

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY NORTHRIDGE

MINDFULNESS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD: TEACHERS, FAMILIES, AND
CHILDREN

A graduate thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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Educational Psychology

By

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DEDICATION

First, this thesis project is dedicated to my family who quietly and non-judgmentally accepted the craziness that I became throughout the span of time I was in graduate school. Specifically, I would like to dedicate this thesis project to my two grandmothers neither of whom got to pursue their educations as far as they would have liked. You both constantly encouraged me to continue studying for as far back as I can remember, and your support was vital throughout this process. Although I am deeply sorry I could not be there for all of you as much as I would have liked, this thesis is an explanation of where I was and what I was doing the last few years.

Second, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my friends, particularly Arman Karkotsyan, Vardui Sharapkhanyan, and Vanessa Batres.

Arman, you were there when I first learned about meditation; sharing your own experiences, and encouraging me to manifest my potential. Throughout this process, you have become one of my best friends, inspirations, and role models. Without your work ethic as an example, I probably would have given up after my first semester. Instead, your lifestyle and coaching skills (and probably also my tight wallet) led me to double-up on the workload in my second semester. The irie life you promote feeds my drive to work through it. Just breathe, and watch your universe expand right?

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PREFACE

In 2012, as a preschool teacher at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), I was offered the opportunity to be trained in mindful awareness by Susan Kaiser Greenland. Several years prior, Susan had worked with teachers and done the research for her Inner Kids program at UCLA, and as a way to show her gratitude, she had decided to return and train a new batch of teachers in teaching mindfulness to young children. My co-workers Victoria Gonzalez and Nada Ghaneian were both signing themselves up, and encouraged me to do so as well. Admittedly, at the time I had no idea what mindfulness was, or how much of an impact it would have on my life and style of teaching. In those moments of silent meditation, I decided to apply to graduate school. My curiosity on the subject of mindfulness never decelerated, and the more I read about its impact, the more I wanted others to learn it as well. Hence, came the desire to develop this workshop.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SIGNATURE PAGE	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
PREFACE.....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
ABSTRACT.....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of Problem.....	1
Purpose of Project.....	2
Significance of the Project	3
Terminology.....	4
Preview of Thesis.....	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Introduction.....	6
Brain Responses to the Distress of Others	6
Hypothesis.....	6
Subjects	7
Methods.....	7
Results.....	7
Discussion.....	8
A Tolerance for Negatively Affected Images	9
Hypothesis.....	9
Subjects	9
Methods.....	10
Results.....	11
Discussion	12
Mindfulness and Parents	12
Hypothesis.....	12
Subjects	13
Methods.....	13
Results.....	14
Discussion.....	15
Mindfulness and Teachers	15
Hypothesis.....	15
Subjects	16
Methods.....	16
Results.....	16
Discussion.....	17
Mindfulness and Preschoolers	18
Hypothesis.....	18
Subjects	18

Methods.....	18
Results.....	20
Discussion.....	21
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	22
Introduction.....	22
Participants.....	22
Participant recruitment.....	22
Demographics	23
The Workshop.....	25
The Powerpoint.....	25
Group discussions	26
Mindfulness activities	27
Handouts	28
Instrumentation	29
Pre-Presentation Questionnaire.....	29
Post-Presentation Evaluation	29
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	31
Participants' Level of Interest and Knowledge on the topic of Mindfulness	31
The Three Most Valuable Things Participants Learned	32
Participant Assessments of Presentation and Presenter	34
Strengths of presentation.....	34
How to improve the workshop.....	37
Strengths of the presenter.....	38
How the presenter can improve.....	38
What Participants' Would Tell Others About the Workshop.....	39
Slide by Slide Evaluation.....	39
The three lowest rated slides.....	40
The three highest rated slides.....	42
Participants' Post Workshop Interests.....	45
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	47
Summary.....	47
Review of Methods and Findings	47
Limitations	48
Sample.....	48
Participant bias.....	49
Instrument design.....	49
Future advancement and research.....	50
Implications.....	50
Becoming less-judgmental.....	50
Developing focus	52
Conclusion	52
REFERENCES	53
Appendix A: PowerPoint Slides	57
Appendix B: Handout	73
Appendix C: Resource List.....	74
Appendix D: Pre-Workshop Questionnaire	75

Appendix E: Post-Workshop Evaluation	78
Appendix F: The Three Most Valuable Things Participants Learned	82
Appendix G: Suggestions for Workshop Improvement.....	84

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 – Participants’ Preexisting Mindfulness Background and Spiritual Practices	25
Figure 4.1 – Workshop Strengths in Content	35
Figure 4.2 – Workshop Strengths in Methods of Presentation	36
Figure 4.3 – Slide 5	40
Figure 4.4 – Slide 15	41
Figure 4.5 – Slide 2	42
Figure 4.6 – Slide 25	43
Figure 4.7 – Slide 14	44
Figure 4.8 – Slide 26	45

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 – Ages of Participants	24
Table 3.2 – Level of Interest and Knowledge about Mindfulness	24
Table 4.1 – Three Most Valuable Things Participants Learned	33
Table 4.2 – Categories for Improvement	37

ABSTRACT

MINDFULNESS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD: TEACHERS, FAMILIES, AND CHILDREN

By

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This thesis project explores mindfulness, the act of “paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally,” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4) as it applies to early childhood settings. Historically, mindfulness has been associated with a number of religions, but more recently, secularized programs have been used in a variety of settings to help people cope with pain, reduce stress, and heighten positive affect (Arch & Craske, 2006; Taylor et al., 2015). Existing research on mindfulness interventions for teachers examines how practicing mindfulness effects stress levels and job satisfaction (Taylor et al., 2015). Current research also explores how it impacts the social and emotional development of children (Flook et al., 2015). Given the findings of such studies, it may be useful to merge the two areas of study to coalesce both practicing and teaching mindfulness with young children. In this project, 25 graduate students in Early Childhood Education were offered a 2-hour workshop on mindfulness, including definitions, activities, group discussions, and applications. The results of pre and post-workshop questionnaires indicated that a majority of participants were very interested in learning about mindfulness, and found the workshop to be extremely useful and informative.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again.” (Nhat-Hanh, 1975, p.15)

The human brain is structured in such a way that each of its parts plays a role in its holonomic functioning. Existing research on mindfulness suggests that practicing it effects overall brain functioning and changes gray matter in the brain stem, amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex (Hawn Foundation, 2011; Siegel, 2011).

Additionally, practicing mindfulness seems to thicken the neural band connecting the left and right hemispheres of the brain. The thickening of this area (known as the corpus callosum), could allow for faster communication between the parts of the brain by integrating the linear and lateral parts of the brain, and thereby making cognition more efficient (Siegel, 2011).

Statement of Problem

“Young children must learn to send and receive emotional messages, using their knowledge about emotions and their abilities to regulate emotions, so that they may successfully negotiate interpersonal exchanges, form relationships, and maintain curiosity and enthusiasm,” (Denham, Zinsser, & Brown, 2013, p. 67). Children who are emotionally competent seem to be more successful in peer relations and usually do better in school. In contrast, children who do not have emotional competence end up having other issues related to mental illness. Those children lacking emotional development skills generally end up being angrier, having school adjustment problems, dropping out

more frequently, and engaging in antisocial behaviors such as delinquency and drug abuse (Denham et al., 2013).

According to the National Alliance on Mental Health (2015), one in five youth ages 13-18 had a mental health condition. Additionally, the National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMH), reported that 50% of all mental health issues onset before children enter the 10th grade, but most do not start receiving treatment for another 8 to 10 years. Half of those children diagnosed with a mental illness never make it through high school. Moreover, 70% of youth incarcerated in the juvenile justice system were found to have a mental illness (NAMH, 2015).

Particularly at risk of mental illness are those children growing up in poverty. Early childhood is a period in life where children are most likely to experience, and be effected by poverty (Ryan, Fauth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2013). Head Start programs (early intervention programs designed to offer high quality early care and education to children in poverty) have been highly successful in building resiliency for children in poverty. Perhaps some of this success can be attributed to the program's focus on parent education as a way to improve parents' overall well-being, and thereby also indirectly influencing the well-being of children (Ryan, Fauth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2013). How might using this model of educating adults to influence the well-being of young children be applied to early childhood professionals? Could programs educating early childhood professionals about mindfulness techniques serve as a way to prevent mental illness in their students?

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this thesis project is to create a workshop for early childhood professionals overviewing mindfulness as it relates to their work. The workshop aims to

increase knowledge and interest in the subject of mindfulness. Content was developed specifically for graduate students of early childhood education at California State University Northridge (CSUN), using the California Early Childhood Educator Competencies to discourse how mindfulness could be applied to teaching young children. Definitions of mindfulness, research findings, exercises in mindfulness, as well as additional resources will be offered to the participants in an attempt to increase strategies to promote the overall mental health and well-being of teachers, families, and children.

Significance of Project

Because much of the emphasis in early childhood education settings is placed on the social and emotional development of children, mindfulness training is highly significant for professionals in this field. A strong focus in preschool is to advance children from Piaget's egocentric thinking phase, and helping them develop theory of mind. Teaching children how to take turns, share, and use their words to communicate instead of physically harming others are common priorities for early childhood classrooms. Several curricular models have been developed and implemented with young children (*Mindful Schools*, 2010; *InnerKids*, 2010; *MindUp*, 2011; *Kindness Curriculum*, 2015), but some of these models are still in the earliest stages of development, and have not yet become widespread topics in early childhood education textbooks. Due to the nature of how children learn, specifically through relationships with caregivers, it may be beneficial to focus on ways to inform teachers about mindfulness meditation to possibly help develop self-regulation and compassion within themselves as a first step in promoting it in the children in their care.

Terminology

- **Dimensional Card Change Sort Task:** “A computerized...task...used to assess cognitive flexibility...” (Flook et al., 2015, p.46)
- **Expert Meditator:** Meditators that “have more than 10,000 hours of practice in Buddhist meditation and are perceived in their communities as embodying qualities of compassion.” (Lutz et al., 2008, p.1)
- **Flanker Test:** “A computerized Flanker task...used to measure inhibitory control...” (Flook et al., 2015, p.46)
- **Focused Breathing Induction:** A 15-minute exercise where participants were asked to
“focus on the actual sensations of breath entering and leaving the body. There is no need to think about the breath. Just experience the sensations of it...when you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath; gently bring your awareness back to the sensations of breathing,” (Arch & Craske, 2006, p. 1853)
- **International Affective Picture System:** A database of pictures used to study emotion and attention (Arch & Craske, 2006)
- **Loving Kindness Meditation:**
“Techniques include concentration exercises that train attention, behavioral training such as generosity, cognitive strategies including reflection on the fleeting nature of the self, and empathic strategies such as shifting perspectives from self-oriented to other-oriented, or the visualization of the suffering of another.” (Lutz et al., 2008, p.1)

Preview of Thesis

The upcoming chapters will provide information about mindfulness and the workshop created to increase interest and knowledge in the topic. Chapter Two provides relevant literature of mindfulness, its effects on neural networks, tolerance for negatively skewed stimuli, parenting interventions, teacher perceptions of job quality and stress management, and children's development of empathy. Chapter Three provides detailed information regarding the workshop, methodology, and instrumentation used to examine the usefulness of the workshop. Chapter Four presents the findings of a post workshop evaluation. Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the implications, limitations, future modifications to the workshop, as well as areas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Although the workshop created as a result of this literature review focuses specifically on mindfulness meditation, the literature herein describes various forms of meditation and their resulting effects. The decision to focus solely on mindfulness meditation in the workshop was to keep it secular in nature, as well as to operationalize the concept most clearly. The first study reviewed examined the activation of neural networks of expert meditators after compassion meditation sessions, and how their brains compared to novice brains. The second study reported how tolerance of negatively skewed stimuli could be strengthened by mindful breathing. The third study looked at how adding a mindfulness component to a preexisting parenting program influenced parenting practices. The fourth study explored how a mindfulness intervention effected teachers' self-reported levels of job-related stress and overall job satisfaction. The final study investigated how a mindfulness based kindness curriculum facilitated social and emotional development in preschoolers.

Brain Responses to the Distress of Others

Hypothesis. Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, and Davidson (2008) explored how meditative practices may cultivate feelings and actions of empathy and altruism in interpersonal interactions. The researchers were interested in comparing neural circuitry between expert meditators and novices during compassion meditation (meditation focused on cultivating feelings of compassion for another's suffering). Their hypothesis was that compassion meditation would,

“enhance affective responses to emotional human vocalizations, in particular to negative ones, and that this affective response would be modulated by the degree of meditation training,” (Lutz et al., 2008, p. 2).

Subjects. The study included 30 participants controlled for age and gender by matching the participants up in pairs according to skill level. Of the 16 long-term meditators, all were between 29- to 64-years-old. Four were female, nine were Asian, and seven were European (Lutz et al., 2008). The unskilled meditators were between 36- to 56-years-old, and their race was not included in the article. Participants were recruited through local newspapers in the University of Wisconsin Madison area, where the study was conducted. Dr. Ricard, an interpreter for the Dalai Lama, translated in Tibetan to the experienced meditators (Lutz et al., 2008).

Methods. The participants were grouped according to experience level (novice vs. expert with experts having >10,000 hours of experience). Each participant was exposed to positive (a baby's laugh), negative (the sound of a distressed woman), and neutral emotional sounds (background noise at a restaurant). Brain activity was measured using functional magnetic resonance (fMRI) scans. At the end of each session, the participants evaluated the state of meditation they had experienced. The participants were asked at the end of each meditation session to evaluate the quality of their meditative state (Lutz et al., 2008).

Results. Using a 2x2x2 ANOVA, the results suggested with $p < .05$ that the more skilled a person was at meditating, the more responsive to negative emotional sounds their brains seemed. In fMRI scans a larger increase in activity was seen in areas associated with empathy and theory of mind including the limbic regions of the insula

cortex, and somatosensory cortex within the brains of expert mediators (Lutz et al., 2008). These cortices include the amygdala, right temporo-parietal junction, and superior temporal sulcus (Lutz et al., 2008). This difference in brain activity was also seen regardless of the participants' reports of the quality of meditation. When novices reported a deeper level of meditation, their brain responses to the sounds were higher, but the expert meditators were still more responsive than novices regardless of the quality of their meditative experience with a $p < .05$ (Lutz et al., 2008).

Discussion. The findings from this study suggests that people who have training in compassion meditation may have higher activity levels in certain parts of their brain associated with empathy. This data also suggests that the mental ability to cultivate positive emotion alters the activation of circuitries previously linked to theory of mind. In terms of parenting, this could potentially mean that engaging in compassion meditation may cause increased empathy toward children's thoughts and feelings, and therefore better attunement to children's needs. Stronger synchrony between parent and child could resulting in the strengthened securement of attachment bonds. For teachers, this might mean becoming more considerate of parents' views, having more intergroup connectedness between the teaching team, and better abilities to empathize with the children they teach. For children, this could result in more advanced development of social and emotional understanding.

Due to the highly religious background of Buddhist monks, it may be premature to assume that these results are related solely to the act of meditation. Would the same/similar results occur in expert meditators who did not associate themselves with any form of religion? How might a less religious group of participants be effected by secular

aspects of meditation? Additionally, is it only compassion meditation that has this type of effect, or do other types of meditation have similar results? Specifically, how might a different type of meditation effect a different population of people? The review in the next section aims to offer some suggestions to help answer these questions.

A Tolerance for Negatively Affected Stimuli

Hypothesis. Arch and Craske (2006) hypothesized that, “a 15-minute focused breathing induction in a normal, primarily undergraduate population would decrease the intensity and negativity of emotional responses to affectively valenced external stimuli and increase willingness to remain in contact with aversive external stimuli,” (p. 1850). According to Arch and Craske (2006), previous studies on mindfulness had shown lowered levels of intensity and frequency in negative emotions, reductions in stress, willingness to deal with uncomfortable situations, and a decrease in time needed to recover from negative experiences in both clinical and non-clinical participants. What Arch and Craske (2006) thought was lacking in these studies was a scientific definition of what mindfulness meant. Rather than trying to define the idea, they focused on a specific secular aspect of mindfulness, which is focused breathing.

Subjects. The participants of this study included 60 undergraduate *Introduction to Psychology* students from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) who were offered the choice of receiving either course credit or a \$10 gift card for participating. The participants had no previous experience with mindfulness, focused breathing, or meditation and their ages ranged from 18- to 25-years-old, with the exception of one who was marginally older. The majority (69%) were female, 39% Asian, 26% White, 5% Black, 3% Native American/Alaskan Native, 7% more than 1 race, 8% other, and 12%

did not indicate. The participants were pre-screened for mental health, anxiety, depression, pregnancy, and heart and lung conditions (including asthma).

Methods. The group was randomly sub-divided into a focused induction group, a worry induction group, and an unfocused attention group. The first group had prerecorded instructions guiding them to

“focus on the actual sensations of breath entering and leaving the body. There is no need to think about the breath. Just experience the sensations of it...when you notice that your awareness is no longer on the breath; gently bring your awareness back to the sensations of breathing,” (Arch & Craske, 2006, p. 1853)

The second group was required to catastrophize about their main worries in six domains including social relations, achievement, money, economics, environment, health, and safety using Vasey & Borkovecs (1992) Catastrophizing Interview Technique. The third group was told to think about whatever came to mind without focusing on anything. Following these instructions, all three groups were exposed to blocks of images from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS).

Each block included five images from the IAPS organized into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. The blocks were shown to participants before the induction, immediately following induction, and the third block immediately after. The slides were not repeated, and participants were shown new images each time. After each time, participants were asked to report their emotional state on a scale of -50 to +50, with -50 being the most negative emotional state and +50 being the most positive. After time 3, the participants were shown the most negatively rated slides. The participants were told that they could stop looking at the slides at any time, and that the slides would stop

on their own after a few minutes, but they were not told exactly how many slides they would be exposed to. Arch and Craske (2006) used the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (M-C 1[10], (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) to test whether outcomes were due to the experiment or if social factors were at play. They also used a computer to administer a 10-question system called the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Mackinnon et al., 1999), to assess a broader range of emotional states. Participants were asked to rate how closely they followed the induction instructions. Heart rates were also measured and monitored.

Results. The results showed that the focused breathing group reported the most stable, least emotional volatility across slide types relative to the other groups. PANAS scores were examined in a 3x3 ANOVA. The differences between group PANAS scores at time 1 and time 2 were insignificant. Arch and Craske (2006) attributed this to the small number of participants in each group as well as how closely the participants had followed the instructions of the induction. The biggest difference in PANAS scores was found in time 3 at $p=.01$. The worry group and unfocused attention group were more likely to respond negatively to neutral slides after the induction than before it. Out of the focused breathing group, 85.7% viewed all 25 slides while only 57.9% of the participants in the unfocused attention condition viewed all 25 slides, suggesting with a $p<.05$ that the focused breathing group had become more tolerant of negative stimuli (Arch & Craske, 2006). The heart rate measure showed no significant differences between groups, but this may be attributed for by the small size of each group. A more useful measure of heart rate may be the change within individual participants as opposed to the difference between groups (Arch & Craske, 2006).

Discussion. The results of this study support the idea that a focused breathing induction may cause participants to become more emotionally stable and tolerant of negatively affected stimuli. This suggests that parents and teachers who engage in mindfulness practices that focus on breath awareness may be less emotionally charged toward children's undesirable behaviors, as well as more tolerant and accepting of these behaviors. Additionally, focused breathing may lead to greater impulse control and empathy of parents and teachers for children by negating the likelihood of erratic emotional responses. Focused breathing may lead to parents and teachers using more positive approaches to discipline, and less physical punishment. As social learning theory suggests, this could result in children becoming more emotionally regulated as a result of witnessing this in their parents and teachers. The next three sections explore the effects of mindfulness interventions on parents, teachers, and children respectively.

Mindfulness and Parents

Hypothesis. Coatsworth, Duncan, Greenberg, and Nix (2009) reviewed theoretical and empirical research on mindfulness, and they noted that although a small number of studies had been conducted on the implications of mindfulness on parenting relationships, what mindful parenting meant was still unclear. Coatsworth et al., (2009), took a pre-existing program called the Strengthening Families Program (SFP) and incorporated a mindfulness component. They categorized mindful parenting into five dimensions including a) Listening with full attention, b) Non-judgmental acceptance of self and child, c) Emotional awareness of self and child, d) Self-regulation in parenting relationships, and e) Compassion for self and child (Coatsworth et al., 2009). Mindful parenting was defined as a "Meta-concept" reflecting a higher level of awareness that

parents have of their internal states and how they think and feel about their thoughts and feelings” (Coatsworth, et al., 2009, p. 204). This randomized pilot trial tested four hypotheses; a) Parents who received the mindfulness-enhanced intervention would demonstrate greater improvement on mindful parenting than parents in either of the other two conditions, b) Parents receiving either the mindfulness adaptation or SFP intervention would show a greater change on child management practices compared to parents in the control group, c) Families in the mindfulness condition would report higher quality adolescent-parent relationships than those in SFP or control conditions, and d) Significant indirect or mediated intervention effects whereby changes in mindful parenting would be related to the changes in child management practices and the quality of parent-youth relationships.

Subjects. Participants included 65 families from small towns in central Pennsylvania. The study focused on survey reports made by mothers and their children on their relationship quality. Mean age of the youth was 11.65 years ($SD = .75$), and 38% of the youth were female. Mean age of mothers was 39.4 years ($SD = 7.0$). Median annual family income of participants ranged from \$40,000-\$50,000. All but one family was European American (Coatsworth et al., 2009).

Methods. Data was longitudinal, and questionnaires were completed immediately before and immediately following the intervention. Pre and post-intervention surveys were mailed to the homes of all families that agreed to participate in the study (Coatsworth et al., 2009). Families were stratified by school district and randomly assigned to one of three conditions: 1) the original SFP program was offered to 23 families, 2) the mindfulness-based adaptation of the SFP program (MSFP) was offered

to 25 families, and included new activities centered on mindful breathing and compassion building, and 3) the delayed intervention control group included 17 families (Coatsworth et al., 2009). All intervention sessions were held at local schools.

In the original SFP program, the intervention was made up of seven weekly 2-hour sessions where parents and adolescents met in separate groups for the first hour and then together during the second hour. Details of the original SFP program were not explicitly outlined in the study. In the Mindfulness-Enhanced SFP group, the format was kept identical to the original version, but the parent's activities in the first hour were slightly adjusted to include more mindfulness activities and the language was shifted to send more messages of mindful parenting, such as "being attentive, reducing emotional reactivity, and being less judgmental," (Coatsworth et al., 2009, p. 206). Facilitators taught mindfulness practices including mindful breathing and loving kindness reflections, and encouraged participants to practice these activities at home as well. The delayed intervention group was contacted 3 months later to be invited to participate in the SFP program.

Results. The results of 50 complete data sets showed that for three out of the four hypotheses, the addition of mindfulness to the intervention tested as effective ($p < .05$) and although not statistically significantly, slightly correlated with more positive outcomes than the original SFP program with a $p < .10$ (Coatsworth, et al., 2009). Between the mindfulness enhanced SFP and the control group, there was strong statistical significance with $p < .001$ for higher positive effect (Coatsworth, et al., 2009). The only hypothesis with no statistical significance between the three groups was the mothers' reported quality of mother-youth relationships.

Discussion. This study implies that principles from mindfulness adapted to parenting intervention programs may be effective in improving the parents' use of the five dimensions of mindfulness. It appears that parents receiving either the mindfulness adaptation or SFP intervention showed a greater positive change on child management practices compared to parents in the control group. Developing parenting programs that incorporate a mindfulness component could be useful in increasing parents' understanding of how they think and feel about parenting and may improve raising parenting skills such as listening, non-judgmental acceptance, emotional awareness, self-regulation, and compassion.

Mindfulness and Teachers

Hypothesis. Taylor et al., (2015), studied the results of introducing a mindfulness based intervention program called the Stress Management and Relaxation Training (SMART) to public school teachers. First, they predicted that teachers who received the SMART training would look at things that triggered stress in their lives more positively than the control group. Second, Taylor et al., (2015), hypothesized that teachers who received the intervention would become more efficacious and resourceful instead of using maladaptive and externalizing methods of problem solving. Third, after experiencing stressful situations, the researchers believed that teachers who received the intervention would likely be more satisfied with the outcomes of that situation than the control group. The researches also predicted that teachers who received SMART training would show increases in compassion and become generally more forgiving, especially with children who were the most challenging (Taylor et al., 2015). Finally, the study tested whether or not the SMART training would have lasting effects over time.

Subjects. Taylor et al., (2015) recruited 59 elementary and secondary school teachers from a large, urban, western-Canadian public school district ($n = 53$ women; $n = 6$ men, and $n = 39$ elementary; $n = 21$ secondary) through email and flyer solicitations. Subjects were prescreened specifically for any preexisting experience in the *MindUp* program which teaches mindfulness techniques to children so that teachers with higher interests in practicing were excluded from the study (Taylor et al., 2015). The racial demographics of the group were 67% Euro-Canadian, 18% Asian-Canadian, and 15% Other (Taylor et al., 2015). The age range of participants was between 28 and 63-years-old (median age was 47), and they each had between 3 and 35 years of teaching experience, with an average of 15.2 years of experience (Taylor et al., 2015).

Methods. The study used a mixed-methods randomized control design utilizing survey data, self-reported data from Likert type scales, and interviews to gather results. The 9-week intervention was offered to 26 participants who received the intervention in spring 2009. The control group ($n = 30$) was waitlisted, and received the intervention in the winter (Taylor et al., 2015). Post intervention comparisons were done 4-months after the introduction of the program. The intervention totaled 36-hours in 11 separate sessions. The mode of attendance was 9/11 sessions (Taylor et al., 2015).

Results. According to Taylor et al., (2015), ANOVAs from the occupational job stress scale showed that teachers who received the intervention reported significant declines in occupational stress (Cohen's $d = 0.90$). When teachers in the intervention group were asked to describe a stressful experience at school, they used significantly fewer negative emotions to describe their experience ($p = .05$). No significant differences in coping strategies were found between the two groups (Taylor et al., 2015). A focus on

the language teacher's used to describe their most challenging students, revealed significant (Cohen's $d = .58$) differences in the number of positive emotion words they used to describe their most challenging students (Taylor et al., 2015). ANCOVA scores from Taylor et al., (2015) also suggested that teachers who received the mindfulness based training were more efficacious in emotion regulation (Cohen's $d = .52$). Results showed higher dispositional forgiveness (Cohen's $d = .70$) as well as situational forgiveness towards students (Cohen's $d = .66$), but no significant differences in forgiveness of colleagues (Taylor et al., 2015).

Discussion. The results from Taylor et al., (2015) suggest that training teachers in mindfulness practices could result in reduced stress, and more job satisfaction. The study also revealed the possibility that mindfulness practice may be useful in generating compassion, and having a more positive attitude in general. Teachers who received the training were more likely to forgive their most challenging students, than teachers who did not. These results are consistent with those found in Lutz et al., (2008), Arch and Craske (2006), and Coatsworth et al., (2009) in that it requires empathy, and tolerance for/acceptance for dissatisfying behaviors to forgive others. It is interesting that this sense of increased forgiveness did not extend to other colleagues. Is there some difference in our abilities to empathize with peers (other adults) versus those with perceived inferior abilities in emotion/behavior regulation (children)? Might studying the development of empathy towards peers in mindfulness interventions with children bring us closer to answering this question? What else might studying the effects of mindfulness on children reveal?

Mindfulness and Preschoolers

Hypothesis. Flook, Simon, Goldberg, Pinger and Davidson (2015) studied the effects of *Kindness Curriculum*, a mindfulness program designed for preschool children. The study was developed to assess whether or not implementation of the mindfulness-based kindness curriculum model would impact children's development in a variety of cognitive and behavioral domains. More specifically, Flook et al., (2015) hypothesized that the children with the lowest baseline scores in prosocial skills and executive functioning who were taught the mindfulness-based kindness curriculum would show the most improvement in teacher ratings of their social competence over time.

Subjects. Families from six different elementary schools within a mid-sized Midwestern public school district that had preschool classrooms on site were invited to participate in the study. Parents of 68 students consented their children's participation, but the researchers were only able to include demographic data of 67 participants. The children were from seven different preschool classrooms, and their mean age 4.67 years old (Flook et al., 2015). According to Flook et Al., (2015), nearly half of the participants were female ($n=34$) and the other half were male ($n=33$). The racial demographics of the participants were as follows: White ($n=40$), Hispanic ($n =8$), African-American ($n =4$), Asian/Pacific Islander ($n =7$), and Other/Mixed Race ($n =8$). The parents of the children included 49 parents who had graduated from college, and 18 who had not (Flook et al., 2015).

Methods. Flook et al., (2015) used a randomized controlled design to assign each of the seven classrooms to either the mindfulness-based *Kindness Curriculum* (KC) intervention group, or to a wait-list control group. Three classrooms ($n=30$) received the

KC intervention, while four classrooms acted as the control group (Flook et al., 2015). The children in the KC group received 20 to 30-minute lessons taught twice a week by experienced mindfulness instructors for 12-weeks.

The children were individually tested using 6 different instruments before and after the KC intervention. The tests included the children's social competence levels as rated by the teachers, a sharing task, a delay of gratification task, a dimensional change card sort task, a flanker test, and school grades. The following paragraphs give a brief description of each of these tests respectively (Flook et al., 2015).

Teacher ratings of social competence (TSC). In the teacher ratings of social competence (TSC) children were rated on the prosocial behavior and emotion regulation subscales of the Teacher Social Competence Scale which uses a 6-point Likert scale with the highest score signifying the most social competence (Flook et al., 2015).

Sharing task. The sharing task utilized four trials in which the children were offered ten stickers at the beginning of each trial and told that they could keep as many as they wanted for themselves, and that they could also choose as many as they liked from the ten stickers to another person. In the first trial the other receiver of stickers was the child's favorite peer, in the second trial it was the child's least liked peer, in the third trial it was an unfamiliar child, and in the fourth trial it was a child who was sick (Flook et al., 2015).

Delay of gratification task. The delay of gratification task asked the children to take a smaller reward now, or a larger reward later in 9 trials with three different types of rewards. Scores represented the mean number of times the child chose the delay condition (Flook et al., 2015).

Dimensional card change sort task. The dimensional card change sort task was a computerized test to assess cognitive flexibility by requiring participants to group cards that could be sorted by two dimensions (i.e. shape or color) first in one way, and then to switch and sort them in the second way (Flook et al., 2015).

Flanker test. Another computerized task, the flanker task, was used to measure inhibitory control. In this test, participants were shown five stimuli (a series of either fish or arrows). Trials were either congruent (matched the direction of middle stimulus) or incongruent (opposite of the middle stimulus), and participants were asked to point one of two buttons to indicate the direction of the middle stimulus (Flook et al., 2015).

School grades. The final test used by Flook et al., (2015) was the children's school grades in the domains of Approaches to Learning, Cognition and General Knowledge, Health and Physical Development, Language Development and Communication, and Social Emotional Development.

Results. Using group by time RMANOVA analyses, the KC group showed greater improvement (though not always significantly) than the control group on all six tests. According to Flook et al., (2015) TSC results were higher for the KC in total score ($p = .011$), as well in the categories of prosocial behavior ($p = .041$), and emotion regulation ($p = .002$) than in the control group (Flook et al., 2015). Significantly more of the children in the KC group ($p = .013$) shared their stickers in the sharing task than did in the control group (Flook et al., 2015). The scores for the delay of gratification task, dimensional card change sort task, and the flanker test were higher for the KC group, but without statistical significance. Additionally, according to Flook et al., (2015) the children's report cards showed significantly higher grades in the Approaches to Learning

domain ($p = .045$), Health and Physical Development domain ($p = .030$), and Social Emotional Development domain ($p < .001$).

Discussion. The findings of this study showed further evidence that mindfulness training could result in more prosocial behavior and better regulation of emotions. These skills could result in better relationships with peers, as well as teachers who generally favor children with conflict negotiation abilities. Additionally, although no significant results were found between the KC group and the control group in terms of report card grades in the areas of Cognition and General Knowledge, and Language Development and Communication, it would be interesting to look and see how those areas are impacted further. Would the children's advanced social emotional development and higher scores in approaches to learning impact grades in other areas later? Moreover, how might the findings of Flook et al., be applied in programs for teacher education?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

If mindfulness meditation could make teachers and children more empathetic, better able to tolerate negative stimuli, more attuned with others, happier, etc. then why is it not included as part of teachers' pre-service and in-service learning? Given the combined results of the aforementioned literature (Arch & Craske, 2006; Lutz et al., 2008; Coatsworth et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2015; Flook et al., 2015) a 2-hour workshop was developed to introduce graduate students in early childhood education to mindfulness practices. The hope for the workshop was that it would give the cohort experiences in mindfulness meditation, and act as a catalyst for discourse within the department. The following chapter introduces the design and methods of the workshop, as well as the measures used to determine its effectiveness in increasing interest, knowledge, and awareness in mindfulness practices. The remainder of this thesis examines the efficacy of a workshop created for early childhood professionals with the intent to raise interest and awareness/knowledge about mindfulness. This chapter describes the workshop as well as the instrumentation used to evaluate its effectiveness.

Participants

Participant Recruitment

The participants included 25 female graduate students who were enrolled in an early childhood education program at California State University, Northridge. The beginning of the workshop was presented during the second half of a regularly scheduled *Issues and Theories in Early Childhood Education* class session, and continued on into

the first half hour of a *Language and Concept Development in the Early School Years* course. With the exception of four students, all participants were first-semester graduate student enrolled in both courses (two of the four were teaching assistants, and the two remaining participants were students who had previously taken the courses and happened to be meeting with the professor during the time the presenter was also in the office planning for the presentation and became interested in the workshop). With the exception of these four students, none of the participants had ever met the presenter or had any previous relationship with her aside from being enrolled in the same graduate program. Three of the four participants with preexisting relationships to the presenter had to leave before the end of the workshop, and did not participate in the post-workshop evaluation. Additionally, one other participant left the workshop to attend a different class and also did not complete the post-workshop evaluation.

Demographics

The ethnic demographics of the participants closely resembled that of the larger university population. The majority of participants ($n=8$, 32%) classified themselves as Hispanic/Mexican-American/Latina. The remaining participants categorized themselves as White/Caucasian ($n=7$, 28%), Middle Eastern/Lebanese ($n=2$, 8%), Asian ($n=1$, 4%), Black ($n=1$, 4%), Filipino ($n=1$, 4%). Additionally, 20% ($n=5$) of the participants listed multiple ethnicities/mixed race. A majority of the participants were under 31 years of age (Table 3.1). While the mode for participants showed a very high interest in learning about mindfulness, most rated themselves lower in terms of their overall level of

knowledge regarding mindfulness (Table 3.2). Many participants practiced a variety of spiritual and mindfulness practices (Figure 3.1).

Table 3.1

Age of Participants

Age	Number of Participants in Age Range	Percentage of Participants in Age Range
21-25	9	36%
26- 30	10	40%
31- 35	4	16%
36+	2	8%

Table 3.2

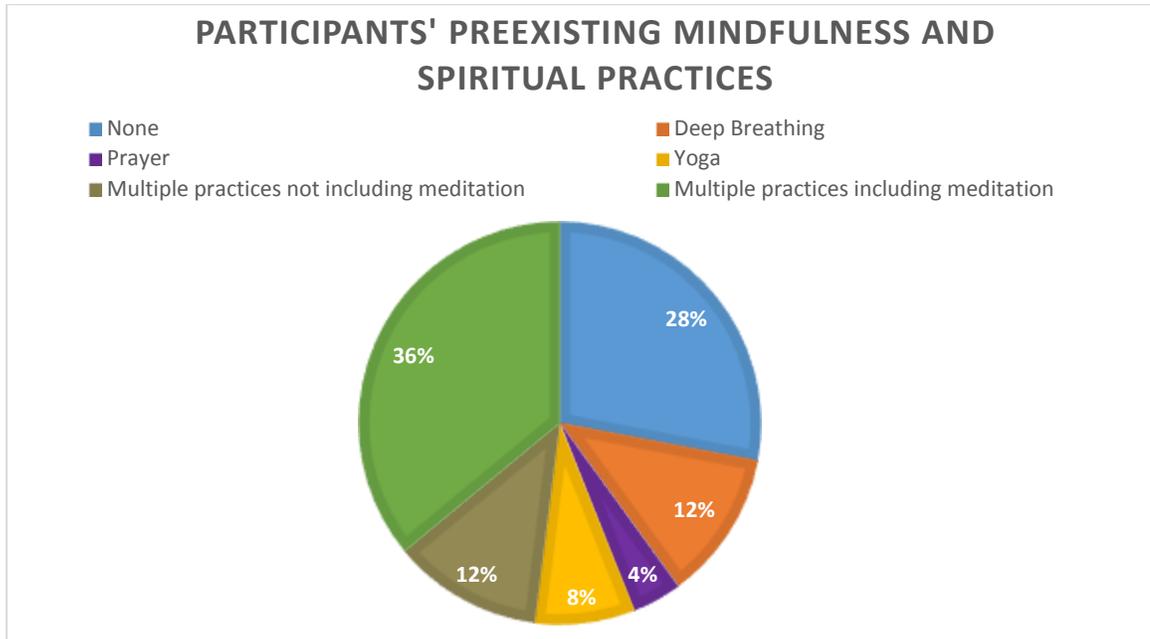
Level of Interest and Knowledge about Mindfulness

Level of *	5	4	3	2	1
Interest in Learning about Mindfulness	<i>n</i> =20	<i>n</i> =4	<i>n</i> =1	<i>n</i> =0	<i>n</i> =0
	80%	16%	4%	0%	0%
Current Knowledge about Mindfulness	<i>n</i> =1	<i>n</i> =2	<i>n</i> =9	<i>n</i> =11	<i>n</i> =2
	4%	8%	36%	44%	8%

**Levels were self-reported by participants on a Likert-type scale with 1 being the lowest, and 5 being the highest.*

Figure 3.1

Participants' Preexisting Mindfulness Background/Spiritual Practices



The Workshop

The workshop consisted of a 2-hour session including a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix A), group discussions, mindfulness activities, a handout (Appendix B) and list of resources (Appendix C) for participants interested in more information, and pre/post workshop questionnaires (Appendices D and E). Details of each component will be described in the following sections.

The PowerPoint

The workshop utilized a 30 slide PowerPoint (slides 27-30 were resources and references) to introduce the topic of mindfulness to early childhood professionals (Appendix A). Slides 1 through 3 were introductory slides to present the topic, presenter, and presentation. Slides 4 through 6 defined and explained the history and purpose for

practicing mindfulness through multiple resources (Nhat-Hann, 1975; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Greenland, 2010; Hawn Foundation, 2011). Slide 6 was a YouTube video of Jon Kabat-Zinn discussing attunement. Slides 8 through 13 introduced changes in the brain associated with mindfulness, as well as theoretical explanations for these changes using additional resources (Thomas, 2005; Greenland, 2010; Hawn Foundation, 2011; Siegel & Bryson, 2011). Slides 13 and 14 described the effects of mindfulness on parenting based on findings from Coatsworth et. al., (2009). Slides 15 through 17 identified the effects of mindfulness on teachers based on Taylor et. al., (2015). Slides 18, 19, 21, and 23 invited the participants into 3 smaller groups to discuss how mindfulness could be used to make teachers more competent as professionals (this will be further elaborated in the next section). Slides 25 and 26 explored the effects of mindfulness on children through findings from Flook, Goldberg, Ringer, and Davidson (2015), and the video clip, *Just Breathe* (2015). Slides 7, 20, 22, and 24 were mindfulness activities which will be further explained in the later chapters of this thesis.

Group Discussions

During slide 18, the participants organized into three groups. The presenter counted off the participants so that each participant was assigned to one of the three groups. The first group discussed how mindfulness might be used to improve their understanding and assessment of child development and learning. The second group was asked to discuss how mindfulness might be used to help build community and foster relationships with families. The second group was also asked how they might use these relationships when setting up learning environments and curriculum plans. The third group was asked to discuss how mindfulness might be helpful to administrators as well as

others in positions of leadership. The groups discussed their ideas for 10 minutes, and then met back in the larger group for a group discussion. Each discussion was followed by a mindfulness based activity which will be explained in the next section (the activities presented were adaptations from the *InnerKids* (2010) curriculum training that the presenter had previously received).

Mindfulness Activities

Glitter jar. Immediately following the introductory slides, the participants were asked to share some of the stressors that were currently part of their lives. The presenter used pink and blue glitter to represent the good and bad stresses respectively. As students shared the stressors of wedding planning, midterms, and the hospitalization of a spouse, the presenter filled an empty mason jar with glitter. She then filled the rest of the jar with water, and began shaking the jar.

The participants were asked to think of the jar as a metaphor for the mind. They were told that the thoughts, feelings, and ideas floating around in their minds were a lot like the glitter because they were preventing the participants from seeing clearly. Participants were asked to put their hands on their bellies and start breathing. As the group began to focus on their breath, the glitter began to sink to the bottom of the jar. The participants were told that the clear water is like a quiet mind and relaxed body, and then were invited to join in a 2-minute focused breathing exercise led by the presenter.

Rock exercise. After the group discussed how mindfulness could be used to improve participants' understanding and assessment of child development and learning, the participants were asked to pick out a single rock from a bag of multiple rocks. They were then instructed to focus on their rock for 2-minutes. They were told to notice its

colors, shape, weight, etc. After observing the rock, they were asked to place it in a tray with everyone else's rock. They were then asked to look through the pile and retrieve their rock.

Zoom. Subsequent to a group discussion of how mindfulness might be used to help build community and foster relationships with families, the participants were presented with a picture book called *Zoom* by Istvan Banyai (1995). The book presented a series of illustrations which slowly zoomed out of one image into the next. Before reading the book, the presenter told the participants that the book had no words, and that she needed their help to tell her what the story was about. After flipping through a few pages, she would pause to ask, "So what is this book really about?" The book was used to prompt a discussion on the limitations of personal perspectives.

Ice cube activity. Succeeding the discussion about how administrators and others in positions of leadership could use mindfulness in their work, an activity to build tolerance was planned into the workshop. Due to warm weather and poor timing, the ice cubes for this activity melted, and the activity was cancelled. The presenter explained that the purpose of the activity was to practice tolerance for discomfort by focusing on the sensation of a freezing ice cube in their palms. They were told that even though at first the ice cube might cause pain, it could also eventually start numbing them to the pain. The group was reminded that everything undesirable eventually changes.

Handouts

Teaching Mindfulness to Young Children (Appendix B), a one-page handout, was passed out to participants which suggested that mindfulness be treated as an underlying philosophy rather than a series of lesson plans. The handout tipped participants in

individualizing mindfulness activities to meet the developmental needs of the children being taught. The participants were reminded to make mindfulness fun, relevant, and appropriate for young children, and were encouraged by the handout to be open, responsive, and in the moment throughout their daily routine. A resource list including curriculum books and websites was also passed out for students seeking more information about teaching or practicing mindfulness.

Instrumentation

Pre-Presentation Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered before beginning the workshop (Appendix D). Questions 1 through 6, as well as question 9, asked for information regarding the participants' definitions, knowledge, speculations, applications, practices, and interests/desires to learn about mindfulness. Questions 7, 8, and 10 solicited demographic information such as age, ethnic background, and experiences working with young children.

Post-Presentation Evaluation

Immediately following the presentation, a post workshop evaluation consisting of 11 questions was administered to the participants (Appendix E). The first two questions in the evaluation asked the participants to define and rate their level of interest and awareness (knowledge and awareness were considered synonymous, and used interchangeably in the pre and post presentation questionnaires) in the topic of mindfulness. Question 3 asked the participants the three most valuable things they had learned from the workshop. Questions 4 through 8 asked for information regarding the quality of the presentation/presenter. Question 9 asked participants if they wanted to

learn more about mindfulness and for which reasons. Question 10 asked what participants would tell other early childhood educators about the workshop. Question 11 was a slide by slide evaluation of the PowerPoint asking the participants to rate the slides based their helpfulness in understanding mindfulness.

The next chapter will describe the results of this workshop, including the participants' responses on the post workshop questionnaires.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Determining the level of effectiveness of the workshop described in the previous chapter is the purpose of this paper. This chapter reviews the data collected from the pre- and post- presentation questionnaire/evaluation. In order to maintain participant anonymity, no names or other such identifying information were collected from the 25 participants of the workshop. The results were aggregated to focus on the shifting of the group as a whole rather than on individual participants. The first section of this chapter will highlight participant definitions of mindfulness before and after the workshop, as well as participants' self-reported levels of interest and knowledge about mindfulness. The second section examines what participants found to be the three most valuable things learned from the workshop. The third section focuses on participants' assessment of the workshop and the presenter. The fourth section reviews the results of a slide by slide evaluation of the workshop. The fifth section discusses what the participants would tell other educators about the workshop. The final section of this workshop reveals what participants were interested in learning more about with regard to mindfulness.

Participants Levels of Interest and Knowledge/Awareness on the Topic of Mindfulness

Participants had a very high level of interest in learning about mindfulness before the workshop (96% reported a score ≥ 4 on the pre-presentation questionnaire), and their interest was maintained after the workshop (100% reported a score ≥ 4 on the post-presentation evaluation). During the pre-presentation questionnaire, only 12% of participants rated themselves with a score of 4 or higher in terms of their current level of

awareness about mindfulness. In the post-presentation evaluation, 86.3% scored themselves at a level of 4 or higher. Participants were also asked to define mindfulness in the pre- and post- presentation questionnaires as an additional measure of their mindfulness knowledge before and after the workshop. If participants defined mindfulness using at least two of the following words: a) non-judgmental, b) present, c) focused, d) awareness, e) purposeful, or f) attention, they were coded as being able to define mindfulness. If they used less than two of these words, they were coded as not knowing the definition of mindfulness. While only 36% defined mindfulness using 2 of these words in the pre-presentation questionnaire, all of the 22 participants who turned in the post-presentation evaluation were able to define mindfulness using 2 of these words after the workshop. Additionally, 64% ($n=14$) used 3 or more of these words in the post-presentation evaluation, and 27% ($n=6$) used 4 of these words to define mindfulness in the post-presentation evaluation. Moreover, the participants learned many other valuable things from the workshop which will be explored in the next section.

The Three Most Valuable Things Participants Learned

Although participants had a variety of responses to the question asking, “What are the three most valuable things you learned from this workshop?” most responses fit into one of three common categories. The first category related to understanding and practicing mindfulness. Responses in this category included statements such as, “how to pay attention purposefully,” “remain in the moment,” and “breathe/take time to calm down.” The second category of responses included learning about mindfulness as a new tool or resource for working with children and families. This category included comments such as, “exercises that could be used with children: glitter jar, breathing

exercise (flower/candle or using Hoberman ball)...” how to “assess students using mindfulness because now I can accurately observe and indicate where my students are academically,” and “how to be more mindful in discussions with peers, parents, and the community.” The third category was elicited by examples referring to the benefits of mindfulness. This type of response included answers such as, “...mindfulness can affect your biological, social, and psychological well-being,” “having a balance between the right and left side of brain to live and work in harmonious way that occurs when you are being mindful,” and “mindfulness exercises lead to better daily focus.” In addition to the following table which details the number of responses in each category, Appendix F provides a conclusive list of individual participant comments.

Table 4.1

Three Most Valuable things Participants Learned

Category of Response	Number of Participants in Age Range	Percentage of Participants in Age Range
Understanding and practicing mindfulness	28	42%
A new tool/resource	19	29%
Benefits of mindfulness	11	17%

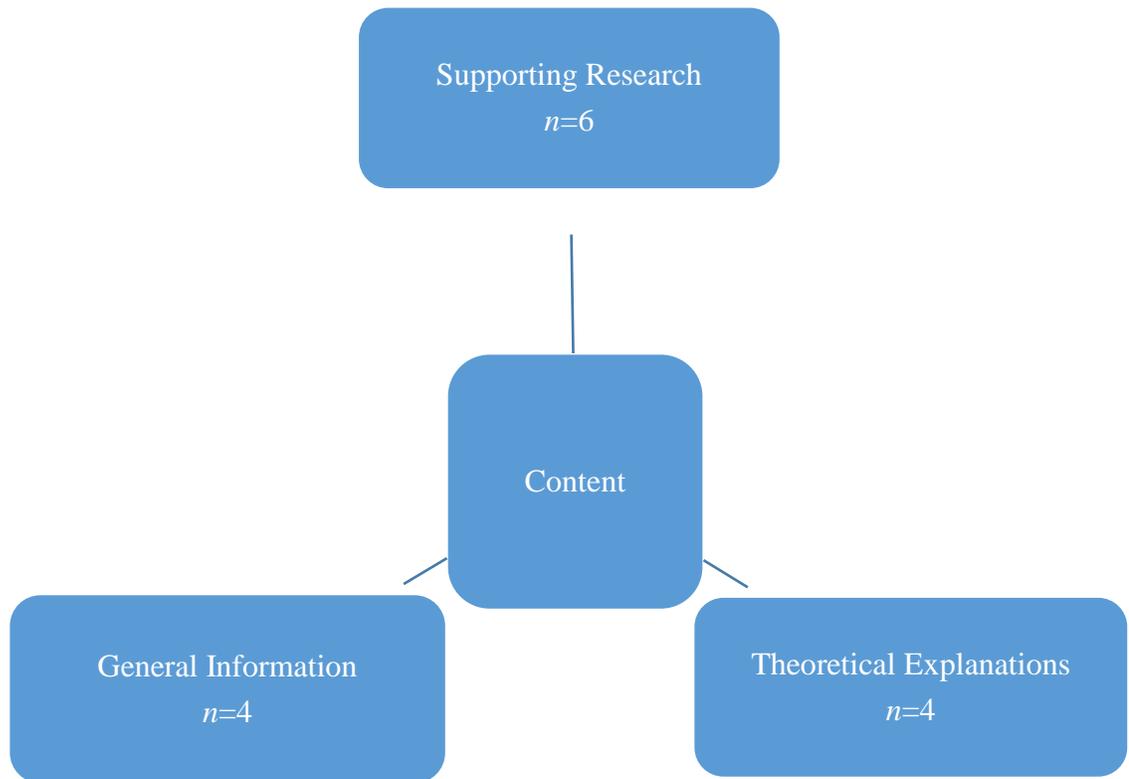
Overall, the participants seemed to value the workshop with 100% reporting that the information presented was useful. Over half (54%) of respondents rated the workshop as

extremely useful. The following section will further detail the participants' assessment of both the presentation and the presenter.

Participant Assessments of Presentation and Presenter

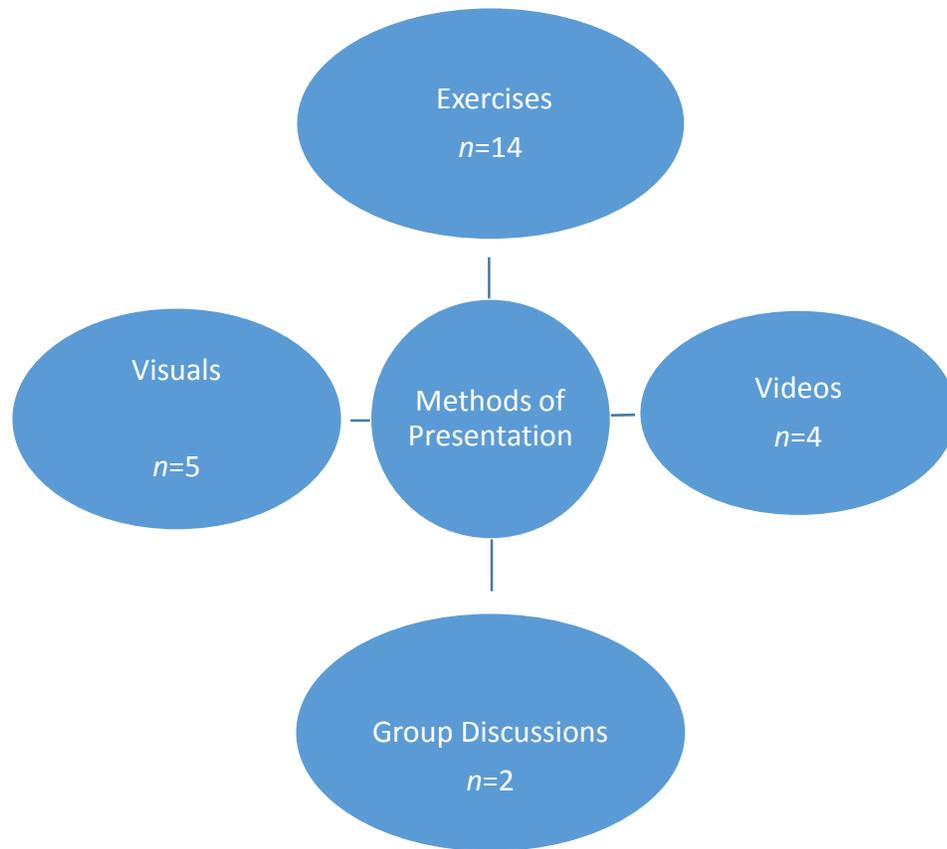
Strengths of presentation. The strengths of the presentation included the specific information being presented and the methods used to present the information. Responses describing content as the strength of the presentation were grouped into three categories: a) general information, b) supporting research, and c) theoretical explanations. Responses about the mediums used to present ideas were grouped into four categories: a) videos, b) group discussions, c) Exercises, and d) visuals. The figures illustrate participant responses in those areas.

Figure 4.1 Workshop Strengths in Content



**n= the number of participants that included comments regarding the content in each category.*

Figure 4.2 Workshop Strengths in Methods of Presentation



**n= the number of participants that included comments regarding specific mediums of presentation as strengths of the workshop.*

Overall, participant feedback suggested that both the content and methods of presentation were engaging and participants were satisfied with the workshop. One participant who was particularly pleased responded by writing, "...You were phenomenal! Your workshop was extremely hands-on, full of applications, examples, and yet you managed to weave in the information about (the) brain. I loved the group work/discussion part. It was a well-balanced presentation." In spite of being generally

pleased with the workshop, participants had many invaluable suggestions for how to improve the workshop. Participant suggestions will be discussed in the next section.

How to improve the workshop. Participants offered valuable feedback on how the workshop could be improved. Common suggestions included resolving technical issues, adding more personal examples, working on the general flow of the presentation, the oral presentation of content (speed/volume of speech), and specific slide content. The following table lists the number of responses suggesting each area for development.

Table 4.2

Categories for Improvement

Category	Number of Comments suggesting improvements in each category.	Percentage of total comments made.
Specific slide content (including videos, images, and verbiage).	7	29%
Flow of presentation	7	29%
Oral delivery of presenter	6	25%
More examples	2	8%
Technical issues	2	8%

During the workshop, the videos embedded in the PowerPoint did not play back. The presenter had a backup plan to use a hyperlink to access the videos online, and although the video was playing on her laptop, it was not projecting on the screen for participants. One of the tech savvy participants volunteered to resolve the issue, but several minutes were spent trying to figure out what was wrong. Of the two participants who asked for more examples, one asked for specific, “examples of using mindfulness in

stressful relationship situations,” and the other just wanted more general examples to better relate to the content. The suggested need for improvement towards the flow of the presentation, as well as the oral delivery during the presentation can both be attributed to the presenter’s nervousness, and will be further detailed in the next sections about the presenter’s strengths and ways to improve. Specific slide content will be discussed in the next section.

Strengths of presenter. Personality, physical appearance (dress/attire), knowledge of subject matter, as well as passion/connection to the subject matter were consistently listed by participants as the presenter’s strengths. One participant wrote, “The presenter knew the material and believed in it so it made it easy to understand...” A second participant similarly stated, “You gave the impression of being very knowledgeable and genuinely interested in the topic. You basically live what you preach. I love that.” The participants appreciated the presenter’s ability to connect with the audience, and that connection was evident in the way that they presented suggestions for improvement.

How the presenter can improve. Participants were overwhelmingly reassuring and empathetic in their feedback. Out of 20 responses (2 were left blank), 12 (60%) listed relax/be more confident as their suggestions. One participant wrote, “Relax ☺ you’re marvelous at what you’re doing; no need to be nervous. Be mindful of yourself!” A second participant wrote, “Don’t second guess yourself. You know the stuff!” Other suggestions were in the category of talk slower/more clearly (25%), and organization/time management (20%). One participant who mentioned organization as an area for growth stated, “I think if the slides were composed better she would have

more organization towards the flow of the presentation.” Overall, the feedback that participants gave the presenter was generally positive. The following section explores feedback that might spread to others through word of mouth from participants.

What Participants Would Tell Others About the Workshop

Of the 22 participants who commented on what they would tell others about the workshop all responses were overwhelmingly positive, and 17 included adjectives such as useful, beneficial, and important. One participant commented, "I would tell them it is essential to take this workshop as it will give them insight to a new way of life. It will make them better teachers.” A second participant wrote, that it “...teaches techniques of mindfulness that can be applied for all ages. After experiencing this workshop, I feel refreshed and more at ease with how to handle situations and live for the moment!” A third participant recorded that it was, “...beneficial and well worth taking...it can improve people (ECE educators) as a whole”. As a whole, the group appreciated the workshop and desired more learning about mindfulness. Details about how participants rated individual slides will be discussed in the next section.

Slide by Slide Evaluation

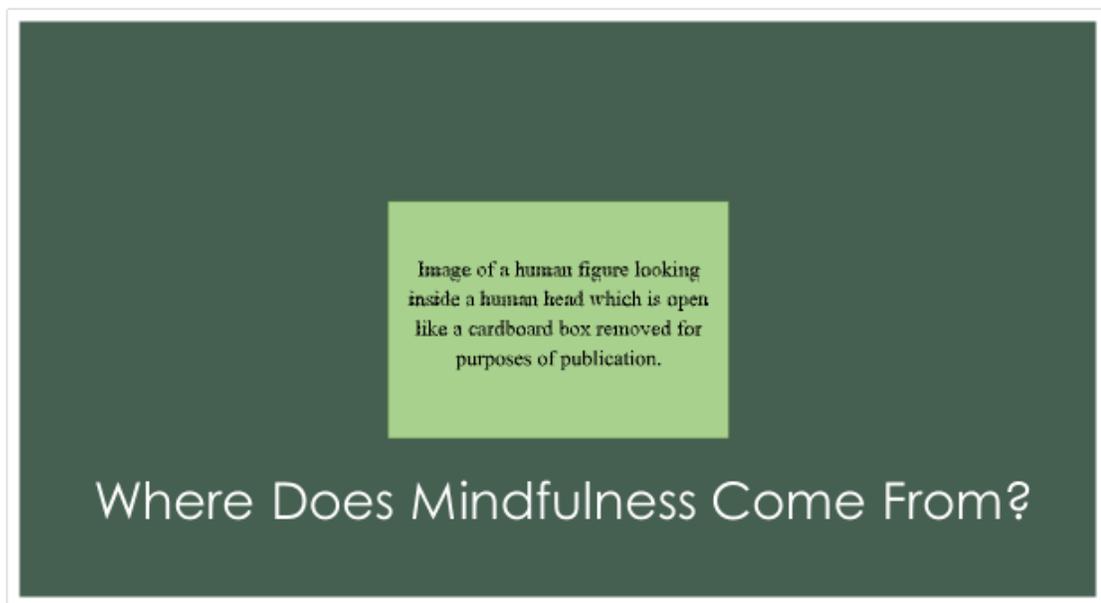
Question 12 of the post workshop evaluation showed pictures of each individual slide and asked the participants to rate each one on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest, and 5 being the highest) based on their helpfulness in understanding mindfulness. The average scores per slide for 25 slides (data from slide 24 were disregarded because the activity was not actually executed during the workshop) ranged from 3.7 to 4.9 (mean scores were rounded to the nearest tenth). The next six figures will depict the three

lowest slides, followed by the three highest rated slides, with examples of what some participants said about the slides.

The three lowest rated slides. The three lowest rated slides were slide 5 (mean rating of 3.7), slide 15 (mean rating of 3.8), and slide 2 (mean rating of 3.9). The following figures depict each of the aforementioned slides and offer examples of participant feedback for each slide.

Figure 4.3

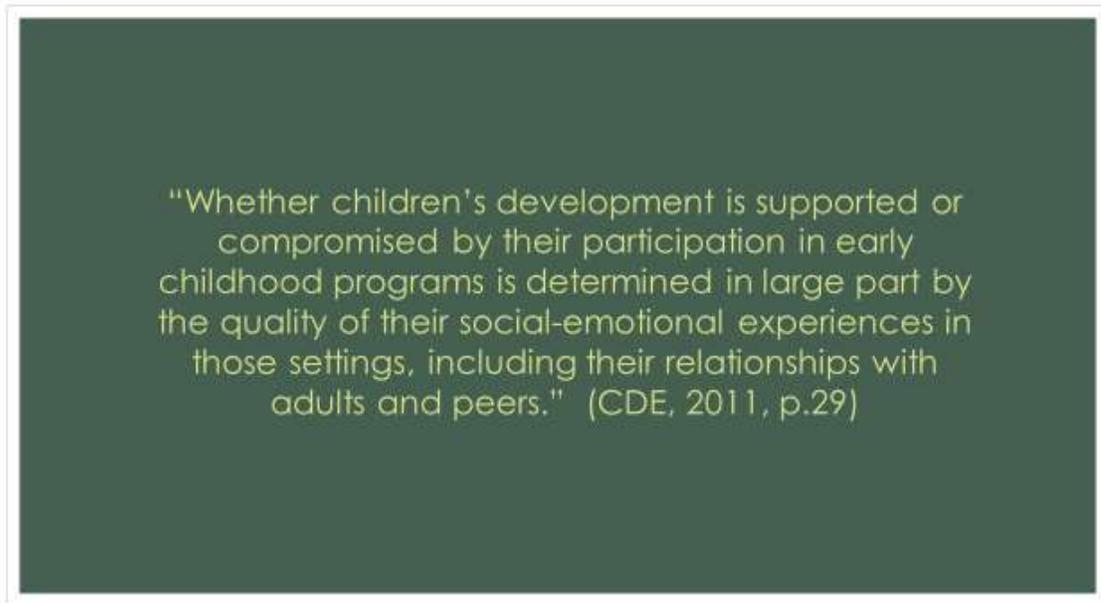
Slide 5



Many of the participants who gave slide 5 a low rating mentioned that it could have been combined with one of the other slides.

Figure 4.4

Slide 15



Slide 15 included only a quote from the California Department of Education, and was meant as a transition into the research about mindfulness interventions with teachers, and the discussion on using mindfulness to become more competent teachers. With regard to this slide, participants stated, "Too much copy," and wanted more discussion about the quote and how it applied to the topic of discussion.

Figure 4.5

Slide 2



Of the participants who left comments regarding slide 2, one suggested that it was “a bit long and easily forgotten.”

The three highest rated slides. The three highest rated slides were slide 26 (mean rating of 4.9), slide 14 (mean rating of 4.9), and slide 25 (mean rating of 4.8). The following figures depict each of the aforementioned slides and offer examples of participant feedback for each slide.

Figure 4.6

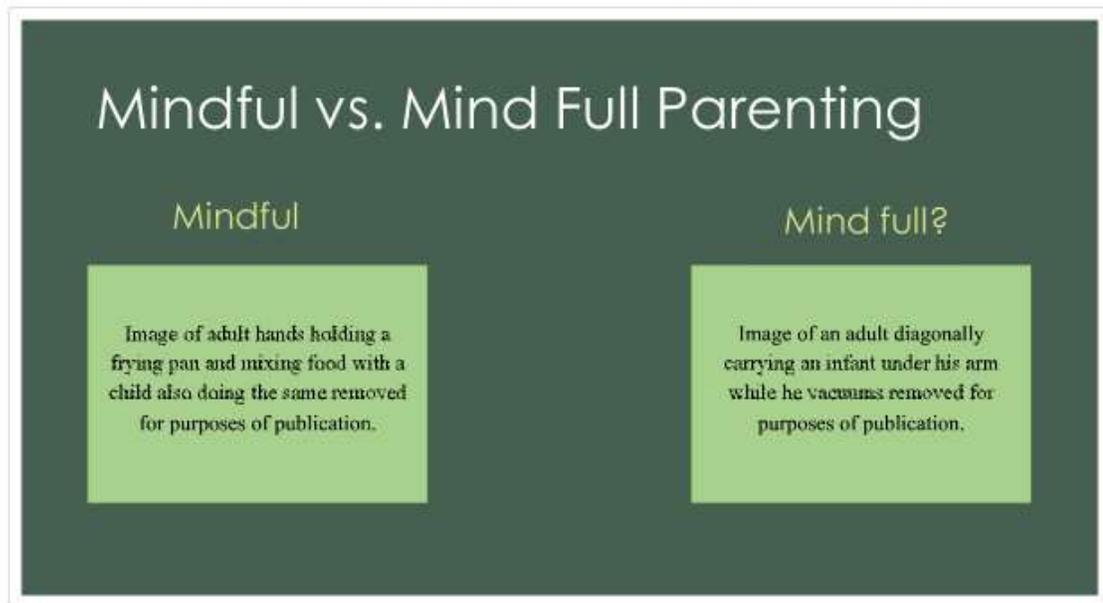
Slide 25



Comments explaining ratings for slide 25 included “Loved this study and the implications,” and “I found this so useful. It made me really think of ways to incorporate (mindfulness) into my workplace.”

Figure 4.7

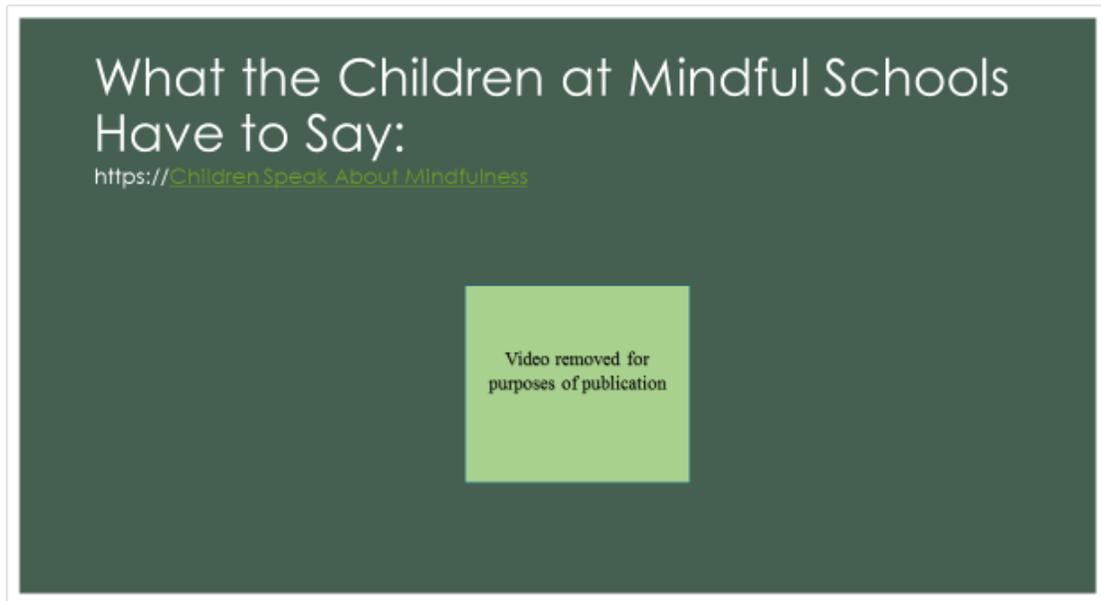
Slide 14



Slide 14 elicited responses such as, “Most influential advice to give to parents,” and “As a parent, it was a great reminder to stop, breathe, and enjoy every moment with my son.”

Figure 4.8

Slide 26



Slide 26, a video clip titled *Just Breathe* (2015) evoked the most written responses.

Participants were very pleased with this slide, and a large number of comments included phrases such as “perfect ending,” “beautiful and inspirational,” and “loved this.”

Participants seemed to have enjoyed the whole workshop. The average of all mean scores revealed that participants rated the level of helpfulness the workshop offered in developing their understanding of mindfulness at a 4.4.

Give Us More, Post Workshop Participant Interests

According to the post-workshop evaluation, 100% ($n=22$) of participants still wanted to learn more about mindfulness. All 22 respondents indicated that they wanted more information about mindfulness for their work with children. Personal insight, relaxation, and wellness was the second most popular response for wanting to learn more about mindfulness with 95% ($n=21$) of participants indicating that they wanted to learn

more for this reason. Of the participants that responded, 72% ($n=16$) wanted to learn more about mindfulness for their work with families. Additionally, many respondents noted a desire to learn more about mindfulness for their work with colleagues (68%, $n=15$), and for working with other members of their cohort in the graduate program (50%, $n=11$). Four participants mentioned other reasons for wanting to learn more about mindfulness listing interpersonal relationships, future parenting responsibilities, and “life and its obstacles.” The sustenance of participant interest and its implications, will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to measure the efficacy of a workshop with the goal to increase knowledge and interest of mindfulness in early childhood professionals. As previously discussed in preceding chapters, children's social emotional competence is related to their relationships with primary caregivers. Practicing mindfulness could strengthen teacher-child relationships by changing the neural wiring of teachers' brains, impacting their level of tolerance towards undesirable events, reducing their stress, and raising their overall happiness with their jobs. Additionally, teaching mindfulness practices to young children could facilitate the development of many social emotional skills which typically do not develop until later in life.

Review of Methodology and Findings

The workshop was presented to 25 graduate students in the early childhood education program at California State University, Northridge. The workshop was a 2-hour multimedia presentation utilizing a PowerPoint, videos, images, activities, books, and group discussions. A pre-presentation questionnaire (Appendix D) and post-presentation evaluation (Appendix E) were used to determine demographic information and to evaluate the effectiveness of the workshop. Efficacy was measured by the participants' ability to define mindfulness, as well as their self-reported ratings of their level of interest and knowledge on the topic.

The findings of this study revealed that the workshop was highly effective in increasing knowledge about mindfulness to early childhood professionals with 100% of

participants being able to define mindfulness in the post workshop evaluation. Due to the already high level of interest the participants had before the workshop (96% had indicated a level greater than or equal to 4), the fact that everyone's level of interest was maintained, and increased to 100% by the end of the workshop was remarkable. Participants appreciated both the content and the methods of presentation, noting them as the strengths of the workshop, and possibly leading to their desire to learn more.

Limitations

Sample. Although the results of this study showed it to be effective, the small sample size could limit its validity and generalizability in larger populations. Additionally, the participants were mostly 20- to 30-year-old females. It would be interesting to see how much interest, knowledge, and experience younger undergraduate students, as well as older teachers, might have with regard to mindfulness for early childhood professionals. Moreover, the California State University Northridge campus, has a culturally diverse student population. In 2013, 38,187 students were enrolled in baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate programs. Of the 38,187 students, 38% identified as Latina/Latino, 27% identified as White, 11% identified as Asian, 7.8% were International Students, 6.4% identified as unknown, 5.9% identified as African American, 3.2% identified as multiracial/other, .28% identified as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and .16% identified as American Indian/ Alaskan Native (California State University Northridge, 2013). The Educational Psychology and Counseling/Early Childhood Education program specifically emphasizes multicultural education. This could be an indicator that the participants were more inclined to wanting to learn about different cultures and enthusiastic about adapting new ideas.

Participant bias. Additionally, the participants of this workshop were all studying in the same program as the presenter. This relationship to the researcher could have caused the participants to be more empathetic to the researcher's need for data, and therefore, more positive and supportive in their commentary. Moreover, the state of California does not currently require a Master, Bachelor, or even Associate-level degree to teach early childhood, so it would be fair to assume that only a very small percentage of teachers ever pursue post-graduate degrees. Thus, it may be worthwhile to consider how early childhood teachers in pre-service training at the undergraduate and community college level might evaluate the workshop and its content. Would those students of early childhood education be equally affected by this workshop as the graduate participants in this study?

Instrumentation design. Although the original designs of the pre-presentation questionnaire (Appendix D) and post-presentation evaluation (Appendix E) used the terms knowledge and awareness interchangeably, the definitions of these words are not exactly the same. While additional measures such as the participants' abilities to define mindfulness, and the three most valuable things that participants learned during the workshop added evidence supporting rises in levels of both knowledge and awareness of participants, a better method would be to ask about their level of knowledge, as well as their awareness in mindfulness practices on both the pre-presentation questionnaire, as well as the post-presentation evaluation. The next section reviews additional areas for future advancement and research, as well as the implications of this workshop.

Future Advancement and Research

Based on the results of the post-workshop evaluation, participants indicated interest in learning more about mindfulness. As a supplement to this 2-hour workshop, future advancement may include revising it into a series of training modules, focusing on each area of interest in more detail. This could resolve participant suggestions to improve time management, and may allow for more discussion as well as building a relationship between the presenter and participants (thereby alleviating some of the presenter's nervousness associated with speaking in front of a group of strangers). Additionally, the presenter may benefit from professional training in how to guide adults through meditation exercises to enrich the experience of participants.

Furthermore, due to participants' high level of interest in learning about mindfulness, it might be of interest to explore how mindfulness could fit into the curriculum framework of the Educational Psychology and Counseling/Early Childhood Education Program at California State University, Northridge. How could mindfulness be used to enhance the existing graduate program? Would this change students' perceptions of the program? Additionally, could mindfulness be used to battle the stresses of graduate school, and in all their work thereafter? Moreover how might mindfulness change the field of early childhood education?

Implications

Becoming less judgmental. As suggested by data from the post-presentation evaluation, and if mindfulness practice is as effective as studies have suggested (Arch & Craske, 2006; Lutz et al., 2008; Coatsworth et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2015; Flook et al., 2015), workshops such as this one might be useful for developing objectivity in teachers.

Instead of classifying behaviors as good or bad, it might potentially help teachers to accept behaviors without judgment, and prevent the labeling of children, who often fall victim to self-fulfilling prophecies. Focusing on behaviors while maintaining a non-judgmental perspective could serve useful in disciplining children more effectively.

Additionally, according to the California Department of Education (2011), teachers should be "...aware of how a person's values, beliefs, and worldview influence one's perceptions of the values, beliefs, and worldview of others," (p.21). Training oneself to take on a non-judgmental approach through mindfulness could have major implications in communicating and building relationships with families. Multiple perspectives and cultural expectations exist around child rearing practices, and providing what is in the best interest of children. Using workshops such as the one developed for this thesis project could help develop an understanding that parents and teachers will inevitably have different ideas about children. Shifting away from the idea that there is a right or wrong way of developing young minds by taking a non-judgmental approach could open up the channels of communication between the home, school, and community at large.

Furthermore, if mindfulness meditation became a popular topic of discourse in the community of early childhood professionals, and the culture of the field shifted to non-judgmental acceptance of all people, what might happen to staff relations? Perhaps staff conflicts could be resolved more quickly. Additionally, avoiding judgment, and instead taking an approach of acceptance might facilitate problem-solving, increase resourcefulness, and promote larger scale thinking.

Developing focus. A major aspect of mindfulness meditation is the constant focusing, losing focus, realizing the loss of focus, accepting it without judgment, and then refocusing (Nhat-Hanh, 1975). How might having mindful teachers be especially beneficial to those children specifically diagnosed with Sensory Processing Disorder? Could teachers develop a deeper understanding of how these children experience their day to day routines simply by focusing their awareness to physical sensations they were experiencing?

During the group discussion portion of the presentation, one participant mentioned how difficult it had become for her to focus on her breath when all she could hear was the ticking of the clock, a clock which she had never heard during class in the weeks prior. Could her new awareness help her better relate to a child that might be experiencing similar difficulties blocking out certain sensations? How might she change the classroom environment to better meet the needs of that child? Finally, how might she introduce the child to mindfulness practice to regulate his/her own focus?

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis project provided graduate students in early childhood education with an opportunity to learn about mindfulness. The literature reviewed (Lutz et al., 2008; Arch & Craske, 2006; Coatsworth et al., 2009; Taylor et al., 2015; Flook et al., 2015) was fully integrated into the development of the workshop presented. Based on the results of the feedback from the post-presentation evaluation, the presentation was well received, and very useful to the participants. The possible implications and significance of teaching mindfulness to teachers could make a valuable difference in a world where frustration is inevitable. Having a resource, such as mindfulness practice, to

experience the day to day moments of a teacher's work seems to add genuine benefits for teachers, families, and children. Additionally, as reported by participants in the pre-presentation questionnaire, only 12% rated their level of awareness on the topic of mindfulness at a level 4 or 5. This indicated that most participants were not aware of the benefits of mindfulness, and were not using it in their classrooms. What would the world be like if our teachers were taught mindfulness, and we all learned to take a few focused breaths early on while we were still in preschool?

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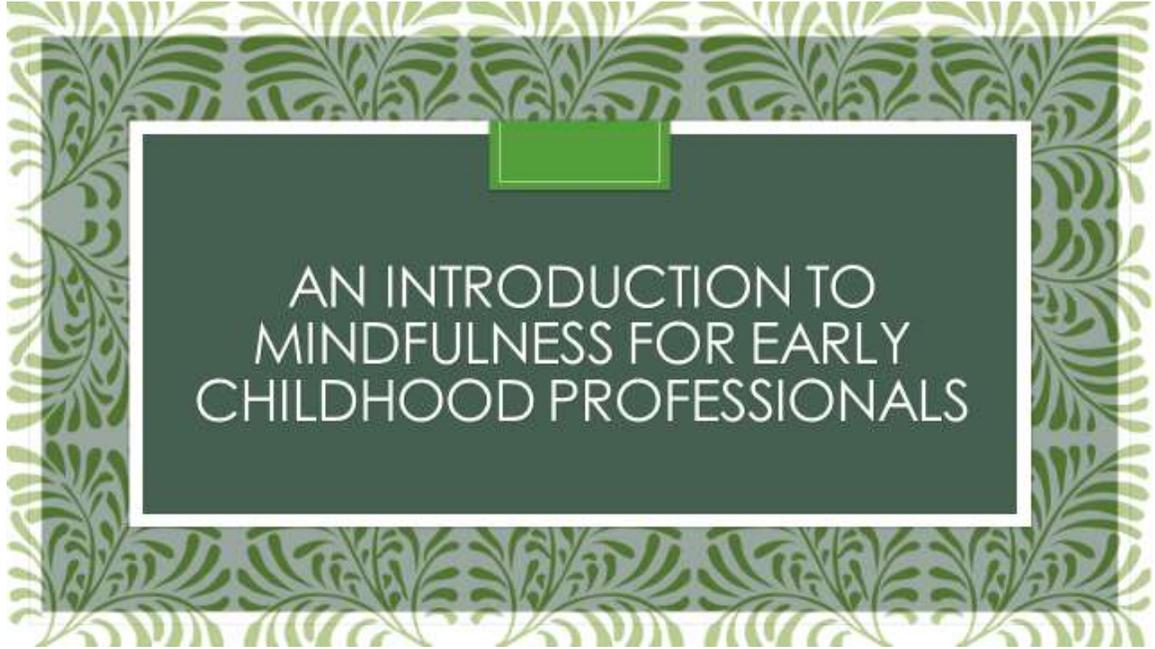
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Wavecrest Films. (2015). Just Breathe. Available from:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVA2N6tX2cg>Appendix A: Power Point

Appendix A: PowerPoint



Agenda

- Pre-test
- Introduction
- Brain Research
- Theoretical Explanations
- Mindfulness and Parenting
- Mindfulness and Teaching
- Becoming more Competent Through Mindfulness
- Mindfulness and Children
- Discussion/Questions/Comments
- Post-test

Self-Intro

Image extracted for
copyright purposes

- Who am I?
- What am I doing here?
- Where am I from?
- When did I start this journey?
- Why did I decide to research this topic?
- How do I hope to involve you?

What is Mindfulness?

"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally."

(Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

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copyright purposes

Where Does Mindfulness Come From?

Hi You, I am Yourself. It's Nice to Meet Me.

• <https://JonKabatZinn.com/Attunement>

Video removed for
copyright purposes

WHAT DOES MINDFULNESS LOOK LIKE? GLITTER BALL ACTIVITY

Image extracted for
copyright purposes

The Effects of Mindfulness on the Brain

Image extracted for
copyright purposes

- Mindfulness is associated with changes in the brain related to involuntary functioning, expressing emotions, and solving problems.

Explaining these Changes through Developmental Theory: Psychoanalysis

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copyright purposes

Preconscious, conscious, subconscious + "meta-conscious"

During mindfulness practice, the meditator becomes conscious of his/her consciousness and exercises control over the ego thereby weakening impulsive behaviors, and seeking out more appropriate methods of dealing with situations.

Thomas, (2005)

Explaining these Changes through Developmental Theory: Bioelectrochemical model

Humans are bioelectrochemical
entities.

Physiological changes during the
heightened activation of certain
organic functions (i.e. breathing)
might cause chemical reactions
resulting in psychological changes.

Thomas, (2005)

Image extracted for
copyright purposes

Explaining these Changes through Developmental Theory: Constructivism

In a Piagetian
Way... it's
about
Organization
and
Adaptation

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Attachment Theory and Mindfulness

Getting Attuned

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copyright purposes

Image extracted for
copyright purposes

A child's attachment style depends on the synchrony and bond between the child and his/her caregivers.

Mindfulness and Parenting

- According to the results from Coatsworth et. Al., (2009) practicing mindfulness could result in better parenting.

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Mindful vs. Mind Full Parenting

Mindful

Image extracted for
copyright purposes

Mind full?

Image extracted for
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"Whether children's development is supported or compromised by their participation in early childhood programs is determined in large part by the quality of their social-emotional experiences in those settings, including their relationships with adults and peers." (CDE, 2011, p.29)

Mindfulness and Teaching

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- Taylor et Al., (2015) suggested that offering public school teachers a mindfulness-based intervention might help reduce their stress levels.

Mindful vs. Mind Full Teaching

Mindful

Image extracted for
copyright purposes

Mind full?

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copyright purposes

Small Group Discussion:

Connecting Mindfulness to
the California Department of
Education

How can we
use
mindfulness
practices to
become
more
competent
professionals
in the field of
early
childhood
education?

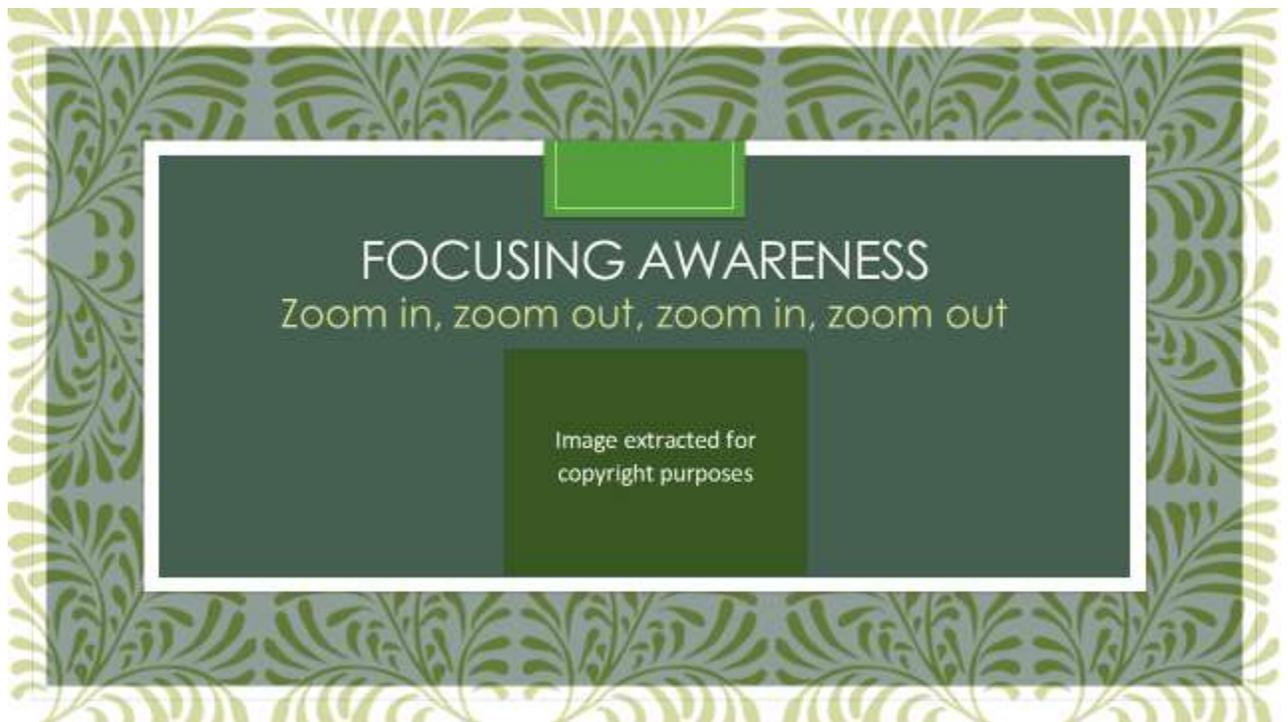
How might mindfulness improve your understanding and assessment of child development and learning?

ROCK EXERCISE

The way you look determines what you see

Image extracted for
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How might mindfulness help build community and foster your relationships with families? How might you use these relationships to set up learning environments and curriculum plans?



How might mindfulness be useful for administrators and other positions of leadership?

ICE CUBE EXERCISE
Tolerance

Image extracted for copyright purposes

The slide features a decorative border with a repeating pattern of stylized green leaves on a light background. The central content is on a dark green background. At the top center, there is a small, empty green rectangular box. Below it, the title "ICE CUBE EXERCISE" is written in white, uppercase letters, followed by the word "Tolerance" in a smaller, light green font. On the left side, there is a dark green rectangular box containing the text "Image extracted for copyright purposes" in white.

Mindfulness and Children

Image extracted for
copyright purposes

- Flook, Goldberg, Ringer, and Davidson (2015) suggested that a mindfulness-based kindness curriculum led to improvements in social competence.

What the Children at Mindful Schools Have to Say:

<https://ChildrenSpeakAboutMindfulness>

Video removed for
copyright purposes

Resources

- www.mindfulteachers.org
- UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC) at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior
- Diane Gehart, Ph.D., California State University Northridge Professor of Educational Psychology and Counseling, LMFT
- www.dianegehart.com
- Zoom by Istvan Banyai
- Mind Up Curriculum
- Themindfulnesssummit.com (October 2015)
- Greenland, Susan Kaiser. (2010) *The Mindful Child: how to help your child manage stress and become happier, kinder, and more compassionate.*
- www.mindfulvalley.org

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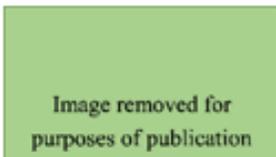
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Appendix B: Handout



TEACHING MINDFULNESS TO YOUNG CHILDREN

Due to joint nature of mindfulness and early childhood education, mindfulness should be treated as an underlying philosophy rather than a series of lesson plans. The activities you choose to engage the children will vary with the needs of the children you serve, and the model of curriculum at your work site.



Be in the moment.



Appendix C: List of Resources

Resources

Banyai, I. (1995). *Zoom*. New York: Viking

Diane Gehart, Ph.D., California State University Northridge Professor of Educational
Psychology and Counseling, LMFT www.dianegehart.com

Greenland, Susan Kaiser. (2010) *The Mindful Child: how to help your child manage stress and
become happier, kinder, and more compassionate.*

Hawn Foundation (2011). *The MindUp* curriculum: Brain-focused strategies for learning-and
living. New York, N.Y.: Scholastic. [Themindfulnesssummit.com](http://themindfulnesssummit.com) (October 2015)
mrsmindfulness.com

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC) at the Semel institute for Neuroscience
and Human Behavior <http://marc.ucla.edu>

www.mindfulteachers.org

www.mindfulvalley.org

4. In the past year, how often, if at all, have you practiced mindfulness?

Never Rarely Monthly Weekly Daily

5. How interested are you in learning about mindfulness today?

Very Somewhat Not sure Who cares?

6. What would you like to learn about mindfulness?

7. How old are you?

Under 21

21-25

26-30

31-35

36-40

41+

8. What is your ethnic background?

9. Do you practice any form of meditation, prayer, yoga, deep breathing, or other spiritual engagement? If so, which forms and how often?

10. How many years of experience do you have working with young children, and in what capacity?

|

Appendix E: Post Presentation Evaluation

Evaluation of Mindfulness Workshop

1. Please define mindfulness.

2. For the following questions, please rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest, and 5 being the highest) on the following measures by circling the corresponding number:

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. Your level of interest in learning about mindfulness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B. Your awareness on the topic of mindfulness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| C. Your current stress level | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3. What are the three most valuable things you learned from this workshop? Why?

4. How useful was the information presented in the workshop? (circle one and please explain your answer)

Not useful ~~Somewhat~~ useful ~~Useful~~ Very Useful Extremely Useful

- c. For my work with families (Describe the families and how mindfulness might be useful, describe scenarios)

- d. For my work with colleagues (please describe how, who, when, where, etc.)

- e. For my work with my CSUN ECE cohort (please be specific)

- f. Other (please specify your reasons)

11. What would you tell other early childhood educators about this workshop?

After completing number 11, please turn this set of questions in, and pick up the PowerPoint slides to answer question 12.

12. Rate the following slides for helpfulness in understanding mindfulness. 5 – extremely helpful; 4 – helpful; 3- somewhat helpful; 2 – limited in helpfulness; 1 – cut it!

Please annotate your responses. In other words, if you think a slide (and the narrative and/or activity that accompanied it) was excellent, tell why such as, “linking this to brain research makes it more grounded in hard science – 5” or “3 – I think parents should be more mindful but how can teachers get them to realize this? Make this more related to early childhood educators”



Images of slides removed for purposes of publication.

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix F: The Three Most Valuable Things Participants Learned

The Three Most Valuable things Participants learned from the Workshop

Participant 1:

- 1) Breathing and its importance.
- 2) Be in the moment.
- 3) Consideration and understanding"

Participant 2:

I learned that we can destress with daily activities if we are mindful. Children can be a part of daily routines with parents, and breathing is important when being mindful.

Participant 3:

- 1) How to apply mindfulness in ECE with all stakeholders
- 2) Importance of mindfulness and its effect on children's performance and development.
- 3) Mindful practices enhance parenting, teaching, and being in tune with oneself.

Participant 4:

Be non-judgmental because it will help me be a better teacher. Assess students using mindfulness because now I can accurately observe and indicate where my students are academically. Be present because we become so busy with life and we forget the importance of it.

Participant 5:

That mindfulness can be more than a stress reliever. That being mindful can affect your biological, social, and psychological well-being.

Participant 6:

I learned the concept of mindfulness complete with a definition. I learned how to incorporate it in my life and as a future educator this was very valuable given the level of stress I have been facing recently. Having a new way to possibly deal with it can be beneficial.

Participant 7:

- 1) How to teach mindfulness to children
- 2) How to be more mindful in discussion with peers, parents, community
- 3) How to be more present as a parent myself.

Participant 8:

How mindfulness can be brought into the classroom in many levels. Future resources.

Participant 9:

Applications of mindfulness seem to go across the developmental domains as well as topics and issues in ECE. For example, mindfulness might improve the quality of

attachment. Mindfulness seems to have powerful correlates with social-emotional learning and with theory of mind. (I am thinking about sticker example, how children were more willing to share them if they had been exposed to mindfulness). I loved the metaphors like the jar with glitter, the rocks...

Participant 10:

Ability to use breathing to be mindful. Mindfulness exercises lead to better daily focus. Using these techniques for children because if I can be mindful I can better help children be mindful.

Participant 11:

Tips on how to pay attention purposefully, how to view thoughts/stress in a different way (glitter jar), effective breathing techniques, and most of all meditation is how you live your life from moment to moment.

Participant 12:

- 1) Different activities or how to implement mindfulness in the classroom of early childhood education.
- 2) The in depth definition of mindfulness
- 3) How using mindfulness techniques affect the brain.

Participant 13:

I learned that slowing down and taking the time to be in the moment serves myself best and those around me.

Participant 14:

That activities that I can do as a teacher with my children seemed very important. Doing the breathing tools with younger children can be such a great opportunity for children to be present and for a teacher to be in the moment with them mindfully.

Participant 15:

Ideas for teaching toddlers mindfulness. Flower/candle, expanding ball. Brain changes. The amygdala shrinks. Benefits of mindfulness (children more likely to share).

Participant 16:

How to incorporate it into my daily life to be a better me. To incorporate it in my relationships to make them stronger. To incorporate it in my classroom to really become a better teacher.

Participant 17:

I learned how to breathe and how to be mindful and the importance of it. I learned how to introduce the concept to children in my classroom and the benefits it will have with friends and family.]

Participant 18:

Mindfulness as a guiding resource/tool for involving families, communities for implementing mindful programs.

Participant 19:

- 1) Zoom in and zoom out is important
- 2) Breathing helps.
- 3) Being aware of awareness is important

Participant 20:

Taking the time to breathe and take care of yourself. Having a balance between the right and left side of brain to live and work in harmonious way that occurs when you are being mindful. Paying attention to being responsive.

Participant 21:

Non-judgmental. Remain in moment. Breathe/take time to calm down. Helps me to understand others to give them time to think too.

Participant 22:

Techniques and applications of mindfulness in the classroom; exercises that could be used with children: glitter jar, breathing exercise (flower/candle or using Hoberman ball), "rock exercise", "Ice cube" exercise, picture examples.

Appendix G: Suggestions for Improvement

Participant 1:

More examples of using mindfulness in stressful relationship situations.

Participant 2:

Just the flow of the PowerPoint. Being prepared for tech issues. Overall the entire presentation was really great. I'm inspired and I can't wait to apply this with my class.

Participant 3:

Small details: For example, she could have written all the discussion questions on the same slide so all three groups can look at the questions while discussing.

Participant 4:

Brain slide = confusing.

Participant 5:

The flow of the presentation. You know your stuff.

Participant 6:

Some graphics were a little hard to see but not a big problem to worry about!

Participant 7:

Participant left no feedback.

Participant 8:

Video at the beginning (a monologue of a Richard Gere-looking guy) was very confusing and boring: slides could be "dressed-up" with more colors, shapes, videograms, etc.

Participant 9:

Don't say, "you guys" use another word.

Participant 10:

The time management of the presentation. Allowing more time for discussion and conversation.

Participant 11:

I thought it was great! But perhaps time management. Also this an AWESOME topic that viewers can truly engage with → Own it, be confident! ☺

Participant 12:

Oral presentation, the more rehearsed the less nervous you will become. Clearly you know the topic, trust yourself.

Participant 13:

You could talk more slowly.

Participant 14:

The first video of Jon Kabat Zinn can be swapped for something even more effective.

Participant 15:

Speak louder and more clearly. Check videos beforehand.

Participant 16:

The flow could be improved maybe. I think there were too many distractions (but not the presenters fault).

Participant 17:

More information on the slides and better pictures of sample specific topic (i.e. teacher mindful & mind full).

Participant 18:

Mindfulness as a guiding resource/tool for involving families, communities for implementing mindful programs.

Participant 19:

The section/explanations on the brain.

Participant 20:

The explanation of the physiological effect of mindfulness (Brain Structures and functions)

Participant 21:

The time management and monotone.

Participant 22:

You were a little nervous, but it's okay. Use more examples; it helps us relate. Reread and make sure you know what you'll say (be confident).

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