

2021

Monday Morning After: Sustaining a Mindfulness Practice after the Initial Retreat

Molly Serene Dunn

Notre Dame of Maryland University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/joci>

Recommended Citation

Dunn, Molly Serene (2021) "Monday Morning After: Sustaining a Mindfulness Practice after the Initial Retreat," *Journal of Contemplative Inquiry*. Vol. 8: No. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/joci/vol8/iss1/4>

This Case Study is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Contemplative Inquiry by an authorized editor of Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. For more information, please contact Jane.Monson@unco.edu.

Monday Morning After: Sustaining a Mindfulness Practice after the Initial Retreat

Molly Serene Dunn

Notre Dame of Maryland University

Mindfulness has emerged as a novel and research-supported way to provide professional development to those who teach. Mindfulness, however, is a personal practice that requires persistence in order to maintain. In this paper, I focus on one teacher's experience with a mindfulness offering and her efforts to sustain it over a five-month period. I draw on findings from traditional case study research, with my analysis of findings showcasing a supportive group dynamic and accountability structures as vital both during the retreat and the subsequent months afterward. Based on this study's results, I argue that mindfulness professional learning communities (PLCs) might be a promising next step for the field since they build upon elements of both the mindfulness literature, which suggests the importance of continual practice, and the professional development literature, which posits the effectiveness of sustained, collaborative opportunities as critical to growth.

Introduction

What happens after the initial euphoria of a weekend mindfulness workshop has worn off? Do participants maintain the same semblance of equanimity that characterized their weekend away? Or do they slip back into "life as usual" once support structures wane? This study tells of Allison (pseudonym) and her experiences with a teacher mindfulness-based intervention (MBI), specifically CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education). Utilizing case study methodology and interviews with Allison immediately after the weekend and at a five-month

follow-up, this article spotlights how she successfully found and relied upon support structures, offered by her local university and school district's professional development (PD) office, to maintain her newfound skills formed at the initial weekend offering. In Allison's own words, she tells the story of how she felt about receiving this training and how such mindfulness training can be sustained over time with the right structures in place.

Allison is from the southwestern part of a mid-Atlantic state and in her third year of teaching. She teaches third grade but has taught kindergarten and first grade in prior years. She has a master's degree in elementary education with an endorsement in gifted education. This year is her last year teaching, however, because she will enter the local university (the site at which the weekend workshop was offered) to pursue a doctorate in education.

When Allison first entered the university, she learned different tenets of mindfulness through a one-credit physical education course that she took her first year. She remembered seeing the course offering and thinking that such a class might make her calm and provide her tools to survive her first year at "such a topnotch institution." She told me that she enjoyed the class, and that it incorporated different aspects of mindfulness combined with movement such as Tai Chi, yoga, and mindful walking. She added, "We talked about all these aspects [of CARE] during my first semester, but then I didn't really use them much after that. I had them in the back of my mind, but I never put them into practice fully as much as I probably should have."

A nascent interest in yoga was what brought Allison back to mindfulness. At the first interview, she had recently joined a gym and for the past year had been "taking yoga classes on the side." She also taught an informal yoga club at her school once a month to third through fifth graders. She told me that she had just been approved for a grant to become certified in Yoga4Schools, a program that trains school teachers in yoga for use in the classroom. According to Allison, her kids "absolutely love" her monthly yoga club and would benefit from more frequent sessions because "two hours a month is not enough for these kids." She also wanted to bring more yoga to her third graders because "this is the point

where I feel like I can really shape their lives and really influence their mindfulness for the future.”

Allison received a flyer on CARE as her initial contact with the intervention. After she read the information sheet, “it was talking about mindfulness and yoga and all these practices. I thought that could wrap in some of the stuff I already know about, but then also my renewed interest in yoga.” Through many of the comments Allison gave, a common theme of wanting to bring mindfulness to others kept arising. For example, of her after-school yoga club, she said:

I have a couple of teachers that come in and help me with the yoga club because they’re floaters that go around and help all the clubs. I had a lady mention to me the other day, “If you offer this once a month or once a week after school, I’m sure people would pay \$5 to come do this yoga.” . . . Or at least I would hope they would want to come and learn more about it, and that way you could kind of try and ‘infect the masses’ with mindfulness a little bit. [chuckle] Bring it out to them and get them started and get them excited and eager about doing it.

Although she was new to mindfulness, she was committed to and passionate about making it a part of her life and a part of the lives of those with whom she interacts. As a third-year teacher, she recognized that time was a traditional barrier for teachers with regard to PD, but she also believed the mindfulness was an addition to a typical workday, as opposed to a subtraction:

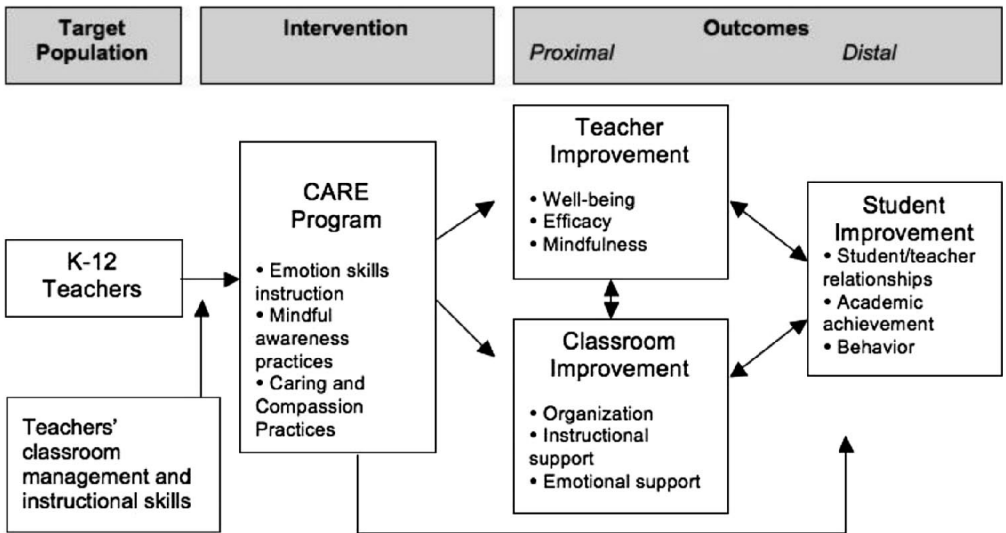
And I think that’s where teachers need to start to realize the time you’re spending right now probably isn’t your most productive use of time. You’re probably sitting around not realizing what to do when if you just took ten minutes of mindfulness for yourself, that might help you get your own ideas straight.

Allison wanted to bring mindfulness to her students, her co-teachers, and her family and friends back home, and she saw herself as the messenger

for mindfulness’s myriad positive messages. Additionally, she planned to incorporate a mindfulness research component into her educational doctorate studies. The forthcoming case highlights Allison’s experience with and sustainment efforts at keeping a weekend retreat’s mindfulness alive throughout her personal and professional spheres.

Methods

Case study methodology guided the examination of Allison’s experiences. Analysis of interviews, observations, and document data adhered to interpretive research traditions respectful of emergent design, multiple perspectives, and inductive analysis (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Research questions and the intervention’s conceptual framework (Figure 1) informed all initial and subsequent levels of code. Member checks, triangulation, audit trails, and peer review were utilized to ensure external validity. The information below details more aspects of the study design, and in particular the methodology behind CARE.



Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Setting

CARE stands for Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education, and its goal is to offer teachers tools and resources for reducing stress, preventing burnout, and enlivening teaching. The CARE retreat took place over a three-day weekend at a university in the western part of a mid-Atlantic state. The Friday evening session lasted three hours, and the Saturday and Sunday sessions lasted six hours, for a total of 15 contact hours. CARE is an important analytic site for several reasons: it is a well-established program with a conceptual framework (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009); it is manualized and facilitated by experts (Jennings, et al., 2013); and it has shown past positive impacts (Jennings, et al., 2011; Schussler, et al., 2016; Schussler et al., 2018). For more information on the weekend curriculum, see Table 1.

Emotion Skills Instruction	Mindfulness/Stress Reduction Practices	Compassion Practices
(Approximately 40%)	(Approximately 40%)	(Approximately 20%)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to emotions, purpose, universal expression, and relevant brain research. 2. How emotions affect teaching and learning 3. Didactic information about “uncomfortable” or negative emotions. 4. Didactic information about “comfortable” or positive emotions. 5. Exploring bodily awareness of emotions. 6. Exploring individual differences in emotional experiences. 7. Practice using mindful awareness activities and reflection to recognize and manage strong emotions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Body awareness reflection. 2. Basic breath awareness practices. 3. Mindfulness of thoughts and emotion practices. 4. Mindful movement practices (standing, walking, stretching, centering). 5. Practice maintaining mindful awareness in front of a group. 6. Role play to practice mindfulness in the context of a strong emotion related to a challenging classroom situation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Caring practices”—a series of guided reflections focused on caring for self, loved one, colleague, and challenging person. 2. Mindful listening partner practices—one person reads a poem or talks about a problem, the partner listens mindfully while practicing presence and acceptance.

Table 1: CARE Program Components (Jennings et al., 2013)

The CARE program involves a blend of didactic instruction and experiential activities, including time for reflection and discussion. CARE strives to achieve its goal of helping teachers handle stresses by introducing three main components: emotional regulation (40%), mindfulness (40%), and compassion (20%). CARE first introduces emotion skills instruction to promote understanding, recognition, and regulation of emotion. Similarly, to reduce stress and to promote awareness and presence applied to teaching, CARE introduces basic mindfulness activities, such as short periods of silent reflection, and then progresses to activities that demonstrate how to bring mindfulness to challenging situations teachers often encounter, such as a confrontation with a student, parent, or fellow teacher. Finally, the CARE program also promotes empathy and compassion through caring practices and mindful listening activities. It is purported that through these activities, teachers learn to bring greater calm, mindfulness, and awareness into the classroom to enhance their relationships with their students, their classroom management, and their curricular implementation.

Finding #1: Perceptions of Intervention

"You're thinking of yourself, but then you're also starting to think about others and your impact on the world and the impact you can have on people."

Immediate Impact

Allison stated that entering the CARE weekend, her expectation was to learn more mindfulness strategies. "I just wanted ways that I could hopefully cope with some of those issues going on within my own school and my own life." On CARE meeting her expectations, she stated that she was very pleased with "how much it tied everything I knew together, but then reminded me of why I enjoyed it in the first place." Furthermore, the weekend was a good reminder that she should be doing these mindfulness practices on a more regular basis. She felt that she not only refreshed her previous knowledge but also built upon it. She concluded with this summary of CARE: "I think I definitely have a good skill set moving forward to help both myself, and my colleagues, and the students that I serve."

Allison thought that the most effective aspect of the intervention was not one particular practice, but rather “a lot of the good outward positive thinking. I feel like sending positive vibes or channeling what I’m thinking and then trying to spin it in a more positive light was really helpful to me.” Allison admitted that she “tends to bottle up emotions a lot.” Something bad would happen at work, and she would have feelings that she would not know how to express. She appreciated talking through angry situations that may arise with teaching, figuring out ways to deal with them, and putting a positive spin on them. For Allison, being positive and outward-focused resonated the most.

Furthermore, this “outward positive thinking” was a true “a ha” moment for Allison. Previously, she had thought of mindfulness as a solely inwardly-focused activity. However, she now saw it as dual-functioning: “You’re thinking of yourself, but then you’re also starting to think about others and your impact on the world and the impact you can have on people.” Another big realization for Allison was that now she could “project mindfulness onto others.” The weekend made her more aware that she could actually do this, but she admitted she did not know to what extent. That is, she realized that people’s perspectives could only be changed so much, and she reiterated the example of the friends and family from her hometown who would be opposed to these practices. Of these people, however, “I guess I can send good thoughts toward them anyway.”

Why CARE “Worked”

CARE worked for Allison primarily because of its group support element: “I feel like I need to be pushed within a group, and I feel like I need to be led at this point in my mindfulness experience.” She said that she can certainly practice mindfulness techniques as an individual, but that she would “get more out of it” if she were in a group, and cited the example of a yoga teacher in front of her making her go through the motions as being most effective in bolstering her yoga practice. Of this group dynamic, Allison enjoyed having teachers from different grade levels, and not just the elementary level. She thought that it was pretty powerful to hear people’s experiences from the middle and high school level because she had no exposure to these years except from her own personal

experiences, and “it’s cool to hear what teachers nowadays are going through with kids and their issues.” She was also touched by how much these middle and high school teachers wanted to help their students with challenging adolescent issues, issues that Allison does not encounter as a third grade teacher.

In addition to the group support, Allison also liked that time was set aside for her to really enter into the experience. As mentioned earlier, teachers often do not have a moment to even sit, let alone breathe, contemplate, and meditate. Leaving the retreat, she was concerned that time would be a real factor in allowing her to implement these techniques most fruitfully into her personal life. In addition to time, Allison added another barrier: “and I guess even sometimes my mindset. I’m constantly being like, ‘Well, I need to do this. I want to do that, but there’s something else I need to do.’ So I guess prioritization maybe is a barrier.” The options she would weigh would be choosing between helping herself to be more centered, and helping others, even though, she admitted, the helping of herself would benefit others in the long run. Time and mindset seem to be two barriers for Allison moving forward, but the initial retreat appeared to be “just the right amount of time” to accomplish everything that she wanted to accomplish.

At the end of the retreat, participants had an opportunity to write a notecard to themselves that would be sent by the facilitators at a later date. Allison remembered that she wrote, “Try to practice daily, but don’t beat yourself up if you can’t.” The outward-focused, “impact others” theme also pops up in what she wrote next. She states that she also wrote: “Allison, don’t be afraid to be yourself and remember that taking care of yourself is the most important thing you should be doing, and that you can impact the lives of others.”

A rather substantial way that CARE might have affected Allison, though, has to do with her plans for next year. As stated earlier, she will not return to her teaching post and is in the process of sending out applications for doctoral programs in education. Finally, Allison would like to help out with CARE in the future, in one of several roles. Allison stated that she would be interested in being trained to facilitate CARE. She was also interested in the research component and wanted to help mindful-

ness experts analyze data on student outcomes, an aspect of the conceptual frame that is beginning to be studied in more depth.

Finding #2: Influence of Intervention at Five-Month Follow-Up

“So there’s been several different mindfulness groups going on, and they all kind of have some of the same people in it. . . . So it’s really bringing the whole mindfulness and education groups together in one spot.”

Recall Allison wrote to herself that she should try and practice daily, but not to “beat herself up” if she could not. At the five-month follow-up, she admitted that she had not been able to sustain an individual meditation practice but that she had found ways to “notice it” when it had worked its way into her everyday activities. Of this awareness, she stated, “I found that practicing on a more routine basis was really stressful for me; I would start to kind of rebel against it because I didn’t want it to be one more checklist thing to do, mindfulness.” Instead, any moment she found herself practicing either mindful eating or mindful walking, she would notice it “and then I give myself a little congratulation for it, like, ‘Good. You’re doing this without really aiming to do it.’ It’s just becoming part of who you are and what you do to help your life.”

Sustainment Efforts

At the five-month follow-up, Allison had found four different groups within the county that helped her practice, gain new ideas, and network with other mindfulness practitioners, and this section will discuss them.

Yoga4Schools. At our five-month interview, Allison had just finished her training with Yoga4Schools. She spoke of how she really enjoyed it and how it helped her combine the mindfulness techniques she learned at CARE with new movement techniques that she could teach her third graders. Recall she had initially taught an after-school yoga club once a month for two hours to third through fifth graders. Because of this training, she was now able to bring it into her regular classroom as a daily activity. She spoke of how it had helped her students, “It’s really great for transition periods, or if I’m noticing they’re doing a really long project and our stamina is waning and we just need to get up and do something to get refocused.”

The Yoga4Schools program ran like a typical yoga teacher training program. It was a ten-week process of twice-weekly meetings where participants learned yoga poses, yogic breathing, and techniques to sequence and structure a class. Yoga4Schools explains their missions as “a great way for teachers to further bond with their students and also for the teachers to relieve their own stress.” Allison stated that the different techniques she had learned “matched very well” with the mindfulness she had learned at CARE.

Allison had much to say about how these methodologies may have impacted her classroom. She came up with the idea of “brain breaks” that they could take during the standardized state test in the spring. She taught her students deep breathing, how to give themselves little massages, and how to lay their head down and close their eyes if a reading passage became too onerous. She also taught them “body breaks,” e.g., how to leave the classroom and do wall push-ups and pacing, which she felt was a form of mindful walking. Allison posited that these techniques may have impacted upon her students’ test scores: “I definitely had some surprises with some of my friends that I thought would not pass. And they ended up squeaking by, and I think it could be because of those techniques that they used during their test to take a break.” She felt that her students “did a really nice job self-regulating themselves.”

Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. Allison also had the opportunity to attend a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course over the spring semester. MBSR (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) is typically taught to adults as a short course, for three to four hours a week for eight weeks. Her local university’s Mindfulness Center offered the class to teachers for a fee of \$395. Allison described her cohort as more of a book club environment, where teachers also read Jon Kabat-Zinn’s *Mindfulness for Beginners* and offered various interpretations on it while practicing several types of MBSR activities. It was held on Thursday evenings at a local middle school. When I asked how she knew about this program, Allison told me that she found out about it through her county’s human resources department, as they periodically send out PD notices to their employees. Allison commented that even though the protocol was designed to

alleviate the stress of adults (much like CARE), she often would discuss with her MBSR cohort (all of whom were teachers like herself) ways to bring these strategies into the classroom.

CARE follow-ups. In the months following the initial retreat, the CARE facilitators offered monthly potlucks for fellowship and additional practice. These follow-ups began in February and ended in May for a total of four sessions. At the end of the retreat, the facilitator stated that she was grateful she had the resources of her university to carry out these types of retreats, and the group affirmed they wanted to continue meeting. The follow-ups were held on Sundays from 12:00-3:00 p.m. and began with a potluck lunch. Of these retreats, Allison said, "I've been to two. One of them I couldn't go to because of an illness, and another one due to family being up here. But, the other two were remarkable." Even though CARE was a retreat meant singularly for the teacher, these informal monthly meetings, according to the county's PD page who advertised them, were "an opportunity for teachers to deepen their personal mindfulness practice as well as learn ways to weave mindful practices into the classroom." Finally, the follow-ups were opened to all teachers in the county, not just those who had participated in CARE.

Farm daylong retreat. Finally, Allison attended a daylong retreat that is offered periodically to teachers in the county. This retreat typically lasted from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., and participants indicated in advance the type of sessions they would attend, either mindfulness for use personally, professionally, or specifically with their students. The retreat was located on a sprawling farm, and participants were encouraged to arrive early and depart later to enjoy some contemplative time in nature. The second half of the retreat, during lunch and subsequent breaks, was conducted in silence, and participants were asked to depart silently to honor the mindfulness that had been cultivated during their day of reflection. Allison told me the participants had been people she recognized from CARE, but also some new faces who did not attend CARE.

Even with these four groups and various overlap between them, there had not been as much cohesion across the groups as she would like. Allison told me, "I feel like there's not as much unity. They're supportive of each other, but I feel like some people don't know each other,

and if there were more ways to make contacts, it would be easier to hold each other accountable.” If this unity happened, and everyone were “more on one page,” Allison thought it “would really show [her county’s school district] that people are truly dedicated to this.”

Why Sustainment Efforts “Worked”

Allison’s Sustainment Efforts worked for her because they provided some accountability measures and support structures for enhancing a practice she found difficult to accomplish on her own. It also gave her a positive outlet of PD support that she did not always find at her individual school site. The next section will detail each of these aspects in kind, along with some of Allison’s musings on PD.

This four-part continuance provided an accountability structure that supported her mindfulness both personally and professionally. Each group had a slightly different focus on whom the beneficiaries were; for example, the MBSR course was an individual self-care protocol, while the Yoga4Schools was primarily student-focused. The retreat at the farm and the CARE Follow-Ups were a blend of both. According to Allison, the farm retreat facilitator “did a great job of setting it up where we have a little survey to fill out to indicate choice of mindfulness for self, classroom, or movement.” Teachers were given autonomy and choice on which they wished to focus.

Additionally, Allison’s Sustainment Efforts gave her a group of positive peers with whom to interact, apart from the teachers at her school. Allison spoke in both interviews of the negativity that often occurred in her teacher faculty lounges: “Teachers typically want to talk shop, they want to talk about what’s going on in the school. . . . It’s not about the positive things we’ve done—it’s more about the negatives.” On the topic of this negativity, Allison had found herself distancing herself from it after the CARE retreat. “Anytime I’m around negativity, I start to shut down, and then I’m like, ‘You know what? I need to get away from this because it’s not good for my well-being and what I believe in and what I’m practicing now.’” She maintained that she had even gone so far as to change the topic of the conversation on several occasions. When faculty meetings or shared lunch space become negative, Allison might suggest, “Let’s talk

about this instead of everything that's wrong. Let's talk about this positive project we just did with the kids." She found that she's more mindful of the tenor of teacher conversations now and her role in creating a more positive environment in the rest of her school.

Recall that the county in which Allison taught might be considered one already favorable to the tenets of mindfulness; it housed a major university and research center dedicated to it. Allison, however, believed it could be more fully embraced by the county school system. She told me, "If this could be a completely county-funded initiative, I think teachers would be better able to regulate their emotions, show compassion, and really use the mindfulness techniques." She told me how the county had already endorsed "Responsive Classroom," a program developed for use in the early elementary grades to help students learn social and emotional skills. Allison stated that she was required to attend a week-long training in Responsive Classroom before she began teaching and felt that CARE should be held to the same training category.

Allison also had some thoughts on introducing mindfulness for the first time to "newbies." Allison said she would "love to have a more condensed, shortened version of CARE that could be given during an hour PD at the school." After this initial introduction, Allison would like to see it made more accessible for teachers. She told me, "A lot of teachers won't make time for themselves. And so, if there was a free opportunity after school to practice. . . I think more people would be willing to do it." Along with accessibility, Allison believed regularity was key. She believed the retreats should be followed up "maybe once a month at salons with a group share about how mindfulness is going in your own life and how it's going in your classroom." Reflecting, however, on how such a group share might be asking too much for novices or those resistant to the idea, she opined that the first year would be better used developing skills for the teacher first and that perhaps during the second year "as long as they're growing in their own personal practice," they could start to bring it into their classrooms.

I wondered how the county might get on board with this program, and Allison answered, "I think it would have to show enough positive impact on students." Allison thought that "it's a no-brainer" that if teach-

ers are less stressed and experiencing better well-being, then “they will naturally transfer that good energy to their students.” She admitted that student output data had always been, and likely always will be in an era of high-stakes accountability, the deciding factor for the “higher-ups.” She was eager for next phases of research that will showcase student effects data.

Allison expressed two possible avenues for her mindfulness practice moving forward, namely, that she would like to develop more of a personal practice outside of a group, and she would also like to help mindfulness researchers with the study, dissemination, and facilitation of CARE in the future. As stated previously, Allison planned to begin her doctorate in education at the local university the following year. She anticipated a “very stressful higher education environment” and realized that “my own personal well-being and mindfulness training is going to be a huge thing so that I can stay very calm.” She hoped to develop more robust individual mindful movement practices such as yoga, mindful eating, and mindful walking and to rely less upon outside sources of support, most especially since she will no longer be a county teacher with access to their mindfulness PD offerings. In the long run for her doctorate degree, Allison plans to “infuse some mindfulness” into her research, and she expressed interest in helping “on the side with CARE, either to help train facilitators or to go on trips just to help [the facilitator] organize things.” She would fulfill such a role “because I really and truly believe that CARE is a phenomenal project, and it really does help educators.”

Summary of Key Findings

In this case study, I have considered how Allison perceived a mindfulness intervention weekend workshop and how she described its influence on her life. My first research question asked how Allison perceived the CARE retreat. With her expectations met, she told me CARE was a good reminder of what she already knew about mindfulness along with useful suggestions on how to extend it further. The most helpful aspect of CARE came by way of all the “good outward positive thinking” and the realization that she could project mindfulness onto others. CARE seemed to work for her on account of the group dynamic and the time

dedicated for an amalgamation and practice of all the techniques. Leaving the retreat, she made a contract with herself that she would “try to practice daily” but not berate herself if she did not.

My second research question asked how Allison described the influence of participation in the intervention. At the five-month follow-up, Allison had successfully networked through the county’s array of mindfulness PD activities and had become a fixture in four of them. In so doing, she met regularly outside of school time with these four different groups, two of which offered her a credential. Allison’s Sustainment Efforts worked for her because of its accountability structures and the positive environment it created. Finally, Allison shared ideas on how to spread mindfulness to more teachers, expressed an interest in helping CARE to grow, and planned to incorporate elements of mindfulness into her education studies at the doctorate level.

Discussion

Allison enjoyed her time at the CARE retreat such that she had much to report about how useful it was and why it was a successful weekend for her. Entertaining rival explanations, however, forces one to consider why CARE, as a weekend workshop alone, might not have been successful, or why it might not have worked for a different sample. From the literature, it would appear that CARE also exhibits some elements of “low-quality” PD. In the last two decades, research has defined a new paradigm for PD—one that rejects the ineffective “drive-by” workshop model of the past—in favor of more powerful opportunities (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Furthermore, many of these PD experiences remain as “episodic updates on information delivered in a didactic manner, separated from engagement with authentic work experiences” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 921). According to Leiberman and Miller (2001), few reform initiatives like this model are ever systemic, and they result in short-term gains rather than building a capacity for continuous improvement. This is why innovations tend to appear and disappear with predictable regularity, such that new techniques keep occurring again, again, and again (Cuban, 1990). Although these traditional forms of PD are still quite common, they are widely criticized as being ineffective in

providing teachers with sufficient time, activities, and content necessary for increasing their knowledge and fostering meaningful changes in classroom practice (Garet et al., 2001). Indeed, CARE was a “one-shot” workshop model. It trained teachers in new techniques and then set them free without support, and it expected teachers to make changes in isolation (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Add to that the “sage on a stage,” the CARE facilitator who was there administering it, and this intervention has many of the trappings of a low-quality PD experience, albeit a feel-good one.

While the CARE retreat displayed some characteristics of low-quality PD, it still seemed to energize and motivate Allison to want to make mindful changes in her personal and professional lives, at least during the times I observed and interviewed her. Here an interesting observation of the data should be noted: Allison left the retreat with intentions of beginning a particular practice; she wanted to “try to practice daily.” However, at the five-month follow-up, Allison found that she would “rebel” against forcing herself to practice meditation daily on her own. What ultimately helped her?

The fact that Allison kept up with some aspects of what was taught through CARE was immensely interesting to me. Having participated in mindfulness retreats over the years, I knew firsthand how difficult it is to sustain these practices once the exciting weekend ends, the participant returns to life as usual, and support structures dwindle. Furthermore, the aforementioned PD literature led me to speculate that such a traditional, episodic approach might lead to merely a “flash in the pan” fling with mindfulness on the part of many of the participants. Allison, however, formed, joined, or reimagined various mindfulness communities within the county’s PD offerings, and then relied upon the support of these communities for accountability. Allison traveled to a different location, outside of school hours and on her own time, for night and weekend gatherings. Her various groups met weekly for 10 weeks (Yoga4Schools), weekly for eight weeks (MBSR), monthly for two of the four sessions (CARE follow-ups), and once per semester (daylong at the farm). While the CARE follow-ups and the farm retreat were free and open to all teachers in the county, the Yoga4School and MBSR trainings were cre-

deniated programs requiring a fee. The support of a community, then, continued to be an important theme for Allison past the CARE weekend.

The focus of Allison's Sustainment Efforts should also be considered, and particularly whether these activities were undertaken to benefit her solely, her students, or a combination of the two. Allison's various groups appear to be a combination of the two. She even mentioned a dilemma she felt when deciding between a mindfulness practice for herself versus one for her students. Research by MacDonald and Shirley (2009) confirms that teachers experience a tension between engaging in restorative practices for themselves and meeting the endless needs of their students.

Sustainment Efforts

Allison's Sustainment Efforts worked for her because of the accountability structures and the positive environment it provided outside of a sometimes toxic school climate. Furthermore, it was mutually beneficial to her and her students, and as welcomed byproduct, the techniques proved useful as a classroom management tool.

Keeping up with a mindfulness practice with the help of others brought Allison some success with CARE. These findings are consistent with, and provide confirmation of, some of the literature on "high-quality" PD. Almost all the recent literature on teacher learning and professional development calls for professional development that is sustained over time (Garet et al., 2009). As stated earlier, the traditional episodic, fragmented approach does not allow for rigorous, cumulative learning (Knapp, 2003). Furthermore, Hawley and Valli (2007) contend that PD should be continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning, including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives. We know that learners simply need the time to strengthen their knowledge and practices by participating in communities in which they work on their knowledge over time, "allowing themselves enough time to develop norms for interaction, navigate tensions and conflict within the group, and build confidence to make dilemmas of practice public" (Kazemi & Franke, 2003, p. 5).

CARE, as a weekend workshop alone, may not have had as big of an impact upon Allison if she did not sustain her practice. That is, CARE could have been like any fond old memory of a relaxing experience, no different from, say, spending a weekend at a bed and breakfast in wine country. Allison, however, grew her mindfulness practices over the course of five months: she joined four different mindfulness groups, though admittedly she was scheduled to attend the Yoga4Schools program prior to CARE. Was this cumulative PD learning precisely what the CARE facilitators had envisioned for participants upon their missioning of them that Sunday afternoon? I cannot say, but in actuality, when considering mindfulness as a form of educator renewal undertaken to prevent the burnout cascade, it might not even matter. That is, if we are working off the premise that mindfulness has the health benefits and classroom renewal properties posited in both the extant literature and conceptual framework for this study, *how* the participants practice mindfulness might not be as important as the fact *that* they practice mindfulness.

Mindfulness Professional Learning Communities

Taken together, the data described here point to the effectiveness of sustained, experiential, and collaborative communal structures as important elements to mindfulness PD. An approach that meets these criteria, and one that has been increasingly featured in the literature, is the professional learning community (PLC). In this model, teachers work together and engage in continual dialogue to examine practice and to develop and implement more effective strategies (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Teachers in PLCs also learn about, try out, and reflect on new practices in their specific context, sharing their individual knowledge and expertise (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

Considering Allison's "Musings on Professional Development," I learned that Allison wanted a session at CARE to discuss ways to bring mindfulness techniques to students, while also recommending a "shot" of mindfulness to be administered to teachers with the idea of monthly "check-ins" at salons. Their collective wisdom on mindfulness PD is redolent of the aforementioned definitions of a PLC. Moreover, Allison felt that this type of PD should be mandatory, similar to the county's mandated weeklong Responsive Classroom training.

The ad hoc monthly potluck follow-ups may be a form of a mindfulness PLC in the making as well as a nice encapsulation of Allison's musings on PD. The original CARE program does not include these group follow-ups; participants instead receive intersession coaching calls, and once the final booster session is complete, the intervention ends and teachers return to their individual teaching sites. Perhaps having a time and place for teachers to assemble on a regular basis to practice CARE techniques, receive guidance from external sources with necessary resources and new perspectives (Hawley & Valli, 2007), and support one another in incorporating mindfulness more fully into their professional lives might be the direction CARE and other MBIs move in order to maximize educator renewal, consistent with the literature on high-quality PD.

Limitations

Methodological limitations are part of all research, and this study is no exception. The case study of one participant is obviously small; therefore, it is important to note that wide generalizability was not the aim of this study. Case studies, according to Stake (1995), are undertaken to "make the case understandable" by providing the reader opportunities for "vicarious experience" (p. 86). Another limitation to this study is that the participant was motivated, self-selected into the study, and received the intervention for free. Furthermore, the researcher conducted several interviews after playing an active role as participant-observer during the intervention and was thus present throughout the entire retreat weekend. Obviously meeting the researcher in a retreat setting and then knowing this person would follow up at various points afterward could have affected the participant's experiences and/or what she decided to share. Finally, this study may have benefited from another, longer follow-up data collection to see if these effects continued to hold over time, not just at a five-month follow-up. Truer longitudinal studies over multiple-year time periods would indeed help move the MBI PD literature forward.

Conclusion

Allison described the influence of CARE through her ability to adapt, rather than adopt, elements of the CARE training to fit her individual and

school contexts. She also maintained Sustainment Efforts through ongoing support mechanisms over the course of five months. I posit that CARE worked for Allison because, in addition to CARE's workshop format, she herself designed sustainability structures in which she was able to practice on an ongoing basis. Based on this study's results, I speculate that mindfulness PLCs might be a promising next step for the field since they build upon elements of both the mindfulness literature, which suggests the importance of practice (Grossman et al., 2004; Meiklejohn et al., 2012), and the PD literature, which posits the effectiveness of sustained, collaborative PD opportunities as critical to teacher growth (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Hawley & Valli, 2007; Kazemi & Franke, 2003).

This study utilized a well-established MBI, Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE), to examine teachers' perceptions and utilizations of mindfulness as a professional development protocol. The teacher under consideration in this study has shown that learning and sustaining mindfulness practices is a personal process, but she also demonstrated that certain aspects of adaptability, community, and university-sanctioned support structures were important at the intervention and through continual maintenance of the measures at a five-month follow-up. This knowledge offers a foundation for continued research of its kind on more participants, more MBIs, and in more parts of the country. My hope is that through a richer understanding of participants' perceptions and sustainment of MBIs, researchers and program administrators can better support and advocate for those who wish to make mindfulness a more permanent practice.

References

- Albrecht, N. J., Albrecht, P. M., & Cohen, M. (2012). Mindfully teaching in the classroom: A literature review. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 37*(12).
- Benn, R., Akiva, T., Arel, S., & Roeser, R. W. (2012). Mindfulness training effects for parents and educators of children with special needs. *Developmental Psychology, 48*(5), 1476.

- Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. H. (2002). *Trust in Schools: A core resource for improvement*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. O. (2009). *Organizing school for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. University of Chicago Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Csaszar, I. E., Curry, J. R., & Lastrapes, R. E. (2018). Effects of loving kindness meditation on student teachers' reported levels of stress and empathy. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 45(4), 93-116.
- Darling-Hammond, L. & Richardson, N. (2009). Research review/teacher learning: What matters? *How Teachers Learn*, 66(5), 46-53.
- Emerson, L. M., Leyland, A., Hudson, K., Rowse, G., Hanley, P., & Hugh-Jones, S. (2017). Teaching mindfulness to teachers: A systematic review and narrative synthesis. *Mindfulness*, 8, 1136-1149.
- Flook, L., Goldberg, S. B., Pinger, L., Bonus, K., & Davidson, R. J. (2013). Mindfulness for teachers: A pilot study to assess effects on stress, burnout, and teaching efficacy. *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 7(3), 182-195.
- Frank, J. L., Reibel, D., Broderick, P., Cantrell, T., & Metz, S. (2015). The effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction on educator stress and well-being: Results from a pilot study. *Mindfulness*, 6(2), 208-216.
- Garet, M., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4), 915-945.
- Garrison Institute. (2014). *Facilitator Manual: CARE for Teachers (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education)*.
- Garrison Institute. (2014). *Participant Workbook: CARE for Teachers (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education)*.

- Hawley, W. D., & Valli, L. (2007). Design principles for learner-centered professional development. In W. D. Hawley & D. Rollie (Eds.), *The keys to effective schools: Educational reform as continuous improvement* (pp. 117-137). Corwin Press.
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research, 79*, 491-525.
- Jennings, P. A., Frank, J. L., Snowberg, K. E., Coccia, M. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2013). Improving classroom learning environments by cultivating awareness and resilience in education (CARE): Results of a randomized controlled trial. *School Psychology Quarterly, 28*(4), 374-390.
- Jennings, P. A., Snowberg, K. E., Coccia, M. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2011). Improving classroom learning environments by cultivating awareness and resiliency in education (CARE): Results of two pilot studies. *Journal of Classroom Interactions, 46*(1), 37-48.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Delacorte.
- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 10*(2), 144-156.
- Kazemi, E., & Franke, M. L. (2003). *Using student work to support professional development in elementary mathematics*. University of Washington, Center for Teaching and Policy.
- Kemeny, M. E., Foltz, C., Cavanagh, J. F., Cullen, M., Giese-Davis, J., Jennings, P., ... & Ekman, P. (2012). Contemplative/emotion training reduces negative emotional behaviour and promotes prosocial responses. *Emotion, 12*(2), 338.
- Kennedy, M. M. (2005). *Inside teaching*. Harvard University Press.
- Knapp, M. S. (2003). The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers' professional relations. *Teacher College Record, 91*(4), 509-536.

- Lieberman, A., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1992). Networks for educational change: Powerful and problematic. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 73, 673-677.
- Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (Eds.). (2008). *Teachers in professional communities: Improving teaching and learning*. Teachers College Press.
- Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2006). *Building school-based learning communities: Professional strategies to improve student achievement*. Teachers College Press.
- Meiklejohn, J., Phillips, C., Freedman, M. L., Griffin, M. L., Biegel, G., Roach, A., . . . Soloway, G. (2012). Integrating mindfulness training into K-12 education: Fostering the resilience of teachers and students. *Mindfulness*, 3(4), 291-307.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey Bass.
- Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. Univ of California Press.
- Patton, M. (1990). Critical trade-offs in evaluation design. In *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (pp. 162-186). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Poulin, P. A., Mackenzie, C. S., Soloway, G., & Karayolas, E. (2008). Mindfulness training as an evidenced-based approach to reducing stress and promoting well-being among human services professionals. *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*, 46(2), 72-80.
- Roeser, R. W., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Jha, A., Cullen, M., Wallace, L., Wilensky, R., . . . Harrison, J. (2013). Mindfulness training and reductions in teacher stress and burnout: Results from two randomized, wait-list-control field trials. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(3), 787.
- Roeser, R. W., Skinner, E., Beers, J., & Jennings, P. A. (2012). Mindfulness training and teachers' professional development: An emerging area of research and practice. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), 167-173.

- Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Schussler, D. L., Jennings, P. A., Sharp, J. E., & Frank, J. L. (2016). Improving teacher awareness and well-being through CARE: A qualitative analysis of the underlying mechanisms. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 130–142.
- Schussler, D. L., Deweese, A., Rasheed, D., Demauro, A., Brown, J., Greenberg, M., & Jennings, P. A. (2018). Stress and release: Case studies of teacher resilience following a mindfulness-based intervention. *American Journal of Education*, 125(1), 1–28.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Taylor, C., Harrison, J., Haimovitz, K., Oberle, E., Thomson, K., Schonert-Reichl, K., & Roeser, R.W. (2016). Examining ways that a mindfulness-based intervention reduces stress in public school teachers: A mixed-methods study. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 115–129.
- Yin, R. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Sage Publications, Inc.