

Mindfulness Practices and Children's Emotional and Mental Well-Being:

Activities to Build and Strengthen Everyday Resilience

Adapted for Primary School Teachers

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Abstract

This project reviewed current research on mental health and Canadian children, and then examined the practice of mindfulness as a means of supporting well-being and circumventing the potential detrimental effects of mental health problems. By contextualizing these findings within the recently released educational vision of the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014), which identifies well-being as one of the core principles of education in Ontario, this project investigated how mindfulness-based practices can be brought into the primary grade classroom. The ultimate purpose of this project is the development of a handbook for Ontario teachers of students in grades 1 to 3 (ages 6 to 8). This resource was developed from a comprehensive literature review and provides educators with easy-to-follow activities to use in the classroom to encourage the development of resilience and emotional well-being through mindfulness. The handbook also includes additional information and resources regarding both mindfulness and mental health that may be helpful to teachers, students, and parents.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My interest in mental well-being has been long standing, but my desire to research strategies that promote emotional well-being and resilience in children developed when I began volunteering with the FRIENDS program, an internationally implemented program for the prevention and treatment of anxiety and depression in children and youth. Working with students as young as 7 years old, I was unsettled by the level of anxiety and self-loathing expressed by these children. There are many mental health initiatives currently being developed and executed to address national findings that mental health problems are on the rise among Canadian children and youth (Mental Health Commission of Canada [MHCC], 2012; Schwean & Rodger, 2013). Although intervention programs are an important component of mental health care, it is equally as important to examine prevention strategies that promote and support well-being (Broderick & Metz, 2009). It is crucial to examine the underlying factors that may contribute to the development of emotional difficulties at such young ages and thereafter develop practices that address these factors (Broderick & Metz, 2009; MHCC, 2012).

This project examines the current research regarding the mental well-being of children in Canada. After contextualizing these findings within the present-day educational goals in Ontario, this project will subsequently explore how the teacher can support the development of emotional well-being and resilience in primary grade level children, by investigating the practical shape of mindfulness in the classroom. Central to this project is the development of a handbook for Ontario teachers of students in grades 1 to 3 (ages 6 to 8). This resource will provide educators with easy-to-follow activities to use in the classroom to encourage the development of resilience and emotional well-

being through mindfulness. The handbook will also include additional information and resources regarding both mindfulness and mental health that may be helpful to teachers, students, and parents.

Mindfulness has long been considered by many contemplative traditions as a practice that increases one's awareness of both internal and external experiences, promotes self-regulation, caring for others, and reduces stress and anxiety (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005). Current research also specifically speaks to its potential in developing resilience in children (Coholic, 2011; Kuyken et al., 2013). The ideas expressed in this project are not necessarily new. They have been expressed for many years (thousands if one considers the origins of mindfulness), but the principles are rarely applied in practice. It is my hope that this project will lend new eyes to old beliefs about the importance building and strengthening emotional well-being and resilience and create a resource for those unfamiliar with the increasingly popular topic area of mindfulness.

Background of the Problem

Emotional well-being is considered to be one of the core components of mental health (Albretch, 2014). Mental health is considered fundamental to children's overall health, affecting their ability to participate in school, familial, social, and leisure activities (Schwean & Rodger, 2013), and therefore emotional well-being is important to overall development. Statistics suggest, however, that mental health problems represent the most common health problem affecting Canadian children (MHCC, 2012, 2013; Schwean & Rodger, 2013; Whitley, Smith, & Vaillancourt, 2012). With 15% to 20% of Canadian children being affected by mental health problems, this represents about one million children (Schwean & Rodger, 2013). Anxiety, depression, and attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder are some of the most prevalent mental health disorders within the child population (Anticich, Barrett, Silverman, Lacherez, & Gillies, 2013; MHCC, 2012; Schwean & Rodger, 2013; Whitley et al., 2012).

If childhood mental health problems are not addressed effectively, they may lead to challenges in adulthood (MHCC, 2012; Waddell, McEwan, Shepard, Offord, & Hua, 2005). Waddell et al. (2005) identify some of these emotional and behavioural challenges, which include “anxiety and depression” (p. 227) and “aggression, inattentiveness, and hyperactivity” (p. 227). There are many personal, social, and economic losses associated with poor mental health. It is estimated that about \$50 billion are lost every year due to mental health problems and illness (MHCC, 2012). Poorer academic engagement, unsatisfactory employment, compromised well-being, family problems, suicide, and increased involvement in the criminal justice system are just a small list of other challenges that may arise when mental health problems are not adequately addressed (Schwean & Rodger, 2013).

The MHCC (2012) states that mental health promotion and mental illness prevention programs as well as early access to intervention can greatly “reduce the impact of mental health problems and mental illnesses” (p. 5); however, 80% of children and youth who require mental health services do not receive any treatment (Whitley et al., 2012). Many barriers affect effective service delivery, and these include fragmented health care systems, location, insufficient funding, stigma associated with mental health problems, socioeconomic status of the family, and lack of qualified health professionals (Whitley et al., 2012). Evidently, there is a need to address the gap between the needs of those dealing with mental health problems and the services/support available to them

(MHCC, 2012). More broadly speaking, it is time to change how mental health is addressed with children and youth in general to ensure a greater likelihood that children experience life with good, well-rounded health (Schwean & Rodger, 2013).

In the ongoing examination of needed changes in the mental health care system, an understanding of how child and youth health is influenced in the educational system has been pushed to the forefront of the discussion (Schwean & Rodger, 2013). The MHCC published Canada's first national mental health strategy in 2012, titled *Changing Directions, Changing Lives*, recommending six key strategic directions for action in mental health. One of these strategies is to promote mental health in frequently visited places such as schools (MHCC, 2012). This strategy is supported by the claim that children and youth are best reached "through broad programs that promote mental health for all" (MHCC, 2012, p. 24). Thus, schools have been identified as playing an integral role in how mental health is promoted and managed (MHCC, 2012).

Children spend the majority of their childhood in school and teachers play an important role in facilitating the development of skills associated with emotional well-being and resilience. The Canadian Teachers' Federation (2012) found that elementary and secondary school teachers alike want to gain a better understanding of the nature of mental health and learn how to help students effectively manage experiences of stress and anxiety; however, 68% of the 3,927 teachers participating in the study had not received training in prevention strategies for mental health, nor any training in learning how to recognize mental health problems (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2012).

The importance of supporting student well-being in addition to academic achievement within education is, however, gaining recognition. The Ontario Ministry of

Education (OME, 2014) recently released a document titled *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* that identifies well-being as one of the four core principles of education in Ontario. Cognitive, social, physical, and emotional well-being are included within the umbrella of well-being (OME, 2014). These revised educational goals represent a significant shift in the traditional focus of education, but continued examination of *how* to promote student emotional well-being and resilience is needed.

Rationale for Handbook

Mental health, and therefore emotional well-being, has a significant impact on cognitive, social, emotional, and academic functioning (Schwean & Rogers, 2013). Optimal emotional well-being and resilience may serve as a buffer against the negative effects of everyday stress and challenges, and can reduce the risk of developing mental health problems and illnesses (MHCC, 2012). It is therefore worthwhile to investigate universal strategies and practices that promote both mental and emotional wellness throughout a child's development. I want to address the need to promote well-being among young students and the lack of resources in this area for teachers. The research I have undertaken will make a practical contribution to a growing body of literature concerning the role that mindfulness plays as a means for promoting emotional well-being, resilience, and overall mental well-being among children.

Mindfulness practices appear well positioned to act as a feasible and effective strategy that promotes emotional and mental well-being within the school environment. Most research claims that the roots of mindfulness are found in Eastern meditation practices (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness can be practiced in a number of ways, but at its core is the idea of awareness within the present moment and paying attention in a non-

judgmental and compassionate way (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). In adult populations, the practice of mindfulness has been associated with improved self-confidence, greater creativity, better focus, increased self-awareness, lower levels of stress, better relationships with others, and higher levels of reported optimism (Davidson & Lutz, 2008; Gold et al., 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Newmark, Krahnke, & Seaton, 2013).

Although research on the accessibility and effects of mindfulness on children and youth remains in its infancy stage, current findings indicate that the benefits of mindfulness have the potential to transcend all ages. A broad range of outcomes has been identified, including the findings that children and youth who participate in mindfulness activities demonstrate a reduction in stress and anxiety, and an increased ability to self-regulate (Broderick & Metz, 2009; Fisher, 2006; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Joyce, ETTY-Leal, Zazryn, Hamilton, & Hased, 2010; Kuyken et al., 2013; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Newmark et al., 2013; Rempel, 2012; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Semple, Lee, Rosa, & Miller, 2010; Semple, Reid, & Miller, 2005; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Incorporating developmentally appropriate mindfulness practices into brief, everyday activities has shown promising results in a child's ability to self-soothe (Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research project was to develop a handbook that will act as a resource for Ontario elementary school teachers to promote the development of emotional well-being and resilience among children ages 6 to 8 (grades 1 to 3). These primary grade levels were selected because they represent an important early transition

period for children from kindergarten into the more disciplined and academically oriented environment of grade school (La Paro, Pianta, & Cox, 2000), and yet this period of transition has received very little research attention. Transitions are key periods “where children face new and challenging tasks as they move from familiar to unknown and more complex surroundings” (Augst & Akos, 2009, p. 3). If effective coping strategies are not made available to the child during periods of transition, positive learning opportunities may be lost to anxiety and stress that compromise mental and emotional well-being (Augst & Akos, 2009). Therefore, transition periods are an important time to introduce strategies and practices that promote emotional well-being and resilience.

The practice of mindfulness presents opportunities to develop such strategies and therefore the handbook is meant to provide information, activities, and resources for primary grade teachers interested in the application of mindfulness within the classroom. The handbook is also a resource of current knowledge regarding mental health and children. And finally, this handbook can act as communication tool with parents who may have questions about mindfulness or who may seek more information about resources for supporting their child’s mental and emotional well-being.

Research Questions

There is a need for further examination into the application of mindfulness, specifically within educational settings (Rempel, 2012). My primary research questions in the development of the handbook include:

1. Why do we need mindfulness in the classroom?
2. What are the research findings on current mindfulness-based initiatives?
3. What does mindfulness look like in the classroom?

4. What are the developmental considerations for primary school children ages 6 to 8?
5. Which types of resources (activities, games, books, training) are needed by teachers to implement mindfulness into everyday activities?

Research Goals

The handbook is neither a defined syllabus nor a mandatory content specific course—as mindfulness can be practiced in highly varied ways. The handbook does, however, provide a framework within which to encourage the practice of mindfulness in the classroom. Mindfulness-based approaches offer teachers and parents tools for helping children cope more effectively in changing and increasingly stressful environments. My hope is that the benefits gained from using mindfulness will permeate through the child’s school experience and personal life. The mindfulness activities in this handbook are divided into four main categories: sensory activities (example strategy: body scans), breathing and visualization activities (example strategy: balloon breath), compassion activities (example strategy: the kindness tree), and perspective-taking activities (example strategy: the worry shoe box). These activities were developed and adapted from empirical research examined through a comprehensive literature review.

Given that mindfulness activities often include pleasurable and play-based activities for children (Klatt, Harpster, Browne, White, & Case-Smith, 2013), this project includes an examination of arts-based mindfulness activities. The integration of mindfulness and arts-based activities such as visual art may be particularly powerful in the promotion of emotional well-being and resilience given the research that suggests that experiences with art may promote mental and emotional well-being (Adu-Agyem, Enti, & Peligah, 2009; Brouillette, 2010; Coholic, 2011; Dunn & Stinson, 2012; Feldman, 2008).

Teachers are also guided towards additional resources such as books, audio recordings, online applications, and recommended mindfulness training programs, as well as general mental health resources for children. The handbook also contains a critical reflection of my own self-practice in mindfulness and provides a list of questions that educators can contemplate and reflect on throughout the implementation of the handbook.

Theoretical Frameworks

This project is guided by three psychological and socio-ecological models: Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, 1983; Erikson's Stages of Psychological Development Theory, 1963; and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, 1989. All three theories are distinct in their focus, but together they provide an interrelated lens through which to understand the important role of the teacher in the facilitation of emotional well-being and resilience and the applicability of mindfulness within the context of school.

Most central to this project's foundation is Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences which broadens the definition of human intelligence to include intelligences beyond the traditionally recognized linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligences. In doing so, Gardner problematizes the traditional and narrow focus in school on achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics as the sole marker of success within the school environment (Gardner & Hatch, 1989; Matthews, 1994). Personal intelligences such as interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences are among the initial seven forms of intelligence outlined by Gardner (1999). Gardner's framework suggests the importance of creating opportunities to cultivate these intelligences.

Complementing Gardner's (1983) more psychologically focused approach, socio-ecological theories explore the interrelationships between social systems and human development (Lee & Stewart, 2013). For example, Erikson's (1963) Stages of Psychological Development Theory highlights the role of social and cultural context at different stages of development while Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Systems Theory examines the reciprocal interaction between the various social contexts in which the developing child exists.

These theories highlight the connection between experience/environment and the development of emotional and mental well-being. They therefore suggest the importance of implementing practices (e.g., mindfulness) within the classroom that create opportunities for learning in the area of mental and emotional well-being.

Although the aforementioned theoretical models guide this specific research project, it should be noted that mindfulness is subject to a host of interpretations and theoretical approaches. Wellness theory (Albretch, 2014), neuroscience (Davidson & Lutz, 2008; Hölzel et al., 2011) and holistic paradigms (Miller, 2010) are a non-exhaustive list of conceptual frameworks applied to mindfulness-based programs and activities. Adaptations of mindfulness practices for children need to be informed by models of human development, but one should always be cognizant of alternative perspectives.

Importance of the Study

A number of mental health initiatives are being developed across Canada at the school, community, provincial, and national level to address the increasing gap between the needs of children and youth and the services available to them and their families

(MHCC, 2012; Ottawa-Carlton District School Board [OCDSB], 2012; People for Education, 2013). Given the number of hours children spend at school, effectively implementing mindfulness practices into early elementary grade classrooms may act as a beneficial complement to other important models of mental health service delivery. It may also act as a critical preventative strategy against the development of mental health problems and illnesses as children build resilience and effective emotional coping strategies for moments of stress and vulnerability. This research is therefore significant to the current efforts to increase the capacity of educators to promote child well-being. This research is also significant to the continued commitment across Canada to the improvement of mental health promotion and prevention, and treatment of mental health challenges that children and youth face. This research is important for teachers, children and their families, the school board, mental health professionals, and the broader community.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to this handbook that need to be acknowledged. This handbook aims to provide early elementary grade educators with current information regarding mental and emotional well-being in young children and provide an introduction to the practice of mindfulness and its role in the development of emotional well-being and resilience. The handbook aims to provide educators with easy-to-follow activities to use in the classroom to encourage mindfulness among the children. Given the importance of attention to age-related developmental needs such as cognitive ability, this handbook is limited to children in the primary grades (grades 1-3). As was outlined earlier in this chapter, the primary grades were selected because they represent an important transition

period for children. During this transition, children must adjust from kindergarten, which primarily focuses on the social and emotional development of the child, to the more academic and regulated environment of grade school. The changes in curriculum and expectations present potentially stressful periods in the child's development and therefore the introduction of resilience building skills that help counter these stressful experiences is important.

Although more research is needed, current findings suggest that the skills—and the benefits—of mindfulness can be made widely available to children of different ages. Therefore, adaptations to the activities suggested in the handbook may be made to meet the needs of younger or older children, but these adaptations are not detailed in this project. Adaptations may also be required for students with specific needs (e.g., mobility considerations).

It should be noted that although these activities are adapted from empirically tested activities, this handbook has not yet been empirically tested. The handbook would benefit from formal review by educators, school boards, and external community members (for further detail on this see chapter 5 section: Limitations of the Project and Recommendations for Future Research). Although mindfulness may have therapeutic qualities that will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2, this handbook is not intended for therapeutic use. Rather, this handbook is proactive in nature, as it encourages the development of skills related to emotional well-being at a young age.

Both class-wide and school-wide approaches are necessary to create opportunities that promote well-being and resilience. This project addresses the classroom environment only, but further research should be put forth into creating a whole school approach.

And finally, it is also important that teachers begin to develop their own practice of mindfulness before they start implementing the practices into the classroom. Teachers of mindfulness stress that one must be grounded in one's own self-practice in order to teach and model mindfulness to others in an authentic way (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This handbook includes helpful resources for teachers interested in professional development opportunities in this area, but the assumption is that the teacher has developed (or is developing) a foundation of personal practice before implementing the activities suggested in the handbook into the classroom.

Chapter Summary

The mental and emotional well-being of children is a relevant issue in classrooms both within Ontario and across Canada. Children who experience stress and who lack appropriate coping strategies and intrapersonal skills are more vulnerable to mental health problems. Emerging studies suggest that mindfulness-based practices may be useful for building and strengthening emotional well-being and resilience in children. Although mindfulness is not meant to be the sole solution to the current mental health landscape, it presents an opportunity for children to navigate their everyday experiences differently and reminds us of the importance of not losing focus on emotional and mental well-being in school.

The following chapter of this project will present a comprehensive literature review. Within this review the theoretical perspectives grounding this project will be elaborated further. The current research regarding the mental well-being of children in Canada will also be examined. A comprehensive review of the literature specific to mindfulness will then be presented. Chapter 2 will conclude with a discussion of how the

present project builds on the findings outlined in the review. Chapter 3 will discuss the methods and procedures used to develop the handbook while chapter 4 is the presentation of the handbook: *Building Everyday Resilience: A Practical Handbook on Mindfulness Adapted for Primary School Teachers*. As a conclusion to the project, chapter 5 will present a summary of the project and a discussion of implications for theory, practice, and policy. The challenges and limitations of the project will also be discussed as well as recommendations for future research in the area of mindfulness and the mental and emotional well-being of children.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is divided into two main sections. The first section will explore the current findings regarding the mental well-being of children in Canada. Descriptions of key issues pertaining to emotional well-being and resilience will be reviewed. The second section will review the current literature on mindfulness, including an examination of current evidence-based practices. A summary of the current research findings and their connection to the present project will be presented at the end. Given that this literature review was an integral part to the development of the handbook rather than simply a means of providing background to this project, it is fitting to situate the literature by first briefly discussing the development process of the handbook. An elaboration of the developmental theories framing this project will also precede the bulk of this literature review.

Situating the Literature

Documents set forth by the MHCC, the OME, the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion (OMHP), People for Education, the OCDSB, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, and the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth were used to examine the current state of mental well-being of Canadian children. These documents were further supplemented by research findings in peer-reviewed psychology journals.

The second step was to examine the most recent literature on mindfulness-based programming and children. Most searches post 2012 yielded mostly research that focused on exceptionalities (e.g., children with autism) and adolescents. This research is beyond the scope of this project, and therefore many of these articles were excluded from the literature review. The studies that were included examined the effectiveness of

mindfulness-based programming/activities with both clinical groups (children identified with specific problems/illnesses or identified as high risk for problems) and non-clinical groups (children without identified problems). Not all reviewed studies were conducted in an educational setting, but many of the techniques/activities used to improve participant outcomes were common to all studies and therefore these studies were relevant to include in the literature review. To ensure that the adapted activities suggested in the handbook were supported by what are believed to be best practices, examination of the content of the mindfulness programs themselves was particularly critical for the development of the handbook. Consequently, studies that did not provide sufficient detail on the mindfulness programming used for the study were excluded, as they did not allow for program content to be reviewed.

Theoretical Perspectives

As was outlined in chapter 1, this project is grounded in three psychological and socio-ecological models: Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, 1983; Erikson's Stages of Psychological Development Theory, 1963; and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, 1989. A combined examination of these three theories lays the groundwork for understanding the importance of nurturing skills associated with emotional well-being and resilience within the classroom.

Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences helped to expand the limited conceptualization of human intelligence, which generally only recognized intelligence as linguistic and logical in quality (Gardner & Hatch, 1989; Matthews, 1994; Sellars, 2008). Given that the purpose of this project is to create an educational resource that diverges from the dominant foci of many schools (e.g., the focus on reading, writing, and

mathematics; Gardner & Hatch, 1989; Matthews, 1994), Gardner's theory is an important component of the overall framework guiding this project. Although Gardner acknowledges the importance of linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligences, he also speaks to musical, spatial, kinesthetic, and personal intelligences as well (Gardner, 1983; Matthews, 1994). Gardner and Hatch (1989) argue that these additional intelligences are an important aspect of adult life as well as school. It therefore stands that it is worthwhile that these intelligences be cultivated in childhood (Gardner, 1999).

Intelligence is defined as: "the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings" (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 5). Intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences are collectively referred to as personal intelligences (Gardner, 1999). Intrapersonal intelligence is described as the capacity to access "one's own feelings and the ability to discriminate among them and draw upon them to guide behavior; knowledge of one's own strengths, weaknesses, desires, and intelligences" (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 6). Conversely, interpersonal intelligence is described as the "capacities to discern and respond appropriately to the moods, temperaments, motivations, and desires of other people" (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, p. 6). Although Gardner makes a distinction between intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences, Gardner considers them to be interdependent, more so than other intelligences (Sellar, 2008). Additionally, these intelligences are considered to be more heavily influenced by "cultural norms" (Sellar, 2008, p. 80). Nurturing skills that are strongly related to emotional well-being and resilience (see chapter 2 sections: Emotional Well-Being, Resilience) may help cultivate these intelligences.

From a socio-ecological perspective, Erikson's (1963) Stages of Psychological Development Theory suggests eight stages of human development that span from birth to death (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2011). Each stage occurs over an approximate age range (e.g., ages 6 to puberty; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2011) and during each stage the individual attempts to overcome a specific conflict (Erikson, 1963). For example, basic trust versus mistrust is an example of the first conflict faced at birth (Erikson, 1963). During this developmental task, the individual is establishing a sense (or lacking sense) of trust with others based on the interplay between the infant and his/her environment (Erikson, 1963; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2011).

According to Erikson (1963), the fourth stage of development is industry versus inferiority. This stage corresponds approximately with the elementary school years (i.e., ages 6 to early adolescence; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2011), and therefore aligns with the early elementary grade levels selected as the focus for this project. In the elementary years, a child's sense of worthiness develops based on his/her ability to master skills (e.g., reading) and on the quality of interaction with others (Erikson, 1963). If a child experiences continued failure in these domains, then there is the risk of developing a sense of incompetence compared to others (Erikson, 1963), and this may have deleterious effects on the well-being of the child. Erikson's Stages of Psychological Development Theory (1963) provides a perspective that speaks to the importance of implementing practices within the classroom (such as mindfulness) where thoughts, feelings, and experiences can be explored without fear of failure or judgment (a safe environment). It also speaks to the potential consequences of an educational system that dictates academic achievement as the sole indicator of success in the future.

Bronfenbrenner (1989) similarly places individual development within a larger social and cultural context. Ecological Systems Theory states that it is crucial to consider development as occurring within both the immediate environment and larger societal influences. There is a reciprocal relationship between the developing child and the various environmental systems in which he or she exists (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Some systems such as the family, schools, and peers exist within close proximity to the child. Other systems function less immediately with the child, but they are still very influential to a child's development (e.g., government bodies that affect policy; Bronfenbrenner, 1989). Through this framework, it is evident that the development of emotional well-being and resilience must be considered both from a biological and environmental lens. The child's immediate environment (e.g., the classroom) must create opportunities for development in the area of mental and emotional wellness, and the child's broader environment (e.g., educational policy makers) must be proactive in prioritizing mental and emotional wellness within schools and the broader community.

The aforementioned theoretical perspectives highlight the connection between experience/environment and the development of emotional and mental well-being. They therefore suggest the importance of implementing practices (e.g., mindfulness) within the classroom where connections can be made between the mind, body, and the surrounding environment, in a safe and caring space. Understanding these connections is important to the premise of this project.

Mental Health

Now that the literature has been situated and the grounding theoretical perspectives have been presented, this section discusses the current findings regarding the

state of mental well-being among children in Canada. This section will also highlight the OME's current attitude toward the focus on well-being and mental health in education. Key components related to emotional well-being and resilience will also be defined and described in this section.

Mental health is defined as “a state of successful performance of mental function resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity” (OCDSB, 2012, p. 2). Mental health is considered a fundamental component of overall health (Schwean & Rodger, 2013), but as its definition suggests, it is complex in nature.

Although mental health is not simply a question of the absence or presence of a mental illness (MHCC, 2012), it is still relevant to outline some of the distinctions between mental illness and mental health problems. Mental illness refers specifically to disorders outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association (currently the DSM-V), which specifies the symptoms of a mental illness required to determine a diagnosis (OCDSB, 2012). Attention deficit disorder and anxiety disorders are among the commonly diagnosed mental illnesses in children (OCDSB, 2012).

Mental health problems, on the other hand, refer more generally to symptoms that do not meet the very specific criteria for a mental illness in the DSM-V (OCDSB, 2012). Mental health problems may simply be a reflection of temporary reactions to stresses of daily life; for example, feeling anxious during the first week of school (OCDSB, 2012). Such reactions, however, become maladaptive (i.e., may be considered pathological) when they start to become persistent and impair daily functioning (OCDSB, 2012). Sustained levels of stress may compromise a developing child's brain (Evans &

Schamberg, 2009). These compromises subsequently increase a child's "vulnerability to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and overall health" (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 296). Mental health (and all its related components) is directly related to a child's overall development (OCDSB, 2012). Therefore, ongoing research and development in mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention strategies are crucial.

Challenging behaviours often result from mental health problems, and it is important to consider the root causes of these mental health issues. For example, mental health problems may be the result of stress related to problems with peers, family problems, or pressures at school (OCDSB, 2012). Although certain circumstances are beyond the control of the teacher, classroom strategies and practices can play a role in helping children address these stresses in a way that may further rather than hinder healthy development (Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth [OPACY], 2006).

This project is directed towards the promotion of mental and emotional well-being rather than the prevention or intervention of specific mental illnesses. The handbook is intended as an educational resource for teachers hoping to create learning opportunities for students that will help them develop skills associated with emotional well-being and resilience. It is crucial to reiterate that the intended use of this handbook is not for therapeutic purposes; however, awareness of problems is important. Resource information regarding mental illness and mental health problems are provided in the handbook should teachers want more information.

Mental Health in Canadian Schools

In Canada, mental health and mental health promotion have received more attention in recent years. Statistics indicate that mental health problems are becoming the

biggest problem faced by Canadian children and youth today (MHCC, 2012, 2013; Schwean & Rodger, 2013; Whitley et al., 2012). With 15% to 20% of Canadian children being affected by mental health problems, this represents about one million children (Schwean & Rodger, 2013). Anxiety, depression, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are some of the most prevalent mental health disorders within the child population (Anticich et al., 2013; MHCC, 2012; Schwean & Rodger, 2013; Whitley et al., 2012).

In Ontario alone, 15% to 21% or between 467,000 and 654,000 children and youth have a mental health problem that impacts many areas of their life (OPACY, 2006). If childhood mental health problems are not addressed effectively, these problems may begin to compound and may lead to further challenges in adulthood (MHCC, 2012; Waddell et al., 2005). In fact, 70% of adults with mental health problems or illnesses experienced symptoms during childhood (MHCC, 2012); however, only one in five children and youth who require mental health services receive help (Whitley et al., 2012). There are many barriers that affect effective service delivery, and these include fragmented health care systems, location, insufficient funding, stigma associated with mental health problems, socioeconomic status of the family, and lack of qualified health professionals (Whitley et al., 2012).

There are many personal, social, and economic losses associated with mental health problems. It is estimated that about \$50 billion are lost every year due to mental health problems and illness (MHCC, 2012). Poorer academic engagement, unsatisfactory employment, compromised well-being, family problems, suicide, and increased involvement in the criminal justice system are just a small list of other challenges that

may arise when mental health problems are not adequately addressed (Schwean & Rodger, 2013). Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among adolescents and in North America, and children are now at risk of having a shorter life expectancy than their parents (People for Education, 2013). Evidently, investing in early prevention and health promotion is equally as important as investing in treatment and rehabilitation later in life (MHCC, 2012).

In the ongoing examination of needed changes in the mental health care system, an understanding of how child and youth health is influenced in the educational system has been developing (Schwean & Rodger, 2013). The MHCC published Canada's first national mental health strategy in 2012 (titled *Changing Directions, Changing Lives*) that suggests six key strategic directions for action in mental health. One of these strategies is to promote mental health in environments that are frequently visited, such as schools (MHCC, 2012). This strategy is supported by the claim that children and youth are best reached "through broad programs that promote mental health for all" (MHCC, 2012, p. 24). Thus, schools have been identified as playing an integral role in how mental health is promoted and managed (MHCC, 2012).

Amidst the growing pressures of accountability and standardization that educators face, the psychosocial needs of children have often been pushed to the background (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2011). In light of growing concerns about mental well-being amongst today's children and youth (MHCC, 2012), however, social and emotional learning is emerging as a critical element in the child's education (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). The importance of supporting student well-being within education is gaining recognition. The OME's (2014) newly published

document *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario* identifies well-being as one of the four core principles of education in Ontario. These revised educational goals represent a significant shift in the traditional focus of education, but there still needs to be continued examination of *how* to promote student well-being and resilience.

Well-being and education are interdependent (People for Education, 2013).

Although the responsibility for child and youth mental health and well-being is not solely that of the education system, it does play an important role (OPACY, 2006). The classroom offers one environment for creating learning opportunities that foster skills associated with mental and emotional well-being (MHCC, 2013). As will be discussed shortly, evidence is accumulating that implementing mindfulness-practices in school is one effective and affordable way to achieve this goal.

Emotional Well-Being

As has been previously outlined, the focus of this project is on the strengthening of emotional well-being and resilience rather than specific mental health problems or illnesses. Therefore, I now turn to an examination of the characteristics of emotional well-being.

Emotional well-being is considered one of the core components of mental health (Albretch, 2014). For the sake of clarity, this review will use the term “emotional well-being” but one should note that at times the literature uses the latter term interchangeably with “emotional wellness” (Albretch, 2014). Characteristics commonly associated with emotional well-being include: the ability to navigate challenging situations effectively; an awareness and openness to one’s thoughts, emotions, and behavioural tendencies; the

ability to recognize, manage, and express emotions in an effective manner; optimism; adaptability; compassion toward the self and others; and resilience (Albretch, 2014; Broderick & Metz, 2009; Collie et al., 2011).

While the ability to attend to and manage emotions (also referred to as self-regulation of emotions) is associated with overall emotional well-being, emotional dysregulation, which occurs when one does not have the ability to recognize and manage emotions in an adaptive way, is associated with mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Broderick & Metz, 2009). The connection between mindfulness and the characteristics of emotional well-being will become more evident in forthcoming sections of this literature review that examine mindfulness in more detail. Prior to this, however, an explanation of the construct of resilience, an important element of emotional well-being, will be provided.

Resilience

Mental health is evidently complex in nature as are the means through which one develops optimal emotional and mental well-being. For the purposes of this project, I have chosen to focus mostly on one facet related to the promotion of emotional and mental well-being: resilience. A basic definition of resilience is the ability to adapt in the face of “risk and adversity” (Bailey & Baines, 2012, p. 48). The term adversity is defined as “experiences that threaten adaptation or development” (Wright, Masten, & Narayan, 2013, p. 17). Risk refers to “an elevated probability of an undesirable outcome” (Wright et al., 2013, p. 17). An example of adversity that is relevant to this project would be stress experienced by a child when transitioning into more academically focused environments.

The ability to better cope with the challenges and stresses that are a part of the human experience contributes to overall emotional and mental well-being (Masten, 2014). Resilience in children and youth should be nurtured and strengthened (OMHP, 2010). A child's resilience depends on the interaction of two types of factors: protective factors and risk factors (Masten, 2014). These are discussed below.

Protective Factors

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services describes protective factors as “traits, characteristics, or environmental contexts that research has shown to promote positive mental health in childhood or adolescence” (as cited in OME, 2010, p. 215). Protective factors may “increase an individual's ability to avoid risks or hazards; and help to promote social and emotional competence” (OMHP, 2010, p. 68). Protective factors include “internal assets,” which are individual characteristics such as emotional self-regulation and coping skills, and “external assets” which refer more specifically to the resources that exist in the individual's social environment such as parental, teacher, and peer support (OMHP, 2010). Protective factors are believed to promote positive mental health in childhood and adolescence, which also contributes to well-being in later adulthood (OMHP, 2010; OPACY, 2006).

Risk Factors

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services describes risk factors as “traits, characteristics, or environmental contexts that research has shown to be predictive of mental health problems or illnesses in childhood or adolescence” (as cited in OME, 2010, p. 216). Examples of risk factors include a child living in poverty, parental abuse or absence, and continued experiences of failure in school (OME, 2010). A combination of

risk factors may also increase the risk of compromised well-being (Masten, 2014; OMHP, 2010). Although it is not possible for a school to address all of these factors, the school and classroom environment do provide an opportunity to reduce risk factors by creating a safe and nurturing environment.

The intersection of risk and protective factors impact the resilience of an individual (Masten, 2014). Positive experiences in childhood will contribute to the development of resilience, while negative experiences are correlated with the development of maladaptive coping behaviours and increased risk of childhood psychopathology such as depression (Anticich et al., 2013; OPACY, 2006). Although all children will experience challenges as they grow up, if a child goes through many negative experiences and has very few available support systems, well-being may be compromised (OPACY, 2006). It is therefore critical to support families, educators, and schools so that children can thrive and develop knowledge and skills that mitigate the influence of risk factors and enhance their well-being (Broderick & Metz, 2009; OPACY, 2006; People for Education, 2013).

Schools can provide children with many opportunities to develop the skills needed to help them cope with stress and challenging situations (MHCC, 2012; OCDSB, 2012; People for Education, 2013). As mindfulness is more clearly defined and discussed in this literature review, it will become evident that mindfulness-based approaches provide these opportunities to promote emotional well-being and resilience.

Vulnerable Periods of Development

Vulnerable periods for development refer to periods of time over the course of development when an individual may be particularly sensitive to risk factors such as

persistent stress (Masten, 2014). Conversely, these periods of vulnerability may present a time when the individual is particularly receptive to learning protective skills (e.g., learning effective coping strategies; Masten, 2014).

Times of transition, into a new grade for example, represent a period of vulnerability (La Paro et al., 2000; Powell, Son, File, & Froiland, 2012). Transitions are periods “where children face new and challenging tasks as they move from familiar to unknown and more complex surroundings” (Augst & Akos, 2009, p. 3). These transitions may provide positive learning opportunities for children, but if effective coping strategies are not made available to the child, these transitions can result in anxiety or stress that compromise mental and emotional well-being (Augst & Akos, 2009). Therefore, transition periods are an important time to introduce strategies and practices that promote emotional well-being and resilience. Each grade represents new challenges for children, but the transition from kindergarten to grade 1 and then from grade 2 into grade 3 represent key periods of academic adjustment that can be particularly challenging and stressful to children (La Paro et al., 2000). Interestingly, there is very little research on the transition periods in primary school grades, which makes it even more important as an area of focus.

Mindfulness: Conceptual and Practical Considerations

The preceding discussion provides a contextual framework in which to start exploring the applicability of mindfulness within educational settings as a means for building and strengthening emotional well-being and resilience among today’s children. This section of the literature review will explore mindfulness both at a conceptual level and a practical one.

Overview

Mindfulness is considered a “fundamental component to human consciousness” (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 292). One of the most commonly cited definitions of mindfulness is the awareness that comes from “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). A conceptual model of mindfulness proposed by Bishop et al. (2004) supports this definition, stating that the self-regulation of attention and an open attitude towards present moment experiences are the two main components of mindfulness.

The self-regulation of attention refers to the observation and awareness of internal and external sensations, thoughts, or feelings occurring in the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004; Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). Through learning how to self-regulate attention, one learns to focus attention on what is occurring in the present moment, and also learns how to “switch one’s attention from one aspect of the experience to another” (Keng et al., 2011, p. 1042). For example, one might change one’s focus on an internal sensation from one part of the body to another. The practice of mindfulness helps one become aware of the internal and external stimuli of the present moment experience (Hooker & Fodor, 2008).

The type of attitude that one has towards an experience is another integral component to mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004; Keng et al., 2011). When one is practicing mindfulness, one is supposed to try to maintain “an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Keng, et al., 2011, p. 1042). In the context of mindfulness, acceptance refers to the ability to experience thoughts and sensations without letting them become distorted by emotions and physiological reactivity (Semple et al., 2005). In

learning how to observe non-judgmentally one can learn how to react more effectively to situations because it teaches us to acknowledge our experience without overly engaging with the experience (e.g., believing that a specific problem defines you), or suppressing the experience (e.g., ignoring the problem; Keng et al., 2011). By using mindfulness-based techniques, individuals therefore have the opportunity to observe their thoughts without reacting to them as facts (Bogels, Hoogstaf, Van Dun, De Schutter, & Restifo, 2008). This broadened perspective may be an effective strategy in dealing with “rumination, anxiety, worry, fear, and anger” (Keng et al., 2011, p. 1042). Attending to present moment experiences with an open attitude may be an important strategy for developing emotional resilience because it allows us to experience potentially uncomfortable emotions more calmly (Broderick & Metz, 2009).

Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, and Freedman (2006) further this model of mindfulness by adding the element of intention. The idea of intention is important because it gives purpose to the practice of mindfulness (Shapiro et al., 2006). For example, one’s intention for practicing mindfulness could be to help manage stress or to reinforce feelings of compassion towards others. Practicing mindfulness with intention can help with the other two components of mindfulness: attention and attitude (Shapiro et al., 2006).

Mindfulness can be practiced in various ways, but a common activity is mindfulness meditation. The practice of mindfulness meditation usually involves using the breath, a physical sensation, or a feeling as a point on which to focus one’s attention (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). This area of focus is referred to as an “anchor” (Burke, 2010, p. 134). During mindfulness meditation, one is meant to continuously return to this “anchor” (Burke, 2010, p. 134) whenever other feelings and thoughts start to capture the

attention. The purpose of this process is to develop a better awareness of present moment experiences and to learn how to approach the experiences without judgment (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). There are formal techniques (e.g., mindfulness meditation) and informal techniques to practice mindfulness (e.g., practicing mindfulness while doing everyday activities like walking or eating; Burke, 2010).

Compassion: For the Self and Other

Before moving forward to cultural perspectives on mindfulness, I would like to spend a moment to further examine one of the integral, yet arguably most difficult to master aspects of mindfulness: holding a compassionate attitude toward the self.

Mindfulness promotes the idea of compassion toward the self, but self-compassion in itself also helps the practice of mindfulness (Neff, 2003). Compassion is characterized by feelings of caring and kindness; the recognition of the common human experience; and the viewing of inadequacies and failures with an understanding and non-judgmental attitude (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion is synonymous with this, except that it is oriented toward the self (Neff, 2003). Being compassionate towards the self allows us to willingly view our thoughts and emotions without judgment (Germer & Neff, 2013).

Germer and Neff (2013) suggest that examining negative emotions with compassion actually elicits positive emotions such as optimism and curiosity. Self-compassion in adult populations has also been associated with decreases in fears associated with failure (Germer & Neff, 2013). Biologically, Gilbert and Proctor (2006) suggest that self-compassion provides emotional resilience because it activates the human “caregiving system” which helps to produce feelings of security. Arguably, learning compassion for the self is important in the development of empathy—the ability to

identify what someone else is thinking or feeling (De Souza, 2014). Through learning compassion for the self, one can learn to extend compassion to others (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion is evidently an important component to explore in mindfulness-based practices aimed at building and strengthening emotional well-being and resilience.

Cultural Perspectives

Mindfulness originated from Buddhism and Eastern practices of meditation over 2,000 years ago. It has since been used and adapted by teachers of mindfulness as a secular strategy to help mental well-being (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). The conceptualization of mindfulness within Eastern and Western perspectives is different. It is important to understand these differences when using or adapting mindfulness-based practices in secular environments such as school, while also being respectful of the origins of mindfulness (Rempel, 2012).

Keng et al. (2011) argue that Buddhist and Western conceptualizations of mindfulness differ in at least three levels: in context, by process, and in content. At the contextual level, the Buddhist tradition views mindfulness as a part of a system of practices that must be cultivated in order to be liberated from suffering—a state of being that is very important to practitioners of this tradition (Gunaratana, 1991; Keng et al., 2011). On the other hand, Western conceptualizations of mindfulness usually do not subscribe to a specific philosophy (Keng et al., 2011). At the process level, Buddhists practice mindfulness while contemplating Buddha's teachings (Gunaratana, 1991; Keng et al., 2011). This emphasis is not generally found in Western practice (Keng et al., 2011). In Western practice, the intentions of a mindfulness practice are diverse (Shapiro et al., 2006). For example, a person's intention to practice may be to reflect on

compassion, empathy, or gratitude, but these reflections do not need to have any religious underpinnings. Lastly, at the content level, Western perspectives view mindfulness as both an introspective activity (e.g., awareness of one's internal experience) and a sensory activity (e.g., focusing on a smell or texture of an object; Keng et al., 2011). On the other hand, mindfulness in early Buddhist teachings does not entail focusing on the attributes of an external object specifically (Keng et al., 2011).

Mindfulness and Spirituality

In discussing cultural perspectives on mindfulness, there is an evident link between mindfulness and spirituality. In an increasingly secularized and pluralistic society, this connection is sometimes seen as problematic, particularly if mindfulness practices are being used in public school settings (Ergas, 2014). Although religion may be a means of expressing spirituality, these two concepts are not the same (Hemmings, 2013). The definition of spirituality is varied, but it concerns parts of the human experience that cannot be understood through material and rational thought, such as emotions of gratitude and joyfulness (Hemmings, 2013). Therefore, although religion is one means of expressing spirituality (Hemmings, 2013), spirituality can also refer to non-religious experiences, and it is increasingly conceptualized as an essential "human capacity that can be nurtured through practice and encouragement" (Jennings, 2008, p. 102). Likewise, the capacity of observing and participating in moment-to-moment experiences, which is synonymous with mindfulness, can be described as "a natural human capacity" (Albretch, 2014, p. 21). This project conceptualizes mindfulness from this secular framework.

Mindfulness and Mindlessness

The previous sub-sections have explained mindfulness at a conceptual level, but

to understand it more fully, I would like to briefly discuss what exists on the other end of the mindfulness spectrum: mindlessness. Langer (1992) defines mindlessness as “a state of mind characterized by an overreliance on categories and distinctions drawn in the past in which the individual is context-dependent and, as such, is oblivious to novel (or simply alternative) aspects of the situation” (p. 289).

Mindlessness is problematic because when acting mindlessly, one is unaware of subtle differences in an experience that could lead one to act differently (Langer, 1992). These experiences may be internal or external in nature. The consequences of mindlessness may be detrimental to overall well-being because one reacts without reflecting (Langer, 1992). The lack of reflection may result in the development of problematic habits such as constant worrying. Conversely, when one is practicing mindfulness one is actively observing the experience, which makes one more sensitive to differences in each experience (Langer, 1992). This sensitivity may help overall well-being (Langer, 1992).

Mindfulness-Based Interventions With Adults

Now that mindfulness has been explored from a conceptual standpoint, I will now present some of the practical research on mindfulness. Since much of the early research on the benefits of mindfulness with children has been extrapolated from studies with adults, it is relevant to explore some of the findings of the more established research on mindfulness and adults.

The practice of mindfulness has been effectively used as a form of intervention for physical and psychological conditions such as stress, anxiety, pain, and depression, in clinical settings for adults (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). In adult populations, the practice of

mindfulness has been associated with improved self-confidence, greater creativity, better focus, increased self-awareness, lower levels of stress, better relationships with others, and higher levels of reported optimism (Davidson & Lutz, 2008; Gold et al., 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Newmark et al., 2013). In addition to behavioural changes, brain image scans done by Davidson and Lutz (2008) found that mindfulness meditation changes the structure and function of the brain (e.g., affecting the areas of the brain associated with attention and emotional regulation). These brain changes were observable even after short periods of meditation practice (Davidson & Lutz, 2008).

Kabat-Zinn (2003) developed the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program originally to explore the use of mindfulness meditation in treating patients with chronic pain. Recent years have also seen the development of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). All interventions have been developed using mindfulness-based principles. These interventions will not be reviewed here, but Keng et al. (2011) provide a review of these interventions.

Mindfulness With Children and Youth

Research on mindfulness practices with children and youth is not yet as comprehensive as with adults. Current research and implementation of mindfulness practices work from the assumption that children may also benefit in the same way that adults do (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). The premise behind using mindfulness in the classroom is that well-being and resilience can be nurtured when children use mindfulness to work with everyday life and stressors (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Introducing children to the practice of mindfulness may better prepare them for

challenges (Rempel, 2012). In other words, rather than simply taking a reactive approach by teaching mindfulness to adults who are already dealing with stress and depression, we can take a proactive approach by providing children with the skills needed to handle problems before they become compounded by years of ineffective coping. Given a child's eagerness to learn and openness to new experiences, children may be particularly receptive to learning mindfulness (Bogels et al., 2008; Rempel, 2012). The fact that children have less exposure to previous knowledge may make them more open-minded learners (Lucas, Bridgers, Griffiths, & Gopnik, 2014).

Although research on the accessibility and effects of mindfulness on children and youth remains in its preliminary stages, current findings indicate that benefits of mindfulness have the potential to transcend all ages, and is generally effective for improving the well-being of children and youth. A broad range of outcomes has been identified, including the findings that children and youth who participate in mindfulness activities demonstrate a reduction in stress and anxiety, and an increased ability to self-regulate (Fisher, 2006; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Joyce et al., 2010; Kuyken et al., 2013; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Newmark et al., 2013; Rempel, 2012; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Incorporating developmentally appropriate mindfulness practices into brief, everyday activities has shown promising results in a child's ability to self-soothe (Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008). The findings from these studies suggest that mindfulness practices can be adapted for children. The findings also suggest that mindfulness

practices can improve the emotional, social, mental, and physical health and well-being of children and youth.

Mindfulness Education

In discussing the place of mindfulness in education, it is pertinent to mention the connection between mindfulness and contemplative education. Mindfulness falls under the umbrella of contemplative practices (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Roeser and Peck (2009) define contemplative education as “a set of pedagogical practices designed to cultivate conscious awareness in an ethical-relational context in which the values of personal growth, learning, moral living, and caring for others are nurtured” (p. 119).

Meiklejohn et al. (2012) discuss three approaches that can be used to bring mindfulness into the classroom. These approaches are: indirect (meaning that the teacher develops a personal mindfulness practice and models mindfulness attitudes and behaviours at school); direct (meaning that the students learn mindfulness exercises and skills through direct teaching); or a combination of direct and indirect approaches (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Although teachers may be able to draw ideas and techniques from training and literature that benefit the student, the benefits may be more sustainable when the teacher also exemplifies mindfulness regularly in the classroom (Burke, 2010; Hooker & Fodor, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

Developmental Considerations

Attention to age-related developmental needs of children is another important consideration for the practice of mindfulness. Given that the research on mindfulness and children is still in its early stages, examination of optimal methods and content is ongoing (Weare, 2013). Weare (2013) suggests that practicing is most important when introducing

mindfulness to either children or adults. Additionally, the basic content is also similar between adult and child-oriented practices of mindfulness (e.g., paying attention to the breath or other chosen sensation in the present moment, practicing compassion toward the self and other; Weare, 2013).

Significant differences between practicing mindfulness with adults as opposed to children are found in the approach. Mindfulness activities are shorter for children than for adults; however, more time is usually spent on the activity itself than on discussing each experience (Weare, 2013). Explicitly discussing meta-cognitive ideas behind the practice of mindfulness are hard for young children to understand and are usually not introduced until late childhood and adolescence (Weare, 2013). Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008) do, however, suggest the use of easy to understand analogies when practicing mindfulness with children. For example, it may be helpful to compare wandering thoughts that occur during a mindfulness meditation to training an excited puppy to sit still. Getting angry when the puppy moves will not help the animal learn to sit still, much like becoming angry with the self when attention wanders is not helpful. Instead, it is best to simply bring the puppy back to a seated position, much like gently bringing one's attention back to the point of focus (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008).

Children between the ages of 6 to 8 differ in the length of time they can attend to one task, but they are generally eager and open to learning and new experiences (OME, 2010). Children in the primary school grades are also imaginative and learn well through activities that allow for play and exploration (OME, 2010). Therefore, the approach to teaching mindfulness to children should be more play-based, creative, and less focused on long periods of silence or stillness (Weare, 2013).

Specific mindfulness-based activities that appear to be effective with children include yoga, body scans, breathing meditations, and visualization meditations (Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010). Movement activities such as yoga may be effective because, in addition to practicing mindfulness, children are also benefiting from physical exercise (Mendelson et al., 2010).

Review of Research on Mindfulness Programs Relevant to Schools

At this point I will review some of the dominant work on mindfulness that is most relevant to schools, including those of current school-based mindfulness initiatives. Since research on mindfulness and children is still ongoing, research studies remain limited, and therefore studies that focused on ages outside of the target demographic of this project (ages 6 to 8) were still included. Searches post 2012 yielded mostly research that focused on exceptionalities (such as children with autism) and adolescents. This research is beyond the scope of this project, and therefore many of these articles were excluded from the literature review.

The summaries of the literature are comprehensive. Although it is generally more appropriate to focus on the key concepts of the studies within a literature review, I chose to write out more detailed summaries given that an examination of the content of the mindfulness programs themselves was critical for the development of the handbook. A summary of the past research will be presented at the end of this chapter. The connections between the findings and the present project will also be outlined.

Napoli et al. (2005) conducted a randomized control trial of a 12-session intervention program called the Attention Academy Program (AAP). AAP was designed to help students practice mindfulness so as to learn how to focus on present moment

experiences and to practice approaching these experiences with curiosity and compassion rather than judgment (Napoli et al., 2005). The purpose of the study was to determine whether participating in a mindfulness-training program helped improve the students' ability to maintain attention and subsequently decrease levels of stress (Napoli et al., 2005).

One hundred and ninety-four first to third grade students (ages 5 to 8) participated in the program. Ninety-seven were randomly assigned to the experimental condition (the intervention) and 97 were randomly assigned to the control condition (no intervention; Napoli et al., 2005). Although the participants did not have any specified mental health diagnoses, they were considered to have high levels of anxiety (Napoli et al., 2005).

The participants of AAP attended a 45-minute session every other week for 6 months, and the sessions were facilitated by two trained and experienced professionals (Napoli et al., 2005). The intervention sessions took place in a classroom, in which all desks and chairs were moved to the side to make room for the children to sit on the floor or on a mat or blanket should they choose to do so. Activities included in the intervention were: sitting, movement, and body-scan meditations as well as relaxation exercises (Napoli et al., 2005). Throughout the sessions, facilitators reminded students to pay attention to the breath, thoughts, and other moment-to-moment feelings that they experience (Napoli et al., 2005). Each session would begin with about 10 minutes allocated to a discussion on mindfulness. Questions addressed in this discussion may have included: "How did you use mindfulness this week?" "What are you aware of today?" (Napoli et al., 2005). Approximately 5 minutes were then given to a breathing exercise. An example of such a breathing exercise had the children take in a slow breath through the nose and required them to notice how the breath moves through the lungs, the

stomach, the ribs, and the shoulders. The children then had to exhale slowly (Napoli et al., 2005). Fifteen minutes were allocated to a physical activity and the remaining 10 minutes were spent doing a sensory focused activity (Napoli et al., 2005). Yoga stretches and positions were commonly used as a physical activity (Napoli et al., 2005). A sensory activity could include going outside and trying to smell, touch, feel, and taste the air (Napoli et al., 2005). AAP did not include home practice exercises. Participants in the control condition engaged in reading or other quiet activities in another classroom.

Questionnaires were completed prior to and following the completion of the intervention in order to compare pre-test and post-test measures (Napoli et al., 2005). In order to assess classroom behaviour and the diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), teachers completed the *ADD-H Comprehensive Teacher Rating Scale* (Ullmann, Sleator, & Sprague, 1997). The children completed the *Test of Everyday Attention for Children* (Manly et al., 2001) to assess selective visual attention and sustained attention. The students also completed the *Test Anxiety Scale* (Sarason, 1978) to measure self-evaluation, worry, psychological reactions, and concern about performing under time limits (Napoli et al., 2005). Napoli et al. found that compared with the control participants, those who participated in AAP showed significant decreases in both test anxiety and ADHD behaviours and also an increase in the ability to pay attention.

Similar to Napoli et al. (2005), Semple et al. (2005) hypothesized that improved ability to maintain attention would help decrease anxiety. Semple et al. (2005) conducted a pilot study on a 6-week mindfulness training program with a slightly older cohort of children than that of Napoli et al. Five children between the ages of 7-9 years were referred to the study based on observed symptoms of anxiety by their teachers (Semple et al., 2005).

The 6-week program was delivered at an elementary school once a week in 45-minute long sessions. The sessions were conducted by two therapists (the first and second author of the study). The sessions were adapted from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002) programming (Semple et al., 2005). Mindfulness was incorporated into activities that were short, active, and sensory focused (Semple et al., 2005). Such activities included: breathing, walking, and the exploration of objects through touch and smell (Semple et al., 2005). Each session began with a 3-minute seated breath meditation (Semple et al., 2005). Following this meditation the participants were asked to write down something that was causing worry and placed the paper in a box labeled “The Worry Warts Wastebasket.” The participants were given the opportunity to collect the slips of paper at the end of the day, but Semple et al. (2005) noted that no participants chose to do so. A mindfulness activity such as mindful eating would then be practiced and discussed. The sessions would end with another 3-minute seated breath meditation (Semple et al., 2005). In contrast to Napoli et al. (2005), these sessions included weekly exercises to be practiced at the child’s home and that were discussed during the sessions.

Participants were assessed at two different points (pre-test and post-test). At each assessment, teachers completed the *Child Behaviour Checklist: Teacher Report Form* (Achenbach, 1991) to assess the presence of problem-behaviours. The children completed the *Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children* (March, 1997), which is designed to assess physical symptoms of anxiety, social anxiety, harm avoidance, and separation anxiety; and the *State Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children* (Spielberger, Edwards,

Lushene, Montuori, & Platzek, 1973), which assesses both state and trait anxiety (Semple et al., 2005). The *Feely Faces Scale* (Semple et al., 2005) and the *Class Satisfaction Scale* (Semple et al., 2005) were developed specifically for this study for the purpose of allowing the participating children to evaluate their present mood and satisfaction with the session. The *Feely Faces Scale* (Semple et al., 2005) was administered at the beginning and at the end of each session, while the *Class Satisfaction Scale* (Semple et al., 2005) was administered at the end of each session.

Following the program, findings suggested some improvements in attention, academic performance, and reductions in teacher-reported problem behaviour (Semple et al., 2005). The majority of the participants also indicated enjoyment of the mindfulness practices (Semple et al., 2005). Clinical observations also led Semple et al. (2005) to the conclusion that young children benefit most from mindfulness practices when instructions are explicit and breathing exercises are kept to a maximum of 3 to 5 minutes. Including activities such as the “The Worry Warts Wastebasket” help make abstract concepts such as not over identifying with a problem into something more concrete and easy to understand (Semple et al., 2005).

Saltzman and Goldin (2008) conducted a study with a similar age cohort as Semple et al. (2005) to examine the efficacy of an 8-week modified MBSR program. Thirty-nine children in grades 4 to 6 participated in the study along with 35 parents (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008). The explicit addition of parental involvement contrasts with the previous two studies that were discussed above. Saltzman and Goldin noted that recognizing parental involvement in a child’s life was an important consideration for adapting MBSR. The purpose of the study was to add to the growing knowledge base

about the effectiveness of adapted MBSR interventions for children (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008). The study wanted to examine outcomes in attention, self-compassion, depression, anxiety, and overall mindfulness (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008). It should be noted that a wait-list control group was used (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008).

The 8-week program, in which participants met once a week, was facilitated by experienced mindfulness instructors. Formal sitting practices were used in combination with informal techniques such as mindful eating (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008). Based on self-reports provided by children and parents alike, preliminary analysis found that attention and emotional reactivity of the children and the parents did improve (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008). Along with the findings that parental involvement may be an important consideration for MBSR programming, Saltzman and Goldin (2008) also recognized the importance of developmental considerations such as the attention span and language capacity of the child. Much like Semple et al. (2005), Saltzman and Goldin considered teacher and parental involvement to be an important component of supporting continued mindfulness practice in children.

In a more recent study, Semple et al. (2010) examined the efficacy of a modified 12-week MBCT program for children. Using a randomized wait-list control trial design, Semple et al. (2010) hypothesized that the children who participated in the program would show more significant reduction in anxiety symptomatology, attention, and behavioural problems than those in the control condition. It was also hypothesized that gains would be maintained at a 3-month follow-up assessment (Semple et al., 2010)

Twenty-five children of the ages 9 to 13 participated in the study (Semple et al., 2010). The participants were referred to the study due to having significant reading

difficulties (Semple et al., 2010). Although this project does not explicitly explore reading difficulties, this study was worth exploring because most participants also displayed symptoms of stress and/or anxiety (Semple et al., 2010). The participants were then matched by gender and age and then randomly assigned to the MBCT program or a wait-list control group. The participants were grouped by age with the 9 to 10 year olds grouped together in either the experimental or the control condition, and the 11 to 13 years olds grouped together in either the experimental or control condition (Semple et al., 2010). The sessions ran for 90-minutes once a week and were facilitated by a trained therapist (Semple et al., 2010). As with Semple et al. (2005) and Saltzman and Goldin (2008), participants were asked to practice daily home exercises in addition to the regular sessions (Semple et al., 2010). Seated breath meditations and body scan meditations were used and were practiced in sessions of 3 to 10 minutes, and mindfulness activities were more play based than discussion based (Semple et al., 2010). Variation in mindfulness activities during a session was a significant difference between child and adult MBCT. In addition to breath and body meditations, activities included: visualization exercises, drawing or writing, and body movement exercises such as yoga (Semple et al., 2010).

Participants were assessed at three different points (pre-test, post-test, and the 3-month follow-up). At each assessment, parents completed the *Child Behavior Checklist: Parent Report Form* (Achenbach, 1991) to assess for problem-behaviours. Like the Semple et al. (2005) study, the children completed the *Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children* (March, 1997; March & Parker, 1999); and the *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory*

for Children (Speilberger et al., 1973), which assesses both state and trait anxiety (Semple et al., 2010).

Compared with those in the control group, parent-based reports indicated that participants in the MBCT program had significant reductions in attention problems. Participants who had initially reported clinically significant levels of anxiety also showed significant reductions in anxiety. Parental reports also indicated improved behaviour and anger management (Semple et al., 2010). Improvement in the outcome measures were still noted at the 3-month follow up (Semple et al., 2010).

Mendelson et al. (2010) investigated the feasibility of a school-based mindfulness intervention program designed to buffer the psychological effects of chronic stress commonly experienced by youth in impoverished communities. Using a randomized wait-list control trial design, Mendelson et al. (2010) hypothesized that participation in the program would result in reduced involuntary stress responses, improved mood, and improved relationships with peers and teachers.

Ninety-seven fourth to fifth grade students participated in the study (Mendelson et al., 2010). The sessions were 45 minutes in length and ran 4 days a week for 12 weeks. The sessions were facilitated by program instructors, not by the teachers themselves (Mendelson et al., 2010). Yoga-based activities, breathing techniques, and guided mindfulness practices made up the core of the program (Mendelson et al., 2010). The purpose of these activities was to promote better awareness and regulation of the body and the mind (Mendelson et al., 2010). The sessions also included a period of discussion in which the instructors explained mindfulness techniques and discussed the health benefits of these techniques.

Participants were assessed before and after the intervention. To measure for involuntary responses (unconscious reactions) to stress, participants completed the *Involuntary Stress Responses The Responses to Stress Questionnaire* (Connor-Smith, Compas, Wadsworth, Tomsen, & Saltzman, 2000). Depressive symptoms were assessed using the *Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire—Child Version* (Angold et al., 1995). Participants also completed the *People in My Life* (Cook, Greenberg, & Kusche, 1995; Murray & Greenberg, 2000) assessment to evaluate the participants' relationships with peers and the school community (Mendelson et al., 2010). Focus groups were also conducted at the end of the intervention both with the participants and with the teachers of the participants (Mendelson et al., 2010).

Findings suggested that participants improved in emotional self-regulation (Mendelson et al., 2010). In general, participants indicated that their experience in the program was positive and that the skills they learned were helpful in everyday life. Teachers indicated support for the idea of mindfulness training programs and most observed behavioural improvements in their students (Mendelson et al., 2010). Teachers also indicated interest in learning more about the skills practiced in the program (Mendelson et al., 2010).

Although most other studies based their results on wait-list control study design, Liehr and Diaz (2010) specifically compared a mindfulness-based intervention to a different active intervention. The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of mindfulness on depression and anxiety specifically with minority children (Liehr & Diaz, 2010).

Eighteen children from Caribbean and Central American countries were recruited

from a summer camp and were randomly assigned to either a mindfulness-based intervention or to a health education group. The average age of the participants was 10 years old (Liehr & Diaz, 2010). The mindfulness-based intervention program was a 2-week program in which the participants attended 10, 15-minute classes of mindful breathing and mindful movement (Liehr & Diaz, 2010). The sessions were facilitated by a teacher who had developed his or her own mindfulness practice (Liehr & Diaz, 2010). The mindfulness intervention focused on developing attention to the breath, mindful movement, and generosity towards others (Liehr & Diaz, 2010). The control group participating in the health education program learned about healthy eating habits, the importance of physical activity, and strategies for stress management (Liehr & Diaz, 2010).

Participants were assessed prior to the intervention and following the intervention via the *Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire* (Angold et al., 1995) that assesses symptoms of depression; and the *State Anxiety Inventory for Children* (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970) that assesses for symptoms of anxiety (Liehr & Diaz, 2010).

Post-treatment test results indicated that there was a significant reduction in depression symptoms for those in the mindfulness group and a reduction in anxiety for both groups (Liehr & Diaz, 2010). Furthermore, this study spoke to the accessibility of mindfulness to children from varied cultures, an aspect that has yet to be addressed in the other studies (Liehr & Diaz, 2010).

Save for the Napoli et al. (2005) study, robust sample sizes are lacking. To address this common limitation, Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010) conducted a study on the Mindfulness Education (ME) program with 12 elementary classrooms ranging in grades from 4 to 7. In total, 246 students participated in the study. One hundred and

thirty-nine students were randomly assigned to the experimental condition (the intervention) and 107 were randomly assigned to a waitlist control condition (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor hypothesized that the students in the ME program would show significant improvements in positive school behaviours and would demonstrate decreases in maladaptive behaviours and aggression.

ME consists of four essential components: quieting the mind, mindful attention (to sensation, thoughts, and feelings), managing negative emotions and thinking, and acknowledgment of self and others (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). The program was delivered by teachers who had received a day-long training (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). The ME program is different from the intervention programs previously discussed because it is intended as a classroom-based universal prevention program (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). The curriculum spanned a period of 10 weeks and the sessions were taught once a week in approximate blocks of 40 to 50 minutes. Daily mindful attention training exercises were also practiced three times a day for approximately 3 minutes each time (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

Participants were assessed via four outcome measures. Optimism was assessed through the *Resiliency Inventory* (Song, 2003). Participants completed the *Self-Description Questionnaire* (Marsh, 1988) to measure self-concept at school and in general; and the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) to assess weekly positive and negative emotions. Teachers completed the *Teachers' Rating Scale of Social Competence* (Kam & Greenberg, 1998) to assess the participants' social and emotional competence in relation to the school environment (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

Results indicate that there was no significant difference between the experimental group and the wait-list control group in terms of overall effect, however increased optimism within the student, and improved teacher ratings on behaviour and social competence were more common among students who participated in the ME program (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). It should be noted that the ME program has since been revised and has been renamed MindUP (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

The aforementioned studies suggest the efficacy of mindfulness-based approaches to the development of emotional well-being and resilience. An additional element to mindfulness-based approaches that is beginning to emerge in the research is the integration of mindfulness into arts-based activities (Coholic, 2011; Coholic, Eys, & Loughheed, 2012; Klatt et al., 2013). The creative process inherent in arts-based activities facilitates the expression of feelings and emotions; understanding; comprehension of the self and other; increased peer-to-peer interactions; and increased conflict resolution and better problem solving (Ho, 2012) and therefore complements the practice of mindfulness. The arts also provide alternative means of expression, which is particularly important to children who are still developing the appropriate vocabulary to navigate emotions and social situations (Ho, 2012). Three studies that explored this integration will be detailed below. The inclusion of these studies is relevant to this project given the importance of creating pleasure and play-based mindfulness activities for children (Weare, 2013).

Coholic (2011) assessed the feasibility and benefits of teaching mindfulness practices through arts-based activities to children involved with a child protection agency or a mental health agency. Coholic (2011) hypothesized that interactive arts-based

activities would be an effective means of teaching mindfulness to children and youth, and that it could help develop emotional regulation skills as well as build and strengthen self-awareness, self-esteem, and resilience.

Participants in the program were referred based on presentations of low self-esteem, a willingness to participate, and an ability to participate in a group environment (Coholic, 2011). Anger and aggression was another common behavioural concern among participants (Coholic, 2011). The study took place over the course of 4 years, during which time a total of 50 children between the ages of 8 to 15 participated, although only 21 completed the post-program interview (Coholic, 2011). Given the length of the study, the program evolved from a 6-week to a 12-week program (Coholic, 2011).

In this program the concepts of mindfulness were taught through exercises that were “more active and sensory focused” (Coholic, 2011, p. 309) in order to engage the participants. An example of an activity used was the “Jar of Thoughts” (Coholic, 2011, p. 309) in which children placed small objects into a jar filled with water and shook it. This activity is meant to help children visualize what the mind looks like when it is full of thoughts (represented by the small objects) that are moving quickly as opposed to when we approach our thoughts more calmly (represented by when the objects rest at the bottom of the jar; Coholic, 2011). Another example of an art-activity involving the exploration of feelings had children draw or paint shapes, colours, words, and/or images that represented feelings that they had experienced during that day (Coholic, 2011). Often times, the shape or size of the image represented the intensity with which that feeling had been felt. Following the art activity, the children were encouraged to discuss strategies that could decrease the size of one feeling (e.g., anger) and increase the size of another

feeling (e.g., compassion; Coholic, 2011). Each session was 2 hours in length and was facilitated by a collection of social workers, child and youth workers, and psychology graduates (Coholic, 2011).

To assess if participants found the program helpful, individual interviews with the children were conducted approximately 2 weeks after the program ended (Coholic, 2011). A qualitative analysis of the interviews suggested that the program was beneficial in helping the participants with emotional regulation, self-compassion, and better emotional awareness (Coholic, 2011). Participant responses also suggested that the elements of enjoyment, creativity, and fun that were incorporated into the activities were one characteristic that made the program most effective (Coholic, 2011).

To account for the lack of comparison groups in the initial study (Coholic, 2011), a follow-up study was conducted by Coholic et al. (2012) to compare the effectiveness of an arts-based mindfulness program to that of a general arts and crafts program in improving resilience in children in need. The Holistic Arts-Based Group Program (HAP) was designed to use mindfulness arts-based activities to help children develop a better understanding of feelings and to encourage the development of their character strengths (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012). Coholic et al. hypothesized that those participating in HAP would score better on resilience and self-concept measures than those in the comparison condition (the general program).

Thirty-six children between the ages of 8 to 14 participated in the study, although only data from 21 participants were used in the final analysis. All 36 children participated in HAP, but participation was staggered to allow for comparison between programs (Coholic et al., 2012). HAP was a 12-week program, during which weekly sessions ran

for 2 hours. The activities were short and emphasized awareness, tolerance, understanding, and compassion towards feelings (Coholic et al., 2012). An example activity was called the “Ant Drawing” which encouraged children to experiment with different perspectives by having them draw an object from the viewpoint of an ant. By imagining and discussing different perspectives, this activity promoted the idea that choices exist regarding how we feel and act (Coholic et al., 2012). A broadening of perspectives may be an effective tool against ruminating thoughts of sadness or anger (Coholic et al., 2012). Conversely, the general arts and crafts group did not explicitly address the mindfulness components that were integrated into HAP. Participants discussed anything they wanted to during the arts and crafts activities (Coholic et al., 2012).

Pre- and post-test measures of self-concept and resilience were assessed. Self-concept of the participants was measured using the *Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale* (2nd ed.; Piers, Harris, & Herzberg, 2005). The participants also completed *The Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents* (Prince-Embury, & Courville, 2008) to assess for three components of resilience: sense of mastery, sense of relatedness, and emotional reactivity (Coholic et al., 2012).

Results of the study suggested that the participants of the mindfulness arts-based group showed decreased emotional reactivity in comparison to those participating in the general arts and crafts program (Coholic et al., 2012). No significant results were found regarding self-concept (Coholic et al., 2012). Such findings lend support to the idea that providing arts-based mindfulness programs to children may be an effective and feasible means of building “some foundational skills that are important for good mental health

and functioning” (Coholic et al., 2012, p. 842).

Similarly, Klatt et al. (2013) investigated Move-Into-Learning (MIL), an arts-based mindfulness classroom intervention designed to reduce stress, improve behaviour, and promote learning in elementary students who are considered to be at-risk for the development of behavioural problems, negative social interactions, and stress-related illnesses. The purpose of the Klatt et al. (2013) study was threefold: (a) to examine the feasibility of the MIL program for children in the third grade; (b) to determine if improvements in behaviour and attention are found in children who participate in the MIL program; and (c) additionally, to determine whether behavioural and attention changes noted at the end of the program were maintained at a 2-month follow up assessment. Forty-one third grade children from a low socioeconomic neighbourhood participated in the study (Klatt et al., 2013).

The 8-week classroom-based program was facilitated by trained graduate students and delivered once a week in 45-minute long sessions (Klatt et al., 2013). Each session was guided by a specific theme, for example “Breathing easy vs. restricted breathing,” however each session combined yoga, music, writing, and visual arts so as to emphasize better body awareness, increase relaxation, and encourage self-expression through art (Klatt et al., 2013). Animal and nature imagery were used to adapt yoga poses for children (Klatt et al., 2013). The arts-based activities were guided by questions that prompted the children to consider “positive skills/support systems/coping mechanisms” (Klatt et al., 2013, p. 235) in their life. The children also participated in a teacher-led 15-minute practice session during the remaining 4 days of the school week. These sessions

focused on stretching, yoga poses, mindfulness meditations, and relaxation (Klatt et al., 2013).

To assess for teachers' perceptions of children's behaviour in the classroom, teachers completed the *Connor's Teacher Rating Scale-Revised, Short form* (Conners, Sitarenios, Parker, & Epstein, 1998) both before and after the MIL program. Teachers also completed this measurement questionnaire 2 months following the intervention to assess for maintained behavioural changes (Klatt et al., 2013). Teachers also participated in a semi-structured interview following program participation to assess for personal opinion on the feasibility and impact of the program (Klatt et al., 2013).

The main findings in the Klatt et al. (2013) study provide support for arts-based mindfulness classroom interventions. Teacher responses to the interview indicated they found the MIL program offered both feasible and acceptable stress reduction strategies for the classroom (Klatt et al., 2013). Teachers also expressed that students described the MIL program as a positive experience in which they learned and developed coping mechanisms to stay focused and calm (Klatt et al., 2013). Data analysis indicated significant improvement in hyperactive behaviours, and that these improvements were maintained at the 2-month follow up (Klatt et al., 2013). Klatt et al. suggest that the written and visual art component of MIL enriched the mindfulness program by allowing the children to explore thoughts and feelings through a creative outlet.

Summary of Past Research

The complex nature of mental health is to be acknowledged, but what is fundamentally most important to reiterate is that mental and emotional well-being are core components of a child's overall healthy development (Schwean & Rodger, 2013).

Given the significant personal, social, and economic costs associated with mental health problems, current research in the area of mental health and emotional well-being establish the need for prevention and intervention strategies that promote and support well-being (MHCC, 2012, 2013; Schwean & Roger, 2013; Whitley et al., 2012). One means of supporting well-being and potentially circumventing the detrimental effects of mental health problems is by providing children with consistent opportunities to build and strengthen emotional well-being and resilience. Since children spend the majority of their childhood in school, teachers play an important role in providing these opportunities. The role is now being recognized by the OME (2014), which recently identified well-being as one of the core principles for education in Ontario.

The early stages of research show promising findings for the feasibility and efficacy of mindfulness-based approaches as a strategy for developing the emotional well-being and resilience of children within the target age of this project (ages 6 to 8; Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Lierh & Diaz, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005). Studies note a reduction in stress and anxiety (Lierh & Diaz, 2010; Semple et al., 2010); reduced depressive symptoms (Lierh & Diaz, 2010); increased optimism (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010); improved attention (Klatt et al., 2013; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005); decreases in parent and teacher reported behavioural problems (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005); improved emotional regulation (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Mendelson et al., 2010; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008); and increases in self-compassion (Coholic, 2011). It

should also be noted that no study found adverse effects from the practice of mindfulness (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Lierh & Diaz, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005).

The literature on mindfulness practices and children also highlights a number of important developmental considerations. The most effective activities for young children appear to be short in length, varied, use simple movements, and are explained in concrete terms (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008).

Common activities included sitting meditations (Lierh & Diaz, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2005); movement exercises (Lierh & Diaz, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010); body scan meditations (Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010); mindful eating (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Semple et al., 2005); and visualization exercises (Semple et al., 2010). Although activity explanations need to be appropriate for the language ability of the child, the element of creativity appears to be important (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013). For example, animal and nature imagery may be used to explain yoga poses to children (Klatt et al., 2013). The elements of play, creativity, and fun must also be present in the practice itself, and therefore, arts-based mindfulness activities may be particularly effective with young children so long as the intention of the activity still promotes present moment awareness (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013).

The studies were not without their limitations and these limitations will be discussed in chapter 3. Consistency in the findings of these studies, however, appears to

support children's ability and willingness to engage in mindfulness-based activities. The studies also indicate that children appear to show improvement in overall social and emotional competencies when exposed to relaxation and attention-training activities that help build links between feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. Furthermore, the reviewed studies suggest that mindfulness-based activities can be used as both a preventative and remedial intervention. It is still unclear as to whether mindfulness-based approaches provide continued protection from the development of mental health problems, but early studies appear to suggest that this may be the case (Klatt et al., 2013; Semple et al., 2010).

The Present Project

In support of the OME's (2014) new educational vision to promote well-being in schools, the purpose of the present project is to develop a handbook that will act as a practical resource for Ontario elementary school teachers to promote the development of emotional well-being and resilience among children ages 6 to 8 (grades 1 to 3). To ensure the sustainability of this resource, the mindfulness-based activities are designed to be simple and easily delivered at very little cost. The preceding literature review was crucial to the development of the handbook: *Building Everyday Resilience: A Practical Handbook on Mindfulness Adapted for Primary School Teachers*.

First and foremost, the literature review was critical for identifying the need for such a resource for children and teachers in Ontario. The need for children to develop and strengthen emotional well-being and resilience skills exists across all ages. The literature suggests that these opportunities must be especially present during periods of transition (e.g., the transitions that occur in primary school). Although teachers would like to help students develop these skills, they do not necessarily feel well informed on the means

through which to do so (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2012). Furthermore, there is little in the way of research and resources that focus specifically at the context of primary school grade transitions.

Secondly, in order for the handbook to move the conceptualization of mindfulness into a practical form, the literature review was important to establish the efficacy and accessibility of mindfulness-based activities in supporting the development of foundational tools for emotional well-being and resilience. Results from the analyzed studies suggest that mindfulness practices benefited the emotional well-being of the participants (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Lierh & Diaz, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005). If such results were noted from programming that generally only occurred once a week (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005), then it is possible that daily practice may be even more effective. Analysis of the content of current mindfulness programming informed the activities presented in the handbook, while an analysis of the developmental considerations of my target age group ensured the developmental appropriateness of the activities. The data on the effects of mindfulness practices on child well-being remain insufficient to speak conclusively, but the activities suggested in the handbook are supported by what are currently believed to be effective practices.

CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPMENT OF THE HANDBOOK

The purpose of this project is multilayered. Firstly it intends to provide educators with an awareness of the important role they play in facilitating opportunities for the development of emotional well-being and resilience. In doing so, this project also emphasizes the importance of introducing these opportunities as early as possible so as to potentially circumvent the development of serious mental health problems. Secondly, this project explores how mindfulness can be used as a practical tool to create these learning opportunities within the school environment. The third but most central purpose of this research project is to develop a practical resource for Ontario primary school teachers to help them promote the development of emotional well-being and resilience through mindfulness-based activities.

The focus of this chapter is to further describe the research and development process undertaken in order to create the handbook. The handbook is meant to provide information, activities, and resources for primary grade teachers interested in implementing mindfulness into the classroom. The handbook is also a resource of current knowledge regarding mental health and children. And finally, this handbook can act as a communication tool with parents who may have questions about mindfulness or who may be seeking more information about mental health resources for their children.

Process of Development

The development process that went into the creation of this handbook was initially discussed at the beginning of chapter 2 (see section: Situating the Literature). This discussion explained the reasons behind the inclusion and exclusion of specific literature. Below I have added further detail to this discussion by describing the types of

literature searches done and how the additional resources in the handbook were established. This section also establishes how the content of the handbook was developed. In addition, this section will discuss why I chose to present the handbook in a paper document format.

The following handbook was created based on an extensive literature review. Searches were conducted on several databases (including PsycINFO, Google Scholar, ERIC, CBCA Complete, Academic Search Complete, SuperSearch). Search terms used included: mindfulness; mindfulness AND schools; mindfulness AND child*; mindfulness AND education; child* AND well-being/wellness; meditation AND child*; mental health AND child; mental health AND resilience; resilience AND child*; school transition AND child; child AND spirituality; contemplative education.

By comparing numerous reputable websites, government documentation, and academic literature on the topic of mindfulness, children, and mental well-being, well-established additional resources for educators, parents, and children were specifically selected for consistency in suggestion. Descriptions of the resources are included in the handbook. There were several reasons for including additional resources: it is important to have access to mental health information, and it is also allows for teachers to easily guide parents to pertinent resources if needed. There are many resources available, and it can be very overwhelming, so the resources were also included because of their clarity and organization. Resources include books, websites, audio/visual material, online applications, and suggested training opportunities for personal and professional development.

I chose the title *Building Everyday Resilience* because it encapsulates the main objectives of the handbook: (a) to nurture skills that can help children navigate the

challenges that come from everyday experiences, and (b) to promote the development of skills associated with emotional well-being and resilience in an everyday setting for children—the classroom. The subtitle of the handbook, *A Practical Handbook on Mindfulness Adapted for Primary School Teachers*, was included for the purpose of identifying the target audience of this educational resource.

The introductory section of the handbook includes facts about mental health, emotional well-being, and mindfulness. This section also includes an outline of practical and developmental considerations when using mindfulness in the classroom. The introductory section of the handbook is a compilation of findings discussed in the literature review (see chapter 2).

The activity section was divided into four main activity categories: sensory activities, breathing and visualization activities, compassion activities, and perspective-taking activities. I chose to focus on these four categories because a comprehensive review of current mindfulness program initiatives (see chapter 2) suggests that these types of activities are both commonly used and effective for developing foundational skills associated with emotional well-being and resilience.

Each activity is presented in the same format. The teacher is provided with objective of the activity, a list of required materials, and a detailed description of the activity. Some activities include prompts that the teachers can use to help guide the children through each activity. Some activities also include scripts that teachers may choose to follow directly, or they may choose to adapt. The content of each activity (i.e., the activity description and scripts) was created by the author of this project, Jennifer Peacock. To ensure that the activities in the handbook were supported by what are

currently believed to be best practices, some of the activities are adaptations of activity ideas used in the studies explored in the literature review (see chapter 2 section: Review of Research on Mindfulness Programs Relevant to Schools). Other activities were developed from conceptual ideas presented in popular published works on mindfulness (e.g., Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Miller, 2010; Nhat Hanh, 1992). Activity adaptations were informed by important developmental and practical considerations that were also discussed on the literature review (see chapter 2). For example, to ensure that the activities were developmentally appropriate for 6 to 8 year olds, attention was given to the type of language used in the activity scripts and prompts. The scripts use simple and concrete language to help guide the children through the activity. The language is also gentle and encouraging to promote a sense of openness and non-judgment. To address the needed element of play, creativity, and fun in the activities, most of the activities incorporated an arts-based component, physical movement, or an imaginative element.

The type of language used to present each activity was also influenced by an important practical consideration: parental concerns about the potential connection between mindfulness and certain religious beliefs. Each activity is presented in neutral, everyday terms to avoid any religious affiliation.

Finally, I also chose to include a reflection on my own experience when I first started practicing mindfulness. The purpose of including this reflection was twofold. Firstly, I wanted to encourage teachers to begin their own practice of mindfulness because self-practice is considered an essential component to creating genuine opportunities for others to learn mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Secondly, this personal reflection helped develop a list of questions that educators can contemplate while using

the handbook. These questions encourage the teacher to be reflective throughout the process of using this educational resource.

I have decided to present this resource as a paper document, organized into well-labeled sections to allow for easy navigation. The rationale supporting the decision to create a textual resource is that the activities, which make up the bulk of the resource, do not require technology to be implemented in the classroom. Although the presence of technology in the classroom is becoming increasingly common (Nichols, Maynard, & Brown, 2012), it is not guaranteed. On the other hand, printed material can generally be very accessible within the classroom. Online resources are, however, suggested within the additional resources section of the handbook.

Although the handbook itself is designed as a paper document, a .pdf copy will be electronically available to any teacher or other interested reader via the Brock University Digital Repository (<https://dr.library.brocku.ca>). The benefit of the online .pdf version is that it allows for easier and widespread distribution of the resource (Nichols et al., 2012). If the reader is viewing the document as a .pdf file, hyperlinks are provided in the additional resource section of the handbook to allow for easy access to external resources. An additional benefit to including these extra online resources is that it provides the reader access to current information. Well-managed online resources can be updated regularly, thus accounting for rapid changes in knowledge (Nichols et al., 2012; van Dam, 2012).

Limitations and Delimitations

The literature review was foundational to the development of the handbook particularly in the effort to ensure that the activities suggested in the handbook were supported by what are currently believed to be best practices. There are, however, several

limitations in the reviewed studies that need to be recognized. One major limitation common to most of the studies is the sample size (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Liehr & Diaz, 2010; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Semple et al., 2005). Small sample selections make it difficult to make generalizations to the general population. Generalizations are usually limited to the subjects in the sample and to the specific characteristics of those in the sample. Therefore, widespread applicability is assumed but not certain.

Another limitation is that most studies included a variety of mindfulness-based activities as well as a number of outcome measures (e.g., emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes), which makes it difficult to determine if it was a specific part of the activity that contributed to anxiety reduction or increased awareness (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Liehr & Diaz, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005). Although some studies included a follow-up testing period (Klatt et al., 2013; Semple et al., 2010), the lack of longitudinal studies also makes it difficult to determine the long-term effects of mindfulness practice. A final limitation of these studies relevant to their applicability to the present project is the fact that the programming was generally facilitated by outside facilitators and not by the teacher (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Liehr & Diaz, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005), however teachers of the participants did voice support and interest in being involved in mindfulness programming (Mendelson et al., 2010).

It is also important to consider the practical concerns and risks when using mindfulness practices in public school settings. Parental concerns are often cited as a barrier to implementing mindfulness/contemplative practices in the classroom (Ergas, 2014). Although mindfulness can be described as “a natural human capacity” (Albretch, 2014, p. 21), it is important to address these concerns with parents. Resistance to mindfulness activities may also be noted on the part of the children. It is crucial never to force a child to participate in mindfulness practice, as it is not a disciplinary tool (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). Furthermore, there is the risk that reflective practices such as mindfulness may result in the opening of emotional wounds. This is arguably a risk to any activity done in the classroom, but teachers should be cognizant of the risks, and determine what support systems are available to the student. Hooker and Fodor (2008) suggest that some mindfulness exercises may not be suitable if the child continues to experience distress after several attempts to practice. Other mindfulness activities, however, that involve focusing on external stimuli may still be suitable (Hooker & Fodor, 2008).

Many of the delimitations of this research project are outlined in chapter 1, but it should be reiterated that this handbook is not intended for therapeutic use. The activities presented in the handbook are predicated on evidence-based practices, but the handbook itself has not been assessed. Although the activities suggested in the handbook are developmentally appropriate for children between the ages of 6 to 8, individual adaptations of activities that may be required by some students with particular needs are not outlined in the handbook.

The assumption behind the development of this handbook is that learning mindfulness can be of great benefit to teachers, students, and the overall school climate.

It is also assumed that the teachers using this handbook have also dedicated themselves to the practice of mindfulness. Being grounded in one's own practice ensures that the teacher is truly embodying the practice of mindfulness when modeling it and teaching it to children (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Mindfulness-based practices can typically be easy-to-use and easy-to-learn, but the effects will be more sustainable in the classroom if the teacher is modeling mindfulness daily (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Outline of Handbook

Below is a structural outline of the handbook: *Building Everyday Resilience: A Practical Handbook on Mindfulness Adapted for Primary School Teachers*.

- The ABCs of emotional health and mental well-being
 - Definition
 - Difference between mental illness and mental health problems
 - Children's mental health in Canada: What is research finding?
 - Key components to emotional well-being and resilience
 - How do schools play a role in mental and emotional health?
- An Introduction to Mindfulness
 - Definition
 - The three main components to mindfulness
 - Why use mindfulness in the classroom?
 - How can children practice mindfulness?
 - Common misconceptions about mindfulness
 - How can I nurture mindfulness in the classroom? Some practical considerations

- Developmental considerations
- Activities
 - Sensory activities
 - Breathing and visualization activities
 - Compassion activities
 - Perspective-taking activities
- Personal reflection from the author on developing a mindfulness practice
 - Reflection on my experience when first starting to practice mindfulness
 - List of questions that educators can contemplate/self-reflect on throughout the implementation on the handbook
- Additional resources for teachers, parents, and children

Conclusion

I hope that this resource will be a step towards creating an environment within the classroom where children are given the opportunity to explore thoughts, feelings, and experiences without fearing failure or judgment. I hope that this will breed a culture of openness and compassion within schools, and provide a means of helping children become more resilient towards the inevitable challenges that are a part of life.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HANDBOOK

This chapter presents the hardcopy of the handbook: *Building Everyday Resilience: A Practical Handbook on Mindfulness Adapted for Primary School Teachers*. This handbook was developed for Ontario primary school teachers because it is important to provide young children with the opportunity to develop and strengthen knowledge and skills associated with emotional well-being and resilience. The practice of mindfulness presents one means of creating these opportunities. This handbook provides teachers with important background information regarding mental health, emotional well-being, and mindfulness. Key references for this section include: Coholic, 2011; Keng et al., 2011; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; MHCC, 2012; OME, 2010; OCDSB, 2012; Schwean & Rodger, 2013; Weare, 2013. Teachers will then find a series of 30 mindfulness-based activities that can be used in the classroom. Additional external resources on mental health and mindfulness are also included. Many of these activities have been developed from activity ideas in current mindfulness program initiatives and conceptual ideas from popular literature on mindfulness (e.g., Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Miller, 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Nhat Hanh, 1992; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Adaptations were informed by developmental and practical considerations for the targeted age group (ages 6 to 8). Although external resources inspired the ideas for many of the activities, the content (e.g., objectives, activity descriptions, scripts, and prompts) has been created by the author. Chapter 3 (see section: Process of Development) details more fully how the content of the handbook was developed.

Building Everyday Resilience:

**A Practical Handbook on Mindfulness
Adapted for Primary School Teachers**

Created by: Jennifer Peacock

A Note from the Author

Mental health is fundamental to a child's overall well-being. National studies, however, are finding that mental health problems are the most common health problem among Canadian children and youth (MHCC, 2012, 2013). The nature of mental health is complex, but one way of supporting well-being and potentially circumventing the damaging effects of mental health problems is by providing children with consistent opportunities to build and strengthen skills associated with emotional well-being and resilience. Since children spend the majority of their childhood in school, as a teacher, you play an important role in creating these opportunities!

As a primary school teacher, this role is particularly crucial. Research suggests that opportunities to develop and strengthen emotional well-being and resilience are particularly important during periods of transition in a child's life (Augst & Akos, 2009). The primary grades represent significant early transition periods for young children (La Paro et al., 2000). These grades are therefore a critical period for helping children build the skills necessary to handle inevitable daily challenges and stress that may make them vulnerable to mental health problems.

Emerging research suggests that mindfulness-based activities may be useful for helping children adapt more effectively in changing and increasingly stressful environments. With that being said, *Building Everyday Resilience* is meant to be a practical resource for primary grade teachers interested in bringing mindfulness into the classroom.

This handbook features a series of fact and tip sheets about mental health and mindfulness as well as a compilation of 30 easy-to-implement activities aimed at helping teachers bring mindfulness-based activities into the classroom. The featured activities are divided into four main categories: sensory activities, breathing and visualization activities, compassion activities, and perspective-taking activities. Using the principles of mindfulness, the activities are designed to help children develop habits that help them manage, cope with, and overcome everyday challenges. These fun, play-based activities are developmentally appropriate for 6 to 8 year olds, but you may need to adapt some of the activities to meet the specific needs of your students. Be creative! The handbook will also contain a personal reflection on my own self-practice in mindfulness and provide a list of questions that you can reflect on while you use the handbook. At the end of the handbook, you will find a collection of additional resources that may be helpful for bringing mindfulness into the classroom. In addition, this section includes a compilation of general mental health resources for children.

The mental and emotional well-being of children is a relevant issue in today's classroom, both within Ontario and across Canada. Although mindfulness is not meant to be the sole solution to the current mental health landscape, it presents an opportunity for children to navigate their everyday experiences differently and reminds us of the importance of not losing focus on emotional and mental well-being.

I hope that you find this handbook useful!

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“We each have a seed of mindfulness, but we usually forget to water it”

(Thich Nhat Hanh, 2011, p. 16).

The Basics

Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

Before introducing you to the concept and practice of mindfulness, it's important to be aware of the basics of mental health, mental health problems, and some of the factors that contribute to well-being. You can also find more information on mental health and well-being by visiting some of the online Canadian resources listed in the additional resource section of this handbook.

What is mental health?

Mental health is very important to a child's overall health, but what does it mean? Good mental health does not simply mean the absence of mental illness. Mental health can be defined as "a state of successful performance of mental function resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity" (OCDSB, 2012, p. 2).

The difference between mental illness and mental health problems:

Mental illness

Mental illness refers specifically to disorders outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association. The DSM is a manual published by the American Psychiatric Association which specifies the symptoms of a mental illness required to determine a diagnosis (OCDSB, 2012). The manual is under continuous revision and is currently in its 5th edition (DSM-V). Attention deficit disorder and anxiety disorders are among the commonly diagnosed mental illnesses in children (OCDSB, 2012).

Mental health problems

Mental health problems refer more generally to symptoms that do not meet the very specific criteria for a mental illness in the DSM-V (OCDSB, 2012). It is very important to keep in mind that mental health problems may simply be a reflection of temporary reactions to stresses of daily life, for example, feeling anxious during the first week of school (OCDSB, 2012). The concern arises when these types of reactions start to become persistent and impair daily functioning (OCDSB, 2012). Evans and Schamberg (2009) found that continuous stress negatively affect the development of a child's brain. These compromises subsequently affect a child's ability to participate in academic, familial, social, and leisure activities (Schwean & Rodger, 2013).

Children’s mental health in Canada: What is research finding?

Current statistics indicate that mental health problems are becoming the biggest problem faced by Canadian children and youth today ((MHCC, 2012, 2013; Schwean & Rodger, 2013; Whitley et al., 2012). Let’s take a look at some of the numbers:

- 15% to 20% of Canadian children are affected by mental health problems. This percentage represents about one million children (Schwean & Rodger, 2013)!
- In Ontario alone, 15% to 21% (between 467,000 and 654,000) of children and youth have a mental health problem that impacts many areas of their life (OPACY, 2006).
- If childhood mental health problems are not addressed effectively, they may lead to challenges in adulthood (MHCC, 2012; Waddell et al., 2005). In fact, 70% of adults with mental health problems or illnesses experienced symptoms during childhood (MHCC, 2012).
- It is estimated that about \$50 billion is lost every year due to mental health problems and illness (MHCC, 2012). Poorer academic engagement, unsatisfactory employment, compromised well-being, family problems, suicide, and increased involvement in the criminal justice system are just a small list of other challenges that may arise when mental health problems are not adequately addressed (Schwean & Rodger, 2013).
- Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among adolescents and in North America, and children are now at risk of having a shorter life expectancy than their parents (People for Education, 2013).
- 80% of children and youth who require mental health services do not receive any help (Whitley et al., 2012).

What does this all mean?

There are many personal, social, and economic losses associated with poor mental health; however, only one in five children and youth who require mental health services receive help (Whitley et al., 2012). Many barriers affect effective service delivery, and these include (but are not limited to): fragmented health care systems, location of services, insufficient funding, stigma associated with mental health problems, socioeconomic status of the family, and lack of qualified health professionals (Whitley et al., 2012).

The statistics speak to the importance of investing in prevention initiatives that promote well-being at early ages (MHCC, 2012).

Emotional well-being: Emotional well-being is considered to be one of the key components of mental health (Albretch, 2014). Since mental health is fundamental to a child's overall well-being, emotional well-being is also important to overall development.

Characteristics commonly associated with emotional well-being include:

- ability to navigate challenging situations effectively
- awareness and openness to one's thoughts, emotions and behavioural patterns
- ability to recognize, manage, and express emotions in an effective manner
- optimism
- adaptability
- compassion towards the self and others
- resilience

This list is compiled from Albretch, 2014; Broderick & Metz, 2009; Collie et al., 2011

Did you know? The ability to attend to and manage emotions is also referred to as self-regulation of emotions. The self-regulation of emotions is associated with overall emotional well-being. On the other hand, emotional dysregulation occurs when someone doesn't have the ability to recognize and manage emotions in an adaptive way. Emotional dysregulation is associated with mental health problems (Broderick & Metz, 2009).

Resilience: Resilience is one of the important factors that promote emotional well-being. Resilience is the ability to adapt in the face of "risk and adversity" (Bailey & Baines, 2012, p. 48). Such adversity could include a number of everyday challenges faced by children (e.g., adjusting to higher academic demands; OCDSB, 2012). The ability to better cope with the challenges and stresses contributes to overall emotional and mental well-being (Masten, 2014). A child's resilience depends on the interaction of two factors: protective factors and risk factors (Masten, 2014).

- Protective factors: "traits, characteristics, or environmental contexts that research has shown to promote positive mental health in childhood or adolescence" (OME, 2010, p. 215).
E.g.: coping skills, support networks
- Risk factors: "traits, characteristics, or environmental contexts that research has shown to be predictive of mental health problems or illnesses in childhood or adolescence" (OME, 2010, p. 216).
E.g.: continued experiences of failure in school

So what? Optimal emotional well-being and resilience may serve as a buffer against the negative effects of everyday stress and challenges (MHCC, 2012). It is therefore important that children have the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills that mitigate the influence of risk factors and enhance their well-being (Broderick & Metz, 2009; OCDSB, 2012; People for Education, 2013).

How do schools play a role in mental and emotional health?

There is increasing interest in learning how the health of children and youth is influenced in school (Schwean & Rodger, 2013). Given that most children spend the majority of their time at school, it has been suggested that schools are an ideal environment to promote mental health (MHCC, 2012).

The classroom can become a busy place, so sometimes it is easy to forget the psychological and emotional needs of the children (Collie et al., 2011). But the importance of supporting student well-being is now being recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2014). The Ministry recently published a document titled: *Achieving excellence: A renewed vision for education in Ontario*. In this document, well-being has been identified as one of the four core principles of education in Ontario.

Teachers play an important role in facilitating opportunities for children to develop the skills they need to help them cope with stress and challenging situations (OPACY, 2006). Although certain circumstances are beyond your control, giving children frequent opportunities to develop these skills can help their overall mental and emotional well-being (OPACY, 2006).

Why the primary grades?

The primary grades are a particularly important time to be exposing children to activities that promote the development of emotional well-being and resilience. This is because the primary grades represent an important early transition period during which children transition from kindergarten to the more challenging curriculum expectations of grade school (La Paro et al., 2000).

Transitions are key periods in a child's life during which "children face new and challenging tasks as they move from familiar to unknown and more complex surroundings" (Augst & Akos, 2009, p. 3). The changes provide children with positive learning opportunities. These transitions can also cause anxiety and stress. If effective coping strategies are not made available to the child during these periods, the benefits of the learning opportunities may be lost (Augst & Akos, 2009).

The academic adjustment that is required at the primary school level can be particularly challenging and stressful to children and therefore the introduction of resilience building skills that help counter these stressful experiences is important. Not only are children particularly sensitive to risk factors (e.g., persistent stress) during periods of change, but they may also be particularly receptive to learning protective skills (e.g., learning effective coping strategies) (Masten, 2014).

An Introduction to Mindfulness

So what does all of this have to do with mindfulness? Over the next few pages, you will be introduced to the concept and practice of mindfulness and its relation to mental and emotional well-being. For some of you, this will be your first introduction to mindfulness, and for some of you, this may simply be an opportunity to reacquaint yourself with the basic principles of mindfulness.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness has a very old history, but it is relatively new in terms of its popularity in North America. Mindfulness is popularly defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). When we are not aware of present moment experiences, we are functioning mindlessly (Langer, 1992).

What does it mean to function mindlessly? When we function mindlessly, we aren't thinking about what it is that we are doing. Unfortunately, this can cause us to develop habits that are problematic to our health. This is because when we function mindlessly we are *reacting* rather than *reflecting* and *responding* (Langer, 1992). Excessive worrying (which can lead to anxiety) is an example of a problematic habit that can be developed through mindlessness. When we anticipate that something stressful is about to happen it is easy to react by worrying, rather than reflecting on these feelings and trying to look at the situation from different perspectives. Mindfulness, on the other hand, does allow for a broader perspective. How? We will talk about that next.

There are three main components to mindfulness:

1. **Attention:** This refers to the observation and awareness of internal and external sensations, thoughts, or feelings of the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004). Internal sensations refer to physical sensations inside the body. External sensations refer to physical sensations outside of the body and within the surrounding environment.
2. **Attitude:** When we practice mindfulness, we are supposed to try to be open and non-judgmental. When we learn how to observe our sensations, thoughts, and feelings non-judgmentally then we actually learn how to respond more effectively to situations because we are neither overly engaged in the experience (e.g., believing that a problem in our life defines who we are), nor trying to suppress the experience (e.g., ignore or run away from the problem; Keng et al., 2011). Remember when I mentioned that mindfulness allows us to practice perspective-taking? This is what I meant. Attending to present moment experiences with an open attitude may be an important strategy for developing emotional resilience because it allows us to experience potentially uncomfortable emotions more calmly (Broderick & Metz, 2009).

3. **Intention:** This is the reason for practicing mindfulness. The reasons can be different for different people. Maybe you are practicing to relax, or maybe you are practicing to reflect on feelings of compassion, empathy, or gratitude (Shapiro et al., 2006). Whatever the reason, an intention helps us maintain our attention when it wanders, and it also helps us keep an open attitude.

Why use mindfulness in the classroom?

The practice of mindfulness has been used as a form of intervention for physical and psychological conditions such as stress, anxiety, pain, and depression, in clinical settings for adults (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). Research on mindfulness and children is still in very early stages of development, but existing research appears to be finding that mindfulness is also effective for improving the well-being of children and youth. Studies have found that children who participated in mindfulness activities displayed a reduction in stress and anxiety (Liehr & Diaz, 2010; Semple et al., 2010); reduced depressive symptoms (Liehr & Diaz, 2010); increased optimism (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010); improved attention (Klatt et al., 2013; Napoli et al., 2005; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005); decreases in parent and teacher reported behavioural problems (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Semple et al., 2010; Semple et al., 2005); improved emotional regulation (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Mendelson et al., 2010; Saltzman & Goldin, 2008); and increased self-compassion (Coholic, 2011).

Giving children the opportunity to use mindfulness to work with everyday life and stressors appears to be a feasible and effective way to cultivate well-being and resilience (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Since children are usually eager and open to learn and experience new things, they may be particularly receptive to learning mindfulness (Bogels et al., 2008; Rempel, 2012). An additional benefit to practicing mindfulness with children is that as they learn to be more compassionate towards themselves, they may also learn to extend that compassion to their peers (Neff, 2003). Integrating mindfulness-based activities into the regular school day will not only promote healthy mental health habits within the classroom, but it may also create a better learning and social environment.

How can children practice mindfulness?

There are formal and informal techniques to nurture the practice of mindfulness (Burke, 2010).

- **Formal practices:** A common formal practice is known as a mindfulness meditation. The practice of mindfulness meditation usually involves using the breath, a physical sensation, or a feeling as a point on which to focus one's attention (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). This area of focus is referred to as an "anchor" (Burke, 2010, p. 134). Whenever other feelings, thoughts, and feelings start to capture our attention during the practice, we are supposed to bring our attention back to our chosen "anchor" (Burke, 2010).
- **Informal practices:** Mindfulness can be practiced during everyday activities too! We can practice present moment awareness as we walk, eat, drink, dress, etc. (Burke, 2010).

Common misconceptions about mindfulness:

Mindfulness is often misunderstood both as a concept and as a practice. These misconceptions can often cause resistance to bringing mindfulness into the classroom. Listed below are some of these common misconceptions (**bolded text**) and their subsequent clarifications (non-bolded text).

- **Mindfulness is religious by nature.** This misconception is probably one of the main reasons that parents and some teachers might object to mindfulness-based activities being introduced in the public school classroom. It is very important to understand that mindfulness does NOT have to have a religious connotation. Although some people may practice mindfulness for spiritual and religious reasons, the capacity to observe and participate in present moment experiences is ‘a natural human capacity’ (Albretch, 2014, pg. 21).
- **Mindfulness is about getting rid of all negative thoughts and feelings.** Actually, mindfulness is not about getting rid of negative thoughts and feelings. It is about learning to reflect on them before they translate into actions. By learning how to respond to experiences in healthier ways, we can avoid reacting to situations in a way that actually causes more stress (e.g., excessive worry)
- **Mindfulness is complicated.** In fact, mindfulness is very simple which makes it a very feasible and accessible tool to bring to the classroom. Practicing mindfulness, however, is not always easy. It is easy to become distracted. It may also be challenging when you are going through a particularly difficult time. It is important to keep in mind that we need to be compassionate towards these experiences instead of judging ourselves when we struggle.
- **Mindfulness is about being very still and quiet for long periods of time.** Not at all! Although some more formal techniques of practicing mindfulness do require some stillness and silence, they do not have to be for long periods of time for children to benefit from the practice. Furthermore, mindfulness-based activities can also be active and creative!
- **Mindfulness is a waste of time.** A common worry is that practicing mindfulness-based activities in the classroom is taking away from valuable time spent on academic subjects. Theory and research, however, support that intrapersonal skills are equally as important aspects in childhood and adult life as reading, writing, and mathematic skills. Furthermore, supporting well-being in the classroom can help create a better learning environment, which may subsequently improve learning in other subject areas.

This list is compiled from Albretch, 2014; Ergas, 2014; Gardner, 1983; Gunaratana, 1990; Hemmings, 2013; Jennings, 2008; Neff, 2003; Semple et al., 2005; Shapiro et al., 2006; Weare, 2013

How can I nurture mindfulness in the classroom? Some practical considerations:

Whatever the type of mindfulness-based activity, there are always some important considerations to keep in mind. Here is a list of considerations that you may find useful as you start to introduce mindfulness-based activities into the classroom:

- When first introducing mindfulness into the classroom, start off with very simple exercises such as basic breathing exercises, basic object manipulation exercises, and listening exercises. Once the children have practiced present moment awareness by being aware of physical sensations, they are ready to start bringing awareness to more complex experiences like their thoughts and feelings. By developing this awareness, children learn that thoughts and feelings influence their actions, and although they cannot control emotions or thoughts, they can control their actions.
- Remember that long periods of quiet or stillness can be difficult for young children. Try to keep quiet exercises short (1 to 2 minutes.) As the children become more familiar with the exercises, you may be able to lengthen the time. Combining breath awareness with movement exercises such as stretching or hands-on activities may be more appealing to young children as these activities also provide an outlet for energy.
- Keep activity instructions simple. Physical props and easy to understand analogies may help the children better understand the objective of a particular mindfulness-based activity.
- Remind the children to be respectful of other children's' space.
- There are many different activities that can promote mindfulness, but being aware of the breath is always an important component of practicing mindfulness. Always remind the children to center themselves with the breath before, during, and after any type of practice. Thoughts are sure to wander during an activity and that is okay! The breath is always something that the children can go back to, but when they first start practicing, they will need to be reminded every so often.
- During more formal exercises, children may close their eyes. If a child is having a hard time keeping their eyes closed, they may keep their eyes half open and gaze downward. The children should be in a position that is most comfortable to them: sitting comfortably with straight backs, or lying down on their backs.
- Mindfulness activities can be used during any time of the day. You may find, however, that the activities are particularly helpful during periods of transition during the day. For example: before a change in subject study, before a test, after recess, etc.

- Reading relevant storybooks can be a helpful way for children to see mindfulness being applied to everyday situations. You will find lots of reading suggestions in the additional resource section of this handbook!
- Have the children bring towels and small blankets from home if they can – to be stored in the classroom. Towels can be helpful when you want to lie down on the floor, but no mats are available. Some children may feel cold when lying still, so blankets may also be useful.
- It is important to allow children to share their experience with you and/or with the class after a mindfulness activity. Examples of questions that can be used to prompt the children to reflect on their experience are: What did you notice during this exercise? What thoughts did you notice in your mind? Did you notice anything going on in your body during the activity? How did you feel when (insert particular moment in the activity)? How do you feel? These sharing periods help children process their experience and listening to how others experienced the practice can also help children notice things in future practices.
- Remember that some activities may not be suitable for some children. You may have to customize activities to best suit the needs of your students. Never force a child to participate in a mindfulness exercise. Although current research on mindfulness and children has not noted any adverse effects from the practice of mindfulness, it is possible that reflective practices such as mindfulness may result in the opening of emotional wounds. If a child experiences distress from a particular exercise, then it may not be suitable for that child; however, other mindfulness activities that involve focusing on external stimuli may still be suitable. Be aware of other support systems available to the child at school should they need additional help. External resources are listed for your convenience in the additional resource section of this handbook.
- Practice, practice, practice! Continuous practice is important to really benefit from mindfulness exercises. If you don't have a lot of time, a basic breathing and listening activity are two fast and easy activities to try and include in the day.
- And finally, remember that as the teacher, your behaviour is also being observed. Being a model for mindfulness-based behaviour can also help with the children's development of the skill.

This list is compiled from Hooker & Fodor, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Nhat Hanh, 1992; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; Weare, 2013; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012

Developmental considerations:

When we compare adult and child practices of mindfulness there are actually a lot of similarities. Practice is important for both children and adults. The basic content of certain exercises is also very similar (e.g., focusing on the sensations of the breath; Weare, 2013). Developmental needs of children change how we *approach* mindfulness-based activities with children. The activities in this handbook are designed to be developmentally appropriate for children ages 6 to 8, however, if you need to make modifications to the activities to suit the needs of the students, here are a list of developmental landmarks to consider:

- Children between the ages of 6 to 8 differ in the length of time they can attend to one task, but they are generally eager and open to learning and new experiences (Ministry of Education, 2010). Keep the exercises short; particularly when first starting out (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; Weare, 2013). A breathing or listening exercise may only be 30 seconds to a minute when you first start. Once the children are more familiar with the exercises, you may spend more time on them (2 to 5 minutes depending on the children).
- Use simple language. The use of props and simple analogies may help the children better understand the objective of a particular mindfulness-based activity (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). One example of a simple analogy to help children better understand how to deal with wandering thoughts during a mindfulness exercise was developed by Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert (2008). In this analogy they compare dealing with wandering thoughts to teaching an overly excited puppy to sit still. Getting angry when the puppy moves will not help the animal learn to sit still, much like becoming angry with the self when attention wanders is not helpful. Instead it is best to simply bring the puppy back to a seated position, much like gently bringing one's attention back to the point of focus (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008).
- Children in the primary school grades are also imaginative and learn well through activities that allow for play and exploration (Ministry of Education, 2010). Therefore, keep methods, materials, and activities play-based and creative (Weare, 2013). Arts-based activities are a great idea, but remember that the intention of the activity is to promote present moment awareness.
- Combining breath awareness with movement exercises such as stretching or hands-on activities provide a means for expelling energy (Mendelson et al., 2010)
- Specific mindfulness-based activities that appear to be effective include yoga, body scans, breathing meditations, and visualization meditations (Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010).

Now what? Now that you have a basic understanding of mindfulness, the following section of the handbook is compilation of 30 easy-to-implement activities aimed at helping you bring mindfulness-based activities into the classroom. These activities are designed to help students learn how to be aware of the present moment and learn practical techniques for coping with everyday challenges. As a teacher, I know that you are very busy already. With this in mind, many of these activities don't have to take more than 1 to 5 minutes! The featured activities are divided into four main categories: sensory activities (Activities 1 to 10), breathing and visualization activities (Activities 11 to 20), compassion activities (Activities 21 to 24), and perspective-taking activities (Activities 25 to 30). Each activity outlines the objective, a list of any required materials, and procedure for the activity. Photocopy masters of any activities that require reproducible material are also included.

As was mentioned earlier, it is important to remember that your students are always observing your behaviour. Although this handbook provides you with activities to promote mindfulness-based behaviour among your students, remember that children learn best through example. The benefits may be more sustainable when you also exemplify mindfulness regularly in the classroom. In order to be a model of mindfulness, you need to start to develop your own practice. A list of suggested readings and training opportunities are available in the additional resource section of this handbook. I would also suggest that you take the time to practice each activity outlined in this handbook before introducing them to the class. Following the activity section, I have also included a personal reflection on my own self-practice in mindfulness. This reflection provides a list of questions that you can reflect on while you use the handbook and that you may find helpful as you start your own practice.

Activities

Sensory Activities

ACTIVITY 1: *What Can You Hear?*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to explore their sense of hearing. This activity encourages present moment awareness, curiosity, and openness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- none required

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this exercise by having the students clear off their desks and sit comfortably in their chairs with a straight back. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap.

Open a window in the classroom. Encourage the students to take a couple breaths in and out.

Say:

I want you to take the next few moments to listen very carefully to the sounds that you hear both inside the classroom and outside the classroom. What is the loudest sound you hear? What is the quietest sound you hear? What other sounds do you hear?

Give the students 10 to 20 seconds to listen quietly.

Say:

Now, when you are ready, I want you to gently bring your awareness back to the feeling of your body touching your chair and gently open your eyes.

Guide the students' attention to the front of the class. Ask the students to identify what sounds they heard and write them on the board. Examples of sounds students may hear include: birds, passing cars, grumbling stomachs, sneezing, etc. Encourage the students to take some time every day to listen to the sounds around them and to try and identify what they are. You could also combine this activity with an art activity by having the students draw what they hear.

(Adapted from Napoli et al., 2005)

ACTIVITY 2: *What Is Behind My Back?*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to explore their sense of touch. This activity encourages present moment awareness, curiosity, and openness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- a collection of household objects (e.g., cup, spoon, bottle, key, sunglasses, etc.)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this activity by having students sit together in a circle. If a carpeted area is not available in the classroom then move the desks to make an open space. Encourage the students to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then ask the students to put their hands behind their backs. Walk around the circle and place an object in each student's hands. Ask them to keep holding the object behind their back and to feel it with their fingers.

Say:

I want you to take the next few moments to touch the object behind your back. I want you to notice what that object feels like. I don't want you to tell me what the object is; I just want you to tell me what it feels like. Does it feel big or small? Does it feel warm or cool? Does it feel heavy or light? Does it feel rough or smooth? What shapes do you feel? What is interesting about it?

Go around the circle and give each student an opportunity to describe their object. Afterwards they may place the object in the middle of the circle so that the other students can see. If there is time, you can have the students exchange objects and ask the students if they notice anything else about the object. Alternatively, you have the students pick the objects from within the classroom or ask that they bring an object from home the night before – nothing breakable!

(Adapted from Zelazo & Lyons, 2012)

ACTIVITY 3: *Exploring Smells*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to explore their sense of smell. This activity encourages present moment awareness, curiosity, and openness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- cotton balls
- fragrance oils (2 or 3)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this activity by having students sit together in a circle. If a carpeted area is not available in the classroom then move the desks to make an open space. Encourage the students to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments.

Dab cotton balls (enough for each student) with one of the fragrance oils. Pass a cotton ball to each student and ask them to hold it gently up to their nose.

Say:

I want you to take the next few moments to smell the cotton ball. What does it smell like? Does it smell like more than one thing? Is it strong or light scent? Does this smell make you think of anything? What does the smell make your body feel like? Where do you feel those feelings? In your chest? In your head? In your hands?

Give the students a few moments and then ask if anyone would like to share what they noticed. Then repeat the process with the next fragrance oil. If fragrance oils are not accessible, then this exercise can also be done with common kitchen spices.

(Adapted from Napoli et al., 2005)

ACTIVITY 4: *Exploring Tastes*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to explore their sense of taste. This activity encourages present moment awareness, curiosity, and openness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- a piece of fruit, a raisin, or a small piece of chocolate

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this activity by having students sit together in a circle. If a carpeted area is not available in the classroom then move the desks to make an open space. Encourage the students to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then ask each student to put out their palm as you hand out a single raisin, a piece of fruit, or a small piece of chocolate to each student. Tell the students not to put it in their mouth but to just examine the piece of food in their palm.

Say:

I want you to take the next few moments to look at (insert name of food). What do you see? Do you notice anything about it that you have never noticed before? How does it feel in your hands? What shape is it? (Pause) Bring the (insert name of food) up to your mouth. Do you notice anything? Can you smell it? Does it make you feel hungry? If you want to, slowly put the (insert name of food) in your mouth. What does the (insert name of food) feel like against your tongue? Smooth? Rough? Slippery? Chew it very slowly! Do you notice the taste in your mouth? Is it sweet? Sour? Where do you taste it? At the back of the tongue? On the sides? At the front? (Pause) When you are finished chewing, swallow. Now your food is moving down your throat towards your stomach.

- ☞ If a student does not want to eat the piece of food, still encourage them to examine it in their hand. What is it that they don't like about it? Explore that feeling.

Once all the students are finished, invite them to share their experience. What did they notice? How did it feel?

Encourage the students to try this exercise when they eat their snacks or their meals.

(Adapted from Semple et al., 2005)

ACTIVITY 5: Memory

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to explore their sense of sight. This activity encourages present moment awareness and develops attention skills.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- a collection of everyday objects (e.g., spoon, rope, pencil, leaf, eraser, pencil case, book, etc.)
- a large sheet

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this activity by having students sit together in a circle. If a carpeted area is not available in the classroom then move the desks to make an open space. Place the selected objects in the middle of the circle. Encourage the students to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the objects.

Say:

I want you to take the next few moments to look carefully at each object in the middle of this circle. Look at its shape, its colour, and its size.

- ☞ Don't tell the students that they are expected to memorize the objects, simply ask them to inspect the objects closely.

Give the children a few moments to examine the objects and then place a sheet over the objects so that they can no longer be seen. Ask the students to name as many objects as they can remember. Once all the students feel that they have named all the objects, lift the sheet and see if they remembered all of them.

- ☞ You can make this activity more challenging for older students by asking them to also pay attention to the objects' location in relation to other objects (e.g., the book is beside the pencil).

(Adapted from Fisher, 2006)

ACTIVITY 6: Body Scan

OBJECTIVE:

This activity helps children get in touch with how their body is feeling. It can be a great relaxation activity, but it also helps children start to notice different sensations both inside and outside their body. Sometimes these sensations are clues to how you are feeling. Learning body awareness is important if we are going to listen to what it is telling us!

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- mats or blankets (if a carpet is not available in the classroom)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this activity by having students lie down on a mat, towel, or the carpet (if there is one in the classroom). Encourage the students to close or half close their eyes and put their hands on their stomach or along their sides.

Say:

We are often very busy and we forget how much our body does for us! It helps us move around, it helps us breathe, it helps us get better when we don't feel well. It's important to sometimes take a little time to check how are body is feeling because it can tell us a lot! It can tell us when we need to rest, it can tell us when we need to stretch, it can tell us when we are hungry, and so much more. So let's take a couple deep breaths and check in with our bodies.

Give the students a few seconds to breathe in and out.

Bring your attention to the very top of your head, the back the head and your face. Is it relaxed? Does it feel tight anywhere? (Pause) Now move your attention to your neck, your shoulders, and your arms. How do they feel? Check your wrists and your fingers. Do you feel your chest and your stomach move up and down with each breath? How does your back feel? Can you feel it supporting you on the floor? (Pause) Now move your attention to your hips and your legs. They must get tired from carrying us around all day! (Pause) How do your feet feel? Your toes? Take a nice slow breath in. Notice how everything in our body is connected. Breathe out. Now when you are ready I want you to wiggle your toes and your fingers. Bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching the mat and gently open your eyes.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

(Adapted from Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010)

ACTIVITY 7: *Counting Our Senses*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to explore all their senses. This activity encourages present moment awareness, curiosity, and openness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- paper
- colouring pencils
- hard surface for children to colour on (e.g., book)
- preferable if activity can be done out in the playground

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Explain that you will be going outside to the playground and that you want them to pay close attention to what they hear, smell, taste, see, and feel. The students are to draw and/or write down two things that they see, two things that they hear, two things that they can feel, two things they can smell, and two things they can taste. Pass out paper and colouring pencils as well as some type of hard surface for them to draw on and head outside.

Say:

When you are looking at something, maybe you will look at the colour and the shape. (Pause) When you listen, try to hear both the loud and the quiet sounds. How would you describe the scents that you smell? When you touch something, notice the texture, the size, and the temperature. And when you taste something, how does it taste? If your thoughts begin to wander, notice what you are thinking or feeling, and then return to exploring what you see, hear, smell, touch, and taste.

Allow the students some time to explore their environment. When they are finished, return to the classroom and give the students an opportunity to share their experience. If some students finish earlier than others, they may share their experience with another peer who is also finished.

ACTIVITY 8: Mirror, Mirror, On The Wall!

OBJECTIVE:

This activity is done in pairs and provides children with the opportunity to develop body awareness. This activity encourages present moment awareness, curiosity, and openness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- music cd (gentle music)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Explain that they will be exploring body movement and noticing where their body is in the space around them. To do this the students will be using each other as a mirror. Put the students into partners and move the desks to the side so that there is some room. Ask the students to stand in front of each other with the palm of their hands facing each other, but not touching!

Say:

You are going to be each other's mirror. When you are looking in the mirror, you see a mirror image of yourself. That means that when you move your right hand, it looks like the person in the mirror is moving their left hand. And when you move your left hand, it looks like the person in the mirror is moving their right hand. When I turn on the music, one of you is going to be the leader and one of you is going to follow the leader. Copy the leader as if you were their mirror. So, if your partner moves their right arm, copy what they are doing with your left arm. Move very slowly, it will take a little bit of time to get used to it. Pay attention to where the different parts of your body are as you move.

Demonstrate this for the students and then select a leader in each pair. Turn on the music and let the students explore. It will probably be a little confusing for the students at first, especially the younger ones, so give them time. Switch partner roles.

When the exercise is over, give the students an opportunity to share their experience. What did it feel like? What parts were challenging?

ACTIVITY 9: *Body Clue Detectives*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to develop body awareness by exploring the different feelings that they experience during the day and where they feel these different emotions in their body.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- large sheets of paper for body tracing
- yellow, blue, red, and orange circle cutouts of construction paper
- glue sticks
- easel pad (or chalk board if you have different coloured chalk)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students move the desks to the sides of the classroom, as they will need a larger space to do their body traces. Once the room is ready, hand out large sheets of paper and markers to each student. Before explaining the activity, have the students sit quietly on the floor for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Say:

Our bodies can tell us a lot about how we are feeling. For example, when we are nervous, we might feel like we have butterflies in our stomach or maybe we feel like we have to go to the bathroom. When we feel happy, we might feel giggly on the inside. Knowing these signs is important for understanding how we feel. Your body is your friend! It is always trying to give you clues to tell you how you are feeling! Today we are going to explore these body clues. We are going to be body clue detectives.

Have the students help each other make full body traces of themselves on the sheets of paper. Once everyone is finished their body traces, bring their attention briefly to the easel where you have written the following four groups of emotions: Happy (written in yellow); Sad (written in blue); Angry (written in red); Scared (written in orange).

Say:

Everyone experiences many different feelings and emotions. Some are sad feelings, some are happy feelings, some are scared feelings, and some are angry feelings. They are all a little different. What are some feelings that you might have during the day?

Have the students share some example and write them down on the easel pad (or chalk board). Examples may include unhappy, embarrassed (sad feelings), excited, cheerful,

confident (happy feelings) nervous, anxious, confused (sad feelings) frustrated, jealous (angry feelings), etc.

Pass around the glue sticks and the yellow, blue, red, and orange circle cutouts of construction paper. Explain that the yellow circles represent happy feelings, the blue cutouts represent sad feelings, the red cutouts represent angry feelings, and the orange cutouts represent scared feelings. Encourage the students to glue the different feeling cards near the part of the body where they might experience that feeling. For example, maybe a student will glue an orange cut out on their hands because they get sweaty hands when they feel scared. Walk around the classroom and encourage the students to share why they pasting the feelings card on a certain part of the body.

Remind students that it is important to listen to their body clues. We can't feel better if we don't know what wrong!

(Adapted from Coholic, 2011)

ACTIVITY 10: *Animal Yoga*

OBJECTIVE:

These stretches are a form of physical activity that helps to promote body awareness and relaxation.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- mat or towels (optional)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Below you will find a list of suggested yoga stretches that you can practice with the students. Use them throughout the day as needed.

Penguin Pose:

Stand with your feet slightly apart and your arms by your side. Stretch out your fingers nice and long. Can you stretch out your toes in your shoes? Now try to walk like a penguin! Keep your arms close to your sides, just like a penguin's wings.

Flamingo Pose:

Flamingoes like to stand on one leg. Stand with your feet together and tuck your hands under your armpits to make your wings. When you're ready, try to stand on one leg. When you get tired, switch legs!

Growing Flower Pose:

Stand with your feet apart and then bend your knees until you are squatting and curl into a ball with your arms wrapped tightly around you. Now you are a tiny seed! With lots of water and sun you slowly start to get bigger. Unwrap your arms and slowly start to stand up. Reach your hands high in the air. If you want to make your flower grow even bigger, try to stand on your tippy toes as you reach for the sky!

Stretching Monkey Pose:

Stand with your feet apart and reach your arms high in the air! Pretend you are a monkey standing on a tree branch trying to reach the bananas that are high in the tree. Breathe in and reach! Once you grab a banana, breathe out and bring your hands down to your toes. You need a rest; that was hard work! Let your head and arms hang heavy. Sway back and forth. Now breathe in and slowly roll up until you are standing nice and straight.

Cat Pose:

Stand on your knees and hands just like a cat. Lower your head and round your back. Breathe in and then when you breathe out lift your head and arch your back. Now breathe in and round your back again. Try this a few times.

Playful Puppy Pose:

Stand on your knees and hands just like a puppy. Make sure your hands are under your shoulders and that your legs are under your hips. Keep your palms nice and flat on the floor. Curl your toes and breathe out as you try to straighten your legs. You can keep them bent too! Lift your bum up into the air just like a puppy does when it wants to play! Try to keep a straight back.

Starfish Pose:

Spread your legs out as far as you can and point your toes out. Lift your arms up and stretch them out wide. Imagine you are a starfish resting on the sandy bottom of the ocean. Breathe in and out.

Snake Pose:

Lie down on your stomach. Bend your elbows and put your hands right underneath your shoulders. Breathe in and gently lift your head and shoulders off the ground. Look down at the edge of the mat in front of you, pretend that you see a tasty treat! Stick out your tongue and hiss like a snake!

Lion Pose:

Kneel down on the ground with your toes touching, but your knees apart. Put your hands on your knees. You're a lion resting on a giant rock, watching everything around you. Roll your shoulders back and then forward. Gently lift your head and look at the sky. Then bring your head down and look at the floor. Bring your head back to the centre and look to the right. Look to the left. Look straight ahead. Breathe in and puff out your chest, as you breathe out make a loud lion sigh: aaaaaaahhhhhhhh.

Sleepy Bunny Pose:

Kneel down on the floor and bring your chest to your legs. Rest your head on the floor and reach your hands behind you. Curl up like a sleeping bunny in its burrow.

(Adapted from Klatt et al., 2013; Napoli et al., 2005)

Breathing and Visualization Activities

ACTIVITY 11: *Two Breaths*

OBJECTIVE:

This breathing exercise is a great way to introduce your students to present moment awareness. By counting their inhales and exhales, children are able to focus on their breath in the present moment. This exercise can be calming and it is a great tool to remind children to use when they feel anxious or wound up.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- none required

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this exercise by having the students clear off their desks and sit comfortably in their chairs with a straight back. If students are having a difficult time sitting up straight tell them to imagine that a piece of string is attached to the top of their head (like a marionette puppet) and that it is helping to hold them up. You could also suggest that they imagine themselves sitting up like a tall, strong mountain to help them keep a straight back. Demonstrate this for the students by sitting up straight in a chair yourself. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap.

Say:

Once you feel comfortable in your chair, take a couple deep breaths. Let's breathe in through our nose and out through our nose – just like that, good job! Once you've taken a few good, slow, deep breaths we are going to start counting our breaths in twos, quietly in our head. I'll count out loud at first to help us get started. When you breathe in that's "one" and when you breathe out that's "two." And then we'll start again at one.

*One – breathe in
Two – breathe out
One – breathe in...*

If you forget what number you're on, just start back at number one. Don't worry if your breathing sounds different from the breathing of the person beside you. This is your breath, not anyone else's!

Allow the children to count their breaths for another 10-20 seconds or so.

Say:

Now, when you are ready, bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching your chair and gently open your eyes.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

This is a good exercise to practice every day, especially if you don't have a lot of time. As the students become more familiar with the exercise, you can make it longer by increasing the counted number of breaths. If some students are more comfortable lying down to do this exercise then you may wish to use mats or towels if a carpet is not available in the classroom. Remind students that they can count their breaths any time of the day if they are ever feeling anxious or upset.

(Adapted from Miller, 2010)

ACTIVITY 12: *What Does My Breath Feel Like?*

OBJECTIVE:

This breathing exercise is another great way to introduce children to present moment awareness. It gives children the opportunity to take a moment to notice all the physical sensations that come along with breathing. It may also have a very calming effect on the mind and the body.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- none required

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this exercise by having the students clear off their desks and sit comfortably in their chairs with a straight back. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap.

Say:

Let's take a deep breath in through our nose and out through our nose. What does the air feel like when you breathe in? What does the air feel like when you breathe out?

- ☞ You will probably have a few students call out answers at this point. Acknowledge their experience but encourage them to think about what they are feeling quietly to themselves and explain that anyone who wants to share their experience can do so at the end of the exercise.

What does the air feel like it when goes through your nose? (Pause) Does it tickle? Does it feel cold? (Pause) What does it feel like in your throat? (Pause) Do you feel your chest and stomach go up and down? Notice as the air goes back up your throat and out your nose. (Pause) You might notice that while we practice noticing our breath that our mind starts to think about other things. Maybe you're thinking about what you'll do at recess or wondering what you'll do at school today. That's okay! Notice what you are thinking and then go back to paying attention to what your breath feels like when you breathe in and when you breathe out. Notice how your entire body feels with each breath, even your legs and your feet!

Allow the children to notice these sensations for another 20-30 seconds or so.

Say:

Now, when you are ready, bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching your chair and gently open your eyes.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

This is a great exercise to practice every day, especially if you don't have a lot of time. As the students become more familiar with the exercise, you can make it longer by allowing the students more time to notice the sensations of their breathing. If some students are more comfortable lying down to do this exercise then you may wish to use mats or towels if a carpet is not available in the classroom.

(Adapted from Fisher, 2006; Hooker & Fodor, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Napoli et al., 2005)

ACTIVITY 13: *My Breath Is My Anchor*

OBJECTIVE:

A boat's anchor helps to bring a boat back when it starts to float away, just like the breath helps to bring us back to the present moment when our thoughts begin to wander to past troubles or future worries. This is an art activity that provides a visual analogy for helping students understand that they can always go back to their breath any time of the day.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- construction paper
- string (one piece per student)
- small, soft u-shape twigs (one per student)
- small, straight twigs (one per student)
- cut strips of blue tissue paper
- glue stick and liquid glue
- colouring pencils
- newspaper (to help with the mess!)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Ask the students if they know what the job of a boat anchor is. If a student knows, provide them with the opportunity to explain. If not, explain to the students that a boat's anchor helps to bring a boat back to its safe spot when it starts to float away. Without the anchor, the boat could float away and get lost. Explain to the students that a boat that is floating away is a lot like when our thoughts start to wander around in our minds, and we stop paying attention to what is going on right now.

Say:

Sometimes our thoughts wander to something that happened in the past. Sometimes these are happy thoughts, but sometimes these are sad or worried thoughts. Maybe you find yourself thinking about a fight that you had with your friend the other day, or maybe you are thinking about a math test that you have write tomorrow. It's easy to get lost in all of our thoughts! But we have our own anchor, just like a boat, whenever we feel like we are getting lost in all our thoughts. Can you guess what it is? It's our breathing! We can always go back to our breath to help us pay attention to what's going on right now. Today we're going to create our own pictures of a boat floating in water attached to its anchor, to remind us that we all have an anchor that can help us.

Cover the desks with newspaper as things can get messy with the liquid glue and distribute the art materials to the students. If you don't have enough glue/colouring pencils for each student then it may be easier to group the students into stations.

- ☞ Allow the children to be creative in this process. They may choose simply to draw a picture of a boat in water with an anchor attached or they may follow some of the suggestions provided in this activity. The point of this activity is for the students to think about the breath as their own personal anchor. Throughout the activity encourage the students to take a few deep breaths every so often.

Suggested steps for craft:

1. Glue the strips of tissue paper onto the construction paper to create the water. Some students may lie the strips on flat, while other might crumple them to make the water look wavy. Allow a little bit of room at the top of the piece of construction paper to draw a boat.
2. Glue the straight piece of twig to the tissue paper and then glue the curved piece of twig so that the middle of that twig attaches to the end of the straight twig to create an anchor shape.
3. While the anchor dries, have the students draw a boat floating on the water. Maybe the boat is empty, or maybe the student will draw someone in the boat. Let them be creative.
4. Finally have the students pour a little bit of liquid glue onto the newspaper (you may have to help with this!) Have the students dab both ends of the string in the glue. Then have the students attach one end of the string to their boat and then the other the anchor. They may choose to glue down the rest of the string, or leave it unglued for a more 3-D effect!
5. Set aside to dry.

Put the students' crafts up on the wall, so that students always have a visual reminder of the anchor whenever they need to be guided back to present moment awareness through their breath. *Remember our anchors!*

(Adapted from Miller, 2010)

ACTIVITY 14: Balloon Breath

OBJECTIVE:

This quick breathing activity gives children an opportunity to connect with the present moment by slowing down their breath. Taking a moment to slow down the breath can have a relaxing effect on the mind and body. It's also a chance for them to stretch their bodies, which is a great way to wake up a sleepy class.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- none required

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this exercise by having the students clear off their desks and sit comfortably in their chairs with a straight back. If there is enough room in the classroom then encourage the children to sit on the floor with their legs crossed. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap.

Say:

Let's take a deep breath in through our nose and out through our nose. Now open your eyes and bring one hand to each corner of your mouth. We're going to pretend to blow up a giant balloon. We are going to take a deep breath in through our nose, but this time we are going to breathe out through our mouth. As we breathe out, we are going to move our hands away from our face as if that balloon is getting bigger. We don't want to blow into the balloon too fast! If we do that then the balloon might pop, so let's breathe out nice and slow.

- ☞ Model this for the students. There may be some giggling here. That's okay! Just remind the students to follow their breath.

Once your balloon is as big as you want it to be, hold it for a few minutes. Move your balloon back and forth while breathing in and breathing out. When we are ready to let the air out of the balloon, take another deep breath in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth. Do this slowly and bring your hands back to the corners of your mouth.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

(Adapted from Napoli et al., 2005)

ACTIVITY 15: Ocean Breath

OBJECTIVE:

This is a relaxation activity that helps children focus on their breath.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- mats or blankets (if a carpet is not available in the classroom)
- small stuffed toy such as a beanie baby (optional)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this activity by having students lie down on a mat, towel, or the carpet (if there is one in the classroom). Encourage the students to close or half close their eyes and then place a small stuffed toy on their stomach. If the student does not want a toy on their stomach, they may put their hands on their stomach instead.

Say:

Let's take two deep breaths together. Breathe in and breathe out. As you breathe in, can you feel your stomach moving your toy up and when you breathe out can you feel the toy move down? (Pause) Now just go back to your regular breath. Can you still feel the toy move up and down? (Pause) As you are breathing in relax the muscles in your face, relax your jaw, let your tongue sit gently behind your top front teeth. Relax your eyes; even try to relax your ears! Just breathe. Remember that sometimes our mind might start thinking about different things while we do this exercise. If you find that you are thinking about something else, just notice what you are thinking about and go back to paying attention to your toy going up and down with the breath.

Give students a few more seconds to breathe in and out.

As you are breathing in and out I want you to imagine that your breath is like an ocean wave moving in and out of your body. Sometimes your breaths will be big and sometimes your breath will be small just like some ocean waves are big and small. Imagine the wave moving all the way from the top of your head to the tips of your toes, and when you breathe out imagine the wave moving from your feet all the way back to your head. Imagine that the toy on your stomach is swimming in the waves, swimming up when you breathe in and swimming down when you breathe out. (Pause). Now, when you are ready, bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching the floor and gently open your eyes. When your eyes are open raise your hand and I will come and collect the toys.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

(Adapted from Miller, 2010; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012)

ACTIVITY 16: *My Calming Word*

OBJECTIVE:

This exercise can be easily combined with other breathing exercises. By repeating a word or phrase such as “it’s okay,” “breathe,” “let it go,” a child can practice self-soothing in times of stress, anxiety, or over-excitement.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- easel pad
- marker

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this activity having the students clear off their desks or sit in a circle if a carpeted area is available in the classroom. Have the students sit comfortably either in their chair or on the floor with a straight back. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap. Have them take a few deep breaths and gently open their eyes.

Say:

Now we know that we can always use our breath to help us feel calm and focused inside, but sometimes it can also be helpful to repeat short little words or sentences as we breathe out.

Brainstorm different phrases or words that students like and write them down on the easel. Remind the students that some peers may have the same word or phrase, while others will have a different one. Everyone gets to choose their own.

- ☞ You may decide to put this sheet of paper up on the classroom wall, so the students always have something to reference.

Model this exercise for the students and then have them choose their own calming word or phrase to practice. The students may repeat their word or phrase inside their head or they may say it out loud, quietly.

Say:

As you say your calming word try to smile a little bit. Smiling can help us relax our whole face. If you notice someone else smiling during the exercise, smile back at them.

Allow the students to practice for 10 to 20 seconds. Once everyone is ready, ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

(Adapted from Nhat Hanh, 1992)

ACTIVITY 17: Going Up!**OBJECTIVE:**

This is another breathing exercise that helps bring children into the present moment by following their breath through the body.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- none required

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this exercise by having the students clear off their desks and sit comfortably in their chairs with a straight back. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap.

Say:

Let's take two deep breaths together. Breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the nose. (Pause). Today we are going to pretend that our body is a giant tree and that we are going to climb the tree with the help of our breath. Are we ready?

Take a deep breath in through your nose and feel your breath go all the way to your toes. Breathe out. Now we are at the bottom of the tree where all its roots are. Breathe in and feel your breath move up to your knees. Breathe out. Now we are at the trunk of the tree. Hold on tight! Take another breath in and let's move the breath to our stomach now. Breathe out. Now we can reach the biggest branches of the tree. Breathe in again and bring your breath up to your chest and shoulders. Breathe out. Wow, we are almost at the top of the tree, we can see the sunlight poking in through the top leaves of the tree. Let's climb all the way to the top. Breathe in, and bring your breath all the way to the top of your head. Breathe out, and then breathe in slowly to get all that nice fresh air at the top of the tree.

Now, when you are ready, bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching your chair and gently open your eyes.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

ACTIVITY 18: My Favourite Place

OBJECTIVE:

Calming visualizations can have a relaxing effect on our minds and bodies. This activity allows students to practice visualizing their favourite place. They can use this technique to calm feelings of stress, worry, or anxiousness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- plain paper
- colouring pencils

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Say:

Sometimes when we feel worried it can be helpful to think about a place that we really like. It can make us feel calmer inside. Maybe you think about your favourite park or your room with all your toys. What are some of your favourite places?

Write student suggestions up on the board and then pass out paper and colouring pencils. Ask the students to draw their favourite place. As they are drawing their pictures, go around and encourage students to share reasons for why they like their particular place. Once the students are finished, have them clear off their desks and sit comfortably in their chairs with a straight back. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap.

Say:

Now that you have been thinking about your favourite place, I want you to imagine that you are at your favourite place right now. What do you see? (Pause) What do you hear? (Pause) What do you smell? (Pause) What do you feel? (Pause). What does your favourite place make you think about? (Pause)

Take a few more breaths in your favourite place. (Pause) Now, when you are ready, bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching your chair and gently open your eyes.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

ACTIVITY 19: Let's Go To The Beach

OBJECTIVE:

This is a group visualization activity that can help students feel calm and relaxed.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- mats or blankets (if a carpet is not available in the classroom)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this activity by having students lie down on a mat, towel, or the carpet (if there is one in the classroom). Encourage the students to close or half close their eyes and put their hands on their stomach or along their sides.

Say:

Once you feel comfortable, take a couple deep breaths in and out of your nose. Now I want to imagine that we are at the beach on a warm, sunny day. You are standing under the shade of giant palm trees. You feel a nice, cool breeze against your neck. You look out in front of you and you see the beautiful blue ocean. The water is very calm and very blue. You walk towards the water. The sand under your feet is warm from the sun. When you get to the water, you dip your toes in. The water is not too hot and not too cold. You can feel the wet sand between your toes. Does it tickle? (Pause) You decide that you want to take a rest so you walk back to the shade of the palm trees and lie down. You look up at the sky. You notice a seagull flying overhead. Can you hear it squawking? You take a deep breath in and out. Let your entire body relax. If you notice that you are starting to think about other things, notice what you are thinking and then bring your attention back to the beach. Listen to the sound of the breeze rustling the palm tree leaves. Breathe in and out. When you are ready, start to wiggle your toes, your fingers, and your nose. Bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching the mat and gently open your eyes.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

- ☞ Remind the children every so often of their breath. You can read the script above or it can also be adapted. Just remember to get students to think about what they hear, feel, see, smell, and/or taste. You may choose to guide the entire relaxation exercise in silence, but you may also have students share their experience throughout the exercise. For example, say: *Imagine yourself on a warm beach near the water. Zoe, what does the sand feel like beneath your feet?* Zoe might respond, "It feels warm and rough." *Elias, what does the air smell like?* Elias might respond, "It smells like sea salt." Encourage all students to share an idea.

ACTIVITY 20: *Self Check-In!*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity encourages present moment awareness by having students check in with what they are thinking, and what they are feeling mentally and physically throughout the day. This is an easy activity for children to practice on their own once they are familiar with the technique.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- none required

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this exercise by having the students clear off their desks and sit comfortably in their chairs with a straight back. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap.

Say:

Sometimes we get so busy during the day that we forget to check in with ourselves to see how we are feeling or what we are thinking. Just like we need to take attendance in the morning to see where everyone in the class is, it is important to take attendance to see where our minds and bodies are!

Let's take a moment to check in with ourselves. Take a breath in through your nose and out through your nose. What are you noticing? What thoughts are going on in your head? What are you feeling? Maybe you are feeling excited, worried, angry, or bored? You don't have to try and change any of those feelings right now, just notice them. (Pause) How does your body feel? (Pause)

Take a few more breaths in and out and when you are ready bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching the chair and gently open your eyes.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

Encourage the children to check in with themselves throughout the day.

(Adapted from: Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

Compassion Activities

ACTIVITY 21: *Kindness Tree*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to think about how it feels to be kind to others.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- cutouts of tree leaves
- large sheets of paper to draw the outline of a tree
- pencils and/or colouring pencils
- tape

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

This activity requires that you first create an outline of a tree to put up on the wall of the classroom. Draw the outline of a trunk, branches, and twigs, but do not draw in any leaves. (Alternatively, you could create the silhouette of a tree by using construction paper.)

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Say:

Kindness is very important. How does it feel when you do or say something nice to someone else?

Allow student the opportunity to share some ideas. For example: it makes me feel good inside, it makes me feel helpful, etc.

Explain to the students that the tree on the wall is called a kindness tree and that it needs to be filled with kindness leaves. Each week you would like students to write or draw something nice that they said or did for someone else. By the end of the school year, you would like to see a nice, full, leafy tree.

Once children are familiar with the activity, it does not have to be done as a group. When they have some time during the day (e.g., they finish another activity early), students may tape up their kindness leaves.

ACTIVITY 22: *Friendly Wishes*

OBJECTIVES:

This activity encourages children to practice compassion and empathy for those around them.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- none required

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this exercise by having the students clear off their desks and sit comfortably in their chairs with a straight back. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap.

Say:

Let's take a couple deep breaths in through our nose and out through our nose. Now, still keeping your eyes closed, I want you to think about someone who you care about. Can you picture them in your mind? Breathe in and breathe out. Whenever you breathe out, imagine that you are sending a kind message to that person. You may think things like: I hope you are having a great day; I hope that you are feeling healthy. Send them a smile!

Now, when you are ready, bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching your chair and gently open your eyes.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share anything they noticed during the exercise.

(Adapted from Nhat Hanh, 1992)

ACTIVITY 23: *Learning To Listen*

OBJECTIVES:

Listening is an important part of being empathetic and compassionate towards ourselves and towards others. This activity helps children develop their listening skills, which requires them to use present moment awareness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- Lego

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Put the students into groups of four and have them put their desks together. Put a pile of Lego in the middle of each desk. Tell the students that they have 2 minutes to create something with the Lego. Once the students are finished, put them into groups of two.

- ☞ It is best if you partner them with a student who was not at the original group, so that they are less likely to be familiar with the structure that their partner made.

Have the student sit back to back, with one student facing the desk so that they have access to the remaining pile of Lego, and the other student facing outward holding their Lego structure in their lap.

Tell the students facing the desks that they are going to be recreating their partner's structure. The student facing outward has to give instructions about the colour, size, and placement of their Lego pieces to their partners. Instructions can be repeated as many times as needed. Once the student has successfully built their partner's structure, they can switch roles.

Once the exercise is finished, have the students return to their seats, and ask if anyone would like to share how they found the experience.

(Adapted from Napoli et al., 2005)

ACTIVITY 24: *The Happiness Recipe Book*

OBJECTIVES:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to explore happiness in the present moment and provides them with the opportunity to create a tangible resource that they can use as a coping strategy when they are feeling stressed, worried, or overwhelmed.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- notebooks (no lines)
- colouring pencils/markers/crayons

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Say:

Today we are going to talk about happiness. It is important to be aware of happiness. Sometimes we forget to think about happiness until we aren't feeling happy anymore. If we forget to appreciate happiness when we are feeling it then we forget to appreciate the things that make us happy. What makes you happy? Is there anything happening right now that is making you happy?

Allow students an opportunity to share their ideas. Write them down on the board. Share your own examples as well. Examples may include: sunny days, when I get to play with my friend, when I'm not sick, when I get to eat ice cream, when I get to go swimming, when my brother shares his toys with me, when I read a good story, etc.

Explain that today the students are going to start making their "Happiness Recipe Book." This recipe book is meant to include a collection of happy moments or things that make the student happy. The student may write, draw, or even paste things in the book. **This can be made into an ongoing project so that students can add to it throughout the school year.**

For the first entry of the recipe book, ask the students to write about or draw something or someone that makes them feel happy.

Once the students are finished their entry, ask if anyone would like to share how they found the experience.

(Adapted from Klatt et al., 2013; Nhat Hanh, 1992)

Perspective-taking Activities

ACTIVITY 25: *What's The Weather Like?*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity helps children reflect on the idea that feelings are always changing, much like the weather. This activity can help children learn to be patient with their feelings. This activity also serves as a simple analogy for children: we need to pay attention to our feelings, much like how we need to pay attention to the weather outside.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- photocopies of the internal weather tracker sheet (see Handout 1)
- colouring pencils

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Ask the students to name different kinds of weather that they have seen and write these examples on the board. Examples may include: sunny, cloudy, rainy, stormy, etc. Remind the students that the weather always changes. Sometimes it can be storming and then all of a sudden a little bit of sunlight comes through the clouds.

Say:

Our feelings are a lot like the weather. They change all the time. Sometimes when we are nervous or upset it might feel like we have a big rain cloud inside of us, but it's important to remember that you won't feel like that forever. Just like it won't rain outside, forever. But, sometimes it is raining or even storming! What do we do if it is raining outside?

Have the students provide some answers. For example: bring an umbrella, play inside.

Say:

So we use an umbrella to protect us from the rain! But what if we feel like it is raining inside of us? What can we do?

Have the students provide some suggestions, provide prompts if necessary. For example: sit down and take a few deep breaths, talk to a friend, talk to a teacher, do some relaxing stretches, etc.

Say:

Great suggestions! So we have umbrellas and raincoats for the weather inside of us too! But before we can choose the right equipment, we need to check the weather, so let's check to see what our weather is like today. Let's close our eyes again, and take a few deep breaths in through the nose and out through the nose. What does it feel like inside of you? Does it feel stormy? Does it feel sunny? Notice your weather and then bring your attention back to the feeling of your breath moving in and out of your body. Take a deep breath in and bring your shoulders all the way up to your ears. Squeeze tight! And then let your shoulders fall and relax. Now bring your attention back to the weather inside of you. Is it the same? Different?

When you are ready I want you to wiggle your toes and wiggle your fingers. Now, when you are ready, bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching your chair and gently open your eyes.

Pass out a copy of a monthly internal weather tracker sheet to each student (see Handout 1). There is a square for each school day of the month where the students can draw what their internal weather was like. Tell them that they can keep track of their weather every day if they'd like.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share what they noticed during the exercise.

HANDOUT 1: Internal Weather Tracker Sheet

Friday				
Thursday				
Wednesday				
Tuesday				
Monday				
Day	Weather	Weather	Weather	Weather

This form may be reproduced or adapted for classroom use.

ACTIVITY 26: Jar of Thoughts

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with a visual analogy of why using strategies to help us feel calm, also help us think more clearly.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- small, clear mason jars
- coloured sand (approximately 3 different colours)
- water

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Take a mason jar and fill it with about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of each colour of coloured sand. Fill the rest of the mason jar with water (below the brim). Close the jar tightly and shake it. Ask the students what they notice. Provide prompts if necessary (e.g., the sand is spinning quickly, the water looks muddy, it's difficult to see through, etc.) Then put the jar down and let the sand settle to the bottom of the jar.

Say:

Our minds are very busy! We have lots of thoughts and feelings all the time. This jar is like our mind and the different coloured sand is like our thoughts. When we start to feel worried, angry, or excited sometimes all the thoughts and feelings in our head start to move around really quickly, just like the sand moves around quickly when we shake the jar. It's difficult to think when all of our thoughts and feelings are spinning around our head, just like it's difficult to see inside the jar when all the sand is swirling around. When we practice being calm, it helps us think more clearly, just like we can see more clearly into the jar when we stop shaking it. Today you are going to make your own jar of thoughts that you can use as a reminder to practice being calm when you start to notice thoughts and feelings spinning around in your head.

Provide each child with a mason jar and have them come up one at a time to put the sand in the jar. They may then fill the rest of the jar with water. Tell them that they cannot shake the jar until you have checked that their lid is on tightly!

(Adapted from Coholic, 2011)

ACTIVITY 27: The Worry Shoe Box

OBJECTIVE:

This activity helps children learn that it is normal to have worried, nervous, or anxious feelings, and that we all feel like that sometimes. Children also learn that we don't have to feel worried all the time though this activity.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- a shoe box (decorated as desired)
- small pieces of paper
- colouring pencils

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

This is a good activity to do at the beginning of the day. Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Ask the students if anyone could share some reasons why people feel worried. Examples that may be provided are: fighting with a friend, having a lot of school work, having to go to a new class, having to meet new people, etc. Explain to the class that everyone feels worried sometimes.

Say:

What if one of your friends is feeling worried? What would you do to try and help them feel better?

Provide the students with an opportunity to provide some answers and then bring out the shoe box labeled: The Worry Shoe Box. Explain to the students that the job of the worry shoe box is to hold our worries so that we don't have to. If we want our worry back, we can always get in out of the box, or we can leave it in the box for as long as we want. Have the students take a moment to notice if there is anything that might be bothering or worrying them. Students can then decide to write or draw their worry down on a piece of paper and put it in the box.

You can use this activity as often as you want during the school year. Once the students are familiar with it, it does not have to be a group activity. Children can simply place a worry in the box whenever they need to.

(Adapted from Semple et al., 2005)

ACTIVITY 28: *The Feelings Pot*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with an opportunity to learn how to reflect on their feelings rather than immediately reacting to them.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- clay
- newspaper

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Say:

Sometimes when we get annoyed, angry, or stressed we act in ways that are helpful to us (e.g., we take a moment to breathe to try and calm our body and mind) and sometimes we act in ways that are unhelpful to us (e.g., we yell at someone). What are some ways you deal with you emotions? We all experience different emotion, but it is always better to notice and think about what we are feeling and why we are feeling that way before we respond to these feelings. If we don't do this first then sometimes we act in ways that hurt us (e.g., we become very anxious which can make us feel sick), or can hurt others (e.g., we say mean things to someone). Today we are going to make a feelings pot out of clay. You can use this feelings pot during any time of the day. Imagine that you are putting your feelings in the pot and just letting them cook for a little. Just like it is easier to chew some foods after they have been cooked for a while, it can be easier to handle some feelings after they have been cooking in the pot for a while.

Pass out newspaper for the students to put on their desk and provide each student with a lump of clay. Students can make their pot look however they'd like. Remind the students that you want them to think about putting strong feelings that they have during the day in the feelings pot before acting on them. Give the students some time to sit with their pots, maybe closing their eyes and taking in a few deep breaths.

(Adapted from Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

ACTIVITY 29: *What Would This Look Like To...?*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity encourages children to think about the idea that everyone sees things and experiences things differently.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- paper
- colouring pencils
- household objects (e.g., cup, spoon, bottle, key, sunglasses, etc.)

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin the activity by having the students sit quietly at their desks for a few seconds, and encourage them to take a few deep, slow breaths in and out. They may close their eyes if they wish for these few moments. Then bring the students' attention to the front of the class.

Pass out household items to each student, as well as colouring pencils and paper. Try to bring enough items so that everyone can do this exercise with a different item. Explain to the students that their task is to draw their object. But, there's a twist! The students need to pretend that they are a tiny bug who is looking at the object. What do you think that object would look like to a tiny bug? Draw what you think the bug sees.

- ☞ If the students need help, do a quick example on the board. For example, if your household item is a piece of yarn, maybe a bug would see it as a snake.

Allow the students some time to complete the activity. Then put the students into pairs and ask that they explain their drawing to their partner.

Bring the students back together as a group and ask the students if anyone would like to share anything they noticed during the exercise.

(Adapted from Coholic et al., 2012)

ACTIVITY 30: *What Am I Thinking?*

OBJECTIVE:

This activity provides children with the opportunity to explore their awareness of thoughts. This activity encourages present moment awareness, curiosity, and openness.

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- none required

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION:

Begin this exercise by having the students clear off their desks and sit comfortably in their chairs with a straight back. Have the students place their hands on their knees and encourage them to either close their eyes or to half close their eyes and gaze downward to their lap. Students may also lie down for this activity if they want to.

Say:

Let's take a deep breath in through our nose and out through our nose. Instead of paying attention to our breathing today, we are going to spend some time paying attention to our thoughts. You don't have to do anything with these thoughts; you are just watching them. Pretend that you are a cat who is watching a mouse hole very closely. Instead of looking for a mouse though, you are looking for your thoughts!

Allow the students a few moments to try this.

Say:

What thoughts do you see? (Pause) Don't try to hold on to the thoughts, just notice them and then let the next one appear. Maybe it's the same thought, or maybe you don't notice any thoughts, that's okay! Remember that when a cat is watching the mouse hole, it doesn't matter to him what mouse he sees! (Pause)

Now when you are ready I want you to wiggle your toes and your fingers. Bring your attention back to the feeling of your body touching your chair and gently open your eyes.

Ask the students if anyone would like to share anything they noticed during the exercise. Remind them that they can practice watching their thoughts throughout the day.

(Adapted from Hooker & Fodor, 2008; Napoli et al., 2005)

Reflection

I decided during the very early stages of developing this handbook that in order to add genuineness to my research it was important that I bring the practice of mindfulness into my own life. Developing my own self-practice was important for two main reasons: 1) to deepen my understanding of the topic area and 2) to provide firsthand reflections to educators.

When I first started to practice mindfulness, I would take 3 to 5 minutes in the early morning (or in the late evening) to practice formal mindfulness meditations. I used audio recordings to help guide my initial practices. You can find suggested audio recordings (e.g., Simon Fraser University Media Library) in the additional resource section of this handbook. Once I became more familiar with formal mindfulness meditations, I was able to practice observing my thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations without relying on audio guidance.

Initially I found that practicing mindfulness was relaxing, but as I continued to practice I found myself becoming attuned with more challenging emotions such as sadness or frustration. Although I sometimes found that acknowledging such feelings was difficult, the experience is important for recognizing the agency that we have over emotional experiences (Keng et al., 2011). Although we cannot control the emotions that we feel, we do have control over how we respond to these emotional experiences (Keng et al., 2011; Semple et al., 2005). Engaging in the practice of mindfulness therefore allows you to respond to experiences more effectively (Broderick & Metz, 2009).

I did my best to practice daily and I noticed that I started to experience the benefits (e.g., feeling less overwhelmed by daily responsibilities) quite quickly even though my practice sessions were quite brief. My experience, however, was not without obstacles. I think that acknowledging that these obstacles might come up as you begin to practice is important so as not to be discouraged by the experience. And remember that your students may go through these same experiences!

- Sometimes I felt tired during the practice. If this happens to you, I found that changing the time of day when I practiced was helpful.
- Sometimes I wasn't able to relax and I felt agitated during the practice. That's okay! I found it helpful to focus on the area of my body that felt tense and to breathe into it. I used to think that I had to be very still during my practice, but a reading of Nhat Hanh (1992) helped me understand that it is okay if you need to move your body because it is better to listen to what your body is telling you!
- Sometimes I felt bored. That's okay too! I realized that boredom is actually an interesting experience to explore in itself.
- Sometimes I had to recognize very strong emotions. This is initially difficult, but it becomes easier with practice.

After a few weeks of practicing mindfulness through formal techniques, I started to try use mindfulness in more informal ways. You can practice mindfulness during lots of everyday activities: cooking, showering, while riding the bus, or even by just taking a moment to step outside and listen to the sounds that you hear (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). I find that informal practices of mindfulness can be helpful reminders for being present. Use everyday moments to practice mindfulness with the students. For example, during lunch, or if the children are eating snacks, ask the students to reflect on the food they are eating: “Is it hot or cold? Is it smooth or rough? Is it hard or soft?” If a child is sad, encourage them to explore the feeling: “Where do you feel sad? In your eyes, in your throat, in your chest?” (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008)

To conclude this handbook, I will leave you with a list of questions that you might reflect on while you use the activities from this handbook in the classroom:

- How did you model mindfulness in the classroom today?
- What did you notice during the activity?
- Were some children not receptive to the activity?
- Do some activities need to be adapted? What kinds of adaptations are needed?
- How were the children behaving after the activity?
- Did the children have an opportunity to share their experiences?
- What thoughts did you notice in your mind during the activity?
- Did you notice anything going on in your body?
- What feelings did you notice?
- How do you feel now?
- Are you noticing students apply the skills learned in the activities to different situations that occur during the school day?

**Additional Resources for Educators,
Children, and Parents**

In this section you will find additional resources for your convenience and specific needs. This section will guide you towards supplementary resources that may be helpful for bringing mindfulness into the classroom. In addition, this section includes a compilation of general mental health resources for children. Resource materials include books, websites, audio/visual material, and online applications. Please note that if you are viewing this document as a .pdf document, hyperlinks are provided.

Books

Children Books

Below you will find suggested reading material that can be used in the classroom to engage the children and to help them learn more about mindfulness. Approximate age ranges for which the books are appropriate are suggested. Book descriptions are adapted from www.amazon.ca.

Anh's Anger

By: Gail Silver

Age range: 4-7 (kindergarten to grade 2)

This story revolves around Anh, a 5-year-old boy who becomes angry when his grandfather asks him to stop playing to come eat dinner. The story helps children realize that anger is a common emotion and that there are positive coping skills that can be used to help deal with difficult emotions.

A Boy and a Turtle: A Children's Relaxation Story

By: Lori Lite

Age range: 4-9 (kindergarten to grade 4)

Using a stress-management technique known as guided imagery as well as breathing techniques, this book helps parents and teachers explore relaxation with children.

Moody Cow Meditates

By: Kerry Lee MacLean

Age range: 4-8 (kindergarten to grade 3)

Children get to learn about the power of meditation by following the story of Peter the Cow. After a bad day, Peter's grandfather helps him to settle his mind and let go of his frustrated feelings.

Moody Cow Learns Compassion**By: Kerry Lee MacLean****Age range: 4-8 (kindergarten to grade 3)**

Children get to learn about compassion for others by following another story of Peter the Cow and his grandfather.

Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids**By: Carol McCloud****Age range: 6-10 (grades 1 to grade 5)**

Children learn the importance of expressing kindness, appreciation and love every day through this award winning book.

Mindful Monkey, Happy Panda**By: Lauren Alderfer****Age range: 4-8 (kindergarten to grade 3)**

Children get to explore the practice of mindfulness along with Monkey, who learns from Panda about the joy of being in the present.

Sitting Still Like A Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents)**By: Eline Snel****Age range: 5-12 (kindergarten to grade 6)**

This book offers suggestions about activities that can help children deal with anxiety, improve concentration and handle difficult emotions.

Peaceful Piggy Meditation**By: Kerry Lee MacLean****Age range: 5-9 (kindergarten to grade 4)**

Another book that introduces children to the benefits of mindfulness meditation.

Stand in My Shoes: Kids Learning About Empathy**By: Bob Sornson****Age range: 4-7 (kindergarten to grade 2)**

This story helps children understand the meaning of empathy and how to develop empathy towards others.

No Ordinary Apple: A Story About Eating Mindfully
By: Sara Marlowe

Age range: 4-10 (kindergarten to grade 5)

This story teaches children about how mindfulness can be practiced through the everyday activity of eating.

The Listening Walk
By: Paul Showers

Age range: 4-8 (kindergarten to grade 3)

This is another story that teaches children about how mindfulness can be practiced through everyday activities. This time the children are learning about practicing mindfulness while going for a walk.

Wilma Jean the Worry Machine
By: Julia Cook

Age range: 7-10 (grades 2 to 5)

Through humour and creativity, this story helps children understand what anxiety is and why constant worrying can become a problem. The story suggests strategies that parents and teachers can use to help children develop positive coping skills to deal with anxiety.

Angry Octopus: A Relaxation Story
By: Lori Lite

Age range: 6-12 (grades 1 to 6)

This story introduces children to a relaxation technique known as progressive muscular relaxation. Progressive muscular relaxation focuses awareness on various muscle groups and breath and can help lower stress and anxiety levels as well as decrease pain and anger. Children relate to the angry octopus who learns how to take deep breaths, calm down, and manage his anger with the help of the sea child.

A Boy and a Bear: The Children's Relaxation Book
By: Lori Lite

Age range: 3-10 (preschool to grade 5)

This book introduces children to self-calming/relaxation techniques to reduce stress, prepare for sleep, and improve self-confidence. Through the story of a young boy and a polar bear who learn about relaxation together, children have the opportunity to mirror the breathing movement practiced in the story.

When My Worries Get Too Big: A Relaxation Book for Children Who Live With Anxiety

By: Kari D. Buron

Age range: 4-8 (kindergarten to grade 3)

This easy to read book is a helpful tool for parents, teachers and children. Children who deal with anxiety have the opportunity to explore their feelings with parents or teachers as they deal with everyday experiences and subsequently develop their own self-soothing strategies.

Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children

By: Thich Nhat Hanh

Age range: All ages

This book is full of hands-on activities to help children and adults reduce stress, increase concentration and confidence, deal with difficult emotions, and improve communication through mindfulness.

Books for Educators and Parents

The following suggests further reading material for adults (both educators and parents). The first three books describe techniques for practicing mindfulness with children. The last three books are suggested as helpful readings for the development of a personal mindfulness practice. Book descriptions are adapted from www.amazon.ca.

The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook for Kids: Help for Children to Cope with Stress, Anxiety, and Transition
By: Lawrence Shapiro and Robin Sprague

This workbook offers more than fifty activities that can be practiced as a family to cultivate optimism, confidence, and joy. Techniques include: deep breathing, guided imagery, mindfulness, and yoga. This workbook suggests that completing just one ten-minute activity each day will help make relaxation an everyday habit.

The Mindful Child: How to Help your Kid Manage Stress and Become Happier, Kinder, and More Compassionate
By: Susan Greenland

This book demonstrates how to teach the practices of mindfulness to children. *The Mindful Child* includes age appropriate activities for children ages 4 to 18. These activities help build kids' inner and outer awareness and attention, which positively affects their academic performance as well as their social and emotional skills. These activities also act as tools for managing stress and to overcome specific challenges like insomnia, overeating, ADHD, hyper-perfectionism, anxiety, and chronic pain.

Child's Mind: Mindfulness Practices to Help Our Children Be More Focused, Calm, and Relaxed
By: Christopher Willard

This book provides an overview of mindfulness and meditation techniques. The book also outlines exercises that can be used to cultivate mindfulness practices and includes personal testimonials that demonstrate the ability of mindfulness to empower children and adolescents.

Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life
By: Jon Kabat-Zinn

This book discusses how mindfulness meditation is a natural activity that can be practiced anytime and anywhere by everyone.

Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment--and Your Life
By: Jon Kabat-Zinn

This book introduces the reader to the benefits of mindfulness and the key components of the practice.

Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life
By: Thich Nhat Hanh

Readers can learn how to increase body and mind awareness during everyday experiences through simple exercises described by Nhat Hanh. Nhat Hanh also discusses how this awareness can be extended to our relationships with others and the world, and is a step towards a peaceful existence.

The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are
By: Brené Brown

This is an easy to read book that allows the reader to explore how to live with compassion, courage, and connection in a society where we often feel inadequate.

Online Resources

Free Applications for Children

This section suggests a number of free applications that can be used with children to help practice mindfulness. These interactive applications can be useful in the classroom, but are also great suggestions for parents so that their child can continue to practice mindfulness outside of the classroom. Some of the apps allow you to create an individual profile and are therefore more suited to individual practice than large group settings. Application descriptions are adapted from <https://www.apple.com/itunes/>

My First Yoga

Age range: 3-6

* Suitable for larger group settings.

Pick an animal from a set of 12 cards, and the app will walk your kid through the pose. This application was created by My First Yoga, which has gained nationwide attention in publications such as The New York Times, The Boston Globe, iVillage, Parents Magazine, and Yoga Journal. This app is for iPad and iPhone and is free!

It is available for download at: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-first-yoga-animal-poses/id365336362?mt=8>

Super Stretch Yoga

Age range: 6-8

* Suitable for larger group settings.

Elementary grade school children will gravitate to these videos of kids doing yoga while a cartoon superhero narrates the steps. The Adventures of Super Stretch app was developed by Jessica Rosenberg, an industrial designer and national yoga educator. This app is for iPad and iPhone and is free!

It is available for download at: <https://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/super-stretch-yoga-hd/id456108738?mt=8>

Smiling Mind

Age range: 7 and up

*Suitable for both individual use and larger group settings.

Guided activities for children include breathing while picturing bubbles. Teachers can benefit greatly from this app as well as they develop their own practice. Smiling Mind was developed by a team of psychologists with expertise in youth and adolescent therapy, mindfulness meditation and web-based wellness programs. This app is for iPad/iPhone and Android and is free, however it does require you to register! (Trial sessions are available prior to registration.)

It is available for download at: <https://itunes.apple.com/ca/app/smiling-mind/id560442518?mt=8>

Stop, Breathe & Think

Age range: All ages

* More suitable for individual use.

Children can identify their mood from icons and hear a customized meditation relevant to their specific situation. This application was created by Tools for Peace, a national educational non-profit. This app is for iPad and iPhone and is free!

It is available for download at: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/stop-breathe-think/id778848692?mt=8>

Websites on Mental Health for Children

This section presents Canadian websites that offer invaluable information on mental health and well-being. URLs and descriptions are included. Website descriptions were taken from the descriptions provided by the website developers.

Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health

<http://www.excellenceforchildand youth.ca/who-we-are>

The Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health works with Ontario child and youth mental health agencies to strengthen services and build an effective and accessible system of care. It offers a diverse collection of tools, services, products and training to help professionals find, use and share evidence that will improve outcomes on the front line of care.

eMentalHealth

<http://www.ementalhealth.ca/index.php?m=staticPage&ID=14424>

eMentalHealth.ca is a non-profit initiative of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) dedicated to improving the mental health of children, youth and families and provides anonymous, confidential and trustworthy information, 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Children's Mental Health Ontario

<http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca>

Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) represents and supports the providers of child and youth mental health treatment services throughout Ontario. The core membership consists of more than 85 accredited community-based children's mental health centres that serve some 150,000 children and their families annually. Services are provided at no cost to clients. Resources for both parents and professionals are available on this site.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

http://www.camh.ca/en/hospital/health_information/for_children_youth/Pages/default.aspx

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is Canada's largest mental health and addiction teaching hospital, as well as one of the world's leading research centres in the area of addiction and mental health. CAMH combines clinical care, research, education, policy development and health promotion to help transform the lives of people affected by mental health and addiction issues. This link brings you directly to the Child, Youth and Family Services section of the website. The services described here focus on helping young people with mental health and/or addiction problems to function better at home, in school and with peers.

The Kids Help Phone

<http://www.kidshelpphone.ca/Kids/Home.aspx>

The Kids Help Phone is Canada's only toll-free, 24-hour, bilingual and anonymous phone counselling, referral and Internet service for children and youth. Every day, professional counsellors provide immediate, caring support to young people in urban and rural communities across the country. There is a lot of helpful information on the website, but if a child needs to speak to a counsellor, the phone number is 1-800-668-6868.

Websites on Mindfulness in Schools

A simple Google search on mindfulness will result in thousands of hits. To help simplify this process, below you will find websites relevant to the practice of mindfulness and the well-being of children. These are websites that are consistently referenced by others and that have become well established. You may find these to be helpful tools as you implement the practice of mindfulness within your classroom. URLs and descriptions are included. Website descriptions were taken from the descriptions provided by the website developers.

Discover Mindfulness

<http://discovermindfulness.ca>

Discover Mindfulness is a non-profit organization that helps to create communities, tools and awareness about bringing mindfulness and mental wellness to Canadian schools. The organization is based in Ontario, Canada. Discover Mindfulness strives to educate people about the benefits and applications of mindfulness, including evidence-based mindfulness programs for students, educators, parents, and others who work with children and teens. Training and education opportunities (mostly focused within the Toronto area) are outlined on this website.

Greater Good Science Center

<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/1697>

The Greater Good Science Center is based at the University of California, Berkeley and studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being, and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. Mindfulness is one of their core themes of study. There is a lot of information to be found on this website. This link will bring directly to a tip sheet for teaching mindfulness to kids. Includes information on mindfulness, teaching mindfulness to children, and using mindfulness in different settings.

The Hawn Foundation

<http://thehawnfoundation.org/mindup/>

MindUP as a social and emotional literacy curriculum and training program. equips children, educators and parents with vital social and emotional literacy skills, helping them increase focus, improve academic performance, reduce stress, gain emotional resilience and optimism. Rooted in neuroscience, the program teaches self-regulatory behavioral control while offering engagement strategies for learning and living. This program was founded by Goldie Hawn and created through collaboration with educators, neuroscientists, positive psychologists and experts in mindful awareness training. This program is used in schools across North America. Educators and administrators may be interested in looking at opportunities to bring this program into their schools.

Websites for Personal Development

Here you will find websites that may be particularly helpful as you build your own mindfulness practice. Resources on guided meditations and current mindfulness research are available.

OnTheMind

<http://onthemind.ca>

This website was developed by researchers and faculty in the Health Behavior Change Lab at York University. OnTheMind provides the interested reader with information and resources to gain a better understanding of mindfulness as well as in class and online opportunities to develop your mindfulness practice.

The Center for Mindfulness

<http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/index.aspx>

The Center for Mindfulness, based out of the University of Massachusetts Medical School, is an innovative leader in mind-body medicine and mindfulness-based treatment and research investigations, pioneering the integration of meditation and mindfulness into mainstream medicine and health care. Information about training programs including the Mindfulness-based stress reduction program can be found here.

The Mindfulness Centre

<http://www.mindful.ca>

The Mindfulness Centre runs out of Oakville, Ontario. The Mindfulness Centre is founded and directed by Stéphane Treyvaud, a Canadian psychiatrist. Opportunities to attend public lectures on mindfulness are listed on this website, as well as other events.

The Association for Mindfulness in Education

<http://www.mindfuleducation.org>

The Association for Mindfulness in Education is a collaborative association of organizations and individuals working together to provide support for mindfulness training as a part of K-12 education

The Mindful Teacher

<http://www.mindfulteacher.com>

This website is a joint project between Dr. Dennis Shirley and Boston College. On this website you will: find resources for developing a mindfulness practice, learn more about the research on mindfulness and education, and have opportunities to connect with other educators interested in bringing mindfulness into the classroom.

Mindfulness Research Guide

<http://www.mindfulexperience.org>

This website is a comprehensive electronic resource and publication database, created by the American Mindfulness Research Association, that provides information on scientific studies and latest advances in mindfulness research.

Simon Fraser University Media Library

<https://www.sfu.ca/students/health/resources/media/your-health--audio-video.html>

Hosted by Simon Fraser University, this page provides free access to audio and video recordings of mindfulness, body scans, and yoga exercises, along with information sheets.

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CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

This chapter provides a summary of the present project and discusses some of the theoretical, practical, and policy-based implications that stem from this research. The limitations of the present project will be revisited and will be followed by a discussion of how these limitations can be used as considerations for future research.

The main purpose of this project was to develop a practical handbook for Ontario primary school teachers to help them promote the development of emotional well-being and resilience among their students (ages 6 to 8; grades 1 to 3). *Building Everyday Resilience: A Practical Handbook on Mindfulness Adapted for Primary School Teachers* provides teachers with information about the current mental health landscape of children across Ontario and Canada. The handbook also introduces teachers to the practice of mindfulness and provides foundational information needed to guide the implementation of the 30 mindfulness-based classroom activities that are outlined in the handbook. Teachers are also guided towards additional resources that can further support the implementation of mindfulness-based activities in the classroom and that provide general information about mental health and mental resources across Ontario and Canada.

Summary of Primary Research Questions and Findings

A comprehensive literature review was integral to the development of the content in the handbook and this review was guided by a series of specific research questions. These research questions were as follows: Why do we need mindfulness in the classroom? What are the research findings on current mindfulness-based initiatives? What does mindfulness look like in the classroom? What are the developmental considerations for primary school children ages 6 to 8? Which types of resources

(activities, games, books, training) are needed by teachers to implement mindfulness into everyday activities? The findings associated with these primary research questions are summarized below.

Role of Mindfulness in the Classroom

Mental and emotional well-being are integral to a child's overall healthy development (Schwean & Rodger, 2013). Providing children with opportunities that nurture important components of emotional well-being, such as resilience, is a proactive way of supporting well-being and addressing mental health problems before they become problematic. Since children spend the majority of their childhood in the classroom, teachers play an important role in providing these opportunities. The OME (2014) has now recognized this role, and has identified well-being as one of the core principles for education in Ontario. A Canadian survey of teachers suggests, however, that there is a gap between educators' desire to help children develop emotional resilience skills and their knowledge/professional training on how to do so (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2012). This gap speaks to the need for practical educator resources in this area.

Although children of all ages and stages of development need to develop and strengthen emotional resilience skills, research suggests that it is particularly important to nurture these skills during periods of transition. Periods of transition are significant periods of change in a child's life that can be challenging, but are ripe with learning opportunities (Augst & Akos, 2009; La Paro et al., 2000). The primary grades require significant academic and social adjustment from children (La Paro et al., 2000) and are therefore a key time to introduce activities that help students develop the emotional tools to navigate these experiences effectively. Current research suggests that mindfulness-based activities, which

promote present moment awareness and openness, may provide the opportunity to develop these strategies (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Liehr & Diaz, 2010).

Research on Mindfulness-Based Initiatives

The preliminary research on mindfulness-based initiatives suggests the feasibility and efficacy of mindfulness-based approaches as a strategy for developing the emotional well-being and resilience of children ages 6 to 8 (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Liehr & Diaz, 2010). Findings suggest that children who participate in mindfulness-based activities, such as focused breathing exercises and sensory focused exercises, display a reduction in stress and anxiety (Liehr & Diaz, 2010); reduced depressive symptoms (Liehr & Diaz, 2010); increased optimism (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010); improved attention (Klatt et al., 2013); decreases in parent and teacher reported behavioural problems (Semple et al., 2010); improved emotional regulation (Coholic et al., 2012); and increases in self-compassion (Coholic, 2011). (Please refer to chapter 4 for more specific examples of mindfulness-based activities.)

Mindfulness in the Classroom

Mindfulness can be practiced in a variety of ways. There are formal and informal techniques that can be applied to mindfulness activities and both can be used within the classroom setting (Burke, 2010). Formal techniques generally involve sitting or movement exercises that use the breath, a physical sensation, or a feeling as a focal point for attention (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). These formal practices are a means of introducing mindfulness to the classroom. Informal practices refer to the application of mindfulness principles to everyday activities such as eating, walking, and daily interactions with others (Burke, 2010).

Given the concern about the potential association between mindfulness and religious traditions (Ergas, 2014), an important consideration when using mindfulness within the public education system is that it be presented in a secular framework. This means that the practice of mindfulness should be presented in the classroom as a human capacity that can be developed without religious connotation (Albretch, 2014; Hooker & Fodor, 2008). In order to avoid this connotation, it is important for educators to be sensitive to the vocabulary used throughout a mindfulness exercise, and to use as neutral and as accessible a vocabulary as possible. Misunderstanding regarding the practice of mindfulness in the classroom can also be clarified by clearly outlining its purpose in the classroom—this intention being the promotion of skills associated with mental and emotional well-being.

Developmental Considerations

Children may be particularly receptive to learning the principles of mindfulness due to their eagerness to learn and their openness to new experiences (Bogels et al., 2008; Rempel, 2012). This receptiveness may be explained by the fact that children have less exposure to previous knowledge, making them more open-minded learners (Lucas et al., 2014). This readiness to learn suggests the importance of introducing mindfulness-based activities as early as possible.

There are also specific developmental considerations when designing and implementing mindfulness-based activities for children. Continuous and consistent opportunities for practice are essential (Weare, 2013). Activities should be short in duration, varied in content, and explained in concrete terms that are suitable to the language ability of the child. Movement exercises should also be kept simple (Coholic,

2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008). Creativity is an important additional consideration and therefore elements of play and imagination should be incorporated into the exercise (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013). For example, children could explore present moment feelings through an art activity that uses colours or shapes to express feelings (Coholic, 2011). Alternatively, children could practice perspective taking by drawing or creating a dramatization of how two different people may perceive the same object (Coholic et al., 2012).

Mindfulness-Based Approaches

Few additional resources are needed to practice mindfulness, which makes it a feasible tool to use within the classroom. Moreover, mindfulness-based exercises can be practiced in large group settings, which make them conducive to the classroom setting. It is strongly suggested that teachers develop their own mindfulness practice before implementing mindfulness-based activities in the classroom (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). It was beyond the scope of this current project to address this element, but professional development opportunities are suggested in the handbook.

Common activities incorporated in mindfulness programming for children include sitting meditations (Liehr & Diaz, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2005); movement exercises (Liehr & Diaz, 2010; Mendelson et al., 2010; Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010); body scan meditations (Napoli et al., 2005; Semple et al., 2010); mindful eating (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008; Semple et al., 2005); and visualization exercises (Semple et al., 2010). Arts-based mindfulness activities also appear to be effective with young children because these activities integrate present

moment awareness with play and creativity (Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013). For example, Klatt et al. (2013) had children create a collage with pictures of positive support systems in their life.

Implications for Theory

This project drew from three psychological and socio-ecological models as a guiding framework: Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, 1983; Erikson's Stages of Psychological Development Theory, 1963; and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, 1989. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983) suggests that beyond the traditionally valued linguistic and mathematical intelligences, personal intelligences (e.g., intrapersonal intelligences) are also an important part of overall healthy development. The skills associated with these intelligences (e.g., the ability to recognize, manage, and express emotions effectively) are an important component of childhood and adult life (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). Erikson's Stages of Psychological Development Theory (1963) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1989) add an important socio-ecological lens to Gardner's theory (1989) and support this project's premise of the importance of creating the opportunities to nurture these intelligences within the classroom environment. Bronfenbrenner (1989) explains that one's environment plays an influential role in one's development. This includes a child's immediate environment (e.g., the classroom) and broader environment (e.g., social/cultural values). Therefore, if a child is to develop knowledge and skills associated with emotional well-being and resilience, these opportunities must be present in the child's environment. Erikson's Stages of Psychological Development Theory (1963) furthers this idea by suggesting that

not only do these opportunities need to be present in a child's environment, but that the quality of these experiences is also important.

This project puts Gardner's (1989), Erikson's (1963), and Bronfenbrenner's (1989) theoretical ideas discussed above into practice. The present resource (see chapter 4) provides teachers with mindfulness-based activities that they can implement in the classroom environment to help children develop intrapersonal skills associated with mental and emotional well-being. For example, one activity encourages children to explore the physical sensations that accompany certain feelings. In doing so, children learn to recognize their emotions and subsequently learn coping skills (e.g., breathing exercises) that help manage strong emotions. Ongoing examination of how the theoretical ideas of Gardner (1989), Erikson (1963), and Bronfenbrenner (1989) may contribute to classroom practices should be an area of continued research.

Implications for Practice

The present handbook entitled *Building Everyday Resilience: A Practical Handbook on Mindfulness Adapted for Primary School Teachers* (see chapter 4) acts as both an information resource and a practical resource for teachers interested in bringing mindfulness-based activities into the classroom. The present handbook provides educators with current and relevant information regarding the mental health and emotional health of children across Ontario and Canada. The handbook also introduces educators to foundational information about the practice of mindfulness and special considerations when practicing mindfulness with children. In an effort to create a practical resource that is sustainable in different classroom environments the activities within the present handbook are designed to be simple, flexible, and easily implemented

with very little cost or lengthy time commitment. In addition, educators are provided with a collection of additional resources that are intended to support the implementation of mindfulness-based activities in the classroom as well as highlight important mental health resources for children (e.g., The Kids Help Phone and eMentalHealth). Furthermore, this handbook can act as communication tool with parents who may have questions about mindfulness. For example, parents may be curious about the reasons for using mindfulness in the classroom, or they may simply be interested in learning more about the practice, so that they can support their child's practice within the home environment. Additionally, this handbook serves as a resource for parents who may be seeking more information about mental health resources for their children.

This handbook may be beneficial to students in a number of ways. Firstly, it will equip them with important intrapersonal skills (e.g., learning to recognize and manage emotions) that are associated with emotional well-being and resilience. Secondly, by encouraging the exploration of thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a non-judgmental way (e.g., by presenting each activity as a very individual experience and encouraging students to share their experiences after the activity) it may help create a classroom environment in which mental and emotional well-being are discussed openly and without fear of judgment.

Implications for Policy

This project was created in support of the OME's (2014) new educational vision that identifies the promotion of well-being as one of the core principles of education in Ontario. This revision indicates a shift towards recognizing the importance of nurturing intrapersonal skills, without negating the importance of more traditionally valued learned

skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Continued examination and revision of policy is important to ensure that practical, accessible, and effective resource tools are being created for educators so that children have the opportunity to develop skills associated with emotional well-being and resilience (e.g., emotion regulation skills and coping skills; Masten, 2014; OMHP, 2010). Additionally, there should be continued examination into policies for incorporating well-being through a whole-school approach. This will help ensure that opportunities for intrapersonal skill development are not isolated to the classroom environment. For more information regarding the whole-school approach, which involves participation from all levels of school (e.g., classroom, school administration, boards of education) to promote health and well-being, please refer to OMHP (2010) and People for Education (2012).

Limitations of the Project and Recommendations for Future Research

There are many potential avenues for future research in the area of mindfulness in schools and the mental and emotional well-being of children, but to remain within the scope of this project, this section will focus these considerations to those related to the limitations of this particular educational resource.

The limitations of this project are discussed in detail in chapter 1 and chapter 3, but first and foremost, future research considerations should include a formal review of this handbook to ensure its effectiveness as an educational resource within the primary grade classroom. A formal review may include evaluation from teachers, administrative staff, school board members, and interested community members. A review may evaluate the organization of the handbook, the readability for the handbook, the quality and usefulness of the handbook content, and the ease with which activities can be

implemented in the classroom. Empirically testing the activities for student outcomes in the area of emotional well-being and resilience would also be important.

An additional important consideration concerns the potential modifications of the activities that may be required for students with specific needs (e.g., mobility considerations, developmental disorders). Adaptations were beyond the scope of this present project and therefore further research into appropriate adaptations of these activities should be done to increase the accessibility of this resource and to expand its usefulness as an educational resource. Adaptations may require a modification in instruction or a modification in activity content. I was unable to locate current literature that outlines these types of modification techniques, so it appears that this is an important area of new research. Another opportunity for research development would be to broaden the scope of the handbook by modifying and integrating the activities into already existing curriculum. Specifically, it may be worthwhile to explore how mindfulness-based activities can be integrated into the Ontario arts curriculum given the beneficial connection that this project found between the arts and the practice of mindfulness (see Coholic, 2011; Coholic et al., 2012; Klatt et al., 2013). For example, the Ontario Art curriculum outlines that by the end of grade 1 “students will express their feelings and ideas about art works and art experiences” (OME, 2009, p.73). Instead of simply reflecting on the art experience, students could use the art experience as a means of exploring present moment experiences. The activity *What Can You Hear?* (please see chapter 4, p. 88) addresses this idea of using art to explore present moment sensory experiences. The children have an opportunity to use the visual arts as a means of communicating present moment experiences, which also addresses the Ontario Art

curriculum expectation that students use visual art “to communicate feelings, ideas, and understandings” (OME, 2009, p. 72).

This handbook does not adequately address the development of an educator’s own mindfulness practice. Continued examination of professional development opportunities for teachers should be another aspect of research to support, for example researching the inclusion of mindfulness training in pre-service teacher training. Integrating mindfulness-based approaches into teacher training programs may help to create more sustainable mindfulness-based programming within the classroom. Due to the fact that this project only addresses the promotion of well-being within the classroom environment, I would also suggest that it is worthwhile to examine the processes that go into building effective collaborations between educators and already existing support systems to help support mental and emotional well-being among students.

Concluding Thoughts

Teachers and the classroom activities that they facilitate play an important role in the development of emotional well-being and resilience in children. At the core of this project is a strong belief that children need ample opportunities to develop important intrapersonal skills that will benefit their well-being presently and in the future; by bringing mindfulness-based activities into the classroom we are providing such opportunities. It is important to recognize that this resource does not address the many other issues that contribute to overall mental health, such as timely access to specialized care; however, by creating an easy-to-implement educational resource that encourages the development of skills related to well-being, I hope that this resource encourages open, positive, and non-judgmental dialogue about mental and emotional health.

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