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Mindfulness as an Emotional Well-Being Tool For Beginning Teachers

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MINDFULNESS AS AN EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING TOOL FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS

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Abstract

Today's early educators are responsible for providing a stimulating learning environment to facilitate student academic outcomes, in addition to providing a positive emotional climate to support student social-emotional functioning. Early childhood educators engage with various physical and emotional stressors throughout the workday (e.g., disruptive behaviors, standardized assessment), and to be effective, they must be able to cope with their own emotional reactivity. Teacher experiences of work stress may lead to decreased performance, burnout, and poor student outcomes, creating serious concerns for the education environment. One transferable strategy to help teachers' emotional well-being is mindfulness self-care (e.g., breathing practices), which can serve as a protector factor, improve emotional well-being, and support self-efficacy. The findings from this single holistic case study explore the emotional well-being of five early childhood beginning teachers engaging with self-selected mindfulness practices for eight-weeks during the transition from pre-service to first-year teaching. The data analysis from this study reveals four major themes, reflecting how the beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession. Two relevant theme categories are physical activities and reflective practices for emotional well-being, which participants use to mindfully pause, reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being. The findings of this study are promising and provide preliminary insight into mindfulness practices and emotional well-being perspectives of the beginning teaching experience.

Dedication

I dedicate this to my mom, Joan. Her two-year battle with stage four ovarian cancer was a seminal time in my life. Among other emotions and points of growth, I recognized life is too short and we are not guaranteed a long life. So, in 2019, I applied for the Ph.D. program to pursue a dormant dream I had for years. On August 18, 2019, she passed at the age of sixty-three. Poignantly, the day of her funeral coincided with my first day of classes at Clemson in the Fall of 2019. It would have been a blessing to have had her cheering me on these past four years, in-person, especially at graduation. She was always a pillar of love and an unending source of unconditional support. She is greatly missed, but still felt, deeply, in spirit.

I thank you, momma, for instilling in me the confidence to follow the desires of my heart. You were always such a beautiful example of how to help others with authentic compassion. I would not be where I am today without your love, support, and guidance. *This is for you.*

Acknowledgments

First, I extend my most heartfelt gratitude to Sandy, my committee chair. I remember meeting her when I first explored the idea of attending Clemson. I sat on the couch in her office talking, laughing, and admittedly crying, but the good kind of crying. I believe that is how all of the subsequent conversations with Sandy have gone over the last four years—laughing, talking, and me crying, at least once. She has been an irreplaceable source of support. She has the perfect blend of approachability and professionalism. She is always working for my good, especially behind the scenes. I will never cease in my gratitude for you, Sandy—Thank you!

Second, I extend a very special thank you to my committee members. Koti has been such a bright light of support for me. I thank you for your generous, kind spirit. Jill has been such an advocate for me and helped me see things from other angles. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and ideas in such a caring way. And Angie, thank you for serving on my committee, especially when you did not have to say yes. I am beyond thankful for your expertise and support outside the Clemson perspective. You have been invaluable to my journey.

Third, I wish to thank my family, friends, and co-workers. Thank you for listening, even when it did not make sense and hanging in there when I had to re-explain what a “proposal” meant. As you know, I’ve had to say ‘no’ to doing a few things with you all over the last four years, so I thank you for seeing me through this time and loving me. Your support has been what I leaned so often. I cannot put words to how much it all means. I love each of you!

Lastly, I cannot complete my acknowledgments without saying a special thank you to my dog, Bogart. He has been my lightkeeper and helper, reminding me to *be* in the present moment. He has been a tender source of love and playfulness that I could not have done without these last four years, either.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Teacher education programs prepare pre-service teachers (PST) for the technical aspects of teaching; however, very little of the education curriculum focuses explicitly on the well-being and self-care of an in-service teacher (Harris, Jennings, Katz, Abenavoli & Greenberg, 2016). As such, college teacher preparation programs must thoroughly prepare PST for their careers (Day & Qing, 2009). However, education programs cannot fully predict all the potential variables of the PSTs' future classrooms. Therefore, it may be helpful to explore well-being techniques as a way to support the emotional well-being of beginning teachers (BT) during the transitional period at the start of their careers. Emotional well-being techniques (EWB), such as mindfulness, may empower them to face any future obstacle with transferable well-being skills (Hirshberg, Flook, Enright & Davidson, 2020). Without these transferrable well-being skills, BT could launch into their careers with an incomplete toolbox. As such, teacher education programs are in a prime position to assist with this specific need.

To shine a light on some of the well-being concerns of the modern teacher, according to a recent National Education Association (NEA) survey conducted in early 2022, 90% of 3,621 participating teachers report their own feelings of burnout as a serious issue (Jotkoff, 2022). Eighty-six percent note more teachers are leaving the profession or retiring early due to the build-up of emotional job-related strain (Jotkoff, 2022). Fifty-five percent of teachers surveyed say they are considering leaving the profession earlier than planned (Jotkoff, 2022).

Overwhelmingly, 94% of the teachers surveyed support providing more mental health care for students (Jotkoff, 2022). The education system, including teacher preparation programs and school systems, can benefit from noting and acting on these staggering self-reported

concerns from teachers regarding their own and their students' well-being.

Additionally, it is prudent to recognize the world is inescapably and drastically changing, such as assessment, technology, post-pandemic concerns, school safety concerns, and focus on mental-emotional well-being. To mirror these dynamic changes and to provide emotional well-being support, the modern learning environment needs to adapt quickly to include intentional well-being interventions for all levels of teachers and students. One avenue of positive emotional well-being intervention is mindfulness techniques (Napoli, 2004). Mindfulness for teachers can support self-efficacy, emotional awareness, and emotional well-being (Hirshberg et al., 2020; Napoli, 2004) and reduce teacher stress, teacher job burnout, and teacher exodus (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenberg, Harris & Katz, 2013; Roeser, Skinner, Beers & Jennings, 2012; Whitebook, McLean, Austin & Edwards, 2018). Mindfulness strategies for teachers can serve as a protective factor and improve well-being (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2012). In these unprecedented times, teachers, students, and the education system can benefit from novel, innovative well-being support from the bottom to the top.

Along with the recent increased awareness of supporting children's mental health, specific to early education (i.e., birth to age eight), early childhood educator (ECE) roles have steadily expanded, over the years, to include much more than 'play' (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In addition to teaching content, they serve as a vital social and emotional element of children's growth by providing developmental support. The role of ECE includes promoting emotionally responsive interactions with young children, encouraging positive social engagements with their peers, and contributing to the child's overall well-being and development (Flook et al., 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). To perform effectively, ECEs must cope appropriately with their own emotional reactivity to student

behaviors and a variety of other physical and psychological stressors (Day & Qing, 2009). ECE experiences of work stress may lead to decreased performance, burnout, and poor student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Many researchers agree more research is needed to explore these dynamic role changes and expectations for ECEs, along with the impact of higher levels of teacher burnout in connection with student experiences, including academic and well-being (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hirshberg et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2012). Awareness and action are necessary to focus on the well-being of ECEs and their students, along with the potential impacts such as teacher burnout, teacher retention, and student academic outcomes.

The increased awareness for teacher well-being creates a research opportunity to explore how early childhood educators (ECE) do not often provide the same level of emotional care and attention to themselves that they offer to the young children in their classrooms (Whitebook, Phillips & Howes, 2014). The limited emotional self-care is especially significant considering how frequently teachers encounter professional challenges, which can negatively impact their own well-being and lead to teacher turnover and burnout (Whitebook et al., 2014; Whitebook, McLean, Austin & Edwards, 2018). ECEs report their own emotional challenges related to their ability to cope with student misbehavior (Whitebook et al., 2018). Student misbehavior is viewed as an increasing source of personal and job-related stress (Whitebook et al., 2018), which can be part of exploring teachers' emotional well-being through self-care.

One avenue of self-care for ECE emotional well-being is mindfulness. These skills can help teachers cope with their own emotional management and engage more effectively in their classroom (Napoli, 2004). However, ECE emotional well-being is an area of limited research, specific to mindfulness self-care and the emotional well-being of early childhood professionals

new to the career. The awareness for more research marshals the need for this present study to explore the emotional well-being of beginning teachers (BT) and the role of mindfulness practices to focus on comprehensive emotional and academic preparation of BT, including PST curriculum and in-service support.

Mindfulness Practices for Teachers

Mindfulness is rooted in long-standing religious practices (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). For the purposes of this study, it is framed using a more contemporary, secular viewpoint. Mindfulness can be broadly described as the presence of mind, receptive attention, and non-judgmental awareness of present events and experiences (Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Napoli explains the "core ingredient in practicing mindfulness is focusing on the breath," which can lead to increased feelings of alertness, focused attention, and connectedness to life (2004, p. 32).

One way for teachers to explore mindfulness practice is through relaxation response techniques, such as mindful breathing. This simple and quick practice can evoke a "relaxation response," a term coined in 1975 by Herbert Benson from Harvard Medical School. The details outlined in his book require only minutes to learn and take less than ten minutes per day to practice and achieve a relaxation response (Benson, 1975). The relaxation response against overstress involves bodily changes (i.e., deep muscle relaxation), which helps to bring the body back to a healthier balance (Benson, 1975). Focusing on the breath is a simple and effective way to achieve concentration, awareness, and relaxation (Napoli, 2004). If teachers practice mindful relaxation, such as mindful breathing, they can better cope and transfer these skills to their students to help them focus and reduce stress (Napoli, 2004).

Conversely, teachers who have yet to develop positive habits of mind are less likely to create an emotionally supportive classroom, which can be a misstep in supporting best practices for student development and learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Research demonstrates incorporating stress-reduction programs, such as teacher and student mindful breathing, into the school curriculum improves students' academic performance, self-esteem, and concentration, and reduces behavior problems (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). A recent research study in 2020 demonstrates how mindfulness practices, targeted with emotional awareness components, reveals improvements in teacher instructional quality (Hirshberg et al., 2020).

Mindfulness may also be a protective factor against stress and burnout, and certain interventions, including contemplative practices, may improve teachers' well-being and reduce stress (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2012). Research outside of education settings shares promising data, suggesting mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) are effective for the treatment of both psychological and physical symptoms (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin & Freedman, 2006).

Mindfulness also encourages individuals to be in the moment, which can help create a sense of harmony alongside the many challenges and stressors teachers face today. Mindfulness, focused on emotional awareness and regulation for teachers, may decrease feelings of psychological distress, alleviate perceptions of time urgency, improve sleep habits, and lower levels of burnout (Crain, Schonert-Reichl, & Roeser, 2017). Mindfulness, in turn, can create positive ripple effects on the teachers' emotional well-being, both personally and professionally (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hirshberg et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2012). Research targeted with teachers suggests mindfulness can serve as a protective factor and improve well-being (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2012).

Filling the Gap between Pre-Service and In-Service Beginning Teachers

Also, it is important to note, as a unique point in time, the transition from pre-service teacher education to the first in-service teaching job is referred to as the "reality shock" (Goddard, O'Brien & Goddard, 2006; Veenman, 1984). To examine this unique period of a beginning teacher's career, Karing and Beelmann (2019) studied 236 pre-service teachers enrolled in various universities and 112 beginning teachers during the first 1-2 years of teaching. They find beginning teachers, when compared to pre-service teachers, report a lower level of mindfulness, increase of emotional distancing, and decrease in feelings of satisfaction. Other researchers find similar results, such as Christ (2004) reports beginning teachers' well-being decreased and emotional exhaustion increased in the first year of teaching (Keller-Schneider, 2018; Klusmann, Kunter, Voss & Baumert, 2012).

Moreover, beginning teachers' success can be related to situational indicators, such as appropriateness of school fit and adequate teacher education; however, this success is also related to personal characteristics in connection with handling the demands of the new career (Klusmann et al., 2012). Other researchers find beginning teachers' negative emotional states can have a negative effect on their classroom practices, which also extends to their students' motivation and achievement; alternatively, positive teachers' well-being can be positively associated with student achievement (Arens & Morin, 2016; Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Recently, in 2019, Karing and Beelmann find a possible positive, direct connection with emotional exhaustion using mindfulness strategies for both pre-service and in-service beginning teachers. Thus, it can be ideal for teacher preparation programs and beginning teacher induction programs to support well-being and assist in reducing emotional exhaustion to benefit teachers, their classrooms, and students.

Personal Statement

I grew up attending church; however, years ago, I stopped going because I felt it became less and less congruent with my core belief system. As an adult, I prefer to experience a spiritual connection with life and other people in various ways, not just through the lens of church. Since childhood, I have always felt, and still feel, there is a loving, omnipotent higher power. Today, I trust I am supported by a bigger, spiritual world fueled by love and goodness. I believe in empowering yourself, doing good for others, and making meaning from your life. I believe love is the best thing we can do as humans. It impacts the life you live today and beyond the boundaries of your life. Years ago, I discovered and started implementing mindfulness practices in my daily life. Anecdotally speaking, I feel it has helped me be a better human for myself and others. My experience includes feelings of less anxiety and more positive emotional well-being. I feel this experience with mindfulness is not a unique-to-me outcome. I feel mindfulness practices can be helpful to anyone. I feel mindfulness and the benefits can be accessible to everyone--only requiring practice and consistency. To me, mindfulness is simple and quick, yet has a lasting impact.

Through my commitment to making it a helpful habit, mindfulness has become a daily practice that is second nature to me. I can implement techniques with ease—not requiring a lot of time or "efforting." Although making mindfulness a quick and simple habit was not how it started for me—it took time. Mindfulness requires practice and dedication. I also recognize my mindful habits as a personal, emotional commitment for me. Early on, and continually, I experienced positive emotional results in my mindfulness practices and have consciously decided that mindfulness was worth my time.

My Professional Experience and Belief System

Since I was a child, I knew I wanted to be a teacher of young children. I attended a small, all women's college in North Carolina. After receiving undergraduate degree, I attended and received my graduate degree. After my masters program, I went on to teach in a public-school setting. The college curriculum did a fantastic job preparing me for teaching; however, in my classroom that first year, I did not feel prepared for the extreme behavior and emotional issues of some children's' home lives that also emerged in the classroom.

For context, my first-year teaching was a melting pot of emotional instability for many children in the classroom. Although unique in details, I know my first-year teaching experience is not a rarity within early education. As a beginning teacher, I felt very prepared to teach academics, but I did not feel prepared to manage the emotional weight of the early childhood teaching experience. Even though I had the standardized beginning teacher support from the school district and a teacher mentor right next door, I felt alone. It felt as though it were all up to me. In reflection, I experienced some tremendous and vastly beneficial personal and professional growth that year. I was able to convey meaning and growth from the emotional experience of my first year of teaching. I still carry this profound experience with me today, personally and professionally.

During my years teaching young children, the trend of children's emotional instability was a recurring theme. It became abundantly clear children's well-being and social-emotional needs were a necessary first step before academics. During my first year of teaching, Conscious Discipline training was a turning point for me. This training explored details related to the emotional states of the brain and the connection with the well-being of children. However, the teacher's mindset and emotional states were the key takeaway to supporting children's well-

being. The training was revolutionary for the well-being of my classroom and my emotional well-being. I received the Conscious Discipline training after graduating from my PST program in college. I wish I had received something like the Conscious Discipline training during my pre-service coursework before I was a first-year teacher. I believe receiving this type of information would have been extremely helpful in preparing me for the emotional requirements of being an ECE.

While still teaching in the early childhood setting, I began teaching courses part-time for a community college in North Carolina. This experience taught me that I loved teaching young children and adult-learners. Years later, when I moved to a different state, I began working as a full-time faculty member in an early education department at a two-year college. For several years, I have observed the need to offer these college students more emotional support over academic support, especially during the final semesters of PST coursework and practicum settings. The idea of students needing more emotional over academic support became yet another recurring theme in my career. I recognize my past experiences create more sensitivity and awareness of these needs.

Awareness of Potential Biases and Limitations

Both in my personal and professional life, I use mindfulness techniques. I am aware my personal and professional experience may potentially bias my perception and expectations within my research. Some potential biases can include perceptions and personal expectations of mindfulness with teachers. However, I also believe my experience can be beneficial, allowing me to understand and interpret teachers' experiences with mindfulness more readily.

Subjectivity Statement

Through previous in-service work as an early childhood educator (ECE) in the public-school system and my current work in higher education as a professor of early childhood, I have repeatedly noted a sizable gap within the PST curriculum. This missing component goes beyond the typical emphasis on academics, including PST's emotional well-being and self-care. For several years, through my work in ECE college courses, I have observed the need to offer more emotional well-being support over academic support to the PST.

To help with this need, I have used various mindfulness-based techniques to encourage emotional management and increase PST confidence. Specific techniques include mindful breathing exercises, movement exercises such as dance and qi gong, moment of silence with a gratitude reflection prompt, self and peer verbal affirmations, self and peer non-verbal affirmation exercises, meditative visualization exercises, and mood interrupter activities, such as physical movement and humor videos-jokes.

Through my personal experience using these self-care mindful activities, I have anecdotally observed this type of non-academic support as beneficial in decreasing negative PST self-perceptions, encouraging a strong bond between individuals in the classroom, creating an inviting, warm classroom environment, increasing PST confidence and encouraging PST self-empowerment. I have also observed how this confidence transfers into their interactions with young children in practicum settings. Many pre-service teachers, in turn, use the same mindfulness techniques they experienced as PSTs with young children in their career classrooms as BTs. However, up to this point, I have not conducted any formalized research related to teacher well-being and mindfulness engagements.

Therefore, my motivation for conducting research is to understand the emotional experience of teaching beyond my personal experiences with PSTs. Overall, I seek to understand the emotional component, specifically the emotional well-being and mindfulness self-care practices during the teaching experience from pre-service to first-year, and how they can be supported during this unique transitional time. I feel our emotions, experiences, and perceptions shape us and guide our decisions. I believe this connection is important to note because teachers are interfacing with a diverse range of people and are required to make impactful decisions throughout their workday, which can create unseen and unaddressed emotional ripples—both personally and professionally. Additionally, I believe teacher preparation college programs are primed to offer this type of emotional support to PSTs while in a transition period in their lives, specifically from pre-service to beginning teaching. I believe more research in this area would help shine a light on the emotional experience and needs of PST and BT. This type of research could help support curriculum changes for PST and in-service support for beginning teachers.

Research Interest

My interest in conducting research is to understand and provide a voice for beginning teacher well-being. I genuinely enjoy exploring facts and reasons behind things, but I am more deeply connected with the emotions of life. I feel our emotions, experiences, and perceptions shape us. In teacher education programs, there needs to be more curriculum focused on preparing PST and BT for the non-academic components of teaching, including managing personal stress, managing classroom behavior, and other job stressors. I seek to explore and understand one avenue of the non-academic side of the PST curriculum and BT emotional experiences using mindfulness practices, such as positive affirmation techniques, breathing practices, etc.

The intention of my research is to inform future research beyond my dissertation. I want to explore practical well-being strategies for teachers, specficially for PST and BT, and understand the emotional components of the beginning teaching experience. Professionally, I recognize the need to help PST prepare for the emotional side of teaching while giving them practical, transferable life skills which can be used in personal and professional contexts. I feel teacher emotional well-being should be part of the early education curriculum in colleges. The role of the curriculum and the role of the teaching faculty needs to include authentic experiences and emotional connections for beginning teachers. The world is changing, and the college curriculum needs to adapt to include more than just academic components. It should encompass of the whole person—academics and emotions, personal and professional. If we are asking PST and BT to educate the whole child, then we, as college educators, should also be demonstrating and actively exploring this holistic perspective.

As a result, my research focus is on the emotional experience of beginning teachers. My research interest seeks to observe and understand the emotional experiences of beginning teachers, including the connection with mindfulness self-care. This research study could provide insight into the potential benefits of emphasizing well-being mindfulness within the early childhood PST curriculum. Which, in turn, could help better prepare the future teaching workforce with a more complete toolbox, including a transferable skill set for their well-being and the emotional enrichment of their students in their classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivist Paradigm

Constructivism is a common epistemology used within education and research. It is considered a learning or meaning-making theory, which offers an explanation of the nature of

knowledge and how human beings learn (Ültanir, 2012). A common principle of constructivist theory is the learner does not find knowledge; instead, knowledge and understanding are constructed (Boghossian, 2006). Depending on perspective, the meaning of constructivism varies. Broadly defined, constructivism requires active engagement of the learner in making meaning within the development of understanding. Constructivists take on an approach of daily life observation (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). According to the constructivist approach, true understanding can only be constructed based on an individual's previous experiences and background knowledge. The individual constructs new knowledge through the interaction between established beliefs and newly engaged ideas, events, and activities (Ültanir, 2012). Knowledge is self-constructed from the meanings one attributes to one's environment. In this way, individuals benefit from previous experiences when resolving problems (Ültanir, 2012).

Mindfulness-to-Meaning Theory

Mindfulness-to-Meaning Theory (MMT) expands on the previous theories of well-being through mindfulness by focusing on the processes of attention, appraisal, and emotion (Garland, Farb, Goldin & Fredrickson, 2015). MMT has two key hypotheses: Mindful reappraisal and mindful savoring. The mindful reappraisal generates meaning by promoting reappraisal, for example, assessing an event or situation in a new or different way. Mindful savoring generates meaning by promoting savoring, including appreciation of the positive aspects. In this way, MMT asserts mindfulness as a eudaimonic, intrinsically motivated connection to life satisfaction (Garland et al., 2015). Life satisfaction is a well-researched key indicator for well-being (Diener, Oishi & Tay, 2018).

Reappraisal

Beyond the boundaries of mindfulness, reappraisal is key to many contemporary theories of emotional regulation. One foundational example is the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This theory identifies the stress experience as one of cognitive mediation, which is a type of mental negotiation, and hypothesizes reappraisal as the most powerful mechanism for transformative emotional experiences (Gross & Thompson, 2007). The process for this emotional transformation can be categorized as either a threat appraisal or a positive appraisal. The threat appraisal begins when an individual first appraises the significance of a stressor within the context of the situation and then reacts using available resources based on the context of the original appraisal. This type of appraisal is often automatic, includes negative emotions, and can pose a threat to the individual's well-being and goal fulfillment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A positive appraisal can also be initially appraised as negative; however, the individual can reappraise the experience as harmless, controllable or negotiable--often resulting in positive emotions and feelings of self-efficacy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Lazarus & Folkman, this positive cognitive strategy (i.e., reappraisal) allows the individual to process and reconstruct stressful events as harmless, meaningful and even productive for personal growth (1984).

MMT and Reappraisal

Building on previous reappraisal research, Garland et al. propose MMT as a lens on how individuals proactively construct eudaimonic meaning in their lives, using mindfulness as a way to promote resiliency and engagement with a life that feels purposeful and valuable (2015). MMT proposes mindful reappraisal is accomplished by modifying how one attends to the "cognitive, affective, and interoceptive" of emotion (Garland et al., 2015, p. 295). According to

MMT, mindfulness contributes to positive cognitive-affective processing through cognitive reappraisal, which, in turn, enhances an individual's well-being (Garland et al., 2015). MMT hypothesizes mindfulness reshapes how an individual evaluates their experiences to engage in habitual, positive self-reappraisals, which encourages the individual to reframe a failure as a pathway for growth (Garland et al., 2015). MMT describes the growth process of metacognitive self-reappraisals to further strengthen the individual's ability to regulate negative experiences while appreciating positive experiences, facilitating life satisfaction and positive well-being (Garland et al., 2015).

According to MMT, mindfulness can facilitate stress coping through reappraisal, promoting fluid adaptation, reconstruction, and transferability of an individual's views of themselves and others (Garland et al., 2015). Mindfulness provides the flexibility of personally constructed meaning (e.g., openness to different viewpoints), encourages the individual's natural capacity to reappraise negative experiences positively, and fosters an appreciation for the positive aspects (i.e., savoring), which in turn enhances the individual's "natural reward processing" abilities (Garland et al., 2015, p. 295). This process of mindfulness reconstruction enables flexible cognitive reorganization, which creates adaptation and effective goal pursuit for the individual (Garland et al., 2015).

MMT Savoring and Eudaimonic Well-being

Moreover, according to MMT, mindfulness moves beyond reducing and alleviating negative emotions and can promote happiness and well-being by cultivating positive mental states (Brown & Ryan, 2003). MMT hypothesizes mindfulness as a means of positive state cultivation through both reappraisal and savoring (2015). Savoring is noted as one of the most powerful means of amplifying positive emotion (Quoidback, Berry, Hansenne & Mikolajczak,

2010). Savoring, through selective positive attending, is a form of positive emotional regulation, which is predictive of increased life satisfaction (Cavanagh, Urry & Shin, 2011). Savoring involves attending to the obvious and subtle aspects of an experience, broadening the range of emotions gained from an experience (Bryant, Chadwick & Kluwe, 2011). Savoring involves both metacognition and self-reflection of the pleasurable components and positive emotions of an experience (Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007). Savoring is viewed as complementary to mindfulness by attending to the positive emotions from an experience. Through mindful savoring, an individual can deepen and enrich their appreciation of an experience. By savoring the positive aspects of experiences, mindfulness may generate deep eudaimonic meanings for an individual, promoting resiliency and engagement with a valued and purposeful life (Garland et al., 2015).

Furthermore, MMT suggests the positive well-being-enhancing effects of savoring prioritizes eudaimonic goals over hedonic, which is a type of pleasure-seeking gratification. MMT explains eudaimonic goals are especially important for positive changes in feelings of life satisfaction (Garland et al., 2015). Garland and colleagues (2010) describe this shift as an upward spiral of resiliency and flourishing. This upward spiral process begins with hedonic (i.e., pleasure-seeking) adaptation to minimize the emotional impact of negative experiences. Then, with savoring, there is a shift in focus to eudaimonic goals, which seem to be vital in establishing "a sustainable, positive trajectory of well-being" (Garland, 2015, p. 296). The theory suggests this shift is much more than just sugarcoated positive thinking or wishful denial. Instead, the process is viewed as reframing stressful events with deeper intrinsic meaning, personal growth and development of resiliency (Garland et al., 2015). The theory additionally clarifies the opposing lens of suppression, which evokes avoidant coping strategies. Whereas positive

reappraisal and savoring create a dynamic step toward active restructuring and re-engagement with the negative experience (Garland et al., 2015).

Using this framework, within the context of this study, provides a structure on how individuals perceive experiences from subjective viewpoints, including how they process, approach, and reflect on experiences through their emotions using mindfulness. To observe individual perceptions and processes, MMT allows for a variety of methods and practices of mindfulness (Garland et al., 2017). This theory provides a hypothesized process for mindfulness and personal meaning, using reappraisal and savoring. Furthermore, this theory suggests mindfulness can cultivate and amplify positive changes and promote well-being by prioritizing sustainable, eudaimonic goals (Garland et al., 2015). MMT provides a process of emotional regulation strategies which can emerge from various types of mindfulness practices (Garland et al., 2017). MMT emphasizes mindfulness as a way to broaden awareness, include previously unattended sensory information, and integrate and adapt thoughts and decisions (i.e., reappraisals). Through the growth process of reappraisals and savoring, individuals can create a sense of meaning, along with sustainable positive emotions and well-being (Garland et al., 2015).

Research Question

This study aims to explore the emotional well-being of beginning teachers and the role of mindfulness practices as a way to focus on the comprehensive preparation of beginning teachers, including the PST curriculum and in-service support. This study will explore the research question: How do beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession?

Using constructivism as the overall theoretical paradigm, the participants will be making

meaning of their understanding, which can only be constructed from their previous experiences and background knowledge, while interacting with newly engaged ideas, events, and activities (Ültanir, 2012). Within the context of this study, participants are able to construct new understandings by using their previous experiences and knowledge of mindfulness during their pre-service coursework, along with new experiences as a beginning teacher. Lastly, according to constructivism, when problems arise, such as feelings of stress during the beginning teacher experience, individuals benefit from the previous experiences and knowledge using mindfulness (Ültanir, 2012).

Building from the constructivist paradigm, the Mindfulness-to-Meaning Theory (MMT) provides a specific structure on how participants perceive experiences from subjective viewpoints, including how they process, approach, and reflect on experiences through their emotions using mindfulness (Garland et al., 2017). Within the context of this study, MMT provides a hypothesized process for mindfulness and personal meaning, using reappraisal and savoring. MMT emphasizes mindfulness as a way to broaden awareness, to include previously unattended sensory information, as a way to integrate and adapt thoughts and decisions (i.e., reappraisals). Through the growth process of reappraisals and savoring, participants are able to create a sense of meaning, along with sustainable positive emotions and well-being (Garland et al., 2015).

Both theoretical frameworks provide structure for the meaning-making process of the participants' beginning teacher experience--both in how they construct understanding based on previous experiences and how they process emotions using prior knowledge, reappraisal, and savoring.

Definition of Terms

Pre-service teacher (PST)

Pre-service teacher (PST), within this study, can be defined as the process of preparing to become a teacher while enrolled in a teacher preparation college program (Koellner & Greenblatt, 2018).

Beginning teacher (BT)

Beginning teachers (BT), within this study, can be defined as an individual teaching in a classroom with less than five years of teaching experience.

In-service teacher (IST)

In-service teachers (IST), within this study, can be defined as individuals actively teaching in a classroom with more than five years of teaching experience.

Early childhood educator (ECE)

Early childhood educator (ECE) is defined by the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2022) as an "individual who cares for and promotes the learning, development, and well-being of children birth through age 8 in all early childhood education settings while meeting the qualifications of the profession and having mastery of its specialized knowledge, skills, and competencies." As defined within this study, early childhood educators teach in early childhood classroom settings with children ranging in age from birth to age eight.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is rooted in traditional religious practices (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). However, the definition, for the purposes of this study, is framed using a more contemporary, secular viewpoint. Mindfulness, within this study, can be broadly described as presence of mind, receptive attention, and non-judgmental awareness of present events and experiences (Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Mindfulness self-care techniques

Mindfulness self-care techniques, within this study, incorporate various practices. These can include, but are not limited to, breathing awareness exercises; movement exercises such as dance and qi gong; moment of silence with gratitude reflection prompts; private journaling; self and peer verbal affirmations; self and peer non-verbal affirmations, meditative visualization exercises; and mood interrupter activities, such as humor videos or jokes.

Emotional well-being (EWB)

Within this study, emotional well-being (EWB), also interchangeably referred to as well-being, is based on an individual's ability to "successfully handle life's stresses and adapt to change and difficult times" (NIH, 2022). This balance and adaptation can reframe personal and professional stress and situational/setting transitions, such as behavior management in a classroom setting and new job expectations. EWB is part of an individual's mental health, impacting how an individual thinks, feels, behaves, and relates to others (NIH, 2022).

Self-Care

This study adopts a definition of self-care from the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH, 2023). Self-care can be defined as "taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health" (NIMH, 2022). NIMH lists benefits of self-care, which include helping to manage stress, lowering the risk of illness, and increasing energy (2022). Noting that even "small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact" (NIMH, 2022). The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is a division under the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which is also a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (NIMH, 2022). The NIMH (2022) recommends various types of self-care,

including physical exercise, healthy eating and sleeping habits, relaxing activities, gratitude practices, and staying connected to others.

Chapter Conclusion

Today's early childhood educators (ECE) are responsible for providing a stimulating learning environment to facilitate student academic outcomes, in addition to providing a positive emotional climate to support student social-emotional functioning (Harris et al., 2016). To perform effectively, teachers must cope with their own emotional reactivity to student behaviors and other physical and psychological stressors (Day & Qing, 2009). Teacher experiences of work stress may lead to decreased performance, burnout, and poor student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Undeniably, the world is ever-changing, and the future workforce and work demands grow more complex with the times. Even still, there is a noticeable lack of research concerning the emotional preparation and support of the early childhood PST and BT population. Programs serving PST and supporting BT are uniquely positioned to embed emotional well-being support (i.e., mindfulness self-care) for PST before they enter the field and BT as they begin their careers.

With this end goal in mind, PST and BT programs can provide support for these individuals with acute knowledge of the types of stressors related to the teaching profession due to the demands of the caretaking role, emotion management, and work overload (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). These profession-wide changes increasingly encourage the development and education of the children; however, how have teacher preparation programs changed to better prepare and support pre-service teachers for the emotional weight of these in-service role changes?

This gap in practice and literature opens up research opportunities to explore mindfulness practices for ECE well-being--at all experience levels. These emotional well-being skills can help teachers cope with their own emotional management and, therefore, engage more effectively in their classroom (Napoli, 2004). More research is needed to explore the emotional well-being of teachers at all experience levels and how mindfulness practices can play a role in creating a more comprehensive preparation experience for PST and BT.

The positive potential for mindfulness training is it produces a transformational change in the teacher (Napoli, 2004). According to Buddhist philosophy, the arising of teacher and student behaviors is symbiotic (Dalai Lama, 2002), meaning the outflow of mindfulness practices from the teacher can impact the students, both directly and indirectly. Despite this hopeful potential, mindfulness techniques with ECE beginning teachers still need more research (Harris et al., 2016). Therefore, this study aims to explore beginning teacher well-being with mindfulness. This research aims to explore emotional aspects of teaching, along with future research suggestions, such as embedding well-being mindfulness self-care within the PST curriculum and BT initiation support programs.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

In the previous chapter, the aim of the study is introduced, which outlines the need to explore emotional well-being mindfulness support for beginning teachers (BT). Teacher burnout and turnover are serious concerns for the education environment (Jotkoff, 2022). Within early education, job-related demands, such as student learning and student social-emotional well-being, have increased over the years, including the teacher's vital role in children's academic and social-emotional development (Flook et al., 2013). Early childhood educators (ECE) engage with a variety of physical and emotional stressors throughout the workday, such as behavior management, standardized assessment, time demands, and professional efficacy, and to be effective, they must be able to cope with their own emotional reactivity (Day & Qing, 2009). One transferable strategy to help teachers' emotional well-being (EWB) is mindfulness self-care, such as breathing practices. Mindfulness can serve as a protector factor for teachers, improve their emotional well-being, and support self-efficacy (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hirshberg et al., 2020; Napoli, 2004; Roeser et al., 2012; Whitebook, 2018).

The second chapter explores a review of literature related to mindfulness and teachers, including teacher emotional burnout, teacher attrition, mindfulness as a well-being tool for teachers, and the transitional gap between pre-service to in-service teaching, referred to as "reality shock" (Goddard et al., 2006; Veenman, 1984).

Context

Specific to early childhood, ECE roles have steadily expanded to include much more than just 'play' (Flook et al., 2013; Sakai, Whitebook & Schaack, 2014). Today, ECEs are tasked with providing an emotionally safe, secure, and warm environment to support the children's well-

being and developing social-emotional skills, while also facilitating their emergent literacy, math, and science skills to prepare them for future academic content and beyond (Bullough, Hall-Kenyon, MacKay & Marshall, 2014). Additionally, ECEs are called upon to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of young children, including multiple-language learners, children who have experienced trauma, and children with special needs (e.g., health, development, behavioral, learning, neurological) (Sakai et al., 2014). To perform all of these tasks successfully, ECEs must cope effectively with their own emotional reactivity to student behaviors and a variety of other physical and psychological stressors (Day & Qing 2009). Moreover, the national ECE workforce makes such low wages they often qualify for public benefits, such as food stamps (Whitebook, McLean & Austin, 2016). Along with the expanded work expectations, many teachers work in environments with little or no planning time and in classrooms that are often understaffed (Whitebook et al., 2014).

When considering these working conditions and increased responsibilities, ECE experiences of work stress may lead to decreased performance, burnout, and poor student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Many researchers agree more research is needed to explore these dynamic role changes and expectations for teachers, along with the impact of higher levels of teacher burnout in connection with student experiences, including academic and well-being (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Flook et al., 2013; Schaacka, Le & Stedron, 2020; Whitebook et al., 2018). Increasing awareness and immediate action are necessary to focus on the emotional well-being of ECEs and their students, along with the potential impacts, for example, teacher burnout, teacher retention, and student academic outcomes efficacy.

The increased awareness of teacher well-being creates a research opportunity to explore how ECEs provide emotional care and attention to themselves (Whitebook et al., 2014;

Whitebook et al., 2018). One avenue of self-care for ECE well-being is mindfulness. Mindfulness self-care techniques can incorporate various techniques, such as breathing awareness exercises, movement exercises such as dance and qi gong, affirmations, and meditative visualization exercises (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Garland, Farb, Goldin & Fredrickson, 2015; Hirshberg et al., 2020). The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2022) lists several benefits of self-care, including managing stress, lowering the risk of illness, and increasing energy. Noting even "small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact" (NIMH, 2022). NIMH (2022) recommends various types of self-care, such as exercise, relaxing activities, gratitude practices, and staying connected to others.

These types of mindful self-care skills can help teachers cope with their own emotional management and, therefore, engage more effectively in their classroom (Napoli, 2004). However, at the pre-service and beginning teacher stages, early childhood professionals' mindfulness self-care and emotional well-being is an area of limited research. The promise of mindfulness training is it produces a transformational change in the teacher (Napoli, 2004). According to Buddhist philosophy, the arising of teacher and student behaviors is symbiotic (Dalai Lama, 2002), meaning the outflow of mindfulness practices from the teacher can impact the students directly and indirectly. Therefore, this study aims to explore how beginning teachers use mindfulness to support their emotional well-being as the central focus.

Review of Literature

This literature review explores emotional burnout of teaching and practical emotional management strategies for teachers, specific to mindfulness-based techniques. Additionally, this literature review focuses primarily on in-service teachers to shed light on ways to best support

beginning teachers (BT) and pre-service teachers (PST). In this way, the review explores literature related to the emotional aspects of teaching, including BTs and mindfulness.

Emotional Burnout for Teachers

Teacher burnout and attrition are pervasive concerns in the field of education, especially for beginning teachers. Multiple research studies highlight 30-46% of new teachers leave the profession during their first five years of teaching (Barnes et al., 2007; Jalongo & Heider, 2006; Podolsky et al., 2016). A Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching study cites the most frequently reported reasons teachers leave the profession include inadequate professional development, insufficient feedback, feelings of disconnectedness, and lack of emotional support (Headden, 2014).

Teacher burnout reveals a pattern of prolonged occupational strain involving emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the reduction, or absence, of feelings of personal accomplishment (Parker, Martin, Colmar & Liem, 2012). Research reveals teacher burnout and stress to be strongly connected to emotional exhaustion, poor working conditions, low salaries, and administration-related concerns (Capone, Joshanloo & Park, 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Specific to teacher occupational and emotional well-being, emotional exhaustion is often used as an indicator to assess teachers' perceptions of personal and professional well-being (Voss et al., 2017). Arens & Morin (2016) define emotional exhaustion as an individual's feelings of "emotional overstrain and reduced emotional resources," which can be attributed to feelings of reduced "personal accomplishment," create feelings of inefficacy, hinder the person's ability to complete work demands and thwart a "sense of personal accomplishment" (p. 800).

Among the three noted components of teacher burnout, emotional exhaustion appears to be the most critical (Arens & Morin, 2016). It is often the first to emerge in the development of

burnout, which can quickly lead to the other two components of teacher burnout--higher levels of depersonalization and reduced feelings of self-efficacy (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). Researchers find when teachers struggle with feelings of emotional exhaustion, they are more likely to have confrontational interactions with students, become annoyed when students do not follow directions, and have negative opinions of their students (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Researchers specify these negative interactions and emotions toward students are likely to impact student experiences and outcomes (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008).

Within early childhood, several studies suggest when ECEs feel burned out, overstressed and underpaid, they appear to demonstrate permanent emotional distancing, such as leaving the job (Grant, Jeon & Buettner, 2019; Wells, 2015). Consequently, ECE turnover rates among early childhood teachers are among the highest in education (Whitebook et al., 2014). Nationally, approximately 30% of ECEs leave their jobs annually, which is a figure four times higher than the attrition rates among elementary school teachers (Whitebook et al., 2014).

Moreover, burnout among ECEs can be as high as 56% (Koch, Stranzinger, Nienhaus & Kozak, 2015). ECE burnout includes cumulative emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion from job stresses, which can hinder the ECEs' capacity to provide a positive classroom environment and consistent prosocial classroom management (Buettner, Jeon, Hur & Garcia, 2016; Koch et al., 2015). ECEs experiencing burnout are also more likely to demonstrate emotional distancing and withdraw from the children in their classroom, have more confrontational interactions with children in their classroom, and spend less time with instruction and communication with families (Buettner et al., 2016; Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley & Gooze, 2015). Compounding these effects, children in classrooms of ECEs experiencing burnout have

higher rates of externalizing behaviors (Friedman-Krauss, Raver, Morris & Jones, 2014) and demonstrate lower academic achievement levels (Hoglund, Klingle & Hosan, 2015).

Additionally, teacher burnout is also associated with numerous other negative impacts and outcomes for the teachers themselves, such as increased irritability (Capone, Joshanloo & Park, 2019). Burnout impacts the likelihood a teacher stays in the profession long-term (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). More specifically, Brouwers and Tomic connect teacher burnout to increased job non-attendance, lowered job commitment, and increased turnover (2000). Teacher burnout is also associated with lower levels of motivation toward the profession (Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006) and greater levels of doubts regarding self-efficacy (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Research demonstrates significant links between teacher burnout and several adverse effects on teachers' physical and emotional well-being, such as a decline in physical health (Hakanen et al., 2006) and higher levels of intentions to leave the teaching profession (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000). Clearly, burnout directly and indirectly impacts the profession and teachers' emotional well-being and beyond.

Burnout with Beginning Teachers

In addition to the generalized research on teacher burnout, specific to beginning teachers, occupational stress seems particularly grueling for teachers early in their careers (Jalongo & Heider, 2006). For beginning teachers, social interactions with students are particularly important for feelings of positive well-being (Schmidt et al., 2017). Positive teacher–student interactions and relationships can act as a resource to maintain well-being and prevent emotional exhaustion. In particular, inexperienced teachers, such as pre-service and beginning teachers, benefit from positive interactions with their students, which link to a reduction of emotional exhaustion feelings (Aldrup, Klusmann & Lüdtke, 2017). BTs can benefit from a foundation of emotional

support before, as PST, and during the first few years to support these positive interactions and relationships, prevent emotional exhaustion, and retain BTs in the field long-term.

Several studies provide evidence during the first five years of teaching, BTs report feelings of adaptation difficulties and unpreparedness with the realities and challenges of the classroom and working life, as well as higher rates of job turnover (Dicke, Elling, Schmeck & Leutner, 2015; Hebert & Worthy, 2001; OECD, 2005). The “reality shock” phase of the beginning teaching experience is repeatedly suggested as an especially vulnerable time for BTs' stress levels as they transition into their career (Goddard et al., 2006; Veenman, 1984). The reality shock is argued to be due to the fact beginning teachers are immediately tasked with the overwhelming workload of all the teaching profession responsibilities, such as lesson planning, preparation, implementations, interactions with others, and school-district requirements (Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011).

For years, research on beginning teachers highlight classroom management as the most pressing concern for beginning teachers (Veenman, 1984). Goddard and Foster (2001) echo and expand on classroom management, to include motivating students, assessment, and rapport with children’s families as the top four challenges for beginning teachers. Beginning teacher stress can be categorized into four categories: behavior management, time pressure with school/district tasks, lack of support from colleagues, and their own feelings of self-worth (Chaplain, 2008). Chaplain points out the most significant stressor for beginning teachers is managing student behavior (2008).

Factors which seem to help, the beginning teachers’ stress, focus on positive social experiences, such as positive interactions with students and supportive colleagues (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007). One qualitative study interviewing 14 beginning teachers report BTs experience

increased feelings of positive well-being due to colleague support and positive interaction with students (Uusiautti, Harjula, Pennanen & Määttä, 2014). Additionally, Richter and colleagues (2011) report mentoring teachers as a primary source of social support for beginning teachers.

Social-Emotional Support for Beginning Teacher Attrition

Teacher burnout and attrition are a pervasive concern in the field of education, especially for beginning teachers, with 30-46% of new teachers leaving the profession during their first five years of teaching (Barnes et al., 2007; Jalongo & Heider, 2006; Podolsky et al., 2016). BTs report they are leaving the profession due to inadequate professional development, insufficient feedback, feelings of disconnectedness, and lack of emotional support (Headden, 2014). To address attrition rates, research shows devoting more resources to teachers' social and emotional wellness can improve teacher well-being and, by extension, assist in enhancing the learning environment and student outcomes (Headden, 2014). These types of social-emotional support seem especially essential for BT, who are more emotionally vulnerable, which can impact their ability to be effective in the classroom (Goodwin, 2012).

Armed with this information regarding teacher burnout and alarming attrition rates, especially for BT, some exploratory research studies have shown how teachers can emotionally manage job demands. In addition to burnout concerns for teachers, due to the nature of the profession, teachers interact with a diverse range of individuals, personalities, and demands. In this way, effective emotional management and emotional regulation skills are particularly impactful for teachers (Brackett et al., 2010). Emotion regulation is the ability to modulate one's own emotional state, which involves various behaviors, such as reframing situations to reduce negative emotions and focusing on feelings of calm or gratitude (APA, 2022).

Teacher Emotional Regulation with Increasing Job Demands

Among the research regarding emotional regulation, teachers with well-developed emotional management skills may be able to cope more effectively with the diverse range of interactions and requirements in their profession, such as child behaviors, building relationships with parents and students, and achieving instructional goals (Brackett et al., 2010; Frank et al., 2015). Additionally, research demonstrates the quality of the teacher-child relationship, especially for young children, is a key predictor of the child's later academic achievement (Hughes et al., 2001; Pianta, 2001; Votruba-Drzal et al., 2004).

However, for ECE to provide this high-quality teacher-child relationship, they must first effectively manage their own emotional well-being, such as physical stressors and emotional reactivity (Day & Qing, 2009). Other research supports the notion that a teacher's emotional competence can, positively or negatively, influence children's social-emotional skills in their classroom (Perry & Ball, 2008). Therefore, teachers' emotional well-being can create an impact beyond themselves, which warrants further exploration of how to support teacher emotional well-being at all experience levels. One way to explore teacher emotional regulation is through mindfulness well-being practices.

Mindfulness as a Well-being Tool for Teachers

The promise of mindfulness training is it produces a transformational change in the teacher (Napoli, 2004). According to Buddhist philosophy, the arising of teacher and student behaviors is symbiotic (Dalai Lama, 2002), meaning the outflow of mindfulness practices from the teacher can impact the students, both in direct and indirect ways.

Mindfulness

In the past several decades, interest in mindfulness strategies for stress reduction is increasing across various disciplines. This focus is slowly growing among education researchers, practitioners, and other research fields. Mindfulness is gaining contemporary popularity in recent years, although the practice of mindfulness is historically rooted in religious traditions dating back to 535 BCE (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Although mindfulness is not exclusively meditation practices, it is called the "heart" of Buddhist meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Over the years, researchers have expanded on the definition of mindfulness to embrace a more secular approach, including presence of mind, receptive attention, and awareness of present events and experiences (Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007). Napoli describes mindfulness as bringing awareness to the current experience while also regulating the focus of attention, which can lead to feeling more alert, fully present and 'alive' (2004). Napoli explains the "core ingredient in practicing mindfulness is focusing on the breath and what is happening in the body and mind—being a witness to one's personal experience" (2004, p. 32). Colman, in the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology, explains mindfulness can create "greater openness to new information, new ways of structuring perception, and enhanced awareness of different problem-solving perspectives, is believed to facilitate insight, revealing reality with increased clarity, and is claimed to produce psychological and health benefits" (2015, n.p.).

Furthermore, mindfulness practices reduce stress and improve emotional coping skills by building on two mindfulness core concepts of attention and a nonjudgmental attitude (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness practices can include various techniques such as body scans, mindfulness meditation, mindful breathing, and mindful movement (e.g., walking and yoga) (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness approaches are not relaxation techniques but rather a form of

mental training to reduce cognitive vulnerability and reactionary habits of the mind, which might otherwise intensify feelings of stress and emotional distress (Kabat-Zinn, 1982).

Mindfulness as an Emotional Regulation Technique

Exploring emotional management using mindfulness with individuals, Davis & Hayes (2011) coin the term 'mindful emotion regulation' to reflect the benefit of emotional regulation with the use of mindfulness practices. Davis and Hayes' research indicates mindfulness meditation may prompt positive emotions, minimize negative rumination, and enhance emotional regulation (2011). Additional researchers use their data to explain how mindfulness may encourage individuals to become less reactive (Cahn & Polich, 2009; Goldin & Gross, 2010) and have greater cognitive flexibility (Moore & Malinowski, 2009). There is also evidence that mindfulness can enable the development of effective emotional regulation in the brain (Corcoran, Farb, Anderson & Segal, 2010; Farb et al., 2010). According to Williams (2010), eight weeks of mindfulness meditation may alter how emotions are regulated and processed within the brain. Although these studies do not specifically explore the role of mindfulness and emotional management with teachers, these results encourage further exploration among teachers since emotional exhaustion and emotional regulation have been linked as significant indicators for teacher well-being and functioning (Aldrup, Klusmann & Lüdtke, 2017; Arens & Morin, 2016; Brackett et al., 2010; Frank et al., 2015).

Mindfulness within Education

Although somewhat limited, when compared to other fields of mindfulness research, the available research focused on teachers provides an illuminating foundation. As previously discussed in the burnout section above, teaching is a stressful profession, especially given how the roles have drastically changed over the years regarding increased caregiving demands,

emotional management, and work overload (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Teacher stress and burnout are a pressing concern, as demonstrated by the recent NEA (2022) survey, in which 90 percent of teachers highlight burnout as a serious issue (Jotkoff, 2022).

When teachers do not develop the habits to manage emotions and demands effectively, it can lead to problems, which can undermine teacher well-being and instructional practice (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Such adverse outcomes for the teacher have consequences in education, both economic and student-related (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Unmanaged stress undermines teacher well-being and increases health care and human resource costs associated with teacher illness, absenteeism, and leaving the profession (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). If teachers can learn mindfulness practices through a formal or informal training program, then practicing mindfulness can help them meet the stressful challenges that confront them (Napoli, 2004).

One way for teachers to explore mindfulness practice is through relaxation response techniques, such as mindful breathing. The term “relaxation response” involves bodily changes when one experiences deep muscle relaxation, a response against overstress, returning the body to a healthier balance (Benson, 1975). Focusing on the breath is a simple and effective way to achieve concentration, awareness, and relaxation. If teachers practice mindful relaxation, they can better cope with themselves and transfer these skills to their students to help them focus and reduce stress (Napoli, 2004).

Teachers in pre-kindergarten through elementary grades who have not developed positive, healthful habits of mind are less likely to create an emotionally supportive classroom, which can impact student learning (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Research demonstrates when incorporating mindfulness stress-reduction programs into the school curriculum there is improvement of students’ academic performance, self-esteem, and concentration and reduction

of behavior problems (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). A recent research study by Hirshberg and colleagues in 2020 demonstrates how mindfulness practices, targeted with emotion awareness components, improve teacher instructional quality in early childhood to early adolescence classrooms. Additional research suggests mindfulness may be a protective factor against stress and burnout, and certain interventions, such as contemplative practices, may improve teachers' well-being and reduce their stress in elementary to middle school environments (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2012). Other research shares promising data, suggesting mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) foster "transformation and change" and are effective for the treatment of both psychological and physical symptoms, such as self-regulation and stress management (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 385).

As mindfulness encourages individuals to be in the moment, it can help create a sense of harmony alongside the many challenges and stressors teachers face today. Emotional regulation-focused mindfulness awareness for teachers may decrease their feelings of psychological distress, relieve perceptions of time urgency, improve sleep habits, and lower levels of burnout (Crain, Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2017). This practice, in turn, can create positive ripple effects on the teachers' emotional well-being, both personally and professionally (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hirshberg et al., 2020; Jennings & Hirshberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2012).

Mindfulness Training Programs for Teachers in Education Settings

Starting in the early 2000s, there have been and are currently some formal mindfulness training programs for the classroom setting. Some are structured exclusively for the teacher, and others are designed for both the teacher and the students (i.e., school-based). One pilot study on mindfulness training with three elementary teachers (i.e. third and fourth grade) and their students focuses on some "being in the moment" techniques, including paying attention to the

breath, movement activities, and sensory-stimulating activities (Napoli, 2004). The implementation structure for each class includes meditation, body scan and movement with the teachers and children, and group discussions on articles related to mindfulness practice with participating teachers. The teachers report benefits using mindfulness as a curriculum aid—specifically as a tool for conflict and anxiety in the classroom and their personal lives (Napoli, 2004). The elementary-level teachers in this mindfulness-training program report an overall improvement in their personal and professional lives.

A Mindfulness-Based Intervention (MBI) study using a school-based model examines the effects of a modified version of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction technique to address the needs of teachers (Flook et al., 2013). One small pilot, with 18 elementary teachers, demonstrates improvements in the teachers' feelings of mindfulness, self-compassion, and performance on attention and emotion tasks and reduction in burned out feelings and psychological distress (Flook et al., 2013). The researchers note the teachers (i.e., participants) responded favorably to this school-based model and opted to continue the school-based mindfulness practices even after the study ended (Flook et al., 2013).

Another formal MBI training study examines the impact of an eight-week Stress Management and Resiliency Techniques (SMART) Program (Roeser, Skinner, Beers & Jennings, 2012). Researchers provide instruction to kindergarten to twelfth grade teachers using various contemplative SMART practices, such as mindfulness meditation, yoga and loving-kindness meditation. In addition, the researchers support participant awareness on applying mindfulness and compassion in their classroom and personal lives (Roeser et al., 2012). The randomized experiment group (i.e., MBI intervention) of teachers report less stress, burnout,

anxiety, and depression and higher mindfulness, self-compassion, and attention (Roeser et al., 2012).

Specific to elementary-age students, Napoli (2002) examines the effects of mindfulness training with third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students and finds after mindfulness training, children reported feeling more relaxed, subsequently relieving tension and anxiety. The children also report positive feelings in their behavior, mood, and attitude when they closely pay attention to their breathing. Children feel better equipped to 'handle' life events, including activities in school and academic concerns. The children attribute these improvements to mindfulness skills for increasing their ability to focus and address conflicts (Napoli, 2002).

Harris and colleagues (2016) evaluate the feasibility and efficacy of the Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM) program with 64 middle-school teachers. CALM uses a brief daily school-based intervention to promote teacher social-emotional competencies, stress management, and well-being. This study randomly assigns the middle schools to either the waitlist control condition or the CALM program intervention group. Comparing results with the control group, CALM demonstrates significant benefits for teachers' mindfulness, positive feelings, classroom management, higher stress tolerance, and improvement of physical symptoms, including lowered blood pressure. The teachers report using the CALM intervention as a feasible and beneficial method for managing stress and promoting well-being. The researchers suggest CALM has the potential to be a strategic method of improving teachers' social-emotional competence and well-being, preventing stress-related problems, and supporting classroom functioning. The quick morning implementation of the program is designed to increase accessibility and promote skills transfer to other contexts throughout the day for both teachers and students (Harris et al., 2016).

Gouda, Luong, Schmidt, and Bauer (2016) define a potential research gap to evaluate the effectiveness of school mindfulness-based interventions for high-school students and teachers. Using the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) method with 29 high school students and 29 teachers, the student group demonstrates improved self-reported stress, self-regulation, school self-efficacy and interpersonal problems. The teacher group demonstrates significant reduction in interpersonal issues and improvement in emotional regulation (Gouda et al., 2016).

Rare within mindfulness research, Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Karazsia, and Singh (2013) measure the effects of mindfulness on children's behavior in an early childhood environment. The research follows preschool teachers during an eight-week mindfulness training. Teachers report a noticeable decrease in challenging behaviors and an increase in children's compliance with teacher requests. Even after the eight weeks, teachers report a continued reduction of challenging behaviors and increased compliance. Teachers also notice a decrease in negative social interactions of the children with their peers. These researchers find mindfulness training for teachers an effective method for implementing positive teacher-student interactions.

For classrooms that use mindfulness as a core ingredient to student learning, Thornton and McEntee (1993), Wong (1994), and Ritchart and Perkins (2000) find students can demonstrate transference of learned skills to new and novel situations, demonstrate more creativity, and think more independently. The benefits of bringing mindfulness into the classroom can increase the quality of the educational experience and enhance the relationship between students and teacher and students with each other (Napoli, 2004).

Gap between Pre-Service and In-Service Beginning Teachers

As a unique point in time, the transition from pre-service teacher education to the first in-service teaching job is referred to as the "reality shock (Goddard et al., 2006; Veenman, 1984).

To examine this unique period of a beginning teacher's career, Karing and Beelmann (2019) research 236 pre-service teachers enrolled in various universities and 112 beginning teachers during the beginning 1-2 years of teaching (e.g. classroom settings from kindergarten to high school). They find beginning teachers report a lowered level of mindfulness, increased emotional distancing, and reduced satisfaction when compared to pre-service teachers. Other researchers find similar results; for example, Christ (2004) reports beginning teachers' well-being decreased in the first year of teaching practice, and emotional exhaustion increased in the first year (Keller-Schneider, 2018; Klusmann et al., 2012).

A beginning teacher's success can be related to situational indicators, such as appropriateness of school fit and adequate teacher education; notably, this success is also connected to personal characteristics in handling the demands of the new career (Klusmann et al., 2012). Other researchers find that teachers' negative emotional state has a negative effect on their classroom practice, which also extends to their students' motivation and achievement; alternatively, positive teachers' well-being was positively related to students' achievement (Arens & Morin, 2016; Briner & Dewberry, 2007).

Specific to mindfulness, Karing and Beelmann (2019) find a direct positive impact on emotional exhaustion using mindfulness strategies for both pre-service and in-service beginning teachers. Thus, it is critical for teacher preparation programs and beginning teacher programs to support emotional well-being and assist in reducing emotional exhaustion.

Chapter Conclusion

Today's teachers are responsible for providing a stimulating learning environment to facilitate student academic outcomes, in addition to providing a positive emotional climate to support student social-emotional functioning (Harris et al., 2016). To perform effectively,

teachers must cope with their own emotional reactivity to student behaviors and a variety of physical and psychological stressors (Day & Qing 2009). Teachers' experiences of work stress may lead to decreased performance, burnout, and poor student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Many researchers agree more research is needed to observe the impact of high levels of teacher burnout in connection with student experiences, both academic and well-being (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hirshberg, 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2012).

While there is a growing interest in mindfulness in education for teachers and children, there is a notable dearth of research on the efficacy of mindfulness within early childhood, especially for early childhood educators at the start of their career. This lack of literature can be due to the novelty of mindfulness within the early childhood education setting and the potential difficulty of researching in early childhood environments. Research demonstrates much of children's social-emotional development comes from the role of quality relationships; therefore, future research can focus on the role of the teacher. Additional research can also focus on exploring children's perceptions of their well-being regarding mindfulness intervention.

This gap in practice and literature opens up research opportunities to explore mindfulness practices for ECE emotional well-being at all experience levels. These skills can help teachers cope with their own emotional management and, therefore, cope more effectively in their classroom (Napoli, 2004). More research is needed to explore the emotional stressors of teaching and how mindfulness practices can play a role in creating a more comprehensive preparation for pre-service teachers (PST), including the emotional components of teaching. To that end, Chapter Three outlines the qualitative methodology used to explore the research question of focus. Using the constructivist paradigm and Meaning-to-Mindfulness Theory (MMT) framework, the following chapter describes a single-holistic case study to explore the research

question. The chapter also examines how researcher biases and limitations will be addressed. This study's methodology includes details for participant selection, triangulated data collection, data analysis, and tests of trustworthiness.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Chapter One introduced this research study's aim, highlighting the need for emotional well-being support for beginning teachers (BT). Teacher burnout and turnover are serious concerns for the modern education environment (Jotkoff, 2022). Early childhood educators (ECE) engage with various physical and emotional stressors throughout the workday, and to be effective, they must be able to cope with their own emotional reactivity (Day & Qing 2009). One transferable strategy to help teachers' emotional well-being (EWB) is mindfulness self-care, such as breathing practices. Mindfulness can serve as a protector factor for teachers, improve their emotional well-being, and support self-efficacy (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hirshberg et al., 2020; Napoli, 2004; Roeser et al., 2012; Whitebook, 2018).

Chapter Two provided a review of literature related to mindfulness and teachers, including teacher emotional burnout, teacher attrition, mindfulness as a well-being tool for teachers, and the transitional gap between pre-service to in-service teaching, referred to as "reality shock" (Goddard et al., 2006; Veenman, 1984). More research is needed to explore mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool for teachers during this unique transitional period from pre-service teaching (PST) to beginning teaching. This gap in practice and literature opens up a research opportunity to explore mindfulness practices for ECEs emotional well-being.

Chapter Three provides the qualitative methodology used to explore the research topic. Using the constructivist paradigm and Meaning-to-Mindfulness Theory (MMT) framework, the chapter outlines the single-holistic case study which is used to explore the research question. The chapter also addresses researcher biases and limitations. The study's methodology includes

details for participant selection, triangulated data collection, data analysis, and tests of trustworthiness.

Introduction

Education programs work hard to prepare students for the technical aspects of teaching; however, very little of the formal education curriculum focuses on the emotional well-being (EWB) preparation as an in-service teacher (Day & Qing, 2009). As such, college teacher preparation programs may need to support and prepare PSTs more holistically for their careers (Day & Qing, 2009). However, since education programs cannot fully know all the aspects of their PSTs' future classrooms, it is helpful to provide PSTs with transferrable techniques to enable and empower them to face any future obstacle. Without this comprehensive preparation, PSTs are beginning their career as teachers with an incomplete toolbox. PSTs are not fully prepared in all facets of the job and may contribute to beginning teachers' feelings of inadequacy, ineffectiveness, job burnout, and professional exodus (Day & Qing, 2009; Harris et al., 2016).

One approach to address the emotional well-being concerns of beginning teachers is mindfulness, such as breathing techniques, positive affirmations, and guided exercises (Napoli, 2004). According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2022), even "small acts of self-care" can significantly impact well-being, such as relaxing activities and gratitude practices. Therefore, incorporating simple emotional well-being mindfulness practices can be easily embedded in an established PST curriculum yet have a significant impact (NIMH, 2022). To provide more comprehensive emotional support, the drastically evolving modern learning environment can benefit from including intentional EWB support for teachers at all levels. In these unprecedented times, teachers, students, and the education system can benefit from novel,

innovative emotional support for all levels, including teachers and students. As a result, the study aims to explore mindfulness techniques in supporting beginning teacher well-being.

Teacher emotional well-being is a pressing concern. According to a recent National Education Association (NEA) survey conducted in early 2022, 90% of 3,621 participating teachers report their own feelings of burnout as a serious issue, and 86% say they have seen more educators leaving the profession or retiring early. Fifty-five percent of educators surveyed say they are considering leaving the profession earlier than planned. Overwhelmingly, 94% of the teachers surveyed advocate providing additional mental health care for the children/students (Jotkoff, 2022). Using mindfulness research within education and other fields of study, teachers' emotional well-being can benefit from mindfulness to address the emotional concerns within modern education. Mindfulness practices reduce stress and improve emotional coping skills by building on two core mindfulness concepts: attention and a nonjudgmental attitude (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness practices can include body scans, mindfulness meditation, mindful breathing, and mindful movement, such as walking and yoga (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness promises that it produces a transformational, symbiotic change in the teacher, which allows for an outflow of mindfulness from the teacher to impact the students directly and indirectly (Dalai Lama, 2002; Napoli, 2004).

However, limited research focuses on well-being and mindfulness techniques for early childhood PST and BT. Therefore, the novel approach of this study aims to explore how early childhood BTs use mindfulness as a well-being tool during the transition into first-year teaching. The study aims to increase awareness regarding the need and importance of emotional support for teacher preparation programs within colleges/universities, along with future research suggestions, including embedded emotional management techniques within teacher education

curricula and beginning teacher initiation support programs. Thus, this study aims to explore the role of mindfulness and the emotional well-being of beginning teachers transitioning between pre-service to in-service positions.

Research Methodology

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

The aim of this study emphasizes beginning teacher feelings of emotional well-being and experiences with mindfulness, posing an exploratory 'how' research question, which assumes a qualitative research design. Creswell (2008) explains qualitative research is "best suited for research problems in which you do not know the variable and need to explore" (p. 53).

Research Paradigm Rationale

A research paradigm is a "set of common beliefs and agreements" shared by researchers regarding "how problems should be understood and addressed" (Kuhn, 1962, p. 43). Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that a research paradigm shares the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs. The current study is framed within the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The constructivist paradigm adopts multiple realities, which are socially constructed through interactions. Constructivism acknowledges objective reality can never be fully captured, yet requires interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Crotty explains that constructivist paradigm research values subjective experience as a way to develop an interpretive understanding (1998). Reliance on the participants' subjectively constructed meanings allows for interpretive meanings within their context by the researcher (Creswell, 2009). As a result of individuality, each participant's experience will illuminate various naturally existing perspectives within the constructivist paradigm.

Constructivist paradigm aims for understanding, which aligns with the goal of this study, to explore beginning teachers' personal interpretations of their own well-being in connection with mindfulness practices (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivism also emphasizes a collaborative, interactive process between the researcher and participants. While exploring BT's feelings, this research requires rapport between the researcher and participants due to the nature of emotional and personal involvement, which can support the researcher's understanding within the context and provide interpretive meanings within their context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Case Study Rationale

Case study can be a useful methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed to explore a theoretical construct (Yin, 2003). Case studies examine specific phenomena in a real-world setting (Stake, 1995). Yin defines a case study as exploring "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear, and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (2002, p. 13). Carving a specific space within social science research, case study provides a "comprehensive research strategy" (Yin, 2002, p. 14), which investigates cases by addressing "how" or "why" explanatory questions concerning the phenomenon of interest. The main objective of a case study is to explore, in-depth, an event or phenomenon in its natural context (Yin, 2002).

Case study methodology is often used within social science research, pulling from foundational methodologists such as Stake (1995) and Yin (2003). Both approach case study research from a constructivist paradigm, believing truth is relative, based on individual perspective (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) describe case studies as beneficial when evaluating programs. Stake (1995) extends the usefulness of case studies to

people and clarifies case studies are less helpful to study events and processes. According to Stake (1995), one of the defining characteristics of case study methodology is the interrelated link between the context and the phenomenon of interest. This notion is similar to the inseparable link Yin alludes to when defining the case (2002). Stake (1995) outlines three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Yin (2002) suggests four types of case study design: single holistic, single embedded, multiple holistic, and multiple embedded. Holistic designs require one unit of analysis, whereas embedded designs require multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2002). Yin (2002) suggests a highly structured case study design, while Stake (1995) supports researchers to have a flexible design to allow for changes, even after the initial design stages, such as during data collection. Stake (1995) suggests that case study researchers allow the research questions to evolve in order to structure the observations, interviews, and document review. In this way, Stake (1995) views case study design as more flexible when compared to Yin's (2002) approach to design preparation.

Taking elements from Yin and Stake, Merriam (1998), in many ways, provides a unique combination of both approaches. Merriam further defines case study design to include the literature review to conceptualize the inquiry and construct a framework for the research process. Merriam (1998) presents a detailed process of designing qualitative research, which includes conducting a literature review, constructing a theoretical framework, identifying research problems, refining research questions, and selecting a sample using purposive sampling. Merriam (1998) recommends a certain degree of flexibility, although less flexible than Stake (1995). Merriam (1998) suggests using purposive (i.e., purposeful) sampling "before the data are gathered" (p. 66). Stake does not provide sampling strategies or procedures for case study design and avoids determining the exact starting point for data collection, which he considers a key,

flexible benefit of qualitative design (1995). Merriam (1998) also provides extensive guidance for data collection procedures, such as conducting effective interviews. For case study interviews, Merriam provides detailed suggestions, such as asking good questions, suggesting questions to avoid, and recording (1998). These detailed interview suggestions, specific to the case study design, are unique to Merriam (1998) since neither Stake (1995) nor Yin (2002) concentrate on such details during the data-gathering process.

Additionally, Merriam's (1998) model of qualitative data analysis for the case study method is complementary to Stake (1995) and Yin (2002). Merriam defines data analysis as "the process of making sense out of the data. Moreover, making sense of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). In this way, Merriam's data analysis provides a more thorough application of the constructivist epistemology and provides more concrete guidance for researchers by using consolidation, reduction, and interpretation analytic processes (1998). Merriam also suggests simultaneous data collection and analysis, which is a distinguishable element of qualitative research over quantitative (1998). To further explain, Merriam also views qualitative data collection and analysis as recursive and dynamic, which becomes more intense as the study progresses (1998, p. 155). The idea of an emerging design within a case study is achieved by concurrent and interactive data collection and analysis process, which is strongly advocated within qualitative research design (Merriam, 1998).

Further, Creswell identifies a case study "involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system" (2009, p.73). The case serves as a case study's central unit of analysis (Merriam, 1998). Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) define a case as a "phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 28). To illustrate this concept,

they provide a visual representation of the case and bounding. This visual includes a heart inside of a circle, where the heart (i.e., case) is the central focus, and the circle helps to define the edge (i.e., bounded system) of the case (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

In the present study, the case is beginning teacher well-being while participating in self-selected, pre-established mindfulness practices. Binding the case helps to define what is and what is not studied, such as time, place, activity, definition, or context, which helps define the study focus and manage the scope of the investigation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Stake, 1995). For this study, the bounded case is beginning teachers who are recent graduates (i.e., May 2023) from an early childhood program at upstate South Carolina University participating in self-selected, pre-established mindfulness practices. This study includes details for a qualitative, single-case holistic case study. The core element of a case study is shedding light on a set of decisions, such as how and why they were made, how they were implemented, and the end result (Yin, 2018). This study illuminates beginning teachers' emotional well-being and how and why they integrate mindfulness during the transition into the profession. The single holistic case study design focuses on an in-depth exploration of contemporary issues within a real-world context (Yin, 2018). This study also focuses on a distinctive situation (i.e., phenomena) through at least three sources of data, to triangulate the resulting evidence (Yin, 2002). For this purpose, this study collects data from participants through semi-structured interviews, documents (i.e., participant reflection journals), and direct observations.

Building from the other forms of qualitative research, case study seeks meaning and understanding, views the researchers as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, uses an inductive investigation strategy, and provides an end product which is richly descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, this holistic, single case study follows the constructivist,

case study approach from Sharan Merriam's Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education (1998).

Case Study Research Question Rationale

Using constructivism as the overall theoretical paradigm, the individual is making meaning of their understanding from their previous experiences and background knowledge while interacting with newly engaged ideas, events, and activities (Ültanir, 2012). Within the context of this study, participants are able to construct new understandings by using their previous experiences and knowledge of mindfulness during their pre-service coursework, along with new experiences as a beginning teacher. When problems arise, according to constructivism, individuals benefit from previous experiences and knowledge (Ültanir, 2012).

Building from the constructivist paradigm, the Mindfulness-to-Meaning Theory (MMT) provides a specific structure on how individuals perceive experiences from subjective viewpoints, including how they process, approach, and reflect on experiences through their emotions using mindfulness (Garland et al., 2017). Within the context of this study, MMT provides a hypothesized process for mindfulness and personal meaning, using reappraisal and savoring. Through the growth process, of reappraisals and savoring, individuals are able to create a sense of meaning, along with sustainable positive emotions and well-being (Garland et al., 2015).

Both theoretical frameworks provide structure to the meaning-making process of the participants' BT experience, in how they construct understanding based on previous experiences and processing emotions, including prior knowledge, reappraisal, and savoring.

Within case study research, it is suggested to remain open to change at all stages of the study, which can include the research question (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the researcher is

encouraged to revisit the research question throughout the study and to refocus the question as needed (Stake, 1995). The following research question is offered as the guide to this research study: How do beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession?

Research Design

Participants

The current study uses purposive sampling (i.e., purposeful) in recruiting participants, which is suggested for case studies by Merriam (1998). Overall, purposive sampling is widely used in various forms of qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). Patton defines several different types of purposive sampling strategies, including criterion (1990). A defining factor within this study is beginning teachers who already practice mindfulness; therefore, criterion sampling helps to define the purpose of the inquiry of the study. Patton describes criterion sampling as valuable to "review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance," further stating the sample "approach is common in quality assurance efforts" (1990, p. 176).

The current study aims to explore early childhood beginning teachers' feelings of their emotional well-being using mindfulness self-care; therefore, the predetermined criterion for sampling includes beginning teachers who are (1) recent graduates of an undergraduate (Bachelor of Arts) early childhood education program; (2) beginning their first-year teaching in an early childhood classroom; (3) have prior knowledge and currently practice mindfulness techniques on their own (i.e., received mindfulness instruction during their PST coursework and are currently practicing mindfulness, as a self-initiated, daily practice); and (4) teaches in a public-school district in the upstate of South Carolina.

Context

This study aims to gather in-depth data related to mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool from five beginning teachers as participants. The small sample is purposeful to provide more enriching rapport between the researcher and participants and provide more researcher exposure within the participants' context, which can provide more in-depth data and interpretation across all three data sources. During the research timeframe, the participants teach in early childhood classrooms in four public-school districts in the upstate of South Carolina. The early childhood grade levels in South Carolina range from preschool to third grade. The amount of children in each classroom varies, depending on the age group and school, for example, 15-22 children.

Additionally, the participants are recent graduates (i.e., May 2023) from an early education Bachelor of Arts program at a public, southeastern university. During the research timeframe, participants are currently enrolled in a teaching residency program, which embeds graduate-level coursework with full-time placement in a public-school setting. The teacher residency is a 30-credit program--completed in three semesters. The program includes a rich, immersive field experience, along with coursework. While in the year-long field placement experience, the participants have the support of a mentor co-teacher. The participants and their mentor co-teachers share teaching responsibilities at various levels at the beginning of the school year. To officially begin the increase of responsibility, the participants implement a full "takeover" of instructional and classroom management for three- to four weeks, from September to November.

The early childhood undergraduate Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) program and teacher residency Masters of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) degree program are both housed in the public, research-intensive, southeastern university. The college setting is suburban (U.S. News & World

Report, 2022). The participants are 22- to 23-year-olds. As part of the prior undergraduate coursework, the participants are informally provided exposure and hands-on experiences with mindfulness techniques in approximately five courses. These in-class mindfulness experiences are at the discretion of the individual professors. Mindfulness is informally integrated into the undergraduate coursework, meaning there is no mindfulness-devoted coursework or objectives within the approved curriculum. When informally implemented, mindfulness techniques include breathing exercises, visualization exercises, mindful journaling, and gratitude exercises.

Data is collected at specific collection points (i.e., three phases) to explore and describe feelings associated with mindfulness. The collection points coordinate with the school-year calendar, roughly capturing the participants' feelings before the school year begins (approximately the end of July) and during the first few weeks to months into the school year (approximately August through the end of September). Due to timing restrictions related to dissertation completion, data collection consists of eight weeks (end of July through end of September). (See Table 1).

Table 1
Data Collection Table

Timeline	Data Collected	Research Question(s) addressed by data
Phase 1: Before the School Year Begins (approx. end of July 2023)	**Survey** (Demographics) **Interviews with BT** **Participants Journals**	How do beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession?
Phase 2: Beginning of School year (approx. beginning of August 2023)	**Interviews with BT** **Participants Journals** **Observations of BT in the classroom**	How do beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession?
Phase 3: Month into the School Year (approx. end of September 2023)	**Interviews of PST** **Participants Journals** **Observations of BT in the classroom**	How do beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession?

Rapport and Ethical Considerations

For this research, I gained access to these participants through convenience sampling due to my work as a graduate teaching assistant within the College of Education, which houses the teacher education undergraduate and graduate school program. However, it should be noted I have never taught nor met participants before the research design. However, due to my professional connection to the program, this asserted the need for an intentionally rigorous research design. To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation from various sources was included for credibility (i.e., interviews, documents, observations). As a researcher, I am aware of my

ethical considerations (i.e., anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, researcher's impact on participants). I addressed anonymity by not asking or including information that does not relate to the research. I upheld confidentiality by using pseudonyms and removing or protecting any confidential information. Informed consent included clarifications of the nature of the study, the role of the researcher and participant(s), the objective of the research, and how the results will be published and used. Participation was not required. Participants were allowed to deny participation at any point during the study. To be transparent, I addressed these ethical considerations as part of the research, such as in the informed consent document, beginning remarks of each observation and interview, and written directions on each of the reflection journal entries.

Data Collection

To enhance data credibility, a case study approach involves the collection of multiple sources of data (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003). In this study, to help address trustworthiness, there were several types of data collection (i.e., documents, observation, and interviews). (See Table 2).

Table 2
Trustworthiness Strategies for this Research

Trustworthiness Criteria	**Purpose**	**Evidence**
Credibility	Establish confidence in results are true, credible, accurate	Triangulation (multiple forms of data collection: interview, observation, participant journals) Prolonged engagement with data (data reduction techniques, data visualization techniques) and Persistent observation
Transferability	Degree, to which results can be generalized (i.e., transferred) to other contexts	Thick description using various data collection throughout the study (multiple forms of data collection: interview, observation, participant journals)
Dependability	Findings can be repeated if replicated in the same context	Detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and contextual information are provided for readers
Confirmability	Other researchers could corroborate results based on objective, neutral findings	Detailed analysis steps and Transparency of data and findings are provided for readers
Reflexivity	Process of researcher self-reflection (biases, preferences, preconceptions) and the researcher's relationship with participants (potential impact on responses).	Statement of Positionality, Rapport and Ethical Considerations statement, Limitations of the study, and Research agenda statement provided for readers

Demographic Survey

Participants completed a demographic survey at the beginning of the study, which included demographic information, such as gender, age, and marital status, and other contextual information, such as grade-level placement and long-term career goals. From these questions, participant profiles were used to create pseudonyms. (See Appendix A).

In addition to the demographic questions, participants were also asked three questions designed for reflection on their feelings about the beginning teaching experience (i.e., grade-level placement) and identified their pre-established mindfulness practices with the following prompts.

(a) What are your feelings about your grade placement?

(b) What mindfulness practices, techniques &/or tools have you previously and/or currently used?

(c) How often do you engage in mindfulness activities?

Reflection Journals

Patton (1990) describes documents as "Written materials and other documents from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries, letters, artistic works, photographs, and memorabilia; and written responses to open-ended surveys. Data consist of excerpts from documents captured in a way that records and preserves context" (p. 2). This study included participant reflection journals as document data collection. The journals were collected as document data triangulation. The journals were considered private and personal. Participant confidentiality was upheld by maintaining participant privacy and withholding any names or contexts which could be identifiable.

For this study, participants journaled about their thoughts and feelings once a week for 6-weeks during all three data collection phases (i.e., Phase 1 in July, Phase 2 in August and Phase 3 in September 2023) (See Table 1). To allow reflection on the week, links to the weekly journals were sent to the participants on Friday afternoons, and participants were encouraged to submit before the end of the weekend. The journals were electronically submitted using Google Forms. The Google form contained the date and week number (i.e., 1-6). The email reminder and digital collection format (i.e., Google Forms) aided in the ease and convenience of participant submissions since Google Forms can be completed on a computer, tablet, or cell device.

In addition to the weekly journal prompts, the Google form included an open-response item at the end to allow participants to share any other thoughts, feelings, etc. The journals had various reflection prompts related to their feelings, teaching experiences for the week, and mindfulness practices. (See Appendix B).

As an example, in the first journal entry, before the start of school, participants were asked to reflect on their initial feelings about their emotional well-being and the potential impact of mindfulness activities on their emotional well-being as beginning teachers using the following prompts.

(a) Describe your initial feelings (specifically, your emotional well-being) related to starting the school year as a beginning teacher.

(b) What emotional well-being “mindfulness” technique(s) seem to be the most effective to you?

(c) Overall, how do you feel mindfulness activities impact your feelings of emotional well-being as a beginning teacher?

Observations

One of the most common methods of case study observation is direct observation in a field setting. Observations can focus on human actions, environment and/or real-world events (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) describes observations as "Fieldwork descriptions of activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experience. Data consist of field notes: rich, detailed descriptions, including the context within which the observations were made" (p. 2).

For this study, the observation data collection comprised narrative observations and field notes based on what the participant saw, heard, and sensed within their classroom environment. To capture a comprehensive picture of the participants' emotional well-being, as beginning teachers in the classroom, observations were conducted in the natural setting (i.e., classrooms) at different times on two separate days during the first few weeks of the school year (i.e., Phase 2 in August and Phase 3 in September 2023) (See Table 1). Each observation was approximately 6-hours each, totaling 12-hours of observation for each participant. Altogether, there was a total of 60 observational hours for this case study. Observations intentionally included various class activities, such as arrival/dismissal, group time, outside time, lunchtime, and small group working time, to capture various engagement and behaviors of the participant in the teaching role.

Observations maintained a non-participatory observer position, for example, sitting in a corner of the classroom. Observation notes included detailed descriptions of the classroom physical environment, participants' emotional state (verbal and non-verbal expressions of emotion), and participants' conversations/interactions with others, for example, with the children, families of the children, and co-workers. The goal of the observations was not to capture and

narrate all events; instead, it was to gain descriptive insight and context into the participants' emotional well-being while on the job in the school setting. An observation protocol was used as a guide for each observation. (See Appendix C).

Interviews

Qualitative interviews provide a way of collecting information when behavior, feelings or how individuals interpret the world around them cannot be directly observed (Merriam, 1998). Patton (2002) describes interviews as "open-ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge. Data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient context to be interpretable" (p. 2). Interviews are the best technique when conducting intensive case studies with a few individuals (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured are more flexible and help explore open-ended questions, which can lead to conversational interviews. This interviewing style is preferable to establish a rapport with the respondent and seek understanding rather than explanation (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, to gain better insight, it is suggested to probe using emerging questions during the interview (Merriam, 2009).

Within this study, interviews employed a semi-structured format with each participant. The interviews were open-ended so new questions could flow from the conversation to avoid a formalized feeling, as with a typical question-and-answer session (Cope & Watts, 2000). The participants were interviewed regarding their thoughts and feelings about their emotional well-being as beginning teachers who practice mindfulness. The interviews occurred outside of school hours when the participants were not working, such as during the evening. The interviews were conducted using video conferencing (i.e., Zoom) to accommodate the participants' schedules and locations. There were three interview collection points during each of the three phases (i.e.,

before the start of the school year in July and twice during the first weeks into the school year in August and September). (See Table 1).

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted approximately thirty-minutes. In total, for all three interviews, participants were interviewed for approximately 1.5-hours. The interview time, in total of all participants of the case study, was approximately 7.5-hours. The interviews were conversational, using the structure of prepared interview questions. (See Appendix D). The questions focused on participants' feelings about their emotional well-being related to their beginning teaching experience and mindfulness practices. The questions maintained a level of consistency yet evolved from each interview, focusing on the experience and passage of time at the start of the school year. The interview followed a protocol of questions. (See Appendix D). Some questions required additional probing for further information or clarification, including member checking. The demeanor of the interview was encouraging and non-biased. A non-judgmental question to gain further insight was, "Are there any other details you wish to add?"

For example, the first interview focused on gaining insight into participants' initial feelings during the transition between graduating from an early childhood undergraduate program to their first-year beginning teaching experience. As such, each participant responded to questions related to their emotional well-being during the transition into the profession and their mindfulness practices during the transition.

(a) Before the school year begins, as you transition from PST to BT, how would you describe your feelings leading into your first-year teaching?

(b) Share your thoughts on mindfulness practices as a BT. How would you describe your level of comfort with mindfulness?

(c) What type of mindfulness techniques do you believe will be the most helpful for your emotional well-being as you transition into your first-year teaching?

(d) As a beginning teacher, what is the importance you place on mindfulness?

The interviews were recorded on a digital audio recording device. Observation notes during the interview reflected verbal responses and non-verbal cues, such as body language congruence with verbal language. The interview recording helped with accurate transcription after the interview for a more thorough analysis. The recording was saved securely on a protected file. In addition to the observation notes during the interview, summary notes and analytic memos were included in this study. After the interview, summary notes included additional observations of the interview, such as observations during and after the interview. The analytic memo details during the interview and after the interview, included potential patterns for future coding, follow-up notes, and any other important reflective information. The interview direct quotes, researcher summary notes, and researcher analytic memos were provided as part of the final documentation in Chapter Four.

Security and Confidentiality of Data

Security and confidentiality of the data were maintained throughout the collection and analysis process. The identities of each participant were coded using pseudonyms. The document identifying the pseudonyms was also kept in a separate, secure file on the researcher's computer. The documentation for all data collection was saved with a passcode on the researcher's personal computer.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is "the process of making sense out of the data... [which] involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen

and read – it is the process of making meaning" (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). This study followed Creswell's (1998) three-steps of data analysis: (1) the researcher began by going through the collected data and sorting out the gathered information, (2) the researcher then refined and modified the units until tentative categories emerged, (3) the researcher continued to filter and revise categories across cases looking for specific themes to emerge. This study included two phases of data analysis: initial data analysis, which happened concurrently with data collection, and intensive data analysis, which began after data collection (Creswell, 1998). Unlike quantitative research, where analysis occurs after data collection, qualitative data analysis coincides with data collection and continues until data saturation is reached (Merriam, 2009).

Initial Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was an ongoing process which occurred simultaneously with data collection (Creswell et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009). This process enabled the research to evolve through a mutually beneficial exchange between data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). The data circle continuously connected data analysis with collection, interpretation, and writing to make meaning from the qualitative data.

Specific to this study, the first data analysis occurred during the initial data collection, providing category construction (Merriam, 2009). This process included notations on emerging ideas, which were included in the field notes and analytic memos for the interviews, journals, and observations. The field notes and analytic memos served dual-purpose as part of the data collection and data analysis. Additionally, these were included in the analysis and results in Chapter Four. Memos carry the potential to be vital in the process of reflection and emerging patterns (Birks & Mills, 2011). Therefore, these notes and memos were used for the initial organization of the data and were the basis for further analysis and emerging themes. The

concurrent data collection and data analysis helped make sense of the data at the early stages, allowing for the organization and focus of the data (Merriam, 2009).

Intensive Data Analysis

The intensive data analysis stage took place after the data was collected. During this phase, the focus was on interpreting and developing an understanding of the qualitative data framed within the research question. This study's data analysis method was constant comparative (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Saldaña, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using this method of analysis, the data was viewed in various ways and times to see different patterns and make meaning from those patterns, including similarities and differences. Saldaña (2014) considers the researcher as the source of this perception and interpretation to address the research question. This method is also supported by Strauss & Corbin (1998), explaining comparison within qualitative analysis is essential because it allows differentiation of categories.

During the review of the field notes and analytic memos, a thorough process of reading and re-reading allowed for the initial step of open coding. The process included keywords and phrases which connected to the research question. Stake (1995) notes, “Sometimes, we will find significant meaning in a single instance, but usually the important meanings will come from reappearance over and over” (p. 78).

After this initial review, the process of observing the notes for patterns across participants and data sources allowed for groupings of similar categories. These emerging themes were compared with previous themes, which enabled the categories to be collapsed, expanded, or modified. Merriam (2009) supports sorting categories during analysis since “the fewer the categories, the greater the level of abstraction, and the greater ease with which you can communicate your findings to others” (p. 187). Merriam, taking inspiration from Guba and

Lincoln (1985), provides four guidelines for creating sorting categories: (1) the number of participants mentioning or frequency can indicate importance, (2) audience-determined credibility, (3) standout, unique categories should be maintained, and (4) certain categories may reveal “areas of inquiry not otherwise recognized” or “provide a unique leverage on an otherwise common problem” (Merriam, 2009, p. 187). Additionally, Stake (1995) notes, "It also is important to spend the best analytic time on the best data. Full coverage is impossible; equal attention to all data is not a civil right. The case and the key issues need to be kept in focus. The search for meaning, the analysis, should roam out and return to these foci over and over” (p. 84-85). Stake supports researchers not being overly inundated by the data and being selective of the best data for analysis (1995).

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Social science research uses four tests of trustworthiness: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Qualitative researchers can frame these tests as confirmability, credibility, transferability, and dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Merriam (2009) ensures quality within qualitative case study through credibility, consistency and transferability. Qualitative research can achieve validity through triangulation (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). External validity is accomplished through transferability, in which the researcher strives to provide rich and descriptive data (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) supports Guba & Lincoln’s (1985) take on the burden of proof (i.e., transferability), which relies more on the reader of the research seeking to make an application elsewhere. Therefore, the original burden is on the researcher to provide “sufficient descriptive data” to make transferability possible (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 298).

Merriam (2009) focuses on the notion of consistency, as provided by Guba & Lincoln (1985), stating the "more important question for qualitative research is whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 221). The finding should be consistent with the data instead of promoting the notion of others finding similar results. In this way, qualitative research is consistent (i.e., dependable) to ensure quality (Merriam, 2009).

Internal Validity

For internal validity, Merriam (1998) employs past strategies from Guba & Lincoln (1985) and Patton (1990) for qualitative data congruency, including triangulation, member checks, peer examination, researcher statements, and engagement in the research situation. Triangulation uses multiple methods, researchers/investigators, or data sources (Merriam, 1998). Member checks return the collected data and tentative interpretations of the data back to the study participants to garner their opinion if the interpretations are plausible—if they "ring true" (Merriam, 1998). Peer examination includes peers or colleagues examining the data and commenting on the emerging interpretations' plausibility (Merriam, 1998). At the onset of the study, researcher statements can include the researcher's experiences, assumptions, and biases, which enables the reader to understand how the data may have been interpreted (Merriam, 1998). Engagement in the research situation includes data collection over a favorable amount of time to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). Within this study, internal validity was supported through data triangulation (multiple data sources), member check (from participants during the interviews), peer examination (from a fellow doctoral student), researcher statements (subjectivity statement), and engagement with the research situation (multiple data collection points over several weeks through the two observations, which totaled

over 12-hours of observation time and the three interviews, which totaled over 7.5-hours of interview time).

Reliability

Merriam (1998) states that the notion of reliability can be problematic within social sciences. For qualitative research on humans and human behavior, the focus is on a dynamic phenomenon. For human behavior, repetition does not necessarily denote reliability for the individual (Merriam. 1998). Since qualitative researchers seek to understand, there may be multiple interpretations, and replication may yield different results (Merriam, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (1985) view qualitative research reliability with the concept of dependability or consistency. For qualitative research, they provide three strategies for dependability: triangulation, peer examination, and audit trail (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Triangulation uses multiple methods, researchers/investigators, or data sources (Merriam, 1998). Peer examination includes peers or colleagues examining the data and commenting on the emerging interpretations' plausibility (Merriam, 1998). An audit trail, suggested by Guba & Lincoln (1985), requires the investigator to describe, in detail, how the data is collected, how the categories are derived, and how decisions are made throughout the inquiry (Merriam, 1998). An audit trail should be detailed so that "other researchers can use the original report as an operating manual to replicate the study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 216). For this study, as previously outlined, triangulation (multiple data sources) and peer examination (from a fellow doctoral student) were employed for both internal validity and reliability.

External Validity

The extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations is often a goal of quantitative research and is referred to as generalizability. This requires the quantitative

sample to be large and random. This notion can also be problematic for qualitative researchers since most qualitative samples are often smaller than quantitative studies (Merriam, 1998) and often employ a variety of sampling techniques to focus on a particular phenomenon. However, qualitative research aims to understand a particular phenomenon, not to provide generalizations to many (Merriam, 1998); therefore, sample sizes can be smaller and intentionally selected using various methods.

One suggestion for qualitative generalizability (i.e., external validity) is reader generalizability (Merriam, 1998). This notion expands generalizability from the researcher's findings to the reader so the reader can determine the application in other situations (Merriam, 1998), which can be best accomplished through rich, thick descriptions. The study included rich, contextual information to thoroughly describe and establish the study's context, such as setting and participants. Additional information to support qualitative generalizability included the bounded case details, information describing the data collection methods, and the timeframe for data collection (Shenton, 2004), which was included in Chapter Three. For this study, these additional details were provided in the appropriate chapters of the study (Chapter Three and Chapter Four). The final suggestion for generalizability is selecting the typical case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2003). Using this suggestion for this study, the representative case (i.e., participants) reflected the average person, situation, and/or instance of the phenomenon of interest.

Limitations of Study

One of the limitations of this study could be the researcher's personal biases, which included potential preconceptions of using mindfulness techniques, both personally and professionally, with other pre-service teachers. Carlson (2010) explains researchers can address

personal biases by being reflexive and transparent about how the research could be influenced. For this study, the researcher's biases, assumptions, and related background were disclosed within the subjectivity statement (Chapter 1). Additionally, during the research, a researcher journal was kept, in which thoughts, feelings, uncertainties, and assumptions were recorded as part of the reflexive process (not included for researcher confidentiality).

Since the sample of participants was from one university, this controlled location could also be a limitation. The researcher used a small number of participants (five), which could be a limitation. However, using a smaller sample within this qualitative case study also allowed the researcher to develop a deeper rapport with participants, actively engage in the context of the participants, and provide rich descriptive data through three data sources (i.e., interviews, journals, observations).

Even though the burden of transferability was not the direct responsibility of the researcher, indirectly, the burden was to collect appropriate data, both in quantity and quality and to write well to provide rich, thick descriptions of the context and data analysis. The researcher aimed to have an element of transferability for the readers. (See Table 2). Further, Stake (1995) states that single case studies are not intended to be generalized; however, they are meant to be added to a collection of cases from which generalized claims can be made. Stake (1995) remarks in a single case, "naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves" (p. 85). Single case naturalistic generalizations are important because of their "embeddedness in the experience of the reader, whether verbalized or not" (Stake, 1995, p. 86).

Chapter Conclusion

To explore this study's research question, this chapter outlined a qualitative case study method. Since the research question aimed to seek meaning and understanding, a case study method using interviews, participant journals, and observations provided richly descriptive data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This case study followed the constructivist, case study approach from Sharan Merriam's Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education (1998).

The study employed a single, holistic case study design with five participants who were beginning teachers starting their first year of teaching. The research timeframe of eight weeks included three interviews, two observations, and six weeks of participant reflection journals. The data analysis included field notes and analytic memos during data collection. Along with the triangulation of multiple data sources, the data was analyzed using open and emergent coding themes. Methods to ensure trustworthiness were employed, including rich descriptions, triangulation, member checks, and peer examinations.

The following chapter (findings) provides a richly descriptive summary of the data findings from each data source (i.e., participant journals, interviews, and observations). The chapter is organized to explore emerging themes and includes direct quotes, data, charts/figures, and excerpts from field notes and/or analytic memos. Chapter Four provides the study's findings through a case study report, structured as an exploration of beginning teachers' use of mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings from a comprehensive analysis of data collected, during a single holistic case study, to explore beginning teacher emotional well-being regarding their experiences with mindfulness practices during the transition from pre-service to their first-year teaching. The data analysis follows three-steps: (1) Initial gathering and sorting of the collected data to gain a holistic understanding, (2) Refining and modifying the units until tentative categories emerge, and (3) Continuing to filter and revise categories across cases, looking for certain themes to emerge (Creswell, 1998). There are two phases of data analysis: initial data analysis, which happened concurrently with data collection; and intensive data analysis, which began after data collection (Creswell, 1998; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Data for this study is organized based on the research question, designed to explore how beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession.

The emphasis of Chapter 4 is reporting the research study data collected via semi-structured interviews, documents (i.e., journals), and non-participant observations. The data analysis and discussion in this chapter are first organized chronologically, according to the data collection timeline of the transition from the undergraduate program to the beginning teacher experience. (See Table 1). Thus, the discussion of the findings begins during teacher workdays before the start of school. The data gathered during the first week (i.e., phase one) are from the demographic survey, one journal entry, and one interview. Once the school year started, the collected data during weeks two and three (i.e., phase two) includes two journal entries, one in-class observation, and a second interview. Following this second phase, to capture the experience

of the beginning of the school year, the collected data during weeks four- through eight (i.e., phase three) includes three additional journal entries, a second in-class observation, and a third interview. As such, in this chapter, the collected data is presented chronologically in three phases to represent the transition timeline into the school year. Phase one represents before the start of the school year, phase two represents the start of the school year, and phase three represents approximately over a month into the beginning of the school year. Under each phase are summary notes and emergent categories. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings and emergent themes resulting from the comprehensive analysis of the data for this single case study.

Participant Information

The participants were recent graduates from an early childhood education bachelors program from a research-intensive university in South Carolina. Participants were recruited using the early childhood graduate listserv through email, social media, and in-person recruitment session during a teacher residency meeting. Five participants, all from a fifth-year teacher residency program, were included in this study. One participant was recruited through the technology outreach, and four were recruited in-person during the teacher residency meeting. All participants were entering their fifth-year in a teacher residency program, meaning they had graduated with a bachelors degree in early childhood education and were continuing their academic progress toward their masters degree, which would be awarded at the end of their fifth year. To justify the sample size, qualitative research aims to understand a particular phenomenon, not to provide generalizations to many (Merriam, 1998); therefore, a sample size could be smaller and intentionally selected using various methods (i.e., criterion sampling).

To maintain confidentially, identity pseudonyms were given to the participants. Each participant joined in three, one-hour, semi-structured interviews over video software (i.e.,

Zoom). In each of the semi-structured interviews, the participants were encouraged to share their perspectives to their comfort level and to ask questions for clarification, as needed. The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with the participants' permission. Identified emergent categories were discussed with the participants for member checking. All five participants were observed in their classroom setting in two, 6-hour, non-participatory observations. Each participant submitted six weekly reflection documents (i.e., journals) using a secure, web-based platform. The study data was collected, for eight weeks, between July 2023 and September 2023. (See Table 1).

Participant Demographics

Each of the five participants started their first-year of teaching in an early childhood setting in four different public-school districts in South Carolina counties. Five participants were selected for the study because they met the inclusion criteria, which included recent graduates of an undergraduate (bachelors) early childhood education program, beginning their first-year teaching in an early childhood classroom, have prior knowledge and currently practice mindfulness techniques on their own (i.e., self-initiated practice), and teach in a public-school district in the upstate of South Carolina.

All five participants self-identified as white females. The participants' ages ranged from 22 to 23 (22, n=4; 23, n=1). Participants self-identified various relationship statuses (i.e., single, n=1; in a relationship but not engaged or married, n=3; and engaged to be married, n=1). None of the participants identified as having dependents. All the participants had a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education from the same upstate South Carolina University. As each participant was enrolled in the teacher residency program, they were placed in an early childhood classroom in a public-school district (District 1, n=2; District 2, n=1; District 3, n=1; District 4,

n=1). The participants were placed in early childhood classrooms (Kindergarten, n=3; 1st grade, n=1; 2nd grade, n=1). (See Table 3).

Table 3
Participant Demographics

Variable	N
Gender	
Female	5
Male	0
Ethnicity	
White	5
Age	
22	4
23	1
Marital Status	
Single	1
In a relationship, but not married or engaged	3
Engaged to be married	1
Dependents	
None	5
Degree Level & Type	
Bachelors in Early Education	5
School District	
A	2
B	1
C	1
D	1
Grade Levels	
Kindergarten	3
First	1
Second	1

Results

Before collecting data, consent to conduct the case study research was requested and obtained using the Clemson IRB approval process. Protocols approved by Clemson IRB and the participating research sites were followed throughout the study. Data was collected from July 2023 through September 2023. The research participants signed informed consent before their participation.

The following research question was used as a guide in this research study: How do beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession?

Phase One

At the start of data collection, in July 2023, participants attended teacher workdays before the first day of school with children. Participants worked full-time hours during the teacher workdays while setting up their classrooms, preparing materials, and attending various meetings within their school. The initial data collection during this phase included a demographic survey, a first journal entry, and a first interview. As part of the initial demographic survey, participants were also asked baseline questions about their grade-level placement, frequency of their mindfulness practices, and types of mindfulness practices. (See Table 1).

Demographic Survey Questions

In addition to the demographic questions, participants were also asked questions designed for reflection on their feelings about the beginning teaching experience (i.e., grade-level placement) and identified their pre-established mindfulness practices with three context prompts. (See Appendix A).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

Three of the participants identified they felt highly satisfied with their grade-level placement for their first-year teaching experience, and the other two participants felt satisfied with their grade-level placement. The frequency of mindfulness practices spanned from several times a week (n=2), once per day (n=1), to several times a day (n=2). All five participants noted various physical, spiritual, and mental-emotional mindfulness practices. One participant mentioned she used affirmation videos, breathing exercises, and focused thinking exercises.

Three participants identified reading and mindful journaling as helpful ways to process their thoughts and feelings. One participant noted reading a faith-based devotional in the morning allowed her to "get in the right head space" for the day. Then, reading a book, in the evening, encouraged a non-technology form of relaxation for her at the end of the day. Physical movement, such as working out, movement exercises, and walking, was noted by three participants. Specifically, one participant noted walking at the end of her day allowed her to "debrief the day" and clear her mind. She added she had used this technique in the past, during her undergraduate program, and noted it allowed her to "wind down the day after being at school."

First Journal Entry

In the first journal entry, before the start of school, participants were asked to reflect on their initial feelings about their emotional well-being and the potential impact of mindfulness activities on their emotional well-being as beginning teachers using three prompts. (See Appendix B).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

When asked to describe their initial feelings, before they start the school year, specific to their emotional well-being, all five participants used the word "excited." There was also an element of nervous curiosity with the unknown of what would come in their first-year teaching experience for all five participants.

When asked about mindfulness techniques which seemed most effective for their emotional well-being, all participants highlighted various physical and spiritual well-being activities. Each participant shared some type of physical activity, such as walking, working out at the gym, and yoga. Two participants also noted using external resources as effective techniques, such as mindfulness apps, faith-based music, and faith-based reading.

When asked how the participants felt mindfulness impacted their feelings of emotional well-being as a beginning teacher, they noted mindfulness helped increase their awareness, focused attention, and compassion on their emotional well-being. The participants viewed mindfulness practices as a way to focus on self-care, process emotions, and stay "grounded." One participant described the importance of mindfulness as a part of her present and long-term awareness of her emotional well-being and her role as a beginning teacher. (See Table 4).

Table 4

Phase One Journal Direct Quotes from Three Participants

Impact of Mindfulness on Emotional Well-Being	"Overall, I feel that mindfulness activities help me be more aware/ understanding of my feelings and help my emotional well-being."
	"I think it helps me to stay grounded to who I am. Everything is so busy right now, and I am glad that I am taking time to take care of myself!"
	"There is great importance of incorporating mindfulness into your life and classroom as a first-year teacher. Being a teacher can be a stressful job for numerous reasons, so incorporating mindfulness activities in the classroom and in your daily life can lead to less stress on a teacher, which can lead to a happier work-life balance and teacher retention rate. Teachers need all the support they can get especially that first year when it can feel the most overwhelming."

First Interview

The first interview, before the start of the school year, focused on gaining insight into participants' initial feelings during the transition between graduating from an early childhood undergraduate program and their first-year beginning teaching experience. As such, each participant responded to questions about their emotional well-being during the transition into the profession and their mindfulness practices during the transition. (See Appendix D).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

During the first interview, when asked about their feelings leading into the first-year teaching experience, each participant expressed various thoughts and emotions. One participant

said she had some fear related to not knowing what was to come, and it felt "nerve-wracking" because it would be all new experiences. She said she was an "overthinker" and tended to over-analyze. During this transition, she said that mindfulness practices helped her be in a "happier space" emotionally. She had practiced different types of mindful breathing, movement, and meditation (e.g., box breathing, yoga) with varying feelings of success. She mentioned box breathing had helped her feel calmer and more focused. Through her various mindfulness experiences, she identified journaling her emotions as the most effective for her. Mindful journaling allowed her to "spill it out on a piece of paper," which allowed her to "vent" her emotions. She noted mindfulness was extremely important for her emotional well-being as a beginning teacher as she could feel overwhelmed with responsibilities.

Another participant noted she was excited and had no fears because she already knew she would "make mistakes" as a beginning teacher. She was comfortable with seeing mistakes as opportunities for growth. She also stated the importance of mindfulness, when she did not get to do her mindfulness practices, she felt "like my day is off. It is not how I want it to be. All day, I'm like, when am I going to find time today [for mindfulness]. I am ball of stress." This participant noted that her daily routine included several mindfulness activities which directly connected to her emotional well-being and self-care. In the morning, she would read and write journal entries, both related to her spiritual practices. She enjoyed being able to "jam out" to her spiritual-themed playlist while commuting to work. She shared that listening to music gave her "a lot of peace," and there was "nothing else running in through my brain; I can focus on one thing, not thinking of 300 billion things to do—just focus." This participant also shared when there was a stressful event, she would give herself an internal pep-talk, which encouraged her to think everything would be okay and "gets my head in the right frame of mind." At night, this

participant enjoyed a non-technology downtime, such as reading a book for pleasure. The participant felt “excited for the challenges that are coming because I know it’s purposeful. The whole point is to doing it to learn how to be the best.” She further noted, “People who know me, know I’m always stressed out. So, this is different for me, knowing I don’t have to be perfect at it.” And “I have this understanding, and it’s all been worth it.”

Another participant described her emotions as excited, extra stressed, nervous, and thankful. She noted she intended to “keep looking at the positive.” The participant shared mindfulness practices, and discussing her emotions, had been something she prioritized during college. Through this shift, of mindfulness practices and discussing her emotions, she had noticed personal benefits, and it had played a “big role in my life.” These personal benefits came from journaling and being in nature--at least 30-minutes to an hour each day. She said these mindful strategies helped reduce her stress level. She noted she felt better if she made time for journaling and time in nature. One type of journaling she mentioned as helpful was ‘joy journaling,’ which allowed her to focus on gratitude, even in the “bad moments.” She enjoyed working out in the gym but said she really enjoyed walking in nature or hiking. She also noted she listened to different self-care podcasts (e.g., faith-based, fitness-focused, and self-care/self-love-themed). She felt her stress would be different during her first-year of teaching if she did not use these strategies, and part of her stress was related to how she would “balance it all.” She said although the strain of beginning her first-year teaching felt overwhelming, the stress was “covered with so much excitement.”

Another participant reported feeling excitement mixed with overwhelmed feelings due to all the aspects beyond “just teaching” responsibilities, such as professional development, meeting new people, engaging with different personalities, and meeting the children for the first

time. Although she would label herself a perfectionist, she would smile and say, “Yay, school is so fun.” She said mindfulness allowed her to stay aware of her perfectionist tendencies by allowing her to leave school at school so that she could relax at home. One tactic she mentioned as helpful was walking outside at home, which allowed her to “decompress.” She said this decompression would be beneficial when dealing with a stress-inducing incident, such as when a “kid would push my buttons.” The participant identified physical movement, such as walking, coupled with listening to positively toned podcasts (e.g., teacher-related content, humorous content) as highly effective for her emotional well-being. The participant noted a high level of interest in her beginning teacher growth through community, such as other beginning teachers and co-teachers. She said she loved feedback, which allowed her to have a “toolbox” of how to be the best she can be as a beginning teacher.

Phase Two

Since the participants represented different school districts, each participant’s first day of school, with children, varied during the two-week period. During week two of the data collection, with the staggered start to the school year for the various districts, four participants started the school year with students in their classrooms. During week three of the data collection, the fifth participant started school with students in her classroom. (See Table 1).

Week Two Journal Entry

During week two, participants journaled on their emotional well-being since the school year had officially started, for four of the five participants, based on three prompts and one open-response. (See Appendix B).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

Although excitement was still noted, the majority of the reflective statements included new instances of blended emotions, especially noting general and specific feelings of nervousness (e.g., “extreme anxiousness” and “nervous energy”), feeling judged by other teachers, and feeling overwhelmed. One participant said she felt nervous and overwhelmed, and when she recognized feeling this way, she liked to “take deep breaths and think about the impact I am going to make in these kids’ lives.” Another participant noted that although she was nervous about the new curriculum responsibilities and getting to know the students, she was “trying to go with the flow and stay in touch with the other [grade-level] teachers.” Another participant noted that she recognized how her anxiety related to her mindfulness practices, especially in her self-reflection and journaling practices. She planned to use the self-reflection time to acknowledge her feelings and think through different ways to “overcome these feelings.” She also mentioned her intention to list a few goals and ways to overcome “this roadblock for me.”

Participants were asked which mindfulness techniques were most effective in a journal prompt. They noted journaling, spiritual-focused practices (e.g., reading a spiritual text), physical exercise, and self-care time (e.g., breathing exercises and relaxing activities). One participant shared her self-care techniques of breathing and journaling allowed her to “reset.” Another participant noted, “Walking was a big one!! Being at school every day was a lot, but I made sure to give myself me time when I got home to relax. I went on lots of walks and took little naps when needed!” Another participant shared she felt all over the place during the first week of school. This participant recognized she needed to increase her awareness and be present to take it

one day at a time. She shared having mindful, reflective conversations with other teachers allowed her to process the change in pace and expectations of the first week of school.

During week two, two participants opted to provide additional notes in the weekly journal's optional open-response item. One celebrated feeling excited to "truly be in a routine!!" Another participant wanted to declare her feelings and intentions to "really, really want to overcome the feelings of judgment or not pleasing," as it related to her rapport with her co-teacher. This participant also noted a hopeful feeling about her mindfulness journaling practices, stating it would help her "center myself and focus on the teaching experience."

Week Three Journal Entry

In the week three journal, all participants were now reflecting on their experiences with children in their classrooms. With this transition, the participants were asked to reflect on barriers to their emotional well-being as a beginning teacher with three prompts and one open-response. (See Appendix B).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

Each participant shared various barriers. One participant shared "sleep was a struggle" (e.g., going to bed early was hard, not feeling as if she had enough sleep or feeling rested from sleep). Another participant mentioned there was "so much you have to do, so many things you are experiencing or doing for the first time, so many things you are learning" and how it could be very "overwhelming." She also noted student misbehavior, at the beginning of the school year, felt like a barrier to her ability to teach and manage all the requirements during the school day. The focus on student well-being and rapport was also echoed in another participant's reflection, noting she recognized focusing on students' well-being is very important but also needed to focus on, and take time for, self-care as a priority. Another participant felt the most significant

barrier to her emotional well-being was feeling judged by other seasoned teachers. She stated the sense of judgment from veteran teachers with beginning teachers, was something she felt now and had always felt in her previous classroom placements during college.

Week three journal prompt asked the participants to reflect on the most beneficial mindfulness techniques for their emotional well-being. The participants reflected on physical and spiritual-focused practices, such as walking for an hour at sunset, working out at the gym, taking naps, and listening to music while commuting to school. Three participants noted the need to shift their routine during week three. For example, one participant shared she napped almost every day during week three of data collection, because it was needed due to her feeling "a lot more exhausted." She said napping allowed her to feel physically recharged and mentally prepared for the next day. Another participant noted she got sick mid-week, which impacted her consistency with her well-being routines. Another participant celebrated completing a "nice reflection journal" about her week. In her personal journal, she reflected on what seemed to work and not work, which enabled her to consider goals for moving forward based on what worked and did not work from the week.

One of the journal prompts, from week three, asked the participants to describe the impact and importance of their mindfulness practices on their emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. One participant noted the impact encouraged her to feel more peaceful, prepared, and "re-centered" during the week. Another participant stressed the importance of aligning self-care to keep her "sane and in their right head space." She noted, as teachers, "we do so much that when we come home, we need to find time for ourselves to relax and focus on our own well-being." Taking time for self-care was also echoed in another participant's journal. This participant noted her mindfulness practices reminded her to slow down and take time for self-

care. Another participant noted mindfulness helped her to redirect her anxious thoughts to affirming, “Hey, I can do this” type of thoughts. She noted this mindful attention to her feelings and thoughts allowed her to process her feelings and “channel them into something more positive and meaningful.”

During week three, one participant provided an additional note in her weekly journal in the optional open-response question. She shared she had a tough week due to some personal struggles. She mentioned she tried not to let her personal struggles get in the way of what she did with the children in the classroom. She recalled, overall, the week was a great week with the children, and she felt as if she was “really starting to get into” the swing of things.

Second Interview

During the second interview, participants reflected on their emotional well-being since the school year started and shared their thoughts on mindfulness practices with the semi-structured interview questions. (See Appendix D).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

One participant said she felt much more comfortable, noting if she “messes up, it’s okay.” She described her appreciation for having a routine now that the school year had moved beyond the first week. She mentioned the first week of school felt like a “wreck” because there was no structure, and she didn’t feel “on top of things.” She noted she had felt “in her head” and was unnecessarily over-analyzing her beginning teacher experience. She identified mindful journaling as the most helpful way to organize and process her thoughts, which helped her feel more productive. After one recent stressful situation at school, she said journaling about it allowed her to “write it all out, which really helped” to process the stress and what she could do differently next time. She said she felt more comfortable now that school has been in session for

two weeks. She recalled using encouraging self-coaching statements during the week, stating, “Hey, I can do this! We got this! Progress!”

During the second interview, another participant described her emotional well-being as “natural teacher tired” but felt good, not “depressed or stressed out.” She described her feelings as “vibing” and at ease, which was noteworthy because she said she usually was “really stressed out.” She noted since it was the beginning of the school year, she needed to “expect the unknown, whatever is going to happen is going to happen, and we are going to figure it out.” She said mindfulness had been helpful as long as she was consistent with her routine, such as listening to encouraging music during her morning commute, reflective thinking at the end of the day, and speaking to other teachers at the end of the day. She noted during the school day, she was “go, go, go” and, therefore, unable to process events during the school day. However, at the end of her workday, she was able to be “still in her thoughts and process it all.” She reflected on previous advice from a prior mentor teacher, “Don’t let the little things build up” because it was “never meant to be a big thing.” She further added, “If it doesn’t matter in five-years, it’s not worth five-minutes. It's not worth complaining. We are human. It happened; let it go if it’s not going to matter tomorrow.” She said she coached herself with statements, such as she “wants to have a better day,” while adding “we will get there” and noted how many more school days remain for the year. She described her emotional well-being as “a lot better than I expected; I expected to be very, very stressed. I am supported in a way that I don’t have to be [stressed], and we [co-teacher and myself] work together. If you are stressed [it’s] because you choose to be, not because you have to be.”

Another participant described how tired she felt due to the “big adjustment” of being at school every day. She also described feeling excited and loved the children and working with

them. To help manage the exhaustion and schedule adjustment, she said she would take naps after school and take walks in the evenings with a confidant, which helped her calm down. She also shared she enjoyed mindful cleaning and clearing in her home environment too. The process of cleaning and throwing things away allowed her to focus on a project and "get everything out." She further added she needed to be in bed early (i.e., 9:30 pm) to help get plenty of sleep. As a beginning teacher, she felt her voice was heard by other grade-level teachers. She noted this feeling of being listened to had a positive impact and helped her feel more confident. As a point of reflection for the start of the school year, this participant felt "a lot stronger than I thought it would be because the first day of school is awful." She felt reassured and supported by her co-teacher. She felt she was in a "very good state starting off" the school year.

Another participant reported feeling "pretty good," but she felt limited in time for self-care. Now that the school year had started, she found it hard to "squeeze in" self-care time at the end of the day. She mentioned she loved to mindfully journal, walk, and meditate; however, the beginning of the school year had started to take a "toll" on her. She said she was trying to make the "mundane routines" fun. Two helpful, mindful activities she liked to do before bed were joy journaling and prayer journaling. She said she enjoyed writing down everything that brought her joy that day. She said joy journaling helped her in a "big way" to have a more positive mindset. This mindfulness routine (i.e., joy journaling) was a technique she learned from a motivational guest speaker in high school. She noted how beneficial she has found this technique since high school. Journaling her prayers allowed her to write everything on her mind, to get it out of her mind, which, she stated, helped her sleep better at night. She also enjoyed walking for at least 30-minutes because she felt like it allowed her to reset. During the walk, she used the time to pray, clear her mind, call family, listen to nature sounds, or listen to music or motivational

podcasts. The participant felt it was necessary to stay present and not to "wish her time away" during her first year of teaching.

Another participant described having mixed emotions related to the beginning of the school year. She said she loved the routine and felt as if it was "rocking and rolling." However, since her teacher residency courses had started, she felt a new level of stress. She felt as if her "world is upside down." She said she felt "happy, excited, nervous," and every day was "a new day." She said, "I feel every emotion." She felt like her life had been disrupted. She described feeling this physical disruption in her body, too, reporting her body felt like "whoa!" She said she felt as if she was "heading up a mountain." However, she felt things would be "on track soon." To help manage the emotions, her mindfulness practices included longer walks, listening to upbeat music, and finding a new routine. She noted she felt "all of the emotions" at this point in the school year; however, she felt as if she could "see the light at the end of the tunnel," but also her "track was a little winding."

First Observation

For contextual insight into the participants' beginning teaching experiences and their emotional well-being while in the classroom, each participant was observed within the first two weeks of the beginning of the school year. The first observation was six-hours, and included observation of the participant and the classroom, before the children's arrival (e.g., 7:00 am) until afternoon (e.g., 1:00 pm). Observations included narrative notes, as well as analytic memos, during and after the observations. (See Appendix C).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

Throughout the observation, one participant demonstrated a positive demeanor, which included positive verbal and non-verbal communication (e.g., encouraging statements, higher

pitch voice, facial expressions, hand motions), a high level of awareness and attentiveness of children, adults, and classroom environment (e.g., frequent movement around classroom, standing at the door in the morning arrival, visually scanning the classroom). She appeared to follow the classroom structure and schedule with ease and confidence.

Another participant demonstrated comfort with redirection and speaking up with children's behavioral issues. This participant demonstrated positive, playful engagement with children, such as laughing and smiling frequently in response to children's words or actions, sharing good job phrasing with a high five, and using voice modulation to capture the children's attention at the morning meeting. When this participant made a mistake during lesson plan implementation, the children called her out: "You had it, but it was upside down." In response, the participant said a "whooo" (e.g., implying a happy sound), and the children giggled. The participant demonstrated quick recovery, using a playful tone of voice and continued in the group schedule and structure. This participant helped the children through the lunch line and to find their seats at lunch. She brought her lunch and ate at the same table with the children. Her remaining time to eat was approximately 10-minutes.

Another participant implemented lessons with excitement, confidence, eye contact with children and used children's names. This participant also used an exercise to encourage the children to recall information and connect socially (e.g., while holding the stuffed animal, she asked, "Who can remember the person that has a loose tooth?"). This participant confidently shared ideas and asked questions when interacting with other grade-level teachers. Her demeanor was open and receptive to the other teachers' opinions and suggestions. At lunch, this participant helped children through the lunch line and eventually joined the other grade-level teachers at their own teacher table. During lunch, this participant comfortably engaged in personal

conversations with other teachers while remaining attentive over the children's tables. The time for the participant to eat her own lunch was approximately 20-minutes.

While helping children with their work, another participant used encouraging words and tone of voice. She frequently used the children's names as a demonstration of rapport, attentiveness, and respect for the child's work. This participant demonstrated clarity and knowledge of the classroom routines, such as parts of the morning meeting and songs (with lyrics/movements). At lunch, this participant sat at one table, talking to the children closest to her. The time for the participant to eat her own lunch was approximately 20-minutes. In the classroom, she redirected behavior, when needed, with a soft, direct tone of voice and word choice.

Another participant used a bold, projection voice to redirect inappropriate behaviors and support language for a whole group lesson implementation. Alternatively, this participant spoke softly to welcome and encourage the children's ideas and opinions. This participant demonstrated attentiveness to children's positive behaviors. She frequently walked around the classroom to stand near children in various areas of the classroom. When a child was unsure of their answer, this participant encouraged her to take a deep breath along with her. The participant bent down to be at the child's level and demonstrated the in-breath and out-breath. Then, the participant and child took one deep breath together.

Phase Three

During weeks four through eight of the data collection, all participants experienced the first month and a half of the school year. Throughout these weeks, participants completed the three final weekly journal entries (weeks 4-6). In addition, the researcher conducted a second in-class observation and the third interview. (See Table 1).

Week Four Journal Entry

During week 4, participants were asked to reflect in their weekly journal about how they felt mindfulness fit into their emotional well-being and identity as a beginning teacher with three prompts and one open-response question. (See Appendix B).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

One participant noted, mindfulness was helpful because it reminded her to take time for herself at the end of each day. She added that it was "okay to have a lot of emotions--that all teachers have been" beginning teachers, which, she noted, allowed her to readjust her anxiety with ease of mind. Another participant noted the importance of self-awareness, stating "what makes you feel happy and calm" related to being a "successful teacher." She noted the feeling was true for her, saying, "If you are not calm and happy, then you aren't going to be the best version of yourself." Another participant reported mindfulness needed to be part of each area of her life, as a beginning teacher. She conveyed, mindfulness had helped her "cope with lots of changes and stress," and mindfulness was a reliable emotional well-being outlet for her. One participant commented on how mindfulness helped her become a more reflective professional. She placed a high level of importance on mindful reflection because it could allow teachers to be humbled and intentional during the struggles of teaching.

During week 4, participants noted some changes in their mindfulness routines. One participant was sick and noted the routine of physical exercise was interrupted, and she recognized her body needed more rest than usual. The feelings of effectiveness showed up in several participants' journals during week four. Journaling allowed the participants to transfer thoughts, feelings, and stress on paper. One participant noted journaling was a "good outlet for me" this week. Another participant noted there were some "hiccups" at school, and mindful

journaling allowed her to mentally take a break, which allowed her time to process and move forward. During week four, mindful physical movement also appeared in three participants' journals. One participant declared her enjoyment of "really long walks" outside in the evening because it was "so beautiful," which allowed her to decompress and mindfully breathe, reflecting on the day. One participant noted reaching out to her mother, also an early educator, was a helpful technique for her. She stated this personal and professional connection brought her "great relief and joy" in sharing "stories, frustrations, concerns and ideas" with a trusted individual and fellow early educator.

One of the week four journal prompts asked the participants to describe the impact of mindfulness. Each participant noted stressors associated with personal life and/or school. Two participants reported their attempts to keep personal emotional well-being issues out of their time at school. One of these participants felt mindfulness helped her to be in a good headspace to keep the emotions separate from her work duties. Another participant noted mindfulness impacted her awareness to be more present through breathing and reflection. She said mindfulness allowed her to "reset" each day on a "new page."

Week Five Journal Entry

In the week five journals, participants were encouraged to reflect on their emotional well-being with three prompts and one open-response item. (See Appendix B).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

Four of the five participants noted various levels of excitement and positive reflections. One participant said the week "went super well in the classroom!!!" Another stated although she felt the workload and stress levels had increased, she felt supported and positive. A different participant said she felt "very good and confident."

In the week five journal, the participants reflected on the mindfulness techniques that felt most effective that week. Two participants reported differences in their routines, which gave them a feeling of being imbalanced. However, they both noted they found some time to implement mindfulness, such as a quick walk and mindfully journaling their emotions. Another participant noted journaling continued to help her with reflection on "working through" her thoughts. One participant reflected that listening to music and sitting in silence were both helpful, which allowed her to decompress and reflect. One participant shared she mindfully cleaned during week five, which helped her calm down, reset, and relax each day afterschool.

During week five, as beginning teachers, participants were encouraged to reflect on the emotional well-being impact of mindfulness. Each participant noted how mindfulness felt helpful to their emotional well-being as beginning teachers. To the participants, mindfulness felt relaxing and supportive and provided relief from the worries and stressors of the job. All participants noted mindfulness as an effective use of personal time, which enabled a feeling of helpful separation between teacher duties and personal emotional well-being. The concept of getting "things off my chest" to regulate emotions and thoughts was evident in three of the five participant journals on week five.

Week Six Journal Entry

In the final reflective journal, the participants were asked to gauge the helpfulness of mindfulness practices as a beginning teacher with three prompts and one open-response item. (See Appendix B).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

One participant noted mindfulness practices were "essential" because it allowed her to process all the new experiences as a beginning teacher. She noted the beginning teacher

experience could be overwhelming and challenging, both personally and professionally. She placed a high level of importance on "preserving" mindfulness time for her emotional well-being, stating it was "crucial" to take time for herself. Another participant said mindfulness helped to decompress from the long days teaching at school. This participant said mindfulness helped her to manage her emotional well-being in order to handle work-related stressors more effectively. Each of the five participants echoed mindfulness as a way to process their emotions. Whether through awareness or reflection, each participant noted how mindfulness was a helpful tool for their developing roles as beginning teachers. One participant said it was an "amazing and powerful" tool used to reflect and grow. She noted there were only upside benefits to using mindfulness. This participant said mindfulness was her best tool to reflect, personally and professionally, in order to be more responsive instead of reactive in the classroom.

By the end of the data collection, participants shared the mindfulness techniques which were the most effective for them. Three of the five participants noted physical movement (e.g., mindful walking). Two of these participants noted physical movement was needed as a way to release the physical stress of the job, as well as feeling it was a way to release mental-emotional well-being to "clear the mind." Additionally, two of the five participants noted journaling was most helpful in reflecting on thoughts and feelings. Mindfulness through physical movement and journaling were highlighted as a way to reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being. One participant reflected on how outdoor physical activity was a way to help her "be more present" and "being nature brings me joy," which "boosts my mood after difficult days" at school. Another participant painted the picture of spending time outside as a way to reconnect. "I began rolling my windows down on the way home each day, allowing the

sun to touch my skin and the air to flow through my hair. It sounds silly, but the outside air really works wonders on a stressful day and a busy mind."

In the last journal entry, one participant noted the "drain" on her emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. When she had not done her mindfulness practices, she noticed a "drastic difference" pulling down her "focus and mood." Another participant noted how mindfulness had been a "tremendous" help with her growth and reflection at the start of her beginning teaching experience. A different participant mentioned how mindfulness had been very beneficial to her well-being, noting how it had made her feel like a "happy teacher."

For the open-response question, several participants added a final note in the last journal entry. One participant stated, "This transition has been a crazy one; it is all very exciting, but this has been up and down as far as emotions go." And "I feel this year is going to be a good one!" Another participant reported how much mindfulness practices helped her with positive well-being feelings. Another participant revealed mindfulness practices encouraged her to be more "intentional with self-care, which has improved all other aspects of my well-being as a beginning teacher." Another participant shared,

> "The mind is a messy and hard place. And it can be so easy to get stuck in an emotional rut. I think starting a new profession that has so much of an emotional and mental strain adds another tough layer to navigating through one's emotional well-being. In my opinion, if someone (teacher or not) does not have healthy coping mechanisms for the challenges of life (including that first year in the classroom), then maintaining your emotional well-being will be so hard. Mindfulness is a great coping mechanism and is such a broad practice that nearly anyone can benefit in some way from a mindfulness practice (big or small). We all need it."

Second Observation

For contextual insight into the participants' beginning teaching experiences and their emotional well-being, while in the classroom, each participant was observed after one month into the beginning of the school year. The second observation lasted six hours, starting mid-morning, and lasted until afterschool (after the children were dismissed). Some participants had afterschool meetings, and some could work in their classrooms, prepping for the following school day. Observations included narrative notes, as well as analytic memos, during and after the observations. (See Appendix C).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

During the second observation, one participant used a loud, poised tone of voice. She redirected children confidently, with her word choice and intonation (e.g., "It is getting too loud."; "We only have two more minutes left, so be wrapping up your work!"; "Move quickly to clean up, quick, quick, quick!"). During teacher planning, this participant demonstrated attentiveness (e.g., visual and non-verbal) with other grade-level teachers during a meeting. This participant demonstrated confidence in speaking up to share her planning ideas. The other grade-level teachers demonstrated active listening and responded respectfully to her.

Another participant demonstrated encouragement and support of the children in her classroom (e.g., word choice and tone of voice). While leading a whole group literacy lesson, this participant demonstrated confidence, ease and flow, and clear voice projection. The participant and her co-teacher demonstrated rapport through verbal and non-verbal communication, including frequent formal and informal reflection conversations. The manner in which the participant and co-teacher interacted demonstrated closeness, rapport, and respect-trust between them.

Another participant appeared relaxed and at ease during individual math desk work; she walked around to attend to the children. The participant demonstrated frequent verbal and non-verbal encouragement with the children (e.g., high-fives with the children at the end of their task of cleaning up). Her demeanor was playful, frequently smiling and giggling with the children. The participant demonstrated responsive assistance with the children (e.g., hand-over-hand when writing). When she recognized something may have been bothering a child about their pencil, she asked, “Is this bothering you? I can help get it off.” When she leaned down to put her face close to his desk, the child motioned in a way he thought he smelled something stinky. She asked, “Did you fart, maybe?” She smiled softly, tilting her head, and they softly giggled together.

Another participant demonstrated attentiveness over the classroom throughout the observation and used redirection for safety and supervision purposes. She occasionally would speak with the other teachers when necessary. During a whole group math lesson, the participant playfully interacted with her co-teacher and used a playful, exaggerated/high-pitched tone: “Come on up, man.” This participant demonstrated a high level of confidence and shared the teaching responsibilities with ease alongside her co-teacher. This participant used encouraging statements, “Awesome,” with a supportive tone of voice. She also demonstrated verbal and non-verbal encouragement by saying, “give me a high-five,” with eye contact and a positive expression on her face.

Another participant and her co-teacher appeared to work together frequently, based on their conversational ease and comfort level (e.g., back-and-forth questions, statements of encouragement, laughter, smiles, suggestions and idea sharing, and non-verbal/body language). At lunch, this participant helped the children in the lunch line. She heated her lunch and had 20-

minutes to eat. While eating, she sat and talked with the children around her at the children's lunch table. In the classroom, this participant demonstrated respectful engagement with the children (e.g., soft voice, positive word choices). She smiled often, directed at the children.

Third Interview

During the third and final interview, participants experienced over a month in their classroom with young children. Participants reflected on their mindfulness practices and their emotional well-being as a beginning teacher with the semi-structured interview questions. (See Appendix D).

Summary Notes with Emergent Categories

One participant noted feeling more comfortable in her emotional well-being. She reflected the first weeks of the school year were "awkward and difficult," but she felt there was now a "rhythm" and rapport with her co-teacher and children. She noted a more "balanced" feeling at this point and has been working on being less reactive and more responsive to the children's behavior. She noted some weeks, she had struggled with feeling less productive. She said, "Productivity determines how I feel." She shared about the importance of a routine bedtime; otherwise, she would feel "tired and grumpy." She said some weeks it was harder to do than others, but overall, she felt "drawing a boundary" between work and personal life was needed during the evenings and weekends for her emotional well-being. Lately, she noted, her energy had felt scattered, and therefore, balance felt challenging with school and her personal life. To help with this imbalance, she said journaling was the mindfulness technique that felt the most helpful for her. She stated reflective writing allowed her to gain further insight so that the "bad thoughts" don't "just sit there and pile up." Mindful journaling allowed her to "dump them out," vent on paper, organize her thoughts, and make a plan. She noted mindful journaling was

like a “puzzle," allowing her to mentally and emotionally move things around. She said she did not see how she could be an “effective teacher” without mindful journaling. During the first month of school, she noted her emotional well-being felt like a “rollercoaster,” but reflective journaling and being more “patient” with herself made her teaching experience much more manageable and positive. She said the tough teacher moments were “hard, but it is the good hard” and was not the “end of the world.”

During the third interview, another participant reflected on her beginning teaching experience as nervous and exciting. As a beginning teacher, she mentioned she had experienced “a lot of stuff” for the first time. She said the children were enjoyable and funny but could also “get on your nerves.” She noted the beginning teaching experience required her to think on the spot, “roll with” the teaching mistakes, and maintain an open mind. She felt she had been able to manage her workload with ease and used her personal time efficiently. She noted she had not felt a “struggle with doing [work] outside of school hours.” She said walking after school each day had become “a lot bigger” practice for her to decompress from the workday. Sometimes, the walk included a confidant, listening to music, quiet thoughts, or appreciating nature and surroundings. She mentioned that she often used the time during her walks to problem-solve within her mind. As a beginning teacher, she noted mindfulness included mentally separating her time at school and home. She placed a high level of importance on leaving her teacher duties at school, which allowed her to have feelings of better self-care time at home.

Another participant, during the third interview, shared she felt her responsibilities had increased lately, in the classroom and personal life. She said she was excited about being more involved and felt more comfortable in the classroom, but also felt overwhelmed. Overall, she reflected that she felt more comfortable and more positive about her teaching experience. She

shared she was recently observed, unannounced, by a district administrator. She said she would normally be nervous being observed, but she felt confident because she had the experience and felt like she had a good rapport with the children.

During the third interview, another participant reported feeling stressed out and "in over her head" due to her feelings related to her workload. She noted she felt drained from the school day, which rendered her unable to think and accomplish tasks at the end of the day. She said it felt hard to do the things she usually enjoyed and wanted or needed to do. She mentioned spending time lately pondering what to do about the drained feeling. She concluded she needed to re-prioritize waking up early to work out before going to work in the mornings. She recalled how she usually felt tired, waking up earlier in the morning to go workout, but after her physical movement it left her feeling more energized, more patient, and kinder to those around her, including the children in her classroom. She said she realized this physical movement made her feel like a "better person and a better teacher." She also mentioned how mindful journaling allowed her to process her day, especially since she often felt she "carried the burdens of others" and felt compelled to help others with their problems. She noted journaling allowed her to process the emotional burdens of others the "right way." She noted journaling, at bedtime, encouraged her to "mind dump" by placing her thoughts on paper, which, in turn, enabled better sleep. At this point in the school year, the participant stated she felt eager and excited for new challenges, while at the same time, she could not shake the feeling of being stressed and overwhelmed.

During the third interview, another participant stated her sense of responsibility had significantly increased. She noted it felt "overwhelming—more than anticipated." She also followed this statement by saying the job was "fulfilling," but she left school every day feeling

physically exhausted. She said she would wake up still feeling tired despite getting good sleep during the night. She felt like her life was on a repeat of work and school, stating, “work, school, work, school, work, school.” Then, she jokingly shared, “But I haven’t had any mental breakdowns or left [school] crying. So, that’s a win.” She noted she felt supported by other teachers and her personal support system. She reflected on how she would feel next year, “I will do things differently” in terms of planning, preparation, set-up, etc. She said it still took her by surprise that she was a teacher, noting she thought to herself, “Wow, I’m their teacher. It’s weird that it is just me and there is no one else.” She said first-year teaching was a big transition from all her previous practicum classroom experiences during her undergraduate program. Since she felt “overwhelmed, stressed, and crazed,” she noted mindfulness practices were extremely important for her each day. Many days, she said she needed to have 30-minutes of stillness when she came home after school. She said she needed to take this mental break in response to what her body, mind, and emotional well-being needed. She also noted she recognized the importance of offering support to others during this transitional time. She said, “If I am needing the extra support, then that means others also could benefit from me offering it to them.” She said although things felt extra stressed and overwhelming, she appreciated the hugs and love from the children. She focused on letting the “positives shine through and let them warm you” as a way to keep moving forward “day by day.” (See Table 5).

Table 5
Phase One Initial Data Analysis: Emerging Categories

Initial Categories	Data Source	Sample Quote
Types of mindfulness activities: Reflective Practices and Physical Activities	Demographic Survey, Journals, and Interviews	Mindful journaling allowed participant to "spill it out on a piece of paper," which encouraged one participant to "vent" her emotions. (Reflective Practice) Self-reflection time to acknowledge feelings and think through different ways to "overcome these feelings" and problem-solve some ideas by writing down some goals and ways to overcome "this roadblock for me." (Reflective Practice) Self-care techniques of breathing and journaling allowed one participant to "reset." (Reflective Practice) Reflective writing allowed one participant to gain further insight so that the "bad thoughts" don't "just sit there and pile up" and to "dump them out," vent on paper, organize thoughts, and make a plan. (Reflective Practice) Walking outside at home, which one participant to "decompress" and was beneficial when dealing with a stress-inducing incident, such as when a "kid would push my buttons." (Physical Practice)
Mindfulness during specific times of the day: Morning, Evening, Weekends	Journals and Interviews	Faith-based devotional in the morning to "get in the right head space" for the day. (Morning) Walking at the end of the day to "debrief the day", clear her mind, and to "wind down the day after being at school." (Evening) One participant would "jam out" to spiritual-themed playlist while commuting to work. Listening to music in the morning gave her "a lot of peace," and there was "nothing else running in through my brain; I can focus on one thing, not thinking of 300 billion things to do—just focus." (Morning) At the end of the workday, one participant's self-care included, "Walking was a big one!! Being at school every day was a lot, but I made sure to give myself me time when I got home to relax. I went on lots of walks and took little naps when needed!" (Evening)

		One participant noted the need to "draw a boundary" between work and personal life during the weeknights and weekends for her emotional well-being. (Evening and Weekend)
Emotional Self-Awareness: Emotional Labeling and Awareness	Journals and Interviews	"Overall, I feel that mindfulness activities help me be more aware/ understanding of my feelings and help my emotional well-being." (Emotional Awareness) Felt fear related to not knowing what was to come, which felt "nerve-wracking" because it would be all new experiences, but mindfulness encouraged "happier space" emotionally. (Labeling Emotions) When one participant said she did not implement her daily mindfulness practices, she felt "like my day is off. It is not how I want it to be. All day, I'm like, when am I going to find time today [for mindfulness]. I am ball of stress." (Emotional Awareness) The stress of the first-year teaching experience was "covered with so much excitement." (Emotional Awareness) One participant said she felt nervous and overwhelmed, and when she recognized feeling this way, she liked to "take deep breaths and think about the impact I am going to make in these kids' lives." (Labeling Emotions and Emotional Awareness) The first weeks of the school year felt "awkward and difficult," for one participant but over time, she felt there was now a "rhythm" and rapport with her co-teacher and children. She noted a more "balanced". (Labeling Emotions)

Summary of Findings with Emergent Themes

The comprehensive data analysis revealed four major themes and six sub-themes reflecting how the beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession. The theme categories were: (a) physical activities and emotional well-being, (b) reflective practices for emotional well-being, (c) spiritual well-being activities, (d) self-awareness of emotions and the use of mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool. The two sub-themes emerged to identify different types of physical activities: (a) connection with nature and (b) physical rest-stillness. Two sub-themes emerged to identify different types of reflective practices for emotional well-being themes: (a) mindful journals and (b) personal self-reflection. Additional subthemes outlined the different types of emotional self-awareness as (a) positive emotions and (b) positive and negative emotions. (See Table 6).

As a reminder, the following research question guided the data analysis of this research study: How do beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession?

Table 6
Phase Two Intensive Analysis Data: Emerging Themes

Emergent Themes	Data Source	Sample Quote
Physical Activities and Emotional Well-Being	Demographic Survey, Journals, and Interviews	Walking at the end of the day allowed one participant to "debrief the day" and clear her mind, which allowed her to "wind down the day after being at school." (Physical: Walking with Emotional Well-Being) Another participant described walking outside in the evening at home allowed her to "decompress," which was helpful when dealing with a stress-inducing incident, such as when a "kid would push my buttons." (Physical: Walking with Emotional Well-Being) A different participant noted "Walking was a big one!! Being at school every day was a lot, but I made sure to give myself me time when I got home to relax. I went on lots of walks." (Physical: Walking with Emotional Well-Being) Another participant noted physical movement made her feel like a "better person and a better teacher" because she felt more energized and kinder to the children in her classroom. (Physical: Walking with Emotional Well-Being)
Reflective Practices for Emotional Well-Being	Demographic Survey, Journals, and Interviews	Mindful journaling enabled her to "spill it out on a piece of paper," which allowed her to "vent" her emotions. (Reflective Practice and Emotional Well-Being) Mindful journaling practices, noting that it would help her "center myself and focus on the teaching experience." (Reflective Practice and Emotional Well-Being) A different participant celebrated completing a "nice reflection journal" about her week. In her journal, she said she wrote down what seemed to work and did not work during the week, which enabled her to consider goals for moving forward based on what worked and did not work during the week at school. (Reflective Practice and Emotional Well-Being)

Spiritual Well-Being Activities	Demographic Survey, Journals, and Interviews	One participant noted reading a faith-based devotional in the morning allowed her to "get in the right head space" for the day. (Spiritual Practices and Emotional Well-Being) Another participant would "jam out" to her spiritual-themed playlist while commuting to work. She noted listening to music gave her "a lot of peace" and "nothing else running in through my brain; I can focus on one thing, not thinking of 300 billion things to do—just focus." (Spiritual Practices and Emotional Well-Being)
Self-Awareness of Emotions and the use of Mindfulness as a Well-being Tool	Journals and Interviews	One participant stated, "There is great importance of incorporating mindfulness into your life and classroom as a first-year teacher. Being a teacher can be a stressful job for numerous reasons, so incorporating mindfulness activities in the classroom and in your daily life can lead to less stress on a teacher, which can lead to a happier work-life balance and teacher retention rate. Teachers need all the support they can get especially that first year when it can feel the most overwhelming." (Positive and Negative Emotions and Mindfulness Practices as a Well-Being Tool) One participant noted the impact [of her mindfulness practices] encouraged her to feel more peaceful, prepared, and "re-centered" during the week. (Positive Emotions and Mindfulness Practices as a Well-Being Tool) Another participant emphasized the importance of aligning self-care to keep her "sane and in their right head space." She noted, as teachers, "We do so much that when we come home, we need to find time for ourselves to relax and focus on our own well-being." (Positive Emotions and Mindfulness Practices as a Well-Being Tool)

Theme 1: Physical Activities and Emotional Well-Being

Throughout the data collection, mindful physical movement was highlighted as a way to reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being. During week one, three participants shared they engaged in physical movement (e.g., working out, movement exercises, and walking). One participant noted walking at the end of her day allowed her to "debrief the day" and clear her mind. She shared she used this technique in the past, during her previous school placements in her undergraduate program, and noted walking allowed her to "wind down the day after being at school."

The participants viewed physical mindfulness as a way to focus on self-care, process emotions, and stay "grounded." One participant described walking outside in the evening at home allowed her to "decompress." She said this decompression was helpful when dealing with a stress-inducing incident, such as when a "kid would push my buttons." Another participant identified physical movement was often coupled with listening to a positive-themed podcast (e.g., teacher-related content, humorous content). She said this movement and decompression practice was highly effective for her emotional well-being.

In the week two reflection journal, when asked about mindfulness practices, one participant noted, "Walking was a big one!! Being at school every day was a lot, but I made sure to give myself me time when I got home to relax. I went on lots of walks."

During the second interview, one participant described how tired she felt due to the "big adjustment" of being at school every day. To help manage the exhaustion and schedule adjustment, she said she would take walks in the evenings with a confidant, which allowed her to calm down. She also shared she enjoyed mindful cleaning and clearing out items in her home environment too. The process of cleaning and throwing things away allowed her to focus on a

project and “get everything out.” She found this mindful cleaning very effective for her emotional well-being.

During the third interview, one participant reported feeling stressed out and “in over her head” due to her feelings related to her workload. She noted she felt drained from the day, which rendered her unable to think and complete tasks in the evenings. She said she needed to re-prioritize waking up early to work out at the gym before school in the mornings. She recalled how she usually felt tired, waking up earlier in the morning to go workout, but after her physical movement it left her feeling more energized, more patient, and kinder to those around her, including the children in her classroom. She said she realized this physical movement enabled her feel like a “better person and a better teacher.”

By the end of the data collection, participants shared the mindfulness techniques which were the most effective for them. Three of the five participants noted physical movement (e.g., mindful walking). Two of these participants noted physical movement was needed as a way to release the physical stress of the job, as well as feeling it was a way to release mental-emotional well-being to “clear the mind.”

Connection with Nature

Three participants revealed mindfulness through physical movement outside, in nature, as a way to reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being. One participant reflected on how outdoor physical activity was a way to help her “be more present” and “being nature brings me joy,” which “boosts my mood after difficult days” at school.

Another participant, during the second interview, stated she enjoyed walking at least 30-minutes in nature because she felt like it helped her to emotionally “reset” during the walk. She

used that time to pray, clear her mind, call family, listen to nature sounds, or listen to music or motivational podcasts.

During week four, mindful physical movement also appeared in three participants' journals. One participant declared her enjoyment of "really long walks" outside in the evening because it was "so beautiful," which allowed her to decompress and mindfully breathe in reflection of the day.

Another participant painted the picture of her enjoyment of the outside environment as a way to reconnect. "I began rolling my windows down on the way home each day [from school], allowing the sun to touch my skin and the air to flow through my hair. It sounds silly, but the outside air really works wonders on a stressful day and a busy mind."

Physical Rest

As the weeks progressed in the school year, mindful movement extended to include rest for the physical body (e.g., napping, stillness). In the week three journal, one participant shared she napped almost every day during week three of data collection, because it was needed due to her feeling "a lot more exhausted." She said napping allowed her to feel physically recharged and mentally prepared for the next day.

During the second interview, one participant described how tired she felt due to the "big adjustment" of being at school every day. She also described she felt excited and loved the children and working with them. She said she would nap after school to help manage her feelings of physical exhaustion and adjustment issues with the work schedule. She further added she needed to be in bed early (i.e., 9:30 pm) to help get plenty of sleep at night.

During the final interview, one participant stated her sense of responsibility had significantly increased. She noted it felt "overwhelming—more than anticipated." She also

followed up this statement by saying the job was “fulfilling,” but she left school every day feeling physically exhausted. Since she felt “overwhelmed, stressed, and crazed,” she noted mindfulness practices were highly important for her each day. Many days, she said she needed to have 30-minutes of stillness when she would come home after school days. She said she needed to take this mental break in response to what her body, mind, and emotional well-being needed.

In the final interview, one participant shared the importance of a routine bedtime; otherwise, she would feel “tired and grumpy” the next day with the children. (See Table 7).

Table 7
Phase Two Intensive Analysis Data: Emerging Sub-Themes

Emergent Themes	Data Source	Sample Quote
Physical Activities and Emotional Well-Being Sub-Theme Connection with Nature	Journals and Interviews	One participant reflected on how outdoor physical activity was a way to help her "be more present" and "being nature brings me joy," which "boosts my mood after difficult days" at school. (Physical Outside Activity and Emotional Well-Being) The same participant, during the second interview, stated she enjoyed walking at least 30-minutes in nature because she felt like it helped her to "reset" during the walk by praying, clearing her mind, talking to others, listening to nature sounds, etc. (Physical Outside Activity and Emotional Well-Being) A different participant declared her enjoyment of "really long walks" outside in the evening because it was "so beautiful," which allowed her to decompress and mindfully breathe in reflection of the day. (Physical Outside Activity and Emotional Well-Being) Another participant painted the picture of spending time outside as a way to reconnect. "I began rolling my windows down on the way home each day [from school], allowing the sun to touch my skin and the air to flow through my hair. It sounds silly, but the outside air really works wonders on a stressful day and a busy mind." (Physical Outside Activity and Emotional Well-Being)
Physical Activities and Emotional Well-Being Sub-Theme Physical Rest-Stillness		One participant shared she napped almost every day during week three of data collection, because it was needed due to her feeling "a lot more exhausted". (Physical Rest Activity and Emotional Well-Being) Another participant, due to the "big adjustment" of being at school every day, would come home to nap and rest to manage the physical exhaustion she felt. (Physical Rest Activity and Emotional Well-Being) A different participant stated her sense of responsibility had significantly increased. She noted it felt "overwhelming—more than anticipated." She also followed up this statement by saying the job was

		"fulfilling," but she left school every day feeling physically exhausted. Since she felt "overwhelmed, stressed, and crazed," she noted mindfulness, stillness practices were highly important for her each day. (Physical Stillness Activity and Emotional Well-Being) Another participant shared the importance of a routine bedtime; otherwise, she would feel "tired and grumpy" the next day with the children. (Physical Rest Activity and Emotional Well-Being)
Reflective Practices for Emotional Well-Being Sub-Theme Mindful Journals	Journals and Interviews	Journaling about the stressful "in [over] her head" week at school allowed her to "write it all out, which really helped" to process the stress and consider what she could do differently next time. (Mindful Journaling and Emotional Well-Being) Another participant, journaling was a "good outlet for me" this week. (Mindful Journaling and Emotional Well-Being) A different participant noted there were some "hiccups" at school, and mindful journaling allowed her to mentally take a break, which allowed her time to process and move forward. (Mindful Journaling and Emotional Well-Being) One participant noted mindful journaling had continued to help her reflect on "working through" her thoughts. (Mindful Journaling and Emotional Well-Being) One participant mindful journaling was like a "puzzle," which allowed her to move things mentally and emotionally around. (Mindful Journaling and Emotional Well-Being)
Reflective Practices for Emotional Well-Being Sub-Theme Personal Reflection		One participant shared having mindful, reflective conversations with other teachers allowed her to process the change in pace and expectations of the first week of school. (Reflective Practice with others and Emotional Well-Being) One participant shared mindfulness helped her to reflect and redirect her anxious thoughts to affirming, "Hey, I can do this" types of thoughts. She noted this mindful, reflective attention to her feelings and thoughts allowed

		her to process her feelings and "channel them into something more positive and meaningful." (Self-Reflective Practice and Emotional Well-Being) One participant reflected on her feeling as if she was "heading up a mountain;" however, through mindful reflection, she felt confident things would be "on track soon." (Self-Reflective Practice and Emotional Well-Being) Another participant, at the end of her workday, she was able to be "still in her thoughts and process it all." She mentioned she often recalled and reflected on previous advice given to her by a teacher, "don't let the little things build up" because it was "never meant to be a big thing." She further added she often reflected, "If it doesn't matter in five-years, it's not worth five-minutes. It's not worth complaining. We are human. It happened; let it go if it's not going to matter tomorrow." She said she used self-coached statements such as mindful reflection exercises (e.g., she "wants to have a better day," "we will get there"). (Self-Reflective Practice and Emotional Well-Being) One participant noted she often used self-coaching reflective statements, stating, "Hey, I can do this! We got this! Progress!" (Self-Reflective Practice and Emotional Well-Being) Another participant noted speaking with a confidant brought her "great relief and joy" in sharing "stories, frustrations, concerns and ideas." (Reflective Practice with others and Emotional Well-Being)
Self-Awareness of Emotions and the use of Mindfulness as a Well-being Tool Sub-Theme Positive Emotions	Journals and Interviews	One participant noted how mindfulness had been a "tremendous" help with her growth and reflection at the start of her beginning teaching experience. (Mindfulness as a Positive Emotional Awareness Well-Being Tool) Another participant mentioned how mindfulness had been beneficial to her well-being, noting how it has made her feel like a "happy teacher." (Mindfulness as a Positive Emotional Awareness Well-Being Tool) A different participant noted mindfulness practices encouraged her to be more "intentional with self-care,

		which has improved all other aspects of my well-being as a beginning teacher." (Mindfulness as a Positive Emotional Awareness Well-Being Tool)
Self-Awareness of Emotions and the use of Mindfulness as a Well-being Tool Sub-Theme Positive and Negative Emotions		One participant said she had some fear related to not knowing what was to come, and it felt "nerve-wracking" because it would be all new experiences. She said she was an "overthinker," and she tends to over-analyze. She said mindfulness practices during this transition helped her to be in a "happier space" emotionally. (Awareness of Negative Emotions and Mindfulness as a Positive Emotional Well-Being Tool) Another participant stated, when she did not get to do her mindfulness practices, she felt "like my day is off. It is not how I want it to be. All day, I'm like, when am I going to find time today [for mindfulness]. I am ball of stress." (Awareness of Negative Emotions and Mindfulness as a Positive Emotional Well-Being Tool) A different participant shared when there was a stressful event, she would give herself an internal pep-talk, which encouraged her to think everything would be okay and "gets my head in the right frame of mind". The participant identified she felt "excited for the challenges that are coming because I know it's purposeful. The whole point is to do it to learn how to be the best." She further noted, "People who know me, know I'm always stressed out. So, this is different for me, knowing I don't have to be perfect at it." And "I have this understanding, and it's all been worth it." (Awareness of Negative Emotions and Mindfulness as a Positive Emotional Well-Being Tool)

Theme 2: Reflective Practices for Emotional Well-Being

Mindfulness through reflective practices (e.g., mindful journaling, communication with others, self-talk, etc.) was highlighted as a way to process, release, reframe, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being.

Mindful Journals

From week one, three participants noted reading and journaling as helpful ways to process thoughts and feelings. During the first interview, one of the participants said through her previous mindfulness experiences, she had found mindfully journaling her emotions was the most effective for her. Mindful journaling enabled her to "spill it out on a piece of paper," which allowed her to "vent" her emotions. She noted that mindfulness, through reflective journaling, was extremely important for her emotional well-being as a beginning teacher since she felt overwhelmed with the responsibilities of the beginning teacher.

In the week two journal, one participant noted she recognized how her mindfulness practices helped with her anxiety, especially in her self-reflection and journaling practices. She planned to use her journal reflection time to acknowledge her feelings and think through different ways to "overcome these feelings." She also mentioned her intention to list a few goals and ways to overcome "this roadblock for me" in her personal journal.

Another participant shared her self-care techniques of breathing and journaling allowed her to "reset" her emotions and perspective. A different participant also shared a hopeful feeling about her mindful journaling practices, noting that it would help her "center myself and focus on the teaching experience."

In the week three journal entry, one participant celebrated completing a "nice reflection journal" about her week. In her personal journal, she said she wrote down what seemed to work

and did not work during the week, which enabled her to consider goals for moving forward based on what worked and did not work during the week at school.

In the second interview, one participant shared the beginning of the school year had started to take a "toll" on her. Two helpful mindfulness activities she liked to do before bed were joy journaling and prayer journaling. She said she enjoyed writing down everything that brought her joy that day, which helped her have a more positive mindset. Journaling her prayers allowed her to write everything on her mind, to get it out of her mind, which enabled her to sleep better at night.

During the second interview, one participant said she felt "in her head" and was over-analyzing her beginning teacher experience. She identified mindful journaling as the most helpful way to organize and process her thoughts, which helped her feel more productive. After one recent stressful situation at school, she said journaling about it allowed her to "write it all out, which really helped" to process the stress and consider what she could do differently next time.

The feelings of effectiveness of their mindfulness practices showed up in several participants' journals during week four and five. Mindful journaling allowed the participants to transfer thoughts, feelings, and stress on paper. One participant noted journaling was a "good outlet for me" this week. Another participant noted there were some "hiccups" at school, and mindful journaling allowed her to mentally take a break, which allowed her time to process and move forward. In the week five journal, one participant noted mindful journaling had continued to help her reflect on "working through" her thoughts.

In the final interview, one participant shared she felt as if her energy was scattered, and therefore, balance had felt challenging with school and her personal life. To help with this

imbalance, she said the mindfulness technique which felt the most helpful for her was mindful journaling. She stated the reflective writing allowed her to gain further insight so that the "bad thoughts" don't "just sit there and pile up." Journaling allowed her to "dump them out," vent on paper, organize her thoughts, and make a plan. She noted mindful journaling was like a "puzzle," which allowed her to mentally and emotionally move things around. She said she did not see how she could be an "effective teacher" without mindful journaling. During the first month of school, she recalled her emotional well-being felt like a "rollercoaster," but reflective journaling and being more "patient" with herself made her teaching experience much more manageable and positive.

During the final interview, one participant reported feeling stressed out and "in over her head" due to her feelings related to her workload. She noted she felt drained from the day, which rendered her unable to think and complete tasks in the evening. She mentioned she had been spending time lately pondering what to do about the drained feeling since she did not want to feel this way. She described how mindful journaling allowed her to process her day, especially since she often felt she "carried the burdens of others" and felt compelled to help others with their problems. She noted reflective journaling allowed her to process the emotional burdens of others the "right way." At bedtime, she noted journaling encouraged her to "mind dump" by placing her thoughts on paper, which enabled better sleep.

Personal Self-Reflection

In week one, one participant stated she used affirmation videos, breathing exercises, and focused thinking exercises to reflect mindfully.

In the second journal entry, one participant shared that having mindful, reflective conversations with other teachers allowed her to process the change in pace and expectations of the first week of school.

In the week three journal, the participants described the impact and importance of their mindfulness practices on their emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. One shared mindfulness helped her to reflect and redirect her anxious thoughts to affirming, “Hey, I can do this” type of thoughts. She noted this mindful, reflective attention to her feelings and thoughts allowed her to process her feelings and “channel them into something more positive and meaningful.”

In the second interview, one participant reflected on feeling as if she was “heading up a mountain.” However, through mindful reflection, she felt confident things would be “on track soon.” To help manage the emotions, her mindfulness practices included personal reflection, listening to upbeat music, and establishing a new routine.

Another participant, in the second interview, noted since it was the beginning of the school year, she needed to “expect the unknown, whatever is going to happen is going to happen, and we are going to figure it out.” She said mindfulness had been helpful as long as she was consistent with her routine, such as listening to encouraging music during her morning commute, reflective thinking at the end of the day, and speaking to other teachers at the end of the day. She noted during the school day, she was “go, go, go” and unable to process events. However, at the end of her workday, she was able to be “still in her thoughts and process it all.” She mentioned she often recalled and reflected on previous advice given to her by a teacher, “don’t let the little things build up” because it was “never meant to be a big thing.” She further added she often reflected, “If it doesn’t matter in five-years, it’s not worth five-minutes. It's not worth

complaining. We are human. It happened; let it go if it's not going to matter tomorrow." She said she used self-coaching statements such as mindful reflection exercises (e.g., she "wants to have a better day," "we will get there"). During the second interview, another participant said she felt more comfortable now that school has been in session for two weeks. She often used self-coaching reflective statements, stating, "Hey, I can do this! We got this! Progress!"

In week four, one participant noted reaching out to her mother, also an early educator, was a very helpful reflective technique for her. She stated this personal and professional connection brought her "great relief and joy" in sharing "stories, frustrations, concerns and ideas" with a trusted individual and fellow early educator.

In the week five journal, one participant noted listening to music was a helpful practice for herself, as well as sitting in silence, which allowed her to decompress and reflect.

During the third interview, one participant reflected on feeling her sense of responsibility had significantly increased. She noted it felt "overwhelming—more than anticipated." She also followed up this statement by saying the job was "fulfilling," but she left school every day feeling physically exhausted. She noted she felt supported by other teachers and her personal support system. She said she had reflected many times on how she would feel next year, "I will do things differently" in terms of planning, preparation, set-up, etc. Since she felt "overwhelmed, stressed, and crazed," she noted mindfulness practices were decidedly important to her each day. Many days, she said she needed to have 30-minutes of stillness when she would come home after school days. She said she needed to take this mental break in response to what her body, mind, and emotional well-being needed. She also noted she had reflected on the importance of offering emotional support to others during this transitional time. She said, "If I am needing the extra support, then that means others also could benefit from me offering it to them." She said

although things felt extra stressful and overwhelming, she appreciated the hugs and love from the children. She said her reflective thoughts remain focused on allowing the "positives [to] shine through and let them warm you" as a way to keep moving forward "day by day."

Mindfulness, as a way to encourage a reflective process, was echoed by each of the five participants in the final journal entry. Whether through feelings of increased self-awareness or reflection practices, each participant noted how mindfulness was a helpful tool for their developing roles as beginning teachers. One participant said mindful reflection was an "amazing and powerful" tool used to reflect and grow. She noted there were only "upside benefits" to using mindfulness. This participant said mindfulness was her best tool to reflect, personally and professionally, to be more responsive instead of reactive in the classroom.

Theme 3: Spiritual Activities and Emotional Well-Being

When asked which mindfulness techniques seemed most effective, spiritual well-being activities were identified as part of three participants' emotional well-being throughout the data collection. During week one, one participant noted reading a faith-based devotional in the morning allowed her to "get in the right head space" for the day. Three participants also reported using external resources as effective mindful-spiritual practices (e.g., mindfulness apps, faith-based music, faith-based reading).

One participant noted her daily routine included several spiritual-based mindfulness activities, which connected directly to her emotional well-being and self-care. In the morning, she would read and journal related to her spiritual practices. She enjoyed being able to "jam out" to her spiritual-themed playlist while commuting to work. She noted listening to music gave her "a lot of peace" and "nothing else running in through my brain; I can focus on one thing, not thinking of 300 billion things to do—just focus."

Theme 4: Self-Awareness of Emotions and Mindfulness for Emotional Well-Being

Throughout the data collection, participants demonstrated high levels of self-awareness related to their emotions and mindfulness practices. The participants often shared a mix of positive and negative emotions simultaneously. Several participants identified ways their mindfulness practices helped or could help with working through negative emotions or figuring out actionable steps. Some participants were able to identify negative emotions as temporary and expressed positive feelings for their future.

Positive Emotions

During week one, when asked how they felt mindfulness impacted their feelings of emotional well-being as a beginning teacher, the participants noted mindfulness helped to increase their awareness, focus their attention, and encourage compassion for their emotional well-being. The participants viewed mindfulness practices as a way to focus on self-care, process emotions, and stay "grounded." One participant described the importance she placed on mindfulness for her emotional well-being and her role as a beginning teacher, including both present and long-term awareness.

> "There is great importance of incorporating mindfulness into your life and classroom as a first-year teacher. Being a teacher can be a stressful job for numerous reasons, so incorporating mindfulness activities in the classroom and in your daily life can lead to less stress on a teacher, which can lead to a happier work-life balance and teacher retention rate. Teachers need all the support they can get especially that first year when it can feel the most overwhelming."

In one of the week three journal prompts, the participants were asked to describe the impact and importance of their mindfulness practices on their emotional well-being as a

beginning teacher. (See Table 4). One participant noted the impact encouraged her to feel more peaceful, prepared, and "re-centered" during the week. Another participant emphasized the importance of aligning self-care to keep her "sane and in their right head space." She noted, as teachers, "We do so much that when we come home, we need to find time for ourselves to relax and focus on our own well-being." Taking time for self-care was also echoed in another participant's journal, where she noted mindfulness helped to remind her to slow down and take time for self-care.

In the second interview, a different participant shared, as a beginning teacher, she felt her voice was being heard by other grade-level teachers. She noted this feeling of being heard had a positive impact and helped her feel more confident as a beginning teacher.

In the last journal entry, one participant noted how mindfulness had been a "tremendous" help with her growth and reflection at the start of her beginning teaching experience. One participant mentioned how mindfulness had been "super beneficial" to her well-being, noting how it had enabled her feel like a "happy teacher."

For the open-response question, several participants added a final note in the last journal entry. One participant shared how much mindfulness practices helped her with identifying and connecting with positive well-being feelings. A different participant noted mindfulness practices encouraged her to be more "intentional with self-care, which has improved all other aspects of my well-being as a beginning teacher."

Positive and Negative Emotions

During the first interview, each participant offered various thoughts and emotions when asked about their feelings leading into the first-year teaching experience. One participant said she had some fear related to not knowing what was to come, and it felt "nerve-wracking" because it

would be all new experiences. She said she was an “overthinker,” and she tends to over-analyze. She said mindfulness practices during this transition helped her to be in a “happier space” emotionally.

Another participant shared during the first interview that she felt excited and had no fears because she already knew she would “make mistakes” as a beginning teacher. She was comfortable with seeing mistakes as opportunities for growth. She also stated the importance of mindfulness, when she did not get to do her mindfulness practices, she felt “like my day is off. It is not how I want it to be. All day, I’m like, when am I going to find time today [for mindfulness]. I am ball of stress.”

In the first interview, one participant shared when there was a stressful event, she would give herself an internal pep-talk, which encouraged her to think everything would be okay and “gets my head in the right frame of mind.” The participant identified she felt “excited for the challenges that are coming because I know it’s purposeful. The whole point is to do it--to learn how to be the best.” She further noted, “People who know me, know I’m always stressed out. So, this is different for me, knowing I don’t have to be perfect at it.” And “I have this understanding, and it’s all been worth it.”

Another participant, during week one, described her emotions as excited, extra stressed, nervous, and thankful. She noted she intended to “keep looking at the positive.” The participant recalled mindfulness practices, and discussing her emotions, had been something she prioritized during college. Through this shift, of mindfulness practices and discussing her emotions, she had noticed personal benefits, and this shift had played a “big role in my life.” She noticed benefits from mindfulness activities of at least 30-minutes to an hour each day. She said these mindful strategies helped reduce her stress level. She noted she felt better if she made the time for

mindfulness activities. One type of mindfulness activity she felt had helped her to focus on gratitude, even in the "bad moments," was joy journaling. This same participant felt her stress would be different during her next year of teaching, and part of her feelings of stress were related to how she would "balance it all." She said although the stress of beginning her first-year teaching was overwhelming, the stress was "covered with so much excitement."

During the week two journal, although excitement was still noted, the majority of the reflective statements included new notations of blended emotions, especially highlighting "extreme anxiousness" and "nervous energy," feeling judged by other teachers and feeling overwhelmed.

One participant said she felt nervous and overwhelmed, and when she recognized feeling this way, she reminded herself to "take deep breaths and think about the impact I am going to make in these kids' lives."

Another participant noted although she was nervous about the new responsibilities of curriculum and getting to know the students, she was "trying to go with the flow and stay in touch with the other [grade-level] teachers."

Another participant recalled recognizing how her mindfulness practices helped with her anxiety, especially in her self-reflection practices. She planned to use the reflection time to acknowledge her feelings and think through different ways to "overcome these feelings." She also mentioned her intention to list a few goals and ways to overcome "this roadblock for me."

Another participant, during week two, reported feeling excitement mixed with feelings of being overwhelmed due to her workload beyond the "just teaching" responsibilities, such as professional development, meeting new people, engaging with different personalities, and meeting the children for the first time. Although she would label herself a perfectionist, she

would smile and say, “Yay, school is so fun.” She said mindfulness allowed her to stay aware of her perfectionist tendencies by allowing her to leave school at school so that she could relax at home.

In the week two journal, one participant shared she felt all over the place during the first week of school. This participant recognized she needed to increase her awareness and be more present, taking it one day at a time. She shared having mindful, reflective conversations with other teachers allowed her to process the change in pace and expectations of the first week of school.

Another participant shared her feelings and intentions to “really, really want to overcome the feelings of judgment or not pleasing,” as it related to her rapport with her co-teacher. This participant also noted a hopeful feeling connected to her mindfulness practices, reflecting they would help her “center myself and focus on the teaching experience.”

In the week two journal, participants described the impact and importance of mindfulness as it related to their emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. The participants noted mindfulness increased the awareness of the need for self-care and emotional reflection. One participant shared it was “so important to make time for ourselves” because she believed teachers could get “caught up in what’s going on at school.” She believed teachers “need to watch our mental [well-being]” as being very important. She noted walking was a good self-care break time, which allowed her to de-stress at the end of the day.

Another participant noted she would come home from school feeling tired, stressed, and overwhelmed due to “managing a variety of tasks,” both personal and professional. This participant shared how much she valued walking for thirty-minutes after school. To her, it was worth prioritizing, despite feeling as if her day and evening were busy, because this 30-minutes

of self-care allowed her time to reflect, relax, and become more mindful of her thoughts and feelings. This time for reflection was also echoed in another participant's journal entry on week two. This participant emphasized her mindfulness activities allowed her to be "very self-reflective." Her mindfulness practices enabled her to process her thoughts and feelings, which allowed her to "analyze" what was working or not working for her as a beginning teacher.

In the week three journal, the participants were asked to describe the impact and importance of their mindfulness practices on their emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. One shared mindfulness helped her to redirect her anxious thoughts to affirming, "Hey, I can do this" types of thoughts. She noted this mindful attention to her feelings and thoughts allowed her to process her feelings and "channel them into something more positive and meaningful."

During week three, one participant shared she had a tough week due to some personal struggles. She mentioned she tried not to let her personal struggles get in the way of what she did with the children in the classroom. She noted the week was a great one with the children, and she felt as if she was "really starting to get into" the swing of things.

In the week three journal, each participant shared various barriers to their emotional well-being. One participant identified "sleep was a struggle" (e.g., going to bed early was hard, not feeling like she had enough sleep or feeling rested from sleep). Another participant mentioned there was "so much you have to do, so many things you are experiencing or doing for the first time, so many things you are learning" and how it could be very "overwhelming." She also noted that student misbehavior at the beginning of the school year felt like a barrier to her ability to teach and manage all required tasks during the school day. Another participant felt the most significant barrier to her emotional well-being was feeling judged by other seasoned teachers.

During the second interview, one participant said she felt much more comfortable, noting if she "messes up, it's okay." She described her appreciation for having a routine now that the school year had moved beyond the first week. She mentioned the first week of school felt like a "wreck" because there was no structure, and she did not feel "on top of things." She noted she has felt "in her head" and was over-analyzing her beginning teacher experience. She identified mindful journaling as the most helpful way to organize and process her thoughts, which helped her feel more productive. After one recent stressful situation at school, she said journaling about it allowed her to "write it all out, which really helped" to process the stress and what she could do differently next time. She said now that school had been in session for two weeks, she was feeling more and more comfortable. She recalled using self-encouragement and self-coaching statements throughout the week, stating, "Hey, I can do this! We got this! Progress!"

As a point of reflection for the start of the school year, one participant noted, during the second interview, she felt "a lot stronger than I thought it would be because the first day of school is awful." She felt reassured and supported by her co-teacher. She felt she was in a "very good state starting off" the school year as a beginning teacher.

Another participant, in the second interview, noted since it was the beginning of the school year, she needed to "expect the unknown, whatever is going to happen is going to happen, and we are going to figure it out." She said mindfulness had been helpful as long as she was consistent with her routine, such as listening to encouraging music during her morning commute, reflective thinking at the end of the day, and speaking to other teachers at the end of the day. She noted during the school day, she was "go, go, go" and unable to process events. However, at the end of her workday, she was able to be "still in her thoughts and process it all." She reflected on previous advice from a prior mentor teacher, "Don't let the little things build up" because it was

“never meant to be a big thing.” She further added, “If it doesn’t matter in five-years, it’s not worth five-minutes. It's not worth complaining. We are human. It happened; let it go if it’s not going to matter tomorrow.” She said she coached herself with statements, such as she “wants to have a better day,” while adding “we will get there” and noted how many more school days remain for the year. She described her emotional well-being as “a lot better than I expected; I expected to be very, very stressed. I am supported in a way that I don’t have to be [stressed], and we [co-teacher and myself] work together. If you are stressed because you choose to be, not because you have to be.”

Another participant shared, in the second interview, the beginning of the school year had started to take a “toll” on her. She said she was trying to make the “mundane routines” fun. Two helpful mindful activities she liked to do before bed were joy journaling and prayer journaling. She said she enjoyed writing down everything that brought her joy that day, which helped her to have a more positive mindset. She also stated she felt it was necessary to stay present and not to “wish her time away” during her first year of teaching.

During the second interview, one participant noted contrasting feelings about the beginning of the school year. She said she loved the routine and felt as if it was “rocking and rolling;” however, she also felt a new level of stress. She felt as if her “world is upside down.” She said she felt “happy, excited, nervous” and every day is “a new day.” She said, “I feel every emotion.” She felt like her life had been disrupted. She described feeling this physical disruption in her body, too, noting her body felt like “whoa!” She said she felt as if she was “heading up a mountain.” However, she felt things would be “on track soon.” She noted she felt “all of the emotions” at this point in the school year; however, she also felt as if she could “see the light at the end of the tunnel,” but also her “track was a little winding.” To help manage these

contrasting emotions, she shared her mindfulness practices included longer walks and listening to upbeat music.

In the week four journal, one participant noted mindfulness was helpful because it reminded her to take time for herself at the end of each day. She added that it was "okay to have a lot of emotions--that all teachers have been" beginning teachers, which allowed her to readjust her anxiety easily. Another participant noted the importance of self-awareness, stating "what makes you feel happy and calm" was related to being a "successful teacher." She emphasized the feeling was true for her, stating, "If you are not calm and happy, then you aren't going to be the best version of yourself."

Another participant reported mindfulness needed to be a part of each area of her life, as a beginning teacher. She conveyed, mindfulness had helped her "cope with lots of changes and stress," and mindfulness was a reliable emotional well-being outlet for her.

One participant commented on how mindfulness helped her become a more reflective professional. She placed a high level of importance on mindful reflection because it could allow teachers to be humbled during the struggles of teaching, which could help with problem-solving and growth.

One of the week four journal prompts asked the participants to describe the impact of mindfulness. Each participant noted stressors associated with personal life and/or school. Two participants reported trying to keep personal and emotional well-being issues out of their professional time at school. One of these participants felt mindfulness helped her be in a good headspace to keep her emotions separate from her work duties. Another participant noted mindfulness increased her awareness to be more present through breathing and reflection. She said mindfulness allowed her to "reset" each day on a "new page."

One participant said the week “went super well in the classroom!!!” She noted that although she felt the workload and stress levels had increased, she felt supported and positive. She said she felt “very good and confident.”

During week five, participants were encouraged to reflect on the emotional well-being impact of mindfulness as beginning teachers. Each participant noted how mindfulness felt helpful to their emotional well-being as beginning teachers. To the participants, mindfulness felt relaxing, supportive, and helpful and provided relief from the worries and stressors of the job. The participants noted mindfulness as an effective use of personal time, which enabled a feeling of helpful separation between teacher duties and personal emotional well-being. This feeling of getting “things off my chest” to regulate negative emotions and thoughts was evident in three of the five participant journals on week five.

In the last journal entry, one participant noted the “drain” on her emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. Noting, when she had not done her mindfulness practices, she noticed a “drastic difference” in her negative “focus and mood.”

For the open-response question, in the last journal entry, one participant stated, “This transition has been a crazy one; it is all very exciting, but this has been up and down as far as emotions go.” And “I feel this year is going to be a good one!”

Another participant noted,

> “The mind is a messy and hard place. And it can be so easy to get stuck in an emotional rut. I think starting a new profession that has so much of an emotional and mental strain adds another tough layer to navigating through one’s emotional well-being. In my opinion, if someone (teacher or not) does not have healthy coping mechanisms for the challenges of life (including that first year in the classroom), then

> maintaining your emotional well-being will be so hard. Mindfulness is a great coping mechanism and is such a broad practice that nearly anyone can benefit in some way from a mindfulness practice (big or small). We all need it."

In the last journal entry, one participant revealed mindfulness practices were "essential" because it allowed her to process all the new experiences as a beginning teacher. She noted the beginning teacher experience could be overwhelming and challenging, both personally and professionally. She placed a high level of importance on "preserving" mindfulness time for her emotional well-being, stating it was "crucial" to take time for herself.

Another participant said mindfulness helped her to decompress from the long days teaching at school. This participant said mindfulness helped her manage her well-being in order to cope with work-related stressors more effectively.

One participant felt more comfortable in her emotional well-being in the final interview. She reflected the first weeks of the school year were "awkward and difficult," but she felt there was now a "rhythm" and rapport with her co-teacher and children. She noted, at this point, there was a more "balanced" feeling, and she has been working on being less reactive and more responsive to the children's behavior. She noted some weeks she had struggled with feeling less productive. She said, "Productivity determines how I feel." She noted the importance of a routine bedtime; otherwise, she would feel "tired and grumpy." She said some weeks it was harder to do than others, but overall, she felt "drawing a boundary" between work and personal life was needed for her emotional well-being during the evenings and weekends. Lately, she noted, her energy had felt scattered; therefore, sustained balance had felt challenging with school and her personal life. To help with this imbalance, she said the mindfulness technique which felt the most helpful was mindful journaling. She stated this type of reflective writing allowed her to

gain further insight so that the “bad thoughts” don’t “just sit there and pile up.” Journaling allowed her to “dump them out,” vent on paper, organize her thoughts, and make a plan. She noted journaling was like a “puzzle," allowing her to mentally and emotionally move things around. She said she did not see how she could be an “effective teacher” without mindful journaling. During the first month of school, she noted her emotional well-being felt like a “rollercoaster,” but reflective journaling and being more “patient” with herself made her teaching experience much more manageable and positive. She said the tough teacher moments were “hard, but it is the good hard” and was not the “end of the world.”

Another participant, in the final interview, reflected on her beginning teaching experience as feeling nervous and excited. She mentioned she had experienced “a lot of stuff” for the first time as a beginning teacher. She said the children were enjoyable and funny but could also “get on your nerves.” She noted the beginning teaching experience required her to think on the spot, “roll with” teaching mistakes, and maintain an open mind. She felt she had been able to manage her workload with ease and used her personal time efficiently. She noted she had not felt a “struggle with doing [work] outside of school hours.” She said walking after school each day had become “a lot bigger” mindfulness practice for her to decompress from the workday. Sometimes, the walk included a confidant, listening to music, quiet thoughts, or appreciating nature/surroundings. She used the time, during her walks, to problem-solve within her mind. She noted mindfulness, as a beginning teacher, included mentally separating her time at school and home. She placed a high level of importance on leaving her teacher duties at school, which allowed her to have feelings of better self-care time at home.

In the final interview, another participant reported feeling stressed out and “in over her head” due to her feelings related to her workload. She noted she felt drained from the day, which

rendered her unable to think and complete tasks once she got home from school. She said it had felt hard to do the things she usually enjoyed and wanted to do. She mentioned she had been spending time lately pondering what to do about the drained feeling because she did not want to feel that way. She said she needed to re-prioritize waking up early, so that she could go work out before the school day in the mornings. She recalled how she usually felt tired, waking up earlier in the morning to go workout, but after that type of physical movement it left her feeling more energized, more patient, and kinder to those around her, including the children in her classroom. She said she realized this physical movement made her feel like a "better person and a better teacher." At this point in the school year, this participant stated she felt eager and excited for new challenges, while at the same time, she could not shake the feeling of being stressed and overwhelmed.

During the final interview, another participant stated her sense of responsibility had significantly increased. She noted it felt "overwhelming—more than anticipated." She also followed this statement by saying the job was "fulfilling," but she left school every day feeling physically exhausted. She said she would wake up still feeling tired despite getting good sleep during the night. She felt like her life was on a repeat of work and school, stating, "work, school, work, school, work, school." Then, she jokingly shared, "But I haven't had any mental breakdowns or left [school] crying. So, that's a win." She noted she felt supported by other teachers and her personal support system, which was helpful to her emotional well-being. She reflected on how she would feel next year, saying, "I will do things differently," regarding planning, preparation, set-up, etc. She said it still took her by surprise that she was a teacher, noting she thought, "Wow, I'm their teacher. It's weird that it is just me and there is no one else." She said first-year teaching was a big transition from all her previous practicum classroom

experiences during her undergraduate program. Since she felt “overwhelmed, stressed, and crazed,” she further clarified, mindfulness practices were of high importance for her each day. Many days, she said she needed to have 30-minutes of stillness when she would come home after school days. She said she needed to take this mental break in response to what her body, mind, and emotional well-being needed. She also recognized the importance of supporting others during this transitional time. She said, “If I am needing the extra support, then that means others also could benefit from me offering it to them.” She said although things felt extra stressed and overwhelming, she appreciated the hugs and love from the children. She focused on letting the “positives shine through and let them warm you” to keep moving forward “day by day.”

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to report the findings from a comprehensive analysis of data collected, for a single holistic case study, to explore beginning teacher emotional well-being regarding their experiences with mindfulness practices during the transition from pre-service to their first-year teaching.

The data analyses followed three-steps: (1) Initial gathering and sorting of data, (2) Refining and modifying emerging categories, (3) Continuing to filter and revise categories for emergent themes (Creswell, 1998). There were two phases of data analysis: initial data analysis (concurrently with data collection) and intensive data analysis (after data collection) (Creswell, 1998; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Data for this study was organized based on the research question, designed to explore how beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession.

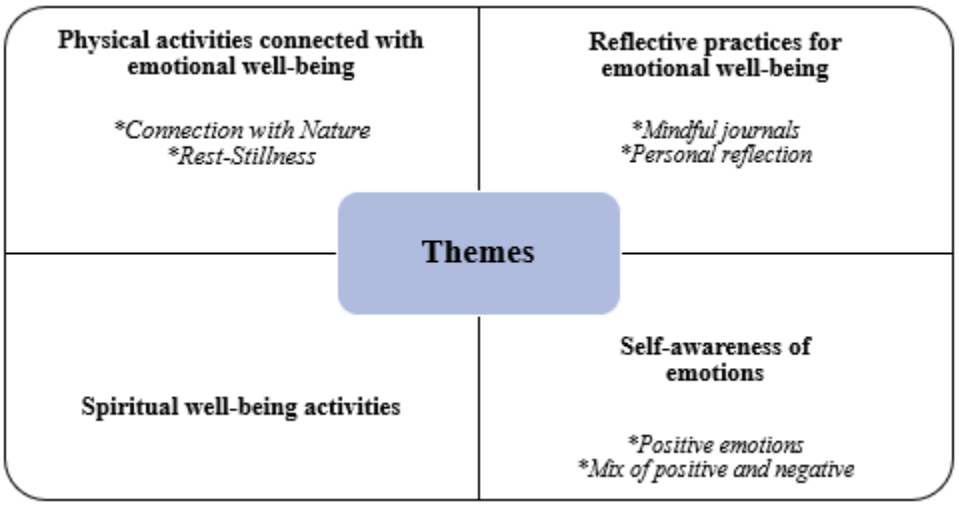
This research study data was collected via semi-structured interviews, documents (i.e., journals), and non-participatory observations. In this chapter, the collected data was presented

chronologically in the three collection phases to represent the transition timeline into the school year. Phase one represents before the start of the school year, phase two represents the start of the school year, and phase three represents approximately over a month into the beginning of the school year. Each phase included summary notes and emergent categories.

The data analysis from this study revealed four major themes and six sub-themes relating to the central research question, reflecting how the beginning teachers use mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession. The four major theme categories were (a) physical activities and emotional well-being, (b) reflective practices for emotional well-being, (c) spiritual well-being activities, and (d) self-awareness of emotions and the use of mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool. Two sub-themes emerged to identify different types of physical activities: (a) connection with nature and (b) physical rest. Two sub-themes emerged to identify different types of reflective practices for emotional well-being themes: (a) mindful journals and (b) personal self-reflection. Additional subthemes outlined the different types of emotional self-awareness: (a) positive emotions and (b) positive and negative emotions. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1

Themes and Subthemes of Data Analysis



The findings offer important insight into mindfulness practices and emotional well-being perspectives of the beginning teaching experience. From week one to week eight of the data collection, all five participants noted various benefits to their physical, spiritual, and mental-emotional mindfulness practices. Mindfulness practices through physical movement and journaling were highlighted as strategies to reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being.

The following chapter provides a summary and discussion of the study's significant findings and themes, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

This single holistic case study explored the emotional well-being of early childhood beginning teachers engaged in self-selected mindfulness practices during the transition from pre-service to first-year teaching.

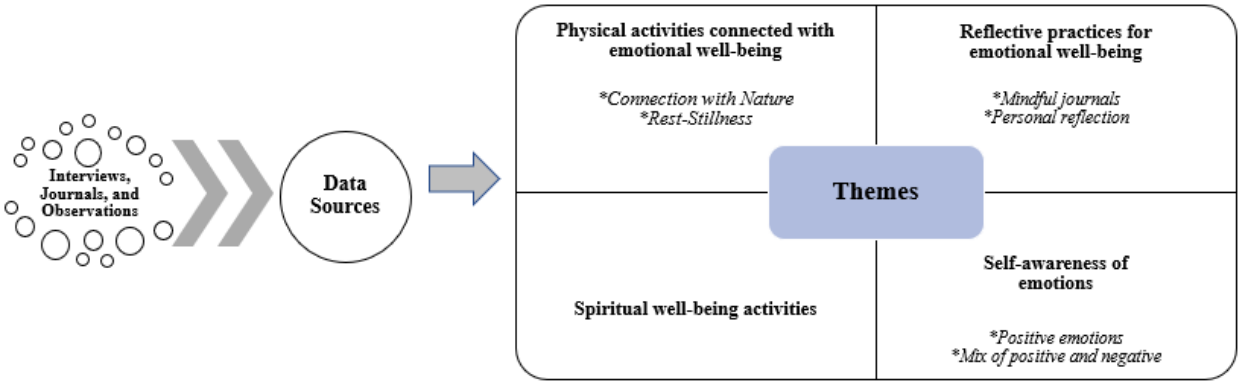
Today's teachers are responsible for providing a stimulating learning environment to facilitate student academic outcomes, in addition to providing a positive emotional climate to support student social-emotional functioning (Harris et al., 2016). Specific to early childhood, teacher-related demands have increased over the years, including the emphasis of the teacher's vital role in children's academic and social-emotional development (Flook et al., 2013). Early childhood educators engage with a variety of physical and emotional stressors throughout the workday, and in order to be effective, they must be able to cope with their own emotional reactivity (Day & Qing 2009). Teacher experiences of work stress may lead to decreased performance, burnout, and poor student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teacher burnout and turnover create serious concerns for the modern education environment (Jotkoff, 2022). One transferable strategy to help teachers' emotional well-being is mindfulness self-care, such as breathing practices. Mindfulness can serve as a protector factor for teachers to improve their emotional well-being and support feelings of self-efficacy (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hirshberg et al., 2020; Napoli, 2004; Roeser et al., 2012; Whitebook, 2018).

Summary of Findings

The data analysis from this study revealed four major themes and six sub-themes relating to the central research question, reflecting how the beginning teachers use mindfulness as an

emotional well-being tool during the transition into the profession. The theme categories were (a) physical activities and emotional well-being, (b) reflective practices for emotional well-being, (c) spiritual well-being activities, (d) self-awareness of emotions and the use of mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool. Two sub-themes emerged to identify different types of physical activities: (a) connection with nature and (b) physical rest. Two sub-themes emerged to identify different types of reflective practices for emotional well-being themes: (a) mindful journals and (b) personal self-reflection. Additional subthemes outlined the different types of emotional self-awareness: (a) positive emotions and (b) positive and negative emotions. (See Figure 2).

Figure 2
Findings from Data to Themes



To connect these findings to the larger body of research, the Mindfulness-to-Meaning Theory (MMT) theoretical framework was used to focus on the processes of attention, appraisal, and emotion (Garland et al., 2015). This theory provided a hypothesized process for mindfulness and personal meaning, using reappraisal and savoring. For an individual, mindfulness practices can generate meaning by promoting reappraisal (e.g., assessing in a new or different way) and savoring (e.g., appreciation of positive aspects). Also, since the participants practiced self-selected mindfulness techniques, MMT allows for the use of a variety of methods and practices of mindfulness (Garland et al., 2017). MMT emphasizes mindfulness as a way to broaden

awareness and integrate and adapt thoughts (e.g., reappraisals). Through the MMT proposed process of reappraisals and savoring, individuals can create a sense of meaning in their lives, along with feelings of sustainable positive impact and a sense of positive well-being (Garland et al., 2015). For this study, the MMT framework provided a structure for the themes of how participants perceived their experiences from subjective viewpoints, including how they processed, approached, and reflected on experiences through their emotions using mindfulness.

Summary of Theme 1: Physical Activities and Emotional Well-Being

Throughout the data collection, mindful physical movement was highlighted as a way to reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being. Types of physical movement varied but included working out, movement exercises, rest, stillness, and walking in nature. This theme of physical activities and emotional well-being echoed previous research discussed in the literature review, which explained how mindfulness could be a protective factor against stress and burnout and how certain interventions, including contemplative practices, may improve teachers' well-being and reduce stress (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2012).

Research outside of the education setting suggests mindfulness-based interventions are effective for the treatment of both psychological and physical symptoms (Shapiro et al., 2006). Mindfulness also encourages individuals to be in the moment, which can help create a sense of harmony alongside the many challenges and stressors teachers face today. Mindfulness, focused on emotional awareness and regulation for teachers, may decrease feelings of psychological distress, alleviate perceptions of time urgency, improve sleep habits, and lower levels of burnout (Crain et al., 2017). Mindfulness, in turn, can create positive ripple effects on the teachers' emotional well-being, both personally and professionally (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hirshberg et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2012). Research focused on teachers

suggests mindfulness can serve as a protective factor and improve well-being (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2012).

In this study, participants reported frequent engagement with physical movement—typically, at least once a day and several times per week. Three participants shared the benefits of end-of-day physical movement, as helpful to their emotional well-being as beginning teachers. One participant emphasized the importance of physical movement in the morning for her body and emotional well-being.

Physical movement as a way to process emotions was noted frequently throughout the study. Participants shared several positive emotional well-being benefits from physical mindfulness activities. The participants reported physical movement (e.g., walking in nature) enabled them to clear their minds, unwind, and decompress. Physical activities, at the end of the day, seemed to provide space to emotionally debrief the day's events, especially if there was a perceived area of professional improvement or a stressful event at school. The debriefing was described as a self-reflective (e.g., mental processing) or an open conversation with others (e.g., family, friend, fellow teacher). One participant noted sometimes movement was not her first choice, but once completed, it left her feeling more energized, more patient, and kinder to those around her, including the children in her classroom. She underscored physical movement enabled her feel like a "better person and a better teacher." Four of the five participants recognized mindful physical practices allowed them to release the physical and emotional stress of the first-year teaching experience.

Additionally, three participants revealed mindfulness through physical movement outside, in nature, as a way to reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being. One participant reflected on how outdoor physical activity was a way to help her "be

more present" and "being nature brings me joy," which "boosts my mood after difficult days" at school. During a walk outside, participants reported they used that time to take in the beauty of nature in silence, pray, clear their mind, mindfully breathe, reflect on the day, call family, listen to nature sounds, or listen to music or motivational podcasts. One participant described her mindful-emotional connection with the outdoor elements when she said, "The outside air really works wonders on a stressful day and a busy mind."

Participants also revealed another side to physical movement: stillness, rest, and sleep. Intentional mindful non-movement was recognized by the participants as a need of their physical body and emotional well-being. The participants demonstrated an increased awareness of how their bodies responded to the amplified responsibilities of their beginning teaching experience and the changes in their daily schedules. Participants reported feeling more exhausted at the end of the school day. Physical resting (e.g., napping, stillness) allowed the participants to feel recharged and better mentally prepared for the next school day.

Participants also mindfully recognized their physical and emotional need to go to bed early to help with their feelings of physical exhaustion. These types of restful self-care allowed the participants to align their daily habits with the perceived emotional well-being benefits. The participants reported using self-directed self-care techniques, which the NIMH (2022) recommends (e.g., exercise, healthy eating and sleeping habits, relaxing activity, gratitude practices, and staying connected to others). Throughout the data collection, participants frequently noted the benefits of physical mindfulness practices to focus on self-care, process deferred emotions, and feel more connected with themselves, others, and their professional goals. NIMH lists the benefits of self-care, including helping manage stress, lowering the risk of illness,

and increasing energy (2022). Noting that even “small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact” (NIMH, 2022).

Summary of Theme 2: Reflective Practices for Emotional Well-Being

Mindfulness through reflective practices (e.g., mindful journaling, communication with others, self-talk, etc.) was emphasized by the participants as a way to process, release, reframe, and reconnect with their feelings of positive emotional well-being.

Participants noted reading and journaling as helpful practices to process thoughts and feelings. Mindful journaling was often described as an opportunity for personal reflection of emotions. The mindful journal experience allowed the participants to express all their emotions and "mind-dump” their thoughts on paper to get them out of their minds in order to release or process events. Mindful journaling appeared to be an important emotional well-being activity as a beginning teacher. Repeatedly, the participants’ described their personal journals were used to process the overwhelming sense of beginning teacher responsibilities. Mindful reflection was self-identified as a beneficial tool to reflect, personally and professionally, to be more responsive instead of reactive in the classroom. These findings echo Davis and Hayes’ research, which indicates mindful reflection may prompt positive emotions, minimize negative rumination, and enhance emotional regulation (2011). As well as other researchers who use their data to explain how mindfulness may encourage individuals to become less reactive (Cahn & Polich, 2009; Goldin & Gross, 2010) and have greater cognitive flexibility (Moore & Malinowski, 2009).

Mindful journal reflection time allowed participants to acknowledge their feelings and think through different ways to “overcome these feelings.” Mindful journaling created space for the participants to work through and overcome “roadblocks” through reflection. According to MMT, a positive appraisal could be appraised initially as negative (e.g., “roadblock”); however,

the individual can reappraise the experience as harmless, controllable or negotiable and often results in a sense of positive emotions and feelings of self-efficacy (Garland et al., 2015; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Moreover, self-care techniques of breathing and journaling allowed one participant to feel "reset" for the next day. Another participant also shared a hopeful feeling related to her mindful journaling practices, noting that it would help her "center myself and focus on the teaching experience." Another participant used her personal journal to write down what seemed to work and did not work during the week, which enabled her to consider goals for moving forward based on what worked and did not work during the week at school. Another participant said she felt "in her head" and over-analyzed her beginning teaching experience. She identified mindful journaling as the most helpful way to organize and process her thoughts, which helped her feel more productive. After a stressful situation at school, this participant said journaling about it allowed her to "write it all out, which really helped" to process the stress and consider what she could do differently next time. According to Lazarus & Folkman, this positive cognitive strategy (i.e., reappraisal) allows the individual to process and reconstruct stressful events as harmless, meaningful and even productive for personal growth (1984).

MMT views reflective reappraisal (e.g., reflective journaling) as a lens on how individuals proactively construct eudaimonic meaning in their lives, promoting resiliency and engagement with a life that feels purposeful and valuable (Garland et al., 2015). An example of proactive eudaimonic meaning was evident when one participant described two helpful mindfulness activities she liked to do at the end of the day: joy journaling and prayer journaling. She said she enjoyed writing down everything that brought her joy that day, which helped her

have a more positive mindset. Journaling her prayers allowed her to write everything on her mind, to get it out of her mind, which helped her sleep better at night.

Furthermore, MMT proposes that mindful reappraisal is accomplished by modifying how one attends to the "cognitive, affective, and interoceptive" of an emotion (Garland et al., 2015, p. 295). For one participant, mindful journaling encouraged a sense of balance when she felt imbalanced due to school and personal life challenges. She stated the reflective writing allowed her to gain further insight so that the "bad thoughts" do not "just sit there and pile up." Mindful journaling allowed her to "dump them out," vent on paper, organize her thoughts, and create a plan. She noted journaling was like a "puzzle, " allowing her to mentally and emotionally move things around. She said she did not see how she could be an "effective teacher" without mindful journaling. During the first month of school, she recalled her emotional well-being felt like a "rollercoaster." However, reflective journaling and being more "patient" with herself made her teaching experience much more manageable and positive.

Further reappraisal was seen in another participant when she described how mindful journaling allowed her to process her day, even when she felt emotionally and physically "drained" from the day, especially because she often felt she "carried the burdens of others" and she felt compelled to help others with their problems. She noted reflective journaling allowed her to process the emotional burdens of others the "right way." She noted journaling at bedtime encouraged her to "mind dump" by placing her thoughts on paper, which, in turn, enabled better sleep. Another participant described the benefits of self-reflection in the evening because the daily schedule at school was "go, go, go," which did not allow her time to reflect and process during the school day. However, she reported during her end-of-the-day commute, she was able to use the time for mindful reflection and processing. She said this reflection time allowed her to

be “still with her thoughts and process it all.” Another participant noted when she increased her awareness and provided attention to her feelings and thoughts; it allowed her to process her feelings and “channel them into something more positive and meaningful”, thus allowing for mindful reappraisal (Garland et al., 2015).

According to MMT, mindfulness contributes to positive cognitive-affective processing through cognitive reappraisal (e.g., self-coaching, self-encouragement), which, in turn, enhances an individual’s well-being (Garland et al., 2015). This was evident when the participants shared the emotional well-being benefits of their other reflective practices, such as self-talk, self-coaching, self-encouragement, and external resources/support. Some participants shared the benefits of using external resources (e.g., podcasts, apps, faith-based books, music) as helpful in their mindful reflective practices. In particular, one participant noted listening to music was a helpful practice, allowing her to decompress, relax, and reflect. One participant stated she benefited from using affirmation videos, breathing exercises, and focused thinking exercises to reflect mindfully. During a particularly stressful time, one participant stated her personal, mindful reflection (e.g., self-coaching, encouraging statements) allowed her to increase her feelings of self-confidence. Another participant echoed the use of self-coaching statements to increase her confidence as a beginning teacher (e.g., “Hey, I can do this! We got this! Progress!”).

Additionally, several participants noted reflection in community with others as a beneficial reflective practice. One participant shared that having mindful, reflective conversations with other teachers allowed her to process the change in pace and expectations of the first week of school. Another participant noted that reaching out to her mother, an early educator, was a helpful reflective technique for her. She stated this personal and professional

connection brought her “great relief and joy” in sharing “stories, frustrations, concerns and ideas” with a trusted individual and fellow early educator. Another participant shared the positive emotional well-being impact of feeling supported by her fellow grade-level teachers and her personal support system (e.g., friends, family). This same participant reflected on the importance of offering emotional support to others during this transitional time. She said, “If I am needing the extra support, then that means others also could benefit from me offering it to them.” She also indicated that although things felt extra stressful and overwhelming, she appreciated the hugs and love from the children. She said her reflective thoughts remain focused on allowing the “positives [to] shine through, and let them warm you” as a way to keep moving forward “day by day.”

Lastly, MMT hypothesizes mindfulness reshapes how individuals evaluate their experiences to engage in habitual, positive self-reappraisals (e.g., reframe a failure as a pathway for growth) (Garland et al., 2015). Mindfulness, as a re-evaluative, reflective process, was echoed by each of the five participants. Whether through feelings of increased self-awareness or reflection practices, each participant noted how mindfulness was a helpful tool for their developing roles as beginning teachers. One participant described mindful reflection as an “amazing and powerful” tool used to reflect and grow professionally. She noted there were only “upside benefits” to using mindful reflection. Throughout the data collection, all five participants frequently noted the benefits of mindful reflective practices (e.g., mindful journals, personal reflection) to focus on emotional self-care, process, reframe, and release deferred emotions, determine future options or actions, and reconnect with positive emotional well-being.

Summary of Theme 3: Spiritual Activities and Emotional Well-Being

Spiritual well-being activities were also identified as part of participants' emotional well-being practices as beginning teachers. This theme aligns with the previous research regarding emotional regulation; teachers with well-developed emotional management skills may be able to effectively cope with the diverse range of interactions and requirements in their profession, such as child behaviors, building relationships with parents and students, and achieving instructional goals (Brackett et al., 2010; Frank et al., 2015). Additionally, this theme aligned with Napoli's (2004) description of mindfulness as bringing awareness to the current experience while also regulating the focus of attention, which can lead to feeling more alert, fully present and 'alive.' Napoli explained mindfulness could encourage the individual to focus on "what is happening in the body and mind—being a witness to one's personal experience" (2004, p. 32).

One participant noted reading faith-based devotional in the morning allowed her to "get in the right head space" before the school day. Other participants noted external resources as effective spiritual mindfulness techniques (e.g., mindfulness apps, faith-based music, faith-based reading). One of these three participants noted her daily routine included several spiritual-based mindfulness activities which directly connected to her emotional well-being and self-care. In the morning, she would read and journal related to her spiritual practices. She enjoyed being able to "jam out" to her spiritual-themed playlist while commuting to work. She noted listening to music gave her "a lot of peace" and "nothing else running in through my brain; I can focus on one thing, not thinking of 300 billion things to do—just focus." Three participants also noted using external resources as effective mindful-spiritual practices (e.g., mindfulness app, faith-based music, faith-based reading).

During the data collection, three participants noted that spiritual well-being activities encouraged their emotional well-being as beginning teachers. Although the types of spiritual activities varied (e.g., devotional journals, spiritual books, podcasts, apps, faith-based music), daily engagement encouraged a mindful, intentional focus on emotional self-care and positive emotions (e.g., peace, stillness, focus, effectiveness). For three participants, faith-based activities were noted as having a direct connection to their feelings of positive emotional well-being (EWB), which is part of an individual's mental health, impacting how an individual thinks, feels, behaves, and relates to others (NIH, 2022).

Summary of Theme 4: Self-Awareness of Emotions and Mindfulness for Emotional Well-Being

Throughout the data collection, participants demonstrated high levels of self-awareness related to their emotions and mindfulness practices. The participants often shared a mix of positive and negative emotions simultaneously. Several participants identified ways their mindfulness practices helped or could help with working through negative emotions or figuring out actionable steps. Some participants were able to identify negative emotions as temporary and expressed positive feelings for their future.

MMT emphasizes mindfulness as a way to broaden awareness and integrate and adapt thoughts. The participants shared how mindfulness helped to increase their awareness, focused attention, and compassion with their emotional well-being. The participants viewed mindfulness practices as a way to focus on self-care, process emotions, and stay "grounded." One participant noted the impact of mindfulness encouraged her to feel more peaceful, prepared, and "re-centered" during the week.

Additionally, the theme of self-awareness of one's emotions is connected to the literature review on mindfulness as an emotional regulation technique, such as the research of Davis and Hayes (2011). They explored emotional management using mindfulness with individuals and coined the term 'mindful emotion regulation' to reflect the benefit of emotional regulation using mindfulness practices (Davis & Hayes, 2011). Davis and Hayes' research indicated mindfulness meditation may prompt positive emotions, minimize negative rumination, and enhance emotional regulation (2011). There was also research evidence that mindfulness can enable the development of effective emotional regulation in the brain (Corcoran et al., 2010; Farb et al., 2010).

Mindfulness was frequently noted as a beneficial emotional well-being and self-care tool for the participants during the transition into their beginning teaching experience. One participant reported how mindfulness had been a "tremendous" help with her growth and reflection at the start of her beginning teaching experience. One participant mentioned how mindfulness had been "super beneficial" to her emotional well-being, noting how it had enabled her feel like a "happy teacher." Another participant noted how much mindfulness practices helped her with positive well-being feelings. A different participant noted mindfulness practices encouraged her to be more "intentional with self-care, which has improved all other aspects of my well-being as a beginning teacher." Another participant shared the importance of aligning her mindful self-care to keep her "sane and in the right head space." She noted, as teachers, "We do so much that when we come home, we need to find time for ourselves to relax and focus on our own well-being." Taking time for self-care was also echoed in another participant's journal, where she noted mindfulness helped her to remember to slow down and take time for self-care.

Reappraisal

As theorized by MMT, mindful reappraisal generates meaning by promoting reappraisal (e.g., assessing in a new or different way) (Garland et al., 2015). One participant noted it was "so important to make time for ourselves" because she believed teachers could get "caught up in what's going on at school." She believed teachers "need to watch our mental" well-being as important. Another participant noted she would come home from school feeling tired, stressed, and overwhelmed due to "managing a variety of tasks," both personal and professional. To this participant, mindful self-care was worth prioritizing, despite feeling as if her day and evening were already busy because 30-minutes of self-care allowed her time to reflect, relax, and become more mindful of her thoughts and feelings. One participant demonstrated reappraisal when she shared that she felt fear related to not knowing what was to come, and it felt "nerve-wracking" because it would be all new experiences. She said she was an "overthinker" and tended to over-analyze. During this transition, she said mindfulness practices helped her be in a "happier space" emotionally.

Savoring

Many of the participants were able to identify negative emotions as temporary and expressed positive feelings for their future. This type of mindful savoring is noted as one of the most powerful means of amplifying positive emotion (Quoidback et al., 2010). Savoring, through selective positive attending, is a form of positive emotional regulation which predicts increased life satisfaction (Cavanagh et al., 2011). Savoring involves attending to the obvious and subtle aspects of an experience, broadening the range of emotions gained from an experience (Bryant et al., 2011). Savoring involves metacognition and self-reflection of the pleasurable components and positive emotions of an experience (Frijda & Sundararajan, 2007).

Mindful savoring is complementary to mindfulness; by attending to the positive emotions from an experience, an individual can deepen and enrich the savoring. By savoring the positive aspects of experiences, mindfulness may generate deep eudaimonic meanings for an individual, promoting resiliency and engagement with a valued and purposeful life (Garland et al., 2015). MMT theory suggests this shift is much more than just sugarcoated positive thinking or wishful denial. A participant shared an example of savoring when she described her emotions as excited, extra stressed, nervous, and thankful. She noted she intended to "keep looking at the positive." This participant recalled mindfulness practices and discussing her emotions had been something she prioritized during college. Through this shift of mindfulness practices and discussing her emotions, she had noticed personal benefits, and this shift had played a "big role in my life." She noticed benefits from her daily mindfulness activities of at least 30-minutes to an hour. She said her daily mindful practices helped to reduce her stress level. She noted she felt better if she made the time for daily mindfulness activities. One type of mindfulness activity she felt had helped her to focus on gratitude, even in the "bad moments," was joy journaling (i.e., savoring). She said although the stress of beginning her first-year teaching was overwhelming, the stress was "covered with so much excitement."

Process of Reappraisal and Savoring

The process of reappraisal and savoring is viewed as reframing a stressful event with deeper intrinsic meaning, personal growth and development of resiliency (Garland et al., 2015). The theory additionally clarifies the opposing lens (i.e., suppression), which evokes avoidant coping strategies. Whereas positive reappraisal and savoring creates a vital step toward active restructuring and re-engagement with the negative experience (Garland et al., 2015).

Participants often described their emotional well-being using the mindful reappraisal process and savoring with blended emotions, especially highlighting happiness, hopefulness, excitement, “extreme anxiousness,” “nervous energy,” feeling judged by other teachers and feeling overwhelmed. One participant said she felt nervous and overwhelmed, and when she recognized feeling this way, she reminded herself to “take deep breaths and think about the impact I am going to make in these kids’ lives.” Another participant noted that although she was nervous about the new curriculum responsibilities and getting to know the students, she was “trying to go with the flow and stay in touch with the other [grade-level] teachers.” Another participant recalled recognizing how her mindfulness practices helped with her anxiety, especially in her self-reflection practices. She planned to use self-reflection time to acknowledge her feelings and think through different ways to “overcome these feelings.” She also mentioned her intention to list a few goals and ways to overcome “this roadblock for me.”

Another participant, demonstrating reappraisal and savoring, reported feeling excitement mixed with feelings of being overwhelmed due to the workload beyond “just teaching” responsibilities (e.g., professional development, meeting new people, engaging with different personalities, meeting the children for the first time). Although she would label herself a perfectionist, she would smile and say, “Yay, school is so fun.” She said mindfulness enabled her to stay aware of her perfectionist tendencies by allowing her to leave school at school so that she could relax at home.

Through reappraisals and savoring, individuals can create a sense of meaning in their lives, along with sustainable positive emotions and a sense of positive well-being (Garland et al., 2015). Mindfulness was noted as helping one participant to redirect her anxious thoughts to affirming, “Hey, I can do this” types of thoughts. She noted this type of mindful attention to her

feelings and thoughts allowed her to process her feelings and "channel them into something more positive and meaningful." Another participant noted the importance of self-awareness, stating "what makes you feel happy and calm" was related to being a "successful teacher." She noted the feeling was true for her, stating, "If you are not calm and happy, then you aren't going to be the best version of yourself." A different participant reported mindfulness needed to be a part of each area of her life as a beginning teacher. She conveyed mindfulness had helped her "cope with lots of changes and stress," and mindfulness was a reliable emotional well-being outlet for her. Another participant noted mindfulness impacted her awareness to be more present through breathwork and reflection. She said mindfulness allowed her to "reset" each day on a "new page." A different participant noted her mindfulness practices were "essential" because they allowed her to process all the new experiences as a beginning teacher. She noted the beginning teacher experience could be overwhelming and challenging, both personally and professionally. Therefore, she placed a high level of importance on "preserving" mindfulness time for her emotional well-being, stating it was "crucial" to take time for herself.

For the participants, mindfulness felt relaxing, supportive, and helpful and provided relief from the worries and stressors of the job. The participants noted mindfulness as an effective use of personal time, which enabled a feeling of helpful separation between teacher duties and personal emotional well-being. The feeling of getting "things off my chest" in order to regulate negative emotions and thoughts was evident for three of the five participants.

Implications for Future Research

These findings offer insight into mindfulness practices and emotional well-being perspectives of the beginning teaching experience for the five participants. From week one to week eight of the data collection, all five participants emphasized various emotional well-being

benefits using physical, spiritual, and mindful reflective practices. Mindfulness through physical movement and journaling was frequently referenced as a way to intentionally pause, reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being. Mindfulness practices focused on personal reflection were also noted throughout the data collection using self-coaching, recognition of emotions, reframing negative emotions, reconnecting to their larger goal(s), and connecting with others.

It is worth emphasizing the type of mindfulness activities seems to be an important component of participants' beginning teaching experiences and emotional well-being. However, regardless of the type of mindfulness activity, repeatedly the participants highlighted the benefits of devoting personal time to concentrating on their thoughts and feelings by using mindfulness practices. The focused, mindful practices created an intentional separation of emotions and experiences, which allowed the participants to ponder, reconsider, and regain a positive perspective of their beginning teaching experience. Overall, participants demonstrated an increase in their emotional awareness, noting emotional benefits with physical practices (e.g., movement and rest), and reported emotional benefits with reflective practices (e.g., mindful journals, self-coaching statements, communication with others).

In a review of past research, beginning teachers can benefit from a foundation of emotional support before their teaching career, as PST, and during the first few years of teaching, to enhance the positive interactions and relationships, prevent emotional exhaustion, and retain beginning teachers in the field long-term. Teacher burnout and attrition are pervasive concerns in the field of education, especially for beginning teachers. Multiple research studies highlight that 30-46% of new teachers leave the profession during their first five years of teaching (Barnes et al., 2007; Jalongo & Heider, 2006; Podolsky et al., 2016). A Carnegie Foundation for the

Advancement of Teaching study cites the most frequently reported reasons teachers leave the profession include inadequate professional development, insufficient feedback, feelings of disconnectedness, and lack of emotional support (Headden, 2014). To address the attrition rates, research shows devoting more resources to teachers' social and emotional wellness can improve teacher well-being and, by extension, assist in improving the learning environment and student outcomes (Headden, 2014). These types of social-emotional support seem especially essential for BT, who are more emotionally vulnerable, which can impact their ability to be effective in their classrooms (Goodwin, 2012). Armed with this information regarding high levels of teacher burnout and alarming attrition rates, especially for BT, there is a need for more exploratory research on how beginning teachers are emotionally supported.

In light of these findings, it is important to reemphasize when teachers do not develop the habits to manage emotions and demands effectively, it can lead to problems, undermining teacher well-being and instructional practice (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Such adverse outcomes for the teacher have consequences in education, both economic and student-related (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Unmanaged stress undermines teacher well-being and increases health care and human resource costs associated with teacher illness, absenteeism, and leaving the profession (Briner & Dewberry, 2007). If teachers can learn mindfulness practices through a formal or informal training program, then implementing mindfulness techniques can help them meet the stressful challenges that confront them (Napoli, 2004).

Research supports one way for teachers to explore coping strategies is through mindfulness practices. If teachers engage in mindfulness techniques, they can better cope with themselves and transfer these skills to their students to help them focus and reduce stress (Napoli, 2004). Teachers who have not developed positive, healthful habits of the mind are less

likely to create an emotionally supportive classroom, which can impact student learning and student efficacy (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Additional research suggests mindfulness may be a protective factor against stress and burnout, and certain interventions, including contemplative practices, may improve teachers' well-being and reduce their stress (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2012).

As mindfulness encourages individuals to be in the moment, it can help create a sense of harmony alongside the many challenges and stressors teachers face today. Mindfulness practices focused on emotional regulation for teachers may decrease their feelings of psychological distress, relieve perceptions of time urgency, improve sleep habits, and lower levels of feeling burnout (Crain et al., 2017). The mindfulness practices, in turn, can create positive ripple effects on the teachers' emotional well-being, both personally and professionally (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Hirshberg et al., 2020; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Roeser et al., 2012).

Future Research Directions

The findings from this study prompt an opportunity to further explore the emotional experiences of beginning teachers, including a longitudinal study—following participants from their pre-service college program through the end of their first-year teaching experience. Capturing the entire arch of the transition from pre-service to first-year would provide a more in-depth analysis of beginning teachers' emotional well-being using mindfulness practices. A longitudinal method could also provide more data related to participants' long-term goals to stay in the profession—focusing on teacher retention as it relates to teacher emotional well-being and mindfulness. The emotional experience of the beginning teachers could be further explored with more in-depth interviews, and data collection could include peer focus group interviews. Further exploration can build on previous research, which suggests beginning teachers' feelings of self-

efficacy can be related to situational indicators (e.g., appropriateness of school fit, adequate teacher education) and is also related to the teachers' personal characteristics in connection with handling the demands of the new career (Klusmann et al., 2012).

The longitudinal data could be more revealing, especially since teacher burnout is a concern and is associated with numerous negative impacts and outcomes for the teachers themselves (e.g., increased irritability) (Capone et al., 2019). Burnout impacts the likelihood a teacher stays in the profession long-term (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). In the previous review of the literature, among the three noted components of teacher burnout, emotional exhaustion appears to be the most critical (Arens & Morin, 2016). It is often the first to emerge in the development of burnout, which can quickly lead to the other two components of teacher burnout: higher levels of depersonalization and reduced feelings of self-efficacy (Maslach et al., 1996). Mindfulness skills can help teachers better cope with their own emotional management and cope more effectively in their classroom (Napoli, 2004).

The findings from this study also illuminate future exploration opportunities into the benefits of different types of mindfulness practices during the beginning teacher experience (e.g., other physical practices, reflective journals). This exploration could assist in identifying additional data among types of mindfulness activities, including the duration and frequency of practices. Future studies can incorporate mixed methods approaches, employing interventions to present new mindfulness practices and/or provide direct support for current practices, such as coaching support or a small group approach. Focus on one or more types of mindfulness practices can be helpful as additional data since mindfulness can be any activity which brings awareness to the current experience while also regulating the focus of attention--leading to feelings of being more alert, fully present and 'alive' (Napoli, 2004). As a reminder, mindfulness

activities are not relaxation techniques but rather a form of mental training to reduce cognitive vulnerability and reactionary habits of the mind, which might otherwise intensify feelings of stress and emotional distress (Kabat-Zinn, 1982).

Further, it could also be important to focus why some participants demonstrate persistence with personal reflective practices. This additional exploration into the motivation of journaling for their emotional well-being could be insightful, especially considering the National Association for the Education of Young Children supports early educators to be reflective practitioners (NAEYC, 2022). This type of reflective practice is "the ability to reflect on one's actions so as to engage in a process" of continued growth (Schön, 1991), which can be achieved through reflection "in action" (i.e. during the event) or reflection "on action" (i.e. after the event). Schön (1991) pointed out reflection requires self-awareness, such as knowing oneself across contexts, which encourages the individual to become more intention with their current and future actions and interactions with others.

The study also presents the opportunity to explore how individual schools and school districts support beginning teachers' emotional well-being as they transition into the profession. Some participants noted receiving some support from the schools; however, it was informal (e.g., principal speaking with participant) and indirect support from the school district, if any (e.g., minimum of one day off of work each month in one of the districts). In the previous literature review, research on teacher burnout, specific to beginning teachers (BT), occupational stress seems particularly grueling for teachers early in their careers (Jalongo & Heider, 2006). For beginning teachers, social interactions are particularly important for feelings of positive well-being (Schmidt et al., 2017). Positive teacher-student interactions and relationships can act as a resource to maintain well-being and prevent emotional exhaustion. In particular, inexperienced

teachers (e.g., pre-service, beginning teachers) benefit from positive interactions with their students, which link to reduced feelings of emotional exhaustion (Aldrup et al., 2017).

Additionally, the study encourages an exploration opportunity with the pre-service teacher (PST) mindfulness and emotional well-being preparatory experiences. The pre-service teachers' emotional well-being can be explored before transitioning into the field—possibly during coursework and PST experiences in the classroom (e.g., student teaching, fieldwork, practicum). An intervention of various mindfulness types (e.g., physical, reflective activities) can be explored through the PST perspective. Since the transition from PST college education to the first in-service teaching job is a unique point in time, referred to as the "reality shock" (Veenman, 1984), preparing PST prior to their first-year teaching experience would be helpful to explore with further research into their emotional well-being and mindfulness practices embedded in the PST curriculum.

Further exploration in this area (i.e., PST emotional well-being with mindfulness) can continue the work of this study, also building on the work of Karing and Beelmann (2019). Their study includes 236 student teachers enrolled in various universities and 112 beginning teachers during the beginning 1-2 years of teaching, of which beginning teachers reported a lower levels of mindfulness and satisfaction and an increase in emotional distancing, when compared with the pre-service teachers.

Further investigation of PST emotional well-being and mindfulness could be explored using relaxation response techniques, such as mindful breathing. This simple and quick practice can evoke a "relaxation response," a term coined in 1975 by Herbert Benson from Harvard Medical School. The details outlined in his book require only minutes to learn and take less than ten minutes per day to practice and achieve a relaxed response (Benson, 1975). The relaxation

response against overstress involves bodily changes (i.e., deep muscle relaxation), which helps to bring the body back to a healthier balance (Benson, 1975). Focusing on the breath is a simple and effective way to achieve concentration, awareness, and relaxation (Napoli, 2004). If a teacher practices mindful relaxation, such as mindful breathing, they can better cope and transfer these skills to their students to help them focus and reduce stress (Napoli, 2004).

Although not a primary focus within this case study, the participants were asked to share their thoughts or feelings about incorporating mindfulness practices in their classroom with young children. All five participants shared an eagerness and willingness to incorporate some mindfulness practices in their classroom (e.g., brain break soft space, guided videos). Each participant expressed the need for this type of emotional well-being support for young children.

However, since this study is focused on early childhood educators (ECE), it could be helpful to expand beyond the bounding of this case study in order to explore the beginning teacher's mindfulness practices with data focused on the classroom environment, including the children (e.g., behavior, academic performance). The data could focus on the teacher's mindfulness practices and/or classroom mindfulness practices (e.g., teacher and children co-engagement practices). A recent research study in 2020 by Hirshberg and colleagues demonstrates how mindfulness practices, targeted with emotional awareness, can support improvements in teacher instructional quality.

Alternatively, other researchers find beginning teachers' negative emotional states can have a negative effect on their classroom practices, which also extends to their students' motivation and achievement, whereas positive teachers' well-being can be positively associated with student achievement (Arens & Morin, 2016; Briner & Dewberry, 2007). Other research supports the notion that a teacher's emotional competence can, positively or negatively,

influence children's social-emotional skills in their classroom (Perry & Ball, 2008). Therefore, teachers' emotional well-being can create an impact beyond themselves, which warrants further exploration of how to support teachers' emotional well-being at all levels.

One way to explore teacher emotional regulation is through mindfulness well-being practices. The use of mindfulness can produce transformational change in the teacher (Napoli, 2004). According to Buddhist philosophy, there is a symbiotic relationship between the teacher and student (Dalai Lama, 2002), meaning the outflow of mindfulness practices from the teacher can impact the students directly and indirectly. Researchers find when teachers struggle with feelings of emotional exhaustion, they are more likely to have confrontational interactions with students, become annoyed when students do not follow directions, and have negative opinions of their students (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Researchers find these negative interactions and emotions toward students could likely impact student experiences and outcomes (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008).

Limitations

Although the current study revealed emotional well-being benefits with the use of mindfulness for beginning teachers, there were some limitations to present. First, while the sample size was justifiably small, it could be beneficial to use a case study methodology to explore other beginning teacher experiences beyond these five participants. Capturing the emotional well-being of other beginning teachers using mindfulness could help to highlight additional themes. Exploring beyond this study’s five participants can also include increased diversity of participant backgrounds and experiences (e.g., location, gender, age, culture, race/ethnicity). Additional BT perspectives could yield other insights into the beginning teaching experience.

Second, the recruitment was intentionally restricted to the population of recently graduated early childhood education students from one university. The participants were all enrolled in the teacher residency program, meaning they engaged in additional graduate-level coursework. Although not mentioned often, some of the participants noted occasional feelings of additional stress and concerns over time management related to their workload with the graduate coursework. Since the participants were enrolled in the teacher residency program, they also were co-teaching in the classroom with a seasoned mentor teacher to assist them during their transition into their first-year of teaching. Therefore, the lead teacher's responsibilities were not solely on the participant. If the participants were not enrolled in the teacher residency program, many of the participants would have been in classrooms without additional teaching staff (e.g., first and second grade), and the feelings related to the first-year experience could have been perceived differently.

Lastly, the homogenous sample represented a narrow selection of participant sex, age, and race. The sample of these beginning teachers were unmarried, white females in their early 20's without dependents. The sample may not be representative of different cultural perspectives of the beginning teaching experience, mindfulness practices, or expressions of emotional well-being. Therefore, the sample may not be representative of various family structures, races, cultures, religions, or generations.

Recommendations for the Limitations

In order to gain additional perspective beyond this study's five participants, it would be helpful to recruit beginning teachers from other colleges/universities, elementary schools, or districts at large. Therefore, the participant pool would be larger and have greater potential to represent a more diverse or underrepresented sociodemographic sampling (e.g., background,

race/ethnicity, age, religion). Expanding recruitment beyond one university's early education program could also encourage participants outside of the teacher residency program. The participants could be beginning teachers who are not taking graduate-level courses and are not placed in classrooms with a mentor co-teacher. First-year teachers, as participants, can provide data representing to their beginning teaching experience (e.g., stressors, personal emotional management).

Finally, to have a more in-depth exploration of the beginning teaching experience, it would be helpful to collect data from before the school year begins until the end of the school year (e.g., approximately July through June). Longitudinal data collection could provide deeper insights from a full year of the beginning teaching experience, potentially providing a more extensive understanding of the emotional well-being experience of BTs using mindfulness practices.

Recommendations

The findings offer insight into mindfulness practices and emotional well-being perspectives of the beginning teaching experience. From week one to week eight of the data collection, all five participants noted various benefits to their physical, spiritual, and mental-emotional mindfulness practices. Mindfulness practices through physical movement and journaling were highlighted as ways to reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being.

Recommendations for PST and BT Programs

Today's teachers are responsible for providing a stimulating learning environment to facilitate student academic outcomes, in addition to providing a positive emotional climate to support student social-emotional functioning (Harris et al., 2016). To perform effectively,

teachers must cope with their own emotional reactivity to student behaviors and other physical and psychological stressors (Day & Qing, 2009). Teacher experiences of work stress may lead to decreased performance, burnout, and poor student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Undeniably, the world is ever-changing, and the future workforce and work demands grow more complex with the times. Even still, there is a noticeable lack of research concerning the emotional preparation and support of the early childhood PST and BT population. Programs serving PSTs and supporting BTs are uniquely positioned to embed emotional well-being support (i.e., mindfulness self-care) for PSTs before they enter the field and for BTs as they begin their careers.

With this end goal in mind, PST and BT programs can provide support for these individuals with the acute knowledge of the types of stressors related to the teaching profession due to the demands of the caretaking role, emotion management, and work overload (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). These profession-wide changes increasingly encourage the development and education of the children; however, how have teacher preparation programs and BT induction programs adapted to better prepare and support pre-service and beginning teachers for the emotional weight of these in-service role changes?

Teacher education programs endeavor to prepare PSTs for the technical aspects of teaching. However, very little of the PST education curriculum focuses explicitly on the emotional components of the in-service teaching role, which can positively or negatively impact teacher effectiveness (Harris et al., 2016). Without this emotional preparation, BTs could launch their careers with an incomplete toolbox. As such, PST education programs and BT induction support programs are in a vital position to assist with this specific need.

Recommendations for In-Service Support of ECEs

Specific to early childhood, ECE roles have steadily expanded to include much more than 'play' (Flook et al., 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). To perform successfully, ECEs must cope effectively with their own emotional reactivity to student behaviors and a variety of other physical and psychological stressors (Day & Qing 2009). ECE experiences of work stress may lead to decreased performance, burnout, and poor student outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Many researchers agree more research is needed to explore these dynamic role changes and expectations for ECEs (e.g., BT, IST), along with the impact of higher levels of teacher burnout in connection with student experiences (e.g., academic and well-being). Increased awareness and immediate action are necessary to focus on the emotional well-being of ECEs and their students and the potential impacts (e.g., teacher burnout, teacher retention, and student academic outcomes).

This amplified awareness of teacher well-being creates a significant research opportunity to explore how early childhood educators (ECE) provide emotional care and attention to themselves (Whitebook et al., 2014; Whitebook et al., 2018). As explored in this study, mindfulness is one avenue of self-care for ECE emotional well-being. Mindfulness self-care techniques can incorporate various techniques (e.g., breathing awareness exercises, movement exercises such as dance and qi gong, affirmations, and meditative visualization exercises). The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2022) lists several benefits of self-care, including managing stress, lowering the risk of illness, and increasing energy. Noting that even "small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact" (NIMH, 2022). NIMH (2022) recommends various types of self-care (e.g., exercise, relaxing activity, gratitude practices, staying connected to others).

Mindfulness self-care skills can help teachers cope with their own emotional management and engage more effectively in their classroom (Napoli, 2004). However, mindfulness self-care and emotional well-being of early childhood professionals (e.g., PST and BT) is an area of limited research.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, the findings of this study are promising and provide preliminary insight into mindfulness practices and emotional well-being perspectives of the beginning teaching experience. All five participants emphasize various emotional well-being benefits using physical, spiritual, and mindful reflective practices. Mindfulness practices through physical movement and journaling are frequently referenced as a way to mindfully pause, reflect, release, and reconnect with feelings of positive emotional well-being. Mindfulness practices through personal reflection are noted as beneficial for their emotional well-being throughout the data collection using self-coaching statements, recognition of emotions, reframing negative emotions, reconnecting to their larger goal(s), and connecting with others. Throughout the data collection, participants highlight the benefit of devoting personal time to concentrate on their thoughts and feelings using various mindfulness practices. Intentional, mindful experiences allow the participants to ponder, reconsider, and regain a positive perspective of their beginning teaching experience.

The study affirms the literature review of mindfulness practices and emotional well-being. This case study creates a new focus of literature regarding mindfulness as an emotional well-being tool for early childhood educators as they transition into the profession. With this exploratory contribution, it is hopeful that more research can be replicated and expanded on to advance these findings further. Additional research can contribute to developing more awareness and focus in this area and provide insight into the practical application of mindfulness as an

emotional well-being tool for pre-service, beginning, and in-service teachers within early childhood education.

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Appendix A

Demographic Survey

Section 1: Demographic Information

How would you describe your gender?
**Participant can select "other" to type-in response*

- Male
- Female
- Transgender Female
- Transgender Male
- Gender Variant/Non-Conforming
- Other (participant can self-identify) _____
- Prefer not to respond

What is your age (in years)?

- _____

How would you describe your race and/or ethnic background?
**If the participant wishes to self-identify, select "other" and type-in response*

- White or Caucasian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Multiracial or Biracial
- Other (participant can self-identify) _____

What is your marital/relational status?
**If the participant wishes to self-identify, select "other" and type-in response*

- Single
- In a relationship but not engaged or married
- Engaged
- Separated
- Divorced
- Other

How many dependents do you have? *(Select one)*

- No dependents
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

What is your current highest academic level? *(Select one)*

- High School
- Associates

- Bachelors
- Masters
- Ph.D.
- Other (participant can self-identify) _____

OPTIONAL Response: What are your long-term academic and/or professional goals?

- _____

Section 2: School Placement Information

List the <u>name of the school</u> AND List the <u>county and/or school district</u>

- _____
- _____

Provide the grade level of your classroom placement *(select one):*

- Pre-Kindergarten (4-year-olds)
- Kindergarten
- First Grade
- Second Grade
- Third Grade
- Other (participant can self-identify) _____

Is this placement the grade level you wish to teach long-term?
If so, respond "yes".
If not, respond by providing the grade level you wish to teach long-term.
If you are unsure, at this time, respond by providing a quick explanation.

- _____

What are your feelings about your grade placement? *(Select one)*

1 = very dissatisfied
2 = somewhat dissatisfied
3 = neutral
4 = somewhat satisfied
5 = very satisfied

OPTIONAL Response: Is there anything you wish to share about your classroom placement?

- _____

Section 3: Mindfulness Information

What mindfulness practices, techniques &/or tools have you previously and/or currently used?

- _____

How often do you engage in mindfulness activities? (Select one of the options or select "other" in order to identify the frequency.)

- Several times a day
- Once per day
- Several times per week
- Occasionally throughout the month
- Rarely
- Never
- Other (participants can self-identify frequency) _____

Appendix B

Document Protocol

Reflection Journal Weekly Prompts (submission on Google Forms)	Week 1: • Describe your initial feelings (specifically, your emotional well-being) related to starting the school year as a beginning teacher. • What emotional well-being "mindfulness" technique(s) seem to be the most effective to you? • Overall, how do you feel mindfulness activities impact your feelings of emotional well-being as a beginning teacher? Week 2: • Reflecting on this week: As a beginning teacher, at the start of the school year, describe your feelings (specifically, your emotional well-being) as it relates to your mindfulness practices. • For this week, what emotional well-being "mindfulness" technique(s) seemed to be the most effective to you? • For this week, describe the impact &/or importance of mindfulness activities, as it relates to your emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. • Open Response: Is there anything else you wish to add to this week's reflection for the beginning of the school year? Week 3: • Describe what you feel are barriers (or blocks) to your emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. • For this week, describe the emotional well-being "mindfulness" technique(s), which seemed to be the most effective to you. • For this week, describe the impact &/or importance of mindfulness activities, as it relates to your emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. • Open Response: Is there anything else you wish to add to this week's reflection related to your emotional well-being and/or mindfulness practices? Week 4: • Describe how you feel mindfulness fits into your emotional well-being and identity as a beginning teacher. • For this week, describe the emotional well-being "mindfulness" technique(s), which seemed to be the most effective to you. • For this week, describe the impact &/or importance of mindfulness activities, as it relates to your emotional well-being as a beginning teacher. • Open Response: Is there anything else you wish to add to this week's reflection related to mindfulness and/or your emotional well-being? Week 5: • Describe your feelings about this week's teaching experience, as it relates to your emotional well-being.

- For this week, describe the emotional well-being "mindfulness" technique(s), which seemed to be the most effective to you.
- For this week, describe the impact &/or importance of mindfulness activities, as it relates to your emotional well-being as a beginning teacher.
- Open Response: Is there anything else you wish to add to this week's reflection related to mindfulness and/or your emotional well-being?

Week 6:

- Do you feel mindfulness practices are helpful or not helpful to you as a beginning teacher? And provide a description of the ways you feel mindfulness practices are helpful/not helpful to you as a beginning teacher.
- Overall, since the beginning of the school year, describe the emotional well-being "mindfulness" technique(s), which seemed to be the most effective to you.
- Considering the beginning of the school year so far, describe the impact &/or importance of mindfulness activities, as it relates to your emotional well-being as a beginning teacher.
- Open Response: Is there anything else you wish to add to this week's reflection related to mindfulness and/or your emotional well-being? AND/OR Do you wish to add a concluding remark related to mindfulness and your emotional well-being, as a beginning teacher?

Appendix C

Observation Protocol

Participant Name or Initials	
Observation #	**_____ of 2 observations**
Date	
Time	**Start Time:** / **End Time:**
Location Site Name & Environmental Description	
Event or Activity of Observation	

Observations (Narrative Field Notes) **Time stamps, setting descriptions, and event description*

Analytic Memo **Observer Reflective Notes—before, during, and/or after observation*

Follow-up Items and/or Questions

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Timeline	Questions
Week 1: Before the School Year Begins (approx. end of July 2023)	*To your comfort level, tell me a little about yourself (personal, professional).* **Reference responses in the initial demographic survey to frame questions.* *Before the school year begins, as you transition from PST to BT, how would you describe your feelings leading into your first-year teaching?* *Share your thoughts on mindfulness practices as a BT. How would you describe your level of comfort with mindfulness?* *What type of mindfulness techniques do you believe will be the most helpful for your emotional well-being as you transition into your first-year teaching?* *As a beginning teacher, what is the importance you place on mindfulness?* *Share one or two sentences to capture how you feel (your emotional well-being) about starting your first-year teaching.*
Week 4: Beginning of School year (approximately beginning of August 2023)	*Now that the school year has started, as a BT, how would you describe feelings, your emotional well-being?* *What are some of the most surprising parts of the beginning of the school year? How does this relate to your emotional well-being?* *Thinking on your experiences so far as a BT, share your thoughts on mindfulness practices, related to your well-being as a BT.* *How would you describe your relationship with co-teachers/assistant teachers? How does this relate to your emotional well-being?* *How do you feel you fit in with the other grade-level teachers (such as during formal planning and informal conversations/interactions)?* *Optional Question: How has your school (colleagues, leadership, or school system) provided emotional well-being support for you, as a beginning teacher?* *Share one or two sentences to capture how you feel (your emotional well-being) about starting your first-year teaching.*

Week 8: During the School Year (approximately at the beginning of September 2023)	*Now that the school year has started, as a BT, how would you describe feelings, your emotional well-being?* *How would you describe your feelings related to behavior management (general and atypical)? How does this relate to your emotional well-being?* *How would you describe your feelings related to your workload—both while at school and outside of school?* *How would you describe your personal time while at school? (Ex. Personal lunch)* *Thinking on your experiences so far as a BT, share your thoughts on mindfulness practices, related to your well-being as a BT.* *What type of mindfulness techniques have been the most helpful for you as you are working in your first-year teaching (and how have they served your well-being)?* *Optional Question: In what ways do you think you could use mindfulness techniques with the young children in your classroom?* *Share one or two sentences to capture how you feel (your emotional well-being) about starting your first-year teaching.*