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# A Phenomenological Study of a Combined Mindfulness and Social-and-Emotional Learning Intervention as Delivered by a Counselor- Consultant to Early-Childhood Educators

Alfredo F. Palacios

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A Phenomenological Study of a Combined Mindfulness and Social-and-Emotional Learning  
Intervention as Delivered by a Counselor-Consultant to Early-Childhood Educators

by

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B.A., Sociology, The University of New Mexico, 2011

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of New Mexico

Albuquerque, New Mexico

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## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the countless early childhood educators that lead with open hearts and invest their lives into the young minds. Thank you for your stories.

And to Danny Maldonado, my Padrino and a giant on whose shoulders I stand.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Mindfulness is an emerging tool that is growing in use in early childhood educational settings. This project identified a high needs area of Albuquerque New Mexico and implemented a mindfulness-based intervention with teachers in a Head Start setting. This study took place over a school year where teachers met weekly with researchers for training in mindfulness and social emotional learning. This study employed a phenomenological inquiry into the perceived experiences of teachers learning these pedagogical tools to be used in their classrooms. Implications are made for early childhood educators and professional counselors that serve in a consultation role in these settings.

Keywords: social emotional learning, mindfulness, early childhood education, and counselor consultation

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Professional counselors can be an incredible supplement to young children's development. Counselors are keen at facilitating quality relationship development with clients and school systems. Developing a quality relationship between students and teachers is an effective approach to affecting the overall academic experiences throughout the duration of their education (Becker, Gallager & Whitaker, 2017; Hwang, 2017). While counselors are invaluable resources in a school, rarely are they positioned in early childhood settings except in responsive services (Jennings, 2014). Given the value of counselors when they provide preventative and early intervention services, it appears that the absence of counselors in these roles in early childhood classes is a significant omission.

Early childhood education setting is a unique environment designed to engage children at pivotal periods of their development. With 48% of three and four-year-olds in the United States attending pre-kinder education, developing social emotional competence is empirically supported ideal for young children (Jennings, 2014; Lomas, 2017). School counselors, as agents of change in schools, are constantly evolving to meet the needs of diverse student population. In response to these changes, it is vital for schools to have a dynamic professional scope of support for both students and teachers (Padilla & Hipolito-Delgado, 2016; Tadlock-Marlo, 2011). Counselors enjoy a wide range of professional practices. Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBI), and professional consultation are areas counselors are capable of integrating.

Mindfulness is an emerging counselor intervention in schools (Cooper & O'Connor 1993; Emerson, Leyland, Hudson, Rowse, Hanley, and Hugh-Jones, 2017; Lemberger, Carbonneau, Atencio, Zieher, & Palacios, 2018; Wisner & Norton, 2013). Primary tenets of

mindfulness are applicable to counselor goals in support of a healthy, thriving school system and student body population. The benefits of mindfulness on personal relationships and navigating the education system have been investigated and used to supplement student engagement and prevention efforts of school counselors (Wisner & Norton, 2013).

Counselor consultation models are suited as a vehicle of implementing mindfulness practices into the schools by augmenting preexisting education practices (Brack et al., 1993; Jones, Begay, Nakagawa, Cevalco, and Sit, 2016; Kurpius & Fugua, 1993; Ridley and Mendoza, 1993; Sander, Finch, Pierson, Bishop, German, and Wilmoth, 2016). Additionally, consultation models are designed to integrate a counselor intervention into a system with many moving parts. The logistics of planning, implementing, and evaluating the effect of a group consultation on a school system are integrated into consultation technique and strategy (Elysia, 2007; Jones et al., 2016). It is important to emphasize this support of traditional models of counselor consultation as an avenue of implementing mindfulness under the more broad promotion of SEL in early childhood classrooms.

Social emotional learning and MBI are similar approaches to educational engagement and are related in theory and practice. Integrating mindfulness into early childhood education is in line with a broader approach to implementing SEL in classroom and into personal practice (Gueldner & Feuerborn, 2016). The concepts present in implementing SEL in classrooms are related to and benefit from mindfulness. Mindfulness involves an intentional and deliberate approach to the self in relation to the world that remains consistent with notions of connectivity and emotional competence seen in SEL paradigms (Bishop, 2004; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, and Davidson, 2015). Conceptualizing a MBI as being a compatible component of SEL objective in

the classroom provides a platform for a teaching training program to establish relevance in research regarding prosocial classrooms.

Mindfulness is rising in popularity, including interventions focused on younger children (Becker et al., 2016; Crane & Hecht, 2018; Flook et al., 2010; 2015; Gold et al., 2009). There is growing empirical on the value of SEL and MBIs in early childhood development (Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Zoogman, Goldberg, Hoyt, & Miller, 2015). Studies interested in adding to this conversation indirectly create a demand for teacher training programs designed to equip educators with the skills needed to integrate mindfulness in the classroom (Crane, 2010; Hayes-Skelton, Orsillo, Roemer, 2013). This phenomenological study is oriented toward understanding the unique context of working in early childhood education, specifically in areas of significant socioeconomic distress. Exploring and substantiating effective training models is an important move toward a more widespread use of SEL/MBI in response to challenges facing young students in disadvantaged New Mexico neighborhoods.

### **Philosophical Support for Mindfulness and Social Emotional Learning with Young Children**

Scholars have paid great attention to how the identifying environmental, relationship, and training factors have been pivotal in the implementation of student school readiness and preparation efforts. Teacher disposition is one of the primary factor identified in improving pedagogical methods and classroom outcomes (Lomas, 2017; Meiklejon, 2012; Miyahara, Finch, Pierson, Bishop, German and Wilmoth 2017; Roeser and Skinner, 2012). The four domains of interest in teacher improvement are: 1) one's knowledge of course content; 2) understanding of effective pedagogical strategies; 3) knowledge of students' development as related to school; and 4) the disposition of teachers in the classroom (Jennings 2014; Roeser et al., 2012). Positioning a

teacher's Social Emotional Competence (SEC) as a central property to a comprehensive training module allows for mindfulness and SEL to be of central importance to teaching objectives.

When targeting the social emotional contexts of children in their classroom, it is reasonable to assert that understanding SEC in teachers is a direct avenue toward creating classroom environments conducive to desirable outcomes in young children.

Given the understood benefits of MBI and SEL on school readiness, integrating these ideas into early childhood education strategies is a reasonable approach to improving classrooms. Utilizing a group process to influence the work of early childhood educators supports a systems philosophy that highlights the influence of early childhood environments on one's development. By promoting mindfulness-based skills into the systemic preferential repertoire can contribute to an educational culture that places young children in a position to develop optimal levels of relational strategies.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Young children in economically distressed settings experience a range of stressors (Flook et al., 2015; McClelland et al., 2013) as do the teachers (Becker et al., 2017; Ruijgrok-Lupton, 2018; Walker, 2017). Specifically, children living in poverty or distress are likely to experience disruption in their maturation of self-regulatory and social emotional characteristics (Finegood & Blair, 2017; Moffitt et al., 2011). In turn, teachers experience stress and vicarious challenges, which in turn affects their personal and environmental circumstances both in and beyond the school environment. Teacher stress levels and unique aptitude toward coping to stress are related to the systemic condition of their classroom and young students (Benn et al., 2012).

Furthermore, I suggest that counselors are underutilized in the delivery of preventative and early interventions in early childhood settings. School-based counselors seldom support the

development of students and teachers in this way despite possessing the training and professional skills to do so (Sander et al., 2016). Further explicating the range of possible support strategies for counselor working with young children (and their caretakers) can respond to this trend. Teacher stress, counselor utilization, and adverse consequences of poverty, as experienced by students and teachers in Head Start classrooms, comprise the variables of interest being explored using phenomenology.

### **Educators as Key Change Agent**

The current body of research regarding mindfulness in schools parallels the broader concept of mindfulness in the workplace and systems wellness approach. When exploring the effects of mindfulness in the workplace, studies typically measure workplace outcomes, while ignoring non-work-outcomes (Crain & Schoner-Reichl, 2017). This study positions mindfulness and concepts of SEL at the center of professional development. In practice, these disciplines have a substantial effect on a teacher's disposition outside of professional settings as well. The facilitator is a central instrument to the endeavor of implementing a MBI. Measuring the effects of mindfulness on coping and responding to the world is central in viewing the educators as the instruments of change (Crane, 2010). The integrity and strength on a classroom mindfulness intervention is strongly related to an instructor's personal relationship with the discipline. Mindfulness-based interventions are no different than the consistent and strong stance held by Kabat-Zinn (1990) and others who believe the quality of the teaching is a key ingredient associated with the delivery of successful outcomes for participants (Crane, 2010). There is an ongoing emphasis on the sharpening teacher repertoire in order to impact the sustained social emotional context of Head Start children.

Studies show that a significant connection exists between teacher's ability to regulate emotions and their social emotional concepts of their students (Emerson et al., 2017). There is a measurable relationship with teacher's ability to be mindful and successful implementation of MBI. However, little is known regarding the mechanisms of change that are present in teacher mindfulness training groups. Among these potential mechanisms, group dynamics, such as attendance and maturation, can be positioned as essential elements of successful SEL MBI training in education settings (Emerson et al., 2017). In emphasizing the teacher as central to the process of change, the current study extracts the essential components of teachers experiencing a group MBI training program. Understanding the mechanisms of change present qualitatively can render proclivities that can be used to create a working model or structured program. Counselors can ground this pursuit in preexisting consultation models used in a variety to settings. In this case, it is important to distinguish the unique scope of support provided by counselor consultant as being distinct from school counselors and counselor-led group psychotherapy.

### **Counselors as Consultants with Early Childhood Educators**

Consultation is one of several primary components to a widely supported scope of practice of professional counselors (Brack et al., 1993). The literature regarding consultation suggests this aspect of the profession as being unique unto itself. Counselor consultation emerged as a separate discipline in response to counselors frequently being asked to provide system consultation. This trend utilized the skills of counselors in understanding mental health, behaviors, and effective methods of fostering positive and dignifying relationships. The emergence of counselor consultation models formalize empirically supported strategies for this type of counselor intervention (Brack et al., 1993).

Counselor consultation models utilize several theories, familiar to counseling, to curate an educational relationship with consultees. Several, relevant to this study, are Gestalt-driven consultation (Brown, 1987; Nevis, 1987) systems-driven consultation (Gerstein & Shillman, 1992) and Irvin Yalom's (1995) theory of group psychotherapy. Although the group process used in this study is tailored to the individual modality of the researcher, these models of consultation were used in preparation and development of intervention strategies.

The value that provided by a Gestalt perspective is an increased emphasis on the group process and repurposing group interactions as desired mode of participant change. The central pursuit from this paradigm is to engage the group process as a microcosm of their as participant's mode of relating to others outside of the group (Cooper & O'Connor, 1993). Furthermore, establishing a goal toward minimizing participant resistance and increasing openness toward genuine contact with others. Capitalizing on these principles contribute to teacher SEC and reflect their openness to genuine contact with the students they work with daily (Gold et al., 2009; Lomas, 2017). Establishing interpersonal boundaries with colleagues with similar pedagogical goals will embed desirable conditions of transferability into all other non-group settings.

In addition to treating the classroom system through the teacher this study also targets the entire school culture. Cooper and O'Conner (1993) include a balanced approach to psychometric (measurable) properties of system processes with respect to the "human" or qualitative components of change. Systems consultation theory at the micro system, mesosystem, and ecosystem. In turn, the individual group is related to the classroom system and the community in which it exists (Brack et al., 1993). This notion is consistent with the aims of the consultation to influence the participating teachers as an active element in several dimensions of the students'

lives. This view of the child's system as significant to their development has broader implications for curricula and educational training policies.

The intervention group is designed to be part educational, experiential, and process group. Considering the intersection these components requires a grounding in group process theory. Yalom's (1995) model of group process provides 11 therapeutic factors that should be used when facilitating change. These factors are: (1) instillation of hope, (2) universality, (3) imparting information, (4) altruism, (5) the corrective recapitulation of primary family group (6) development of socializing techniques, (7) imitative behavior, (8) interpersonal learning, (9) group cohesiveness, (10) catharsis, and (11) existential factors. Facilitating a group that transitions between educational and process modalities engaging facilitator sensitivities to these therapeutic factors enacted these factors. Several factors are prevalent to consultation groups of this type. First, instillation of hope is an essential component to counselor consultation models and requires the consultant to establish a group understanding that change is possible and worth the personal work (Brack et al., 1993; Cooper & O'Connor, 1993).

A group model can be employed for implementing SEL as an improved component of the classroom. Group consultation and psychotherapy theories operationalize desirable group intervention characteristics that are certainly relevant to this endeavor. Presenting mindfulness and SEL activities as a worthwhile discipline in addressing challenging classroom dynamics is a rendering of this factor. Furthermore, group universality is prevalent in the group setting to allow teachers to relate to one another. Group facilitator emphasizes universality as a continuous factor between weekly meetings. Group members work alongside and relate to one another in response to school conditions and classroom contexts. Facilitators using group interventions to train teachers will encounter an intersection of consultation and group theory.

### **Purpose of Study**

The goal of this study is to determine the necessary components of a counselor-led combined SEL and MBI consultation intervention, directed at early childhood educators and targeting the development of children in challenging economic environments. To accomplish this goal, the researcher will consider the following. First, the researcher captured and analyzed data related to the cross compatibility of a counselor-lead consultation group with early childhood educators. Counselors working in schools are operating under determined professional boundaries, and often work with teachers under limited circumstances. Furthermore, counselors leading process-groups with teachers is an emerging area of inquiry in the profession. Second, when utilizing a wide range of counselor process group skill, what ethical considerations emerge in the interaction need to be determined. This brings into question the scope of support of counselor working in school settings leads to the most ideal group design and appropriateness of teacher personal investment. A final component to the purpose of this study is to utilize qualitative input toward extracting the individualized voices of educators working in distressed neighborhoods. Understanding the culture of poverty and education can provide a platform for human nuances in experience to be integrated into the development of a working training program/model. Utilizing a phenomenology will provide a rigorous mode of learning and explicating the contributions of teachers' culture and history toward social and emotional competency.

### **Research questions**

Phenomenological research questions used are reveal the meaning of human experiences. Further, these questions establish an inquisitive eye that aims to extract descriptions, and experiential renderings of the group (Moustakas, 1994). For this current study, the research

question targets essential aspects that can be used to further develop a working model of this group. Research Question 1: How do early childhood educators experience a counselor-lead, mindfulness-based, consultation group?

### **Summary**

The current conditions of early childhood education research are ideal for a phenomenological contribution to MBI and SEL interventions. Currently, there is a need for further understanding of the influence of poverty and socioeconomic distress on the SEC of students and teachers in early childhood education settings. In response to these circumstances a mindfulness-based social emotional learning interaction was used for its effectiveness in teacher skills acquisition and residual classroom benefits for children. The purpose of this study was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the essential experiential components of a counselor-lead MBI SEL intervention group with educators. The intervention group utilized in this inquiry employs several counselor consultation models. These models integrate the influence of Gestalt-driven consultation, Systems-driven consultation, and Yalom's 11 primary therapeutic factors for process groups (Brack et al., 1993; Cooper & O'Connor, 1993; Yalom, 1995). The intersection of these models provides a working conceptual rendering of their most applicable uses.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review was designed to inform the research design and provide context for the discussion of the results. Three primary topic areas are introduced, including mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) with young children, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) interventions with young children, and theoretical bases of counseling consultation. The theoretical foundation to mindfulness is introduced and the few existing empirical studies on mindfulness intervention in early childhood education settings are discussed. Next, summaries of empirical studies with teachers and children are included. Finally, a review of counseling consultation theory will provide implications for consultation models that satisfies the targeted group purpose and utility.

### **Mindfulness-Based Interventions with Young Children**

**Theoretical bases of mindfulness.** A working definition of mindfulness establishes a common language to describe, characterize, and study a nuanced and highly subjective process (Moussakas, 1994). For the purposes of the current study, the working definition of mindfulness for multidisciplinary use was Scott Bishop and colleagues (2004). Bishop and ten other colleagues incorporated aspects of previously understood definitions of mindfulness.

Mindfulness can be understood as an orientation toward two cooperative components. The first is a sense of self-regulated attention. This attention is meant to target the inner subjective environment of the participant. Further, Bishop and colleagues establishes a second operational component which involves seeking an understanding of the present moment that could be described as curious, open, and accepting. The operational definition of mindfulness used in this study was conceptualized as a metacognitive skill and “defined, in part, as a self-regulation of attention that involves sustained attention, attention switching and the inhibition of elaborative processing” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 233). In an effort to explicate the philosophical foundation of

mindfulness and its application to the current study, this definition will be adopted and used to define mindfulness in this context.

**Mindfulness-based interventions with children.** In recent years, the number of studies that consider early childhood mindfulness has increased, with a particular focus on how such practices target early childhood emotional regulation. Lisa Flook and colleagues (2010; 2015) piloted studies that developed effective mindfulness-based classroom interventions with young children. Flook and colleagues (2015) developed a Kindness Curriculum (KC) that was meant to target self-regulatory behaviors in 68 preschool children over a 12-week period. In doing so, these researchers established that children that participated in KC demonstrated a higher social “competence and earned higher report card grades in domains of learning, health, and social-emotional development” (Flook et al., 2015, p.44). In addition, the control group that received no intervention demonstrated a higher degree of selfish behaviors over time. Flook and her colleagues’ work illustrates the potential of integrating mindfulness into early childhood settings. Moreover, the KC intervention was a brief supplement to the classroom activities, yet yielded benefits in early childhood academic and social domains.

The current study is also meant to derive strategies that are tailored to children and educational settings in economically disadvantaged settings. Poehlmann-Tynan and colleagues (2015) sought to measure the benefits of a mindfulness intervention with children who are economically disadvantaged. Researchers tested a control group of three 14-student classrooms and a treatment group of two 15-student classrooms. Beyond the targeting of economically disadvantaged settings, the novel contribution of this study was the use of three measurement periods. Child self-regulatory behaviors were measure pre intervention, immediately post-intervention and once more three months following the conclusion of the intervention. The value

of this strategy is to demonstrate the sustainability of experiences benefits of MBI, when conceptualizing the significance of a MBI on a child's social emotional context and academic achievement. The sustainability of results overtime is a necessary domain of outcome research. This study was the first to acquire support for an MBI to increase self-regulation and attentional control for preschool students of economically disadvantaged circumstance (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015). These domains of interpersonal repertoire have been found to improve educational outcomes for Head Start children (Jennings, 2014).

In the time following Poelmann-Tynan and colleagues' 2015 study, Lemberger and colleagues (2018) measured the effect of a mindfulness-based social emotional learning intervention with 23 3 and 4-year-olds from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Similarly, this study measured the effect of the intervention on children over time. To do this, researchers established a randomized control design, multilevel model approach to analyze behavior measures across multiple measurement checkpoints. Findings indicated that the children that were in the intervention group demonstrated a higher degree of self-regulatory behavior following participation in the mindfulness intervention (Lemberger et al., 2018). This finding is consistent with other research regarding the relationship between preschool children and an improved capacity of self-regulation following MBI.

This study also incorporated a qualitative analysis to code and compile emerging themes regarding the treatment fidelity and implementation of the designed intervention. Qualitative findings included observations regarding the environment, more specifically, that children from both groups had inconsistent attendance. More specifically, across the 32 sessions, attendance ranged from 41% to 75%. Most important, qualitative analysis illustrated a change in commonly-used language among children that participated in the intervention (Lemberger et al., 2018).

Although the sessions averaged 50% attendance, absenteeism was consistently distributed among the students. This finding is significant regarding the role of attendance in treatment effectiveness in future implementations of SEL and MBI. Finally, qualitative themes that emerged brought attention to the use of kindness language consistent with the intervention. Throughout the intervention, the group activities and intervention domains exposed the treatment group to several renditions of kindness. More specifically, kindness was framed as being both related to the self and others in the classroom. Qualitative observers coded a pattern that children receiving treatment had a more dynamic understanding of kindness that went beyond avoiding unkind interactions with others. “As the interventions progresses, children’s language around the concepts of kindness became more sophisticated and demonstrated an awareness that kindness affects both the self and the community” (Lemberger et al., 2018, p.297).

**Mindfulness-based interventions with teachers of children.** The emergence of MBI as a mode of improving young children’s self-regulatory behaviors in the classroom necessitates a deeper understanding of the role of educators in fostering student success. The literature regarding teachers and mindfulness can provide a foundation for the currently study about mindfulness interventions targeting teachers. The interventions discussed earlier in this review are brief interventions where a professional facilitator or supporting team visiting the site to implement the intervention. Targeting teachers would allow for the principles of SEL and MBI to be integrated into the classroom through an informed early childhood pedagogy. The following studies provide relevant knowledge regarding training educators to notice, articulate, and utilize important principles in classrooms and in relation to the school as a community.

The relationship between student and teacher is a central element of classroom interventions in any discipline. Becker and colleagues (2017) raise the point that mindfulness

interventions with teachers have been primarily focused on teacher well-being and personal wellness in multiple aspects of their lives. In response, Becker and colleagues (2017) focused their project on the impact of teacher disposition (with specific regard to social emotional competence). In doing so, this team surveyed 1001 teachers across 37 Pennsylvania Head Starts. This online survey was utilized a path analysis for teacher responses. The team assess teacher student relationships with use of an abbreviated version of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS). The construct of dispositional mindfulness (the likelihood that a teacher to be mindful during their daily lives) is applicable to the current study. This element was measured using the Cognitive and Effective Mindfulness Scale-Revised (CAMS-R; Becker et al., 2017). Following a path analysis Becker concludes that “ more mindful teachers also had lower levels of depressive symptoms and less conflicted relationships with the children in their classroom” (p.48). These results also indicate the contrary to be true. The higher levels of depressive symptoms is also indicative of more challenging encounters with preschool students. This study established a strong empirical connection between the social emotional repertoire of educators and relationship outcomes with students.

A goal of the current study is to target children with a particular set of needs (i.e., poverty) that a teacher must attend too. For children with unique classroom needs, educators are in a position to make accommodations and tailor pedagogical practices to create classrooms conducive to success. Benn and colleagues (2012) acknowledge the particular stresses involved when working with young children with social emotional challenges. This team or researchers implemented a five week group mindfulness training with parents and teachers of children with special emotional needs. This study is the earliest randomized control study that indicated that a group-based mindfulness training can be effective with this population and yield desired changes

in participants over time. The impact of this study to the overall literature is the addition of an initial framework for mindfulness training groups with teachers and parents. The implications of these findings are that future research may contribute a more dynamic range of measures of the effects of a group mindfulness training with educators. Furthermore, this project was consistent with participation patterns in other studies. During the implementation there were drops in study participation after the selection process. This drop in participant attendance is credited to “last minute unanticipated changes in summer plans and life circumstances” (Benn et al., 2012, p. 1485).

Continuing to address the notion that the occupation of teaching can be inherently stressful for educators. Crain and colleagues (2017) illustrate the connection between workplace stress and home life health. In this study, the group of researchers highlighted the aspect of sleep as a byproduct of workplace stress. More specifically, how rumination about workplace stress at home contributes to their work with students. The platform of stress aligns with the practice mindfulness to establish, cultivate, and use thought awareness to bring more about more positive outcomes. The Workplace Mindfulness Training (WMT) was an 11-session program that took place over eight weeks taking place in schools after work hours. This intervention utilized a mixture of pedagogical models that engaged educators through experiential activities, group process, and small group activities that process the application of mindfulness principles to real-life scenarios (Benn et al., 2012; Crain, 2017). This model of group mindfulness intervention is similar to the current study in its combination of multiple domains of teaching and learning to promote the integration of mindfulness in the lives of educators. In this case, those that participated in the mindfulness training utilized learned practices to alleviate symptoms of depression and fostered an improved state of relationships and workplace functionality.

Since it is commonly understood that early childhood educators are instrumental in cultivating a desirable academic trajectory for young students, addressing attitudinal contexts with educators is of key importance. Patricia Jennings (2014) suggests that teacher social emotional characteristics is of critical importance when understanding and improving the quality of teaching interventions and classroom outcomes in early childhood settings. This study was in support of systemic health, in schools, for teaching in highly stressful environment. If one teacher aims to improve the quality of classroom experiences then targeting the wellbeing of educators in an efficacious strategy to achieve that goal (Jennings, 2014). Although these findings contribute relevant knowledge several limitations to this study helped design the current study. First, although a relationship was illustrated between educator disposition and classroom quality researchers were unable to demonstrate directional causality. This means that challenging classroom dynamics may exist due to factors beyond the influence of the educator, leading to burnout and less self-compassion.

Building on evidence that supports improving classroom quality through improving educator wellbeing, Gold and colleagues (2009) tested the effects of a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). The MBSR intervention is based on principles of mindfulness that trains participants to increase attention toward one's inner emotional states. Increasing awareness toward their relationship with stress and its effect on their inner emotional states. This is done through meditation practices and ritualistic implementation of mindfulness into all aspects of daily life. The second aim of this study was to have participants of the MBSR intervention to teach these techniques to the student in their class. This team used the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS) to assess the degree in which the MBSR was able to influence the participating early childhood educators. The MBSR intervention took place immediately

following a school day, and typically lasted 2.5 hours. Following closely to Kabat-Zinn's (1990) training model, this intervention included Saturday five hour "silent session." Most participants reported undesirable levels of concentration, impaired motivation, and confidence. Following the intervention, a majority of educators that participated experienced improvement in their levels of stress, depression and anxiety (Gold et al., 2009). This study successfully capitalized on a self-selected sample of educators seeking improve their well-being through meditation and mindfulness. Considering evidence that improving teacher wellbeing improves overall classroom quality (See Becker 2017; Crain, 2017; Jennings, 2014), Gold and colleagues' (2009) intervention process is a viable strategy to achieve this goal.

Meiklejohn and colleagues (2012) reviewed all relevant research pertaining to mindfulness training being integrated into the education domain. They depict an evolution in the western application of this discipline in medicine, personal health, and now, education. Part of this evolution in the West, included a slow adaptation of mindfulness mediation from a purely Buddhist tradition. The essential elements found in this tradition (nonjudgmental attention to the present moment etc.) have been adapted into a secular model that produced several renderings of this practice for medicinal purposes. Meiklejohn and colleagues' (2012) review encompasses many common modes of mediation practices. The first, is the intentional practice of focusing one's attention on a particular thought, emotion or sensation, such as loving-kindness. The second involves participants selecting a mental "anchor" and attempting to remain fixed on this cognitive landmark. Inevitably the mind will wonder making the task to then accept and dismiss these thoughts allowing for a return to one's anchor (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Building on this defined paradigm of mindfulness practice, this review discusses the psychological and physiological benefits of this practice with teachers. Most important is the work that involves,

“measurable physiological and psychological benefits through a reduction in stress physiology and through measurable changes in the function and structure of diverse areas of the brain” (Meiklejohn et al., 2012, p. 136). Other findings noted in this review are efficacious evidence that physical changes occur in the brain overtime in areas targeted by mindfulness practices. Noting correlation between mindfulness training and the thickness of cortical structures of the brain (grey matter), mindfulness training improves memory, self-regulation, and self-reflective capacities. These physiological structure shifts are indicative of the potential for benefits to last over time (Mieklejohn et al., 2012).

This review also depicts the unique circumstances of educators in maintaining high executive function under considerable stress. Moreover, the benefits of mindfulness practice positively supplement the areas of the brain that are used most to respond to classroom demands (Hwang et al., 2017; Miekejohn et al., 2012). Distinguishing between direct and indirect implementations are important. A direct approach to implementing mindfulness in the classroom is to teach the skills involved in a straightforward lesson to students. An indirect approach could be classified as mindful teaching rather than simply teaching mindfulness. Hwang and colleagues performed a more recent review of educational based mindfulness literature. Although there are few studies conducted in this emerging area of interest, current knowledge targets improve teacher performance and combat educator attrition via mindfulness (Hwang et al., 2017). Competing definitions of mindfulness have emerged across several recent studies. The noticeable pattern was a tendency for studies to declare a mindfulness definition and deviate from this definition when implementing an MBI. Frequently, these discrepancies occur when researchers and trainings incorporate other interpersonal domains into the intervention ad hoc. For example,

three reviewed studies added foci to their programs including emotional skills training and listening practices that are based in a separate interpersonal tradition (Hwang et al., 2017).

While reviewing qualitative analysis several themes emerged. The first was the use of mindfulness as a personal coping strategy and preferred response to stress. Educators participating in MBI demonstrate an increased attunement with the body to regulate themselves and co-regulate the students in their class (Hwang et al., 2017). A second theme was a noticeable change in participant orientation to experience. Recording an “increased sensitivity to noticing emotions and thoughts enables some teachers to examine their perceptions and perspectives before reacting, separating themselves from their emotions and thoughts creating space between reactions” (Hwang et al., 2017, p.39). This qualitative finding illustrates several targeted goals that have been successfully achieved by multiples modes of MBI over several studies and locations. An additional emerging theme was participants experiencing changes in teaching practices. This change was more specifically expressed in educators increased capacity to respond to student stress, tension with a mindfulness-based approach to fostering relaxation and healthy responses to adversity. Qualitative findings illustrate the practice of mindfulness with educations initiated a changed, more intentional approach to daily teaching activities, such as curriculum prep, and attending to student relational behaviors rather than content and observable outcomes. Overall, qualitative findings support the notion that improved social emotional competence in teachers can lead to an improved quality of classroom experiences for students in early-childhood education settings.

Finally, Lomas and colleagues (2017) performed an additional review of the literature and illustrating the effect of MBI on the wellbeing of educators and the subsequent improvements in their classrooms. Findings indicate that most interventions of educators have

yielded positive results across multiple measures. Among the valuable contributions of these studies is evidence that mindfulness can serve as a catalyst for observable improvements in teacher disposition. Lomas and colleagues (2017) extracts a critical mechanism in this positive change. He notes that reperceiving is a construct that involves active detachment themselves from preliminary distressing states that contribute to more substantial levels of stress (Hwang et al., 2017; Lomas et al., 2017; Micklejohn et al., 2012). Reperceiving results from an increased capacity to navigate one's inner world and recognize the nuances of interpersonal climate to navigate reactive potential in a more intentional manner. Mindfulness-based intervention programs directed at educators have yielded statistically significant results for changing the quality of educator mental health in the domains of burnout, depression, anger and resilience (Emerson, 2017). Furthermore, it was demonstrated that intervening with educators in this manner was a viable, efficacious strategy of improving the quality of classrooms (Hwang et al., 2017; Jennings, 2014; Lomas et al., 2017; Micklejohn et al., 2012).

### **Social and Emotional Learning Interventions with Young Children**

The focus on SEL is a growing area in early childhood educational programs and pedagogical practices. It is important to distinguish three areas of this topic. First, a theoretical foundation to SEL was established as a constant model or framework in which the all references to SEL are checked against. Then a review of research regarding the application of SEL in classroom targeted both toward children via classroom routine and targeting teachers via a counselor-led consultation intervention.

**Theoretical bases of social emotional learning.** Social Emotional Learning is an operationalized approach to considering education and promoting interpersonal ability in academic and community domains. Payton and colleagues (2000; 2008) established a theoretical

definition for SEL that is based on the following criteria. Social emotional learning is a process that uses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of children to achieve responsible decision-making, sustaining positive relationships, emotional recognition/management, and personal goals. In order to achieve a sustainable state of SEL in a classroom, educators must understand and implement a five-component set of Social Emotional Learning Competencies supported by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. First, self-awareness is the ability to appraise their inner context and assess a range of beliefs, emotions and behaviors. Next, self-management involves engaging self-awareness and making intentional maneuvers to regulate emotion, control impulses, and monitor progress toward self-directed goals. Next, social awareness refers to the ability empathize and place one's self into the perspective of others all the while making the best use of social resources. Following this, relationship skills encompass the ability of a child to establish and maintain cooperative, meaningful relationships that satisfy the developmental needs of the individual. Finally, responsible decision-making is a competency that identifies ones capacity to make choices based on reasonable social norms, morality, and ethical consideration of others (Payton et al., 2000; 2008). Social Emotional Learning can be achieved in a number of different ways. This versatility can allow educators to tailor their interventions to the unique needs of the students. It is ideal to employ the competencies in a manner that is congruent with the particular strengths of the facilitator. For example, how one facilitates self-management or responsible decision-making can present differently depending on the individuals involved but keeping the core competency as a guide is most important (White, 2017).

**Social emotional learning interventions with young children.** The application of SEL in educational setting is of importance to the current study and has is existing research

supporting its use in education. For early childhood students, the classroom or the school setting is the most ideal setting where mental health and SEL component of development can be accessed. Children attending school at a young age engage in an opportunity to build healthy interpersonal boundaries and see examples of intentional, deliberate behavior patterns. The importance of mental health and SEL, and educational setting is reason to consider a more dynamic role for school counselor. Even and Quast (2017) argue a case for SEL to be integrated into educational settings via professional school counselors. First, they claim that although school counselors are sufficiently trained in this area they are typically underutilized in schools for this purpose. The argument made by these authors is that a more dynamic approach to the roles of school counselors is necessary for school systems to act on mental health of students and classroom quality. Further research suggests that designing educational curricula to include SEL competencies and mental health sensitivity is essential and effective in promoting a higher degree of academic achievement for students. As seen in the current body of research, MBI/SEL programs are ideologically aligned with the “age of accountability” characterization of the climate of education. The structured, evidence based, interventions are easily incorporated into school settings.

The use of SEL intervention is supported by the literature for its appropriateness for all educational settings. However, White, Moore, Flier, and Anderson (2017) discusses the optimization of benefits that occur when preschool students engage in SEL during that crucial developmental window. White et al. explored the use of SEL programs with preschool children with the aim of deducing the common competencies most apparent across a variety of implementations. First, the most apparent presentation of SEL instruction involved educators facilitating personal awareness, cooperation with classmates, and problem solving skills. Direct

interventions with children, a classroom culture of student engagement, family involvement, from SEL program implementation. Additionally, educators are challenged with creating pedagogical methods that deliver SEL ideologies to students. The most common ways that this was done was through modeling, metaphor (e.g., imaginary role-play, rehearsal etc.), individual activities, collective movement, and class cooperation. Finally, common among all reviewed renderings of SEL group activities, provided a desirable format for engaging students in this way. White and colleagues (2017) argues “implementation procedure were predominantly informed by systems variables, in particular ecological systems theory and attachment models of development” ( p.88).

### **Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness-Based Interventions with Teachers of Children Counseling Consultation**

The interpersonal characteristics and attention to relationships inherent in mindfulness and social emotional learning, positions counselors as ideal for treatment (Jennings, 2014; Miyahara et al., 2017; Payton et al., 2010; White et al., 2017). Although the merits of SEL/MBI interventions are boasted in current research, counselor consultation with educators put the individuals in the best position to create change. Counseling consultation can address a variety of systemic issues within larger groups of professionals, such as businesses, human service agencies, and education. First, an exploration of the theoretical literature on counseling consultation will provide a history, purpose, and context to consultation. Then specific applications of counselor consultation models will be discussed with regard to their utility in early childhood settings.

**Theoretical bases of counseling consultation.**

Counseling consultation models specialize in the dynamics of human organizations and combined individual theories of change with principles of systemic counseling. Fundamentally the consultant is challenged to encounter and confront the system complexities with the goal of establishing a new direction for consultees (Fugua & Kurpius, 1993; Kurpius & Fugua, 1993). Defining counselor consultation is important in distinguishing this discipline as a practice with a knowledge base and unique context. Kurpius and Fugua (1993) define counselor consultation with several essential components or conditions. First, the consultant role is based in the task of providing information/education to consultees. In doing so, the consultant provides an outside perspective and integration of a functional theory of systems change. Consultants rely on several relationship theories in order to understand the current climate of a school and provide knowledge and advisement to consultees (Kurpius & Fugua, 1993). These properties allow researchers to distinguish counselor consultation from other consultation disciplines.

**Counseling consultation practices and effects on educators.** Among the empirically supported and traditionally used models of consultation, the Developmental Counseling and Training model (DCT) prioritizes the identified problem while empowering the consultee to affect second-order change (Elysia, 2007). The first step of this model is to assess the current methods being used by the educators. This process involves close attention being paid to the language and words used to describe the student-teacher relationship. Finally, DCT co-constructs a professional development plan that is grounded in consultee strengths and developmental considerations (Elysia, 2007). Developmental Counseling Training considered multiple perspective when considering teacher stress. For example, a sensorimotor modality challenges consultees to observe the classroom. Additional formal-operational goal is mode of consultation

that targets past events in the classroom and connects many events overtime seeking to generate patterns and illustrate habitual responses. Overall, by use of several operational modes, DCT seeks to develop a perspective of classroom challenges that is open to alternative narratives co-constructed by consultant and consultee (Elysia, 2007).

### **Summary of the Literature**

The purpose of the current study is to achieve a deeper understanding of the lived experienced and nuanced significance of a combined MBI/SEL group intervention with early childhood educators. In doing so, current knowledge on mindfulness interventions with teachers and students provides a framework for group intervention. Bishop and colleagues (2004) created an operational definition of mindfulness for the purposes of research and intervention development. In doing so, two primary components of interest emerge. The first common component of mindfulness is a sense of intentional, self-awareness toward the inner climate of the individual. The second is a use of an targeted emotion or meditation subject such as loving-kindness as a counter-rumination to stressful responses to classroom environment. (Bishop et al., 2004). Although the use of these skills in the West continues to be adapted from primarily Eastern traditions (with religious connotations) researchers achieved a mostly secular practice of mindfulness. In a secular Practice, there still are aspects of the discipline that provide the largest medical/health benefits (Hwang et al., 2017; White, 2017).

Participants in the current study are working in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods with young students with unique social emotional needs. Inheriting in this profession is a level of stress and accommodation of pedagogical practices to respond to the unique needs of students (Crane, 2010; Emerson, 2017; Jennings, 2014). Educational systems are constantly responding to a fluid educational climate in the United States. In doing so, methods of improving

classroom quality and educational outcomes for students were explored. The research explored in this review supports the notion that improving the health and quality of life for teachers is a viable strategy to effect the most change in the classroom. Mindfulness interventions are successful in achieving desired social emotional change in teachers (Lomas et al., 2017; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). By teaching educators mindfulness-based coping strategies, principles of mindfulness and intentional self-awareness will permeate into their strategies of engaging students. Improving classroom environment to align with a MBI creates sustained classroom outcomes for young children (Flook et al., 2010; 2015; Lemberger et al., 2018; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015). Implementing a MBI in early childhood classrooms can be done with professional trainers or classroom guests. However, a limitation of many MBI with children studies is the brevity of the intervention and the semi-integration of trainers into classroom. This illustrates the need for teachers to be equipped to, themselves, adapt to these disciplines (White, 2017).

Counselor consultation models apply in bringing educators the training they need to respond to students in an SEL/MBI informed manner. Considering the role of mental health professionals in schools is an important inquiry for system's use of an important resource. It is understood that counselors in schools are equipped with the skills to engage teachers in group skills interventions, but counselors are often underutilized for that purpose (Even & Quast, 2018). Counselor consultation models consider many important aspects of teaching, psychological development, and best practices in educational settings to affect changes in teachers, and thus changes in the classroom. The current body of research supports SEL and mindfulness as effective catalyst for positive social emotional changes in young children. The current study gives educators the knowledge, skills, and awareness to benefit from a mindfulness

practice. The logic behind this is to improve the current toolbox of educators and create a more dynamic and healthy sense of social emotional competence.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to come to understand the lived experience of early childhood educators participating in a counselor-led weekly group meeting aimed at integrating mindfulness and social emotional learning into pedagogical practices. To accomplish this goal, as the researcher, the study consists of a phenomenological research design that is aimed at capturing the experiences of seven early childhood educators exposed to the combined social and emotional learning (SEL) and mindfulness-based (MBI) counselor-consultation intervention used in the study. The broader purpose includes two related and contributing areas of inquiry. First, I gained an understanding of the participants' lived experience while active in the consultation intervention. Second, I explored my own experiences as the intervening counselor-consultant, including considerations related to the intervention content and process.

To collect the necessary data to analyze the participants' and my own lived experiences, I recorded audio sessions, notated sessions, and extracted results that are designed to inform the construction of a larger model of counselor consultation with professionals in an early childhood education setting. A phenomenological design is the most ideal because of its orientation to qualitative experience. In order to develop a model for counselor-early childhood education, the aspects of this endeavor that are not quantifiable must be considered. The experiential contexts of the participating teachers carries a set of nuanced dimensions, such as culture and larger personal historical contexts. In many ways, a phenomenological study captured the voices and narratives of early childhood educators in a manner that acknowledges the individuality of the participants (Hipolito-Delgado, 2016).

Furthermore, phenomenology as a research method is ideal for studying topics or subjects where there is little preexisting literature. By gaining exhaustive insight into this experience,

researchers can extrapolate meaningful paradigms that must be integrated into a model of counselor-early childhood educator consultation in order to construe desired outcomes. In the following sections of this chapter, phenomenology is explained. Additionally, a detailed discussion of the choice of participants, the positionality of the researcher (described as an Epoché in the current study), and the procedures followed in facilitating these consultation groups and data collection is provided. Finally, the analysis plan is described.

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology, as a philosophy pertaining to the lived experiences of individuals, has evolved to capture the subjective experiences of individuals, including usage in qualitative research. Historically, the intellectual tradition of Descartes posits a separation between mind and body, known as Cartesian Dualism (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1999). This school of thought positions the mind as an observer and experiential centerpiece to knowing the objective world. Husserl (1931) develops phenomenology as a way of grounding our knowledge in experience. The phenomenological method engages the researchers as instrumental to the understanding the processes being studied. Scholars suggest that phenomenology is a philosophy and methodology centered on essences. This school of thinking positions the questions of science as being a matter of describing, defining, and articulating essences. This method grounds objective reality as “already there, prior to reflection-like an inalienable presence- and whose entire effort is to rediscover this naïve contact with the world in order to finally raise it to a philosophical status” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945 p.6). Phenomenology requires the observer to bracket their preexisting assumptions, understandings, and world view regarding the phenomena prior to observation. Husserl, and the phenomenologists describe one’s *natural attitude* as the perspective of the observer that is unique unto them often resulting from the sum of their

experiences (Husserl, 1931). Each individual participating in this study and the researcher will encounter themselves by way of their preexisting attitudes

Phenomenology is compatible with a wide variety of sampling procedures (Hepplner Wolmpold & Kivligan, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). The participant and researcher perspectives are central to this process. In order to capture and extract conclusions from these experiences, researchers utilize a combination interviews, observations, and reflective recounting of one's experiential field. In this case a combination of documents, interviews, and observations will be explored with aim to create a detailed, textured, account of participant and researcher experiences. Moustakas (1994) discusses a process of horizontalization, as the process of identifying recurring experiential data and extracting evidence of importance. When reading transcribed interviews the phenomenological researcher will begin to cluster and organize emerging patterns. This process results in a synthesis of "invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience... and construct a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of your experience" (p.122). Several strategies promote internal and external validity. Following this, a composite representation of the experience can be expressed in rich, descriptions or the phenomena of interest.

### **Epoché**

In order for a researcher to position themselves as an observer, the phenomenological method tasks the researcher to focus on the general experiences and smaller more particular participant-based phenomena. Therefore, the "pre-understandings" must be resolved through bracketing and reflexivity (Hopkins, 2016). In working with early childhood educators it is vital to bracket, or set aside as a given, my preconceptions of the settings and subjects. The perspective of the research is influenced by my own knowledge and experience. I am then tasked

with setting aside this knowledge and attempt to see the experiences for what they are; not lead entirely by what I suspect I will see. However, there are limits to my ability to fissure myself from my preexisting notion. Accounting for this requires that I adopt a moderate stance toward awareness of what contributes to my appraisal of an experience. In light of this, my pre-understandings of this setting and subject have several dimensions.

As a researcher in the state of New Mexico, it is important to consider my cultural and historical background as the dimensions from which my orientation is determined. First, I have lived in Albuquerque for entire 30 years of life. I identify as a cisgender Chicano male. I am a second generation American from a family anchored in Mexico City. These aspects of my history shape my worldview and cannot exist separate from phenomenological observation. Additionally, as a male non-early childhood educator, my scope of conceptualizing the experiences of female teachers does not align with any part of my self-identified demographics. My cultural background and experience with Youth Development Inc. (YDI) creates an insider-outsider dynamic between myself and the participants. Further researcher dynamics are influenced by the numerous roles I have assumed at these sites in the past.

My professional history and training is an important element of this study. My interests in humanism in psychotherapy bring a certain set of beliefs and understanding regarding the human condition and role of the helper. Humanism in counseling is a specified ideology that contributes to my approach to the participating teachers in this study. First, humanistic philosophy states that the idea that the individual is central to determining their own outcomes. Furthermore, the human experiences are viewed as a valid foundation for knowledge from which to base the approach to relationship building. This philosophy posits that human being have a preexisting momentum toward realizing their best selves. If granted the autonomy and nurturing setting the individual

will move toward a self-defined desired state. My inclination toward research is grounded in this philosophy. The field of counseling has several identifying hallmarks, including commonly used communication skills that serve as the foundation to helping others. Counselor communication strategies will be used in the facilitation of the consultation groups in this study. This ideological position applies humanistic philosophy to the process of analyzing data. More specifically extrapolating themes and essential phenomenological meaning will be influenced in this way. My experience as a qualitative researcher includes previous studies regarding SEL and MBI. This study is heavily influenced from a previous project where I developed classroom interventions based in the same material I am presenting to the participating Head Start teachers.

I was employed by Youth Development Inc. from 2011 to 2012. During this time, my position functioned as both administrative and active in the classroom. As a service specialist my job was to work with the families toward collaborative goals for the betterment of their family. Head Start has two primary functions. One is to provide free education for pre-kindergarten students. The second is to provide case management services in attempt to assist parents in skill and resource acquisition that move to resolve impoverished living conditions. Families demonstrate socioeconomic living conditions through several means including providing tax paper work (IRS 1040 or 1099) or proof of qualifications for other public assistance. This position required me to visit the family homes and develop several-year-long relationships with families focused on employment, physical and mental wellness, and parenting strategies. While fulfilling these duties at the Centro De Amor Head Start in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I frequently visited the classrooms to observe child behavior, consult with teachers, or substitute teach as a temporary Head Start Teaching Assistant. In this position, I was also able to familiarize myself with the YDI system or administrators and network of other Head Start

facilities. To some degree, I have developed an opinion of the school system that is unique to a Service Specialist and may align with the experiences of the participants with this same system. I have grown to recognize the limitations of the current management style and the influence this dynamic has on in-classroom condition. In part this understanding is justification for the proposed intervention and may be reflective of early childhood education settings nationwide.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to extrapolate necessary experiences without which the group would not be the same. This process results in a tentative working model from which to base future consultation groups. Phenomenology orients this inquiry toward questions surrounding experiences and experiential understandings. From this view the following research questions were developed and operationalized for the analysis of collected data. Research Question 1: How do early childhood educators experience a counselor-lead, mindfulness-based, consultation group?

### **Participants/Group Design**

Head Start Teachers at YDI are eligible to take part in this study if they are conducting classes in one of several models of instruction approved by federal funding source. Participating teachers will agree to engage in weekly process groups designed to last 45 to 60 minutes and take place at three sites. Each site will have the potential for three teacher participants. Teachers will, in addition to weekly groups, attend two larger half-day (four hours) group meetings where participants from all three attend. Teachers agree to attend a group where the purpose is threefold. These aims are part support-group where teachers process classroom dynamics and work to foster improvements to challenges in the classroom. Secondly, is an educational component where teachers learn, discuss, and apply desired SEL paradigms to their students.

Finally, mindfulness and meditation are introduced as foundational skills in maintaining oneself and intervening with problematic classroom dynamics. For a qualitative phenomenological study a sample size of 5 to 25 participants is recommended (Moustakas, 1994; Hays & Wood; 2011; Heppner, Wampold, & Kivligan, 1999). To be included in this study, teachers need to be full time Head Start instructors serving the role of teacher in their classroom (not Teacher Assistant or Educational Assistant). Teachers of New Mexico Pre-K programs (located at same sites) are excluded due to their abbreviated class times and critical differences in classroom structure (et., size, duration, age, etc.).

### **Procedures**

This study initially relies on a selection process that will determine participating teachers. This selection process occurred at random from a larger pool of qualified participants. Among those selected, each individual participant has agreed to attend a process group aimed at learning MBI SEL for their students. Each week teachers will complete a group lasting 45 to 60 minutes. Each group will consist of group process of classroom challenges, discussion regarding social emotional learning, and a routine mindfulness practice. Each week, I will arrive at the end of the school day and allow for teachers and teacher's assistants to finalize classroom tasks. We will meet in an empty classroom with a dedicated window of time where the room will remain private and free of other uses. Prior to the beginning of the conversation, I will employ the use of audio recording with Apple Garage Band and a Yeti Blue Microphone. At the conclusion of the discussion, I will stop audio recording and save file in password-protected media. Immediately after, I will record my experiences of the group that day. These notes will be taken for the purpose of recording the interaction as it occurred. Furthermore, notes will be as thorough and oriented toward

One third of each session will focus on the group processing challenges experienced in the classroom. Often, these challenges will present themselves as problematic behaviors in students, dynamics between teacher and teacher assistant, and other external stressors, such as administrative interaction and personal life experiences (Becker et al., 2017; Cain & Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The second portion each group meeting will take an educational tone and discuss SEL, and ways that teachers can inform their classroom interventions to benefit from engaging these interpersonal dimensions. Finally, each session will end with a group meditation. The meditations will be done with use of preselected audio files that guide listeners through a 10 to 15 minute mindfulness exercise. Exercises will vary and I will scaffold each based on participant ability and response. The foundational audio will be a body scan. The intention behind the selection of this track is to emphasize the mind-body awareness skills that will eventually be utilized with children. Much of the experiential mindfulness-based activities will incorporate an amount of one being aware of oneself and intentionally focusing on what the body is communicating. Once participants are fluent in this, they can build on the activity and the skills used to facilitate mindfulness. The foundational body scan will allow for more targeted and specific mindfulness exercises to be used. For instance, implementing mindful breathing into a story or group activity will utilize the similar mechanisms regarding awareness and intention.

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>Key words (actions)</b>	<b>Student talk</b>	<b>Parallel Teacher talk</b>
<b>Orientation to Experience (self/other)</b>	okay, doing best (calm, emotionally neutral, noticing)	This is really hard to do.	We are all challenged sometimes, I can see that you are working really hard and though it is not getting you what you want now, you're putting in a lot of effort.
acceptance	wonder, curious, (questioning, noticing)	I wonder what will happen if I try and do this this way.	You have noticed that your last attempt didn't work out the way that you wanted, now you are trying something a little different.
curiosity (social)	together, we, friend (proximity, smile, eye contact)	I like spending time together. We have a lot of fun.	You find value in your relationship and appreciate how the experiences you share with your friend.
<b>Sense of Community</b>	noticing, looking, paying attention	Ms. Jane is talking, so I better look to see what she is talking about.	I can tell Johnny is paying attention to Ms. Jane because he is looking at her.
connection/relationship	noticing, inside/outside,	I was talking to Gina, but I better pay attention to Ms. Jane now, because she is talking. I just noticed I'm cold, so I better get my jacket.	Gina was paying attention to Ms. Jane, but when she noticed she had to go to the bathroom she raised her hand and asked to go.
<b>Self-regulation of attention</b>	deciding, waiting	I really want to have the glue stick next, but I will wait until it's my turn.	You have the patience to share with your neighbor and you believe waiting a bit will be worth it when it is your turn.
attention	See, hear, notice	The room smells really bad, I don't want to be here.	It is uncomfortable when you noticed the smell, I wonder what things you can do to make it easier to be where you are supposed to be.
switching	different, change	I was working on that thing the teacher asked but I'd rather play	You were focused on what you were asked, but something else has changed what you are doing.
inhibition	wonder, curious, (questioning, noticing)	I wonder what will happen if I fold this here?	How do you believe Tony is feeling right now?

Table 1. Note. Used by permission from Lemberger-Truelove (n.d.).

The tentative analysis plan will begin by compiling collected data and organizing media for efficient exploration. First, this process begins with horizontalization, or the listing and grouping of similar data. Second, a reduction process occurs where each recorded experience is checked against whether it contains an essential aspect of the experience or if can be extracted

and stand alone as a construct. There are several types of evidence and data that will be extracted from the audio recordings. Three approaches to field notation will be utilized in this case, including observational notes, theoretical notes, and methodological notes (Bailey, 1996). Observational notes will articulate objective occurrences described without interpretation. Theoretical notes will consist meaning and experiential significance from observable phenomena. Methodological notations will capture any particular supplement to the researcher. These notes include observations of operations and notes for the researcher regarding any relevant methodological change or occurrence (Lapan, 2012). Next, disaggregated data will be compiled into themes. This process will result in a structured description of essential autobiographical experiences. Although these methods will derive a phenomenological rendering of these groups, steps and considerations will be taken to ensure that trustworthiness is valued and sought after using supported methods.

Trustworthiness is a construct similar to validity for qualitative research. Several strategies are commonly supported as being central to a trustworthy phenomenological study. Member checking, data triangulation, and researcher reflexivity are desirable strategies in improving qualitative trustworthiness (Lapan, 2012). I will employ these strategies throughout the process of this study. Following the conclusion of data collection, I will check with participating members and inquire their reaction to the findings of the study. Further, member checking will ensure that findings do not significantly deviate from the experience of members. Researcher reflexivity includes a transparency regarding a number of issues including “the relationship between theory and data, the researcher’s impact on the data collects, the researcher’s bias and assumptions, and the relationship between structure and agency” (Lapan, 2012, p. 386). Additionally, trustworthiness is improved by cross validating different types to

data. The triangulation process ensures the research process, findings, and conclusions are based on a variety of data forms employing an multidirectional eye on qualitative phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter includes the results of a study conducted to ascertain early educators' experiences of a combined MBI and SEL intervention as delivered by a professional counselor-as-consultant. This includes a summary of the study, an overview of other research findings for comparison, and trends identified in the data.

The results of the analyses are organized in this chapter using the salient themes from the initial data from the intervention sessions, and the contents of the member-checking sessions. To further illustrate the trustworthiness of the themes, specific quotes and anecdotes are provided.

Reporting results is done in line with a transcendental phenomenological lens. More specifically, when articulating the essential component of the current study I adhere to the valued characteristics of Husserl's (1931) phenomenology. This approach is phenomenological by virtue of the pursuit of essential experiences encountered through observations and recorded accounts of events. The component identified as transcendental refers to the anchoring assumption that reflection and contemplation are valid representations of phenomenological findings (Moustakas, 1994).

### Summary of the Study

Interest in the current study began in response to implications for future research suggested Lemberger et al. (2018). In particular, the intervention conducted in this study was done by an outside facilitator also serving as researcher. Lemberger and colleagues (2018) warned that the brevity of the intervention was both a distinguishing feature and an opportunity for improvement. The researchers from the study theorized that providing MBI and SEL to early childhood educators over a longer periods of time would more likely lead to greater internalization and more observable, sustained changes in the classroom. Drawing from these

ideas, the problem this study targeted is how teachers supported with MBI and SEL can affect their teacher and identify experiences and behaviors when working with young children in highly impoverished environments (Finegood & Blair, 2017; Moffitt et al., 2011).

In order to fill the gap of previous research and support select early childhood educators, the author delivered, coded, and analyzed the experiences of teachers resulting from instructional groups facilitated at three Head Start centers in the Southwest US. These groups were designed to utilize counseling group process theories (Cooper & O'Conner, 1993; Yalom, 2005) and consultation processes (Fuqua & Kurpius, 1993) to deliver combined MBI and SEL training to early childhood educators. In doing so, each session consists of three primary components.

Generally, participants in the current study reported varying experiences to the combined MBI and SEL trainings. Although the participants reported diverse experiences, knowledge, and skill resulting from their experiences. Each participant clearly acquired a new and usable understanding of relevant mindfulness and social emotional learning principles and practices. In doing so, participants processed a number of pedagogical changes made with these principles in mind. Themes in the data indicated a benefit of educators engaging in a semi-structured group process of classroom challenges, becoming a positive opportunity to model social emotional engagement. Educators that participated in these groups reported using mindfulness strategies and tools outside of the workplace to their personal benefit or to the benefit of others. There are several factors that occurred universally across sites and members. Stress in the home domain (for both children and educators), cultural connotations to teacher relationships with parents and children. The use of MBI and SEL interventions/language in response to stressful situations. Environmental factors are discussed, including workplace conflict, systemic management

expectations, and cultural contexts pertaining to living and working in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in a southwest city.

## **Results**

The emerging content from data is organized into five primary components with subcategories designed to encapsulate the participants' experiences. Primary coded themes include: 1) environmental factors; 2) professional relationship contexts; 3) challenging child behavior; 4) teacher implementation of mindfulness; and 5) observable domains of group process. In this case, environmental factors include all remarkable features of a classroom setting, access to necessary resources, and the emergence of home dynamics in the classroom setting for both student and educator. Professional relationship context is broad code that encompasses all references and processing of an educator's interpersonal climate with management, teacher assistants (TA), parents, and peers. This category also includes reported use of mindfulness skills to address workplace conflict and personal coping with undesirable coworker dynamics. Next, the category of challenging child behavior, is used to organize all references to stressful teacher-student dynamics. This includes any use of remarkable language by the educator in reference to a child that may convey attitudes held. This category also incorporates facilitator coaching and processing of classroom circumstances to connect to mindfulness and SEL. The next primary category is teacher use of MBI and progressive development of personalized utility in these areas. This includes relationships at home, work place conflict, improved child dynamics and teacher reflection of positive relationships changes with the self and others. Teacher use of MBI also accounts for the group processing any circumstances where a teacher is employing an alternative approach to a challenging classroom dynamic based on information presented in intervention groups. Finally, the data illustrated the

relevance of group process dynamics as they presented themselves among the participants.

Group process codes include: discussion of teacher stress outside of the classroom, MBI SEL coaching by facilitator, teacher responses to stress, and the reported benefit and use of mindfulness by participants.

Provided below are excerpts and evidence of these thematic components of the MBI SEL group intervention. Represented below are figures that demonstrate the occurrence of particular code in data. In Figure 1, the size of the area represented in the figure represents the occurrence of codes relevant to other coded themes. Figure 2 is an idea web that represents the deeper connections between aggregated codes. While there are 5 primary domains, each domain has other represented ideas and codes that occur in several primary domains.

Table 2

<b>Minfulness SEL Coaching</b>	Teacher~parent	Child stress~...	Teacher ...	Stress~h...
<b>Teacher Use of MBI</b>	Teacher Responses...	Child individ...	Teacher ...	Manager...
<b>Challenging Child Behavior</b>	Group Process	Work place co...	Environme...	Mind...
		Teacher ~ TA	Teacher-chil...	Minfu...

## Environmental Factors



*Figure 2 Environmental Factors*

The Head Start facilities where these groups take place are all managed under the same governing body, but they experience unequal distribution of resources. Figure 2 illustrates the nodes of meaning found in the data related to the environmental factors. One site in particular would regularly express a struggle with school nutrition. The whole of this Head Start organization employs trained kitchen staff that follows a predetermined regimen of balanced nutrition. This regimen includes the use of accessible fresh ingredients to be included in all provided meals as well as child nutritional education. For example, children are regularly exposed to healthy perspectives on food via classroom activities. Children participate in activities that provide a hands on exercises with use of healthy foods, such as citrus to invoke interest in the nutritional value of meals. One site had an abrupt interruption to this due to sudden changes in kitchen staff. Being the largest of all sites, this location utilized an alternative nutrition plan. Rather than having a kitchen staff cook hot meals from scratch they utilize a service that provides cold, sack-lunch-style meals for the children. The change in dietary resources stood out as a systemic change that influenced the dynamics of the classroom.

Environmental factors include a number of remarkable home dynamics for both students and teachers as they present themselves in the classroom. A qualifying characteristic of home dynamics is that there is a noticeable cross over into the classroom. Additionally, it is understood that children living in poverty experience depression and anxiety, and have less positive educational outcomes than middle or upper class children (Ellen, 2005). Every student attending

Head Start needs to qualify for attendance by virtue of socioeconomic status and degree of need. Therefore, it is likely that each family has a degree of struggle in their narrative. This domain of findings demonstrates the phenomenological experiences of home dynamics as expressed by children of teachers within the school setting.

The emergence of this theme in the groups occurred during discussions regarding day-to-day classroom activities. It is common for child protective services to follow up on reports of unhealthy or dangerous home environments during the school day. In one case, a child was involved in a state investigation. Here, this teacher offers a gesture of comfort and reprieve that is indicative of a strong working bond.

Participant describes:

“And then they ask you all kinds of questions and then I kind of felt bad, because the CPS person they sent was a big, tall lady who looked like a man. You know, she had real short hair. She kind of looked man-ish. And then the police officer and the investigator were both big, huge men taking this tiny little boy... He's all like, ‘You're gonna leave me here, teacher?’ It's like, I'm sorry. I'll be in the room. He just came back in, when he came in, and he's just came and hugged me and hugged me and ... hugged me ... you're gonna make me cry.”

Over time, this student came to regard his teacher as safe and comfortable during times of distress. This teacher notes that this relationship was achieved through the sum of many interactions. When discussing SEL this participant frequently references their family as an example of challenge and triumph. The other component of this occurrence is the attitude that the instructor holds toward this family. Over the course of her career she discusses encountering nontraditional families and learning to “see the best in them.” Additionally, this particular

encounter with an emotionally heavy set of circumstances was regarded as rewarding and all the while provided. In this case, she describes a sense of relief that she was there to support him.

Nontraditional families are numerous at all three sites. The teachers describe families in their sites as varying greatly in their response to Head Start's input. Working to individualize an approach with a particular child is simultaneously an effort to understand that family. Frequently, these two domains of the child's life cross over and teachers become both a presence at school and within the family unit. Each year teachers do home visits and conduct educational goal setting meeting with parent in their own home. During the group process, participants discussed encountering children in their home and ways that that influence their interaction daily in school. One participant describes a home visit where her and her TA were challenged to engage the family in their setting. More specifically these participants encountered a discrepancy between their understanding of appropriate living conditions with the reality of this child's household. Additionally, this visit comes off the heels of several unsuccessful attempts to meet with parents and discuss their child's work in Head Start. Here, a teacher speculates on the connection between at home stress and child behavior in the classroom. She is concurrently articulating her attitude toward the family and extrapolating insight into this student in class.

There is a language barrier, he has ... Oh I forgot to tell, well I'll tell him Monday. I did a Child Find for speech. And I know there's family issues going on. And then they're chronic smokers, so I'm thinking that has a lot to do with it. Second, third and fourth-hand smoke is the worst for a child. And I'm thinking it has a lot to do with his home environment. 'Cause Mom is about this big. And she crawls everywhere she goes because she's so heavy, she can't walk. So that's kind of creepy already, to me.

C19: She's on her hands?

T18: On her hands and knees, crawling everywhere because she can't walk, she's so heavy. And she's got an oversized wheelchair, which I had never seen before either. And she's very loud. Like very, very loud. We did a home visit with them and she was like ... It was intimidating to be at that home. And then Dad was with the squirt bottles, you know, spraying. "Excuse me, excuse me can you step over there?" And mopping, with a mop about this big, and he was like this (moping motion).”

The role of the teacher is to serve as a bridge between the household and the classroom. This promotes a more cohesive and comprehensive approach to child wellness. However, in this group participants discussed ways to remain nonjudgmental in a situation where there were numerous environmental factors worthy of critique. The attitude toward this particular family is that they were non-participatory and seldom interested in helping in the classroom. Upon entering the home of this family, barriers to participation were evident and a unique counter narrative was presented for participants to synthesize. In the context of these weekly meetings this became an opportunity to discuss the role of our accepting others for where they are before applying exemplary expectations.

During another time, participants processed the backstory of a new student. New students typically showed up in group when discussing participant's weekly progress in their classrooms. Receiving a new student was seen as having the potential to disturb or supplement classroom dynamics. With this site in particular there is a period of unknown outcomes as educators learn more about the individualized needs of the student. It was clear that teachers are given a little information about the child before they arrive and attempt to connect that information with a reasonable expectation for the child. During this time, one participant brought up an exception to her expectations. She mentioned a time when she was given a new student and all signs pointed

to challenges. She describes a productive relationship despite nontraditional family characteristics:

And I listen, I file it away and this one particular child came in and I mean, she was a joy. he was a joy. The only thing that was kind of weird was, her dad was 73-years-old.

T12: Oh wow. Wow.

T16: No mom in the picture. She was a prostitute I guess that he had kind of taken her under his wing and she was, he was the sugar daddy.

T12: My goodness.

T16: But I mean, he was a good daddy. He would bring her every day clean. He had Parkinson's, so he shook bad. His grown up kids were horrible, horrible, horrible people.

The mindfulness intervention groups became a setting where educators can process their assumptions regarding students, and explore ways that alternative perspectives can be reached. This parallels the goals of the group in emphasizing the values in being aware of assumptions and extend a nonjudgmental gesture of support and group connection.

Environmental factors for children include family dynamics that may influence the child's functioning and developmental goals. Group participants move through numerous narratives of children exposed to aggressive or angry parental behaviors. Within this context, many members related on children that they have worked with over the years. Several participants have one outstanding example of ways that children exhibit similar aggressive behaviors. Several others provide reflections of children of having an out of place, timid, disposition toward others, more specifically, adults. One participant states

mom is ... She's kind of ... You know? Cause every time we have that conference, I would have sit in on it because you know, if she goes off on me I can't deal with it. Like,

Mom said that there was some kind of traumatic experience the child went through with Dad. An example, she was telling us out of the blue, ‘I need to stop attracting these kind of men.’ I think it's men who are violent, men who just won't man up to the responsibility. And she goes ‘yeah, you need to stop attracting these men and go for what's good for you and your children. You ought to think about your children too.’ Then she goes, ‘well, I look at the clouds and they talk to me.’ And I'm like, ‘oh God.’

### Challenging Child Behavior

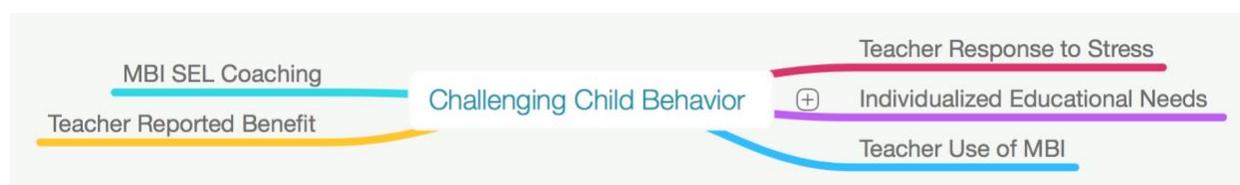


Figure 3 Challenging Child Behavior

The current study yielded insights into the nature of challenging child behavior as expressed in the classroom setting. When discussing and processing child behavior in groups, the participants received coaching regarding their use of mindfulness and SEL. Figure 3 illustrates the coded nodes of meaning related to the construct of challenging child behavior. These instructions of mindfulness interventions were meant to target teacher use in the classroom. Additionally, to promote an awareness of teacher response to stress in an effort to acknowledge alternative approaches to their intervention. One participant expressed a regularly occurring effort to command attention from a group of students not cooperating with teacher-initiated classroom transitions. One participant describes her response to stress, “you have to sit there and basically holler at them. Start clapping really loud, just something outrageous to get their attention. They look at you for a couple of minutes and they're just right back.” Circumstances where teachers are working to achieve a calm attentive group tended to invoke stress in instructors. Class group transitions are among the most commonly experienced challenges by

participants. Most classrooms begin their day with breakfast as children arrive over the course of an hour. During this time, classrooms varied in their approach to transitioning from eating and semi-structured play into circle time.

Circle time, across sites, typically occurs within the first portion of the day and following morning mealtime. For Head Start, this is the primary time of education for the group. Each classroom employs different approaches to circle time and typically follows a set routine that involved group interactions. When facilitating circle time, teachers will teach children the days of the week, months of the year, and other lessons that progress daily. Disruptions during this time tend to stand out as challenging to participant. Participants all acknowledge the importance of circle time and group instructions. It was common for educators to identify this time as the most valuable time for the group during the day. One participant describes one child's common disruption. More specifically, they spoke of the effect one child's behavior had on the remaining students. The first quotation demonstrates an avoidant approach to intervening (hoping the child would return to group on his own) and a direct intervention of behavior. Introduce:

So that causes—I think the other kids are feeding off of it a little bit too because it changes the atmosphere in the whole room when a child is just constantly whining and screaming. Like he walks around—we have a circle here in the middle of the room around the furniture, and if I'm not paying attention to him he'll start to just do laps in the room, which is a self-soothing thing, that's fine. But he does it and he goes 'ooooh' like that the whole time and it's super duper loud. And the other kids are talking louder just so they can be heard. I don't even think they're screaming just to be obnoxious, they're just trying to have a normal day with their friends. But then TA gets all, 'You guys are too loud, it's too loud in here.' And then everybody's like, 'T13, teacher T13, T13!' And I

was like, 'Oh, shit, guys, it's Monday. It's Monday. It's not okay. So I had a moment today at breakfast' On another occasion, same participant addressed problematic behavior with alternative, more direct language addressing the child individually. 'But when her face is like, you know, and she cries when she leaves and he feeds off of that. And so stuff like that. So we're working on it. But I didn't like getting my hair pulled today. And so he came to stand by me. I was sitting in that chair over there and he kept going like, 'T13, T13,' over and over with his hands up and I just told him, 'Until you calm down I'm not going to hold you because you hurt me and that wasn't cool. And you can stand here but if you're going to continue to scream I will not put you on my lap. I'm not going to give you extra attention that I wouldn't give to any other kid for behaving that way. And I don't know if I used too many grown-up sentences but...' Another site describes; transition difficulties, which I know, obviously in preschool, you're gonna have those. Yeah, hard. And you do, like we stick to a routine and a schedule so that's the same. And I know kids are sometimes individually going through things, whether they are angry about something at home or one little boy has I think things that have happened at home. One little boy is delayed developmentally and like with language so, that's hard sometimes.

Venturing into public areas is also another emerging area of teacher anxiety with participants in this study. There are policies in place that mandates all children participant in field trips and other planned class activities despite behavior patterns. It is not permitted for teachers to decide that certain children cannot go on field trips. However, it is encouraged that the parents of children that may need extra chaperone attention attend the field trip. This is not always possible. During the Fall months, the children attend an annual field trip to a local corn

maze. This corn maze is located in a rural area and involves a longer than average drive, and more of time commitment for parents to attend. One participant describes,

he was running from her and so she was like- he was crying and punching her and pulling her hair and kicking her and-

C19: Outside in the corn maze?

T18: Yeah. And then he'd run away from her so she'd have to go run after him and she said, I'm leaving. She said I can either take him with me, or you can deal with him. So, me and TA tried. I had another parent try. My husband went and he tried, and he was like no, I don't wanna go with you. No, no. And I'm like okay. I say okay, you can calm down. I said, if you want to go with mom, I'll let you go with mom. I was trying to explain to the bus driver...what happened, but I felt at that point that it was just too big of a liability because it's not the parents' responsibility to chase after this kid if he decides to run off.

The dynamic worth noting is the role of the educators in facilitating a parent-child interaction while managing the other students in the class. Most of the participants mention that challenging children are easier when the attendance is low or if they are in small groups.

Participants also describe a connection between classroom behavior and their perceived quality as a teacher. In some situations, challenging student behavior is seen as indicative of a more broadly chaotic classroom environment. This affects their interactions with classroom guests, such as parents, managers, and observers. For example,

I mean, everything in that shelf was on the floor. Everything on these shelves were on the floor. Everything over here was on the floor and she's like, 'I told them. I told them. I told

them to put it up.' And I'm sitting here because I brought the new parent in here to show her the classroom.

On another occasion this same participant describes the agency behavioral manager's decision to place a difficult child in her classroom. This was done because this teacher was seen as capable and able to do well with a child that was having trouble elsewhere.

T16: I have on starting Monday. Four years old with post-traumatic stress disorder.

C19: Starting on Monday?

T16: Well, yeah. I know my son was diagnosed with it at eight.

T12: I wonder if they'll

T16: But I didn't think you could be at four years old.

C19: Do you know anything else? Or they just told you that.

T16: Oh, he had, there was abuse that happened that was supposedly the trigger for it. So, we'll see.

T12: Some kids you just [crosstalk 00:13:36]

T16: It's like, I take everything. I stick it back here.

T12: And try to have a clean

T16: Yeah. I've had MH bring me kids that she'll come in and she's like, "I want this child in your class. We've made arrangements." They've moved kids from my class to put these kids in my class.

T12: That's a huge compliment!

T16: And it's like she does this, she does that. She does this, she does that. And I'm sitting there looking at Mary Hale being like, "you hate me. You hate me, Ms. M!" She's like, "no, I love you." It is evident in the data the challenging classroom behavior is

nanced in its impact on a teachers functioning in the classroom. Additionally, this area was of the most prominent discussion topic in each of these groups. This appearance of this topic in group sessions was also expressed to be among the most helpful aspects of this experience to early childhood educators.

### Teacher Use of Mindfulness Based Intervention and Social Emotional Learning



Figure 4 Teacher Use of MBI SEL

Phenomenological data analysis includes a primary code of all conversations, behaviors, and references to the teachers tying-out and using mindfulness based intervention with their students. Additionally, this code includes situations and evidence that MBI and SEL interventions with students affect other relationships. Figure 4 illustrated the coded nodes of meaning related to teacher use of MBI SEL from data analysis. The following excerpts were selected to demonstrate the most significant instances of teachers using the MBI or SEL techniques and ideas to their benefit and the benefit of those around them. The most discussed topic in this area is the way the MBI and SEL are used to intervene with challenging children. The value inherent in the following narratives is the illustration of both opportunities for improvement and successful use. Both of which illustrate participant understanding and application of group content. One participant describes a rendering of SEL into an everyday classroom activity. She describes attempting to emphasize a balance between highlighting the individual or the group in an activity.

The activity described below successful met the participant goal of integrating story, movement, and community positive feedback into a reading activity.

So we're all doing some of those things, and then I love to have a chance every day for you to... everyone gets a turn at something. Like when we're reading the story about a little boy who did these karate kicks, he took a karate class or something. So then we talked about, okay so then everyone got to have a chance to come to the circle and do their own kick.

These shifts in teacher interventions correspond to co-occurring trends in coaching and education in this area by group facilitator. A notable group session topic included in the following coaching language:

So one day we talked about ways we can do a breathing-based intervention, for example, on a child. And that's something that involves trust that you already have, we're just going to use it in a different way. And then again, the other part of our conversations, have to do with the class, the group as a whole. And how that whole spirit sort of transfers to everybody. And how that can really help you in the way that you're leading. And so, if you don't feel like you're doing something new every day as a result of this, it's probably a good thing.

Although not specific to any particular step-by-step lesson plan the ideas conveyed in the group appear in classroom changes.

Another prominent theme regarding teacher use of MBI is the manner in which mindfulness and SEL principles emerge in participant intervention with challenging circumstances with their students. Strategies that allow teachers to individualize their approaches

with children from a relationship-based lens were explored. Some describe a new found moments of being able to observe the children closely attending to their individuality. Introduce:

I mean, you want more opportunities like that to just sit back and observe, watch them play and interact with them some, but you know watch. We get so busy we're so caught up in so many, counting and a little bit of documentation here or controlling this dispute that's over here, and it's nice when you can just sit back and watch and see.

This same participant frequently reflects on ways that ideas processed in group have broadened her repertoire of tools used to intervene with students:

He gets so intense. Today he got so intense and I told him to breathe, let's breathe first and then he can talk to me about what the problem is. So he stood there and ... he didn't want to at first, he was like 'No.' I said, 'Well before you go back over there, you're going to have to think about and then breathe.' He gets so intent, he's like ... he wants to retaliate against that other student, but then while he just stood there this morning I said 'Well, let's breathe. Breathe in, breathe out.' He actually put his hand on his heart like I always do in my circle time after we get done exercising. I always tell them 'Touch your heart' and then he did that and then he calmed down, he did two breaths with me and then finally he told me what was the problem with the other students and then I said 'Are you ready to rejoin the group?' He goes 'Yes.' So after he did his breathing, he talked to me for awhile and then he went back. So that's what really helped with him and my other students. I don't see him until afternoon, and he always comes in and he says 'I miss the exercise, I miss doing the breathing with you' because he's not with me in the morning anymore, so he just comes in the afternoon. And then that thirty second rule, I started doing that. Give me thirty seconds and I said 'You have thirty seconds in there, hurry and

tell me' and they're just 'okay!' And just five seconds just okay, alright and then they start ringing off, doing their own thing. So I started doing that a little bit more and now I don't get so intense when they say 'Teacher! Teacher! Teacher!' I just say 'You have thirty seconds to tell me what you have to say'. And they're like 'Okay!' And they just tell me and they just walk on.

Noteworthy here is the use of MBI SEL to address behaviors described as most disruptive (eg., tantrums and repetitive pestering behaviors).

Previously this participant describes addressing this behavior in a different manner.

Introduce:

Yeah, it's interesting, those competing volumes. I can think of situations where just being in a loud room trying to talk to someone and soon you're just like, 'Have I been shouting for an hour?'

T13: And your throat hurts, yeah.

C19: Yeah.

T13: It's hard. And I told him after breakfast—he finally calmed down to eat for a little bit and he came to circle and he did all that stuff, great. But after breakfast all the kids were going, I hear "Teacher T13" over and over during meal times. And I'm like, "I need you all to not say my name for three minutes." Like I showed them on the clock, "When that little line hits that number, then you can talk to me. I need three minutes. Let me get my stuff ready for circle time. Don't say my name." Because it's just over and over. And then it makes TA mad because she likes, "You guys can ask me too."

C19: Yeah.

T17: That's typically my day, every day. The day you experienced, that's my day.  
Every day.

T13: All the time.

T17: All the time.

Participants describe noticeable changes in classroom management skills. When reflecting on positive changes seen with a student, co-occurring attitude change between teacher and student are demonstrated:

Yeah. Where I would just say, 'Well, now it's time to clean up,' and he didn't want to. But when I finally got him to calm down outside, I put my hand on his chest and showed him, 'Take a deep breath.' And he stopped and I held him and he fell asleep on me for a little bit. And then we came in and he was fine at lunch. And he followed me around as I put mats down; not crying, just followed. And then he slept for at least an hour or so. And then as soon as he wakes up he's so sweet. He's so helpful and he's a completely different kid than he is in the morning. And I almost wish I could have nap time at nine in the morning so I could have a nice, calm rest of the day. Because he was great after nap time. He was helping wake up the kids, it was cute. But, oh well, we'll get there.

Participants were particularly vocal regarding the noticeable benefits of learning mindfulness as expressed in their classrooms and other interpersonal relationships. One participant describes,

Yeah, so I have to constantly remind them. 'That's not the rule, that's not what we do. You can't go over there and ask her, you already know what to do.' So they're like, walking back and forth. So it's hard when one of us is out. Really, it's hard on me because I have to constantly remind every day-- sometimes it feels like every five minutes--

remind them. But stress-wise, it's getting a lot better with my kids. They're starting to adjust, follow the rules. Like before I had a kid that was crying all the time and I had a kid not listening. But I think once you keep talking to them and talking to them they realize that there are rules in the classroom where there are rules at home too.

When reflecting on perceived utility of weekly groups participants references changes in the classroom and at home:

“I got to see things in in a whole different way. I got to use techniques that actually worked with the kids. And like at home... It was an eye-opener for me”

“Yeah. That's very interesting. Cause my husband's going through that now. It's like ... he thinks he has post-traumatic stress syndrome and ... that's a different way of looking at it.”

### Group Process

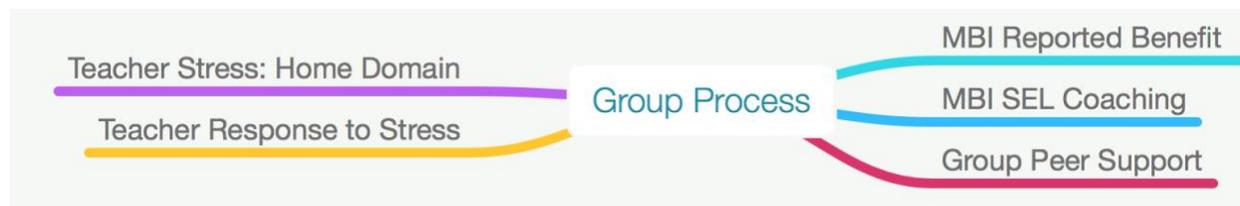


Figure 5 Group Process

Group interventions with teachers, and facilitated by a counselor, became another primary code in the data. Figure 5 illustrates the related nodes of meaning as related to group process code. This process is illustrated though group peer support, participants discussing personal stressors and ways that influence pedagogy and stress coping. The following examples illustrate group processing dynamics that address personal stressors’ crossover into the workplace. One participant describes circumstance where her historical trauma surfaces while working:

I'm a survivor of domestic violence, and there are things sometimes that I'll see or hear that just I'm triggered back that last state that I was with my ex. We were outside one day and we saw a man and a woman that were fighting on that side of the fence, and he's screaming at her, calling her all kinds of names, so I'm telling the kids, let's start going to the front. It was, we used to take them out in the afternoon, because we didn't have a real ... We had a 20 minute quiet time and that was it. So, before you know it, all these other men start coming and getting in there and, 'Oh, nah nah nah nah nah,' and all this and that, so by then I'm telling them, let's go, and I'm telling the teacher, "Let's take them in." The group responded to this participant in a supportive manner and allowed for her to take the time to move through this topic. These moments of support and validation are evident as valued by participants and group counseling theory.

There is one instance where group members remarked on what was impactful to them. The three participants in this particular group were familiar with one another prior to this group. One group member experienced the loss of her parent during the course of this study. This member continued to attend and use the group appropriately to process what has occurred:

I'm going to drive you to your mom. He goes, just come home. Even if I go, I've got to be there. And he goes, just come home. And he was talking to me throughout this. And I go, I'm going to miss my mom. And I started crying again. And he goes, don't cry. She's going to be okay. And then, when I finally got there, he was ready, because my son was going to take my car. He goes, I'm going to drive you. And then when I got to the parking lot, they called me again. He goes, where are you at? I go, I'm in the parking. He goes okay. You know, they said that. And then when I walked in front of my husband, and there was the two nurses, and one of them was crying. And that's when I just broke down

and I almost collapsed, and she held me up, because my husband couldn't ... He couldn't touch me. I guess he was in shock. And then when I finally said, I need to go see my mom, she was yellow. I guess she goes that at nine o'clock they gave her morphine because her breathing was shallow. At 9:06, she was gone. And then I got there five minutes later. And I was trying to rush, but ... But see, the night before, I was laying on her chest, just listening to her breath. And I told her, it's okay, mom. It's going to be okay. Just say hi to Dad, give him a big kiss for me when you see him. I go, but it's okay to go with Jesus now. And her breathing kind of like calmed down a little because I know she could hear me. And then she starts looking around, and I really believe it was her angel saying it's almost time to go. But I stood with her for two hours, just laying on her chest like I usually do, and I just listened and gave her a big kiss. I was like caressing her face, and she could feel my ... Because she kept like ... The group in this circumstance served as a setting for a highly emotional disclosures among coworkers. This process is similar to that of a psychotherapeutic group. At this point the three participants were in a working phase of group process that matured over a matter of weeks.

One teacher provided the group with significant insight into her personal history. She was able to disclose aspects of her life and childhood all the while discussing her teaching.

Like for me, for instance, I didn't really start reading until I was like eight, seven years old and because no one wanted to help me read. So, my Aunt's, my Uncle's, didn't have the patience for me, so one day I went to school and my teachers would get mad at me and say, 'How come you don't know how to read? You're supposed to be able to know how to read.' So, that's where I built that wall, so then she would pair me up with an advanced student and then that little girl became a good friend. She noticed and we were

just eight years old and she noticed I didn't wanna read out loud until we're playing outside together and she asked, 'Can you read?' Cause we had become friends, really good friends and she asks me, 'Can you read?' I told her, 'No.' And that's when she would help bring books, little single books and she'll say, 'These are sight words.' And she was a really smart little girl and she helped me to read and when it came time for me to read out loud, she'll stand there with me and help me.

T14: So, you had a relationship?

T17: We had a relationship first before she was able to ... Because she knew that I would put up a wall and the teacher would say, 'You don't know how to read? How come you don't know how to read?'

The themes illustrated the integrative value of a multipurpose group with educator peer groups. The group dynamics developed into an effective support for each participant. Along with the educational and meditation component, the group process dynamics supplemented the educational process in a positive way. This primary code illustrated the ways in which group members came to know one another and experience a sense of community.

### Professional Relationships



Figure 6 Professional Relationships

In the same sense that MBI and SEL are meant to positively supplement classroom relationships between students, the same potential exists for educators. Figure 6 illustrates the nodes of meaning related to the professional relationships code in the data analysis. The notion that the classroom is a network of relationships and the quality of this network affects outcomes

for its members. The professional relationships code is meant to categorize all references and accounts of teacher relationships to peers, management and parents. The other emerging component to this domain is the work place conflict. The sites varied in size and all experienced unique expressions of conflict and cooperation.

Each of these sites has a high population of Spanish speaking families where Spanish is the first language of the parent. In some cases, teachers do not speak Spanish and often discuss the language barrier as a factor in determining the relationship quality. One teacher described the being apprehensive toward applying newly-learned Spanish phrases to classroom situations:

T12: I kind of am, and I need to get over that, but I am a little bit hesitant to try any Spanish, because I'm like, "Oh that would sound dumb, or I don't know." I know families, I think they appreciate that. I can see that though, because you're not comfortable with it enough to just sort of express yourself in there.

T16: Or you mispronounce it and you're telling them something else.

T12: Like this white girl, whatever.

C19: I mean there have been times when I've seen some folks, it's like part Spanish part charades. You're using your hands to sort of say, 'Where's my backpack?' And like, 'You went to sleep,' and, 'Walking down the road.'

Professional relationships in schools are an integral component to functioning child education centers. The groups provided an opportunity for participants to process conflict in the work place and apply mindfulness and SEL component toward an effort to seek more effective outcomes. Participants use the time in group to discuss ways that workplace conflict can influence their attitude in the classroom. The impact is evident in the demeanor and disposition

that are used to interact with children thus directly effecting the classroom dynamics for children.

The following are noteworthy occurrences of workplace conflict in the current data. Introduce:

Yeah. Identifying their letters, their numbers, writing their numbers. So we're focusing on that, so ... Our kids are just such a joy that we don't have time to think about them. It's like, who cares? I never cared in the first place, cause I never ... And then with T15, too. I don't know what happened to her, she's on this boat about gossiping, and we have to stick together because we're the elders is what she told me one day. I don't know what, who dirtied the water there with her and I, cause she's rude with TA, she doesn't talk to me. I mean, I'll still go and ask her. If I have a concern or if I wanna share something, then I'll go and ... I'll kill her with kindness. I'm not gonna stoop to her level, I'm not ... I'm gonna be professional, I'm not gonna run when I see her coming.” This disagreement created a schism in a three classroom child education center. The two teachers involved no longer speak and an one never returned to the group. The following an explanation of the current dynamics with a rising sense of tension. “three months, really. So all that's happened in all that time, and then, I don't know, T15 just ... And it's been more with TA that they've been arguing with and so she's ... She got accused, we got accused of spying in their room because she went to go get a laminator, which we all share, and went and got it. So I don't know what she told the girls, and then I went to take her ... She had a phone call, we finally got a cell phone in this classroom ... So I went to give her the phone because a parent's therapist wanted to talk to her about the Nurtured Heart training that we had last Thursday. And so I went to take her the phone that same day, and she was just all hyper, wanting to throw me out of the room, and I just looked in there like that, and I said, ‘Are you by yourself?’ And she's like, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.’ I'm like, ‘Okay.’ So, that was

it. And that, she carried onto the girls and said we were spying, and TA went and took the laminator without asking, and ... Yeah, so she just muddied the water really, really bad.

Patterns of relationships between teachers became a remarkable component of the SEL material discussed in group. Similar to facilitating peer relationships with students, it was possible to model the application of these ideas with the narrative provided by the participants.

He was real shy, real quiet. And one day he comes in and the director cause they have two center directors came in and said, "You guys need to go to the office and have a conversation with Howard." Neither one of us kinda realized the dynamic it was putting on the classroom with the kids and everything, cause we wouldn't talk to each other. ... But in my classroom, you're gonna be respectful to each other." So, we started talking to each other and ... We got to be friends. I'm still friends with her to this day. My two friends that I had been friends with for three years, no longer talk to me. Because I don't remember what happened and they would pay for us to go to the NAEYC Conference. We went and I was with my two friends and she came walking up, and my friend, "Oh, god. P.U. let's go." The ideas present in mindfulness training naturally applied to interpersonal relationships in the professional domain. Participants volunteered these examples as ways of enacting immediate benefits for themselves and their classrooms.

Throughout the analysis several domains of salient themes occurred, through noticing patterns, stratifying links between ideas and collecting/compiling narrative that speak to the lived experiences of participants in this group. Moreover, these groups occurred naturally with a semi-structured mode of counselor consultation. The results of this inquiry highlight themes of content both explicit and implicit. The groups were designed to respond to the discretion of members. Participants encountered themselves as educators and emotional beings and appeared to use this

mindfulness skills to inform their interactions with others. Teacher stress is present throughout. These groups explored individual stress responses and provided usable alternative to unhealthy relationships with stress. Further, many connections are made to the role the teachers play in school systems. When discussing environmental factors the important of a healthy school system dynamics were explicated. Child behavior was important for all members as both a need for improvement and a considerable source of stress. These findings can contribute to the current body of literature by providing implications for counselor consultants to design, and implement effective groups. These implications emphasize the relevant input regarding the social emotional competence of educators as well as systemic factors that can contribute to more positive outcomes for young students living in poverty.

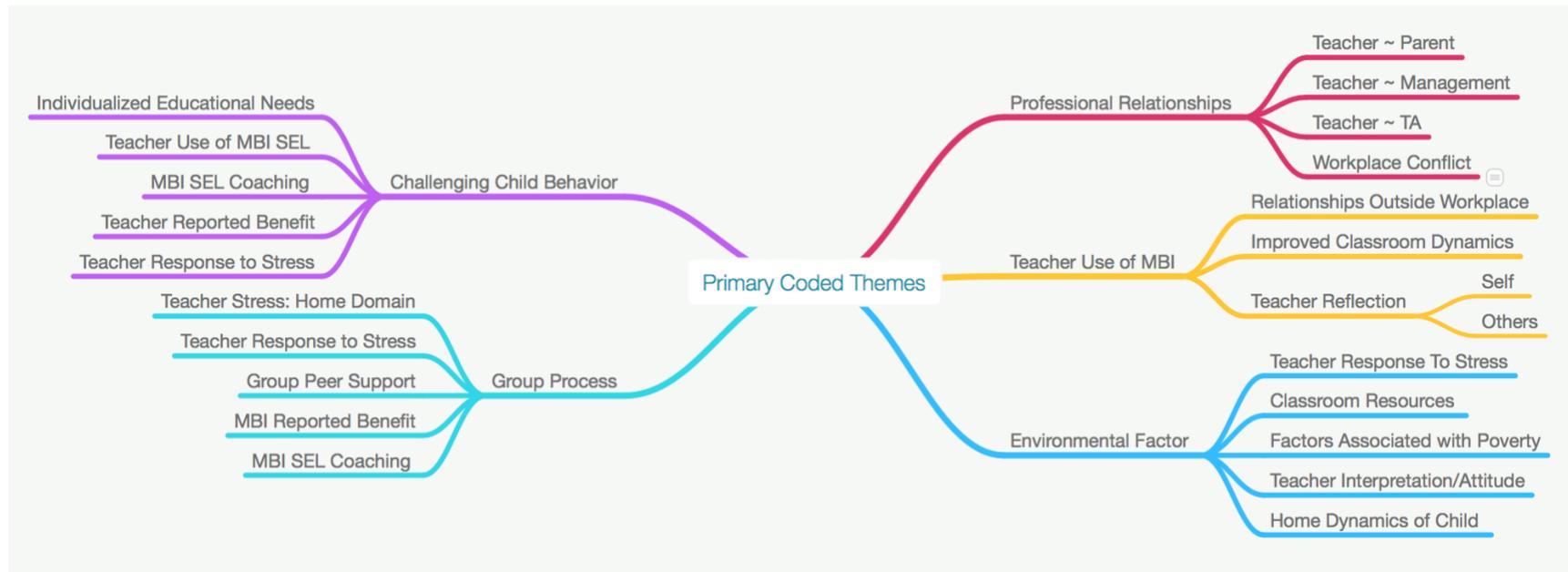


Figure 7 Total Aggregation of Qualitative Codes

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

It is common for schools in economically disadvantaged areas to seek new and innovative strategies to improve classroom quality, employee satisfaction, and educational outcomes. Economically disadvantaged children are at a higher likelihood of experiencing negative classroom outcomes, facing challenges, and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships (Frank, Jennings, & Greenberg, 2015; Flook et al., 2015; McClelland et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Furthermore, early childhood educators have encountered stress in the workplace and experienced a number of unique challenges in and outside of the classroom (Crane, Kutken, Hastings, Rothewel, & Williams, 2010; Ruijgrok-Lupton et al., 2018). In this case, mindfulness is a secular adaptation to the eastern practice focusing on awareness, nonjudgmental attention, and control of the body and mind. Mindfulness trainings have been successful in implementing the necessary tools for educators to create healthier lives and positive classroom outcomes (Gold et al., 2009; Lomas, 2017). In response to these dynamics, a group was developed for early childhood educators.

The current study is a phenomenological investigation regarding a weekly counselor-facilitated groups with early childhood educators. The purpose of these groups is to teach participating Head Start teachers the principles of mindfulness, social emotional learning (SEL), and classroom interventions based on these practices. These weekly sessions consisted of three distinguished domains. First, each session included a group process period. During these times during the intervention sessions, the facilitator allowed for participants to voice remarkable moments in their classroom. Second was an educational period, where educators learn and apply the ideas inherent in mindfulness and SEL. Finally, at the end of each session the group participated in a guided mindfulness meditation.

Giorgi's (1997) 5-step model of phenomenological analysis was used to analyze the data obtained. The first step is to collect verbal data. The second is to perform phenomenological bracketing of the self and conduct a deep reading of the transcribed data. This reading included an initial pass where the researcher reads to understand the facts without interpretation. The third step involved organizing data into categories. Then, once an initial set of codes and ideas are organized a second analytical reading occurs with these codes in mind to ensure thorough representation of ideas and themes as they occur. The fourth step is to organize the data from a "disciplinary perspective" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 5). Finally, the data were summarized and synthesized (see Appendix). In this chapter, the narratives of the participants will be explained through the lens of the phenomenological discipline with the aim of extracting essential lived experiences. Also, implications for counselors and future research will be discussed.

### **Primary Findings**

The results of this study are centered in several domains. First, findings regarding the consultation group process, illustrated the dynamics of a counselor-led weekly group with early childhood educators. Another novel domain explored was the dynamics around counselor-consultation groups. Although models of counselor consultation are frequently used for systemic interventions, MBI groups with early childhood educators exhibited the qualities of counseling groups. Yalom (1995) describes 11 therapeutic factors of groups: (1) Instillation of hope; (2) Universality; (3) Imparting information; (4) Altruism; (5) The Corrective Recapitulation of Primary Family Group; (6) Development of Socializing Techniques; (7) Imitative Behavior; (8) interpersonal Learning; (9) Group Cohesiveness; (10) Catharsis; and (11) Existential Factors. Mindfulness-based intervention and social emotional learning group with early childhood educators involved a degree of hope and universality. In working with these participants, it is

evident that they wanted to improve the programs before the study began. However, within the context of a multi-educator group activity, participants immediately expressed the benefit of processing shared experiences. Additional present therapeutic factors is the benefit of group cohesiveness. Yalom (2005) discusses the group process as being a micro representation of society or the world outside of the group setting (Boyle, Whittaker, Eyal, & McCarthy, 2017). It became evident that in learning how to use and achieve benefits from MBI/SEL techniques, the relationships experienced by educators became the medium in which the group worked toward classroom change.

Second, findings highlight the role of environmental factors in educational outcomes. For instance, both the school and home environments students and teachers continues to be relevant to the understanding of the challenges children face in these schools. The interviews delve into the detail of the day-to-day functions of the school including management and resource allocation. Additionally, teachers share and process the individualized histories of students. Many participants acknowledge challenges the child is facing at home as being related to challenges the student face in the classroom. Participants suggest that in understanding a child's home environment, they can engage more appropriately with the student. Related to the group process findings is the frequent occurrence of teachers processing their own histories. This highlights life stories as an expression of what contributes to their pedagogical methods. Many of the narratives here illustrate previous experiences with teachers, as well as their innate concepts of family and community. It is evident that when facilitating MBI and SEL learning groups, environmental factors become pronounced as positive contributions to classroom dynamics.

Another essential component that distinguished the group sessions in this study is the exploration of professional relationships as pronunciations of mindfulness and SEL skills. First, a

striking component to each classroom is the dynamics between the teacher and the teacher's assistant (TA). The classroom has two professional educators with different responsibilities. This duo creates a power dynamic that presented itself differently in each class. It became clear that the teachers' use of mindfulness strategies and SEL was meant to improve relationships. Most educators acknowledge that if the relationship with the TA works well, then other aspects of the classroom will also work well. Although in this study, TAs did not participate in group sessions perhaps future studies could incorporate all classroom professionals. Another realm of professional relationship findings is the theme of workplace conflict with peers and management. In some instances, workplace conflict can be rather severe, while other sites had this occur in more indirect ways. Regardless, every site utilized the skills learned in this group to address unique workplace conflicts.

The final two levels of relevant results is the contribution of challenging child behavior to the overall social emotional competence of an instructor. In addition, the use of MBI interventions by teachers were primarily targeting unwanted child behavior. This study illustrated variance in teacher held attitudes towards their students. The primary mode is to intervene with challenging child behavior. This domain of the data indicated all different types of nuanced child behavior and the manner in which that contributes to the overall classroom dynamics. In this case, it was evident that a misbehaving child influences the entire room dynamic with teachers as the force of this energetic shift. When educators are preoccupied with the behaviors of a few, they have a tendency to assume undesirable attitudes that can affect the remaining students. When teachers began to practice, learn, and implement mindfulness in the classroom, learning alternative interventions with children seemed most beneficial.

A relevant relationship between the current study and the existing literature is the connection between teacher health and responses to stress and classroom dynamics (Benn, 2012; Crain, Schoner-Reichl, & Roeser, 2017; Emerson et al., 2017; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). From the present study, it was evident that participating teachers were struggling with the behavior of several children in their room. In addition, educators were all experiencing some type of dysfunctional professional relationship. This might be with one peer in particular or a group feeling of feeling wronged and misunderstood by management. When presented with strategies, ideas, and practical interventions educators found ways to seek alternative narratives to their current circumstances. Moreover, participants constructed ways that they can adapt and apply these ideas to their personalized perspective. In turn, teacher use of MBI strategies was reported to have a range of outcomes and some very successful relationship transformations with student and teacher.

### **Educator Individualized Factors**

The results indicate several important branches of implications. One key component to the documented successes of the intervention was individualization. During the time spent in these trainings, the content was derived from their experiences in their own classrooms and outside of the school setting. This proved to be an advantage in both teaching mindfulness and providing practical uses of it. This emerged as an essential experience of the participants. The notion that they were able to tailor the skills and practice real examples of challenges they faced that day, or will face tomorrow, instilled a noticeable sense of efficacy and tangible gains. This was beneficial as teaching mindfulness can be an abstract obscure endeavor for the novice (Crain et al., 2017; Crane & Hecht, 2018). These findings support previous findings by Becker and colleagues (2017) in that teacher dispositional mindfulness is an individualized factor that related

to relationship quality in Head Start classrooms. This finding has implications for future studies with regard to group size, cohesiveness, and facilitator approach to teaching mindfulness to early childhood educators. This consistency is further illustrated by participant acknowledgement that tailoring the interventions to their skills put them in a position to be successful. Furthermore, the design of the study was such that each intervention introduced was based on a classroom activity or skill already possessed by the group or individual educators.

The dynamics of teacher health that are relevant are both physical and mental. More specifically, changes in symptoms of depression, anxiety and trauma in the nonprofessional lives of educators have been correlated with changes in classroom dynamics (both negative and positive; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). By emphasizing the physical benefits of mindfulness participants, as they grew in skill, began to exhibit and report positive changes in their health as correlated to positive changes in response to stress. The current study revealed prevalent themes that are similar to findings in previous studies. The participants in this study utilized the group as an comfortable setting to explore aspects of themselves, other relationships, and possible connections with how they operate their classrooms (Becker et al., 2017; Crane et al., 2010). Moreover, the data showed that frequent discussions regarding responses to stress and challenging situations in both home and classroom domains. In characterizing an educator's response to classroom dynamics, both similarities occurred with respect to educator's response to relationship dynamics outside of the classroom.

### **Mindfulness as an Impactful Classroom Supplement**

The current body of research regarding mindfulness and early childhood education emphasizes mindfulness skills as an alternative response to stress, and a viable strategy for relationship changes (Ruijgrok-Lupton et al., 2018). Although the literature supports mindfulness

interventions for children, the current study extracts additional support for these interventions to be done by teachers rather than third party professionals. The findings regarding mindfulness in this case can be discussed from two vantage points of both the student and the teacher. First, participants experience a wide range of reactions to mindfulness practice and learning skills involved self-awareness and control. However, a majority reported having experienced the benefits of mindfulness breathing outside of the classroom. Several occasions teachers describe the process as an “eye opener,” begging the question “why haven’t I done this before?” The strategies presented in group were informed strategies that participants apply to their children and themselves. Consistent with Roeser and colleagues (2012) the activating agent here was intervening in participant habitual thinking. Without tasking the facilitator to notice participant habits and offer alternative, fostering an awareness among participants allows them to extract and highlight their own interpersonal habits. The findings of this study also draw a connection between teacher preferred stress responses and the responses they elicit from their children. For instance, breathing as an intervention tool became increasingly present among participants as their capacity for targeted breathing exercises grew and began to effect positive benefit unto them.

Mindfulness interventions increase the quality of educational outcomes and relationships in the classroom for young children (Flook et al., 2010; 2015; Lemberger et al., 2018; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2015). Remaining true with the purpose of this study, teaching educators the benefits of SEL and MBI and how pedagogical intention in the classroom align paradigmatically with these principles. At first, the primary concern for participants was integrating another approach to teaching on top of their current curriculum. In all three sites, classrooms vary on the curriculum the facility expects them to perform. When introduced to

mindfulness and SEL the task was met with reluctance and described as stress inducing. The value introduced in these groups was the long-term exposure to direct ways that MBI/SEL can be a shift in habitual thinking, interpersonal skillset, and responses to stress (both taught to students and used themselves). The findings of this study further support the use of mindfulness in early childhood education settings. Participants in this study reported a range of benefits. While some experienced little perceived benefit with their students, others reported drastic improvements with remarkable challenging individuals. One apparent mechanism of this change is the teacher's co-regulation of student emotions. For example, breathing with the child or utilizing grounding techniques to create a language of coping allowed for the children to draw on these skills during times of need.

### **Multiculturally Competent Consultation**

The findings of this study also indicate the unique nature of the counselor-lead consultation model that informed the group method. Many school settings around the country employ a counselor to provide services to the school. This study, aside from teaching mindfulness intervention, illustrated the important of multicultural competence when working in disadvantaged communities (Ellen & Cirecie, 2007; Sander et al., 2016; Slaten & Elison, 2015). The primary cultural dynamic that is noteworthy for counselors and counselor consultants is the unique cultural domain of economically disadvantaged areas. Evident in this study, is the notion that there exists a sense of "otherness" experienced by families in poverty. This sense of being set apart from other families, characterized by lack of resources, places parents, children, and teachers in a unique relationship with cultural and societal shame. Practitioners must employ strategies that target this cultural context. The strategies that the participants described as successful in this study are consistent with suggestions rendered by Padilla and Hipolito-Delgado

(2007). Through supportive relationships, culturally and socio-politically relevant facilitation strategies, and engaging in conversations regarding oppression and systemic limitation that exists in these areas, counselor consultants can provide a culturally competent lens to MBI/SEL training groups (Padilla & Hipolito-Delgado, 2007; Vereen & Bohecker, 2017).

The facilitator attends to issues of cultural understandings and models the manner in which a teacher can serve as a cultural bridge to the family (Luke, Goodrich, & Gilbride, 2013). Much of this work presented itself during the aspects of the study where teachers were reflecting on the attitudes they hold toward families and children. Often, the awareness associated with mindfulness allowed for teachers to encounter and process a number of attitudes that may be dormant in their disposition prior to an accepting, nonjudgmental look inward. When promoting principles of SEL the idea of community and group member investment in one another called for participants to put their beliefs under scrutiny. Attuning to the cultural relevance of the language was a common mode demonstrating the importance of nuanced expression of attitudes. The data analysis revealed that many positive changes in teacher relationships with parent and family members. These changes occurred as awareness of their held attitudes allowed them to experience the lives of families with an increased empathy and understanding of world view. Participants gaining awareness of themselves through mindfulness, fostered an increased capacity to empathize with parents and families. This is vital when serving disadvantaged communities, and communities of color (Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

### **Limitations**

The current study included a number of limitations that will be disclosed and discussed as contribution to future research. One limitation to this study was the incorporation of a TA in the training. Often, it is understood that classroom duties are split between these positions, with the

most important being the teacher. During the group, it was apparent that discrepancies exist between the educator's approach to the classroom and the TA. Mindfulness practice and skills training are just as applicable to the TA as the instructor. In fact, if both are making gains as a result of the group the benefits become reinforced. This study was designed keeping in mind that the greater the exposure to MBI/SEL to students, the greater the potential gains made in the classroom.

A primary purpose of research is to provide other researchers with the material they need to reproduce the study. In phenomenological data, the essential components of the study are one-of-a-kind. The participant individuality and state of professional practice and knowledge at any given time presents challenges in reproducing this study even if same participants are used. The findings of this study are heavily dependent on the unique personal characteristics of the facilitator, participants, and the school systems. This being said, this study can only be replicated in approximation. Future research may consider the planning involved regarding the group structure, goals and purpose, it is challenging to generalize findings to all Head Start settings.

### **Implications**

Counselors today perform professional services from a variety of modalities. Mindfulness based treatments continue to rise in popularity and evidence-based empirical support with children (Jennings, 2014; Miyahara et. al., 2017; Roeser et al., 2013; White, 2017). The current study demonstrates that the principles of mindfulness and SEL are effective, tools of intervention for counselor working with children or educators. The experiences of the participants of this group demonstrated a multidimensional impact of training one's ability to cope with stress and foster positive relationships. Counselors, regardless of orientation, can implement an attention toward social emotional interventions with clients. Schools can supplement their model of

counseling to emphasize the interpersonal nuances of clients and their communities.

Furthermore, mindfulness principles can be applied and tailored to the individual needs of clients and the problems they face.

Promoting the social emotional capacities of children is found to be an effective way to improve educational outcomes and positively supplement the many layers of healthy development (Flook et al., 2015; Lemberger et al., 2018). However, the findings of this study imply that investing in the social emotional capacities of educators will contribute to that of the students. It was evident in all settings that by sitting and processing stress and workplace challenges allowed educators to experience feeling of validation. Counselors in school typically treat the systemic climate of their setting through a number of group interventions, typically, through awareness efforts, classroom guidance lessons, or administrative advocacy. The results of this phenomenological inquiry indicate the group interventions with teachers extend beyond psychoeducational goals and will benefit the health of school system.

### **Conclusion**

The significance of this study is its contribution and commentary on contemporary issues in early childhood education. The education system is always seeking to improve classroom outcomes for young children. Mindfulness and social emotional learning are emerging practices that are proven helpful in promoting prosocial skills acquisition. In bringing these practices to children this study emphasizes educators as mediating roles in this process. Training teachers to implement the MBI SEL will allow for students to be provided with the most exposure to the intervention over time. Moreover, training teachers to implement MBI SEL intervention with children inherently encounter personal lived experiences of educators. This study provided a diverse pallet of support for teachers. Through education, peer processing, and a trusted setting

to learn new pedagogical techniques, educators experienced remarkable interpersonal benefits. This being said, future efforts in this area are well advised to invest resources in a way that provides attention and aid to educator's capacity to have a positive relationship with stress. By fostering positive relationship outcomes with teachers, these educators will then have experiential precedence for reaching positive outcomes with young children.

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# Applied Phenomenological Method

**Step 1 Bracketing:**  
Assuming the phenomenological attitude while conducting research. Researchers suspend natural attitude and assure a clear view of data with an understanding of bias

Natural Attitude: A person's habitual ways of interpreting their conscious experiences. Constituted every-day beliefs and knowledge and when set aside allows for researcher to "see" the data.

**Step 2 Naïve Description:**  
This requires a close initial reading of the data to get a sense of the whole experience before constructs are stratified (Giorgi, 1997). First full read-through

**Step 3 Meaning Nodes:**  
Identifying and points in the interviews where meaning emerges and landmark experiences become evident. These emerging themes begin to form the outlined of a lived narrative for participating teachers. Second full read-through with coding

**Step 4 Scientific Expressions:**  
Noting and extracting pieces of meaning and shifting to individuated, concrete and based in experiences. Third full read-through with coding.

**Step 5 Imaginative Variation:**  
an intellectual process where researcher extracts essential components of the experience phenomenological meaning structure.

