

## Toward a Sustainable Sense of Self in Teaching and Teacher Education: Sustainable Happiness and Well-Being Through Mindfulness

### L'atteinte d'un sentiment d'identité durable en enseignement et au sein de la formation des maitre : bonheur durable et bien-être par la pleine conscience

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Article abstract

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# TOWARD A SUSTAINABLE SENSE OF SELF IN TEACHING AND TEACHER EDUCATION: SUSTAINABLE HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING THROUGH MINDFULNESS

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper examines the effects of mindfulness practice through *pranayama*, hatha yoga, and meditation on practicing teachers in an inner city school to determine if practices of this nature could contribute to sustainable sense of self, sustainable happiness, and well-being for practicing teachers and pre-service teachers. Furthermore, mindfulness practice is discussed in the context of new pedagogies that are contributing to the transformation of teachers, students, and education. This inquiry has demonstrated that this process not only offers the practitioner serenity, awareness, peace, and well-being: but the benefits of the practice move far beyond the personal environment of those practicing teachers and into the classroom and school community providing opportunities for transformation; growing sustainable happiness and well-being.

L'ATTEINTE D'UN SENTIMENT D'IDENTITÉ DURABLE EN ENSEIGNEMENT ET AU SEIN DE LA FORMATION DES MAITRE : BONHEUR DURABLE ET BIEN-ÊTRE PAR LA PLEINE CONSCIENCE

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article s'intéresse aux effets de la pratique de la pleine conscience par le *pranayama*, le hatha yoga et la méditation sur des enseignants travaillant au sein d'une école du centre-ville. Il vise à déterminer si les pratiques de cette nature peuvent aider les enseignants en devenir et en exercice à atteindre un sentiment identitaire et un bonheur durables, ainsi que le bien-être. De plus, la pratique de la pleine conscience est abordée dans le contexte des pédagogies nouvelles, pédagogies qui contribuent à transformer les enseignants, les étudiants et le milieu de l'éducation. Cette recherche indique que ce processus ne permet pas seulement aux enseignants d'atteindre un niveau de sérénité, de conscience, de paix et de bien-être. En effet, les bénéfices vont au-delà de l'entourage personnel de ceux qui le pratiquent, touchant également la classe et la communauté scolaire, en offrant des opportunités de transformation, de bonheur durable et de bien-être.

## THE SUSTAINABLE SELF, SUSTAINABLE HAPPINESS, AND WELL-BEING

The concept of sustainable happiness was developed by O'Brien (2008) to merge principles from sustainability and findings from happiness studies. It is defined as "happiness that contributes to individual, community, or global well-being without exploiting other people, the environment or future generations." Sustainable happiness extends happiness research and reinforces the relationship to sustainability and our interdependence with each other and all life on the planet. Furthermore, it underscores the fact that each of us may contribute positively, or adversely, to the well-being of others and the natural environment. Sustainable happiness can be incorporated into any area of the curriculum as well as school policies and practice (O'Brien, 2010, p. 1).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of mindfulness practice through *pranayama*, hatha yoga, and meditation on practicing teachers in an inner city school with a population of approximately 1,000 students and to determine if practices of this nature could contribute to a sustainable sense of self, sustainable happiness, and well-being for practicing teachers and pre-service teachers who have yet to enter the myriad demands of the present and future classroom space and school community. Furthermore, mindfulness practice is discussed in the context of new pedagogies that are contributing to the transformation of teachers, students, and education. The research question, then, is "how can practicing teachers use mindfulness practice as a new pedagogy to contribute to a sustainable self, sustainable happiness, and well-being within the demands of classroom space and school community?"

### *Locating the context: Teacher (dis)engagement*

It is important to discuss the demands of the classroom space and school community so as to understand the context of the mindfulness exploration. Teachers are becoming disengaged and beleaguered (Galand, Lecocq, & Philippot, 2007). The teaching profession has become isolating and stress laden (Borg, Riding, & Falzon, 1991; Janosz, Thiebaud, Bouthillier, & Brunet, 2004). Opportunities for collaboration, professional growth, and for pursuing innovation decrease yearly with fiscal constraint, fostering feelings of being misunderstood and not appropriately valued. Teachers face increasing expectation, including longer working days, higher student needs, school violence, verbal victimization, and fiscal restraints causing burnout. Burnout has been defined by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) as a work-related construct consisting of three dimensions including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Verbal victimization, especially, is the cause of higher levels of depression and has a negative impact on well-being (Galand et al., 2007). This changing educational landscape has become the school space that is detrimental to teacher well-being. The disengagement causes strife, stress, absenteeism, as well as poor morale, and physical and mental exhaustion (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Pas, Bradshaw, Hershfeldt, & Leaf, 2010). Disrespect from students has been connected to emotional exhaustion

among teachers (Friedman, 1995). Hastings and Bham (2003) also noted that perceived inattentiveness and disrespect from students causes teachers to be emotionally overextended and exhausted by their work.

Teachers continue to work daily with increasingly fewer resources and higher student needs. This has fostered an environment of increased economic output with little increase in life satisfaction; ultimately causing an increase in mistrust and depression (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Atkinson, Claxton, Osborn, and Wallace (2013) have researched and written extensively on how children's learning is highly dependent on the teaching style of the teacher as well as the surroundings and environment that the teacher creates in the classroom. What kind of an environment are we creating for learners with the experiences we are having as teachers? How do we support teachers, both becoming and practicing, to a sustainable sense of self, sustainable happiness, and well-being? How do we support teachers in understanding the changing social, economic, and environmental landscape in educational spaces?

Considering the growing disengagement of teachers, it is consequential to consider how it may be possible to transform the way pre-service and practicing teachers work within their school spaces. One approach is through mindfulness practice. The purpose of the mindful process that was introduced to in-service and pre-service teachers was to bring the yoga participants into some deeper knowledge around their practice; their practice being what constitutes their personal sense of self in relation to their lived experience. A further aim was to have a positive impact on the well-being of these educators. The subsequent shared experience was enlightening as what I set out to do was to be a facilitator, a shared participant on a journey that was not only theirs but also mine. In the process, I arrived at profound insights for myself as an educator, for teacher education, and for emerging work on transforming education.

### *Teaching, learning, sustainable happiness, and well-being*

Teachers are expected to engage students in curriculum acquisition, provide a supportive and safe classroom environment, be aware of student, parent, and administration needs, adapt curriculum to meet student needs, handle aggressive and disruptive behaviours, and support student mental health needs while appearing professional. However, if we cannot take care of ourselves, how are we to take care of our students? If we have lost our personal sustainable sense of self, how can we foster learning in our classrooms? These kinds of questions lead us to query the very purpose of education and how education can contribute to (rather than detract from) individual, community, and global well-being — essentially, sustainable happiness or well-being for all. I can't think of a more prescient topic for teacher education as sustainable happiness presents chances to understand that our lives, from both an emotional and intellectual capacity, are implicitly touched by all other living things, personally and environmentally (O'Brien, 2012).

### *Mindfulness practice*

Mindfulness approaches have become one of the most widely studied phenomena in the world for treating a myriad of mental health issues (Chong, Tsunaka, Tsang, Chan, & Cheung, 2011; Seigel, 2010). Dr. Ron Seigel, a Harvard Medical School clinical psychologist, has defined mindfulness as “a particular attitude toward experience, a way of relating to life, that holds both the promise of alleviating our suffering and making our lives rich and meaningful” (Seigel, 2010, p. 5). Mindfulness engages the practitioner by acclimating us to the momentary experiential space and encouraging deep insight into how the mind generates suffering (Seigel, 2010).

The word *yoga* means to yoke or to join. It is derived from the Sanskrit root, *yuj*. Philosophically, this joining is thought to involve the union of a person’s individual sense with a person’s universal sense (Bower, Woolery, Sternlieb, & Garet, 2005). Yoga has roots in India as well as being found in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. *Hatha yoga* is one of the eight limbs of yoga and is the physical expression of the discipline. Feuerstein (2001) and Stone (2008) have noted that hatha yoga has the aim of liberation through physical transformation. Transformation can occur physically or corporeally as well as mentally by reformulating structures of meaning (Feuerstein, 2001; Mezirow, 2000). Yoga, as a mindfulness practice, can replace our conscious patterns of thinking and doing with new, less harmful and more benign patterns. These reformulations are expressive of the power and virtue of self-realization (Feuerstein, 2001; Stone, 2009), offering a pathway for sustainable self, sustainable happiness, and well-being. The transformational approach has also been described by Cohen (2003) as a reformulation of the reified structures of meaning in an incremental shifting approach, which will ultimately lead to a new and more flexible mind.

Mindfulness pursuit through yoga as a practice is a knowledge quest for knowing oneself and ultimately knowing oneself in relation to others through an engaged bodily awareness. Through this mindfulness pursuit, one is able to find the still point – a place where the mind, body, and spirit can find wholeness (Harpur, 2005) – and ultimately the sustainable self, sustainable happiness, and well-being. The hatha yoga practice, the *pranayama* breath work, and the meditation are emancipatory discourses that allow sustainable happiness and well-being to unfold. This process is one of consciousness-raising as the journey to well-being is realized. Researchers and health practitioners acknowledge that ancient and modern mindful practices assist the individual with many psychological issues including everyday worry, dissatisfaction, neuroses, anxiety, depression, and addiction as well as fostering happiness (Chong, et al., 2011; Seigel, 2010).

***Mindfulness through yoga as an instrument for the proliferation of the sustainable self, sustainable happiness, and well-being***

Research initiatives on the neurobiology of mindfulness practices have demonstrated that sustained practice promotes significant benefits for teachers and their students including an increased overall sense of well-being, enhanced teacher efficacy and classroom management, and expanded relationship building (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). This practice, even for as few as 15 minutes a day, has shown to change sense of self and sense of self in relation to other, promoting a happier, healthier environment. Napoli (2004) studied mindfulness with teachers and noted that these individuals experienced change that was positive in all aspects of their educational practice. The transfer of the practice from the personal to the school community engages generalized well-being and positive aftereffects for not only the participating teacher but also those who interact with the teacher. Strong and caring relationships form through a socio-emotional learning process that fosters and grows a mindful spirit.

Biologically speaking, the evidence is powerful. The Garrison Institute (2015) noted current advances in neuroscience indicate that the mindfulness practice assists in facilitating awareness and self-regulation while also supporting a calm and focused mind. This enhances openness, responsiveness, and sensitivity in teaching and in learning. With teachers gaining inner strength, they become more present and responsive to their students' needs, thus becoming more effective teachers, role models, and guides to healthy behaviour. Stone (2008) referred to this as neuroplasticity, explaining the idea that the brain is an organ that is not separate from the body or the mind and has the ability to recognize itself by continually forming new neural paths. As the brain sprouts new nerve endings, it changes at all times within the environment that it is in. The mind-body system is not a closed system or loop, but instead an open and flexible loop constantly in motion and subject to change. This means our ideas, attitudes, and predispositions are open to change as well. "Mindfulness is a meditative awareness practice that develops a capacity to attend to our body, emotions, mind, and the environment with a receptive, noninvasive attitude" (Powers, 2010, p. 90). Greeson (2009) examined hundreds of studies on the effects of mindfulness between 2003 and 2008. The most rigorous empirical results indicated that cultivation of mindfulness assists in reduced emotional stress, more positive states of mind, and improved quality of living.

***Relevance to new pedagogies and meeting global learning needs***

O'Brien and Murray (2015) discussed the zeitgeist we are presently experiencing in educational culture, indicating that educators are increasingly aware that conventional ideas within education are passé. There is broad agreement that the factory model of education that supported industrial societies is outdated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (O'Brien & Murray, 2015). Innovative practices are emerging that provide new directional sense and supporting transformation

in education. Hopkins (2013) has called for a collective transforming vision that reframes new opportunities for personal and collegial growth encouraging repurposing education that fosters well-being for all, sustainably. O'Brien (2016) reinforced this perspective and added that "changing the narrative of education ultimately requires us to consider the very purpose of education, to test our own assumptions and to be open to a paradigm shift" (p. 2).

Mindfulness through hatha yoga is a holistic, integrated practice that is contributing to new narratives. I consider this practice as a creative methodology and an expansion of qualitative inquiry in practice from both epistemological and theoretical perspectives. While these practices have ancient roots, they could also be viewed as one of the new pedagogies that have the capacity to contribute to the education "makeover" that has been discussed by Fullan (2013) and others. Fullan (2013) confirmed the need to shift from superficiality in 21<sup>st</sup> learning skills to the implementation of a transformative practice as part of the new pedagogy agenda. I envision these new pedagogies as provocative he(art)-centered work engaging forward-thinking practice, where teacher and student become learning partners and use imagination and creativity to change the educational space and to contribute to well-being for all. This is indeed the heart and soul of education and an expansion of the idea of new pedagogies.

### *Contemplative sustainable self, sustainable happiness, and well-being*

We all desire to be happy. O'Brien (2012) has spoken to our natural universal desire for happiness. She noted in her work that this natural desire for happiness is the beginning point in discovery that our personal well-being is intimately and sustainably linked to the well-being of all other beings as well as the natural environment. We cannot dispute that sustainable happiness increases student and teacher productivity. Employees demonstrate less absenteeism, more cooperative behaviors, and more creative thought processes when they are happy. Meiklejohn et al. (2012) noted that school teachers face excessive stressors but are provided with little opportunity for alleviation of these. Numerous studies point to the very evident need for school systems to train their teachers to better handle stress and support their teachers in becoming more resilient. O'Brien (2010) asked if we are supporting our teachers in fostering resilience; essentially how can we change their stories to create a more hopeful space. Similar questions can be raised with respect to student happiness and well-being. Mindfulness practice can assist in supporting teachers in changing their stories to those that encourage and foster resilience; within themselves and within their students – emphasizing interconnectedness and interdependence in an educational space. This resilience grows self-awareness, compassion, and empathy as well as reduces stress (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Despite the need and value of enhancing student and teacher well-being, O'Brien (2012) discussed that the idea of happiness and well-being have not been traditional aspects of formal education. She asked who is teaching us

about happiness and what might we be learning? With students spending an increasingly excessive amount of time on computers and smart phones, the informal education they receive is ridden with the idea that happiness and well-being can be acquired through materialism (O'Brien, 2012). She said that this is neither the path to happiness, sustainability, nor well-being.

***The path to mindfulness in school spaces: Embodied methodologies***

My mindfulness journey began with a study and focus on embodied methodologies. Embodied methodologies are of a corporeal nature: "these are methodologies which can handle the complex and messy realities of corporeal experience; methodologies which reflect the multifaceted, contradictory, ambiguous nature of lived experience and the ways in which it defies easy categorization" (Inckle, 2010, p. 27). As I was studying embodiment and its impact on the sense of self and lived experience of teen females in public school spaces and private places, I soon came to realize that the experience was a shared journey between the teen participants and myself. At this time, I was also teaching mindfulness through *pranayama*, hatha yoga, and meditation one day a week after school to a group of high school teachers.

It is through this mindful approach that I aimed to support my yoga participants to seek out sustainable self, sustainable happiness, and well-being. This alternative educational process engages emancipatory discourse where the participants' growth will assist them in understanding themselves as well as others and ultimately becoming a sustainable self in an educational space that typically does not stop to be reflective as it moves quickly in a changing world.

I have spent much time as a researcher studying female teens' journeys of self-discovery through embodied awakening using holistic methodologies. I came to the realization from my own personal experiences that, essentially, the "eye" of the researcher cannot be separated from the "I" of the researcher (Ellis, 2004). It is not only our students who require supports, training, and resources. Our teachers do, too. Through my work as an educator, I often became isolated, experiencing high levels of professional stress due to situational dilemmas beyond my control. It was through these situations and the actions I undertook to sustain my sense of self and well-being that brought me to the very forefront of teacher well-being and ultimately sustainable self and sustainable happiness. Spending many years as a front line public school teacher / counselor, and then ultimately researching these very same ideas, I have come to realize of late that we are severely missing a quintessential idea in education, knowledge building, and curriculum delivery. We need a paradigm shift in education that contributes to well-being for all (O'Brien & Murray, 2015).



### *Reflexivity as a creative methodology*

As discussed by Alley, Jackson, and Shakya (2015), “reflexivity is a process that enables researchers to critically examine the nature of their work and how their assumptions, underlying values, and preconceptions affect the research produced” (p. 426). I was once a high school teacher and high school guidance counselor. I am also a yoga and meditation teacher. These roles have allowed me to fluidly move from role of researcher to role of participant within my own work as a self-reflexive practitioner and utilize a reflexive approach in research (Bourdieu, 1990). As this work may be construed as being laden with bias, I analyze my bias reflexively and acknowledge from a post-modern perspective that I cannot be separated from this work as it is my embodied lived experience: “This writing and research is a double portrait of myself as researcher and as participant as I situate my work firmly in the place that I embody. This gives authenticity to my work in that I live-in-the-world and be-in-the-world” (Kyte, 2014, p. 37) of teachers and students. This moves away from researcher as “disembodied voice” (Bolwell, 2011, p. 686) and places me firmly within the field with authentic lived experience as the mindfulness practice through yoga is implicitly embodied. Subjectivities of the researcher in this work are integral to the analysis of the data (Kumsa, Chambon, Yan, & Maiter, 2015; Pillow, 2003). I am not gathering separate pieces of information, but instead, examine inter-related stories which allow the discovery of themes that are the starting point of the inquiry (Todres & Holloway, 2010) as a self-reflexive practitioner. Embodiment is the key experience and idea in this inquiry to further the quest for sustainable self through the mindfulness practice. Barbour’s (2011) definition of embodiment states:

Embodiment is a holistic experience, different from “body” experience (which remains differentiated from the “mind” and is typically based on Cartesian dualistic understanding of body and mind). I argue that embodiment encompasses an individual person’s biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, social, gendered, artistic, and spiritual experience, within their cultural, historical and geographical location.... Embodiment therefore indicates a holistic experiencing individual. Most importantly, embodiment can also be understood through movement, an embodied activity. (p. 88)

The process of embodiment through a mindful practice in an educational space encourages the path toward sustainable self.

### *The body as instrument / movement as method: The weekly practice*

My body is my instrument. It is the place where I can give voice to my opinion. It is the space where I have certain power, even if it’s only the power of locating my thoughts and emotions. (Bruguera, 2015, para. 1)

In each yoga class, the students and I began our mindfulness practice with quietude and focusing, *pranayama* (breath work), and some light stretching. From this point, I would choose music that enabled detachment so as to at-

tach — not to the events of the day or the week — but instead to the events of the moment; the pure expression of momentary knowing and being. I would guide my participants through an hour practice. This mindful practice would begin with *pranayama* and end with meditation while engaging physical embodied pursuits with a middle space of hatha yoga movement. The practice was always the same, yet always different depending on the number of participants, the physical energy levels, and the psychic energy. This was purely dependent on each individual's sense of self on that day and the expression of that at the practice time. At this time, I was not thinking about how this practice elicited change in each individual's sense of self, although I noted at times the beautiful aftereffects in words, expressions, and in physicality. After pursuing this process for several years while also attending to the literature on sustainable happiness and well-being, I am able to connect the practice as a way to achieve the goals of sustainable happiness and well-being for teachers, both practicing and becoming, and their students.

After deciding to explore mindfulness practice as a way to achieve sustainable self and well-being for practicing teachers and pre-service teachers, I began recruitment by word of mouth for participants within the Teacher After School Mindfulness Program who would be willing to engage in an embodied interview process about their experiences. Several of my students seemed interested and asked questions about the process including the time commitment and what this would specifically entail. I was hoping to have at least two participants and up to four to discuss and share their mindfulness journey with me and with each other. After discussing the exploration each week of class for three weeks, I was able to have two teachers commit to the process. This participation required a time commitment of approximately two hours where they would be interviewed in a group setting about their experiences as mindfulness practitioners. I asked 12 questions of them:

1. How has mindfulness practice influenced the way you teach?
2. How has mindfulness practice influenced the way you interact with your students?
3. Have you used mindfulness practice outside of the classroom? If so, how?
4. What are the different ways in which you use mindfulness techniques in your classroom?
5. Are there particular times of the school day that you use mindfulness practice more frequently?
6. Why do you use them at that particular time of day?
7. Are there particular techniques that you use more frequently than others? Which ones? Why do you use them?

8. What changes have you noticed in your classroom since you implemented mindfulness practice?
9. How does the mindfulness practice change your feelings at the end of the day?
10. Can you elaborate on the general feelings you experience from the practice?
11. How does this experience translate to other areas of your life?
12. How do you deal with conflict and anxiety through mindfulness practice?

These questions formed an entry point to the dialogical process we would share.

### THE FEEDBACK (LOOP)

We all have many stories to tell. Our stories come from deep within our souls and within our hearts. These stories determine who we are, what we are, where we have been, and where we will go. Our deepest felt experiences come from our embodied sense of self; our embodied being and knowing how our bodies and minds experience the world and what this means to our understanding – our personal understanding of ourselves and the world around me / each other. Gibbs (2005) noted that language and thought are determined from embodied activity. Language becomes a passage that we use to share and express ourselves.

The themes in the stories that follow were uncovered through an analysis of the interview transcripts. It reflects a storytelling experience from them to me, and I lived it through them. This text is their stories retold as interview dialogue. The word *text* is related to the Latin word, *textus*, a tissue, which is derived from *texere*, which is to weave. This storytelling is the weaving of their words eliciting their “consciousness of growing” (Greene, 2000, p. 273). The mindfulness practice encourages growing of the sustainable self, and uncovering and discovering sustainable happiness and well-being. This in turn allows a changing space in educational contexts, enabling us to move from a fixed space of what we view as traditional learning, the three “r”s – reading, writing, and ‘rithmetic, to an educational place of learning that is transformative.

#### *Introducing Sharon and Yolanda: Their stories*

Sharon and Yolanda (real names used with consent) are teachers on their path to sustainable happiness and well-being. Their path is my project in a broad project-based educational plan to enhance and change the he(art) and soul of teacher education through mindfulness. Through the act of embodied interviewing, I was able to be part of the world of Sharon and Yolanda. Both Sharon and Yolanda have been yoga students in the schoolteacher Mindfulness program for the past four years at the high school where they work. Although it is an informal program comprised solely of teaching staff as participants

with an opportunity to drop in or out as one pleased, these two participants and I often dialogued about the need for alternative approaches to teacher support that might have long term positive effects on individual participants as well as whole school communities. Once I received school board approval to proceed with the research, we moved forward. With agreement to be part of the mindfulness inquiry from a subjective location, I interviewed Sharon and Yolanda in a semi-structured group interview to determine if mindfulness practices contributed to a sustainable sense of self, sustainable happiness, and well-being and whether this sense of well-being transferred from their practice, to their classrooms, and into their personal lives. They gave written consent to use their real names in the research and writing process.

Although the interviewer, as a participant in engaging mindfulness, I was an insider to the experience and the embodiment of the process. Sharing the dialogue as an insider permitted me to take part in the journey and the experiences. This allowed an opportunity to create their personal storytelling and shared narrative. The embodied interview process becomes a storytelling session where I had the opportunity, as Bruner (1996) noted, for “trafficking in meaning” (p. 90). Bresler (2006) discussed this as “embodied narrative” (p. 24), where interviewee and interviewer develop a personal connection and explore meaning together. I, as audience, and the women, as performers, share lived experience together (Bresler, 2006). This story is my story but it also Sharon and Yolanda’s stories; my journey but also theirs.

### *The findings of the inquiry expressed as narrative*

The findings of this inquiry indicated that the mindfulness practice encouraged and supported sustainable self and sustainable happiness by offering serenity, peace, awareness, and well-being. These themes not only manifested themselves within the teachers’ classroom practice but also in their personal lives.

#### *Serenity*

Sharon discussed her perspectives of the mindfulness practice after a hectic day:

It’s like the day can be absolutely crazy, and then we just go to the library and just, you know, lay on our mat and then we just start yoga. And then by the time it’s over, like by the time I’m ready to leave, I just feel like I’ve got just like a new way to look at the world almost.

When asked to expand that thought, she explained, “I just feel like whatever happened that day, it’s sort of gone.” This practice has allowed her to separate from the strain of the everyday to move into a new place of quietude.

Yolanda concurred but spoke about the feelings of being serene from her perspective:

So in yoga, it really brings me into that moment.... As far as my job goes, I find if...I wish...I'm so glad that we have yoga in school now because I think the students need that because it allows you to appreciate everything that you have right now in this very moment, and not be so caught up in the negativity that can so easily come with the job, especially as of late. [Laughs]. So it's...you know, it's crazy, school's crazy. But when you really think about this moment right now, and yoga helps people to get there, it makes you appreciative of all that we're blessed with.

Sharon took a moment and expanded on Yolanda's thoughts:

I think back like years ago, before I found yoga, before I knew anything about it, I would just get caught up in the craziness of my day at school. I don't find I do that as much anymore. And I think it is...I think I just sort of take a breath and like live in the moment.

I asked her to talk more about what being in the moment meant to her and she responded,

just kind of take one thing at a time and not let things overwhelm me. Because if I did sort of stop and think about it, you know, just like you, Yolanda, we'd be overwhelmed. But I think yoga and the idea of clearing your mind and the breathing and the relaxing and, you know, just like when you're in a posture, closing your eyes and just losing yourself in that, I think it just gives you a new way to look at the world and your job. And I think that is a big part of my life right now. I do. And the way I look at my job and my kids [students].

Yolanda also talked about this interconnected serenity that she is able to bring to her students:

With my students sometimes, you know, I tell them to practice some breathing.... And I would say, you know what, guys, [inhale] this really will, like seriously, trust me here, in this moment trust me, take some deep breaths and let that stuff go.... I've actually done that with the kids.... I don't have those small pullouts to do anymore. And I miss that connection that I can have with the kids. And sometimes they're skeptical. But I'm like seriously, this is proven to [inhale] help you relax.... So that they're in tune with themselves. Know yourself as a learner, know what works for you. So if you know yourself as a learner that's being mindful. And yoga can help in that as well.

### **Awareness**

Yolanda discussed the expectations she feels are on teachers today and her awareness around what she can do in these real-life circumstances from a more mindful perspective:

Expectations on teachers is that they're miracle workers and that they can solve every problem. We can't. We know that. All I can do is help the student in this moment. You know, I might leave here and go out and teach math. I'm going to help them. In that particular moment that's all I can do. When they leave us, I'm hoping they're more equipped with what we're teaching. But not even so much what we're teaching, it's what we're

modelling is so much more important as far as their wellbeing. We want well-rounded individuals but we're focusing so much on the academics. And that's what school is supposed to be about. And maybe there's not time to teach some of this other stuff, but we certainly can model it because modelling doesn't really take any extra time... And if the student is not mindful, then the student is not going to learn.

She expanded upon this thought with a discussion around the awareness she has about the importance of relationship building and relationships:

They need that relationship. Relationship was first. So the student needs to feel safe and not be in that flight or flee the whole time before they can learn. And economically we're not providing those conditions for those at-risk kids, and we're going to lose them.

Sharon also talked about how the mindfulness practice has given her more awareness of her place and space at school:

I'd say for me, in the morning, with my morning when I start here. I have a couple of boys...well, probably three students right now that come in in the morning and they just want a quiet place. You know, we just sort of get started with their day and, you know, what did you do last night or what's your day looking like today?

She went on to explain her awareness of the power of breath in her life and in her classroom practice:

And they need that, you know, like a little breath. You know, he comes in, in the day, and Andrew and Taylor...and they need that sort of start to the day. But you know what, I feel like that if they didn't have that, I don't know where they would go. I'm sure that they would survive but I feel like I am... maybe I am mindful of that. That that's what they need to start their day, you know. And then it kind of works in there.

She acknowledged that sometimes what happens is not that consequential, but that other times, it's very meaningful:

And any issues that they had yesterday or like anything that they couldn't deal with or whatever, you know. And sometimes it's nothing. Sometimes it's like sit down, check your...like they'll go on the computer. Here, have a granola bar. You know, let's get ready. What do you have first period? And that's pretty much it. But other times it's, if anything is bothering them or what they need to talk about. You know, it's sort of their time to be mindful of what's going to happen for their day.

This practice of mindfulness changes the teacher and the student in that moment and for the remaining part of the day. She closes the idea by noting:

And I think just being aware at the beginning of their day and at the end of their day, that's a big thing. And I think that's why I'm so crazy about when I am off, that I have somebody that will come in and do that same thing in the morning, especially for any length of time. Because I think that's helping them. I really do. It's a good way to start their day. And it's a

good way for me to start my day too because then I'm aware of what's going on and I'm not running around trying to find out what's happening with these kids during the day.

### *Peace*

To give some background on the space of the teachers' world of work in the past year is important to understand the consequential nature of achieving peace. These teachers, beyond what may have happened in their day to day personal lives, experienced a great deal of trauma in their work space within the course of eight months. The staff and student morale suffered considerable hardship.

Sharon began her discussion with an incredible amount of emotion:

Last year was probably the worst year of my whole life. I'm going to cry. And I did yoga with you, and I did yoga with Verna, and then I did yoga at home. Remember I told you I found YouTube yoga. And it helped me. I'm telling you, it did. I think the breathing. And I used to be way too fast in my life, and I would never like lay there and listen to...meditation.

She discussed her past way of moving, going, and planning:

I would be like, you know, no, no, I've got to move, I've got to move, I've got other stuff to do. And I do that now, right, and it helped me. It helped me. And I think about...last year. I'd go for Christmas [break], I did yoga every single day. And I think that's what got me through. I honestly do.... I was at peace afterwards. I don't know, I just felt like my anxiety wasn't there. And I was just...yeah, I had peacefulness. You know, I did.

She acknowledged that the peacefulness she felt after the mindfulness practice was so consequential for her that she would be a calmer person if she practiced everyday:

And if I had yoga every day, I would be calmer. I'm telling you, I said to Darlene, I sleep better having yoga. I do. At the end of my day, it's like it's the best part of my day, is when I can end my day with yoga and just close my eyes and just...yeah, I just love it. I really do.

Yolanda looked at her peaceful self from the mindfulness process in a more abstract way:

I'm like ah, this is just so wow. Like I'm home in a warm house with a fuzzy blanket and a wonderful pet, and I have a roof over my head.... So I think that is the type of attitude that mindfulness...and if you can really learn and be mindful of that moment, you look around you and you are just blessed with so much. And no matter what crisis that you may be facing, you can look at the positives.... When I look at some of the crisis that we've had and the whole bit, I just look at, well, you know, I was able to be part of somebody's life or I was able to help or something like that, rather than saying, oh my goodness, this is awful and to look only at the negative.

### *Well-being and sustainable happiness*

I began the dialogue around well-being by asking both Sharon and Yolanda to speak to their personal feelings as well as their relationships with others since experiencing the mindfulness practice; in essence, sense of self and self in relation to other. Yolanda began by discussing her improved ease of spirit:

I find people can't push my buttons.... I keep my power. And so then I'm not spreading negativity because...I know people have said to me,... why don't you get upset about that?... But I know in my heart and in my mind what is true. So that's all that matters. So it's not perpetuating the negativity, I don't think, for the most part.

Sharon echoed these ideas:

And I think as well, you've sort of recognized situations and relationships around you. And you re-evaluate those and what is the most important to you. You know? And where like you might have put yourself in a situation or with a group of people or somewhere that maybe you weren't comfortable before or maybe that wasn't bringing you happiness. Like you will re-evaluate that. Like it makes you just look at the world differently. And like Yolanda said, keep your power. Like not to let situations get the best of you. Or like even at work, like just coming in, it can be overwhelming at times and crazy and all that stuff. But you know what, you can do what you can do. And you're going to try to help people and you're going to try to do the best job you can, and then you're going to accept that, and you're not going to beat yourself up and say that, you know, I should have done more, you know. And you're just going to be able to say I can just do as much as I can do, you know, and keep myself sane and happy as well, and content in my life.

Yolanda acknowledged herself as an accepting and unique being:

But then being mindful is just like, okay, we're all on a different spot of this journey of mindfulness. And some people are here, some people are there. And the advice that I give to people when they are upset and stuff like that is stuff that tries to help them be a little more mindful. So I am trying to help people but not in a...just in a suggestive way,... I like to listen. And people say you don't really give advice. I'm like, no, I like to listen. But if the advice that I do give is something to bring them to mindfulness, it's like, well, how is that really...you know, somebody's going on about something in the past. Well, how is that really helping you right now? Like you know? But then I'll leave it.

Sharon also spoke to Yolanda's ease with handling challenging work related situations with her mindful approach:

And I think it's just your way of life, Yolanda. Like the way...I just know like being in meetings and stuff with you, you do a really good job but you don't take yourself too serious and you don't get overwhelmed in situations. You just look at it and say, okay, this is what I can do and I'm going to go on.



Yolanda responded, “Yes, I accept the moment.” This acceptance has changed their work-related space and approach. Sharon acknowledged that this present year feels “impossible,” yet, when I asked her how she felt her mindfulness impacted her work and personal relationships, she responded indicating:

I find I’m more accepting. You know, if a student makes a choice and maybe it’s not the best choice but it’s not going to harm them, then I’ll support that. You know, it might not be the best thing that I see for their future. In a personal relationship, I think I really appreciate what I have so much more now. Like I really do. I just look at, you know, my family and my husband, and I just think, God, I am so lucky to have the life that I have. I really am, you know. And I really...yeah, I’m so fortunate. And I feel like I count my blessings and just all the wonderful people that I have around me, you know, and people that I care about. I think that’s all. That’s what’s important.

Yolanda echoed Sharon’s sentiment about difficult working conditions acknowledging the importance of finding well-being as what we live is what our students experience and these worlds are not separate but interdependent and interconnected:

And that’s so timely right now because again in our negotiations and everything, you know, we have always put forth that our working conditions and how we are is a student’s learning conditions. They’re not separate from each other. So if you don’t have people in the right framework and mind, it comes across obviously.... It’s affecting the students. So if teachers feel overwhelmed and unsupported and can’t build that relationship with the students to get them out of that...those at-risk students which we have so many here, if we can’t get them out of that fight or flee mindset, then they’re not going to come to school because they’re not learning anything. And they truly aren’t because physiologically they cannot because they don’t feel supported, they don’t have the relationship. And that is key. It’s key.

While Sharon nodded her head and added,

I agree. I really do. I think it starts with us. Like we have to be mindful of our job. Well, I guess it starts with downtown [administration], right. They have to be mindful of what we need as well. But you know, we can’t do a good job if we’re not well.

The pivotal piece in this statement is the consequential nature of well-being for a teaching and learning environment to function and, hopefully, flourish in interconnectedness and inter-dependence.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The aim of this exploration was to examine whether mindfulness practice as a new pedagogy could contribute to sustainable self. Teaching has become challenging as teachers experience high levels of stress, depression, and burnout (Borg, et al., 1991; Galand et al., 2007; Janosz et al., 2004). This emotional

exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) is preventing teachers from being healthy and well (Borg et al., 1991; Janosz et al., 2004). This inquiry used mindfulness practice to foster the sustainable self, and create sustainable happiness (O'Brien, 2008) and well-being in individual teachers' lives as well as in school spaces and beyond. The process begins within oneself and its overarching effects transcend the immediate space of the practice as the practitioner becomes one with their mindfulness.

## LIMITATIONS

As researcher, I must acknowledge not only what my study is about but also what it is not about. I have opened the door to possibilities for teachers to use mindfulness practice to assist in achieving the sustainable self in the rapidly changing and demanding place that is the school community. There will always be limitations regardless of how one proceeds with their research. In this particular context, many examples of mindfulness are anecdotal in nature as they come by personal narrative and self-expression. The representative voice was that of just two teachers as well as myself as researcher-participant as we codetermined meaning. However, "personal experience motivates academic research more often than researchers acknowledge" (Garrett, 2001, p. 329). Through a reflexive methodological approach, I can acknowledge my personal reasons for pursuing research of this nature.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This exploration adds to a small body of literature on the benefits of mindfulness practice in school spaces for teachers. This inquiry has demonstrated that this process not only offers the practitioner serenity, awareness, peace, and well-being, but the benefits of the practice move far beyond the personal space of those practicing teachers and into the classroom and school space. Encouraging and fostering responsive pedagogies meet the changing needs of school populations and have the capacity to contribute to positive school health (Morrison & Peterson, 2013). These ideas are part of new pedagogies that are the he(art) and soul of education where teacher and student become learning partners using imagination and creativity to provide opportunities for transforming the immediate space as well as the space of others emotionally and intellectually; growing sustainable happiness and well-being. Further research on mindfulness practice for teachers as a new pedagogy for sustainable happiness and well-being will add to the sparse literature on the benefits of this practice for the classroom and school community.

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