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Educating the Whole Child: Using a Holistic Education Approach and Mindfulness in the Classroom

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Using a Holistic Education Approach and Mindfulness in the Classroom

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Dedication

To my students, past, present, and future, learning and growing alongside of you has been my source of inspiration to make the educational experience a better one for all people. And for my son, Trey, who I was pregnant with me during my final semester as a graduate student. When I closed my eyes and imagined your future classroom, I thought of what I would wish for you, and for all students, it has translated into this thesis. My son, thank you for being a light in my life, and allowing me to share that light with others.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all of my former teachers, especially my professors Transformative Education and Social Change (TESC) program who in some way touched my life. Whether it was a first-grade teacher or a graduate professor, you made me believe in myself and encouraged my love for learning. I feel so fortunate to now pass that onto other students. I would also like to acknowledge my program advisor and thesis advisor Dr. Dana Morrison whose guidance, support, and mentorship set exceptional standards for success. Thank to my family for your support and love throughout the last two years to complete this program. I have immense gratitude for my friends and colleagues who have cheered me on in this process. All of this encouragement kept me going. And for my partner, Peter, who has helped me to embody these practices I present for myself and my students. I am a better version of myself for loving you.

Abstract

Throughout this thesis I will outline how the current school system creates considerable gaps in developing happy, healthy, and fulfilled individuals. Since I believe the purpose of a democratic education is to help all people reach some level of self-actualization, I will explore how schools can and should tend to the basic needs of children as a foundation for their learning experience. By investigating the purpose of schools and the purpose of educators, I will argue the importance of taking education beyond the world of academics to tend to the physical, emotional, and social bodies of all students and the positive repercussions of doing so. I will explore why our educational system is established to place so much emphasis on academia, rigor, and testing and expose inequities for our students. I will further expose this issue and its impact on students' mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being through theoretical frameworks, historical and literary reviews. Finally, I will propose a three-step intervention system that creates a shift for preservice teachers, existing teachers, and students. I will then further explore a mindfulness-based intervention for teachers through on a professional development course for existing educators.

Keywords: holistic education, mindfulness, well-being, mental health literacy, wellness

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Chapter One

Introduction

I recently took the Myer-Brigg's 16 Personality Test, which revealed I am *The Protagonist*. In short, The Protagonist falls under the personality category of a Diplomat. Like most good diplomats, The Protagonist personality type embraces opportunities that have a positive impact on the world. Protagonists are natural born leaders who use their moral compass to guide their way; often choosing what is right and just over the path of least resistance. They are empathetic, optimistic, and passionate. Many great leaders whom I admire identify as The Protagonist personality, Barack Obama, Maya Angelou, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and even the fictional character, Albus Dumbledore, from Harry Potter (Personality Max, 2022).

Reading these results, I smiled to myself, recalling my first core academic memory. During parent-teacher conferences, my first-grade teacher, Ms. Lane, told my parents I would likely be the first female president. I brightly remember grabbing my parents' hands to escort them to my desk where I displayed a beautifully organized row of colored pencils, neatly stacked notebooks, and stickers I had earned. My teacher shared that I was organized, a natural leader, and she was particularly impressed by how I always made sure the group included our classmates with learning differences. My six-year-old self was quite impressed with herself. A diplomat, indeed.

My School Experience

A love of learning was instilled in me as a child. My mom worked in education for most of my life and brought many of her teacher-ism into our home. For this, I am eternally grateful. As a young child many of my afternoons paralleled a preschool routine. My mom

offered in age-appropriate academics, set up arts and crafts projects, showed me how to cook, taught my sister and I how do basic chores, taught us French vocabulary, and encouraged free play as a modality of learning. In my home, learning was engaging, hands-on, and valued.

My early home life translated to a very positive elementary experience for me. As a young learner I was bright, motivated, and involved. I found great success in the school settling through academics, social endeavors, and athletics. I thrived in the well-rounded school day that offered time for different methods of play and learning. I was excited to attend school each day. I recall feeling supported by my teachers, confident in my abilities, and connected to my peers.

As an early adolescent, however, my learning experience shifted. At home, I encountered a series of hardships that I was ill-equipped to handle. My parents separated and got back together numerous times, eventually divorcing and moving our family various times in the process. My grandmother, with whom we spent time with weekly, was diagnosed with dementia and deteriorating quickly. And my mom and sister were both active addicts. The instability in my home negatively impacted all realms of my life.

I slowly began to disengage with the schooling experience. First, I quit most of my academic and social extracurricular activities, one-by-one I dropped out each of my four sports teams, and eventually I started skipping classes. As someone who is trained in and has practiced in secondary education, I have seen how secondary schooling focuses more heavily on academic rigor and holds less space for the development of the whole child, including their emotional, social, and physical wellbeing. In subsequent chapters, I will refer to these essential entities of each induvial as the four bodies; humans are comprised of

physical, social, emotional, and mental bodies. I firmly believe that my school's lack of focus in supporting me as a 'whole student,' and not just an academic being, contributed to my struggles during this time.

During my junior year in high school, I was diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and ADHD. Due to my lack of engagement with schooling, I was at-risk for not graduating with my projected class. I existed in survival mode, constantly wondering if I was safe. Abraham Maslow's framework of the *Hierarchy of Needs* highlights how humans must have their physiological and safety needs met before they can focus on higher level thinking tasks (Block, 2011). Therefore, it makes sense why I no longer valued or prioritized my learning. School was no longer a safe space for me, but another place that I felt like a failure.

After a meeting with my principal and school counselors, I was placed in my school's alternative program for my senior year. The Bridges program allowed me to complete all the same coursework as assigned in regular senior classes without attending those courses in person. The Bridges Program was held in a separate part of this school with roughly 8 to 20 other students. Courses were offered by two teachers, each who specialized in different subject areas and focused on building relationships with students. The small class size and one-on-one support created a classroom community I could thrive in socially, physically, emotionally, *and* academically. The whole being, my four bodies, were supported and looked after.

In addition to the academic curriculum, the program taught about mental health, emotional regulation, resilience, how to manage stressful situations, promoted building healthy relationships, and provided tools to stay focused and motivated. The teachers encouraged learning outside of the classroom, community engagement, and learning in

public spaces. The teachers in this program drastically shifted my life; they restored my love for learning, equipped me tools for academic success, and provided the emotional support I needed to thrive academically, but also as a well-adjusted individual.

My Professional Experience

Upon my high school graduation, I was inspired to study secondary education English in college. I respected the positive impact my teachers had on me in my early years as a learner and again in my senior year. Most importantly, I studied education because I often wondered what would have happened if one of my teachers intervened early on in my struggle. I pondered how students could benefit from a school curriculum that provided tools to seek help. But mostly, I chose to enter the field of education because I believe that education is the most powerful tool to positively impact the lives of students.

I credit a great deal of my success to two things that occurred during my last years of high school: The Bridges Program and beginning a mindfulness practice. The skills I learned by practicing mindfulness have played an integral role in the woman I am today. I dove more deeply into mindfulness, yoga, and meditation in my early twenties. These practices provided a time and space for me to feel safe within my body, practice gratitude, and become more present in my life. Similar to feeling inspired to become a teacher because of the positive impact of my educators, I developed a desire to teach mindfulness to others. I enrolled in a yoga teacher training while pursuing my undergraduate degree in education. I saw the classroom as a wonderful place to bring mindfulness. Additionally, teaching yoga empowered me to be an influential teacher. Getting experience as a yoga instructor helped me to become comfortable conveying complex information, lesson planning, and leading groups of people.

My personal experience, as both a successful learner and a struggling student, impacted the trajectory of my professional career. Following college graduation, I worked for two wilderness therapy programs for at-risk teens. These programs were an alternative to juvenile detention or rehabilitation centers. I suppose I felt called to working with teens who were labeled “at-risk” like I was. While both programs hired me as an educator, my daily teachings focused mainly on non-cognitive development. We certainly used our texts as a guide, however, most of our assignments surrounded personal reflection, developing empowering skills, and community building. All our activities used holistic approach to health, learning, and healing, where all aspects hold equal weight, and none take precedent over any other. In other words, the central focus of learning and development was not only on cognition, but also on emotional awareness and progression.

Following my time in wilderness therapy, I worked in a traditional high school setting for four years. Here I worked with a range of students and curriculum from honors sophomore English, to managing a yearbook staff, to co-running our alternative schooling program serving students 9-12. Despite these classes having much more defined curriculum, I felt the importance of educating the whole child as I believe education is about people first and content second.

Therefore, I integrated parts of my past teaching experience as both an educator and yoga instructor into the classroom. Mindfulness and social emotional learning became a part of our daily routine.

My desire to offer support for the whole child comes both from my own experience as a learner and my observations as an educator. In my time as a teacher, I witnessed a similar pattern of students disengaging with academia and/or their passions due to emotional

turbulence. Sometimes this detachment was caused by a minor let-down like a disagreement with a friend. But other times, the issues were much larger like systemic challenges or a larger trauma. Regardless how big or small the problems my students face is, I made a commitment to including well-being practices daily. I believe that my job as an educator is to teach humans beings above teaching their curriculum, which means I need to take time to tend them as people not just as learners. I saw a positive response to mindfulness in the classroom. Students were generally less distracted, our classroom culture felt more peaceful and respectful, and overall we experienced much fewer behavioral interruptions. My students responded positively to mindfulness and it optimistically influenced our classroom culture. I believe this occurred because mindfulness, as I will explore in chapter 3, has positive impact on all of the four bodies of an individual.

Bringing Mindfulness to Others

During my fourth year as a classroom teacher, I proposed to the Superintendent that I take my mindfulness practice outside of my classroom and offer it throughout our district. With some data collection, I was approved to travel to classrooms K-12 to offer mindfulness lessons tailored to the needs of students as identified by the teachers. I became a certified children-teen yoga teacher in 2018 with such intention in mind. I used this time to connect with students and provide them with tools to manage stress, identify their emotions, and feel comfortable in their bodies. My colleagues also appreciated the time as it was a space for them to practice self-care and to learn techniques for their students.

Later that year, I accepted the offer to work for a children's yoga studio specializing in teaching yoga in schools and training educators in mindfulness. For the next two years, I traveled to over thirty schools teaching yoga K-12 and offering professional development

for teachers around mindfulness in the classroom. During breaks and summer months, I offered workshops and continuing education courses for teachers and entire school districts. I also created mindfulness curriculum and published two books intended for all people who play a role in the lives of children.

I saw and felt a shift in the climate and culture of the classrooms that we served. Students and teachers alike applied the mindfulness tools they learned outside of our lessons, and the practices seeped into the lifestyle of the classroom. Some teachers criticized using instructional time to offer mindfulness and yoga. However, those who applied the practices noticed that using five minutes of class time for mindfulness often gave them more time on the back end since they were not using the time later to attend to behaviors or attention redirection. Perhaps most importantly, taking time out of instruction creates more meaningful connection with children. Former educator and author, Tom Berger (2020), reports, "taking a few minutes to personally greet every student at the beginning of the day, or the beginning of each class in middle and high school, can bolster students' feeling that they belong to a community of learners" (p. 1).

My Research Questions

The research questions that I am currently pursuing in my work are: How does holistic teaching impact both teachers' and students' mental, physical, and emotional well-being? How can educators address the needs of the whole, integrated people in their classrooms? How can teachers effectively translate mental health literacy and wellbeing curriculum into their classrooms to support the whole child? And, what tools can pre-service teacher education provide teachers so that they can effectively translate mental health

literacy and wellbeing curriculum into their classrooms to support student growth-socially, emotionally, and academically?

In this thesis, I will focus on how educating secondary classroom teachers in mental health literacy and practices that support mental, physical, and emotional well-being can positively impact student success.

The Role of the School, The Role of the Teacher

A student does not simply enter the classroom as an intellectual being. An entire being walks into the classroom as a political, social, emotional, communal, and personal entity. Schools need to be ready to support the child in their entirety.

People often view school as a place where children learn their basic academics and skills to become productive working members of society. However, schools hold much higher importance that that. The function and value of schools cannot be reduced to skills and grades. The COVID-19 pandemic proved this to be true. It has always been evident that there is an unequal distribution of resources across school districts based on their socioeconomic status. But the nation really felt how far the ripples of inequity were spread during the height of the pandemic—even beyond the world of academics. As stated by Dr. Bridget Long of Harvard, "You think about schools and academics, but what COVID really made clear was that schools do so much more than that…. A child's school, is social, emotional support. It's safety. It's the food system. It is health care" (as cited by Simon, 2021). Schools can and should offer much more than academia as they prepare children to be whole, autonomous, and critically minded citizens. Many children have their emotional needs met at home. However, that is not true for all children. The pandemic showed teachers

especially which children were dependent upon the care, nourishment, and affection they received that during the school day.

During the pandemic, I personally felt an even louder call to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of teachers and students. It seemed that everyone was, and perhaps still is, operating at their breaking point. Zooming into many classrooms in early 2020-2021 I, too, began to feel the weight of the need's schools were failing to meet for students and educators. Teachers echoed familiar words to me, "my kids are struggling, and I just do not know what to do to help them." Of course, teachers did not have the resources to support such hefty issues. As teacher preparation programming stands right now, it does not equip teachers with any tools to promote student wellbeing or address mental health supports.

Recognizing my limitations as one person, who can only pop into so many virtual classrooms or physical rooms a school year, I enrolled in M.S. of Transformative Education and Social Change at West Chester University. It was time to put my title as a Protagonist to work and begin to call for a well-rounded approach to educating all children.

Broad Introduction to my Thematic Concern

It is important that society pays close attention to the way in which schools are, and are not, tending to the needs of our children as they are creating the future every day. Our children are history in the making. We as the adults have a duty to tend to them. The role of education extends far beyond preparing students academically. Schools are a place to foster growth for the *whole* child. However, there are major gaps in current curriculum models to support the mental and emotional health and wellbeing of secondary-aged children.

It is estimated that 1 in 5 people experience a mental disorder during adolescence (Kutcher et al., 2015). It is also noteworthy that overall mental and emotional health are

impacted by much more than mental illness and are also significantly influenced by stress. In a survey across 72 countries, 66% of secondary-aged students reported academic stress alone having a negative impact on their overall well-being (Pascoe, 2020). Without these issues being tended to, a student experiencing any type of mental disorder, or even severe stress, will never be able to see their own academic and personal potential.

For decades schools have been working to support the whole child in education by introducing programs and interventions under a wide range of titles, most commonly using the term “social and emotional learning” (Weare, 2015). Even with all the resources and creation of programs, it seems that education still comes up short in supporting children outside of academia. This is because schools have been looking for resources outside of the teachers to actualize the importance of mental health and wellbeing. Teachers need to embody these practices.

According to Reinke (2011) the majority of school aged children who receive mental health services do so in school settings rather than through private groups. Currently, most of these mental health and well-being interventions in schools are provided by brining outside professional into the school communities (Ojio et al, 2015). This in turn leaves a considerable gap for students due to limited resources, funding, and time constraints. When school seek to find support outside of their walls it creates major issues. One of them being that not all schools have access to the same funding, programming, and scheduling. The other major issue that I see is that it creates a “not my problem” approach to teaching and learning. What this means is that teachers could choose to only see their job as offering curriculum and leave the other portions of growth and development to others.

This notion that it is not a school's, or teacher's, responsibility to support the whole child creates what psychologists have coined the "bystander effect" in which one feels a diffused responsibility to help another because they believe someone else will take care of it (Emeghara, 2020). The bystander effect is often used to describe why people do not intervene in a fight or a public altercation. Regardless of the setting, in the bystander effect, people will not provide support or help because they believe someone else will tend to the issue. When we are talking about applying the bystander effect to the wellbeing of children, it leaves *a lot* of space for kids to fall through the cracks.

Mental health is multifaceted and is influenced by a variety of factors, yet most people tend to associate the term mental health only with mental illness. Mental health is much more than mental illness; it also pertains to one's mental *wellness*. Most students do not currently have the knowledge, vocabulary, or resources to address and support their own mental health and wellbeing (Ojio et al, 2015). This becomes problematic to the overall development of individuals and perpetuates negative stigmas around mental health. The issue is exacerbated by the lack of training, resources and time teachers must address mental health, emotional health, and wellbeing for their students, as well as themselves.

Mental health literacy curriculums and wellness practices are most accessible, best received, and have the most long-lasting impact when facilitated by a trained classroom teacher and prioritized as part of the curricular work (Ojio et al, 2015). Providing training for educators in mental health and wellbeing practices is a sustainable and dynamic force of change for our schools, teachers, and students. When schools can provide teachers with training and support for mental health and wellbeing it creates a positive ripple effect. A

staff-led program can positively influence mental health in secondary schools in a variety of ways.

First, it can positively influence mental health by offering teachers training emphasizes self-care for teachers, many of whom report burnout. Teacher self-care and wellbeing is important as it can enhance in the student-teacher relationship, a known factor in student success. Additionally, when teachers are trained in mental health literacy and equipped with wellbeing practices serve as a positive role model of wellbeing for students. Finally, training teachers allows them to be an advocate for their student if they see signs of mental illness (Reinke, 2011).

Preview of Thesis

I am honored to share a powerful vision for education, and thus a positive vision for all children, with you throughout the remainder of this thesis. This dream is not something that I take lightly, nor is it something that I have envisioned alone. Throughout the course of my program in Transformative Education and Social Change, I have had the privilege of learning from professors and studying alongside of colleagues who too believe that our children deserve better- these have been my people and my inspiration for the last two years. Additionally, by dedicating myself to researching theories, practices, and interventions from masters in the field of education, sociology, and mental health, I have collected a great deal of research that supports my own experience and educational philosophy.

In chapter two I will share the frameworks that support my theory and philosophy of education- that the educational process should support the whole child. This chapter will define key terms used throughout my thesis, share my larger beliefs about the purpose of education, the goal of schools, and the role of educators in this process. Perhaps most

importantly, I will address the powerful influence education, and educators, has on children and why we must look at this through the lens of critical pedagogy.

Chapter three offers a historical and literature review of education and mental health in school-aged children. The chapter begins by explaining why our educational system operates as it does, how this system was, and continues to be oppressive, and the ways in which students are still negatively impacted by a "banking model" of education. I will then provide a brief history of how mental health in schools by summarizing literature reviews and exploring the history of concepts in holistic education. Finally, this chapter will share how current affairs such as Covid-19 and technology have deepened the need a holistic approach to education.

This all sets me up to share my intervention plan in chapter four. Here I will share a three-tiered system for implementing change in schools. The first intervention involves an educational course for preservice teachers. The second is a series of professional development courses for existing educators. Finally, my intervention includes a health course for high school ages children that addresses the importance of tending to the four bodies and well-being.

Chapter five will share how these programs can be implemented and evaluated. The implementation will offer the anticipated timeline for each program and resources needed for each. Assessment and evaluation of the program will be both formal and informal and will prioritize teacher and student testimony along with data.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will outline terms in my critical lexicon. These terms are found in order of use and importance. I will also outline my philosophy of education. This section will further my view on explain the purpose of education, the role of educators, and the responsibility of schools as it pertains to developing the whole person.

Critical Lexicon

Term	Definition	Relates to Thesis
Holistic	An approach to health, learning, and healing where all aspects hold equal weight.	A holistic approach to education honors the interconnectedness of all aspects of the student (social, emotional, political, socioeconomic, identity, and so on) as influential and integral parts of their learning and growing process. Holistic education is the philosophy of nurturing the whole child beyond academics (American University, 2020).
Mental Health	One's condition as it relates to psychological, emotional, and social well-being.	Mental health is the state of one's internal being. One can have good mental health, poor mental health, or mental illness. Mental illness is diagnosed by a disorder- while poor mental health is typically self-diagnosed without the appearance of a mood, anxiety, personality, or psychotic disorder. Most people, especially children and teens, are unaware of

		their own mental state and require explicit education on how to have good mental health. Therefore, to support the students holistically, schools, and their workers, needs to be aware of mental health (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).
Mental Health Literacy	The knowledge of mental health, mental health disorders, and mental wellness. Mental Health Literacy (MHL) is built on four pillars: a) understanding how to optimize and maintain good mental health, b) understanding mental illness and their treatments, c) decreasing stigmas around mental health, d) enhancing help-seeking efficacy (Big Brother Big Sisters, 2022).	Classroom teachers spend more time with their students than anyone else in the building. Having mental health literate teachers builds all four pillars of MHL which increases a students' access to support in a timely manner.
Well-being	An overall good state of being – physically, mentally, and emotionally. Well-being is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity (Tchiki, 2019).	There are various dimensions of well-being: emotional, financial, social, occupational, spiritual, intellectual, environmental, and physical (University of Wisconsin, 2019). Often times, not having a mental illness is associated with a sense of good well-being. However, the two are not synonymous. Students who are not taught how to take care of themselves emotional, financial, social, occupational, spiritual, intellectual, environmental, and physical need to be

		offered time to explore these in the classroom in order to be successful individuals.
Social Emotional Learning	"The process in which people acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. There are five competencies of SEL: self-awareness, self management, responsible decisions making, social awareness, and relationship skills" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2023, p. 1).	In education the social emotional movement is a commitment to ensure students obtain social and emotional skills in addition to academics. Many SEL programs are currently being implemented in school settings.
Mindfulness	The art of paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, with non-judgement. The goal of mindfulness is to increase one's awareness of both their internal self and their external world (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).	Using mindfulness in the classroom helps students to become more emotionally aware, socially respectful, and increases self-regulation. A mindful teacher is also able to respond to the whole child and the root of their rather than student behavior itself.
Whole Person	An approach to health, wellness, and education that takes all parts of being into account, including mental and physical health, emotional, financial, social, cultural, spiritual, occupational, and	Many times, in education, students are reduced to their cognitive abilities. Addressing the whole person in the classroom means tending to all aspects of the child and caring for their cognitive abilities in

	nutritional wellness (Bridge Psychological Services).	addition to all noncognitive components as well. Logistically speaking in the classroom this means not just focusing on test scores and encourages play, curiosity, physical and emotional wellness, and exploration as a part of the learning process. As a practitioner, looking at the whole person means looking at each person as being dynamic and influenced by a variety of factors.
The Four Bodies	Along the same vein of looking at the Whole Person- the four bodies specifically break down the four main "bodies" of a person- physical, mental, emotional, and social. The four bodies move beyond looking at all of the aspects that make up a person and focuses on four components that anyone interacting with young people should be aware of.	These four bodies are a clear means to look at how students are influenced by the world around them and determine supports that would be beneficial. Educators can look at each of the four bodies as a mean to assess how a student is doing. For example, they might be thriving socially with their peers, but face challenged when it comes to their physical body. Looking at these individually are important as well as a whole as the bodies influence one another in a very reciprocal relationship.
Critical Consciousness	An educational concept developed by Paulo Freire that includes developing a deep understanding of the world and examining social and political contradictions. The three components of critical consciousness are	In the classroom, critical consciousness includes, but is not exclusive to, one's ability to conceptualize and think independently and critically about topics in and out of the classroom- in this sense it is deeply tied to

	critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action (Friere, 2020).	the one's liberation. Critically conscious students examine content from various perspectives or and critique the larger context of information. Critical consciousness is imperative to instill in students so that they can be active agents in history, rather than passive recipients.
Public Pedagogy	Public pedagogy focuses on the "the real world" as key to one's learning and development. One of the main aims of public pedagogy is to bring learning into public spaces and to impart some type of change as a result. It is noteworthy that public pedagogy requires the use of both critical thinking and critical consciousness.	Public pedagogy produces some type of outcome or impact in the world–not just an outcome that is seen in the classroom in the form of an assignment or an assessment. It is bringing the classroom to the world, and the world to the classroom.
Place Based Education	An educational approach that engages students with their local community including their physical environment, culture, history, and/or the people (Minero, 2016).	A Place Based approach to education is mutually beneficial for the community itself and student learning as it ensures that learning is meaningful beyond that of a test score and has a real-world impact.
Self-Efficacy	A psychological term that relates to one's belief in their ability to achieve a specific goal or execute certain behaviors. Self-efficacy is closely related to one's self-esteem (Carey& Forsyth, 2009).	Education should empower student's belief in their abilities to exceed their goals. To do so, the educational system must provide the tools required for success including teaching executive functioning skills, identifying student

		strengths, teaching in various modalities, and emotional encouragement.
Classroom Community	A reciprocal relationship of respect, understanding, and empathy establishes a classroom community. It is a space where all feel safe, seen, and valued.	A classroom community provides a safe environment for students to be themselves and build healthy relationships with the teacher and peers. It is a space for students to learn, fail, and try again. The role of the teacher is imperative in creating a positive classroom community, teachers are the barometer of the classroom. Teachers needs to be reflective and intentional in their pedagogical practices and classroom procedures as not all classrooms are effective in establishing a classroom community, or a healthy environment.
Autonomy	Synonymous with self-governing, autonomy is ones ability to decide how to live their life. It is foundational in building one's self-esteem and well-being and is linked to one's life satisfaction (Marmot, 2003).	A proper education will provide students with a sense of autonomy by empowering them to think critically, establish their self-efficacy, and promote self-esteem. The act of being autonomous is associated with higher level thinking and reasoning that can only be reached when one's foundational needs are met.
The Power Elite	A term coined by C. Wright Mills in his 1856 book, *The Power Elite.* The term, the power elite, refers to military, corporate, and political leaders, and their influence over modern	Education is a deeply influential process on each individual person. Therefore, it is important to examine the influences on education. Most decisions in the educational field are

	citizens. Wright suggests that everyday citizens, i.e., those not in a leadership role, hold very little power in the way they live their lives (Wright, 1856).	not made by teachers themselves, but instead sent from the government, or members of the power elite.

My Philosophy of Education

I believe the purpose of education in a Democratic society is to prepare students to be whole, autonomous, socially responsible, critical thinkers. To achieve this goal, we must equip teachers with tools that encourage such growth and provide them with the skills to meet the needs of their students. This means addressing the needs of the students as it pertains to their four bodies: physical, emotional, social, and mental.

Being autonomous, free-thinking, and socially responsible require higher levels of cognition that can only be reached when one is not in survival mode (Strittmatter et al., 2021). Therefore, to allow students to become critically conscious individuals and reap the benefits of a Democratic education, teachers must first address basic needs of students, including emotional regulation, well-being, and mental health literacy.

I believe that good education should provide people the tools they need to be successful in life, whether that relates to finding their personal identity, increasing social abilities, establishing occupational aptitudes, gaining intellect, or mastering everyday life skills. Good education should teach students about three things: themselves, the world around them (including the past, the present, and the future), and how to be autonomous, or self-governing. Certainly, there is curricular content that learners benefit from having. However, I believe the focus of education should be on how to think, not what to think

about. The focus of education should be on prioritizing teaching people, not teaching content.

Although often used interchangeably, the terms learning, education, and school, are not the same. For the purpose of this thesis, I will address learning as what I believe should happen in an educational experience, while referencing school as the place that is notoriously responsible for providing that development. It is noteworthy that while school is typically the place learning occurs, learning is much broader than schooling and learning can, and should, happen anywhere and everywhere.

In short, my philosophy of education is that schools should be a place where children could come to grow and learn—about themselves and the world in which they exist, and thus how to participate in creating the world. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that we are, in every moment, the creators of history. Therefore, we must hold the needs of children with the utmost importance. Our children are our future. They are creating the world which will exist.

Influences from Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire, one of the most influential educational philosophers, held caring for children of the world close to his heart. He believed it is through tending to children that we can also tend to our future (Freire, 2000). Freire instills hope for the future by reminding readers that nothing is predetermined. As stated by Freire (2000),

> The future is seen not as inexorable but as something that is constructed by people engaged together in life, in history. It's the knowledge that sees history as possibility and not as already determined. The world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming. (p. 52)

Because our world is in the process of becoming, our schools need to reflect the kind of growth we wish for our future leaders and creators of humankind. We can change the future. Education must support all children, and educators must be the motivational foundation for a brighter and better world.

Freire denied all notions that history is predetermined and that human beings should remain immobilized and conform. Freire (2000) states, “there is no theory of socio-political transformation that moves me if it is not grounded in an understanding of the human person as a maker of history and as one made by history” (p. 95). The key word for me in this sentence is *transformation.* If one sees people as the recipients of a preset destiny, they certainly will not be a part of a movement for change in education. In fact, those who believe in a predetermined future probably do not see anything wrong with the education system as it is now. I am not one of those people.

To create education that transforms our future, we must remember that our future, and eventually our history, is not predetermined. Both the future, and the eventual past, are being created-right now; the largest way they are being created and influenced is through our educational system. Thus, schools should be used as a place where transformation begins.

When one thinks of a school, they typically think of a building. However, I believe good education takes students outside of the walls of their classroom and into the world as we are influenced by, and influencers of, the world around us (Freire, 2000). Learning can and should occur both in formal learning spaces like in schools and in informal public learning spaces that include familial and communal engagement. Students must learn *with* the world they exist in and in the world *in* which they exist.

The movement of place-based learning brings education outside of the classroom. Educational advocate Emily Minero (2016) says, “place-based learning engages students in their community, including their physical environment, local culture, history, or people. With place-based learning, students get to see the results of their work in their community” (p. 1). Allowing students to feel connected to their learning is of vital importance. Students should feel that their learning not only pertains to their life and their community, but that their learning has an impact on their life and their community. Thus, good schooling makes learning larger than the classroom.

When done with intention, the learning process can empower children to be active citizens in creators of a better tomorrow (Minero, 2016). In this way, schools have the power to be transformative of our society. In fact, educational theorist Michael Apple (2012) believes that education does not just have the power to change society, but that the act of educating *should be* about changing society. Apple believed schools have the ability to positively influence the changes that occur for the betterment of humans. He studied Paulo Freie who reminds us of our “unfinishedness” as human beings and as a society. As stated by Freire (2000),

> I like being human because I know that my passing through the world is not predetermined, preestablished. That my destiny is not a given but something that needs to be constructed and for which I must assume responsibility. I like being human because I am involved with others in making history out of possibility, not simply resigned to fatalistic stagnation. (p. 34)

Remembering that we, as humans, are unfinished inspires people to add meaning to their learning. When bridging Freire's philosophy of unfinishedness with Apple's belief that schools can change society, we see the education as a powerful force for the future.

Bringing learning beyond the walls of the classroom is a wonderful way to make learning more meaningful. In the book, *Bringing School to Life: Place Based Education Across the Curriculum,* author Sarah Anderson (2017) says "one of the main goals of place-based education is to help raise citizens who understand how everyone and everything in a community is interconnected" (p. 1). It is through this interconnectedness that learning can promote civic engagement, allowing students to make a difference in where they live (Anderson, 2017). This, I believe is one of the main goals of good education, to allow the knowledge and skills acquired to move beyond that of a test or a marking period and make some type of impact on the local and or global community in which the learning occurs.

The Purpose of the School

Since our children are creating our future, I believe that it is the goal of education, or an educational institution, is to help all children reach their highest personal potential. To do so, schools must provide academic, social, emotional, professional, and communal support. Schools also must create a space for children to learn, reflect, discuss, and participate in society.

The word 'school' is derived from the Greek term *(schole):* free time, rest, delay study, discussion, class, school, schoolhouse (Masschelein & Simons, 2013). With this definition in mind, schools were created as a place where the elite member of society could "suspend time" and take a well-deserved break from all their troubles to immerse themselves in thought. In other words, for the early Greeks, school was seen as a reprieve

from the stress of ordinary living. The goal of this "break" was for young minds to reaching great philosophical thought and higher levels of cognition–a value of the Greeks.

Somehow it appears that the Greeks already knew something that psychologists discovered centuries later through Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which states that reaching any type of self-actualization requires all foundational needs to be met beforehand (Berger, 2020). Meeting a child's basic needs before focusing on academics is known as "Maslow's Before Bloom." This theory can, and should, be applied to traditional schooling.

Berger (2020) defines "Maslow before bloom" as "the idea that educators should meet students' basic needs for safety and belonging before turning to challenging academic tasks is one that guides the work of many schools" (p. 1). The article continues to state that hosting a morning meeting before class begins in a great start, but it is not enough. Schools should not just have pieces of the day that meet the nonacademic needs of a child- the entire day should be structured as a place that fosters growth for the entire being. I align with the philosophy in the article that the entirety of the school day should continuously meet the social needs of the child.

Returning to the idea of *schole*, it appears to me that when the Greeks created schooling, they knew that great thinkers could not be produced while they were worrying about where the next meal would come from or while existing in survival mode. Today's schools could not be more disconnected from the original Greek intentions of schools. In modern society, schools are viewed as more of a "job" than a break. In fact, most of the intention of schooling is not on growing the child as a person, but instead on filling students with academic content and teaching students to be high scoring test takers.

Teachers feel pressured to get through content throughout the year so that their students will be prepared for the next academic year, score well on their school's benchmarks, and perform well on standardized testing. In the article, *Too much content, not enough thinking, and too little fun* author Stephen DiCarlo (2009) says, "teachers must abandon the mistaken notion that unless they 'cover the content' students will be unprepared for the future and they will have failed as teachers" (p. 1). It makes sense why teachers feel the pressure. State ranking systems for schools consider student performance on test scores.

Furthermore, a school I previously worked for offered raises for employees whose students scored well on the standardized testing. This was such an injustice for the school's students. Offering raises for high performing classrooms meant that teachers fought one another to teacher high-level students and that instructional time focused on teaching the content of the test. Based on previously completed work and classroom discussions, I noticed many of my students did not have the foundational skills required to move forward with the content on the exams themselves. Instead of blowing through all the content, we took time so students could be confident in their abilities. I was not alone in feeling that the test expectations were not obtainable for my students. In fact, a survey by the Nation Education Associated showed that 70% of teachers believe standardized tests are not developmentally appropriate for their students (Walker, 2016).

During this teaching experience, I was transparent with my students that we were not going to be learning to the test. We held classroom conversations about this change where I left ample room for student voice about the pros and cons of this style of teaching. Some of my students feared they would have anxiety on the day of the exam if they had not seen the material. While others, placed more significance on taking their time to digest one level of

content before moving to the next. In this way, my students taught me that I do not always know what it best for them and sometimes, they need to teach me, too. This idea is what Freire (2000) called "reciprocal learning." I believe reciprocal learning is imperative to classroom culture as it gives students voice in what and how they best learn.

Honoring reciprocity in the learning process is a huge part of my philosophy of education. While I might hold a teaching degree and have mastery of the content, only my students are the masters of themselves and know what they truly need. I am a learner-teacher and a teach-learner, as are my students. To this notion Freire (2000) states, "Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning" (p. 31). The classroom is a reciprocal place where the input, experiences, concerns, questions, and musings of students should be valued as much as the educator.

My Classroom

I adjusted my classroom based on the voices of my students over the demands of standardized testing. Since most of the 8th graders were at a 3rd grade reading level, we took time to cover foundational skills, while offering students opportunities for enrichment and choice lessons. We used Mondays as foundations day, allowing students to work on the same standards at their own ability level. Tuesday-Thursday offered scaffolded lessons and group where students with higher levels of cognition worked to teach their peers. Fridays were enrichment lessons that focused on topics of student interest as it pertained to the standards. Fridays were all our favorite days because it removed the prescribed text from the class and offered relevant content to the students in the classroom. In fact, students could vote on and submit topics of interest for them which often included lessons centered on their

chosen music, hometown heroes, history of their neighborhood, and stories written by teenagers just like them.

I gave my students a choice in their learning, and in return their learning was much more active. I believe that good teaching will offer content that is meaningful to the student as a social, historical, and political being. Tailoring content to meet the interests and needs of students benefits the students themselves and society. Learning, like place-based learning, that allows children to leave the classroom is important, but it is also important to bring the immediate world into the classroom through the curriculum. Relevant curriculum allows students to learn about themselves, where they come from, and what they can do as citizens (Anderson, 2017).

Organizing a classroom and teaching time around standardized testing does not consider the needs of students. It also does not tailor the content for different geographical, social, or economic groups. Having taught students who identify with different socioeconomic status, race, and religion in various states, I can attest that certain content will be more meaningful to certain students.

Good curriculum should inspire students to pursue their passions and explore how to better their world. It should help them learn and practice critical thinking skills- meaning becoming free-thinking citizens. Good curriculum will keep up with the changing world, not just offering the classics. It should pertain to their surrounding areas as reflect the time in which they live. It will reflect a variety of voices, not just that of the dominant culture. A good curriculum will offer room for student voice, reflection, and plenty of room for real-world learning. Finally, good curriculum will include more than just content of knowledge, it will include the growth and development of students as whole, autonomous, thinking,

feeling, human beings. While providing a beneficial curriculum is engaging for learners, teaching the curriculum itself should never be the focus- the focus should always be the child. Finally, not only will good curriculum take the student's circumstances into account, but it will also include more than just academia.

Educating the Whole Student

My belief that education should not be reduced to academics due to my unfortunate experience of almost failing out of school is not unique to my circumstance. My secondary schooling did not meet my foundational needs, which meant that I was unable to succeed academically. The idea of meeting student's foundational needs before tending to academics is not just reduced to "Maslow's Before the Bloom theory" and not just a conversation about curriculum (Berger, 2020). Teaching the whole student should be an educational philosophy and a way of being in community with students in schools. Berger states, "The idea that educators should meet students' basic needs for safety and belonging before turning to challenging academic tasks is one that guides the work of many schools" (2020). Another schools of thought that bolsters caring for the whole child, not just the academic brain, is holistic education.

According to the School of Education Online Program (2020) the movement of *holistic education* emerged in the 1980's to offset the current learning structures. At the time school reform pushed curriculum and tests scores as the utmost importance. To best serve student needs, holistic educators worked to provide "wraparound support" or services that maintain both academic and nonacademic growth (School of Education Online Programs, 2020). Undoubtedly, the teachers, parents, and learners behind this movement recognized that our education system was, and still is, underserving the needs of the whole child in

schools by placing too much emphasis on the intellectual body and leaving social, emotional, and physical health well-being behind.

Holistic education is an inclusive approach to learning where the teacher addresses emotional, social, and ethical needs of the students in addition to academia (School of Education Online Programs, 2020). In my experience this is the only way to *genuinely* approach teaching and learning because the alternative is just to reduce education to the transfer of information. A student does not enter a classroom just as a cognitive brain. They walk in as whole person with an assortment of needs, curiosities, experiences, questions, gifts, and challenges, and they should be treated as such.

Educational philosophy researchers, Masschelein and Simons (2013) use the analogy of an onion to represent how a child enters the classroom which lines up with a holistic approach to education. In reference to a student these researchers state,

> What walks into the classroom is an onion; several layers of school blues – fear, worry, bitterness, anger, past, an ominous present, a future condemned…The lesson can't really begin until the burden has been laid down and the onion peeled back. It's hard to explain, but just one look if often enough, a kind remark, a clear steady word from a considerate grown-up, to dissolve those blues, lighten those minds and settle those kids comfortably into the *present indicative.* (p. 37)

As Masschelein and Simons indicate, learning cannot begin until the entire student has been addressed and tended to. If a student's emotional needs are the outer layer of the onion, and the core is their higher levels of cognition, educators will struggle to get students to tap into their academic potential while existing only as an outer shell. In other words, students need to step out of the fear, worry, and stress that they carry to be fully present with the lesson

and the materials at hand. Since many of the stressors students experience are outside of the walls of the school building, perhaps the lesson itself can and should include lessons to transform the conditions outside of the classroom as well.

As a practitioner I did my best to see my students for who they were each day and honor my role to teach their whole being. I greet my students, looking them in the eye when they enter the classroom, as though to say, "*I see you."* I was intentional about using their preferred pronouns, offering stress management skills weeks before their finals, creating time to include relaxation and play as essential parts of learning, making learning meaningful and relevant, and responding to student journal entries. All these practices allowed me to connect with students on a deeper level and in some way provide wrap-around support.

This aligns with the holistic approach to education that emphasizes a strong teacher-student relationship (School of Education Online Programs, 2020). As a result of this strong relationship, I saw my students engaged during learning time, become more willing to step outside of their comfort zone in classroom discussions, and hold one another to a higher moral standard to ensure there was a culture of communal respect.

Holistic education can take on a various educational models including, but not exclusive to, a) experiential learning which utilizes hands on learning and real-world experiences, b) self-guided learning where students learn at their own pace, c) engagement and interaction within the community as vital components to the learning process, and d) interdisciplinary coursework that addresses multiple subjects in each assignment (School of Education Online Programs, 2020). All or a combination of these can be integrated at any grade level to have a profound impact on students.

Approaching education from a holistic perspective allows teachers to view the purpose of education as being much broader than producing good test takers or future workers. Holistic education helps facilitate the deeper purpose of education, which is to create critically minded, autonomous, whole, individuals who are prepared to think for themselves, manage the challenges of life, and create sustainable life for themselves and their fellow human beings. All learning, whether compulsory or voluntary, is an invitation for each person to gain knowledge, to know themselves more deeply, and to think more critically about life. I believe one of the major flaws of our educational system is that it removes the ability for students to think for themselves.

Avoiding the Banking Model of Education

Viewing teaching and learning as a complex and ever-evolving experience that tends to emotional, social, and ethical needs of students is not only in alignment with holistic education, it is how we keep the humanity in education. It allows for sharing of information, genuine discourse, challenging of ideas, relationship building, self-exploration and much more. If we do not invite these into the classroom, we risk viewing education as what Paulo Freire (1970) identifies as the *banking model of education* in which the teacher is the keeper of knowledge and dispenses information into the children. In the banking model of education, student knowledge is reduced to their ability to regurgitate previously provided information on a test. In this instance, students are done a disservice because they equate learning with providing the correct answer, rather than engaging with new material with inquisition, creativity, and curiosity.

In the banking system the teacher is the dispenser of knowledge, and the student is the empty receptacle storing what is being provided by the teacher. I like to envision this

occurring as a traditional piggy bank where the student, the piggy bank, is only filled with that which has been provided to them by the teacher, the banker. There is likely a great deal of space inside of the piggy bank that is not occupied by coins, but the piggy bank's receptacle slot was only designed only to take in coins by the banker, meaning that even if the piggy bank was offered information from another way than their traditional "slot insertion," they would reject it simply by design of the system.

The design of the piggy bank, and baking education, was created this way on purpose. By depriving this student of receiving knowledge in any other way it also inhibits inquiry of the information provided. In other words, the pupils are object of learning and passive participants (Freire, 1970). Holistic education is the opposite of the banking model. Holistic education works to educate students for democracy in which they are active participants in their learning and in their communities to work toward actual change (Mahmoudi et al., 2012).

Following the banking system in education where the teacher's perspective is always right is oppressive education because it decreases student creativity while strengthening the notion that they must attend to the thoughts, beliefs, and wishes of those in charge, or the oppressor (Freire, 1970, p. 73). Without creativity and original thought, the education process is reduced to memorization of information that the teacher has deemed important knowledge to share with students, which is the opposite of what I believe education should be in a Democratic society.

The use of memorization in education not only reinforces the lack of creative thought, but it also sends the subliminal message that it is not necessary to think for oneself. I believe the lack of independent thought is strengthened especially when the person is

rewarded for it. I have often seen this in education with students who earn high grades for being good test takers, receive verbal or monetary praise for said grades, or are regarded in a higher social status for being agreeable. Alarmingly, the praise for being "a follow of the leader" can translate outside of the classroom into one's life, whether that is a in an occupation, politics, religion, or romantic relationships. I saw many students who wanted to be told exactly what to do to get a good grade instead of thinking for themselves.

In the classroom, it is likely this memorization style of learning will be measured on a test in which students simply restate what has previously been shared with them. Certainly, a student may know a fact, but that does not mean that they understand the information, could apply it in any practical or helpful manner, or could challenge the thought that exists to determine its validity for themselves. In his book, *Wheels in the Head,* Spring (2007) asks readers to question how free thinking one can be, even in a Democratic society, if they are constantly told what to think or how to think.

Knowing something and understanding something are two entirely different concepts. A comical, but proper, example of this was explained by Dicarlo (2009) in which he explains that he taught his cat to purr the National Anthem. Sure, his cat mastered the song and passed his "test" of knowing the information. But the feline will never understand what the song means, and thus, we will not have truly learned it. I do not believe that someone can understand something, or apply their understanding, without critical consciousness. Structuring classrooms to only plant certain ideas in the minds of children does not promote critically minded citizens, which is essential for a society to flourish (Spring, 2007). Schools need to teach students how to think, not just show them what to think about through the curriculum.

This means that students need to have an environment in which free-thinking is encouraged and learning is measured in a variety of ways. But before students can fully take advantage of these opportunities, educators must ensure they are tending to the needs of the whole child socially, emotionally, and physically. According to Mahmoudi et al (2012) the goal of holistic education is best encompassed by the term *ultimacy,* or the highest state of being a human can aspire to be. This is congruent with Maslow's peak experience as seen in his hierarchy of needs (Berger, 2020).

Conclusion

To be an educator is such an honor. What an educator does each day has significant impact on the students in their classroom, and thus our global future. It is the responsibility of schools, teachers, and leaders in education to acknowledge the influence, both positive and negative, that the schooling experience has on students. To reduce education to that of academics and intellect is one of the greatest disservices we can do societally. I am living proof of this. I went from meeting with my principal about the possibility of repeating a grade to graduating college with high honors. I attribute this shift to the non-cognitive support that I received in the school rather than a massive shift in my intellectual abilities. Our students are more than just minds and we need to help them grow in all ways to best serve our present world and the future one.

Chapter Three

Historical and Literature Review

This chapter will provide a brief historical review of the development of American education and how our public schooling system came to be structured as such through historical agendas. I will address how and why our schooling system has failed to support children holistically, provide literary reviews explaining why leaving the whole child behind is a problem, explore current mental health trends among adolescents and educators, and share ways that mindfulness and holistic education are proving to combat the increasing issues present in the modern-day world through influences like technology and the COVID-19 pandemic.

How Did We Get Here?

Learning is the process by which one acquires new skills or knowledge through experiences, studies, or by being taught. Innately, humans learn every day through informal processes. In fact, for as long as humans have existed, we have found ways to pass down what they felt was pertinent information to generations that would follow. Evidence of this through Egyptian hieroglyphics, origin stories from various cultures and religions, and even tales associated with the stars through astrology. But what about formal education? How, and perhaps more importantly why, was our school system in America established the way that it was? And why has the structure of education barely changed since the origins one room schoolhouse?

Early American Schooling

During America's Colonial Era, 17th and 18th centuries, access to education was variable. The availability and quality of the education was based on a child's region, race,

and religion. Since the modern institution of a free, tax-supported public schooling was not developed until the 19th century, most early American schools tailored to wealthy English settlers who could afford to pay a fee in exchange for education (Roos, 2022).

Not only did access to school vary across the regions of the colonies, so did the content, or what we now define as educational curriculum. For example, in Massachusetts's the Puritans believed that reading was a daily religious duty and therefore the Puritans were the first to require education for all children. The Puritans used compulsory education to keep children closely connected to God and a specific value set. Many middle colonies did not have formal schools and primarily left education of children up to individual families and churches. Moreover, since the south was so deeply connected to European trade and farming, only children of very wealthy landowners attended school, some in America and others were sent to boarding schools in Europe. The children who could not afford to pay for school were mostly left uneducated. There are even accounts that some southern communities created working farmhouse schools where students spent their day working in the fields as opposed to learning literacy (Roos, 2022).

Regardless of the region in the early America's, most of the schools focused heavily on reading, writing and grammar, and arithmetic. Groups of children of various ages were often taught by one teacher. This teacher told the children what they would learn, how they would learn it, and when they would do so. Much of schooling included memorization of information and religious discussion. Notably, there was no teacher education at the time and classrooms were run by appointed members of society. Additionally, all schools across the colonies were heavily infused with theological studies and used corporal punishment to

keep their students in line (Roos, 2022). Public embarrassment and beatings were used as fear strategies to keep children behaving properly during the school day.

Why Were Schools Created?

Many people, my former self included, hold the belief that education was created by our founding fathers to provide tools, skills, and knowledge for individuals for the betterment of themselves and the overall society and nation. However, after examination it is plain to see that education, even in its earliest form of practice, was designed to regulate the beliefs, behaviors, intellectual processes, and values of the people. Education was not created for the good of the individual, but the good or agenda of the elite members of society and the government (Malott, 2021).

Education as Control

As our nation was building, those with power—the wealthy and those in governing positions—wanted to ensure that everyone fit the status quo and followed along with dominant societal ideology. Why? There is a philosophy that people can be controlled by two means: 1). By policing them in some way whether through fear, laws, or abuse and 2). By changing their belief systems. When the belief systems or behaviors color outside of standardized lines, then the policing or punishment comes into play (Malott, 2021). The aristocrats found it much easier to correct one's thinking through education than to continually have to correct one's inappropriate behavior.

When speaking of education, Founding Father, physician, politician, and social reformer, Benjamin Rush noted that our colonies were made up of many different groups of people who came with various experiences, backgrounds, and ideologies. Therefore, he suggested that schools should be standardized to ensure all citizen of the United States are

analogous. As stated by Rush (1798), “Our schools of learning, by producing one general, and uniform system of education, will render the mass of the people more homogeneous, and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government” (p. 1). In this quotation, Rush explicitly states that if all people in the nation are like one another, they will be much easier to govern and rule.

The goal to regulate society continued in education. In the 1830’s Horace Mann, who became known as the father of the Common School, used his position as Secretary of Massachusetts to implement educational reform. The Common School Movement made it possible for all children in Massachusetts to receive a free education funded by taxes. In theory, this was a great stride for compulsory education, as educational opportunities in early Colonial America were not all equal. However, before determining this free public school to be of benefit for the people, one must question who decides what is taught, how it is taught, by whom it is taught, and most importantly, why is the schooling system established as such (Spring, 2014).

In fact, the American model of education was not just designed to make it easier to rule others, but for them to be better able to fight for our country without questioning a leader’s perspective or the cause of war. In the 1830’s Mann visited Prussia—modern day Germany—to study their “successful” model of education. The Prussian model of education was developed as a response to the country’s defeat by Napoleon in 1806. Prussian leaders equated the defeat with the soldier’s inability to follow orders. Leaders feared that the “masses,” the common people, began to think for themselves and did not follow the order of their leaders closely enough. Therefore, the Prussians developed a model of education that

provided skills for what would become an industrialized world. The schools prioritized duty, discipline, and following orders to create a sense of Nationalism (Spring, 2014).

The Prussian educational system did not want to generate great thinkers and leaders, but great followers. The goals of the school were compliance, obedience, and Nationalism, all which Prussians believed would best serve their country. Mann saw this model of education, and this became the American way, too. Mann's commitment to education stemmed from his belief that "political stability and social harmony depend on education" (PBS, 2023, p. 1). The school and formal schooling were therefore designed for the betterment of the country and the government, and not for the people themselves.

It is noteworthy that the elite and wealthy children went on to complete additional schooling or attended alternative schools altogether. This is because those who would eventually become leaders needed different types of training or education to do more than merely follow orders (Roos, 2022). In this way education became a way of social oppression for the working class.

Education as Homogenization

Education to homogenize and control the masses is not something that existed in early America. This is a common thread seen throughout American History and still holds true today. One of the most extreme examples of examples of education to assimilate cultures was the use of Native American boarding schools. In fact, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School opened in 1879 within just two hours of West Chester University in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The school brought in thousands of American Indian children from all over the United States during the 19th Century Indian Wars.

Originally, white leaders believed the only good Indian was a dead Indian. But officers realized they could not kill off a whole population of people. So rather than have mass homicide, the English attempted to kill their culture. The goal of the school was to "Americanize" or "civilize" the Native American children. The Carlisle Indian Industrial School was in operation for nearly 30 years and its mission was to "kill the Indian" and "save the Man." The verbiage "save the man, kill the Indian" shows how little value the Americans had for other cultural values or perspectives and strengthened their belief that "their way" was the only way (Spring, 2010).

Essentially, The Carlisle Indian Industrial School wanted to see if they could strip the Native Americans of their native identity and make them become what they deemed to be the ideal American. Students were forced to wear Anglo-American clothes, speak only English, and engage in United States Values. The children lost their personal, familial, and tribal belongings, many of which had spiritual significance to them. The staff cut off long braids of hair on male children. To the Americans this was not symbolic at all, however long hair in Native culture represents power and strength (Spring, 2010).

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School was not the only school in operation. In fact, there were roughly 367 boarding schools across the United States. Today, survivors of Native American Boarding Schools openly share heartbreaking accounts of being taken away from their families, some without guardian consent, the process and impact of losing their cultural identity, and how the trauma still impact them today. Nowacimig, or Dennis Banks, a survivor of various Native American Boarding Schools and co-founder of the American Indian Movement, said "I never allowed my mind to be at peace" after being taken from his family and losing his relationship with his mother (Alechemida, 2015). He

said his relationship with his mother became estranged because she did not write him while he was at boarding school. However, researchers later discovered at least fifteen letters intended for Nowacimig from his mother that were kept from him along with bus fare to be sent home.

Stories like this are not unusual. The educational leaders prioritized colonializing native children over their mental, emotional, and physical health. It is estimated that over 60,000 Indigenous children were sent to similar boarding schools around the United States in Canada with the intention of converting their culture and ideology to that of the Anglo-Saxons (Spring, 2010). Nowacimig recalls being beaten badly by those in charge and being ridiculed by being forced to wear a dress. “There was no medicine man allowed to come….every night there was crying. Even my crying was amongst them” (Alechemida, 2015).

While this is an extreme example, it accurately portrays that the initial, and current, purpose of education is not to give individuals the tools they need to become self-actualized individuals or to provide for our country. Instead, the goal of compulsory education is to create a nation of people who hold similar values, share like thought patterns, and who simply follow directions of those in charge regardless of what impact it had on the individuals.

The philosophy that “different” equals less than is still evident today. The notion of deficit thinking is the idea that student of lower income or those that are of racial or ethnic minority are less likely to succeed in school because of these defects or deficits. In other words, it is the belief that not being white, and wealthy will negatively impact the learning process and ultimately one’s abilities. In classrooms where deficit thinking is the norm

students are subliminally and explicitly given the message, much like the Native Americans at boarding schools, to be successful, they must abandon their background and fit into the "status quo" or majority (Valencia, 2012). In this way education is still being used as a means to homogenize groups of people and encourage similar values, thoughts, beliefs, and even socioeconomic status.

Education as Oppression

Even after the United States abolished slavery in 1865, the power elite still did not see African Americans as equal to their white counterparts. The United States continued to marginalize people of color through segregation. The "Black Codes," also passed in 1865, dictated how African Americans could live their lives. These laws continued to progress into the Jim Crow laws which lasted nearly 100 years throughout the United States. While each state developed its own set of laws, the Jim Crow laws put restrictions on everything for Black Americans: from housing to restaurants, doctors' offices to public transportation, to jobs and entertainment. Almost everything one accesses daily was separated based on skin color. One of the most damaging ways African Americans were marginalized during this time was through inequal access to education in school segregation (Spring, 2010).

According to School of Education Online Programs' magazine publication from American University in Washington, D.C., "from their inception, schools serving students of color received significantly less funding than schools serving white students and faced overcrowding, inadequate supplies, and insufficiently paid teachers" (2020a, p.1). These irregularities in funding left Black students with far less educational opportunities and lower quality of education. Alarmingly, in 1950 only 1 in 10 Black students graduated from high school compared to 4 in 10 white students. Black students living in southern states with far

more restrictive Jim Crow Laws on received only an average of five years of schooling (School of Education Online Program, 2020a). Not only was the schooling offered to Black student not equal, but it was also not as encouraged or accessible.

The power elite used unequal access to schooling as an attempt to keep African Americans and other minority groups oppressed, undermined, and subordinate. Most educational policy, including segregation in schools, are a result of larger society wide balance of forces that has exploited, oppressed, or enslaved. Why? Because the power elite knew that knowledge was equivalent to power. If Black Americans, Native Americans, or any American that identifies as "other than the dominant group" were to have the knowledge, skills, and power to organize, they could overthrow the current system and demand new laws to be enforced (Mallot, 2021). If the power were in the hands of the people, truly, then the masses would have the ability to make changes in the educational system. But that is not the case, even today.

Schools serving Black students remain underfunded compared to predominantly white schools. Even after Brown v. Board of Education ruled segregation of schools to be unconstitutional in the United States, public school segregation remains a major issue. The United States is more diverse than ever before, yet some schools remain mostly segregated by race ethnicity and socio-economic status. In the 2020-2021 school year, more than a third of students attend a school with students of predominantly the same race and ethnicity (Carillo & Salhotra, 2022). More than 40% of Black and Hispanic students attend schools where nine out of ten children are students of color (School of Education Online Program, 2020a).

The evidence of segregation in schools remains today, as does the issue of separate and unequal. Schools serving students of color continue to face social, structural, and financial challenges that do not pertain to mostly white schools. This is because most with a higher population of students of color exist in low-income areas. Since public school funding relies on property taxes of local neighborhoods, these schools receive much less money. Student to student this means that, "Average revenue per student in nonwhite school districts is $2,226 lower than in white school districts" (School of Education Online Program, 2020). The unequal distribution of wealth across schools does not just mean that Black students do not have as quality of an education, it means that underfunded schools are less likely to be able to meet the mental, physical, and emotional needs of the child as well.

Education to Maintain Status Quo

For as long as schools have existed, the question of what to teach and how to teach has never been in the hands of the educators. Instead, these decisions have largely come from state and governmental officials. This was true in the days of the Puritans, and still holds true today. Teachers and public opinion alike disagree with educational decisions not being in the hands of those working in education. As cited by Mallot (2021), David Hursh (2015) noted that "77% of the public felt that placing education policy decision making in the hands of business and political leaders, effectively ignoring teachers … was exactly the wrong approach" (p. 182). Despite most Americans believing that educators should oversee making decisions, the public has long allowed the power elite to supervise educational decisions.

Government officials have passed laws that ensure the decisions of education stay in their hands, rather than the hands of educators and students. The beginning of a problematic

top-down era in educational policy started in 1983 when the Ronald Ragan Administration released “A Nation at Risk.” The report that received widespread panic stating that American schools were worsening instead of getting better. It stated that our test scores were dropping, and we were in jeopardy of schools internationally succeeding us (Kamenetz, 2018).

While the numbers did in fact show that American schools had declined, A Nation at Risk failed to look at the various factors contributing to the data. Test scores at the beginning of the period were based on those with the most access to education, white and wealthy males. The scores that showed the “nation was at risk” included groups of students who did not historically have the same access to education as their white and wealthy classmates. When lumped together, the test scores from the 1960s to the 1980s appeared to have declined. However, when subgroups were broken out: men, women, white, Hispanics, African Americans, and low socio-economic students, separately it was found that all of the groups slightly improved over time (Kamenetz, 2018).

So, then why report that the nation is at risk? To gain more control over educational policy. The Ragan administration gave specific recommendations for how to reverse the course of failure. The recommendations were as follows: 1. More rigor: challenge students to do better and learn more content. 2. Create New Standards: These standards outline the ways in which a student should be proficient to pass high school. 3. Adjustment to teacher preparation and pay: More standardized and expertise in teacher training programs and higher teacher pay based on student achievement (Kamenetz, 2018). By using fear the Reagan administration was able to bring educational control back to those in power. The government was able to state what should be taught, how students should be assessed on

their learning (specifically through standardized testing), and how the information should be presented.

A Nation at Risk has greatly influenced the way that the public views education and government's role in student's academic process. Schools do not turn to the teacher who are with their students 30 or more hours each week to see what children need. In fact, most public schools have little autonomy over their curriculum and instruction based on the interference of government with the learning process. A Nation at Risk has been succeeded by the No Child Left Behind Law in 2002 and then the Race to the Top Initiative in 2009 (Kamenetz, 2018). These laws have not been created to prioritize the well-being of children. Instead, they were created to standardize the educational experience and reduce it to what it has always been: a way to control, homogenize, and oppress society. Those who made and continue to make decisions in education do not think about the well-being of individuals or collectives.

Education and High Stakes Testing

Perhaps the most problematic result of A Nation at Risk and all its predecessors is how it shifted the focus of education and schooling to that of testing. Schools became more heavily focused on teaching content, rather than teaching children. The pressure on educators and students to perform well on high stakes testing became higher than ever before. This is true for all public schools, regardless of their funding (Terada, 2022). Many teachers, my former self included, are forced to schedule their lesson planning around test dates and content to ensure their students will be prepared for the examination. Unfortunately, standardized testing is not used as an just a formal assessment, but instead often seen as an all-encompassing view of student intellect and teacher efficacy.

Au (2008) describes how standardized testing are a part of educational policy design that connects student scoring with grade promotion, graduation, and in some instances, school personnel salaries and positions. The term “high stakes testing” denotes two things 1. Student success will be measured only by standardized testing 2. The results of these tests will be attached to consequences that impact both students and teachers alike. In other words, the point overall values of high stakes testing can label a student, teacher, and even a school district as “good” or “bad.” The emphasis on measuring student and teacher success on high stakes testing is proof of how far we have come from a vision of education that supports the whole child. In my experience, students often view their ability and intellect as the score they receive on testing which is not an accurate depiction of their knowledge or skills.

Today students begin filling in scantron sheets as early as third grade. These early tests are often referred to as “diagnostic testing” to capture a student’s ability. However, such tests have not been proven to produce appropriate data regarding a student’s actual intellectual abilities as the tests cannot assess creativity, critical thinking, or true understanding of material. Many of the test are normed which created biases based on a student’s background knowledge, their gender, race, socio-economic status, and culture. Not only are these tests not accurately capturing a student’s intellect, but they also continue to create an increase in stress among elementary and high school students alike (Terada, 2022).

Analysis

Education was not designed to develop more intellectual, self-actualized individuals who could create a better life for themselves and a better society. Instead, education was created to replicate more of what already it. Those who control our nation, and thus

education, want to keep power in the hands that hold it and use that power to push down anyone who might challenge it. Ultimately our educators, and most importantly our students are the ones who are negatively impacted. If the goals of our schools were to create self-actualized individuals, children would be learning from a holistic perspective where their intellect, mental, and physical selves are nourished.

Why Is the United States Model of Education a Problem?

To grow, a sunflower requires a certain set of conditions: evenly moist and well drained soul, an inch of water weekly, ample sunlight, and plenty of space to grow. Even if a sunflower were planted in a full-sun space, but overcrowded by other plants or trees, it would not be able to reach its fully potential. The sunflower would be stunted. Rather than blame the flower for its lack of bloom and declare that something must have been wrong inherently with the seed, a good gardener looks to the environment in which it has been planted to determine the issue. The same should be true for education.

A child needs more than intellectual capacities to grow into a self-actualized individual. Not only is our educational system used to control and oppress, as it stands, our educational system today only attempts to nurture one component of the child- the academic side. Our schooling system worked to create conditions in which children cannot fully grow into themselves, they have never provided some of the basic needs for children to be successful.

What Do Children Need to Grow?

Humans are much more than their intellectual capacities. We are composed of many different types of bodies: physical, social, emotional, and mental. All of these four bodies have a specific set of needs in order to grow and contribute to one’s overall wellness and

they are highly interconnected. Much like the sunflower, a person cannot just be given sunlight, or academic rigor, and be expected to grow into their full potential. Similarly, if the stem of the flower, of the physical need of a student, is being damaged or negatively impacted, the flower might not be able to grow as tall, or the child may not be able to focus on class. Due to their interconnectedness and dependences on one another, all needs must be tended to and treated of equal importance.

Moving beyond the four bodies, there are even more components of what constitutes one's wellness. According to Grand Rapids Community College (2023), there are seven dimensions of wellness that comprise a person's overall well-being. They are 1. Physical 2. Emotional 3. Intellectual 4. Social 5. Spiritual 6. Environmental 7. Occupational. To fully support a student being a self-actualized individual, which I believe is the purpose of education, all these seven dimensions of wellness should be explicitly taught in the classroom. Each should have ample time for exploration and application, and students should be provided with hands-on learning opportunities for all of these. But we know, this is not the case. Schools are simply not preparing children for their present life or life after graduation.

XQ Schools, a national institution that focuses on rethinking high school education so students graduate with the skills that they need has been polling learning communities throughout the country to determine what would be most beneficial for students in their academic experience. Even though schools today focus so heavily on academic content, of more than 300 participants polled through XQ Schools (2023), 93% said they did not think high schools were preparing them to succeed in the future. This aligns with much other research in recent years. In fact, on more than 200 two-year and four-year college campuses

more than half of the incoming students will take remedial courses. The lack of preparedness is true for those who directly enter the workforce as well as nearly half of recent graduates said they were not prepared for their occupations following graduation. If the answer outline to a "successful America" by A Nation at Risk was focusing on academics, then these numbers would look a lot different. This is the voice of the people telling us that the system is failing them.

Not only do students report a lack of preparedness for their intellectual life after high school, but they also say they do not feel prepared for the "real world." Both graduates and non-students were asked to rate how prepared they felt to navigate adulthood beyond the structure of their schools on a scale of 1-5 (with 5 being "very prepared.") Only thirty percent of recent graduates rated their preparedness at a 4 or above. Of non-students, only seven percent ranked their perceived graduate preparedness at a 4 or above (XQ Schools, 2023). These polls echo the voices of many students that "there's a disconnect between what students learn in school and the skills and knowledge they'll need to solve challenges in real life (XQ Schools, 2023 p. 1). Possible solutions to help students feel more prepared for life after high school, or to grow more fully into themselves, are emphasizing social and emotional learning, create curriculum that combines academic learning with life sills, and to focus on overall well-being.

The History of Holistic Education

The notion of teaching more than just academic rigor back dates back to 380 B.C. in Plato's *The Republic* in which he stated, "maintaining a sound system of education and upbringing you produce citizens of good character; and citizens of sound character, with the advantage of a good education, produce in turn children better than themselves and better

able to produce still better children in their turn"(Beaty, 2018, p. 68). Plato was describing teaching students from a holistic perspective to make children better equipped citizens for society. Plato saw all that a child needed to grow and thrive through their educational experience, which is why he included more than just academia in the schooling experience in his educational philosophy.

Why does this matter? Because the idea of approaching education from a holistic perspective seems to be a new and radical trend. But is it really? We can see that before the common era great philosophers were discussing teaching our children from a holistic perspective. In fact, the philosophy of wholeness in education dates to ancient Greece and other indigenous cultures. In the United States, the holistic education movement began in the 1980s as a counter response to learning structure that appeared to be "mechanistic" (School of Education Online Program, 2020b). The great minds behind holistic education wanted to make learning a more organic, or natural experience, and less manufactured (i.e., dictated by state standards and measured by scantron machines) for the betterment of the students and ultimately the betterment of our society.

In the 20th century several "whole person" approaches to education took hold. Some of the most renowned holistic education philosophies are Maria Montessori's self-motivated growth philosophy along with Rudolph Steiner and Emily Molt's Waldorf learning technique. In fact, Montessori and Waldorf schools are still popular for school-aged children today (School of Education Online Program, 2020b). Many of the educational models and teacher strategies used today are based off these early schools of thought. They include, but are not limited to experiential learning, self-guided learning, community schools, interdisciplinary coursework, strong student-teacher relationships, encouraging

self-confidence, and integrating emotional reflection (School of Education Online Program, 2020b).

Holistic learning is a philosophy, rather than a prescribed practice, which provides teacher autonomy to meet the specific needs of students in their classrooms. Despite the route taken to support the whole child being diverse, the goal of holistic educators is the same. School of Education Online Program (2020b) defines the goal of holistic learning as "to cultivate a developing child's physical, emotional, moral, psychological, and spiritual attributes. Serving the whole child means providing opportunities that are personalized to a child's skills and feelings" (p. 1).

A holistic approach to teaching is not used in most public schools today and is typically seen in tuition-based private institutions. Here we still see that even with good intentions, quality education that supports the needs of a child is left for those who can afford it or by will of teachers who fight against the educational system to do what they believe is right for their students' development. Many public institutions, however, are attempting to implement social and emotional learning, which can be seen as a part of the holistic approach to education. Despite social and emotional learning being a branch of the tree of holistic learning, it cannot be confused for a holistic approach or the only means to support the whole child.

What is Social and Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the educational process that aims to grow social and emotional skills of a student (Beaty, 2018). This type of learning happens through explicit and implicit classroom instruction. The concept of social and emotional learning has been developing since the 1960's although the term itself was not coined until 1994. The

group The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been a driving force in integrating positive academic, social, and emotional learning for all student's preschool through high schools. CASEL was founded to establish the social and emotional competencies that could contribute to a student's success both in school and in their personal lives (Beaty, 2018). Some states have even adopted social and emotional learning standards that are used as markings during report periods for students.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2023), there are five interconnected core competencies that comprise social and emotional learning- self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. CASEL has developed lessons that build foundations of the five competencies to help support the whole student. Their belief is that when SEL lessons are offered in the classroom it has a positive ripple effect into all other areas of a student's life. CASEL outlines how SEL can be implemented on a classroom basis to positive improve classroom climate, on a school level to promote good schoolwide culture, practice, and policy, on a familial level to develop authentic partnerships, and within communities to provide out of the classroom learning opportunities aligned with whole person growth and development.

Many schools have incorporated SEL learning to reap the academic benefits associated with the practices. In fact, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2023) reports that students who had SEL interventions increased academic performance by 11 percentile points. However, if schools are including SEL with the intention that they can improve test scores, they are not looking at how to support the whole

child- and instead perhaps looking at how they can improve test scores alone. Luckily, SEL lessons have many benefits beyond just that of academics.

A metanalysis across 213 studies that included 270,000 students showed SEL is linked to improved classroom behaviors, increased management of stress and depression, improved attitude about self, others, and their overall school (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2023). Additional studies through CASEL show that offering SEL in school years has positive long-term effects; students reported having higher levels of well-being up to 18 years after their SEL learning.

Overall, the implementation of social and emotional learning in schools has been positive in developing the whole child. These programs are often offered through age-appropriate lessons and provided as additional curriculum. Rather than being integrated throughout the school day, many social and emotional programs have designated time for its instruction. It is important to examine why there is a need for such programs and to explore why only teaching social and emotional strategies do not suffice as holistic education.

Brain Functioning and the Four Bodies

A person's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical body are a reciprocal relationship- meaning each one is heavily influenced by the other dimensions. According to Diamond (2010), "A human being is not just an intellect or just a body; every one of us is both—and we are not just cognitive and physical, but also emotional and social. We ignore any of those dimensions at our peril in raising and educating children" (p. 781). In educating children, schools, teachers, and administrators must take more than just academics into account. Diamond continues to say that programs that cultivate the whole child (cognitive,

emotional, social, and physical needs) are the most successful at improving any single of these components.

Perhaps the holistic approach was once viewed as an emotive way to view education, but today we understand the biology of why educating a whole child is effective. The essential executive functions of the brain (i.e. working memory, decision making, and attention) are the foundation for much more complex cognitive processes such as reasoning, problem-solving, and crucial thinking; all of which are essential to being whole autonomous beings. When our social needs are unmet, feeling lonely, isolated, emotionally starved, our executive functioning suffers. In controlled experiments, feeling isolated is shown to impair decision-making, decrease persistence, and impair selective attention (Diamond, 2010).

A 2002 study had three groups of participants. They told one group they would have close relationships throughout their lives. The second group was told the opposite. The third group was told unrelated bad news. The information provided to the groups did not impact their ability to perform on memorization-based questions, as those types of questions do not require executive functions. Though those who were told they would feel lonely performed lower than the other two groups on logical reasoning problems. Additionally, the study found less prefrontal cortex activity while doing mental math in the group that was told they would be isolated (Diamond, 2010).

Cognition is impacted by much more than just social relations. It is noteworthy that our brains suffer when we are feeling stressed. According to Diamond (2010), “even mild stress floods prefrontal cortex with dopamine and norepinephrine, impairing how prefrontal cortex works and thus impairing executive functions” (p. 783). Other sections of the brain that rely on these neurotransmitters are not as heavily impacted by stress compared to the

prefrontal cortex. This means that if students are in a constant state of stress, whether that stress is caused by a standardized test or problems at home, they will not be able to reach their full cognitive ability- not just inside of the classroom but in their lives outside of school as well.

The relationship between the physical body and the cognitive brain is a fascinating one. Our thinking suffers when we do not get enough movement, sleep, and we are not properly nourished. Improving one's physical health has been shown to positively impact the prefrontal cortex and executive functioning. The affirmative impact of aerobic exercise on cognition is seen at molecular, cellular, systems, and behavioral levels. The same is true for proper sleep and nutrition. When the physical body is tended to, all other aspects of the body function more optimally (Diamond, 2010). Understanding the interconnectedness of one's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical bodies highlights the importance of tending to wholeness of a child in schools.

The Negative Impact of Stress

In today's world being stressed is almost identified as a lifestyle, many people report living in a state of constant stress. Children today are growing up in schools and in homes with fast-paced lifestyles, high stakes testing, and an immense pressure to perform. Given that many habits are formed during adolescent years, it is important to examine long-lasting impacts of stress, especially on teens. Stress can come from a variety of factors; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conducted a study focusing only on the negative impact of academic stress across on teens 72 countries.

The study included 540,000 students found that 66% reported feeling stressed about receiving poor grades, 59% reported they worry that a test will be difficult, and 55% said

they feel anxious about school testing even when they are prepared. This data shows that education is a significant cause of stress for adolescence. Students who reported higher levels of academic stress had a correlation to lower levels of well-being measured by psychological, social, cognitive, and physical components (Pascoe et al, 2020).

The negative impacts of stress, regardless of the cause, have a snowball effect that can follow a child throughout their entire life. High levels of stress precipitates to higher levels of mental illness such as anxiety and depression. “The reciprocal relationship between stress and depression and anxiety is well established…. in young people the first onset of depression is often preceded by major life stressors” (Pascoe et al, 2020, p. 105). Longitudinal studies show that students with higher levels of anxiety and depression score more poorly academically, concentration difficulties, and problems with task completion. Looking at adolescent stress and mental illness is important as it has long-lasting impacts. A 25-year study in New Zealand showed that those with depression ages 16-21 had greater welfare dependance and higher levels of unemployment. There is also suggestive evidence that stress can increase the dropout rate (Pascoe et al, 2020).

Stress doesn’t just impact one’s cognitive ability, but also their life trajectory. Disturbingly, a high level of stress in adolescence is also associated with high levels of substance abuse. In a survey of 128 11^{th} grade students at a competitive private school students who reported higher levels of stress also had higher levels of substance use than those that did not (Pascoe et al, 2020). The higher levels of substance use were associated with less effective coping strategies for stress management and lack of closeness with their parents. In this way, this study echoes the importance of tending to social relations and the ability to manage one’s emotions to support physical health. Not only should schools be

conscious of the ways in which they are causing children stress, they should be providing education for how to manage stress and the negative emotions associated with high stress levels. This provides a sense of justification to bring mental health awareness and positive mental health practices into the classroom to help support students who might be struggling from outside stressors and academic stressors.

Mental Health in Schools

The literature summarized in this section is from a study completed in 2014. I choose to use this resource as it provides a wide lens of students' mental health, available resources in schools, and the gaps in support available prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Later in this chapter, I will address current mental health trends and how all the issues present in 2014 including poor mental health and inequitable resources have been exacerbated in the last decade.

Every school has students who are struggling with their mental health. According to Rossen (2014) one in every five students will receive a serious mental health diagnosis. It is notable that this number cannot include those who remain undiagnosed due to lack of resources or whose problems do not warrant a formal diagnosis. Despite the number of people impacted by mental illness in school years being so high, mental health is not discussed in many schools or teacher preparation education. According to Rossen (2014) "Raising awareness of the many children who come to school with mental health issues and then treating them appropriately is the best way to ensure they achieve their potential in school and life" (p. 8).

Students face many struggles outside of the classroom such as peer conflict, divorce, chronic stressors, poverty, homelessness, community violence, and abuse. Students facing

such struggles cannot reach their highest potential without being supported in these areas first. Rather than implementing social and emotional curriculum as a supplemental activity Rossen (2014) says, “Addressing student mental health is a prerequisite to learning and achievement, not an add-on or extracurricular luxury” (p. 8). Without having their foundational needs met, students will not be able to meet the learning standards outlined by schools or reach their own personal goals.

It is estimated that 10 million K-12 students across the United Stated need professional help for mental health reasons. To look at this on a smaller scale, in a high school for 750 students about 150 of those students will experience a mental illness that negative impacts their learning and behavior. Only 50 out of those 150 students will receive the help that they need. This shows how inadequate our support system for mental health services truly is in schools. Poor access to mental health providers, negative stigmas around mental health, and additional disparities based on ethnicity, income, and location, all play a factor in whether a school can provide mental health support for their students. This is problematic as 70-80% of children who receive mental health services first receive support at school (Rossen, 2014).

Teacher Perception of Mental Health in School

At least 75% of adults who do experience a mental health disorder in their lifetime noticed the onset during their adolescence or school-aged years (Grey, 2019). Although schools are an ideal setting for addressing student’s mental health, and the correlation between cognitive, physical, emotional, and social well-being, widespread integration of evidence-based practices that support wellness for students has yet to occur in the United States. According to Reinke (2011) 89% of teachers agreed that schools should be involved

in addressing mental health in students. Most of these teachers stated that the mental health of their students has impacted their classroom. Teachers identified the top five major mental health concerns they have for students in the past year as: disrupting behaviors (97%), problems with inattention (96%), hyperactivity (96%), defiant behaviors (91%), and family stressors (91%) (Reinke, 2011).

While almost 100% of teachers agree that schools should be a part of the mental health solution for students, only 34% of teachers believe they have the skills necessary to support their students emotionally themselves. Echoing the study Rossen (2014) teachers said that their schools did not have the services needed to support their students wither. Teachers identified the top five barriers as insufficient number of school mental health professionals (82%), lack of adequate training for dealing with children's mental health needs (78%), lack of funding for school-based mental health services (66%), stigma associated with receiving mental health services (63%) and competing priorities taking precedence over mental health needs (59%) (Reinke, 2011).

A 2017 study found that 1 in 5 teenagers in the United States have considered committing suicide, the second leading cause of death for those between ages 15-24. Students struggling with depression are far more likely to receive the help they need if an educator is aware of symptoms, support, and sources of intervention (Beaudry). Many educators report that they do not have the time to address mental health in the classroom due to rising demands of educational standards. This can make it challenging to address the myriad of topics outside of curriculum such as careers, conflict resolution, character building, and so on.

To make mental health education more accessible to teachers, some schools choose to align mental health curriculum with the common core standards. In fact, Maryland has created a curriculum of mental health education that follows its own sets of mental health standards. This program and the standards were created by the Adolescent Depression Awareness Program from John Hopkins University School of Medicine. The Adolescent Depression Awareness Program (ADAP) provides a mental health curriculum that aligns with Common Core Standards. After obtaining information regarding mental health through ADAP, students were more likely to seek help with experiencing challenges (Beaudry, 2017).

Significantly, just because someone does not have a mental illness, does not mean they are mentally well. As seen earlier, there are seven dimension of well-being, all which correspond to the four bodies. Not only should schools provide mental health intervention services, but they should also support well-being through various practices seen in holistic education.

Promoting Well-being for Students through Positive Relationships

Positive mental and health and well-being correlates to positive social relationships, developing a healthy lifestyle, reduces the risk of psychiatric disorders, self-harm, suicide, and adverse socioeconomic outcomes (Harding, 2019). Positive relationships with teachers and the feelings of safety in the classroom have been found to be important for the well-being of adolescence. Having positive teacher-student relationship is just one small way that schools can be a part of promoting well-being for students. “Students having a positive relationship with their teachers may contribute to school connectedness which is defines as an environment in which students believe that the adults in the school care about their

learning and about them as individuals" (Harding, 2019, p. 182). Healthy student and teacher relations is a foundation of a holistic approach to education. This positive relationship helps to support the social side of a child, which we know in turn supports all the other three bodies as well.

Promoting Well-being for Students through Mindfulness

Mindfulness, or the act of being present, dates back hundreds of years and is rooted in Buddhist teaching (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). There have undoubtedly been many documented positive impacts of mindfulness on one's well-being such as improvement ro mental and physical health conditions, on social and emotional skills, and there is neuroscience that supports mindful meditation can alter the structure of the brain to improve quality of thought and feeling (Weare, 2012). With the popularity of mindfulness rising, there have been positive effects seen in schools that incorporate mindfulness.

Mindfulness has been shown to positively contribute to cognitive and performance skills for school aged children. When students are taught how to be more present and less anxious it helps them to be more focused, develop closer relationships, and use existing knowledge more effectively. Additionally, mindfulness has been able to improve student well-being, reduce anxiety and distress, manage reactivity and bad behavior, improve sleep and self-esteem, and bring about more self-regulation and inner peace (Weare, 2012). Various studies have looked to explore the positive impacts of mindfulness in schools. As compiled by Weare (2012) the following studies look at the impact of mindfulness on one's emotions, intellect, and physical bodies.

Mindfulness on the Physical Body

According to Weare (2012), as reported by Gregoski et. al (2011) a mindfuln breathing meditation program was included in a summer camp for 166 Afro-American adolescents who were at risk of cardiovascular disease. At the end of a twelve-week mindfulness intervention during health class students showed stronger regulation in systolic blood pressure, reduced diastolic blood pressure and heart rate compared to the group that was not provided with the same interventions.

Mindfulness on the Intellectual Body

A collection of five studies examined the impact of mindfulness on cognitive processes defined as, attention, focus, and executive functioning including the processes that are in charge of working memory, planning, problem solving, reasoning, decision making, and multi-tasking. All of the studies were provided in a school setting with children age ranges seven to thirteen. All of the studies showed positive correlation between mindfulness and cognitive processing (Weare, 2012).

Mindfulness on the Emotional Body

The "Learn to BREATHE" curriculum is a derivative of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. In 2009 Broderick and Metz conducted a year-long study including 17- to 19-year-old students in an American independent girl's school. Their findings showed a decrease in negative affect, enhanced relaxation, self-acceptance, emotional regulation, awareness, and clarity (Weare, 2012).

Mindfulness on the Social Body

Mendelseon et. al employed a mindfulness- based intervention with the goal of increasing self-regulation in nine- and ten-year old's from disadvantaged backgrounds. The

study used the physical practice of yoga, breathing techniques, and guided mindfulness practices to help manage student stress levels. There were significant findings in the involuntary stress response in students as well as a greater trust in friends and stronger relations (Weare, 2012). Mindfulness is a great way to provide support for the whole developing person and has positive impacts on all the four bodies- promoting self-actualization and whole person wellness.

How Do We Make Changes?

With the rise in mental health crisis in students over the last 30 years, schools have taken their role in the "non-cognitive" side of education more seriously. Schools who us an evidence-informed approach to teaching social and emotional well-being report positive impacts on academic learning, staff and student well-being, the development of social and emotional skills, reduction in mental health problems, and improved behaviors. With so many programs that are available to schools it can be hard for districts to find an appropriate launching point.

Weare (2015) states the following three tactics as effective framework in promoting well-being and responding to mental health: 1. Adopt whole-school thinking: A whole-school approach makes mental health 'everyone's business,' provide a positive universal focus on well-being where discussing mental health and asking for help is the norm, develop supportive school and classroom climate and ethos with values that endorse well-being, provide early intervention for mental-health concerns and come up with short-term and long-term approaches, and address staff stress levels. 2. Engage the whole community: Promote student voice in making decisions about their learning academically and emotionally, also involve caregivers in these decisions, this helps reinforce the message of

well-being for students and is inclusive to families who might feel stigmatized. 3. Prioritize professional learning and staff developments*:* This helps staff to understand all of the factors in a student's well-being, raise staff awareness about mental health and the role of the schools, and provide staff with tools to share with students to help cope with challenges. All these practices should be kept in mind when looking at content and roll out of programs/interventions for well-being and creating behavior management strategies.

Why Is This a Pressing Issue NOW?

Our world is always being shaped and molded by what is happening here and now. And right now, I would argue our school aged children are living in crisis. Technology, and especially social media, is having a negative impact on esteem and attention in children. We have the most depressed and anxious generation of children yet, and mental illness continues to rise as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Social inequities in education are creating alarming disparities among communities and teacher turnover rates have skyrocketed. Now is the time to shift education. Now is the time to educate the whole child.

The Impact of Social Media

Technology is at the center of most of our lives in the 21st century. We have the ability to be in constant communication with others, purchase items with the click of a button, respond to a work or school email immediately, and absorb any type of information we please. While there are many advantages to living in the digital age, there are new stressors that come hand-in-hand with constantly holding a device. Social media is undoubtedly a cause for concern for teens.

In 2021, 4.3 billion people, more than half of the world, had a social media account. Today more teens are using social media than ever before (Braghieri, 2022). Most social

media accounts portray picture-perfect family moments, various achievements, lavish trips, and so on. In other words, they show a particularly curated life, and this has created the unseen, but felt, stressor for people (both children and adults) to consistently perform and share their accolades. "It is unclear if social media has been the result of the pressure to live a constant camera-ready life, or if it was the fertilizer that fueled its growth. Regardless of the cause, it is evident that living in this manner can negatively impact our ability to feel content with what we have" (Strittmatter, 2021). This race to perform, succeed, and post has trickled into the lives of children through their parents and now their own social media accounts. It comes as no surprise that as social media popularity began to rise in the mid 2000s so did the increase of mental health disturbances among teens (Braghieri, 2022). Scholars hypothesize that the increase in social media is an important factor to take into consideration.

Many hypothesize that the most recent uptick, 17% in the last two years, in screen time for children and teens could be a result of difficulties parents faced with school and childcare during the pandemic. During the pandemic kids looked to screens for entertainment and connection since many of them did not have in-person activities (Moyer, 2022). Despite social media having a social component, it cannot replicate social interactions and often hinders one's social development. Healthy relationships offer support, emotional intimacy, and create a foundation of trust. Often social platforms have the adverse effects of developing positive relationships with others, which is perhaps one of the most damaging unseen threats to a developing adolescent. According to Turner (2023) "numerous studies have revealed that children's interactions with peers have enduring effects on their occupational status, salary, relationship success, emotional development,

mental health, and even on physical health and mortality over 40 years later. These effects are stronger than the effects of children's IQ, socioeconomic status and educational attainment" (p. 1). Knowing that many teens are now seeking their relationships through screens, now is an even more crucial time for schools to prioritize social relationships with peers and educators.

The threat of online bullying is ever present. Social media allows bullies to have almost constant access to their victims. Even if bullying occurs between two students at the same school, some schools choose not to be a part of the intervention since it is not occurring on school property. Bullying has a serious negative impact, not just on one socially, but on a neurological and biological level as well. In an interview, Turner (2023) found that, "Brain scans of adults and youths reveal that online harassment activates the same regions of the brain that respond to physical pain and trigger a cascade of reactions that replicate physical assault and create physical and mental health damage" (p. 1). Social media attacks can have a negative ripple effect on all areas of a child's life.

Previous research shows that mass consumption of social media is linked with higher rates of depression among teens. There is no doubt the use of these apps is interfering with children socially and emotionally. New studies are showing that social media is also impairing the ability to focus. The constant use of social media is significantly associated with a higher risk of ADHD (Chatterjee, 2018). Researchers are having a hard time keeping up with the impacts of rapidly evolving technology and the emergence of applications. A study in Los Angeles County followed 2,587 10th graders for over two years. At the beginning of the study, none of the teens showed no symptoms of ADHD. Using a standardized questionnaire for nine ADHD symptoms including hyperactivity and

inattention, it was found that those who had higher usage of social media were more likely to display ADHD symptoms (Chatterjee, 2018). Attention is essential for all that we want to accomplish on a daily basis and connected to higher levels of cognitive functioning.

With the pervasive influence of social media on school aged children, our students need more health human connection, hands-on learning, and stress management than ever before. One can draw many conclusions between the negative association of social media and adolescent mental health. However, I do not foresee we will slay the digital beast, which makes it increasingly important to address student mental health in schools to support healthy behaviors and promote wellbeing.

Covid-19: Mental Health Trends

Today, one in five children have a mental disorder and it is estimated that only 20% of children needing mental health intervention are currently receiving the support they need compared to the 30% of students receiving the support needed per the Rosen 2014 study.. Mental illnesses and the demand for psychological services are currently at an all-time high. And the mental health crises are still on the rise. From March 2020 to October 2020 mental health emergency department visits increased 24% for children aged 5 to 11 and 31% for ages 12 to 17 when compared to data from the year prior (Abramson, 2022).

Schools are not set up to support the increasing demand for mental health support. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist per 500 students. Current data estimates the ratio is 1 school psychologist to every 1,211 students. The pandemic has further intensified preexisting disparities in mental health services. A 2020 technical report from the University of Massachusetts Boston and University of Massachusetts Amherst showed that students who needed access to school-

based mental health services the most, particularly those in low socioeconomic areas, had the lowest rate of school interventions in their district (Abramson, 2022).

A 2020 survey of 1,000 parents around the country showed that 71% of parents believed the pandemic had taken a toll on their child's mental health. Another survey of 3,3000 high schoolers in spring 2020 showed that one third of students felt more depressed than usual (Abramson, 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic has, and continues to have, adverse impacts on student mental health. The pandemic also highlighted all the ways that schools help to support children outside of academia- whether that is providing meals, offering a safe space for children to come each day, and delivering crucial social interaction for development. The negative impacts of schools closing for many years showed how much holistic education is required to support the whole child for ALL children, not just in districts with high taxes.

Perhaps the full impacts of the pandemic have not yet been fully realized. According to Douglas (2021) it is not likely that a stress response appears immediately after a major incident or trauma. Instead, educators will likely we will see increased mental health concerns as students' express anxiety and/or fear of the future because of the continued destabilization through the pandemic.

Teacher Turn Over Rates

Teachers play an essential role in the lives of children, and thus the country's present and future state. Despite the importance and value of this profession, schools are experiencing a workforce shortage. A 2022 poll by the National Education Association (NEA) found that 55% of teachers plan to leave the field sooner than they expected, many of which are due in large to additional challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. This

statistic should be alarming as there is evidence showing that high turnover rates negatively impacts student achievement (School of Education Online Programs, 2022).

Teachers are not just leaving one school for another; they are leaving the profession altogether. To understand the cause for such high turnover rates, the NEA conducted several studies and surveys. Teachers reported the following as contributors for leaving: burn out (90%), low pay (78%), general stress from the pandemic (61%), and lack of respect from the public and parents (44%) (School of Education Online Programs, 2022). Studies indicate that teacher vacancies are much higher in high poverty areas. Children in underprivileged areas are more negatively impacted by the low number of educators entering and staying in the field than their wealthier counterparts (School of Education Online Programs, 2022).

Not only is teacher retention vital for student success, but it is also necessary in education reform. According to School of Education Online Programs (2022)

> High turnover rates create constant flux, making it significantly more difficult to institute changes in education policies. Experienced teachers who are familiar with the needs of a school and its students are best poised to provide advice on how to meet those needs. When they leave, these voices are lost, and education policy suffers, as senior education administrators no longer receive their feedback on the success (or failure) of different initiatives. (p. 1)

Experienced teachers have the knowledge to see what works for students and what does not. They are the best assets in mapping out the trail to move forward in education. Having more experienced educator, especially those who have been working in inequitable conditions, brings more power to what is possible for the future of education, the future of our children, and thus, the future of our country. With so many qualified and passionate teachers leaving

the profession, schools are often left with little options for the hiring process meaning students are not necessarily getting the most qualified or heartfelt teachers to support their growth. Instead, they might be settling for someone who is willing to align their classroom lessons with standardized test goals and generic academic content. Therefore, leaving the students without the opportunity to learn and grow fully.

Conclusion

The topics I have discussed above show why and how schools operate the way that they do and how this systemic approach goes against my belief that the purpose of education is to grow the whole child. Students need to be supported in their physical, mental, emotional, and social selves to thrive, and school is just the place to nurture and support such an endeavor. It is clear our current model of education is not serving our students with so many students leaving high school feeling ill-equipped for the real world and the continual increase of students struggling with mental health related issues. The number of teachers experiencing burnout and leaving the profession, also shows that the current system is also not serving our teachers. There is an adage, “if you keep doing what you are doing, you will keep getting more of what you’ve already got.” I have had enough. In chapter four I will propose programming that can support both our teachers and our students in their wellbeing and make education a more holistic, sustainable, and enjoyable experience.

Chapter Four

Critical Action Research Program Proposal

In this chapter I will define critical action research compared to more traditional methods of research and explain why I believe in using critical action research in my intervention plan. I will also introduce the purpose and goals of my intervention plan while sharing how we can take the theories of apply holistic education to transformative the schooling experience and make it tangible through practice.

Critical Action Research

Traditional research, whether qualitative or quantitative, often relies on the "fly on the wall approach" approach. Meaning the goal of many traditional researchers is to gain an objective perspective on the subjects of a study by observing them in their natural setting. A key goal in traditional research is neutrality- meaning those that are studying participants are not directly involved with the group, sometimes even removed from the subject of study, and do not hold any biases. Critical action research, often referred to as CAR, however, utilizes the ideas, experiences, and voices of those living in the area that is being studied or observed (Anderson et al, 2007).

CAR has practical purpose and differs from traditional research because the goal of critical action is not simply to conduct study, but instead to impart social change for the betterment of a greater population of people. It provides a metaphorical voice for many people, not just an echo of the opinion of those conducting the study. Additionally, CAR is often conducted in a collaborative way, whether by having a team of researchers, or allowing participants to be involved in the research itself, also known as participatory action research (PAR). In this way, CAR is political in nature. The word "action" in critical action

research is key. CAR involves developing a plan of action to improve what is already happening and therefore is the bridge between research theory and practice (Anderson et al, 2007).

CAR gained traction in education in the 1950's and was promoted in the field of education by Corey at Columbia Teachers College. This form of research placed an emphasis on teachers conducting their own research through university teacher education programs. The practice of educators and future educators conducting their own research through practice began to legitimize teacher's perspectives on what was happening in their own classroom (Anderson et al, 2007). CAR professionalized and prioritized teacher knowledge of their craft and helped mark their opinions as valid. In this way, critical action research put power, legitimacy, and professionalism in the hands of teachers.

Why Use Critical Action Research?

The study and practice of critical action research is empowering as an educator and a researcher because it provides the opportunity to make a difference in real time. With so many regulations on what is expected of teachers today, it is easy to feel disempowered and stuck within a predetermined system. Critical action research allows teacher to create a difference. During this program, my colleagues and I have been challenged to create the plans of action to make change in our own classrooms. These changes are a microcosm of the larger macrocosm I hope to positively influence as a professional.

Anderson et al. (2007) suggest that effective teacher have been naturally using critical action research in their classroom as a pedagogical practice. The idea that teachers can gather information and data about their students and their classroom is not a new concept nor should it be viewed as a radical. The action portion of critical action research

should lead to a teacher improving their own classroom, thus the bettering experience of their students, and in some small way, transforming the educational experience.

Prior to my time in the Transformative Education and Social Change program I had never heard of critical action research, nor had I really viewed myself as a professional researcher. I regarded research as being reserved for much more astute and professional scholars who held more advanced degrees. Though, the more I learned about CAR, the more I realized that being a reflective and transformative educator is synonymous with being a critical action researcher. Without knowing it, I have been a critical action researcher my entire professional career.

As a teacher, I am consistently making formal and informal observations in my own classroom by looking at what is working well and what is not serving my students. I have examined this through subjective lenses, seeing what "clicks" for students, noticing what types of lessons they enjoy, and gauging the energy of the classroom. I have also looked at the engagement of lessons through measurable objectives, looking at data scores, taking student surveys, and assessing active participation during lessons. Based on these observations, and student voice, I create hypothesis about why things worked and why they did not. This leads to the next step of CAR which is to develop some type of intervention plan or next steps for the benefit of my students. Once those plans were offered in the classroom, I would reflect on the efficacy of them formally and informally, and when appropriate incorporate student opinion in the reflection. This is critical action research in practice.

Perhaps the most important point I can make here is that critical action research is a living thing- not a stagnant study or theory of intervention. Since CAR asks researchers to

observe in real time what is happening with their participants, it organically evolves and grows with and for participants, thus making the boundary of participant and researcher more porous than rigid compared to traditional methods (Anderson et al, 2007). With the needs of students always changing, the history of our nation consistently being built, and educational demands shifting, critical action research is the best way to impart social change as an educator because it allows for the fluidity and flexibility to meet students where they are all while holding hope for what is possible.

Theory to Practice

In chapter two I outlined that the goal of education is to support and develop the whole individual. By providing students with lessons and learning opportunities that extend beyond academic content, students can do much more than just perform on tests and attain some level of self-actualization, which I believe is the goal of a good democratic education. In fact, chapter two explores Maslow's "before the bloom" theory which states that in order for someone to reach self-actualization, they must have their foundational needs met (Berger, 2020). This theory alone greatly influenced my work and intervention proposals. I recognize that many students' needs are not being met at home, therefore, the school has the power to be one of the most positive influences on the child's life. Chapter two then explores the theoretical frameworks that support the educational programming I am designing. I display how using critical pedagogy, holistic education, and the use of education with the purpose to develop a person beyond academia can greatly benefit the whole person, and society.

Chapter three showed how and why education was not historically created to support the whole individual and then explored why offering teaching and learning in the say way it

has always been approached is problematic. The United States has used education as a means to reproduce system of oppression and maintain status quo. However, Beaty (2018) reminded me that the notion of holistic education and prioritizing the whole child predates our nation's history and goes back to the beginning of schooling with ancient Greek. It inspired me to see that in 380 B.C. the focus of education was not on testing or enforcing social normative. Instead, it was centered on finding a way to develop the whole child, which would develop the whole nation. I believe our restrictive approach to education has negatively impacted the development and overall health of our children. Therefore, I use the current mental and emotional state of students to demonstrate why changes need to occur and provide examples of how education can be a place to positively influence the whole child. Seeing how the accumulation of stress, both from within the school system and in student's personal lives as reported by Pascoe et al (2020) inspired me to find ways to support the well-being of all children in the school system. Additionally, as someone who has been in education before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, I am reminded of the importance of doing this work now. The theories outlined in chapter two and studies summarized in chapter three have all influenced the three intervention plans I am proposing.

I am proposing a systemic approach to address the gaps in student education beginning with a course for future educators to take during their preservice educational courses, adding annual continuing education for existing teachers, and trickling into a class for high school students during their health curriculum. I believe that all these levels of education need to have interventions for any change to be long-lasting and comprehensive. If the goal is to support students' overall growth, development, and well-being, we must also not only equip educators with the tools to do so, but we must support the physical,

intellectual, emotional, and social bodies of teachers. Harding et. al (2019) says, “teachers themselves are consistently reported to be at increased risk of common mental health disorders compared to those in other occupations. Poor wellbeing may be problematic not only for teachers’ long term mental health but also for that of their students (p. 180).” Learning is a reciprocal process that occurs between the teacher and the student. Teacher and student wellbeing are connected by many complex and interconnected factors; meaning we cannot overlook the need for teacher well-being to promote student well-being.

Program Proposal

Intervention One: Educating the Whole Child

The first intervention I am presenting is a course called Educating the Whole Child, a college course for preservice teachers. The content of this course will focus on critical pedagogy, holistic education, mental health trends, mental health literacy, child development, current resources in education, mindfulness, and well-being practices for physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development. The course will be taken during preservice teacher education, ideally occurring after their initial field observation experience and before their student teaching. The purpose of the course is to provide preservice teachers and in-depth overview of the importance of meeting the needs of the whole child while also providing ways to apply educational theory into practice.

This class will be self-reflective and interactive, asking teachers to explore the well-being of their four bodies, implement their own self-care practices and determine how these can be easily translated into daily classroom routines. Additionally, students of this class will be asked to research child development as it pertains to their teaching certificate age range to best understand the needs of children during this time. From there, the course will

ask students to reflect on their own physical, intellectual, emotional, and social selves during that time to see how their needs were addressed and how they were not. Although teachers will likely not know the demographics of their future schools, they will be encouraged to examine the state of education in this region especially as it pertains to racial, social, and socio-economic disparities. At the end of the course, students will be able to align classroom instruction with teaching that promotes learners to use critical thinking and develop skills to be whole autonomous beings.

Intervention Two: Continuing Education Courses

The second intervention is a series of professional development courses for those working in education. These courses are to be offered to all school staff members, including who have graduated without having the Educating the Whole Child course, and as supplemental courses for those who have already completed the college class. Using professional development for student and staff well-being is an effective use of resources as every state requires teachers to participate in continuing education courses to maintain teaching certificates and most districts include some type of formal professional development throughout the course of the year for educators. These courses are intended to be a part of staff personal and professional development.

Rather than develop a prescribed list of courses to take and the order to take them in, I believe that schools should be given the autonomy to choose which course will be most beneficial for their community each school year and of most interest to their learning communities. With the goal of giving representation to teachers, the school administration will send a list of possible courses to teachers for a community vote to determine which course will be focused on during an eight-week period. Schools will complete these

trainings together to encourage a strong learning community with accountability, support, and continued collaboration. Should teachers wish to participate in additional trainings, they are encouraged to connect with others in that course outside of their district to build a strong society of change-makers.

Schools and educators are encouraged to find local and global courses that would best serve their students and staff that connect to one of the following topics 1. Holistic Education 2. Critical Pedagogy 3. Teacher and Student Wellness 4. Well-being for the Four Bodies 5. Mental Health 6. Mindfulness. The continuing education courses I am proposing in the intervention include pre-existing continuing education courses for teachers that I have personally researched as well as a course I have created called "I Am Present," an eight-week class based on the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction courses offered.

Possible courses:

- I Am Present- Julie Strittmatter
- Learn Mental Health Literacy – The University of British Columbia (Mentalhealthliteracy.org, 2023).
- Social-Emotional Learning Courses-National Education Association (National Education Association, 2023).
- Classroom 180: A Framework for Creating, Sustaining, and Assessing the Trauma-Informed Classroom- Beyond Consequences Institute (Forbes, H. 2023).
- Balancing Your Classroom Each and Every Day- Challenge to Change Inc. (Challenge to Change Inc., 2023).

- Becoming a Calm, Happy Teacher- Advancement Courses, a Wiley Brand (Advancement Courses, 2023).

Intervention Three: Being Well

Lastly, the third intervention I am proposing is a course offered in late middle school or early high schools called Being Well. The grade offering will likely vary based on state health requirements and what the community deems most appropriate age for their students. This course educates students on their own wellbeing. It will be offered as an eight-week course, as many schools are sections into eight-week quarters or sixteen-week semesters. The course will cover topics such as mental health literacy, self-care practices based on the seven dimensions of wellness, well-being practices that support the four bodies, and mindfulness.

The class will include content, testimony from authors and educators on their relationships with themselves, personal reflection, and classroom discussion. When available this course will utilize place-based education, taking students into the community as a portion of their learning. For example, in the physical body well-being schools are encouraged to take their students on a mindful nature walk on a local trail. Additionally, they will visit community businesses and nonprofits that support overall whole person wellness. Students will be encouraged to explore themes like relationships, resiliency, identity, and purpose.

In-depth Intervention Proposal: "I Am Present"

For the purpose of this thesis, I am going to provide an in-depth overview of the continuing education course I have developed called "I Am Present." While I deem all three

tiers of the intervention as necessary to hold unequivocal and reciprocal benefits, I recognize that there are layers of obstacles to overcome for the other two program proposals.

For a course like "Educating the Whole Child" to be added to teaching prerequisites, it would require quite a bit of systemic change in higher education courses. At minimum it would require a university to change its preservice teaching requirements, and at maximum it would entail a state or the nation to do the same. This could take a considerable amount of time and red tape to cut through. Additionally, many universities require courses to be created by teaching members with a doctoral degree, which I do not hold yet. While this is still a part of my vision for intervention, I know this is something that I can work on in time. With my current teaching role as an adjunct professor at West Chester University, I am learning the politics of education in higher education and building a stronger network of transformative educators.

Similarly, adding the student course "Being Well" into secondary curriculum will require systemic changes from shifting curriculum at an individual school basis and building to a national level. Adjusting student curriculum and requirements for graduation varies on a school basis and would require a buy in from students, staff, administration, and community. While I again believe that this intervention is important and more than possible, it will take time, connections, and willingness from districts.

I learned early on in my program that it can feel overwhelming, and at times, a bit discouraging, to be just one person with big visions for change in education. The mountain of change in ahead can feel insurmountable. I am not the only one who has peered at this mountain and felt too small to make a difference. Stern and Brown (2016) cite interviews with many Philadelphia educators who felt depressed, burnt out, and hopeless. However,

they continued to teach over other professions because they believed in the work they were doing and the change they could make. Many of the educators interviewed were a part of activist educational groups in the greater Philadelphia area, but the reality is, it is not just teachers in this area that feel the burnout and despair- it is felt globally. Andrew Old, a blogger in the United Kingdom published the following quote from a long-term educator on the impact of the state of education on her health.

> To sum up, I have been teaching for 10 years now…Last year has been awful. Wanted to quit; couldn't cope; cried all the time at home; worked ridiculous hours to keep up; didn't sleep. Also, I've put on nearly 3 stone [about 40 pounds] through poor diet, eating on the run and comfort eating and look about 50 (I'm 31) [i.e., Andrew *Old*]. I went to the doctors because I was ill a lot and, once I explained symptoms, he medicated me for work-related anxiety. (As cited in Sterns & Brown, 2016, p. 1)

Through the guidance of my professors, I have been encouraged to find people with a similar dream of how to improve the lives of teachers and children, to utilize my unique gifts, rely on my areas of expertise, and to start with what I have where I am. As a certified yoga and mindfulness instructor, former high school teacher, and with my experience leading continuing education for teachers, I feel my energy, talents, and proficiency most closely aligns with developing the course "I Am Present." Supremely, this is a course I can begin offering in real time to teachers and schools to begin to create a positive ripple effect of change right here and right now.

In the summer of 2022, I enrolled in the clinically proven and significantly researched Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course as offered through Mindful Leader. The original MBSR training was created by mindfulness guru Jon Kabat-Zinn at

the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in 1979. The program was created for patients with chronic illness who were not responding to traditional medicine and its benefits are now recognized worldwide. The program has been shown effective at managing chronic pain, addressing anxiety, depression, and reducing general stress (Mindful Leader, 2023).

Based on my immersive experience in the MBSR course, my 200-hour yoga teacher training, 95-hour children through teen yoga teacher training, over a decade of experience in the field of education, and my studies through this program, I created "I Am Present" to support the personal and professional development of teachers with the goal in mind to support the whole teacher and thus the whole student. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to outlining the "I Am Present" continuing education course for existing educators and school personnel.

Program Outline

Once participants register for the course, they will be sent a detailed "Welcome Letter" outlining the objective of the course, meeting days and times, how to prepare for the class, and what to expect (see Appendix A). Participants will also be asked to use a journal to track their experience during the course to aid them as they gain deeper personal insight. There are four specific journals: A. initial questions B. Weekly journal trackers C. Pleasant events tracker D. Unpleasant events tracker (see Appendix B). What follows is a weekly outlay of the eight-week program including key elements, how we will use our meeting time, homework, and additional resources for the virtual version of this course. Each week will have a PowerPoint with resources based on the theme of the week. See a sample of week one PowerPoint (see Appendix C). What follows is a weekly outlay of the eight-week

program including key elements, how we will use our meeting time, homework, and additional resources for the virtual version of this course.

Week One
Theme: Introduction to Mindfulness

During Class:

- Introduce self
- Get a buddy
    - Introductions with buddy
    - Whole group introductions (depending on size of class)
- Breath Practice
    - Counting breaths, affirmation breaths, noticing breaths
- Teaching: an Introduction to Mindfulness
    - Jon Kabat-Zinn definition
    - 9 foundations of mindfulness
    - My interpretation of mindfulness
        - Formal and informal practices
- Informal Practice
    - Mindful Eating: Eat a raisin
- Formal Practice
    - Body Scan (20 minutes)
- Choose your affirmation for the week ahead

Homework:

- **Daily**
    - Cultivate a 5-minute seated practice
    - Practice the 20-minute body scan
    - Choose one activity to practice informal mindfulness
    - State your weekly affirmation out loud (an intentional thought)
- **Throughout the week**
    - Update your mindfulness recorder
    - Watch the following videos
        - The Power of Mindfulness (Shapiro, 2017)
        - Don't Try to be Mindful (Larson, 2015)
- **Supplemental Practices**
    - Read chapter "What is Mindfulness" in *Grow: Tending to the Hearts and Minds of Children Through the Practice of Mindfulness (*Strittmatter, et al.2021)
    - Create your own definition of mindfulness

Week Two

Theme: Training the Mind

Sub themes: attention, perception, what we focus on grows

During Class:

- Meet with buddy to discuss last week's practice
    - Option for whole group sharing
- Breath Practice
    - Counting breaths, bell, silence
- Teaching: Training the Monkey Mind
    - Watch Monkey Mind (Headspace, 2018)
    - Watch Monkey Business (Simmons, 2010)
    - Make a list of what pulls on your attention
        - Discuss past, present, future
    - Read Mindful Monkey Happy Panda (Alderfer, 2011).
    - Look at old face/young face woman illustration
    - 
- Informal Practice
    - Write down all of the kind words you would say to someone whose attention wanders- apply these to yourself this week during practice
- Formal Practice
    - Grateful body (20 minutes)
- Choose your affirmation for the week ahead

Homework:

- **Daily**
    - Cultivate a 5-10 minute seated practice
    - Practice the 20 minute body scan or grateful body
    - Choose one activity to practice informal mindfulness
    - State your weekly affirmation out loud (an intentional thought)
- **Throughout the week**
    - Update your mindfulness recorder
    - Take note of at least one pleasant event that happens throughout the week. Use the recorder to track this event and experience
    - Watch the following videos
        - The Happiness Advantage (Anchor, 2010)
        - How to Tame your Wandering Mind (Jha, 2018)

Week Three

Theme: Embody

Sub themes: Coming into the body, Reconnection

During Class:

- Meet with buddy to discuss last week's practice
    - Option for whole group sharing
- Breath Practice
    - How is my mind, heart, and body, breathe into specific body parts, silent breath
- Introduction to Yoga
    - What is Yoga?
        - Origins
        - Different styles of yoga
        - goal=yoke
        - Difference between mindfulness, meditation, and yoga
        - Embodiment
            - introduce article on somatic practice (Madeson, 2011)
            - We leave our bodies
            - Rupi poem

- Informal Practice
    - What am I grateful for about my body?
- Formal Practice
    - Yoga Practice (30 minutes)
        - Mini gratitude body meditation
- Choose your affirmation for the week ahead

Homework:

- **Daily**

    - Cultivate a 5-10 minute seated practice
    - Practice the 20 minute body scan, grateful body, or yoga practice
    - Choose one activity to practice informal mindfulness
    - State your weekly affirmation out loud (an intentional thought)
- **Throughout the week**
    - Update your mindfulness recorder
    - Take note of at least one unpleasant event that happens throughout the week. Use the recorder to track this event and experience
    - Do something that is embodied: dance, take a bath, use a weighted blanket, practice self massage
    - Watch the following videos
        - The Reflection in Me (Fablevision, 2017)
        - Girls Ages 6-18 Talk about Their Bodies (Allure, 2018)
        - You Don't Have to Love Your Body: Alternatives to Body Positivity (Due, 2021)

- **Supplemental Practices**
    - Read chapter "Mindfulness, Meditation, and Yoga" in *Grow: Tending to the Hearts and Minds of Children Through the Practice of Mindfulness (*Strittmatter, et. al. 2021)
    - Read remainder of Embodiment Practices: How to Heal Through Movement (Madeson, 2011)
    - Watch Returning to the Body (Rippentrop, 2022)
    - Watch Lizzo X Jameela on Finding Confidence and Dealing with Social Media Criticism (Jamil, 2020).

Week Four
Theme: Stress
Sub themes: Reacting vs Responding, The Pause
During Class:

- Meet with buddy to discuss last week's practice
    - Option for whole group sharing
- Breath Practice
    - Mantra: I am here, I am now, silent breath
- Teaching about stress
    - Read "The Guest House" (Rumi, 2004).
        - How do you react or respond to your emotions?
    - Define stress
        - Watch How Stress Affects Your Brain (Murgia, 2015)
        - How mindfulness reduces stress
        - Reacting Vs. Responding
            - Why mindfulness is your superpower
            - 5-4-3-2-1 Senses Practice
- Informal Practice
    - Make a list of your stressors
    - Make a list of your coping skills
        - Franklin D. Roosevelt's quote, "a smooth sea never made a skilled sailor"
        - 'You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf' is a famous saying by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Formal Practice
    - Guided Visualization- Your Happy Place (25 minutes)
- Choose your affirmation for the week ahead

Homework:

- **Daily**
    - Cultivate a 10-15 minute seated practice
    - Practice the 20 minute body scan, grateful body, yoga practice, or your happy place
    - Choose one activity to practice informal mindfulness
    - State your weekly affirmation out loud (an intentional thought)
    - Practice 5-4-3-2-1
- **Throughout the week**
    - Update your mindfulness recorder
    - Watch the following videos
        - How to Make Stress Your Friend (McGonigal, 2013)
        - Just Breathe (Salzman, Julie & Salzman, Josh, 2015)

        - The Science Behind Mindfulness Meditation (UpRising Uk, 2016)

- **Supplemental Practices**
    - Read chapter “Mindfulness and The Brain” in *Grow: Tending to the Hearts and Minds of Children Through the Practice of Mindfulness* (Strittmatter, et. al. 2021).

Week Five

Theme: Staying Present

Sub themes: the good & the bad do not last, stop "shoulding" on yourself, knowing what you need in the moment

During Class:

- Meet with buddy to discuss last week's practice
    - Option for whole group sharing
- Breath Practice
    - Calming Breaths
        - Crocodile breathing, Triangle Breath
    - Energizing Breaths
        - Sniff, sniff, sniff, exhale, windmill
    - Focusing Breaths
        - Magnet breathing, flower breathing

- Teaching Staying Present
    - Read "Being Present" by Jessy Humann

Being Present

I like petals in the sunshine
that sleep beneath the roses
and I like the sound a bird makes
when its beak opens and closes.

I like the way the grass bends
in the passing of a breeze
and I like the way that vines look
as they climb and wind up trees.

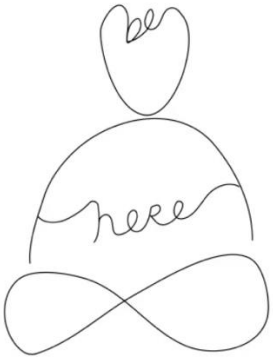
I like the way the world looks
as I sit here on the ground
and I love the way my mind feels
when I notice what's around.

~ Jessy Humann ~

    - Read Rupi Kaur

i get so lost
in where i want to go
i forget that the place i'm in
is already quite magical

- rupi kaur



- ○
    - ■ Past, Present, Future (we are here now)
        - When we are present, we can explore what we need in the moment AND what our students need
- ○ Mindfulness in your Classroom
    - ■ Why Aren't We Teaching Mindfulness (Rossi, 2015)
    - ■ How to integrate mindfulness into your classroom
        - Brainstorm ways you can see yourself doing this
            - ○ How I did it (5 mins, mindful conflict resolution, set timers for stressful projects)
            - ○ Knowing what you need- knowing what your students need. How can you respond to those needs instead of reacting to behaviors? The classroom is a responsive place

- Informal Practice
    - ○ What do I need today? What does my mind need? What does my body need? What does my heart need?
- Formal Practice
    - ○ Mantra Meditation (20 Minutes)
- Choose your affirmation for the week ahead

Homework:

- **Daily**
    - ○ Cultivate a 10-15 minute seated practice
    - ○ Practice the 20 minute body scan, grateful body, yoga practice, your happy place, or mantra meditation

    - Choose one activity to practice informal mindfulness
    - State your weekly affirmation out loud (an intentional thought)
- **Throughout the week**
    - Update your mindfulness recorder
    - Watch the following videos
        - Bite Sized Mindfulness (Wiley,2018).
        - Valuable Lessons for a Happier Life (Kay, 2016)

- **Supplemental Practices**
    - Read chapter “Mindful at Any Age” in *Grow: Tending to the Hearts and Minds of Children Through the Practice of Mindfulness* (Strittmatter, et. al 2021)

Week Six
Theme: Loving Kindness
Sub themes: pouring from a full cup, put on your oxygen mask first
During Class:

- Meet with buddy to discuss last week's practice
    - Option for whole group sharing
- Breath Practice
    - Silent breathing, labeling (thoughts, feelings, sensations)
- Teaching Loving Kindness
    - What is the loving kindness meditation
        - Maya Angelou — 'I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.'
        - Why we send love to ourselves first
        - Not starting with the most challenging person to forgive
    - Practicing Loving Kindness with students
        - We are the emotional barometer for our classrooms
        - Watch How Childhood Trauma Affects Health Across a Lifetime (Harris, 2014)
        - Think of a student who would have benefitted from these practices and gently just send them love
        - Walking meditation with metta

- Informal Practice
    - Think of an IAK you can perform this week (intentional act of kindness)
- Formal Practice
    - Metta Meditation (20 Minutes)
- Choose your affirmation for the week ahead

Homework:

- **Daily**
    - Cultivate a 10-15 minute seated practice
    - Practice the 20 minute body scan, grateful body, yoga practice, your happy place, mantra meditation, metta meditation
    - Choose one activity to practice informal mindfulness
    - State your weekly affirmation out loud (an intentional thought)
    - Complete one intentional act of kindness
- **Throughout the week**
    - Update your mindfulness recorder
    - Watch the following videos
        - The Selfish Benefits of Kindness (BrainCraft, 2019)

- **Supplemental Practices**
    - Read chapter “Teaching Mindfulness to Children” in *Grow: Tending to the Hearts and Minds of Children Through the Practice of Mindfulness* (Strittmatter et. al. 2021)

Week Seven
Theme: Gratitude
Sub themes: pause to give thanks
During Class:

- Meet with buddy to discuss last week's practice
    - Option for whole group sharing
- Breath Practice
    - silence, Mantra: I am grateful, a person you are grateful for, a place you are grateful for, an item you are grateful for
- Teaching Gratitude
    - Quotes:
        - "If you only say one prayer in a day, make it thank you "- Rumi
        - It is not grateful people that are happy, it is happy people who are grateful
        - Gratitude turns what we have into enough
    - Ways to practice gratitude
        - Gratitude alphabet
        - Gratitude rampage
            - Bigger than an elephant
            - The color blue/yellow
            - Smaller than a seed
            - Gratitude timer
            - Gratitude journal
            - Gratitude jar
        - An Experiment in Gratitude (Bernstein & Pittman, 2013)

- Informal Practice
    - Text someone in your life that you are grateful for
- Formal Practice
    - Choose a practice with your buddy
- Choose your affirmation for the week ahead

Homework:

- **Daily**
    - Cultivate a 10-15 minute seated practice
    - Practice the 20 minute body scan, grateful body, yoga practice, your happy place, mantra meditation, metta meditation
    - Choose one activity to practice informal mindfulness
    - State your weekly affirmation out loud (an intentional thought)
    - Send one gratitude email at work
- **Throughout the week**

    - Update your mindfulness recorder
    - Watch the following videos
        - Kiss Your Brain (Costa, 2021)

- **Supplemental Practices**
    - Read chapter “Mindfulness Practices” in *Grow: Tending to the Hearts and Minds of Children Through the Practice of Mindfulness* (Strittmatter, et al. 2021)

Week Eight

Theme: The Path ahead

Sub themes: reflection, creating a sustainable practice

During Class:

- Meet with buddy to discuss last week's practice
    - Option for whole group sharing
- Breath Practice
    - Silence
- Journal Reflection
    - What worked well for me?
        - Types of practices, times of practices, independent practice, group practice
    - What did not work well for me?
    - What practices do I more naturally gravitate towards?
    - How much time would I like to spend on my mindfulness practice
        - Weekly
        - Daily
    - What is my biggest take away?
- Teaching Mindfulness
    - How do you see yourself bringing this into your classroom?
- Formal Practice
    - Write your own brief guided visualization and read it to your buddy
- Closing circle
    - Share what is your biggest take away

Final Thoughts

The task of transforming the schooling and learning experience for educators and students alike is a cumbersome task that requires time, energy, visionaries, and most importantly people who are yearning for a change. Albeit challenging, my passion makes it is a mission worth undertaking. In my experience, teachers and students alike are ready for a more holistic approach to education that supports their overall well-being. Creating a pipeline approach to change from preservice teachers-continuing education for existing teachers-education for students is the greatest way to influence sustainable shifts in education.

I am honored to begin a small positive ripple effect of change in the educational system through “I Am Present.” At the current moment, I am reaching out to school districts and individuals alike who would be interested in being a part of the first group training. If a district is willing to join, this is something I will offer in person for the staff during their allotted professional development time. If individual teachers are interested, the course will be offered virtually on a week-night evening with the option to utilize a recording if the meeting time does not align for participants.

Chapter Five

Implementation and Evaluation

This chapter is dedicating to the logistics of implementing "I AM Present," a continuing education course for teachers. Throughout the chapter I will discuss the timeline for the program, how to gain community involvement and approval for the programming. I will also explore my plans for evaluation of the efficacy of the course and the degree to which I have met the course goals as described in Chapter 4. Finally, I will discuss the limitation of the programming by looking ahead at possible disparities in population, resources, and other challenges I foresee.

Implementation

As previously mentioned, this course will take place over the duration of eight weeks. The course duration has been designed as such for three reasons. First, I have taken into consideration the school year which is typically sectioned into quarters lasting eight weeks. This means that teachers can dedicate their professional development for one quarter of the school year to this program and its goals. Second, "I Am Present" is based on the well-studied Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program, which found most benefits when practiced over the course of eight weeks. Third, the program is intended to help teachers identify and experience the benefits of mindfulness, develop and authentic mindfulness practice in their personal lives, and then find ways that they wish to translate these tenets to the classroom- all of which will take time.

Each meeting time is set for an hour and a half to align with most school's professional development time. Participants will be given exercises to practice in between sessions based on the teaching each week. Because I know teachers already have a lot on

their plate, their coursework is minimal and uses only assignments that I believe to have maximum benefits. There are supplemental readings, videos, and resources for teachers to use on their own time if they choose to deepen their practice. An important part of the implementation program is ensuring that all participants will have a "mindfulness buddy." The relationship is intended for support, check-ins, community building and to hold one another other accountable in their practices. Overall, once the eight-week course is complete, teachers should develop their own mindfulness practice personally and have found ways to organically integrate the practices into their learning communities professionally.

Program Involvement

Some schools are eager to bring programming like "I Am Present" into their classrooms. In fact, I have already worked with my alma matter, Great Valley High School, to offer a Yoga for Self-Care course district wide, free meditations for teachers during the height of the covid-19 pandemic and volunteered at their welcome back to school wellness fair for teachers. My hope is that this district will be the pilots of this program in the 2023-2024 school year. In my experience, school involvement requires teacher interest and advocacy. Therefore, connecting with progressive educators and sharing about this program and its benefits is critical in its launch.

Another way to work with a district and teachers is to gather parents who are activists for mindfulness training in schools. I believe this piece is very important because it helps bridge the gap between the local community and the school community, which we can see are not in fact separate entities but shared. To gain community involvement and excitement, I will lead a free yoga and mindfulness session for any students and parents in

districts where “I Am Present” is being offered, or districts that are considering the programming. Moreover, it would be wonderful to open some of the professional development sessions to parents who also wish to deepen their understanding of mindfulness and how it can benefit their children.

A more ambitious, but still reasonable goal for increasing community involvement is appointing one staff member with the task of Community Mindfulness Connection during their “I Am Present” training. The program can challenge all teachers, but especially the Community Mindfulness Connection, to think of ways that the mindfulness practices they apply in their classroom can trickle into the community to become a larger portion of a child’s daily interactions. Because the programming allows for teacher autonomy in determining the most effective way to translate mindfulness practices to their classrooms, it is hard to predict how these practices will translate to the community. A few possibilities are hosting a monthly mindful meeting open to all families in the community whether that is by a school personnel with training or a mindfulness/yoga professional locally. Another possibility is having students in speech classes prepare a speech on their experience with mindfulness and sharing it with member of the community instead of simply giving a speech in their classroom. Finally, on a small scale, teachers can parent-teacher conferences with a mindfulness experience before discussing their student.

The dream is to have at least one person in every school building who can serve as the point person for continuing mindfulness as a way of being in the school community. This person would need to have additional training, such as a formal mindfulness certification or yoga training. I believe that having one person in each school who has

formal training will help continue mindfulness as a form of well-being for all students and staff. It will also ensure that there is internal support for teachers as they try new lessons.

Program Evaluation

The evaluation of this program will rely on both qualitative and quantitative data. Since one of my core beliefs is to eliminate the use of standardized testing in education for students, I believe the evaluation of learning and efficacy in "I Am Present" should rely on fluid feedback from teachers in addition to scoring their own perceptions of the program's impact. The more quantitative data will serve as at-a-glance assessment of the course, while the qualitative data will provide more thorough evaluation and feedback. I also affirm that collecting feedback in this way gives more of a voice to the educators who participate in the program outside of simply using a scale. Thus, allowing the program to continually grow and evolve to best serve its participants, which is also best practice to support their students. As the facilitator of the course, I will invite real-time feedback from participants. Each week, teachers will be encouraged to email me with questions, comments, celebrations, concerns, or any other feedback. This will informally allow me to continually meet the needs of those in the course without waiting until the end to receive any type of response.

At the end of eight weeks there will be a more formal evaluation of "I Am Present," through a series of surveys on the course. The first survey will focus on the content of the course and effectiveness of teaching principles (see Appendix D). The second survey will focus on teacher's preparedness to translate mindfulness theory into practices and the impact of mindfulness on their own life and in their classroom (see Appendix E). Finally, teachers and their buddies will be asked to submit any additional feedback they might have. In an ideal setting, I would like to set up post interviews with participants six months following

their training to see the lasting impact of “I Am Present” on their personal lives, their classroom culture, and their students (see Appendix F).

This qualitative research can lead to adjustments to the course and possibly follow up professional development courses. I can also see the need to create suggested items to put in a classroom mindfulness tool kit, additional resources for teachers, and recommended books or trainings to deepen their own understanding and practices.

Looking Ahead

While most educators agree that the system needs improvements, making any changes within the current structure will provide some hurdles to overcome. The main issue I foresee is gaining school commitment bringing “I Am Present” to their staff. Schools are presented with many choices when it comes to staff professional development. I will need to efficiently communicate the course offering with districts and promote it prevalently so there is visibility. Once the course is promoted, school personnel need to see and understand the benefit of “I Am Present” for their teachers, and thus their students. Choosing to prioritize a training like this course for a quarter of the school year is a radical decision for most districts, and with change, some pushback can always be anticipated.

Some people judge mindfulness, meditation, and yoga as having religious affiliations. Therefore, some states have pushed to keep these practices out of the public school system. While these practices can enhance a practitioner’s spiritual connection, they are in no way connected to certain religions or creeds. Addressing this misconception upfront when promoting the course and conversing with districts and communities can help alleviate some of this potential friction and hopefully attract more people to the programming. Along a similar vein, some districts that do not prioritize whole student wellness might be more

resistant to work that supports the emotional, physical, and social bodies of a student and teachers over their intellectual beings. Therefore, it will be important to address the interconnectedness of the four bodies and for myself, and anyone else instructing the course to meet these conversations with confidence, grace, and resiliency.

As with most interventions in education, funding will certainly be a hurdle to overcome. As I explored in chapter three, funding for schools is incredibly inequitable, often leaving students of color with far less resources than their white counterparts. If the course is only offered to districts who can financially afford their professional development, then this will only be another rift in the educational gap. Therefore, applying for state funding, gaining money from sponsors, and asking for donorships will be essential in the beginning of offering the course. Having funding from outside of the schools will allow me to provide the course to some schools free of charge.

Despite my belief that one person can make a difference, I will need to train other instructors to lead the course as well. Having a variety of facilitators will ensure class sizes can stay below 30, ensuring a solid connection between the facilitator and the group. It will also allow the course to be offered to a wide variety of people across the nation, and perhaps even the world, whether that is in person or virtual. And finally, having a variety of instructors will provide more diversity to the programming, allowing teachers and districts the autonomy to choose from a facilitator whose training style and experiences most closely aligns with what they are seeking.

Conclusion

With so many broken pieces in our current educational system, it can be quite overwhelming to know where to begin. Moreover, it can be more challenging to know if

what we are doing makes a difference on a larger scale. I know that as a classroom teacher, tending to the four bodies of my students and maintaining my mindful classroom made a difference. I know this because I can feel it, I have seen it, and I have heard it. Knowing that I have made small impact on the lives of students in my own classroom inspired me to earn my Master of Education in Transformative Education and Social Change. It is my hope that I can take the positive experiences in my classroom and find various ways to translate them to positively influence a larger student body.

In this chapter, I provided what I believe to be my next step in transforming the educational experience by offering the course “I Am Present.” While finding ways to evaluate its efficacy and limitations are challenging to predict at this moment, doing so is essential to the making the types of changes I wish to see. As this continuing education course grows, it will certainly evolve. I am committed to that because I am committed to making a better educational experience, and thus a better life, for all students.

While the system may feel broken and maybe even beyond repair, I know that the children that schools serve are not broken. I know that people are resilient. People are good. And people need love. The famous bell hooks (1994) said, "to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (p. 13). If we wish to see a change for our students, we need to teach them from a place of love and respect, not just teach for rigor and test scores.

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Appendix A

Welcome Letter

Welcome to I Am Present!

My name is Julie Strittmatter and I am so honored to be with you on this 8 week journey into mindfulness. Congratulations on dedicating your precious time and energy to yourself and the art of living more fully in the present moment. You are right where you are supposed to be.

Course Objectives:

1. Deepen your understanding of mindfulness
2. Develop sustainable mindfulness practices for yourself
3. Integrate mindfulness into your classroom
4. Cultivate habits that promote a healthy mind, body, and heart

Our learning together will take place during hour and a half weekly zoom meetings. Each week will be centered on a different mindfulness theme with practices that help us explore each topic as they pertain to us personally and professionally. Session formats are as follows: sharing with partners, education on each topic, interactive mindfulness practices, assignments for the week, and reflection.

In addition to our meeting time together, you will be invited to practice mindfulness on your own. These practices range from 10- 60 minutes daily. It is always helpful to plan ahead.

Things to consider:

Space

Find or create intentional physical space for your practices. This space can be anywhere you would like. Consider somewhere with plenty of room for a yoga practice, a relatively quiet space, and a spot where you will not be disturbed. I suggest making this space as relaxing as possible; perhaps include a candle or incense, a photograph of a loved one or yourself as a child, and anything else that feels special or sacred to you.

Time

Explore the best time for you to dedicate to your practices. Some days you will need to create the time in your schedule as it likely does not innately exist. Inform your family and friends ahead of time that this is a personal and reflective practice. Turn your devices on “do not disturb.”

Props and Clothing

Some sessions will involve some movement. Wear loose fitting, comfortable clothing to each session. Bring a yoga mat, towel, or find a carpeted area to practice on. I also suggest having a cushion or a pillow to prop yourself up in seated meditation. Please bring your journals with you to each session.

Communication
I am here for you. Please reach out to me with any questions, challenges, and inspirations. If you are going to miss a class or would like to schedule an additional private meeting time with me, please contact me.

I look forward to seeing you on the mat soon.

With gratitude,
Julie

Appendix B (A-D)

Weekly Journal Trackers (A)

Initial Journal Prompts

These questions will be provided to participants during the first meeting time.

Intro Questions:

As we begin the course, it is great to know where, and how, we are beginning. Please take your time to fill in the following questions.

Why did I sign up to take this course?

What am I hoping to get out of this course?

What is my personal intention/goal for this course?

What is my professional intention/goal for this course?

Where will I do my home practice?

When will I do my home practice?

When will I complete my journal?

Who are my support people for this course?

Weekly Journal Chart (B)

This chart will be used during each week of programming. Participants will fill in their week number and the theme for the week along with their own positive affirmation. For their mindfulness practice they will choose a breath practice that has been taught, a formal mindfulness experience, movement such as yoga or exercise and they will track their sleep, mood, and gratitude each day.

Week (number) (theme)

Weekly Affirmation:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breath Practice							
Formal Practice							
Movement							
Hours Slept							
Mood							
Gratitude	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
Informal Practice							
Reflection							

Pleasant Events Tracker Week Two (C)

In order to become more aware of sensations in the body, participants will be asked to track pleasant events as it connects to sensation in the body during week two of our training.

What was the experience /event?	Were you aware of the pleasant experience while it was happening?	How did your body feel during this experience? Be as detailed as possible, where did you feel it? What sensations occurred?	What mood or feelings came with the event?	What do you notice now as you write this down?

Unpleasant Events Tracker Week Three (D)

In order to become more aware of sensations in the body, participants will be asked to track pleasant events as it connects to sensation in the body during week two of our training.

What was the experience/event?	Were you aware of the pleasant experience while it was happening?	How did your body feel during this experience? Be as detailed as possible, where did you feel it? What sensations occurred?	What mood or feelings came with the event?	What do you notice now as you write this down?

Appendix C

Week One PowerPoint

"I AM PRESENT"

8 WEEK MINDFULNESS PROGRAM FOR EDUCATORD BASED ON MBSR

Julie Strittmatter

WEEK ONE AGENDA

1. Introductions and Buddies
2. Breath Practice
   - Counting breaths, affirmation breaths, noticing breaths
3. Teaching: an Introduction to Mindfulness
   - JKZ definition
   - 9 foundations of mindfulness
   - My interpretation
4. Practices
   - Informal Practice
     - Eat a raisin
   - Formal Practice
     - Body Scan (20 minutes)

INTROUDCTIONS

1. Your name
2. Where you are from
3. Your role in education
4. What brought you to this course?
5. Your ideal Saturday

BREATH PRACTICES

COUNTING BREATHS

inhale: 1-2-3
Exhale: 3-2-1

MANTRA BREATHING

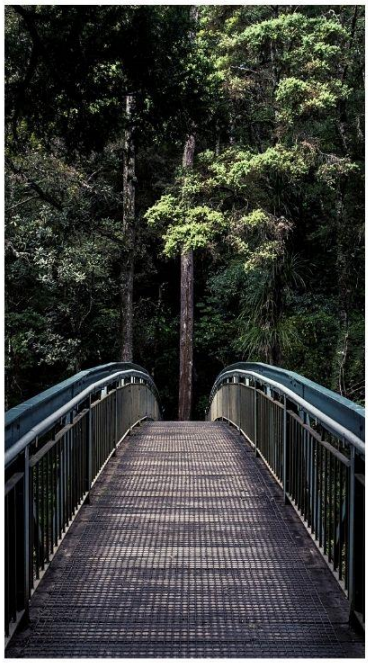
Inhale: I am strong
exhale: I am sytrong

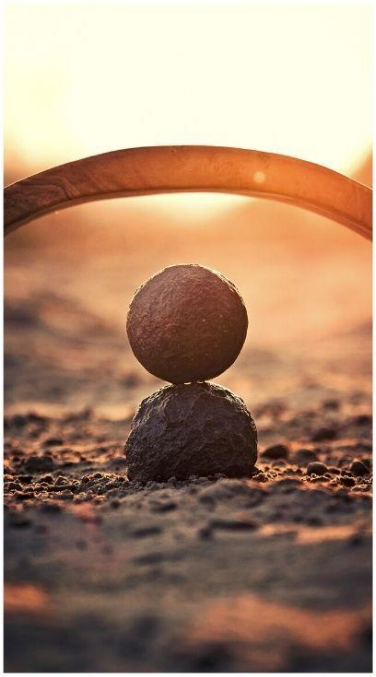
NOTICING

Simply notice the thought in your mind, the sensations in your body, and the feelings in your heart.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally," says Kabat-Zinn. "And then I sometimes add, in the service of self-understanding and wisdom."

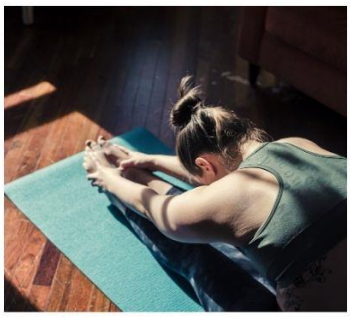




FOUNDATIONS OF MINDULNESS

01. Non-judgement
02. Patience
03. Beginner's Mind
04. Trust
05. Non-striving
06. Acceptance
07. Letting Go
08. Generosity
09. Gratitude

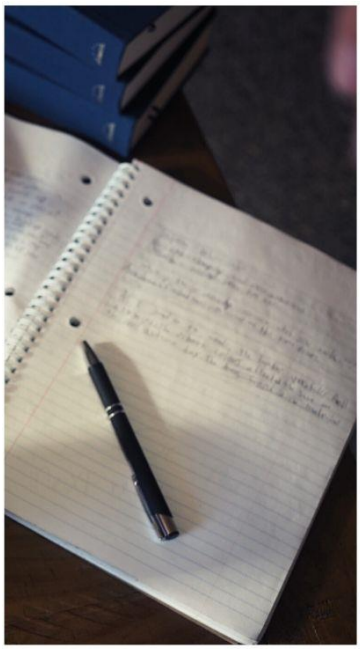
FORMAL PRACTICES



INFORMAL PRACTICES

1. **PAYING ATTENTION ON PURPOSE**
2. **BEING PRESENT**
3. **PRACTICING NON-JUDGEMENT**

CHOOSE YOUR AFFIRMATION FOR THE WEEK AHEAD



SELF STUDY

- Daily
  - Cultivate a 5 minute seated practice
  - Practice the 20 minute body scan
  - Choose one activity to practice informal mindfulness
  - State your weekly affirmation outloud (an intentional thought)
- Throughout the week
  - Update your mindfulness recorder
  - Watch the following videos
    - The Power of Mindfulness by Shauna Shapiro
    - Don't Try to be Mindful by Daron Larson
- Supplemental Practices
  - Read chapter "What is Mindfulness" in Grow: Tending to the Hearts and Minds of Children Through the Practice of Mindfulness
  - Create your own definition of mindfulness

THANK YOU!

BE IN TOUCH THIS WEEK.

Appendix D

I Am Present Professional Development Survey

Please use the following scale:

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly Agree

1. This course increased my understanding of mindfulness and its benefits.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

2. The course materials were presented in a way that was relevant to my profession and easy to understand.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

3. There was a good balance of content and mindfulness application throughout the course.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

4. I participated in the weekly practices most days.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

5. The instructor of the course was effective in their teaching and available when needed.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

Optional: What materials, discussions, or assignments were the most impactful?

Appendix E

I Am Present Professional Development Survey

Please use the following scale:

1-Strongly Disagree 2-Disagree 3-Neither Agree nor Disagree 4-Agree 5-Strongly Agree

1. This course helped me to build a mindfulness practice for myself.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

2. As a result of this course, I plan to continue to practice mindfulness in my daily life.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

3. I am prepared to share the benefits of mindfulness with my students.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

4. I feel equipped to translate the theory of mindfulness into practice with my students.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

5. This PD series offered ways to care for myself personally and professionally.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

6. This PD will positively impact my classroom climate and the well-being of my students.

   1 2 3 4 5 Comments:

Optional: What are your biggest take aways from this course?

Please provide any additional feedback for the course and/or your instructor.

Appendix F

I Am Present Six Month Post Professional Development Interview

1. What have you noticed for yourself personally since completing the course?
2. How has I Am Present impacted your classroom?
    a. Follow up prompts:
        i. Has the PD impacted your classroom academically?
        ii. Has the PD impacted your classroom socially?
        iii. Has the PD impacted your classroom emotionally?
        iv. Has the PD impacted your classroom physically?
3. How has this course impacted your classroom culture?
    a. Follow up prompts:
        i. Has your classroom culture felt more peaceful?
        ii. Has your classroom culture been more collaborative?
        iii. Have your students been more respectful of one another?
        iv. Have you noticed students have increased focus on assignments?
4. Tell me about a time when something you learned in "I Am Present" impacted your personal practice.
5. Tell me about a time when your classroom or students were impacted by your learning in I Am Present.
6. If you had to create a follow up training to "I Am Present", what would you include?

Please use the space below to leave any other thoughts, comments, questions, and celebrations you would like to share.