



Social & Emotional Teaching: Mindfully Modeling How to Put on Your Own (Non-Medical Grade Disposable) Mask First

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This curriculum unit for professional development is recommended for:
instructional staff at the 6-8 level

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Teacher Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teacher evaluation standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: Passionate teachers are aware that their own mental health and well-being influences the work they do in the classroom. Students thrive when they are given good resources and witness great role models—it follows that if the health and safety of students is paramount, then teachers must make sure they have addressed their own stress as well to create a nurturing environment for their students. While teachers are expected to have intrinsic knowledge of this nurturing role, explicitly valuing their contributions and giving them the tools and resources to succeed will go a long way toward taking a direct path toward improving relationships across the board. This unit aims to give an overview of how stress impacts an individual, then gives concrete examples of how to combat the endless barrage of stressors that educators face every day in order to combat burnout and care for their overall health.

*I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to **approximately 50 staff members who serve 1200 middle grades students.***

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Ann Tapia

Introduction

Tuesdays are the worst day of the week to be a teacher—contrary to both Garfieldian (-felinedian?) adage ("*I hate Mondays*") and the axiom of my favorite book, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*¹, whose characters never quite get the hang of Thursdays. At least on Mondays, you're coming back from a breather; if you're anything like me, you spent the majority of Sunday restoring your emotional reserves and stay a little more chipper for a tad bit longer. But when dismissal hits on the second day in and you're stuck babysitting for a half hour with neither consequences nor common sense to hang over your children's sweet little screaming heads with nary a spare second to answer an email lest they all spill out into the hallway—again—to terrorize the neighbors...things begin to look pretty bleak. When you measure how much time remains until Friday, which were it not for the start of the weekend would be the *actual* worst day of the week, because our collective reserves are at a new all-time low. And then we get ready to do it all over again—now, with the majority of us having returned to the school buildings in the fall of 2021, in legitimately perilous conditions.

It's not any wonder that those who admit to their own emotional shortcomings are teetering on the brink of employment right now, and those who are politely ignoring their stresses manifest it through mannerisms in all manner of shades from delightful to detrimental. And as with any great societal upheaval, the runoff of toxic waste sweat by the adults invariably affects the children most of all. Rather than attempting to dam the flow, though, the more prudent solution is to attempt to stop it at the source. Teachers, for better or for worse, are one of the most impactful elements in a child's malleable little life. But if teachers themselves are finding it difficult to manage, how can they be expected to provide a nurturing and stable environment for their students, be it Monday or Thursday or any other day that ends in "y?" The grounds behind this unit's concept come from a desire to help teachers help themselves before returning their love and emotional labor outward unto the masses, preemptively breaking a cycle of toxicity.

Rationale

As loath as much of society is to admit it, the very nature of our day-to-day function has changed irrevocably due to the Covid-19 pandemic and all of its associated stressors and complications. The way the United States educational system has consistently adapted and molded to new circumstances is one of the biggest changes of all—and these changes require a sturdy marriage

¹ Adams, Douglas. *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

of function to form, namely from educators themselves. Where once we had only whiteboards and anchor charts to facilitate instruction, we now had to contend with the largest and most obvious gap in accessibility that any of us had seen in our careers, with many teachers forced to become fluent in a short time with technology that was alien to them in order to serve their students. Even now that we are “safely” back in the classroom, we must still accommodate for our students using virtual platforms, as many will have extended absences due to quarantine or exposure. This is all without even considering the emotional toll it takes to learn how to do your job all over again just when you thought you were getting into the swing of things.

While many stakeholders are primarily concerned with returning to traditional face-to-face instruction due to factors such as "learning loss" and student socialization, the effects of the transition back to in-person learning has been jarring for some, especially as many pre-adolescent students deal with the looming fear of illness from close contact with peers who become sick. Not only that, but these incidents take place on top of the grief many of them experience from the loss of loved ones, nonetheless for their traditions and routines. Often, school is the only place of normalcy for children—which is why an educator's chief goal is to create a space that is conducive to their safety and comfort, as they cannot be expected to learn in any other state. But if the adults in the room are expected to shoulder their students' burdens as well as their own, what will be left when it's time to accommodate for their own grief and fear and disruption to routine?

Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools has seen an unprecedented amount of resignations and shortages, steep even in the wake of high turnover rates that already plagued many of our underserved schools. As of November of 2021, Charlotte-Mecklenburg reports well over 500 resignations and timely retirements², leaving positions open across the board: even at schools like mine that normally tout little turnover because of their highly coveted working atmospheres. The lack of consistency easily trickles down to affect the children they teach. This doesn't even account for those who have plans to retire in the near future. Adolescent students in particular need a different level of support for their well-being than previously anticipated when the district initially introduced its obligatory social and emotional learning curriculum to its middle grades schools. There is no better first point of contact than the educators who teach them. Try as they may to provide the stability for students, the effects they have may be even more detrimental if teachers continue in an environment that has created large increases in its already high turnover rate and general disgruntlement, with exhaustion and burnout at an all-time high. Thus, this unit's aim is to focus on mindfulness techniques intended to begin healing at the faculty and staff level of a school, setting into motion a pattern of healthy habits implemented in all facets of life, beginning just outside the classroom.

School Demographics

Piedmont Open Middle is a full-magnet school in the Central Learning Community 2 of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools whose entire student population participates in the International Baccalaureate program, with which all of its staff is trained. It is located on the outskirts of

² Lankford, Ciara. “More than 500 CMS Teachers Have Left the School District since Aug. 1.”

Uptown Charlotte, lending its students an opportunity to attend walking field trips to cultural staples such as museums and arts programs alongside developing relationships with municipal functions, such as the mock trial team's partnership with the county courthouse.

While now data on economic status is difficult to determine by the original metric—which is the percentage of students who required free or reduced school lunch—is irrelevant due to the district now providing free breakfast and lunch for all of its students regardless of status, it stands to reason that the data will be similar to previous years', with the last updated school report card placing its percentage of economically disadvantaged students at 38.9 percent³.

Over the last several years there has been a slight fluctuation in the specific demographics of the student population, namely because of the recent phase-out of entry requirements based on state assessment scores—first math, then reading. Regardless, Piedmont's population remains diverse in several ways; the most recent data on demographics from the North Carolina Department of Instruction states that of the 1,123 students enrolled in the 2020-2021 school year, approximately five are classified as Indigenous or Pacific Islander, 80 as Asian, 160 as Hispanic, 600 as Black, 230 as white, and 30 as multiracial⁴.

Though there is not a diversity report for staff that I can easily find through resources provided by either the district or the school itself, I am safely able to say that the majority of the faculty and staff at Piedmont are white, heterosexual, and fall in an age-range of 30-60. Our teacher turnover rate is relatively low in comparison to other "inner-city" schools, which I attribute in part to a strong and empathetic administration, but some transitions have allowed the school to interview and hire more teachers of color from different lifestyles and backgrounds. In addition, two out of three of the counseling department are women of color, which contributes to many of our students' feeling of safety and comfort.

This curriculum unit focuses on staff, but it is important to note the student demographics for several reasons. First, it calls attention to the disparity of culture present in the building—many educators are not given the training necessary in cultural competencies that will best serve their students, instead attempting to institute a "one-size-fits-all" model of behavior in the classroom that will inevitably backfire when tested. Second, it is also important to note that many of our students come from underserved populations, and bring their own stressors and difficulties into the classroom as well.

Unit Goals

The primary goal of this unit is to emphasize the importance of teachers' mental health and well-being in the role of education and treat it as integral to the career; despite the expectations that they demonstrate devotion akin to martyrdom, it is essential that schools create a culture where teachers are comfortable prioritizing their own needs in order to serve expected professional roles. While efficacy should not take more focus than mental and physical health,

³ Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. "CMS SES Status 2020-2021"

⁴ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Pupils in Membership by Race and Sex at School Level."

one will beget the other. The community must trust teachers to take what they gain and turn it back into the classroom. Furthermore, the goal of this unit is to identify constructive action to proactively correct the symptoms of burnout that permeate school halls.

Most importantly, this unit looks to be at least one cast of a line out toward practices that aren't just temporary solutions to burnout in education, but that swim closer to the root causes. Stress is endemic to the career—and stress is the most harmful thing that can be perpetuated in a school building. Doing things for the love of it is *noble*, and expected; those for whom money is no object will even agree that wages are not the most valuable resource our communities can give us. To make this sustainable, we must lower the pressure cooker of expectation when it comes to tireless days and nights of working and the emotional labor we perform by rote.

Nadine Burke Harris's *The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity*⁵, posits that creating more stable conditions when it comes to the mental health and security of children is essential to creating healthier adults. "*Toxic stress*" is the insidious force creeping around the walls of households all across America, race, class, or education notwithstanding, but can be circumvented, palliated, and even rectified through conscientious practice of care activities such as exercise, nutrition, and yes, even meditation and mindfulness. But where to start? The current state of education is the communal well, to borrow the apt metaphor from which Harris takes the title of her book:

"...I took from it a larger lesson: If one hundred people all drink from the same well and ninety-eight of them develop diarrhea, I can write prescription after prescription for antibiotics, or I can stop and ask, 'What the hell is in this well?'"

Germ theory, as applied to education, makes us as teachers the unwitting super-spreaders all continuously coming to drink from the same well. But options are limited, and metaphorical Brita purifying filters few and far between—the resources necessary to purify the well of our stamina and motivation are not being serviced by our communities. Our reserves of time and energy and compassion are tainted time and time again by interference, from those with good intentions and those with less-than. Implementation of long-term programs and systems that will reify teachers' initial passion and motivation will not only decrease teacher turnover rate and burnout, therefore improving the overall quality of instruction, but will trickle down to the children they're responsible for as well. (You know, the ones who are *our future* and all that?)

Throughout the span of this unit's implementation, the goal is to give teachers several options for their toolkits when it comes to bandaging their own emotional wounds before handling those of their students. Firstly, it aims to create an outlet—not a commiseration session (otherwise known as a "pity party"), but a place to channel the frustrations and agitations; the ones that are caused from the very love of the profession and only make it more difficult to perform. Secondly, it aims to use proven techniques for alleviating stress that teachers will then in turn bring to their classrooms—and ideally, to their homes, communities, and students, who can do the same. Thirdly, it's the best action I can think to take to Clorox down our well at the

⁵ Burke Harris, Nadine. *The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Adversity*.

source of contagion. With a lot of extra time to think, and a lot of extra things to think about, it became clearer over the last year how I can help be a conduit for contagious change instead, which is especially difficult when you feel helpless and resourceless. Sometimes all it takes is speaking up.

Content Research

Educators are intimately familiar with distraction, and not just from the students who aren't paying attention. With so many disruptions to instruction and duties piled atop one another, it can be difficult to feel present and connected with the tasks at hand one at a time. But what does it mean to be mindful, especially for someone in a role that has them anticipate being pulled in every direction?

For the teacher, mindfulness must take into consideration the vast amount of time-sensitive and urgent tasks asked of us throughout every day. While it seems that interruptions will be inevitable, it doesn't mean that throwing in the towel is the only option. Often we see initiatives as a challenge or a deterrent, where mindfulness aims to be the opposite. Rather than shoving in another obligatory activity to cross off the list, mindfulness asks us to stop and take a concerted look at the ones we already have. It's not just appreciating the little things—it's not bulldozing over the little things we have left to appreciate in our quest for productivity.

For the student, learning comes from placing as much weight on the receipt of content as on the content itself, a dichotomy of moving parts, one in and the other out. To be mindful is to demonstrate a commitment to learning—brought about by the practice of *contemplative pedagogy* that allows the present and thoughtful quiet spaces which allow the next level of independent inquiry and application required of a student to demonstrate mastery of content and acknowledgement of the students' own role in their education⁶.

Technology, though also one of the biggest detractors, can be used as an aid for redirecting attention so long as it is used appropriately. "Preventative" measures such as Internet blocking services are not as effective as coming in to a work session with an intentional design for keeping focused, such as a Pomodoro timer, which chunks out small intervals of time intended for work with a corresponding "break" time before beginning again. The difference inherent between both strategies is that the former depends on the aid itself to push one's focus, but the other encourages engagement in the moment through the challenge of beating the clock with some measure of productivity before the small interval is up⁷.

A concrete example of mindfulness in the classroom comes in concert when analyzing the goals of someone teaching music—their primary objective is to ensure that each individual member of their ensemble strives to become one part of a symphonic whole. Performing rote memorization of music by simply glancing over sheet music and performing on autopilot will not produce the same organic quality as someone who is consciously drawing out every note; they

⁶ "A Contemplative Turn in Education: Charting a Curricular-Pedagogical Countermovement."

⁷ Rose, Ellen. "Can Online Teaching and Learning Support Mindfulness?"

are prepared for improvisation at any slip of intonation, and will not be caught with their bow down should an unexpected crescendo arise. Conductor James Byo⁸ emphasizes that the orchestra will have the clearest sound should the person behind each instrument should have autonomy, as "student decision making creates independent musicians," who will in turn demonstrate their musical education as virtuosos when treating even the least complex of music with gravity.

But the director of an orchestra must first learn how to conduct its players, which is a tall order if you are not even in sync with yourself.

When You Just Can't Stress It Enough

Stress is a hell of a drug. The impact it has on the body is maddeningly profound, and the number of ways it can sneak into your everyday life as creaks and aches and pains alone makes it intimidating as a potential silent killer. But just as the carbon monoxide detector informs when the local environment becomes untenable for life, stress does its best to sound the alarm in the language it knows best—which, over time, will be manifested to those who are especially unobservant (or who simply are extraordinarily tenacious in their denial) may escalate into intense physical maladies, somatic or painfully tangible.

On the extreme end, stress may result in trips to the hospital, or contribute to other conditions that will grant that special privilege, such as heart disease—ever imply you're on the verge of a cardiac event when your present situation is less than ideal? At the post-traumatic end of the spectrum of stressors lay the most severe of ailments: stress and trauma are direct precursors to the leading causes of death for both children and adults in the nation.

At the risk of trivializing what members of the armed forces across the globe experience, I have often referred to my coworkers as my brothers in arms, recognizing that the school building is our battlefield, each of our classrooms and email inboxes filled with potential landmines. The school year is a sustained point of stress, with D-Day falling somewhere arbitrary at some point between late February and May, where one party reaches a point of spontaneous combustion in a way the custodians are simply not equipped to deal with cleaning. (#PayRaiseForCustodians).

Attempts at morale raising begin to feel like drops in the bucket—were the panacea for burnout as simple as the complementary plate of nachos at staff happy hour! Teaching is a notoriously exhausting profession, and in the pre-post-pandemic-but-everyone-thinks-it's-actually-over era, our shared trials by fire lately do more to engender haggard looks and helpless shrugs than the normal recess banter. As we approach the End Days (hopefully just of 2021, as of this writing), the fact that humans were simply not equipped to handle being trapped in stasis of a stress-fear-trauma response warranted by Covid-19 isn't a privileged statistic to be cited, but has absorbed itself into the sphere of common knowledge, thanks to ubiquitous long-form think pieces and editorials from science and

⁸ Byo, James L. "Mindful (Not Mindless) Teaching: Ask the Accomplished Learner Question Often."

psychology magazines.

So now that we're well past damage control, how do we compensate?

Out of Sight, Into Mindfulness

Here's a better kept sociological secret than "the Coronavirus pandemic has royally screwed us up"—becoming *present* in each facet of your daily life has an extraordinary effect on your outlook, hence the concept of mindfulness rearing its head in unexpected contexts such as the school building.

Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Art of Mindfulness*⁹, a short text that elaborates on the "trainings" required to devote oneself to mindfulness, begins with the quintessential example of the practice: enjoying a cup of tea—and *only* a cup of tea—for as long as it takes to finish it. I admit to balking at the concept—what on earth else am I supposed to be doing? I haven't done just one thing at a time since developing fine motor skills, and there is always so much to get done in a day. But when the brain fires neurons at rapid-fire pace, sometimes the best thing to do is not to lean in, but to check out; if you come back calmer and more focused, you have a lot more in your arsenal to conquer the rest of your day. That hour spent has value, because your appointment with life will fly right by should you let each of these opportunities float by. Hanh's text states that appreciating the little things will wash down the aftertaste of the rest:

"Even when the tea is in our mouth, we aren't conscious of it. We're drinking our projects, we're drinking our problems."

It's not relevant just at tea time—the practice asks that "whatever you do, you do it with your whole being." After all, rushing through your daily tasks is often counterintuitive—take it from someone intimately familiar with neurodivergent tendencies. The quicker you try to climb the mountain, the more tired you get, frustrated that you can't sign in for the long haul. Being intentional with each your tasks, regardless of "urgency"—such as giving authentic feedback on grades or having meaningful conversations with students—will head many of life's daily issues off at the pass. Haste makes waste, after all. Mistakes are a natural and educational facet of life, but many of them can be avoided with just a little mindfulness.

While the tea-drinking is a literal task, the example serves as a conceptual metaphor for the rest of our lives. The five mindfulness trainings don't paint it as a selfish behavior to slide into your self-care routines, but a tool to improve your relationships as well. It's a tool of love. It's a weapon to combat the cycle of suffering. It's the gift of connection. The individual trainings ask you to reach beyond yourself, cultivating several concepts in your daily life; in short, one must exercise compassion, kindness, responsibility, speech and listening, and health. Becoming aware of your body gives it permission to let off the signals we need to hear when it comes to unburdening and becoming our best selves. Ideal!

⁹ Hanh, Thich Nhat. *The Art of Mindfulness*.

But much of this is anecdotal. How to create buy-in from the cynics of the world?

The Body is Hereby Fired From Referee Duty (I Mean, Like, Seriously, Who Gave That Guy A Buzzer?)

Tuning back in to the stress part of the playing field, we find severe consequences to forgetting how to unwind. Not just taking the occasional vacation day—reframing your way of thinking so that the traumas and stressors that wired your brain to be perpetually set to *panic mode*: fight, flight, freeze, or fawn, don't control you more than you control them. It's no simple task. Health issues are embedded in stress, and habitually ignored for the sake of just getting on with it, for crying out loud. Who needs to spend any more time reflecting on the past, never mind the *present*.

An intimate partner of stress is trauma: kind of how the result of extended time teaching in the battlefield of a pandemic-riddled classroom might look. The brain is unable to turn off its responses for fight, flight, or freeze, elongating the physical symptoms of stress that humans were simply not meant to feel long-term—they're adrenaline responses designed for protecting yourself in a dire moment, but when dealing with prolonged stress, these powerful physiological responses keep running like the faucet I have to call to get fixed again if I ever have the time outside of work hours (ha!).

Said physiological responses have long-term consequences: they're direct lines to conditions such as depression and anxiety, and contribute heavily to the diseases that plague the population in abundance, like those cardiac events mentioned earlier. It puts the body in a position between mobilizing and staying put, causing a pervasive learned helplessness that affects every single element of one's life, including concentration and decision making. Those aren't really things teachers can afford to have compromised. Life is already difficult even without considering the high possibility of developing autoimmune disorders, inflammatory conditions, and chronic fatigue.¹⁰ If our emotions play out like broken records, it's our obligation to rewind until we get to the part where it keeps skipping and skipping and skipping and skipping and skipping and—you get the picture. It's a whole lot of the same, but with none of the pleasures of monotony, unless you think having no stability in your health is a grand old time.

Mind the Achievement Gap

It baffles the mind to think how many schools think that the solution to "low-performance" (*by whose standards? A Scantron's?*) is to continuously toss out the newest and shiniest professional development to each battleground instead of allowing teachers time to perfect the last one that came down the pipe, or even to see if it works in the first place, or to see which teachers even bother sticking around long enough to have an accurate assessment on whether any of it's come to fruition. Rollouts and initiatives and catchphrases and rallying cries are spit out with succinct regularity every two to five years without fail and then left abandoned and dusty like the set of test practice workbooks I held onto because I was absolutely *sure* we'd come back to them

¹⁰ van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, & Body in the Healing of Trauma*

someday. Variety is the spice of life, but these particular spices are simply repackaged and versions of the old with the brand new: a set of hot lingo, more mandatory training, and increasingly higher price tags. Yet every upheaval creates another rift in consistency for students; out with the old and in with the new leaves teachers scrambling to learn a new system rather than putting their energy into the things that best support their students. Then, like the snake eating its own tail, it leaves teachers and students more confused than where we started. So why try yet another new strategy?

Though it differentiates its "transcendental meditation" technique from other types of meditation, including the practice of mindfulness, the Quiet Time¹¹ program hosted by the David Lynch foundation claims marked improvements in quality of life for the students in its pilot schools, namely increased concentration and overall better mood—not just in the children, but in the teachers, and even the parents and guardians who willingly involve themselves as well with the program's supplementary classes. While the program is specific, many of the concepts are rooted in the same principles of mindfulness—if anything, the purported success is encouraging for a rollout of meditative practices at the grade school level in any context.

Furthermore, even if it doesn't have the grand and far reaching impact that the last seventeen mandated district-level programs implemented did (not!), there is still merit and value in emphasizing the importance of centering oneself and going about your life with intention regardless of the shocking discovery that it's the magical cure for low test scores and/or headaches and the like. Logically, attempting to stay present and grounded—what Hahn calls "unitasking"—cultivates a habit of treating everything with the same magnitude...and the rest of the successes will surely follow.

Instructional Implementation

It is a truth universally acknowledged that teachers make the absolute worst students. Don't pander to me with your turn and talks and your jigsaw style learning and your infernal *anchor charts*—I got things to do. But I also know what it's like to have a whole lot of valuable information to eagerly and earnestly share to a group of people who simply do not wish to give you the time of day. Thus comes the dreaded challenge of engagement. How do you teach a teacher?

Teaching Strategies

The initial hurdle in instruction will be buy-in to the importance and relevance of the topic—yes, teachers often do not make good students, and their attention spans and tolerance for compulsory school activities that detract from their planning time is understandably low. One strategy is to be upfront about the rationale and goal of the instruction, which emphasizes that everything ties in directly to accommodating and advocating for students. Structuring the opportunity as an opt-in experience will also ensure that the data received is not skewed by more pessimistic or cynical individuals who may become outliers on any data received.

¹¹ David Lynch Foundation. "Quiet Time Program for Transcendental Meditation in Schools."

Teachers—heretofore also referred to as the students or participants when used in the context of this professional development—will also require incentive to engage in something long-term. Historically in this environment the students demonstrate a competitive nature and tend to participate in low-risk, low-stakes activities meant as team-building exercises or icebreakers.

As my school releases later in the afternoon, the majority of the mandated staff meetings that fall outside of school hours take place earlier in the day. There are usually at least two to three meetings a month, which usually fall on Wednesdays. Each week is assigned a different purpose, but the third to last week has rotated from year to year and taken the form of independent professional development or small group studies. Because it has been so flexible, I believe this would be the best place to incorporate a curriculum of professional development programming for teachers that would integrate not just the concepts behind mindfulness, but encourage the behavior associated with it over time.

Also, provided that there are in-person meetings, I will also incentivize participation by bringing a range of healthy snacks for a slew of dietary needs, as adults are fewer in number and less prone to be vocally ungrateful about something that cost someone else's money than are children. Also, it's a pleasant thank you for those in the participation group who are more hesitant to sign on because of the time constraint or time of day itself. I am not a morning person. I'm not an evening person either; I'm simply an ethereal and formless bog creature of executive dysfunction who only goes where the dopamine is. My success rate at being early or even on time to morning meetings is frankly tragic. Noting this, there will be two possibilities for each session to be voted on by participants—either a small group in-person meeting, or the same cohort coming together on Zoom. As one of the chronically (not just temporally) late, I have a suspicion that many colleagues will appreciate the flexibility allowed by meeting virtually.

One of the elements of pedagogy which resonates with me the most is the concept of reciprocal teaching—learning by doing. An integral part of each session will be having the staff disseminate the same practices they are sampling amongst their students. As teachers are incorporating their newfound skills, they'll be challenged to make them part of their classroom routines, bit by incremental bit. I have modeled the content being presented after a slightly more traditional informal lesson plan—the "dinner" approach, with a warm-up appetizer, direct instruction first course, guided practice second, rounding it out with an exit ticket dessert. Delicious! Given their relationship with their own students and assessment of the classroom dynamic, as well as their personal comfort with the technology, resources, and time constraints at hand, they may also deem it an appropriate element of their supper, or they may choose to orchestrate the activity with a lot of explicit structure, or as an informal conversation.

Ultimately, the program is intended to lessen stress—I will make clear from the outset that this is a no-judgement zone should anyone need to rescind their commitment, as everyone's threshold for stress is different, and no one should feel like they have been put on the spot or ostracized for being overwhelmed. Presenting the content as such is intended to do double duty: treating the exercise with a relaxed nature carrying few consequences should engender empathy

for their students, who may also be experiencing a range of different things, and have considered their course content to be inessential lest it be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

As part of the implementation, teachers will be given the resources from each segment through easily accessible means, such as Google Drive, and perhaps organized via a new course created through a learning management system. Our district mandated Canvas in the wake of virtual teaching, but I have been using it for several years; my familiarity will make it easy to place things visibly and organize in a way in which individuals can share their experiences through journaling, collaborate with another, get feedback, and curate resources.

The strength of technological literacy across the staff varies widely—for simplicity's sake, all content, such as slideshows or links to course content, will be posted in a central location. Depending on what's most prudent for the situation, I will prepare for link distribution ahead of time—an email or message through another common platform which contains the information, or by generating QR codes to display to an audience if we are able to use our common space in the media center, or a link in Zoom chat.

Hopefully one more element that will encourage enthusiasm are the additional passive benefits participants will receive—for instance, I will also take care to emphasize that one of the then core learner profile attributes that the International Baccalaureate student must demonstrate is open-mindedness, so if you sign up you can put it in your evaluation as evidence that you are practicing what you preach. We all scratch each other's backs around here.

Lessons & Content

Each session will begin with a check-in that will serve as a temperature check (and maybe even a little tiny bit of a vent session, so long as it stays constructive) to ground participants in the right context. It will also serve as a baseline for that day's growth and as a variable to compare with the other emotional states recorded throughout the sessions.

The goal will be to leave participants directly responsible for their own learning as they seek answers and strategies. Rather than direct instruction for the entirety of the part of the session that involves learning and content, resources such as excerpts from relevant texts will be provided for students to parse and analyze on their own, leaving several options afterward depending on time. The “jigsaw” technique, a classic favored by instructors everywhere, will have small groups each read a separate passage and then share the central idea and other essential supporting details as a short summary. The passages would also facilitate discussion and allow students to compare and contrast personal experiences and perspectives for context. The articles will focus on different aspects of mental health, including how experiences like stress and trauma can impact the mind and body.

The second half of the session will be through practicing what is preached, allowing time for students to perform basic yoga techniques and stretches—so basic, in fact, that they will not even need to leave their seats for the majority of it. For many of us, the most dangerous risk at

work with regards to physical exertion is carpal tunnel from answering parent emails. Therefore, activities designed for ameliorating the effects of more strenuous exercise can be saved for later. For those sporty ones.

This section will be defined by incorporating practices known as “chair yoga,” which involves more simple techniques designed to alleviate tension without leaving one’s seat, and other strategies such as mindful breathing exercises (which have come in clutch more than once in moments of deep classroom panic on standardized test days—especially when I’m the one doing the panicking). Where possible and applicable, other stretching techniques such as gradual muscle relaxation will take place while being conscientious of safety throughout all of it.

Finally, students will be tasked with homework: to bring these practices to their own students as well. They’ll be given tasks to incorporate some of these techniques of mindfulness and emotional regulation to share with their classes, using these moments to model ideal behavior. For example, in times of high stress, teachers may choose to narrate their own emotions to normalize getting to the root causes of them and establishing a judgment-free zone for adults and students alike. Student-teachers may also wish to share other practices with their students such as gratitude journaling or transforming habits by including happier and healthier ones to help curtail the negative; for example, ones focused on introducing exercise or even just peaceful moments of mindfulness throughout the day.

Assessments

In order to gauge efficacy of the program, each participant will be given a pre-assessment survey styled as a Likert scale that will ask specifics regarding their prior experience with mindfulness and other meditative practices; current, general, and anticipated mood and outlook (in short and long term); their level of enthusiasm (or apathy) regarding the program; their optimism as to whether the program will have tangible or discernible benefits for their personal or professional lives; their relationship with their career, and their interactions with peers. These will be filed away for later reference so that they may ultimately be compared with another at the end and measure deterioration or growth in social and emotional wellness. The summative assessment will be in the form of a written analysis that asks participants to reflect on their self-assessment scores and measure what benefit, if any, they received from the process over time.

The qualitative and quantitative elements will be drawn from the template provided by the data in the study "Exploring a Complementary Stress Management and Wellbeing Intervention Model for Teachers: Participant Experience."

General formative assessments will also include in-person/live discussion and conversation where teachers reflect on their practice incorporating the content from the program in their classrooms or elsewhere in their daily lives that sparks an active dialogue and evaluates the level of individual buy-in as a factor in the efficacy of mindfulness as a tool for stress reduction; there will also be asynchronous forums or discussion threads that they will be asked to allot some time to complete.

Resources

Journaling: I will look over a general journal, where participants can choose to share as much or as little as they like about personal affairs and coping strategies. Regardless of their level of participation in the journal that will be assessed, teachers will be encouraged to keep a journal of their own. I intimately understand the ease and convenience of digital word processors and the speed associated with typing rather than writing, especially as the time it takes for setting up something in a journal allows much more downtime to forget precisely what it was that you were already drafting in your head as opposed to the spontaneity of phone note, audio recording, or other file or document. As someone with an untoward fixation on owning a great variety of pens, I will prioritize an analogue model and demonstrate the joy of recording thoughts through pen and paper—or encourage participants at least to outline with intention on their favored medium, as physical writing inherently requires the subject to be more present and mindful than they may normally be while using a keyboard; an additional way of cultivating mindfulness inspired in part by a strategy one of my colleagues calls "brain on paper." Gimkit's Ink feature offers a tool for collaborative writing as an alternative to Canvas submissions and posts, or the classic communal Google Doc. Participants will be given guidelines on free writing and stream of consciousness, and several suggested points to cover, but what content is included is ultimately up to the individual.

Appendix 1: Teacher Standards

Standard I: Teachers Demonstrate Leadership

- Ia.** Teachers lead in their classrooms.
- Ib.** Teachers demonstrate leadership in the school.
- Ic.** Teachers lead the teaching profession.
- Id.** Teachers advocate for schools and students.

Standard II: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students

- IIa.** Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults.
- IIb.** Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world.
- IIc.** Teachers treat students as individuals.
- IId.** Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs.

Standard IV: Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students

- IVa.** Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students.
- IVc.** Teachers use a variety of instructional methods.

Standard V: Teachers Reflect on Their Practice

- Va.** Teachers analyze student learning.
- Vb.** Teachers link professional growth to their professional goals.
- Vc.** Teachers function effectively in a complex, dynamic environment.

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