to make choices in personal practice and classroom implementation. The following sections describe the data investigated in determining any impact those choices may have had on teacher perceptions of classroom climate, student interactions, or self-efficacy.

Classroom Observations

Teacher journaling occurred over the course of a 16-week period, beginning in December 2016 and concluding in March 2017. Classroom observations were scheduled for January 2017 and February 2017, and teacher interviews were scheduled during February 2017 and March 2017, during times that were convenient for the teachers. The timeline is detailed in Figure 2. Observations lasted approximately three hours in each classroom during times when teacher-

student interactions were more likely to occur. Naptime was avoided. The researcher was unobtrusive and had minimal interaction with the students or the teacher during the observation. The observation framework (Appendix B) was developed by the researcher based on documented research involving mindful behaviors and characteristics (Weare, 2014; Zoogman et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2013; Benn et al., 2012; Southerland & Oswald, 2005; Brown & Kasser, 2005). A summary of the criteria the researcher used for observation is shown in Figure 1. The researcher listed observable behaviors and characteristics linked to mindfulness that could be looked for and listened for during the observation. During observations, if a situation occurred during which the researcher felt more information was needed to understand the teacher's feelings or intent, a side note was made in the observation rubric and was included in the interview discussion later.

Research Based Criteria	Looked for/Listened for
<p>“Mindfulness has been shown to be helpful in building relationships and increase a sense of interpersonal closeness” (Brown & Kasser, 2005). Additionally, mindfulness training has been shown “to increase patience, empathy and forgiveness of self and others” (Benn, Akiva, Arel & Roeser (2012).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respectful interactions between teacher and student • Teacher demonstrates concern and compassion during stressful or challenging situations • When challenging situations occur, teacher remains calm • Classroom sounds active but positive
<p>“When teachers are challenged with a stressful situation, the initial instinct is automatic and reactive but when they use the “breathe in, breathe out” mantra whenever they felt they were being swept away by their emotions, it brought them back to the present moment, increased awareness of their usual responses and positively altered their approach to the situation” (Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Karazsia & Singh, 2013).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause before responding to a situation • Responses that are calm and controlled • Responses that are thought-out and not reactive • Positive and calm tone of voice • Welcoming body language
<p>Research around mindfulness training for teachers shows that when teachers “provide clear instructions, feedback contingent on performance and high rates of reinforcement, students typically display high rates of social and academic engagement” (Southerland & Oswald, 2005). Additionally, the use of systematic positive reinforcement decreases misbehavior and discipline problems (Southerland & Oswald, 2005).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear instructions • Feedback to students based on performance • Frequent reinforcement

Figure 1. Summary of criteria for observations.

Teacher Interviews

The researcher scheduled and conducted semi-structured interviews with each participating teacher. Teacher journaling occurred over the course of a 16-week period, beginning in December 2016 and concluding in March 2017. Classroom observations were scheduled for January 2017 and February 2017; teacher interviews were scheduled during February 2017 and March 2017, during times that were convenient for the teachers. The timeline is detailed in Figure 2.

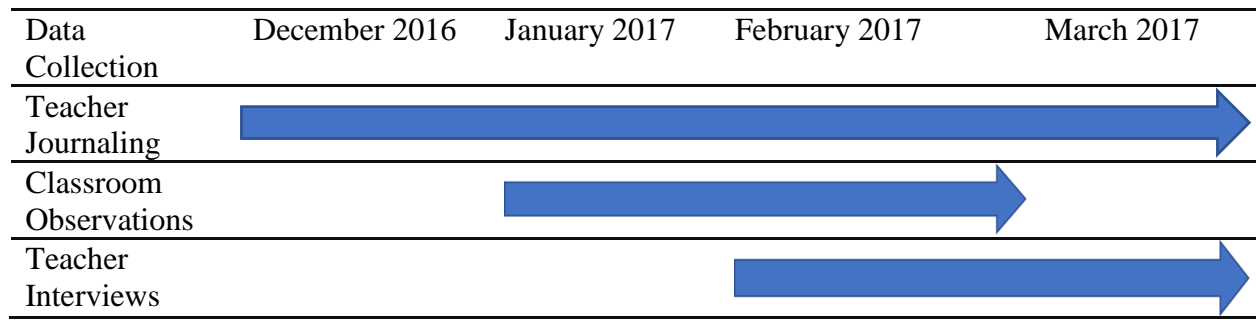


Figure 2. Data collection timeline.

The interviews were guided by an interview protocol (Appendix D). The questions for the protocol were developed by the researcher and based on studies supporting mindfulness implementation in classrooms (Weare, 2014; Zoogman et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2013; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Albrecht et al., 2012). The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format in order to capitalize on non-verbal communications like gestures, facial expressions, and body language. The interview questions remained consistent across all participants and the responses were recorded verbatim with the participants' permission, to achieve trustworthy data (Creswell, 2014; Eisner, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the researcher encouraged open discussion if a topic warranted further inquiry. Additionally, the researcher analyzed the notes from each classroom observation before interviewing the respective teacher, and if a

situation occurred during a classroom observation that raised questions for the researcher about the teacher's feelings or intent, a follow-up inquiry was added to a related question in the interview protocol for clarification. For example, when a teacher interacted with a student that raised questions during the observation, the researcher would make a note to return to that interaction during the interview to gain greater understanding. Comparisons between the interviews were made to uncover similarities and differences in and among each teacher's reflections, to aide in the development of themes. Where similar teacher reflections appeared multiple times across two or more teachers, the researcher recorded those similarities and assigned umbrella themes. Finding similarities in several teacher interviews strengthens the likelihood that those findings are trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Teacher Journals

Teacher journaling occurred over the course of a 16-week period, beginning in December 2016 and concluding in March 2017. Participating teachers were provided with an electronic journal containing weekly prompts (Appendix A). The prompts were developed by the researcher based on the research questions as well as research that reported specific findings around the impact of mindfulness (Weare, 2014; Zoogman et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2013; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Albrecht et al., 2012). The researcher emailed participating teachers twice over the course of the 16 weeks as a reminder to continue to journal. Once all classroom observations and teacher interviews were completed, the researcher emailed participating teachers and asked them to return their journals. All seven teachers returned their journals through secure email. Any identifying information was removed by the researcher and replaced with an identifying code. The journals were used as a culminating analysis activity to tie the interviews and observations together and find consistencies within and among all three data.

Overview of Analysis

The following sections are organized first by data sources and then by research question. All three data sources were interrelated in design. The observations were the first data point and served as the foundation for the analysis of the teacher interviews and journals. Next, the researcher used the interview protocol (Appendix D), as approved by the IRB, to conduct the teacher interviews. Based on classroom observations, the researcher added insights from the observations into the interview discussion to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' classroom experiences. Finally, the teacher journal data served as an overarching umbrella to tie together the observation findings and the interview findings, and to identify themes related to the research questions.

Classroom Observation Analysis

Classroom observations were collaborative and positive rather than evaluative or punitive. The teachers were apprised that the observations were non-evaluative and a requirement of participation in the study prior to signing the consent forms. Observations lasted three hours in each classroom during times when teacher-student interactions were more likely to occur. Naptime was avoided. The researcher was unobtrusive and had minimal interaction with the students or the teacher during the observation.

The observation framework (Appendix B) was developed by the researcher based on documented research involving mindful behaviors and characteristics (Weare, 2014; Zoogman et al., 2014; Singh et al., 2013; Benn et al., 2012; Southerland & Oswald, 2005; Brown & Kasser, 2005). The researcher listed observable behaviors and characteristics that could be looked for and listened for during the observation. The researcher notes provided data that would later be compared with and between interview data and teacher journal data.

The observations were scheduled in advance to allow the teachers to plan for the visit. Upon arrival in the classroom, the researcher reminded the teacher that the observation was non-evaluative and intended to observe mindfulness strategies and impact in real-time. The completed observation framework provided the researcher with an objective measure of characteristics and behaviors one might find in a classroom where the teacher is more “mindful.” In addition, field notes taken during the observations allowed the researcher to get a sense of classroom climate, student interactions with one another, and teacher-student interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). Aggregating the field notes with the observation framework during analysis enabled the researcher to use a rich, thick description of findings, allowing the reader to experience an element of shared experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Analysis Procedures

Classroom observations grounded the researcher’s perspective with real-life examples of implementation and practice. Given the nature of observations, where only events that can be seen and heard are relevant to the exercise, the researcher relied heavily on these classroom observations, particularly around analysis of Research Question One: How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of the classroom climate? More specifically, Research Questions Two and Three are less easily addressed through observation. One can get a clear feeling for classroom climate, but events like self-efficacy and perception of student interaction are less observable. Therefore, the researcher focused analysis of classroom observation data specifically around Research Question One.

Research Questions Two and Three were considered during the analysis of the observation notes; however, because teacher perceptions of student behavior and of self-efficacy were not observable, no discernable themes were identified under those research questions

during classroom observation analysis. The researcher focused on triangulating those data that could be observed and which appeared in at least one other data set. This resulted in two overall themes: 1) positive impacts and 2) teacher modeling.

Research Question One: Perceptions of Classroom Climate

Positive impacts. During classroom observations, the researcher recorded interactions and activities that contributed to the classroom climate. Examples included songs and finger plays, stories, and GoNoodle media showing guided breathing activities for young children. In each classroom, the researcher noted moments when the teacher's tone of voice was calm and controlled. Interactions between teachers and students were positive and appeared to be nurturing in nature. While the classrooms were often noisy and active, it felt to the researcher to be positive and supportive.

Some teachers engaged in more mindfulness practice and employed strategies more consistently than others. In classroom observations where mindfulness strategies were consistently being practiced and introduced by teachers, the researcher recorded teachers using techniques that led to more influence over climate than those classrooms where mindfulness was not being practiced consistently. For instance, during a classroom observation, one teacher led children in breathing practices to help them calm down. She offered them choices in the types of calming strategies they wanted to try. This teacher also reported in her interview that she practiced mindfulness strategies personally as well as in the classroom. Those findings are discussed further in the interview analysis section of this dissertation.

The researcher noted that participating teachers sometimes grappled with a difference in approach or philosophy between themselves and their co-teacher or assistant teacher. This disconnect between teaching styles was a noticeable factor in the "feeling" of the classroom

climate. In those cases, the participating teacher continued to model mindfulness strategies. The researcher made notes regarding this observation, prompting further discussion during the interviews with those teachers. Those findings are discussed in detail in the interview section.

In classrooms where mindfulness strategies and practices were not embraced with consistency, the researcher noted that the teachers struggled more to maintain a positive climate. However, in all classrooms, the teachers performed actions and communicated in ways that demonstrated kindness and empathy for their students. Those teachers who engaged in fewer mindfulness activities later revealed in their interviews that they faced challenges in implementation either because they did not have buy-in from colleagues or because they didn't feel they were equipped to lead mindful practices with their students.

Teacher modeling. In every observation, the researcher noted that teachers modeled effective strategies and behaviors for emotional regulation. Clear instructions, positive feedback to students, and frequent and positive reinforcement were among the strategies noted. In six of the seven classroom observations, a challenging interaction with at least one student occurred. In all cases, the teachers approached the situation with a calm, compassionate disposition. Teachers used welcoming body language and a soft tone of voice with the students. In two cases, the teacher modeled mindfulness techniques for the student, the student joined in the calming activity, and was then able to manage their emotions more effectively.

Additionally, teachers modeled compassion and respect. When an altercation occurred between two or more students, several teachers offered the students some time to step away from the situation and calm down. They provided students with vocabulary to help them label their emotions and, in some cases, mediated the conversations between students. Overall, the teachers

embodied what they hoped to instill in their students. Table 2 provides a summary of the findings for classroom observation data.

Table 2

Summary of Classroom Observation Findings

Research Question	Theme	Classroom Observation Findings
Research One	Positive Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In all cases the researcher noted teacher tone of voice as being calm and controlled. Interactions between teachers and students were positive and appeared to be nurturing in nature. • While the climate was often noisy and active, it appeared to the researcher to be positive and supportive • In a classroom where the teacher had embraced mindfulness, by her own account, she led children in breathing practices to help them calm down. She offered them choices in the types of calming strategies they wanted to try
Research One	Teacher Modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear instructions, positive feedback to students, and frequent and positive reinforcement were among the strategies noted. • In six of the seven classroom observations, a challenging interaction with a student(s) occurred. In all cases the teachers approached the situation with a calm, compassionate disposition. • Teachers modeled compassion and respect. They did so through their interactions with adults in their classroom as well as with the students. • When an altercation occurred between two or more students, several teachers offered the students some time to step away from the situation and calm down.

Classroom observations served as a foundation for data analysis and informed the teacher interviews. Given the fact that an observation provides data that can be seen and heard, the focus of this analysis centered on Research Question One, perception of classroom climate. The researcher focused on triangulating those data that could be observed and appeared in at least one other data set. This resulted in two overall themes under classroom observations: 1) positive

impacts and 2) teacher modeling. Findings from interviews, including follow-up from some classroom observation notes, follow.

Teacher Interview Analysis

The researcher used a semi-structured, open-ended approach to interviewing the teachers. This approach facilitated a comfortable interaction between the researcher and the participant because it allowed the researcher to ask clarifying questions about something a teacher said or something they may have been feeling during the study period or during the classroom observation. The researcher encouraged open discussion if a topic warranted further inquiry. Additionally, the researcher reviewed the classroom observation transcripts prior to the interview. If a situation occurred during the observation in which the researcher was unsure of the teacher's feelings or intent, a question was added to clarify. The interviews were facilitated with an interview protocol instrument that was reviewed and edited in the validation study and was based on the study's research questions (Appendix D).

Analysis Procedures

In the initial analysis of teacher interviews, the researcher identified segments of data that were reflective of Research Question One: How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of the classroom climate in communities where poverty is prevalent? The interview data was analyzed again to uncover any segments relating to teacher perceptions about student behaviors and interactions in the classrooms. The interpretations from that analysis addressed Research Question Two: How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher's perception of and response to student behaviors in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?

The researcher analyzed the interview data a third time to uncover segments relating to teacher self-efficacy and the impact teachers felt mindfulness may have had on that perception. This third level of analysis addressed Research Question Three: How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of self-efficacy in classrooms where poverty is prevalent? Responses to interview questions are reflected using codes to identify the participant while maintaining confidentiality and are provided in Table 3. Those findings are reported according to research questions and relevant units and themes are described in the following section.

Table 3

Participant Coding

Participant	Gender	Years of Experience	Education Level
T1	Female	5 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T2	Female	2 ½ years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T3	Female	10 years	BS El. Ed, N-3 Certification
T4	Female	3 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T5	Female	15 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T6	Female	8 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification
T7	Female	2 years	BA El. Ed, Prek-4 Certification

Research Question One: Perceptions of Classroom Climate

The participating teachers’ responses to interview questions were analyzed to determine how their perceptions of classroom climate had changed due to mindfulness instruction. All participating teachers recognized that they influence their classroom climate. When asked to

identify challenges in maintaining positive classroom climate, the teachers often reflected on their own state of mind during those times. Through analysis of the interviews, the researcher identified two units of data in relation to Research Question One: 1) self-awareness and 2) perceptions of others. Within each of the units, the researcher developed themes. The themes are described under the corresponding unit description.

Self-awareness. Teachers were asked to what extent they felt they could have an impact on the classroom climate and whether that perception had changed over the course of the study due to mindfulness instruction. All teachers made some reference to their own feelings of calm and their ability or inability to regulate those feelings. As teachers became self-aware, they appeared to notice their own feelings more and realize the influence they were having on their students. Their reflections revealed two themes: calmer feelings and teacher influence.

Calmer feelings. Four of the seven teachers made comments related to an increased feeling of calm in their classrooms. Teacher (T1) indicated that prior to using mindfulness techniques her classroom “felt heavy” but after introducing it both personally and in her classroom, she noticed a difference in the climate. She said, “It just feels calmer.” Teachers reported a sense of calm in themselves as they reflected on the classroom climate, too. Teacher (T2) remarked, “Because it is making me be self-aware, I am trying not to get too upset and be a little more easygoing and just understand they’re kids; remind myself it’s okay, it’s gonna work itself out, they’re just kids, you can’t get mad about it. I notice I’m reminding myself more often to just breathe.” Teacher (T3) stated, “I feel it’s just kind of calmer. If I am able to stay **calm** and keep **calm** the kids seem calmer.” Teacher (T7) discussed the calmer, more focused climate when she brings students to circle for breathing activities. She commented, “They struggle with transitions because they’re coming down from all the hype and the running around and energy

stuff, so we bring them to circle and do the breathing and circle time runs a lot smoother, they're a lot **calmer**, they're able to focus better."

Teacher influence. Several teachers talked about the ability to affect their classroom climate with their own behaviors and attitudes. When asked what impact she thought she had on classroom climate, teacher (T5) responded, "Sometimes (the children) will feel whatever feeling you are feeling because you create the feeling for the classroom." This impact was recognized as having both positive and negative effects. Five of the seven teachers discussed the realization that when they get frustrated or upset, it effects the way the children behave. Teacher (T7) reflected, "I notice when I am short with (the children), and when they hear that, they are more like that with each other." Teacher (T5) said, "Sometimes if you're not having a good day or not feeling well, (the children) will be more empathetic toward you, more empathetic toward you." Teacher (T3) talked about classroom climate, saying, "I feel it's just kind of calmer. I feel, as much as I hate to admit it, a lot of times my attitude drives how I see it. If I am able to stay calm and keep calm, I don't know if it's the kids are calmer or if I'm just seeing them in a different way. Or maybe it's a combination of the two that I feel better about the day when I have a better attitude towards things."

Perceptions of others. Teachers were asked about the feedback or reactions they were receiving from other adults, including colleagues and parents, in terms of changes in classroom climate. Five of the seven teachers reflected on feedback they had received from both colleagues and parents about their students or the classroom. Parent feedback typically occurred during pick-up or drop-off time. Two teachers referred to positive parent feedback about classroom climate specifically, and attributed it to improved relationships and communication with the families. The feedback teachers received on classroom climate appeared to focus on the student

interactions and the support the teachers were giving the students. That feedback is described in the following sections under two themes: 1) student interactions and 2) supportive teachers.

Student interactions. Two teachers talked about feedback they received from others regarding student interactions in the classroom. The teachers remember adults saying that the children were engaged in positive behaviors and that they had noticed a change in the interactions of the children over time. Specifically, teacher (T5) replied, “The parents make comments about how nice the students are to each other and how they use their manners more now.” One teacher (T7) discussed how other teachers were noticed a difference in student interactions when they visited the classroom or substituted for the day. She said, “A few staff members have noticed a difference and said that it seemed like the breathing activities were working with the students.”

Supportive teachers. Three teachers responded to questions regarding classroom climate by reflecting on the feedback other adults had given them on the support they were providing their students. Teacher (T1) mentioned one parent who responded in a survey about how the teacher had helped with her child’s social and emotional development by being supportive and kind and by encouraging the same kindness with the other children. She reflected, “I had a survey and one of the moms said the teachers are amazing, they really help my child with his social and emotional skills.” Teacher (T4) reflected on feedback from a parent saying the students were well-mannered and good listeners. She attributed that to the teacher giving clear instructions and setting reasonable expectations for her students. Specifically, she responded, “The parents are always saying these are a great group of kids. I think that’s coming back to those clear expectations I have for them.” Teacher (T3) talked about a parent commenting on the change she had seen in her child. She reflected, “(Mom) is always asking how (her child) is

doing in class and I tell her she's great here. The mom said that (her daughter) is doing so much better here and that she has noticed a huge difference in her now that she is in my class."

Research Question Two: Perceptions of Student Interactions

The interview data were reexamined to identify reflections regarding a shift in teacher perception as it pertained to the interactions between students as well as the teacher-student interactions. All teachers made comments indicating their belief that, as early childhood educators, they play a significant role in guiding the social and emotional development of their students, and that their beliefs about their students impact that ability. Through re-analysis of the interviews, the researcher identified two units of data in relation to Research Question Two: 1) theory versus reality and 2) consideration for experiences. Within each of the units, the researcher developed themes. The themes are described under the corresponding unit description.

Theory versus reality. The divide between child development theory in teacher preparation programs and the realities of teaching in an early childhood classroom is vast. In theory, a teacher is instructed on typical behaviors in young children, but when that behavior is experienced by the teacher in a real-life setting and they are responsible for addressing it, a shift in understanding occurs. The reality of 20 children in one classroom, many of whom may come from backgrounds and experiences unfamiliar to the teacher, may create stress for a teacher. Stress may cause a teacher to revert to instinct and rely less on theoretical understanding. This shift in understanding appears in several responses during teacher interviews. One teacher specifically talked about the teacher preparation in her undergraduate program. She explained that her course work on child development, classroom management, and developmentally appropriate practices had not prepared her for a real-life early childhood classroom when it came to children's interactions and behaviors. Specifically, teacher (T1) reflected, "I want to reach out

to my professors in college. They need to add this to their curriculum. I think positive behavior and all that, they could teach until their faces are blue, and they just need to teach this.” From this unit, theory versus reality, one theme emerged: responsive versus reactive.

Responsive versus reactive. While teachers, in theory, start their teaching career with an understanding of appropriate early childhood behaviors, in practice they may lose sight of that understanding when stressful or chaotic situations occur. Teachers repeatedly reflected on their awareness of how the children’s ages related to the behaviors seen in the classroom. Teacher (T2) stated, “I am trying not to get upset and be a little more easy-going and just understand they are kids.” Teacher (T3) reflected on her own attitude and how it affected her ability to remember they are only four years old. She said “...instead of just looking at their behaviors, I will start looking at the reasons behind them.” When asked how she handles social and emotional challenges in her classroom, teacher (T7) talked about trying to be more reflective. She replied, “I’m remembering to separate the children because they are young and don’t always know how to solve a problem. I give them some time to calm down and then when they are ready, and I am ready, bring them back together to talk.” All three teachers appeared to shift from an instinctively reactive mindset to a more responsive one when faced with developmentally appropriate yet challenging situations.

Consideration for experiences. Through analysis of interview data, this second unit emerged regarding teacher perception of student interactions. When teachers experience stress, the likelihood of making assumptions about student behavior may increase as well. Those assumptions may not be accurate or take into consideration extraneous factors. In a challenging situation, a teacher may not consider a child’s background, experiences, or struggles. In this study, several teachers reflected on their students’ personal experiences. They recognized that a

child's background and experiences may impact the way a student is or is not able to manage emotions or follow directions easily. Reflections indicated that this mindset was one that evolved over the course of the year and are captured below. These reflections related to one theme: from assumption to empathy.

From assumption to empathy. Several teachers reflected on the importance of understanding and considering a child's experiences and background when working through difficult situations with them in the classroom. Teacher (T3) reflected, "I feel like sometimes too we forget that they are not coming to us with completely developed social and emotional skills. ...and we shouldn't be surprised much unless there are severe problems, but they are still learning, they're still practicing." When asked during the interview how her interactions with students had changed over time, if at all, teacher (T3) discussed how sometimes she felt more "tuned-in" to the children and what might be going on at home, or what a child may be bringing with them when they come to school. Teacher (T5) talked about having an ability to understand a child's background and home environment, which allowed her to have a more empathetic attitude, especially if they were struggling to manage their emotions. She responded, "Sometimes they might go home to something that is not so positive, so you try to be more positive. It helps me be more empathetic toward the children." During discussions related to teacher interactions with students, teacher (T6) talked about her experiences with mindfulness and restorative practices. She felt that experience prepared her and helped to develop a strong sense of empathy for the children and their families. She commented, "My restorative practice experience definitely gave me an advantage. You really have to focus on individual needs and make sure they are met."

Research Question Three: Perceptions of Self-Efficacy

A final analytical review of the interview data investigated teacher perception of their success as prekindergarten teachers and of the implementation of mindfulness strategies either personally or professionally. The analysis revealed four units of data, which include: 1) successes build confidence, 2) teachers as role models, 3) obstacles, and 4) paying closer attention. Within each of the units, the researcher developed themes. The themes are described under the corresponding unit description.

Successes build confidence. According to the teachers, the more the children began to like and request certain mindful activities, the more successful they felt. Several teachers reported practicing specific activities and embedding them in their day while others reported feeling like they did not have the skill set to implement the strategies effectively with their students. Four of the seven teachers felt mindfulness activities did contribute to their feelings of success. The teachers who implemented mindfulness games or activities reported feeling positive about their impact and having a greater sense of control over what might happen in a day. Generally, the reflections focused on one theme: positive influence.

Positive influence. Teacher (T1) discussed the impact she felt she had on the classroom climate. She described her ability to introduce new strategies and techniques to the children and the success she had in getting their buy-in. She noticed a positive difference in her students and attributed much of that to her ability as a teacher. Based on notes from the classroom observation with Teacher (T1), the researcher asked the teacher to describe an interaction with one student where mindfulness strategies were successful in supporting the child in calming down. She explained, “At first the kids breathing, they didn’t understand, but starting simply and developing different breathing techniques kind of helped it. We started with ‘belly pop’ and they thought

that was kind of funny to make their belly pop, and now we became more involved with the ‘roller coaster’ and bringing in those new challenges kept them engaged with it and they didn’t become bored with it.”

Teacher (T3) talked about her realization that she was having an impact. “When I’m having days where I feel triggered, using the (mindfulness) strategies makes me feel like I am definitely having an impact.” Teacher (T7) spoke about having a positive impact in terms of the children enjoying themselves in her classroom. She explained, “If my kids weren’t enjoying it then I wouldn’t be successful, but they come in every day telling me that they want to be here and that they are having fun so mostly I am gauging it through them and their responses.”

Teacher (T4) talked about feeling successful. She commented, “I would say fairly successful. I think there’s always room for growth, but I feel like my children are learning, they have respect for each other and respect for teachers.”

Teachers as role models. Throughout the interviews, teachers reflected on their awareness that the students paid close attention to the teachers’ reactions and behaviors. Some of those comments from the interviews referred to specific, discernable teacher behaviors, which were detected by the researcher during classroom observations. Other remarks about teachers acting as role models focused on the teacher’s emotional state, a less observable phenomenon, yet one they still felt affected the students and the classroom climate. Teacher reflections about feeling successful coincided with an increased awareness of their own impact on the classroom climate. Two themes emerged from this unit: teachers modeling behaviors and teachers modeling emotions.

Teacher modeling behaviors. During classroom observations, the researcher noted several instances where teachers modeled positive interactions and strategies for appropriate

behavior. The researcher added clarifying questions to the interview protocol in those instances to gain a deeper understanding of the teacher's perspective. Six teachers described various strategies for modeling calming or positive behaviors in their classrooms. Teacher (T1) remarked, "I noticed that when I take even a second and breathe I have a new external output of my own emotions." Several teachers talked about using emotional vocabulary in the classroom and modeling what it meant to be a friend or to be kind or patient with another. For example, teacher (T2) described strategies she uses when children are having difficulty with their emotions and how she provides them with the words they can use to express themselves and work out their differences with a friend. Specifically, she reflected, "If they are having a problem, we provide them with words they can use to say what they are trying to say, and we really encourage them to try and work it out themselves, but we try and make sure they know we are here to help them if they need it."

Another teacher (T3) reflected on her personal practice with mindfulness and the effect she felt it had on her impact in the classroom. She explained "...when I practice mindfulness personally, I am better able to pass that on to (the students) and model the behaviors for them." Some teachers used props to model mindful behaviors. For example, teacher (T4) used sensory jars that the students could shake up and watch as the glitter settled to the bottom, and finger plays that she sings with the children to help them calm down. She reflected, "We have sensory bottles that we use. (The kids) can shake them up and watch them calm down. And then the finger plays we sing with them help too." Teacher (T5) talked about reading children's stories that modeled kind and compassionate behaviors. She commented, "I had a stretch of time where kids were using unkind words to each other, so we would read stories about feelings and draw pictures about the stories and our own feelings." Some teachers talked about counting activities

as a strategy. Teacher (T6) noted, “The counting down with the hand is appropriate and works with the kids. I have them doing it now for themselves or each other. It’s just to actually have to stop and think that they have to count down.”

Teacher modeling emotions. When talking about the climate of their classrooms, several teachers indicated that their own emotional state played a role in how successful they felt.

Teacher (T1) talked about mindful breathing and the sense of control it gave her in the classroom, “...breathing makes things real, right now and that’s what I like about it. (Teaching) is very demanding, but for whatever reason I roll with the punches and I have a very positive outlook.” When reflecting on classroom climate, teacher (T7) talked about how a teacher’s emotional state of mind can sometimes have a negative impact. She said, “I noticed if I’m short with the students, and they hear that, they become more like that with each other.” Several teachers discussed the challenges they faced in keeping personal feelings in perspective. They recognized that when they were stressed or having a bad day, those emotions were felt by their students. Teacher (T2) explained that she tries to keep her emotions out of her interactions with the kids and that mindfulness instruction got her really thinking about that in a more intentional way. Specifically, she reflected, “Sometimes I get frustrated very easily so I have to remind myself, I can’t put my emotions on the kids. I try to keep my emotions out of my interactions with the kids. It’s not always easy. Mindfulness trainings really got into my head to really think about it.”

Paying closer attention. Teachers may hold themselves to high or impossible standards, especially in early childhood classrooms where the children are so young. In this study, several teachers reflected on an ability to be kinder to themselves and avoid feelings of failure when a day did not go as planned. Teachers who practiced mindfulness strategies, either personally or in

the classroom, talked about feeling more focused on their teaching successes and less on the things that did not go well or as planned. While all teachers made comments acknowledging mindfulness benefits, several also recognized they were not implementing it or practicing it consistently enough to realize those benefits. The reflections representing these impressions follow and fit under one theme in this unit: shifting focus.

Shifting focus. Two teachers spoke specifically about feeling that mindfulness practice made a positive change in their feelings of success. Teacher (T1) stated, “Breathing makes things real right now and that’s what I like about it.” She described a feeling of control over her classroom and her teaching. She continued, “to teach the children mindfulness, it has changed everything and that’s what I want to do, it makes me more proficient, more prepared to deal with behaviors.” Teacher (T2) remarked that mindfulness instruction made her more self-aware. She stated, “It really made me think about why I was feeling a certain way. It made me think through the things I would say and really think about what’s important personally and in the classroom. When I did that I felt I could do a better job teaching.” As teachers realized the calming strategies and other activities they were using had a positive impact on their students, their feelings of success also appeared to improve.

Obstacles. While the benefits for those teachers engaged in mindfulness practices were evident, several teachers expressed challenges in either implementing and keeping up with mindfulness strategies or maintaining the climate when other adults in the classroom or in the students’ lives did not have a mindful disposition. Teacher reflections indicated that those challenges often impacted their feelings of success as a teacher. When teachers were unable to overcome some of the obstacles to implementing mindfulness, they were less likely to practice

either personally or in the classroom with the students. Two themes were identified in this unit in relation to these challenges: sustainability and other adults.

Sustainability. During interviews, two teachers mentioned the challenges of implementing mindfulness in their classrooms. Teacher (T3) discussed the need for more support when she said, “I feel like I need more support with (mindfulness) activities, ideas, how to carry it out.” While she recognized that practicing mindfulness techniques more with her students caused her to notice changes, it was hard to stick with a new strategy consistently. When teachers did not feel like they were “doing it right,” they were less likely to try activities with students. Teachers reported lack of time, materials, and training as some of the obstacles to successful implementation. When asked to share any other insights about mindfulness process and challenges, teacher (T7) replied “Lack of materials, stuff that I didn’t think about that I need like if I want to do a quiet space I need all the stuff like scarves and yoga mats. So, trying to get that.”

Other adults. The presence of other adults in a teacher’s classroom was discussed in interviews by three teachers. During several classroom observations, the researcher noted a distinctive difference in approaches to student interactions and classroom management between the participating teacher and the assistant teacher or co-teacher. The researcher asked those participating teachers to reflect on that phenomenon. Teacher (T6) reflected on the impact other adults had in her classroom and on the climate. She reflected, “I see a difference in (other adults) who don’t approach the students the way I do. They tend to be less patient or have rules whereas I choose my battles and if they want to dance, that’s fine, as long as they are quiet.” Differences in teaching style and disposition appeared to impact a teacher’s feeling of success as well. Teacher (T5) remarked, “(My co-teacher and I) have two different ways of teaching and that has something to do with the mindfulness. So, if two people teach a little differently...it’s confusing

for the children.” An example of this teacher’s reflection might be when a teacher tries to calm a student down during an emotional event through breathing techniques, while the co-teacher’s strategy is to raise her voice or reprimand a child, and the consistency in approach is broken. These inconsistencies appeared to create challenges in positively impacting classroom climate and a teacher’s feelings of success. A summary of the findings from the teacher interview analysis are included in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of Interview Findings

Research Question	Theme	Interview Findings
Research Question One	Self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I feel it’s just kind of calmer. If I am able to stay calm and keep calm the kids seem calmer.” • “Sometimes (the children) will feel whatever feeling you are feeling because you create the feeling for the classroom.” • “I notice when I am short with (the children), and when they hear that, they are more like that with each other.”
Research Question One	Perceptions of others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The parents make comments about how nice the students are to each other and how they use their manners more now.” • “A few staff members have noticed a difference and said that it seemed like the breathing activities were working with the students.” • “I had a survey and one of the moms said the teachers are amazing, they really help my child with his social and emotional skills.”
Research Question Two	Theory versus reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I’m remembering to separate the children because they are young and don’t always know how to solve a problem. I give them some time to calm down and then when they are ready and I am ready, bring them back together to talk.” • “I am trying not to get upset and be a little more easy-going and just understand they are kids.”

Research Question Two	Consideration for experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I feel like sometimes too we forget that they are not coming to us with completely developed social and emotional skills. ...and we shouldn’t be surprised much unless there are severe problems, but they are still learning, they’re still practicing.” • “Sometimes they might go home to something that is not so positive, so you try to be more positive. It helps me be more empathetic toward the children.”
Research Question Three	Successes build confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When I’m having days where I feel triggered, using the (mindfulness) strategies makes me feel like I am definitely having an impact.” • “If my kids weren’t enjoying it then I wouldn’t be successful, but they come in every day telling me that they want to be here and that they are having fun so mostly I am gauging it through them and their responses.”
Research Question Three	Teachers as role models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “...when I practice mindfulness personally, I am better able to pass that on to (the students) and model the behaviors for them.” • “I noticed if I’m short with the students, and they hear that, they become more like that with each other.” • “Sometimes I get frustrated very easily so I have to remind myself, I can’t put my emotions on the kids. I try to keep my emotions out of my interactions with the kids. It’s not always easy. Mindfulness trainings really got into my head to really think about it.”

Research Question Three	Paying closer attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “(Mindfulness) really made me think about why I was feeling a certain way. It made me think through the things I would say and really think about what’s important personally and in the classroom. When I did that I felt I could do a better job teaching.” • “Breathing makes things real, right now and that’s what I like about it. To teach the children mindfulness, it has changed everything and that’s what I want to do, it makes me more proficient, more prepared to deal with behaviors.”
Research Question Three	Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I feel like I need more support with (mindfulness) activities, ideas, how to carry it out.” • “Lack of materials, stuff that I didn’t think about that I need like if I want to do a quiet space I need all the stuff like scarves and yoga mats. So, trying to get that.” • “(My co-teacher and I) have two different ways of teaching and that has something to do with the mindfulness. So, if two people teach a little differently...it’s confusing for the children.”

Each of the research questions guided analysis of the interview data. Analysis from the perspective of Research Question One identified two units of data: 1) self-awareness and 2) perceptions of others. Through re-analysis of the interviews, the researcher identified two units of data in relation to Research Question Two: 1) theory versus reality and 2) consideration for experiences. A final analysis revealed four units of data connected to Research Question Three: 1) successes build confidence, 2) teachers as role models, 3) paying closer attention, and 4)

obstacles. Twelve themes emerged from the initial unit analysis and allowed the researcher to focus the findings more effectively. Next, the researcher began an investigation of the journal reflections as they related to each research question. The findings from that analysis are described in the following sections.

Teacher Journal Analysis

The goal of teacher journaling was to capture beliefs about classroom climate, student interactions and teacher self-efficacy over the course of the study. Reflective thinking and journaling in the context of teaching has been defined as “an inner dialogue with oneself in which a person calls up his or her own experiences, beliefs, and perceptions about an idea” (Lowe et al., 2013; Campbell-Jones & Campbell-Jones, 2002). The journals provided rich, detailed descriptions about the participating teachers’ experiences in the classroom and shed some light on their insights about challenges, coping strategies used, and even transformation in their belief systems (Lowe et al., 2013).

Participants were instructed to not include specific names or descriptions of students or adults in order to ensure confidentiality. Teachers were given the option of an electronic journal that was emailed to all participants a document that could be printed for handwritten notes. All participants were asked to record in their journals at least once per week. Teachers were provided with prompts each week to facilitate their reflections. The analysis of the data and the findings is described next.

Analysis Procedures

In the initial analysis of the teacher journals, the researcher identified segments of data that were reflective of Research Question One: How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of classroom climate in communities

where poverty is prevalent? The teacher journal data was analyzed again to uncover any segments relating to teacher perceptions about student behaviors and interactions in the classrooms. The interpretations from that analysis addressed Research Question Two: How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of student interactions in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?

The researcher analyzed the teacher journal data a third time to uncover segments related to teacher self-efficacy and the impact they felt mindfulness may have had on that perception. This third level of analysis addressed Research Question Three: How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of self-efficacy in classrooms where poverty is prevalent? Findings from the journal analysis are reported in the next section and are organized by the three research questions. Unlike the interview data, the journal analysis did not reveal larger units of data. More focused themes were identified during journal analysis.

Through analysis of the journal data, the researcher established two themes under Research Question One: 1) calm classrooms and 2) teacher impact. Analysis of the journal data from the context of Research Question Two revealed two themes: 1) taking a step back and 2) empathy. Finally, analysis of the journal data concerning Research Question Three identified two themes: 1) positive influence and 2) shift in mindset. Additionally, the researcher analyzed the teacher journal data for any themes surrounding the impact mindfulness may have had on teacher perception overall. Three themes were developed: more aware of others' needs, more compassionate about children's behaviors, and less stressed and more equipped as a teacher. The teacher reflections are described as they relate to the themes.

Research Question One: Perceptions of Classroom Climate

The participating teachers' responses to journal prompts were analyzed to determine how their perceptions of classroom climate had changed due to mindfulness instruction. Some of the journal entries related to teacher perceptions of classroom climate were prompted by questions like: *Describe the classroom climate this week. Why do you think it felt that way? Did mindfulness practice have any impact on the climate in your opinion?* Two themes emerged from the analysis: 1) calm classrooms and 2) impact of the teacher. The following section describes some of their responses.

Calm classrooms. Generally, all teachers made some reference to a feeling of calm, either in themselves, in their students, or in the classroom climate. Teacher (T3) remarked, "I thought the classroom was relatively calm this week." Teacher (T7) described the feeling that mindfulness practice helped to create a calmer atmosphere at circle time and teacher. She commented, "They are also calmer at circle since we have been doing some mindfulness techniques. They really enjoy it and it really makes a difference." Teacher (T6) noted, "Children are demonstrating techniques that create a calmer climate." She reported that breathing techniques were specifically used with one child who had trouble regulating his behavior for prolonged periods of time. The teacher gave the child options to count down to ten or breathing in and out slowly and he usually chose breathing as a calm down method. Teacher (T1) offered an example of a time when the classroom climate was calm, because, "we have started to turn off lights when the temperament is high, play natural sounds while students relax..." Teacher (T4) responded to a prompt in the journal related to the feedback she received from others (parents, other teachers, visitors) and said, "There have been many positive comments from parents, administrators and other people, they are so happy to see how the class is progressing and how

much calmer things seem.” She remarked that having an ability to calm herself down and thinking about the “here and now” has helped to create a calmer environment as well. Teacher (T5) reflected in her journal, “I try to be calm with my students. I feel using the rain stick is calming. When they hear it they immediately stop and calm their bodies.” In her journal, teacher (T6) talked about the impact she felt mindfulness practice had on her classroom climate. Specifically, she reflected, “(Mindfulness) had a significant impact on the classroom climate. Children are labeling feelings, using counting down strategies and breathing techniques.”

Teacher impact. Some teachers talked about an awareness they had about their own impact on the classroom climate and on student behavior. Teacher (T6) reflected that a teacher’s calming disposition comes from the inside and must be genuine for it to impact the children and classroom climate in a positive manner. Specifically, she reflected, “I learned to welcome different techniques. There are so many, from breathing to instrumental music, all while continuing a calming disposition. It all comes from the inside and must be delivered with genuineness to have an impact.” Teacher (T1) talked about how some students set the tone or climate of the classroom, but that it’s the teacher’s reaction that effects how the child will manage those emotions. She wrote, “I feel like a couple of students with behaviors sometimes set the tone for the classroom. I definitely know that my reaction affects how the behaviors are managed. I have learned to observe and think before reacting.” Teacher (T2) discussed the impact she felt she had on classroom climate and noted that when she was experiencing less stress, the children noticed it and tended to be calmer. She added that she believes she does exert a positive influence on her students. Specifically, she reflected, “I believe I can exert a positive influence because I am more aware of myself and my stressors. I know when I need to take a

moment or remind myself to take a deep breath and relax. When I am exhibiting less stress, the kids will see that, and they will be more relaxed.”

Research Question Two: Perception of Student Interactions

The journal data were reexamined to identify reflections regarding a shift in teacher perception as it pertained to the interactions between students as well as the teacher-student interactions. Some of the journal entries related to teacher perceptions of the students’ interactions and behaviors were prompted by questions like: *Has mindfulness had an impact on your perception of student interactions? What challenging situations did you encounter this week? What strategies did you use to overcome them?* Several teachers reflected on a shift in their perception as reflected in the responses below. Two themes emerged from that analysis: 1) taking a step back and 2) empathy.

Taking a step back. When talking about their perceptions of student interactions, several journals mentioned strategies or practices for looking at the situation from a different lens. Teacher (T1) reflected, “I think I am better able to think through how I am going to tackle disruptions in the planned day, it gives me some clarity to what works best, or what students need at the moment. This might be scratching my lesson and reaching them in a different way.” When prompted to consider whether there was a change in perception of student interactions, teacher (T3) indicated that she believed mindfulness helps one to seek out the positive instead of always looking for the negative. She reflected, “I think (mindfulness) will affect the way I see things. Instead of just looking at the behaviors, I will start looking at the reasons behind them.” In week one of journaling, teacher (T4) reflected on the impact of mindfulness and replied, “...being aware as a teacher, of the present moment, and figuring out different possibilities on why a child is reacting the way they are reacting, will be able to help the child get the needs they

are looking for.” Teacher (T4) reiterated this feeling in week 12 when she reflected that mindfulness allowed her to look at a situation in the current moment and think about what was causing a challenge and really support a child and his or her needs. Specifically, she wrote, “I feel like mindfulness helps me think about my students’ needs. I am able to look at the situation at the current moment and really think about what is causing it.” Teacher (T3) said “...instead of just looking at their behaviors, I will start looking at the reasons behind them.” In the final week of journaling, teacher (T1) described how her approach had changed, in that if a challenging situation occurred, she would observe to see what was causing the behavior instead of judging it as she had in the past. She reflected, “Now if a meltdown occurs, I observe to see what caused the behavior. I learned to acknowledge students, so they don’t feel belittled, but understood.”

Empathy. Two teachers reflected in their journals about their increased ability to consider a child’s experiences when reacting to his or her behaviors. Teacher (T2) explained that when she is more mindful, she can put her feelings aside to show empathy and help a children understand their own feelings or emotions. After 12 weeks of journaling, she explained, “Mindfulness allows you to become more aware of yourself and your needs along with others and their needs.” Teacher (T1) reflected in week seven of journaling that she was more understanding that every student comes to her with their own experiences and that mindfulness gives both her and her students the strategies to calm themselves and problem solve. She said, “We will not always agree on issues. Mindfulness gives us both strategies on how to calm down and problem solve. It helps us to model attitudes and skills.”

Research Question Three: Perception of Self-Efficacy

A final analytical review of the journal data investigated teachers’ perception of their success as prekindergarten teachers and with the implementation of mindfulness strategies either

personally or professionally. The researcher prompted the teachers to reflect on their feelings of success as a teacher using the following questions: *As a teacher, how successful did you feel this week? How do you think mindfulness affects your perception of your success, if at all? Do you feel that you can exert a positive influence on both the personal and academic development of your students now that you have been practicing mindfulness strategies? Why or why not?*

Reflections from these prompts yielded the following data and fell under two themes: 1) positive influence and 2) shift in mindset.

Positive influence. Six of the seven teachers reported feelings of success as teachers. Several of them referred to mindfulness as a contributing factor. Teacher (T1) reflected on the idea of having a positive influence over the classroom when she remarked, “I think I have the ability to manage challenges through breathing or being present. My students then have a model of what that looks like.” Teacher (T2) also reflected on her influence in the classroom, stating, “I believe I can exert a positive influence because I am more aware of myself and my stressors. Therefore, I know when I need to take a moment or remind myself to take a deep breath and relax. When I am exhibiting less stress, the kids will see that, and they will be more relaxed.” When prompted to think about any new skills the teacher may have utilized that affected her feelings of success, teacher (T7) recorded, “It was calmer this week. We continued our yoga lessons. I have seen an improvement at naptime. They are calmer and fall asleep faster. I feel good about that.”

Positive feedback and reactions from others related to teachers feeling successful were referenced in several teacher journals. Teacher (T4) remarked, “There have been many positive comments from parents, administrators, and other people from different programs. They are so happy to see how the class is progressing and how well (the children) are doing.” Teacher (T5)

described similar feelings of success and positive impact when describing the feedback from others. She reflected, “I have had comments from parents saying that their child enjoys coming to school. They go home and tell their parents what happens at school or reenact the activities in school that they like the best, which makes me feel like I am having a positive influence.”

Teacher (T6) had similar reactions to feedback from others in terms of feeling she had a positive impact in her classroom. Specifically, she replied, “I believe I am having a significant impact. The most impressionable would be the parents talking about an increase in empathy in their children and that they are using some of the breathing techniques and the counting down strategies at home.”

Shift in mindset. Three teachers reflected in their journals about the realization that, when they paid closer attention to their own emotional well-being, they began to feel more successful as teachers and more confident in their ability to handle difficult days. Teacher (T1) stated, “I think I am better able to tackle disruptions in the planned day.” As the study was nearing its end, teacher (T1) reflected, “I feel less stressed and more confident in my strategies in behavior management.” When asked how mindfulness may have affected her feelings of success, teacher (T2) replied, “I am very hard on myself when I overthink everything and feel as though I am not successful. I think being more mindful of everyday thoughts and actions can help me be more successful in the long-run because I will be more aware of the things that are going well.” Teacher (T2) later reflected that mindfulness had helped her to stop and deliberately think about what she was saying to the children and how it might make them feel. She reflected, “mindfulness allows you to become more aware of yourself and your needs, it is kind of about your inner self and intuition.”

Teacher (T7) reported feeling more successful after participating in mindfulness because it helped her reflect less critically about her teaching ability so that she could find ways to improve rather than become discouraged when something did not go well. Specifically, she commented, “(Mindfulness) helps me reflect less critically and negatively. I can calmly see my mistakes and find better ways to improve instead of complain and become discouraged.” She discussed feeling more hopeful about her ability to impact the classroom, saying, “I know if I can help myself, I can help them.” When prompted to reflect on her ability to be responsive to her students’ needs, teacher (T7) replied, “When I stop and walk away, I can think about how to respond and the situation works out more smoothly.”

Mindfulness Impact Analysis

While the research questions do not explicitly address the teachers’ feelings about mindfulness, their reflections occasionally revealed aspects about the practice they found valuable or challenging. A number of journal prompts focused on mindfulness and the impact, if any, a teacher felt it had on perceptions of classroom climate, student interactions, or feelings of success. Some of the prompts to encourage these reflections included: *Do you feel as time goes by mindfulness practice will help you become more capable of helping to address your student’s needs? How do you think mindfulness affects your feelings of success, if at all? Did mindfulness practice have an impact on classroom climate in your opinion?* Through those prompts, three themes were revealed: 1) more aware of others’ needs, 2) more realistic about children’s behavior, and 3) less stressed and better equipped as a teacher.

More aware of the needs of others. Three teachers reflected in their journals about mindfulness and its impact. Teacher (T2) reflected that when she is more mindful she is better able to address students’ needs. She said, “If I am more mindful, I believe it could help me to

address student needs because I will be more aware of everyone's needs. If I am more mindful I can put my emotions aside and help a child understand their own feelings." Teacher (T4) stated, "Being more aware as a teacher of the present moment and figuring out different possibilities on why a child is reacting the way they are reacting will be able to help the child get the needs met they are looking for." Teacher (T7) described her desire that mindfulness would have a positive impact, saying, "I hope it will (make an impact). I want to be able to understand my students' feelings as well as help them understand themselves and teach them ways to de-stress and express themselves."

More compassionate about children's behaviors. Two teachers reflected on the idea that mindfulness helped to shift their focus from negative judgment and frustration related to children's behaviors to one that was more realistic and compassionate. Teacher (T3) responded, "Instead of just looking at their behaviors, I will start looking at the reasons behind them. As I notice more about why these behaviors occur I can try and head them off at the source." Teacher (T5) talked about a realization that, when given the tools to manage their emotions, students can be successful, and the classroom climate could improve. She reflected on her belief that her students would benefit from calming strategies, and felt mindfulness was a good way to help them clear their minds. Teacher (T5) wrote, "Mindfulness helped me realize that it is possible for the kids to calm themselves down if I give them some strategies."

Less stressed and more equipped as a teacher. Two teachers attributed their own improved feelings of well-being and success to mindfulness instruction and practice. Teacher (T1) described her experience by saying, "At times when stress rises, I can utilize the practice of mindfulness and know that the stress and anxieties will pass. I now LIVE by breathing techniques. They have been a tool that I often resort to when I feel my anxiety rising. Doing so

has helped me regroup my thoughts and even provide me with the clarity to solve a problem differently.” Teacher (T4) also talked about her personal experience and explained, “Understanding how you as a teacher are feeling during the moment and if your feelings and attitude are impacting the children and their reactions would be beneficial. Overall, I think that mindfulness will help me as a teacher address not only my success, but the success of my children.”

A summary of findings from the journal analysis is included in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Journal Findings

Research Question	Theme	Teacher Journal Findings
Research Question One	Calm classrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Children are demonstrating techniques that create a calmer climate.” • “I try to be calm with my students. I feel using the rain stick is calming. When they hear it they immediately stop and calm their bodies.”
Research Question One	Teacher impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I learned to welcome different techniques. There are so many, from breathing to instrumental music, all while continuing a calming disposition. It all comes from the inside and must be delivered with genuineness to have an impact.” • “I feel like a couple of students with behaviors sometimes set the tone for the classroom. I definitely know that my reaction affects how the behaviors are managed. I have learned to observe and think before reacting.”
Research Question Two	Taking a step back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think I am better able to think through how I am going to tackle disruptions in the planned day, it gives me some clarity to what works best, or what students need at the moment. This might be scratching my lesson and reaching them in a different way.” • “...being aware as a teacher, of the present moment, and figuring out different possibilities on why a child is reacting the way they are reacting, will be able to help the child get the needs they are looking for.” • “Now if a meltdown occurs, I observe to see what <u>caused</u> the behavior. I learned to acknowledge students, so they don’t feel belittled, but understood.”

Research Question Two	Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Mindfulness allows you to become more aware of yourself and your needs along with others and their needs.” • “We will not always agree on issues. Mindfulness gives us both strategies on how to calm down and problem solve. It helps us to model attitudes and skills.”
Research Question Three	Positive influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think I have the ability to manage challenges through breathing or being present. My students then have a model of what that looks like.” • “I believe I can exert a positive influence because I am more aware of myself and my stressors. Therefore, I know when I need to take a moment or remind myself to take a deep breath and relax. When I am exhibiting less stress, the kids will see that, and they will be more relaxed.”
Research Question Three	Shift in mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I feel less stressed and more confident in my strategies in behavior management.” • “I am very hard on myself when I overthink everything and feel as though I am not successful. I think being more mindful of everyday thoughts and actions can help me be more successful in the long run because I will be more aware of the things that are going well.” • “I know if I can help myself, I can help them.”
Research Question Three	More aware of others needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If I am more mindful, I believe it could help me to address student needs because I will be more aware of everyone’s needs. If I am more mindful I can put my emotions aside and help a child understand their own feelings.” • “Being more aware as a teacher of the present moment and figuring out different possibilities on why a child is reacting the way they are reacting will be able to help the child get the needs met they are looking for.”

Impacts of Mindfulness	More compassionate about children's behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Instead of just looking at their behaviors, I will start looking at the reasons behind them. As I notice more about why these behaviors occur I can try and head them off at the source.” • “Mindfulness helped me realize that it is possible for the kids to calm themselves down if I give them some strategies.”
Impacts of Mindfulness	Less stressed and more equipped as a teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “At times when stress rises, I can utilize the practice of mindfulness and know that the stress and anxieties will pass. I now LIVE by breathing techniques. They have been a tool that I often resort to when I feel my anxiety rising. Doing so has helped me regroup my thoughts and even provide me with the clarity to solve a problem differently.” • “Understanding how you as a teacher are feeling during the moment and if your feelings and attitude are impacting the children and their reactions would be beneficial. Overall, I think that mindfulness will help me as a teacher address, not only my success, but the success of my children.”

Through this phase of analysis, the researcher identified two themes under Research Question One: 1). calm classrooms and 2). teacher impact. Analysis of the journal data from the context of Research Question Two revealed two themes: 1). taking a step back and 2). empathy. Finally, analysis of the journal data concerning Research Question Three identified two themes: 1). positive influence and 2). shift in mindset. Additionally, the researcher analyzed the teacher journal data for any themes surrounding the impact mindfulness may have had on teacher perception overall. Three themes were developed: more aware of others' needs, more

compassionate about children's behaviors, and less stressed and more equipped as a teacher. A third phase of analysis was conducted with the observation data and described in detail next.

Relationships Across Data Sets

In an effort to ensure validity and credibility, the researcher engaged in a deeper level of analysis by reviewing all three data sets for consistencies and themes. This review was organized by research question. The following section discusses the teachers' insights, opinions and experiences as they were expressed in journal entries and interviews and compared to researcher observations. These data were the basis for the findings and guided the development of the themes. Table 6 delineates the sources of qualitative data in order to illustrate where a teacher's response was generated (journal entry, observation or interview). The data were often interconnected and may have addressed more than one research question. The organization and themes for those data were decided by the researcher as analysis progressed.

Table 6

Sources of Data Responses

Source of Response	Code
Interview	INT
Journal Entry Week 1	JE1
Journal Entry Week 2	JE2
Journal Entry Week 3	JE3
Journal Entry Week 4	JE4
Journal Entry Week 5	JE5
Journal Entry Week 6	JE6
Journal Entry Week 7	JE7
Journal Entry Week 8	JE8
Journal Entry Week 9	JE9
Journal Entry Week 10	JE10
Journal Entry Week 11	JE11
Journal Entry Week 12	JE12
Journal Entry Week 13	JE13
Journal Entry Week 14	JE14
Journal Entry Week 15	JE15
Journal Entry Week 16	JE16
Observation	OBS

The units and themes that surfaced in the initial analysis of each data set individually were analyzed again across data sets to reveal relationships. From Research Question One, two themes emerged: 1) calm, compassionate classrooms and 2) teacher impact. From Research Question Two, two themes emerged: 1) reflective teachers - compassionate expectations and 2) empathy. Finally, from Research Question Three, three themes emerged: 1) positive influence, 2) teacher modeling and 3) self-aware. The journals, interview transcripts and observation notes were all coded similarly for analysis. Where data appeared to fit into several themes or addressed more than one research question, the researcher made decisions on placement and, in some cases, cross-referenced the data. Qualitative data from these three sources, for all seven participant teachers, are described in the following sections.

Research Question One: Perception of Classroom Climate

Calm, compassionate classrooms. During classroom observations, the researcher indicated that while the classrooms were busy and active, there was a sense of calm and compassion between teachers and students, and the teacher tone of voice appeared calm. In their journals, all seven teachers related the classroom climate to a feeling of calm. To demonstrate this, teachers gave specific examples like, “I thought the classroom was relatively calm” (**T3, JE6**), “kids were calmer at circle since we started mindfulness,” (**T7, JE3**) and, “children are demonstrating techniques that create a calmer climate.” (**T6, JE7**).

Teacher (T1) thought that, prior to using mindfulness techniques, her classroom “felt heavy,” but after introducing it both personally and in her classroom, she noticed a difference in the climate (**INT**). She reported that breathing techniques were specifically used with one child who had trouble regulating his behavior for prolonged periods of time. The teacher gave the child options to count down to ten or to breathe in and out slowly, and the child usually chose

breathing as a calm down method (**JN2**). Teacher (T1) offered an example of a time when the classroom climate was calm, because, “we have started to turn off lights when the temperament is high, play natural sounds while students relax” (**JN5**).

Teacher (T1) reflected in both the interview and in her journal that the rhythm of the classroom had improved, indicating the climate was more positive and manageable (**JN10, INT**). Brown and Kasser (2005) found that relationships between the teacher and the child are important in building a sense of interpersonal closeness, and when teachers can manage their own emotions effectively in their classrooms, those relationships can become stronger. The researcher documented during observations that teacher (T1) was using a calm voice during what could have been categorized as a stressful situation. She appeared to stop, and rather than react instinctively, she responded with kindness and compassion (**OBS**).

Teacher (T4) responded to a prompt in the journal related to the feedback she received from others (parents, other teachers, visitors) and said, “There have been many positive comments from parents, administrators and other people, they are so happy to see how the class is progressing and how nice they are being to others” (**JN6**). She remarked that having an ability to calm herself down and thinking about the “here and now” has helped to create a calmer environment (**JN7**). Teacher (T7) made similar reflections about feedback from others. Specifically, “a couple of staff members have noticed (the students) are much quieter and one observer said they seemed to like the breathing and she noticed a difference” (**INT**).

Teacher (T5) indicated that she found it was necessary to take a moment and calm her body to help her mind be clearer (**JN16**). In her journal, teacher (T6) talked about the impact she felt mindfulness practice had on her classroom climate. She described techniques children engaged in that created a calmer classroom environment (**JN5**). Some of those techniques

included belly breathing, finger plays and songs, and storytelling. Teacher (T4) spoke about techniques she had implemented, like breathing in and out and counting down, that had helped a child who struggled with emotional regulation and how it allowed him to calm himself down **(INT)**.

Teacher impact. In all interviews, teachers reflected on the realization that their mindset and attitude affected the climate of the classroom. Teacher (T1) talked about how some students set the tone or climate of the classroom, but that it is the teacher's reaction that affects how the child will manage those emotions **(JN5)**. Teacher (T2) discussed the impact she felt she had on classroom climate and noted that the children noticed when she was experiencing less stress and as a result tended to be calmer **(JN7)**. Teacher (T3) echoed that feeling and replied, "...I feel it's just kind of calmer. If I am able to stay calm and keep calm the kids seem calmer" **(INT)**.

When asked what impact she thought she had on classroom climate, teacher (T5) responded, "Sometimes (the children) will feel whatever feeling you are feeling because you create the feeling for the classroom" **(INT)**. Teacher (T6) remarked that a teacher's calming disposition comes from the inside and must be genuine for it to impact the children and classroom climate in a positive manner **(JN16)**. Similar connections were made when teacher (T7) talked about her attitude and the classroom climate. She replied, "I notice when I am short with (the children), and when they hear that, they are more like that with each other" **(INT)**. The observation notes for every classroom documented teacher-child interactions where the teacher's response to a child was calm and compassionate **(OBS)**. There appeared to be an awareness from most teachers that they were impacting the classroom climate, and that could be either positive or negative, depending on their disposition.

Research Question Two: Perception of Student Interactions

Reflective teachers – compassionate expectations. During interview transcript and journal analysis, the researcher identified a common thread regarding teachers' perception of children's interactions and behaviors. That thread was realism. All teachers discussed some level of a shift in perception, specifically, that they became more "tuned-in" to the kids and saw them for who they were: children. Detailed below are reflections and units of data that emerged in the journals and the interviews to demonstrate that point.

During the interview, teacher (T1) talked about noticing the difference in the children's interactions (**INT**). She felt they were engaged in mindful activities and they were making a difference. She specifically talked about changing her reaction to behaviors from reactive to using mindful techniques (belly breathing). This shift in perception, and in her reaction, was positive for her as referenced in her reflection, "I think I am better able to think through how I am going to tackle disruptions in the planned day, it gives me some clarity to what works best, or what students need at the moment. This might be scratching my lesson and reaching them in a different way" (**JN2**). Teacher (T1) added that she felt mindfulness strategies had helped the students to regroup, which gave her a more positive outlook on their behavior (**JN3**).

When prompted to consider whether there was a change in perception, teacher (T3) reflected that she believed mindfulness helps one to seek out the positive instead of always looking for the negative (**JN2**). She talked about noticing positive student behavior and stopping to think about the root cause of the challenging behavior. Teacher (T4) mirrored this perspective, stating, "So I am usually pretty good at being patient and taking a step back and thinking about, okay, why is this child acting this way" (**INT**). In week one of journaling, teacher (T4) reflected on the impact of mindfulness and wrote, "...being aware as a teacher, of the present moment,

and figuring out different possibilities on why a child is reacting the way they are reacting will be able to help the child get the needs they are looking for” (JN1). Teacher (T4) reiterated this feeling in week 12 when she reflected that mindfulness allowed her to look at a situation in the current moment and think deeply about what was causing a challenge in order to support a child’s needs (JN12).

Developmentally appropriate expectations in an early childhood classroom are important for building relationships between teachers and children. Two teachers reflected on their shift in expectations. Teacher (T2) replied, “I am trying not to get upset and be a little more easy-going and just understand they are kids” (INT). Teacher (T3) remarked, “I feel like sometimes too we forget that they are not coming to us with completely developed social and emotional skills...and we shouldn’t be surprised much unless there are severe problems, but they are still learning, they’re still practicing” (INT). Teacher (T3) continued to reflect on her own attitude and how it affected her ability to remember they are only four years old (INT). She said “...instead of just looking at their behaviors, I will start looking at the reasons behind them” (JN1). When talking about classroom climate, teacher (T6) discussed the chaos she experienced in her classroom prior to implementing mindfulness techniques. She noted a shift in her attitude, saying, “I don’t mind them yelling now, I don’t mind them dancing now, it’s structured and appropriate chaos” (INT).

In several cases, teachers discussed the notion that they used to watch for issues and challenges in the classroom, but that throughout the study, as they shifted their focus on children’s need, their reactions became more reflective. Teacher (T1) described how her approach had changed, in that if a challenging situation occurred she would stop and observe to see what was causing the behavior instead of judging instinctively as she had in the past (JN14). Teacher (T2) reflected on the idea that sometimes her attitude affected the children’s attitudes

(INT). When asked how she handles social and emotional challenges in her classroom, teacher (T7) talked about trying to be more reflective. She remarked, “I’m remembering to separate the children, give them some time to calm down and then when they are ready and I am ready, bring them back together to talk” (INT). This reflection demonstrates an awareness that young children need strategies to support their social and emotional growth.

Empathy. The theme of empathy emerged in data from all participants. Teachers responded in interviews and journals that they began focusing on their students’ needs and were changing the way they reacted to a child. Teacher (T1) remarked, “I tend to really focus on their needs. So like if a student has an emotional need like attention and love, I give that to them first. If they need a hug and they’re feeling down, they are gonna get it first because that is what they need” (INT). Teacher (T1) went on to say that she tries to acknowledge students’ feelings by saying things like “I see you’re upset, I see you are feeling frustrated, I understand” (INT). When talking about whether mindfulness practice will make a difference in the way they address student needs, teacher (T2) explained that when she is more mindful, she can put her personal feelings aside to show empathy and help a child understand their own feelings or emotions (JN1). After twelve weeks of journaling, teacher (T2) explained, “Mindfulness allows you to become more aware of yourself and your needs along with others and their needs” (JN12).

When asked during the interview how her interactions with students had changed over time, if at all, teacher (T3) discussed that she had times where she felt more “tuned-in” to the children and what might be going on at home, or what a child may be bringing with them when they come to school (INT). Teacher (T5) talked about having an ability to understand a child’s background and home environment, which allowed her to have a more empathetic attitude, especially if they were struggling to manage their emotions (INT). She replied, “You are more

empathetic toward (the children) because they are asking for their mommy or daddy all day and you feel for them” (INT).

During discussions related to teacher interactions with students, teacher (T6) talked about her experiences with mindfulness and restorative practices. She felt those experiences prepared her and helped to develop a strong sense of empathy for the children and their families (INT). She described the impact parents were seeing and providing feedback on as well. “The most impressionable piece is the impact’s ripple effect as parents confer with me in the morning about noticeable changes in persona and reactions, for example, increased empathy and compassion” (JN5). Teacher (T6) attributed a change in the overall classroom dynamics to the increased empathy (INT).

Research Question Three: Perception of Self-Efficacy

Positive influence. All seven teachers expressed feeling successful as teachers. Sometimes those reflections were specifically attributed to a more mindful approach. Several comments addressed the idea that teachers felt they had a positive impact when they took care of their own emotional needs. Teacher (T1) discussed the impact she felt she had on the classroom climate. She described her ability to introduce new strategies and techniques to the children and the success she had in getting their buy-in. She noticed a positive difference in her students and attributed much of that to her ability as a teacher. Specifically, she said, “So if I write the lesson plans and I do the breathing, they’re doing it too, and I notice a difference in them” (INT). In a reflection, teacher (T1) reiterated the idea of having a positive influence over the classroom when she remarked, “I think I have the ability to manage challenges through breathing or being present. My students then have a model of what that looks like” (JN1). This comment also

reflects the role teacher (T1) believes modeling plays in having an impact on the classroom and is discussed in that section as well.

Teacher (T2) also reflected on her influence in the classroom, stating, “I believe I can exert a positive influence because I am more aware of myself and my stressors. Therefore, I know when I need to take a moment or remind myself to take a deep breath and relax. When I am exhibiting less stress, the kids will see that and they will be more relaxed” (JN7). Reflecting on their reactions to stress and how it had impacted the classroom appeared in many teacher reflections. When asked to what extent she felt she had an impact on the classroom climate and student interactions, teacher (T3) responded that she felt she realized more now that she does have an impact. She replied, “When I’m having days where I feel triggered, using the (mindfulness) strategies makes me feel like I am definitely having an impact” (INT).

Teacher (T7) spoke about having a positive impact in terms of the children enjoying themselves in her classroom. She explained, “If my kids weren’t enjoying it then I wouldn’t be successful but they come in every day telling me that they want to be here and that they are having fun so mostly I am gauging it through them and their responses” (INT). When prompted to think about any new skills the teacher may have utilized that affected her feelings of success, teacher (T7) recorded, “It was calmer this week. We continued our yoga lessons. I have seen an improvement at naptime. They are calmer and fall asleep faster” (JN11).

All three teachers indicated feelings of success when they reflected on the positive feedback and reactions from others. These reflections were noted in several journals and during an interview. Teacher (T4) remarked, “There have been many positive comments from parents, administrators, and other people from different programs. They are so happy to see how the class is progressing and how nice (the students) are being to others” (JN6). Teacher (T4) talked about

the rewarding feeling of teaching in a prekindergarten program serving low income families and how she started to realize how much of an impact she was having on the children's futures (INT).

Teacher (T5) talked about similar feelings of success and positive impact when describing the feedback from others. She reflected, "I have had comments from parents saying that their child enjoys coming to school. They go home and tell their parents what happened at school or reenact the activities in school that they liked best, which makes me feel like I am having a positive influence" (JN6). Teacher (T6) had similar reactions to feedback from others in terms of feeling she had a positive impact in her classroom. She responded, "I believe I am having a significant impact. The most impressionable would be the parents talking about an increase in empathy in their children and that they are using some of the breathing techniques and the counting down strategies at home" (JN5).

Teacher modeling. During interviews and classroom observations, the researcher noted numerous responses and behaviors that indicated teachers were modeling the very behaviors they hoped to inspire in their students. During a classroom observation, the researcher made note of teacher (T2) modeling positive interactions for the children by greeting each child as they entered the room (OBS). Additionally, positive modeling is evidenced in the following descriptions and reflections from journals and interview transcripts.

Teacher (T1) encountered a situation where a child was distraught and inconsolable. She had the child come next to her and began talking calmly with him. She acknowledged his feelings and offered him two choices, "elevator breathing" or "belly breathing." Reluctantly, and through tears and wailing, the child chose belly breathing. Teacher (T1) then began the belly breathing on her own, as the child continued to cry. She persisted and, after three or four breaths,

the child began doing it with her. After a minute and a half, the child had calmed down, and was able to join his friends for lunch (**OBS**). When discussing this incident in the interview, the teacher reflected on the reaction from his mother regarding how much he had improved in managing his emotions since being in her classroom (**INT**).

Teacher (T1) talked about mindful breathing and the sense of control it gave her in the classroom, "...breathing makes things real right now and that's what I like about it. (Teaching) is very demanding, but for whatever reason I roll with the punches and I have a very positive outlook" (**INT**). When asked if she felt successful as a prekindergarten teacher she resounded with a "Definitely. Ever since I used (mindfulness) I was feeling a difference in me because I was burning out so quickly, so I started feeling clarity and a rhythm" (**INT**). Teacher (T4) repeated this theme when asked if she felt she had a positive influence on the development of her students. She reflected, "Yes, I think being able to help calm myself down, thinking about the here and now, has helped influence both personal and academic development in my students. When my students can see myself not over reacting to certain situations it teaches them that they do not always have to overreact too" (**JN7**).

Self-aware. Several teachers commented, in either their journals or during interviews, on being reflective about their teaching ability and the successes they were having. Similar to the reflections regarding appropriate expectations of children and their behaviors, teachers reported being more aware of and realistic about their teaching abilities and successes. They talked about being kinder to themselves. Conversely, being self-aware can also bring about less positive realizations, which are also discussed here.

Teacher (T1) stated, "I think I am better able to tackle disruptions in the planned day" (**JN2**). As the study was nearing its end, teacher (T1) reflected, "I feel less stressed and more

confident in my strategies in behavior management” (JN13). When asked how mindfulness may have affected her feelings of success, teacher (T2) replied, “I am very hard on myself when I overthink everything and feel as though I am not successful. I think being more mindful of everyday thoughts and actions can help me be more successful in the long run because I will be more aware of the things that are going well” (JN2). Teacher (T2) later reflected that mindfulness had helped her to stop and really think about what she was saying to the children and how it might make them feel (JN11). She said, “mindfulness allows you to become more aware of yourself and your needs, it is kind of about your inner self and intuition” (JN14).

Teacher (T7) reported feeling more successful after participating in mindfulness because it helped her reflect less critically so that she could find ways to improve rather than become discouraged when something did not go well (JN2). She discussed feeling more hopeful about her ability to impact the classroom, saying, “I know if I can help myself, I can help them” (JN13). When prompted to think about her ability to be responsive to her students’ needs, teacher (T7) replied, “When I stop and walk away, I can think about how to respond and the situation works out more smoothly” (JN15).

Reflection and self-awareness can prompt both positive and negative emotions and conclusions (Janssen, 2008). However, both emotions can prompt growth and learning (Janssen, 2008). Many of the comments about self-awareness centered on the realization that teachers’ negative responses were influencing their classroom climate. Teacher (T4) stated, “...it gets really stressful and then I know I sometimes take my stress out on the kids” (INT). Teacher (T7) talked about the realization that when she is short with the children, they are short with each other (INT). She responded, “I noticed if I come in here already thinking about something else, something that doesn’t even belong here, I notice I’m a lot (snippier)” (INT).

When prompted to reflect on whether she felt successful, teacher (T6) replied, “I have a lot of growing to do. A lot. So as far as connection with students and rapport with the families, yes. Organizing my reflections, no, I’m just not there” (INT). Inevitably, there are days that do not go as well as others, and teachers made several remarks about that phenomenon. When asked if there were ever days when the teacher felt like things went poorly, teacher (T7) responded, “Yes, usually on the behavior side. When the kids are fighting all day, because I have several kids who are more on the emotional side, I feel like a failure” (INT). However, teacher (T7) adds that she had been trying to be more reflective with the students and take a step back for a moment before engaging with them in a negative manner.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher describes the findings in classroom observations, teacher interviews and teacher journals individually based on each of the three research questions; perceptions of classroom climate, perceptions of student interactions and perceptions of self-efficacy. Within that analysis of the interview data, the researcher identified overarching units of data. Those data were broad and served as a foundation for the underlying themes. Within each unit, one or more focused themes are extracted and described. The analysis of teacher journals and classroom observation notes revealed more focused themes at the onset. Once themes were established within each data set, the researcher analyzed journals, interviews and observations for consistent themes across all data.

Overall, comparison of all three data revealed seven commonalities or consistencies in the findings. First, a sense of calm and compassion was observed, reflected on, and discussed in some way by all teachers in every data set. Second, the realization of teacher impact on classroom climate was referenced in both the interviews and the teacher journals. Third, a shift in

teacher perception about student interactions and behaviors was consistent in both the interview data and the journal data. Fourth, empathy was observed, reflected on, and discussed in all three data sets. Fifth, teachers consistently reflected on the feeling that they had a positive influence in their classroom in both the interview data and the journal data. Sixth, all teachers discussed or reflected on their ability to be successful through modeling appropriate social and emotional skills. The researcher also observed many of those skills. Finally, a sense of self-awareness among all teachers was consistently discussed and reflected on in either the journal data or the interview data.

The classroom observations served as the heart of the data analysis. The researcher was able to observe phenomena within the teacher's context and then gain a deeper understanding of those observations during the interviews. Findings from the classroom observation data indicated that teachers modeled positive interactions with students and offered support to students in managing their emotions. The interview data were the most comprehensive of the three data sources and aided the researcher in making connections between the observations and the teacher journals. The findings from the interview data corroborated findings from classroom observations in that the teacher modeling of positive interactions was a purposeful and reflective activity that teachers were aware of and intentional about. The researcher's interpretation of classrooms that felt calm and compassionate were echoed in both the teacher interview data and the teacher journal data. Many teachers reflected on a sense of calm, either in the overall climate or in themselves or their students.

Teacher journal data and teacher interview data had consistent themes between them. Those themes were less observable and therefore were not always evident in the classroom observation findings. For example, teachers reflected on their realization that their attitudes,

behaviors and feelings had an impact on the students in their classrooms in both the teacher journals and interviews. Similarly, both data sources revealed a shift in teacher thinking around student behaviors toward a more compassionate and empathetic mindset. Teachers reflected in their journals and during the interviews that they felt more equipped to take a step back and really think about the why behind a behavior and remind themselves that students are children who are still learning. In all three data sources, the challenges of implementing and maintaining a mindful disposition was evident. The researcher made note during observations of the impact other adults can have on a classroom even when the teacher is practicing mindfulness. Additionally, in both the journals and the interviews, teachers commented on challenges in maintaining a mindful climate in their classrooms. Those included other adults, lack of resources, and lack of comfort with the strategies. Chapter Five will include detailed discussions about the findings as well as the researcher's recommendations and implications for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Review of Purpose and Methodology

Young children in poverty are especially vulnerable in classrooms lacking a positive and supportive climate fostered by an empathetic and compassionate teacher (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Because these students may be experiencing systemic stress outside the classroom, their need for compassion from others is high. Teachers who work to develop their capacity for compassion may have a positive impact on their students as they model positive social and emotional skills. A teacher's own social and emotional competence plays a critical role in the success of all students, but especially those in classrooms where poverty is prevalent (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). One strategy for teachers to develop their own social and emotional competence is mindfulness. Mindfulness practices are associated with increased compassion and empathy for others (Jennings et al., 2013). If mindfulness is a path to developing one's compassion, and that compassion can translate to those we encounter, it follows that teachers practicing mindfulness could positively impact their students, their classroom climate, and their own feelings of success.

Mindfulness has the potential to serve as one of many possible supports to teachers. Mindfulness can have an impact at both a school-wide level and with targeted populations like students or teachers (Zoogman, et al., 2014). One study suggests that teachers experience improved relationships with their students after completing a mindfulness instruction program, even when the students themselves did not receive any mindfulness instruction (Jennings, et al., 2013). Mindfulness has been found to increase empathy, compassion, and social competence, and supports the development of a non-judgmental mind (Weare, 2014; Roeser et al., 2012).

Given the interpersonal and intrapersonal nature of teaching, a teacher's social and emotional competence must be considered and supported to help foster compassionate and equitable classrooms (Lowe et al., 2013).

The purpose of this case study was to explore the impact mindfulness instruction and practice had on early childhood teacher perception of classroom climate, student interaction and self-efficacy when working in communities where poverty is prevalent. In answering the study's research questions, the researcher aimed to understand early childhood teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the usefulness of mindfulness to their teaching practices. Additionally, the researcher sought to gain a deeper understanding of a teacher's experience with mindfulness as well as identify any potential challenges.

This case study was conducted in an inner city, Pennsylvania school district that serves families eligible for the state-funded prekindergarten program, Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, in the school year 2016-2017. Seven teachers participated in the study. The three research questions that guided this study were:

1. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of the classroom climate in communities where poverty is prevalent?
2. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of and response to student interactions in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?
3. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of self-efficacy in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?

General Procedures and Review of Analysis

Three sources of data were used to triangulate the results for this study: classroom observations, teacher interviews, and teacher journals. The researcher engaged in simultaneous

data collection and analysis for this study, which involved doing some preliminary analysis during and between data collection activities such as classroom observations and interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to analyze data as they were being collected, the researcher engaged in several strategies. The researcher included reflective comments in all data, as they were initially collected. This included memos and side notes in the observation documentation, as the observation was taking place. Hunches and notable perceptions were written in the margins of interview notes and in the researcher's journal, after leaving the interview location and finding a nearby spot to reflect and write (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Mindfulness Trainings

Prior to any data collection or analysis, participating teachers attended four three-hour trainings as part of their school district professional development program. The school district offered the mindfulness instruction through a program called *Wellness Work in Schools*, which was created in 2001 by Kinder Associates LLC. This program is based on mindfulness principles and practices. The program focuses on mindfulness as a positive response to classroom stress created by challenging situations. Through mindfulness, the program assists teachers in developing and leveraging their own compassion, which in turn can help them instruct students in self-regulation, focus, and their own compassion toward others. All Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts teachers were able to participate in the four professional development over the course of the school year. During the sessions, participating teachers received instruction on the foundations of mindfulness as well as strategies and exercises they could use personally and in their classrooms.

The sessions included hands-on practice of mindfulness exercises, and teachers were provided with a workbook that could be referenced later as they implemented strategies in their

classrooms. All participating teachers possessed bachelor's degrees in early childhood education or related fields with teacher certification in early childhood education. The concept of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is the foundation for early childhood teacher education (Bredekamp, 1987), and mindfulness practice seeks to align DAP with its core principle of compassionate responses to potentially chaotic and stressful situations in the classroom. Having been exposed to the basics of mindfulness through the training, the teachers were free to make choices in personal practice and classroom implementation. The following sections describe the data investigated in determining any impact those choices had on teacher perceptions of classroom climate, student interactions, or self-efficacy.

Classroom Observations

Teacher journaling occurred over the course of a 16-week period, beginning in December 2016 and concluding in March 2017. Classroom observations were scheduled for January 2017 and February 2017, and teacher interviews were scheduled during February 2017 and March 2017, during times that were convenient for the teachers. The timeline is detailed in Chapter Three, Figure 2. Observations lasted approximately three hours in each classroom during times when teacher-student interactions were more likely to occur. Naptime was avoided. The researcher was unobtrusive and had minimal interaction with the students or the teacher during the observation. The observation framework (Appendix B) was developed by the researcher based on documented research involving mindful behaviors and characteristics (Benn et al., 2012; Brown & Kasser, 2005; Singh et al., 2013; Southerland & Oswald, 2005; Weare, 2014; Zoogman et al., 2014). The researcher listed observable behaviors and characteristics linked to mindfulness that could be looked for and listened for during the observation. During observations, if a situation occurred during which the researcher felt more information was

needed to understand the teacher's feelings or intent, a side note was made in the observation rubric and was included in the interview discussion later.

Teacher Interviews

The researcher scheduled and conducted semi-structured interviews with each participating teacher. Teacher journaling occurred over the course of a 16-week period, beginning in December 2016 and concluding in March 2017. Teacher interviews were scheduled during February 2017 and March 2017, during times that were convenient for the teachers. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol (Appendix D). The questions for the protocol were developed by the researcher and based on studies supporting mindfulness implementation in classrooms (Weare, 2014; Zoogman, et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2013; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Albrecht et al., 2012). The interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format in order to capitalize on non-verbal communications like gestures, facial expressions and body language. The interview questions remained consistent across all participants and the responses were recorded verbatim with the participants' permission, to achieve trustworthy data (Creswell, 2014; Eisner, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the researcher encouraged open discussion if a topic warranted further inquiry. Additionally, the researcher analyzed the notes from each classroom observation before interviewing the respective teacher, and if a situation occurred during a classroom observation that raised questions for the researcher about the teacher's feelings or intent, a follow-up inquiry was added to a related question in the interview protocol for clarification. For example, when a teacher interacted with a student that raised questions during the observation, the researcher would make a note to return to that interaction during the interview to gain greater understanding. Comparisons between the interviews were made to uncover similarities and differences in and among each teacher's reflections, to aide in the

development of themes. Where similar teacher reflections appeared multiple times across two or more teachers, the researcher recorded those similarities and assigned umbrella themes. Finding similarities in several teacher interviews strengthens the likelihood that those findings are trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Teacher Journals

Teacher journaling occurred over the course of a 16-week period, beginning in December 2016 and concluding in March 2017. Participating teachers were provided with an electronic journal containing weekly prompts (Appendix A). The prompts were developed by the researcher based on the research questions as well as research that reported specific findings on the impact of mindfulness (Weare, 2014; Zoogman et al., 2014; Jennings et al., 2013; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Albrecht et al., 2012). The researcher emailed participating teachers twice over the course of the 16-weeks as a reminder to continue to journal. Once all classroom observations and teacher interviews were completed, the researcher emailed participating teachers and asked them to return their journals. All seven teachers returned their journals through secure email. Any identifying information was removed by the researcher and replaced with an identifying code. The journals were used as a culminating analysis activity to tie the interviews and observations together and find consistencies within and among all three data.

All three data sources were interrelated in design. The observations were the first data point and served as the foundation for the analysis of the teacher interviews and journals. Next, the researcher used the interview protocol (Appendix D) as approved by the IRB, to conduct the teacher interviews. Based on classroom observations, the researcher added insights from the observations into the interview discussion to gain a deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences in the classrooms. Finally, the teacher journal data served as an overarching

umbrella to tie the observation findings and the interview findings together and identify themes related to the research questions.

Discussion of Findings

Qualitative analysis methods were utilized as described above, across all data elements, to gain a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions of classroom climate, student interaction and self-efficacy. As relationships among the data were identified, similarities and differences were noted and described, as they related to current research. Findings are organized by the research questions. Two findings emerged from Research Question One: 1. teachers developed a perception of calm in their classrooms and 2. realization of teacher impact on classroom climate. Two findings emerged from Research Question Two: 1. reflective teachers: realistic expectations and 2. teachers' strengthened sense of empathy and compassion. Three findings emerged from Research Question Three: 1. perception of positive teacher influence, 2. teachers' increased awareness of the importance of modeling and 3. reflective teachers: realistic expectations of self. In the following sections, the researcher makes connections between the findings of this study and theoretical research including Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Theory on the Ecology of Human Development and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Learning Theory.

Research Question One: Perception of Classroom Climate

Finding one A – teachers developed a perception of calm in their classrooms. The researcher's classroom observation notes indicated moments of calmness in each classroom. After completing mindfulness trainings, many of the teacher journal entries and interview comments from this study supported the idea that participating teachers felt they were more aware of the calm moments and that they felt children were calmer in situations where they previously had not been. Many teachers reported the use of simple mindful techniques like “belly

breathing” and “counting breaths” as effective strategies that contributed to the sense of calm. Several teachers reported hearing positive comments about the calm classroom climate from other adults, including parents during drop-off and pick-up time and assistant teachers and co-teachers who were frequently in the classroom.

In both interviews and teacher journals, a recurring theme emerged in relation to teacher awareness of their own level of calm. This awareness is important because students pay close attention to how a teacher manages frustration, maintains classroom control and stays focused (Jones, et al., 2013). While this sense of calm was not always consistent in every classroom, and teachers reported on several occasions that aggressive behaviors would disrupt that sense of calm, they indicated that having the mindful strategies at least reduced those disruptive times or helped the teacher frame those situations more positively. Teachers who are calm and compassionate are more likely to be able to treat students with respect, even when a student’s behavior is challenging or disruptive (Jones et al., 2013). Additionally, mindfulness supports the development of an open, non-judgmental mind that enhances the ability to think clearly and make thoughtful decisions even when under pressure (Weare, 2014; Roeser et al., 2012).

From a theoretical perspective, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theories about behavior and development suggest that “what matters most is the environment as it is perceived, rather than as it may exist in reality.” This study relied heavily on teacher perception, understanding that those perceptions played an important role in their own behavior and in classroom climate. A teacher’s feelings of calm in this study appeared to correlate with their perception of the children behaving in a calmer manner. There appeared to be a shift in many teachers’ perceptions to a more positive one.

Finding one B - realization of teacher impact on classroom climate. When prompted in the journals, and when asked in interviews how teachers felt the mindfulness trainings may have affected their perceptions about the impact they can have on classroom climate, most reflected on the realization that they indeed had a powerful influence. This finding is similar to those found by Singh and colleagues (2013) supporting the notion that mindfulness practices with teachers correlated with positive changes in student behavior and interaction, ultimately affecting the classroom climate. There was an awareness that a good day for a teacher could positively impact the classroom climate as much as a bad day could negatively impact the classroom climate. Change in classroom climate must start with the teacher and the teacher's perceptions (Dorman, 2015). This shift in perception by the teacher, termed "reperceiving," can lead to positive change and outcomes for the teacher (Shapiro et al., 2006).

While the researcher did not conduct observations on the students, the participating teachers did bring up positive changes in the students' behaviors and in the classroom climate. Often these positive changes occurred even when teachers were not practicing mindfulness with the children. However, the teachers themselves were aware of and had practiced mindfulness strategies to some extent. In several cases, the teachers attributed those positive changes to their own mindfulness.

This finding has been documented in previous research involving 53 teachers who took part in a mindfulness program and reported improvement in relationships with students, classroom management and classroom climate, despite no direct mindfulness instruction for the students (Jennings, et al., 2013). The researcher in this case study concluded from these data that teachers who engaged in some type of mindful practice recognized the impact they were having on student development and, ultimately, classroom climate. They noticed those positive changes

in their students and in the classroom climate even when they did not practice mindful strategies with the children. In essence, the teachers had positively influenced the social and emotional development of the students, and thus the climate, by actively engaging in positive social and emotional behaviors themselves.

This finding aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of development in that the teachers in this case study were active members of the environment and appeared to have an impact on the development of their students. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that the interactions between all three – the classroom, the teacher and the student – are the most influential of all the layers of the ecological model and thus critically important to the development of the child. In this case, all three components, the teacher, the student, and the classroom climate, intersected to create positive change.

Research Question Two: Perception of Student Interactions

Finding two A – reflective teachers: realistic expectations of students. The data in this case study indicated that teachers' perception of the children in their classrooms and of the behaviors they noticed shifted from one of judgment to one of compassion and understanding after participating in mindfulness trainings. This finding has been previously documented in research reporting that mindfulness has the potential to positively affect a teacher's ability to respond more thoughtfully to students and their behaviors (Flook et al., 2013). These claims were based on research that found increased brain activity in areas that regulate attention, empathy, and other positive emotions can be linked to mindfulness practice (Hölzel et al., 2011; Weare, 2014). In that study, the most noticeable changes in the brain were found in those who practiced mindfulness long term. However, even those who practiced for shorter periods of time showed evidence of positive impacts on the brain (Hölzel et al., 2011; Weare, 2014). It is

important to make note of that finding as it relates to this case study because participating teachers were only exposed to four mindfulness trainings over the course of five months; a relatively short exposure. Yet, in that short time, changes in perception occurred.

As teacher expectations became more realistic, the climate of the classroom, while not always quiet and calm, became more positive. When altercations did occur, and a teacher approached the situation with this new perspective, the teacher felt more successful and the climate felt more conducive to learning. These positive interactions can lead to stronger teacher-student relationships and may have an impact on student performance not only in these classrooms, but also in classrooms for years to come (de Boer et al., 2010).

From a theoretical perspective, the impact one's dispositions, beliefs, background, and life experiences can have on the development of another is often referred to as the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, the data reflects a shift in the teachers' beliefs; specifically, their beliefs about the students they teach and their behaviors. Teachers commented that they went from a belief that young children come to them able to control their emotions and knowing how to handle challenging social interactions, to a belief that young children are still learning, that they are not born with these abilities, and that they need someone to model these skills with patience.

Finding two B – teachers' strengthened sense of empathy and compassion. The data from this case study suggests that as teachers became more cognizant of and concerned with a student's emotional well-being, they were able to accept the challenging situations in their classrooms with curiosity and without judgment. People who practice mindfulness gradually learn to focus and accept their experiences in a more reflective and less judgmental way (Weare, 2014). As in this study, the exposure to mindfulness instruction in Weare's research was

relatively short, yet they also engaged in thoughtful contemplation about their students' lives and emotional well-being. This finding is further supported by research indicating that mindfulness encourages the development of an open mind, increasing the likelihood of making thoughtful decisions under pressure (Weare, 2014; Roeser et al., 2012).

Mindfulness has the potential to positively impact social and emotional skills such as the ability to build meaningful relationships and to be compassionate (Weare, 2012; Baer, 2003; Salmon et al., 2004). Based on participating teacher reflections, it was evident that they had always experienced empathy for their students. However, the mindfulness trainings and the self-reflection activities appeared to prompt the teachers to call on that empathy more often during more chaotic or stressful situations. For example, one teacher commented, "Mindfulness allows you to become more aware of yourself and your needs along with others and their needs."

Research Question Three: Perception of Self-Efficacy

The next three findings all relate to efficacy and have commonalities. What distinguishes them is the cause behind the feelings of efficacy. Finding Three - A centers on the teachers being more cognizant of the times when they have a successful moment or day. Finding Three - B centers on the teachers feeling successful because they realize when they model positive behaviors, they see positive changes in their students' behaviors. Finally, Finding Three - C aligns closely with Finding Three – A, but centers on the teachers being less judgmental about their abilities as teachers versus an overall awareness of success. The details of these findings are described in greater detail below.

Finding three A – perception of positive teacher influence. The data from this study suggests that teachers developed greater awareness of the successes they had with their students and in their classrooms after participating in mindfulness trainings. Several teachers reflected

that they had developed skills through mindfulness that they felt impacted their ability to manage difficult situations and support their students in positive social and emotional strategies. There was a sense that teachers who had learned to better manage their own emotions and shift their perspective about challenging situations felt more successful and more in control of their reactions to students. They appeared to be more aware of their success.

Similar findings were noted in a recent study reporting that when teachers learn to adapt their expectations of themselves to more realistic standards, their sense of self-efficacy may increase (Gouda, Luong, Schmidt & Bauer, 2016). This appeared to be especially true when a teacher could redirect their attention or their behavior from a negative lens to a more positive one. Teachers in this case study who engaged in mindful strategies reported feeling as though they had more realistic expectations of themselves, which improved their feelings of success. Additionally, they reported a shift in their perceptions about difficult or challenging situations from one of failure to one of acceptance.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings are supported by Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977). Specifically, Bandura theorized that a person's evaluation of his or her own abilities can impact their emotional reactions to anticipated and actual events in their environment. In this case study, teachers who reported engaging in mindfulness activities were more realistic about expectations of themselves, which improved their feelings of success in the classroom.

Finding three B – teachers' increased awareness of the importance of modeling. A teacher's ability to change classroom climate can be linked to his or her own behavior and perceptions of student behavior (Dorman, 2015). The data in this case study offered insight into that phenomenon, as teachers reported the awareness of the impact their own behaviors appeared

to have on their students. Mindfulness is, at the core, both a disposition and a behavior. As some of the teachers began engaging in mindful dispositions and sometimes in mindful behaviors, they began to see those same behaviors in their students. This modeling, which Vygotsky (1978) referred to as cooperative dialogue, provided the learning in this context for social and emotional skill development of the students.

Interestingly, several teachers reflected on the power of modeling when they realized students were modeling not only positive behaviors, but also negative ones. For example, some teachers reflected that when they were having a bad day or were feeling stressed or tired, the students' behavior appeared to mirror the teacher's disposition. Knowing the negative behaviors were being observed and replicated by their students opened the possibility that positive modeling could have a similar impact. This realization appeared to have a lasting impact on several teachers and prompted more engagement in mindfulness strategies. Those teachers who realized this phenomenon reported more interest in and practice of these strategies.

From a theoretical perspective, this study was conducted in prekindergarten classrooms where the students were at the optimal age to be exposed to social and emotional skill development. The teachers, or the knowledgeable others, played a significant role during this time that Vygotsky referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1979). As the teachers' strategies for self-regulation and self-awareness improved, so did the children's. This impact is also seen in social cognitive theory. When adults model positive strategies for self-regulation, students then have an example or a place to start their learning (Bandura, 1977).

Finding three C - reflective teachers: realistic expectations of self. The data in this case study suggests that mindfulness training may have provided teachers with an opportunity to take a step back and reflect on their abilities as a teacher. The researcher noted the following

comment as evidence of this phenomenon, “I am very hard on myself when I overthink everything and feel as though I am not successful. I think being more mindful of everyday thoughts and actions can help me be more successful in the long-run....” This reflection is consistent with recent research stating that people who practice mindfulness on a consistent basis report that they incrementally learn to focus and accept their experiences in a more reflective and in a less judgmental way (Weare, 2014).

The act of being reflective with their own practices and beliefs had a significant impact on teacher self-efficacy. Even when a day did not go well or as planned, those teachers who employed mindful dispositions or strategies tended to feel better about it. These teachers looked for the positive in their students, and also in themselves. When participating teachers reported difficult or challenging situations, many reflected that having strategies like mindfulness to reframe their thinking improved their sense of ability and success.

From a theoretical perspective, data in this case study were reflective of Bandura’s social cognitive theory and his suggestion that individuals who view themselves as ineffective tend to persevere on those feelings and give them more weight than they should (Bandura, 1982). Conversely, when teachers trust that they have the ability to create change through their actions, they will engage in that more productive behavior (Bandura, 1999). In keeping with social cognitive theory, the researcher concluded that mindfulness practices may have provided teachers with the opportunity to form less judgmental beliefs about their teaching abilities, allowing them to engage in more productive behaviors.

Implications of Findings and Recommendations for Future Research

This case study contributes to the body of research surrounding mindfulness, teacher self-efficacy, and classroom climate. After attending a series of mindfulness trainings, participating

teachers agreed to classroom observations by the researcher, interviewed with the researcher and journaled for approximately 16 weeks. Several interesting phenomena occurred as a result of this study and merit further investigation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Social and emotional competence in teachers. Addressing social-emotional competence for early childhood educators in teacher prep programs at both the higher education and continuing education levels should be further explored. Several teachers in this study discussed their personal experiences with mindfulness in the context of counseling for anxiety. More teachers are reporting higher levels of stress than in previous years (Metropolitan Life Insurance, 2011). Yet, in teacher preparation programs, there is little or no attention given in coursework to address the implications of this stress. All teachers in this study reported moments where it felt stressful in their classroom or that they felt they were unable to be successful.

As teachers continue to work in classrooms where their students are experiencing environmental stressors and, in some cases, traumatic events, attention should be paid to the possibility of compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is the emotional pressure one feels when working with people who suffer from the effects of traumatic events in their lives (Figley, 2002). Combatting the effects of compassion fatigue may be a long-term solution to teacher burnout and inappropriate expulsions and suspensions of preschool children. Longitudinal research on the impact mindfulness coursework might have on the ability teachers have to care for their own social and emotional wellbeing would add to the depth of research on educator effectiveness.

Implicit biases and mindfulness. This case study did not investigate implicit bias as it related to teacher perceptions. However, several teachers talked about the socioeconomic conditions many of their students were experiencing and the impact they felt that may have on a

child's ability to develop social and emotional skills. There should be further investigation into implicit bias and the impact mindfulness may play in recognizing and minimizing it. Implicit biases exist across cultures, countries, and institutions, and these biases can have an impact on teacher-student interactions (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti & Shic, 2016; American Psychological Association, Presidential Task Force, 2012). Mindfulness may offer an opportunity to shift adult perspectives, leading to a positive change (Shapiro et al., 2006).

A similar study in a comparable setting that investigates the impact implicit bias may have on teacher perceptions may help to address early childhood suspensions and expulsions. While this case study did not investigate suspensions and expulsions, the rate of expulsions in State funded prekindergarten programs is high (Gilliam et al., 2016). A lack of compassion may be contributing to the disturbing increase in expulsions from prekindergarten classrooms in publicly funded programs across the country (Gilliam & Shahr, 2006). As reported in this case study, mindfulness may offer an avenue for increased compassion. A longitudinal study surrounding the impact mindfulness can have on implicit bias and suspensions and expulsions could have profound implications for state and federal policies around teacher preparation and educational settings.

Supports needed for mindfulness implementation. Several teachers in this case study reflected on the challenges of implementing a mindful practice. They cited three obstacles: co-operating teachers in their classrooms did not embrace mindfulness strategies, administration had not provided materials or time to adequately implement the strategies (the researcher was not aware of whether administration had been asked), or the teacher did not feel comfortable implementing personally or with students because they did not feel they were “good at it.”

An in-depth examination of the supports needed to ensure fidelity to a mindful approach would be beneficial in determining the extent to which implementation of a mindfulness program is feasible for early childhood programs. Mindful dispositions and the benefits of mindfulness techniques are typically realized over a sustained period of time. Therefore, a longitudinal study that allows for a deeper exposure to mindfulness instruction would be important to understand the length of time needed in mindfulness instruction and practice to feel comfortable in implementation. A more intensive and comprehensive preparation may increase the likelihood of continued teacher efforts.

Student impact from mindful classrooms. Finally, a more comprehensive exploration of the impact mindfulness has on young children exposed to a mindful approach in the early years should be considered. This case study did not investigate the impacts of mindfulness on students in the classrooms. A quantitative study with access to data on student social-emotional competence prior to mindfulness instruction for teachers and post-mindfulness instruction may offer insight into the long-term benefits for students when teachers are versed in mindfulness strategies and practices.

One limitation of this study was the maturation of the students. Naturally, the students developed over the course of the study. The researcher could not account for the possibility that teacher perception of classroom climate improved simply because the students matured. A study with control classrooms where no mindfulness trainings occur may be able to account for that limitation.

Implications of Findings

Pre-service preparation and professional development for early childhood educators. One comment that resonated with the researcher was when a teacher remarked that,

in all of her teacher preparation, she had never learned about the benefits or impact of mindfulness and was disappointed. She specifically said, “I had a classroom management course in college and they never taught us this. I can do sticker charts until I’m blue in the face and the kids won’t care, but this (mindfulness), this they get. This makes a difference.” Higher education institutions and, in particular, teacher preparation programs, should consider curricula that supports the social and emotional competencies educators already possess and need continued support in.

There are numerous classroom and behavior management resources, curricula, and models available to educators today. The Positive Behavioral and Intervention Supports (PBIS) is just one example. While a school wide PBIS model has been effective in classrooms and schools, it does not support the teachers in their own skill development. A teacher dealing with financial strain, emotional stressors, and students who reflect varied backgrounds and experiences could benefit from ongoing social and emotional well-being supports.

The researcher recommends offering coursework through teacher preparation programs that highlights several methods for developing a teacher’s sense of self-care, empathy and compassion, and reflection on personal biases. As the research suggests (Dorman, 2015; Singh et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012), and the data from this dissertation supports, a teacher’s behavior and ability to manage his or her reactions can have a profound impact on their students. This is especially critical when teachers are working in classrooms where they are not representative, culturally or socioeconomically, of their students. It is then that empathy and compassion are of increased importance.

Once preservice teachers have a solid foundation for mindfulness, ongoing coursework on how to transfer those skills to their students and into their classrooms would be beneficial. It

is important to set the foundation for several reasons. The literature is clear (Weare, 2014; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Crane et al., 2010; Albrecht, Albrecht & Cohen, 2012) and supported by the findings in this case study: Teachers should learn and embrace mindfulness prior to introducing it into their classrooms. In this researcher's opinion, those teacher participants who embraced the mindfulness practices were better prepared to initiate it with their students. Additionally, those teachers were more likely to recognize the benefits of the practice on their classroom climate.

Ongoing professional development on mindfulness should also be considered. First, there is an entire workforce of early childhood educators who have never been introduced to the concept of mindfulness. Ideally, a teacher would attend a college level course to obtain the knowledge. If that is not an option, professional development sessions should be made available through district and state-level professional development sessions. Second, as preservice teachers attend these courses in college and subsequently enter the workforce, they will need continued skill development and practice in order to maintain the practice and develop additional skills.

Realistic and developmentally appropriate teacher expectations. When teacher expectations are not in line with the realities of teaching in stressful environments, the likelihood of feeling frustrated or anxious increases. Higher education programs for preservice teachers and even professional development trainings for in-service teachers offer courses and sessions on developmentally appropriate practices and, in many cases, on child development. However, when teachers enter the classroom, they are often ill prepared for the reality of developmentally appropriate behavior in their students. This, coupled with the possibility that the teacher is not familiar with a child's cultural, socioeconomic, or experiential background, can cause teacher-student tension and deteriorate the classroom climate.

Often, adult expectations of children are influenced by the adult's cultural, socioeconomic, and experiential background. This layer of the student's environment, or the exosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), can have both positive and negative effects on a child's development and on the relationship between the adult and the child. The participating teachers in this case study reflected frequently on a shift in their perception of student behavior. Most significantly, there was a more realistic and accepting perception of behaviors. While this study did not directly investigate the students or their behaviors, teacher perception is of the utmost importance when considering strategies to improve the classroom climate. Undeniably, coursework on classroom management and child development is important as a foundation, but it should be followed by evidence-based, practical strategies that address the social and emotional competence and dispositions of teachers.

Creating positive classroom climate in communities where poverty is prevalent. It is this researcher's opinion that it may be time to reframe our understanding of the achievement gap in this country and recognize it for what it is: an equity gap. While the presence of poverty in the setting for this study was explicitly mentioned in the research questions, the researcher does not consider poverty to be the root of the issue. Where poverty is present, there are likely diverse cultures, backgrounds, and experiences of the families and students in those communities. Inherently, implicit bias may have a significant impact on teacher perception of classroom climate, student interactions, and self-efficacy (Gilliam et al., 2016). The solution is two-fold. First, building a more diverse educator workforce is imperative. While there are biases within every group, the importance for students to have teachers who remind them of themselves is imperative. The second, and the one addressed in this case study, is leveraging the current workforce to build a capacity for reflection on implicit bias, empathy, and compassion.

Conclusion

Mindfulness instruction and practice appeared to have a positive impact when teachers embraced the concept. However, barriers to the fidelity of the implementation did exist. For a mindful approach to work in early childhood classrooms and with early childhood educators, teacher preparation programs must pay attention to the support and education of teachers entering the field. Our youngest citizens rely on the adults in their lives to guide them, nurture them and believe in them. The early childhood educator plays a significant role in their development. If we as a society are not willing to give these educators the social and emotional support to navigate these changing classroom dynamics, then educators will never see the change they so desperately seek in their children.

The landscape of teaching has shifted significantly over the years. Increased diversity in classrooms has added incredible perspective to the educational system but has also exposed our lack of understanding, recognizing, and addressing implicit bias, as well as the importance of compassion and empathy. When educators prepare students for social and emotional success at the foundational level, the academic growth has great potential. Educators cannot continue to expect early childhood educators to be paid, in many cases, poverty level wages, while simultaneously underpreparing them for the realities of teaching children who face adverse childhood experiences regularly. Change must occur, and it must be prioritized. Mindfulness may be one of several tools to support that change.

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Appendix A

Teacher Journal Prompts

Directions:

Each week of the project teachers participating in the project should set aside time to write in their journals. The purpose of the journal is to keep a comprehensive account of your experiences during the study and to reflect on your perceptions of classroom climate, student interactions and feelings of success. Because the entries are made close to the time of your experiences, they are more likely to be an accurate reflection of your impressions than weeks after the event.

- You should set aside time each week to write in your journal (approximately 15 minutes per week)
- Your writing should be free, spontaneous and informal
 - Entries should be descriptive, analytic and personally reflective
 - Talk about what you experienced, what you did about it and what you decided to do after the experience
- Use the prompts attached as “journal prompts” to get you started each week. You may add any additional thoughts to your entries as well
- **You may keep your responses brief (3 to 5 sentences)**
- You should look at the “journal prompts” prior to starting the week so you are aware of some of the things to look for during the week
- Your journals will serve as triangulation of data as they relate to the research questions:
 1. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of the classroom climate in communities where poverty is prevalent?
 2. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of and response to student interactions in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?
 3. How will instruction in and the practice of mindfulness impact early childhood teacher perception of self-efficacy in classrooms where poverty is prevalent?

- **Important:** For the purposes of privacy and anonymity, when referring to a situation in the classroom or challenging interaction, please do not identify a child by name. You may use terms like Child A or Student A.

Prompts:

WEEK #1

Do you feel that, as time goes by, mindfulness practice will help you become more capable of helping to address your students 'needs? Describe why or why not.

WEEK #2

As a teacher, how successful did you feel this week? Why?

How do you think mindfulness effects your perception of your success, if at all?

WEEK #3

The most challenging situation in my classroom this week was.....

What, if any mindful techniques did you utilize in that situation?

WEEK #4

Describe the classroom climate this week. Why do you think it felt that way?

Did mindfulness practice have any impact on the climate in your opinion?

WEEK #5

Were you confident in your ability to be responsive to your students 'needs even if you were having a bad day?

Did mindfulness strategies have any effect on your ability? If so, how?

WEEK #6

Describe the classroom climate this week. Why do you think it felt that way?

Did mindfulness practice have any impact on the climate in your opinion?

WEEK #7

When challenging situations presented themselves this week, did you utilize any new skills to overcome them? What were they?

Do you think mindfulness increased your ability to use those new skills?

WEEK #8

As a teacher, how successful did you feel this week? Why?

How do you think mindfulness effects your perception of your success, if at all?

WEEK #9

Describe the classroom climate this week. Why do you think it felt that way?

Did mindfulness practice have any impact on the climate in your opinion?

WEEK #10

Describe any comments you may have had from other adults (teachers, parents, administrators) about your students or classroom. Were they positive or negative? What were they?

Do you think your mindfulness training had an impact on that?

WEEK #11

Do you feel that you can exert a positive influence on both the personal and academic development of your students now that you have been practicing mindful strategies?

Why or why not?

WEEK #12

Describe whether you feel teaching prekindergarten is rewarding for you.

Has that feeling changed over the years? Why or why not?

Other thoughts....

WEEK #13

When challenging situations presented themselves this week, did you utilize any new skills to overcome them? What were they?

Do you think mindfulness increased your ability to use those new skills?

WEEK #14

Describe the classroom climate this week. Why do you think it felt that way? Are there differences from the beginning of the year?

If there was a change, did mindfulness have anything to do with the change?

WEEK #15

When challenging situations presented themselves this week, did you utilize any new skills to overcome them? What were they?

Do you think mindfulness increased your ability to use those new skills?

WEEK #16

Do you feel that, as time goes by, mindfulness practice will help you become more capable of helping to address your students' needs? Describe why or why not.

WEEK #17

In comparison to the beginning of the project, are you feeling less stressed, more stressed or about the same? Do you attribute this to mindfulness at all? Please explain.

WEEK #18

The most challenging situation in my classroom this week was.....

What, if any mindful techniques did you utilize in that situation?

WEEK #19

What differences if any are you noticing about your teaching strategies?

Do you attribute any of the change to mindfulness? Why or why not?

Other thoughts....

WEEK #20

Were you confident in your ability to be responsive to your students' needs even if you were having a bad day?

Did mindfulness strategies have any effect on your ability? If so, how?

WEEK #21

Describe what you have learned from this experience and what you might use in your future work.

Will you continue to use mindful strategies in your everyday teaching practices? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Classroom Observation Framework

Teacher Code: _____

Date _____

1. “Research around mindfulness training for teachers shows that when teachers provide clear instructions, feedback contingent on performance and high rates of reinforcement, students typically display high rates of social and academic engagement. Additionally, the use of systematic positive reinforcement decreases misbehavior and discipline problems” (Southerland & Oswald, 2005).

Look for/Listen for: Clear instructions, feedback to students based on performance, frequent reinforcement

Observed Behaviors/Interactions:

2. “When teachers are challenged with a stressful situation the initial instinct is automatic and reactive but when they use the “breathe in, breathe out” mantra whenever they felt they were being swept away by their emotions, it brought them back to the present moment, increased awareness of their usual responses and positively altered their approach to the situation” (Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Karazsia & Singh, 2013).

Look for/Listen for: Pause before responding to a situation, responses that are calm and controlled, responses that are thought out and not reactive, positive and calm tone of voice, welcoming body language

Observed Behaviors/Interactions:

3. “Mindfulness has been shown to be helpful in building relationships and increase a sense of interpersonal closeness” (Brown & Kasser, 2005). Additionally, mindfulness training has been shown to “increase patience, empathy and forgiveness of self and others” (Benn, Akiva, Arel & Roeser, 2012).

Look for/Listen for: Respectful interactions between teacher and student, teacher demonstrates concern and compassion during stressful or challenging situations, when challenging situations occur teacher remains calm, classroom sounds active but positive

Observed Behaviors/Interactions:

Appendix C

Teacher Interview Protocol Pilot

Mindfulness Training: Investigating Impacts on Prekindergarten Teacher Perceptions of Their Ability to Build a Positive Classroom Climate

Teacher Interview Protocol- PILOT

Early Childhood Expert Instructions- Please fill out the demographics below to verify your name and expertise in the field. If modifications need to be made to interview questions, this ensures that the researcher can consult with the expert to make revisions according to experts' suggestions. The researcher is looking for at least 5 (five) expert opinions. Your participation in this project is voluntary. Please mark each question as "acceptable" if you believe the question is sufficiently clear. If the question is not clear, please write suggested revisions, or "remove" if you feel the question should be completely removed from the interview protocol. Return the entire form to Marnie Aylesworth in the included self-addressed, stamped envelope. Thank you in advance for your time and expertise!

Expert's Name _____

Years of Experience in Early Childhood Education _____

Phone Number _____ Email _____

How would you prefer I contact you if I have follow-up questions regarding your feedback? _____

Interview Protocol- Prior to interview:

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is Marnie Aylesworth and I would like to talk to you about your experiences participating in this project and about the *Wellness Works in Schools* program and how it has affected, if at all, your classroom climate, student interactions or how you feel about teaching prekindergarten.

The interview should take no more than 30 minutes. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I would like to capture all of your comments accurately. If you don't mind, I would like to record the session. Because I am recording, please be sure to speak clearly so that I don't miss your comments. Your responses will be transcribed verbatim.

All responses will be kept **confidential**. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with my dissertation committee members. I will ensure that any information I include in my dissertation does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions about what I have just explained?

Are you willing to participate in the interview?

Demographics:

Gender_____

Education Level_____

Years Teaching_____

Grade Levels Taught_____

Efficacy

Reflect for me on your personal and professional experience with the mindfulness training this year?

Did you find the activities in the mindfulness trainings and practices to be developmentally appropriate? Which ones come to mind and why?

Do you feel successful teaching in the prekindergarten classroom? Please explain

Classroom Climate Supports Positive Relationships

Could you share how you handle some of the social-emotional issues/challenges that emerge in your classroom? Please identify at least two challenges and elaborate on your approach.

To what extent did you see a difference in the overall climate of your classroom after attending the professional development and the implementation of mindfulness practices in the classroom? Please elaborate.

To what extent do you feel you can have an impact on the classroom climate? Has that perception changed since you have been teaching? If so, how?

What comments/reactions regarding your student's' social-emotional skills have you heard from parents, other teachers, visitors before, during or after mindfulness trainings?

Effectively Respond to Student Interactions

To what extent do you think prekindergarten teachers play a role in guiding the social-emotional development of their students? What might this look like in a classroom?

How have your interactions with students changed if at all over this training period? Provide specific examples if possible.

Please share any other impressions you have about the training, this project, personal practice, implementation in the classroom, resources and limitations.

Appendix D

Teacher Interview Protocol Primary Study

Mindfulness Training: Investigating Impacts on Prekindergarten Teacher Perceptions of Classroom Climate, Student Interactions and Self-Efficacy

Interview Protocol- Prior to interview:

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is Marnie Aylesworth and I would like to talk to you about your experiences participating in this project and about the *Wellness Works in Schools* program and how it has affected, if at all, your classroom climate, student interactions or how you feel about teaching prekindergarten.

The interview should take no more than 30 minutes. Although I will be taking some notes during the session, I would like to capture all of your comments accurately. If you don't mind, I would like to record the session. Because I am recording, please be sure to speak clearly so that I don't miss your comments. Your responses will be transcribed verbatim.

All responses will be kept **confidential**. This means that your interview responses will only be shared with my dissertation committee members. I will ensure that any information I include in my dissertation does not identify you as the respondent. Remember, you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to and you may end the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions about what I have just explained?

Are you willing to participate in the interview?

Demographics:

Gender_____

Education Level_____

Years Teaching_____

Grade Levels Taught_____

Efficacy

Reflect for me on your personal and professional experience with the mindfulness training this year?

Did you find the activities in the mindfulness trainings and practices to be developmentally appropriate? Which ones come to mind and why?

Do you feel successful teaching in the prekindergarten classroom? Please explain

Classroom Climate Supports Positive Relationships

Could you share how you handle some of the social-emotional issues/challenges that emerge in your classroom? Please identify at least two challenges and elaborate on your approach.

To what extent did you see a difference in the overall climate of your classroom after attending the professional development and the implementation of mindfulness practices in the classroom? Please elaborate.

To what extent do you feel you can have an impact on the classroom climate? Has that perception changed since you have been teaching? If so, how?

What comments/reactions regarding your student's' social-emotional skills have you heard from parents, other teachers, visitors before, during or after mindfulness trainings?

Effectively Respond to Student Interactions

To what extent do you think prekindergarten teachers play a role in guiding the social-emotional development of their students? What might this look like in a classroom?

How have your interactions with students changed if at all over this training period? Provide specific examples if possible.

Please share any other impressions you have about the training, this project, personal practice, implementation in the classroom, resources and limitations.

Appendix E

Announcement to Teachers: Informational Communication - Primary Study

Dear Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts Teachers,

I am seeking volunteer Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts teachers in the School District of Lancaster to participate in a research study involving the impacts of mindfulness practice on early childhood educators teaching experiences. The purpose of this case study is to explore the impact mindfulness training and practices have on an early childhood teacher's perception of their ability to build a positive classroom climate and develop relationships with their students where poverty is prevalent in the community. The study will also look at early childhood teacher's beliefs and perception of the usefulness and effectiveness of mindfulness in their personal teaching practices. Finally, the study will explore whether early childhood teachers feel there is a change in their own beliefs about and their reactions to their students. You were identified as a possible volunteer because you are participating in the *Wellness Works in Schools* professional development sessions and you are a Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts teacher. This study is being led by Marnie Aylesworth, a doctoral student in the Curriculum and Instruction program offered by Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The study has been approved by the University, and by the School District of Lancaster.

What Will Participating Teachers Do?

- Participants must sign a consent form. Consent forms will be distributed and collected in an envelope at one of your Wellness Works trainings where there are no persons of authority present.
- After consents are signed and submitted participants will be informed of their participation and will attend an informational meeting to answer any questions
- Teachers will continue to participate in the *Wellness Works in Schools* training sessions and practice the suggested activities.
- Your classroom will be observed in a non-evaluative manner in order to provide the researcher with descriptive background data on the classroom climate. Observations will be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time and you will have the opportunity to review the researchers notes at the conclusion of the observation for accuracy. Your decision to participate, not participate or discontinue participation in the study at any time will not impact your position in the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program or with the School District of Lancaster
- Keep an anecdotal journal of reflections from the week, perceptions about classroom climate and the mindfulness practices being implemented. You will be provided with some prompts but will also have the opportunity for open-ended comments.
- Participate in an interview at the conclusion of the program.

Benefits of Participation

- Knowing that your participation may add to the body of knowledge regarding the impacts social and emotional wellness practices like mindfulness may have on teacher efficacy, classroom climate and student interaction.

Which Teachers Can Participate? Any SDoL teacher with ECE certification working full time in a Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts classroom

If you have any questions about the study or the expectations please contact Marnie Aylesworth at 717-943-3810 or marayl@berksiu.org

Appendix F

Teacher Consent Letter

Consents/Statement of Assent Primary Project

Informed Consent- Teachers For a Research Study entitled

MINDFULNESS TRAINING: INVESTIGATING IMPACTS ON PREKINDERGARTEN TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ABILITY TO BUILD A POSITIVE CLASSROOM CLIMATE

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Marnie Aylesworth, a doctoral student in the Curriculum and Instruction program offered by Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The purpose of this case study is to explore the impact mindfulness training and practices have on an early childhood teacher's perception of their ability to build a positive classroom climate and develop relationships with their students where poverty is prevalent in the community. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts teacher in the School District of Lancaster and you are attending the *Wellness Works in Schools* professional development sessions offered by the District.

If you participate, you will be asked to practice and use the skills discussed in the *Wellness Works in Schools* Mindfulness trainings offered by the district. In order to determine the impact of these practices you will be asked to keep an anecdotal journal weekly throughout implementation. You will be interviewed at the conclusion of the program to collect data regarding your perceptions of the program and other factors. The interviews will be face-to-face, set up at a mutually agreeable time and, with your permission, will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews should last no more than 30 minutes. If a line of inquiry presents itself during program implementation, there may be additional interview questions asked. At a later date you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript record for accuracy.

Additionally the researcher will conduct a classroom observation. This observation is non-punitive and will not be used for the purposes of evaluation. None of the observations will be shared with any person or organization and will be coded to afford confidentiality. The researcher will act as a non-participant in the classroom for approximately three hours in order to better understand the implementation of practices and the climate of the classroom. All data collected through the observation will be kept confidential and the names of the participants will

be coded so as not to identify them. The teacher will have the opportunity to review the researcher notes from the observation to ensure accuracy.

The anticipated risks for participation in this project are no more than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. Your additional work load for participation is minimal. In order to maintain confidentiality, any observations, communications or documentation will be marked with a number and your name will be removed. The research codes will be private and will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Only the researcher will have access to the research records. While the researcher is employed by the same organization that oversees Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts, her role as Director of Program Operations recuses her from any immediate or direct oversight of the classrooms and has no bearing on performance, evaluations or status of either the teacher or the School District of Lancaster.

If you participate in this project you will have the likely added benefit of improving your social and emotional wellness as well as your students'. You may also benefit by knowing that your participation may add to the body of knowledge regarding the connection between social-emotional competence and positive classroom climate, positive student behavior and teacher efficacy. I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

If you decide to participate, you will not incur any out of pocket expense of your own and you may keep the materials you are given while you participate.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time during the study by contacting the researcher. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your position in the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts program or the School District of Lancaster in any way.

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. If you have any questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Marnie Aylesworth at (717)943-3810 (c), (717)213-3736 (w), 15 Cobble Court, Middletown, PA 17057 or you may email marayl@berksiu.org (w), or marnieann66@gmail.com (h). You may also contact her faculty chair, Dr. Beatrice Fennimore at (724)357-7763 or by email bzfennim@iup.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional

Review Board by phone (724) 357-7730 or email irb-research@iup.edu. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

Participant Signature Date

Printed Name

Investigator obtaining consent Date

Printed Name