

**I CAN BE MINDFUL:  
DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A MINDFULNESS-BASED  
CAMP FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN AN EARLY LEARNING SETTING**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Objectives:** Describe and analyze the development and implementation of I Can Be Mindful, a 4-week integrated mindfulness summer programs for 4 to 7 year olds in an inclusive early learning setting.

**Methods:** Data sources included: 1) twice daily video/audio recordings of teacher-guided reflective conversations with the children (avg. 30 min. in length), 2) twice daily video/audio recordings of pre/post session with teaching staff (avg. 60 min. in length), 3) daily video/audio recordings of yoga sessions (avg. 30min in length), 4) audio recordings of notes made during meetings with advisors, 5) audio recordings of meetings with camp planning committee (research team + teaching staff), 6) weekly parent newsletter, 7) optional end-of-camp parent survey, 8) weekly teaching plans, 9) photographs of camp experiences, 10) drawings created by camp participants, 11) focused observations by the participant observer and teaching staff, 12) research journal. Data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (bottom-up approach).

**Results:** Nineteen children attended the 4-week summer camp [12 female; age 5.11 (1.20) years]. Inductive thematic analyses suggest: 1) mindfulness was integrated through the curriculum and environment<sup>1</sup> in order to holistically support young children's learning and development in the context of intentionally-planned ecological

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, environment is defined holistically to include the physical, social, and temporal aspects of the program.

experiences and reflective conversation, 2) reflective practice was used as a means of informing planning and refining as well as integrating experiences for children and teachers, 3) teachers were actively engaged with the children's experiences, the children's families, and in documentation of mindfulness throughout the environment (physical, social, temporal), 4) family partnerships were formed through families' participation and engagement on field trips, and a weekly newsletter shared by teachers via email providing reinforcing resources for children's mindful learning at home, and a voluntary end-of-program survey.

Conclusions: Integrating mindfulness through the curriculum and the environment (physical, social, temporal) in the context of intentional planning, applied present-moment engagement and reflective discussions between the children their teachers and families yielded a collective understanding of the feasibility and promise of impact on the integration of mindfulness for children, their teachers and families in inclusive early learning environments. These rich descriptive analyses provide a perspective that is not currently being captured using the outcomes-focused approach. Mindfulness and early childhood are both holistic paradigms and should be honored as such. These preliminary findings are critical in designing and delivering community-based participatory mindfulness programming in inclusive early learning contexts.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Silencing Curiosity

And in the naked light I saw  
Ten thousand people, maybe more  
People talking without speaking  
People hearing without listening  
People writing songs that voices never share  
And no one dared  
Disturb the sound of silence  
- Simon & Garfunkel (1966) The Sounds of Silence

In our current technologically-charged climate, distractions abound and multitasking<sup>2</sup> is no longer regarded as a skill, it has become a way of life. ADHD diagnoses are on the rise (Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2010; Visser et al., 2014), and the pressures to perform are not lessening (Scheffler et al., 2009). Technology mediates our schedules and our moods. There is a perpetual need to be “on” at all times. Full awareness of our experiences in the present-moment is elusive and for some, non-existent. The fear associated with indulging curiosity through experiential inquiry seems no longer necessary, as Google provides a much more convenient and safe alternative. Despite all this, we are a generation on auto-pilot,

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<sup>2</sup> Brain can only attend to one cognitive task at a time – multitasking is actually task-switching. See Rosen’s (2008) “The Myth of Multitasking” for an overview of multitasking in the modern age.

often relatively unaware of our ingrained behavioral habits (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008), and even young children, who are innately curious and naturally mindful, have become vulnerable to this mindless state of being (Capel, 2012; Erwin, 2015). Family car rides are no longer riddled with excited curiosity. Children no longer eagerly asking their parents, “Why?” Instead, faces aglow with the iridescent light of their tablets, the children are silent.

### **Early Childhood Environments**

Early childhood sets the scene for emotional and cognitive development in adolescence and young adulthood. Social-emotional skills in early childhood serve as predictors of key young adult outcomes across multiple domains of education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). Over the last fifteen years, early learning environments have shifted due to changes in education policy and reform, transforming holistic approaches that supported young children’s development and learning into competitive environments with outcome-based focuses on performance, assessments, and rote learning (Willis, 2015; Beatty, 1995; Blaustein, 2005). These outcomes-based conditions nurture passivity and superficial learning (Ritchart & Perkins, 2000) and rule out “the stimulation of wonder” (Dewey, 1933, p.59), further shrouding the natural curiosity that young children bring to early learning environments. In particular, kindergarten classrooms have become increasingly competitive due to high-stakes testing (Hatch, 2002) and children are experiencing stress as a result (Hirsh-Pasek, Hyson, & Rescorla, 1990). Young children are naturally mindful; however, like adults, they may become distracted by the many demands for their attention in the environment (Erwin & Robinson, 2015). Therefore, there is a relevant need for the cultivation of

environments that holistically nurture and support children's innate curiosity and intrinsic desire to mindfully inquire.

### **Plug n' Chug Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is not a cold cognitive process. When one is actively drawing novel distinctions, the whole individual is involved. For the purposes of this paper, "Plug n' Chug"<sup>3</sup> Mindfulness refers to the methodical identification of a problem (e.g., stress, social-emotional learning) and the prescribed application of mindfulness-based practices or approaches to test for a solution.

Mindfulness has been defined in contemporary research as the focused attention and awareness that emerges from paying attention on purpose and nonjudgmentally to one's experience in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). It is this definition that has been adopted and disseminated across a variety of contexts, including clinical settings, corporations, governmental agencies, and most recently education. Coinciding with this definition, Kabat-Zinn (2013) emphasizes the importance of adopting a holistic perspective, viewing engagement in mindfulness practice as a way of being, cultivating a sense [awareness] of our body as a whole... He goes on to say that we are not practicing to make anything go away (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). It is extremely important to keep this fundamental and holistic perspective in mind when considering the use of mindfulness in contemporary settings.

In recent years, there has been an outpouring of studies investigating the use of mindfulness in schools, with a steadily increasing focus on the effects of mindfulness

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<sup>3</sup> a procedural way of solving problems and completing assignments by applying previously learnt methods or concepts (Sheth, Sandkühler, & Bhattacharya, 2008),

programming on SEL outcomes. Empirical evidence suggests that mindfulness-based practices are an effective approach to stress-reduction with adults (Baer 2003, Bishop, 2002); and, more recently, it has been asserted that mindfulness-based interventions also show promise in helping children manage stress by enhancing self-regulation, mood, and social-emotional development (Mendelson et al., 2010). Social-emotional development or learning is sometimes called “the missing piece,” (Elias, 2006) because it represents a part of education that links academic knowledge with a specific set of skills important to success in schools, families, communities, workplaces, and life in general (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). Studies investigating the use of mindfulness in schools is a burgeoning area of literature that is steadily expanding, but quantity does not necessarily translate to quality. Greenberg & Harris (2012) speak to a lack of quality in the evidence and call for a more rigorous scientific base through well-designed experimental studies that are grounded in developmental theory and measure multiple indicators of change.

It is equally important for teachers to be competent in social-emotional learning and development. When teachers lack the resources to effectively manage the social and emotional challenges within the classroom, children show lower levels of on-task behavior and performance (Marzano, 2009). In this climate, teachers may respond reactively, modeling behavior that is inconsistent with what they are hoping to impart to their students. Findings suggest that mindfulness training is an effective means of fostering positive student-teacher interactions, increasing self-efficacy, wellbeing, classroom management, and addressing psychological symptoms of distress such as stress, depression, and burnout (Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012;

Hue & Lau, 2015; Jennings et al., 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 2013; Singh et al., 2013).

Literature on mindfulness with adolescents, youth, and teachers in educational settings is a popular area of research, but research on mindfulness and early childhood is still in its early stages. Currently, there is a lack of evidence documenting the use of mindfulness with early childhood populations (Erwin & Robinson, 2015; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). This gap in the research is of significant importance as recent studies have shown SEL skills, developed in early childhood, serve as reliable predictors of key outcomes in young adulthood across multiple domains of education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

Mindfulness has proven effective in alleviating symptoms of distress with adult populations and it has been deemed potentially effective in ameliorating similar symptoms in adolescent and youth populations, as well as enhancing social-emotional outcomes (Burke, 2010). However, a clear disconnect exists in mindfulness research with adolescent, youth, and early childhood populations – outcomes have been driven by investigator interest and background and the research has been clearly divided into studies assessing health risk and outcomes and those measuring cognitive and behavioral outcomes (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). Collaborating with researchers, practitioners, and families while adopting a developmental perspective in conjunction with mixed methods studies could provide a broader and more integrated framework on which to assess the full potential of mindfulness with younger populations whose brains are still developing.

## **Significance**

Given the competitive shift in early childhood environments (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016) and the feasibility of mindfulness in educational contexts with adolescent and youth populations (Greenberg & Harris, 2012), it would seem as though early childhood is a viable candidate for the integration of mindfulness practices. However, there is very little research investigating the use of mindfulness with early childhood populations. This could be due to the clear developmental disparity between early childhood and other stages of development, necessitating an overhaul in the well-established prescriptive approach. Greenberg & Harris (2012) suggest taking a developmental perspective, citing a need to further identify what “age-appropriate” practices are (e.g., sitting meditation practices may be developmentally- inappropriate for younger children and even adolescents) and that qualitative work may be useful in establishing said practices.

Of the research that does exist with early childhood populations, there is a trend toward its adapted application; meaning, studies conducted with this population adapt existing mindfulness-based practices and programming that have proven effective with adult, adolescent, and school-age populations and apply them to early childhood learning environments (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012; Greenberg & Harris, 2012). According to Greenberg & Harris (2012), such adapted practices may take a wide variety of forms, including nature-related activities, the arts, physical disciplines involving set postures or sequences of movements (such as tai chi or yoga), guided imagery, or various forms of sitting meditation. As with adults, mindfulness training for children typically occurs in small-group sessions that include a variety of activities, such as body scans, breathing exercises, and sitting meditations (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). To compensate for children’s limited self-regulation skills, the lessons and

individual training activities are shorter for younger participants: Adults may be able to attend to their breathing for 45 min, but 5-year-olds may only manage for 3 min (Burke, 2010).

These programs are designed as modules and delivered in isolated sessions to young children in early learning settings with the hopes of training children in the core aspects of mindfulness: including non-judgmentally noticing one's moment-to-moment experiences, monitoring attention and redirecting attention when it has wandered, and non-reactively observing one's thoughts and feelings (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012).

Contrastingly, a few studies have suggested the use of mindfulness as a means of enhancing the development of social-emotional skills in early childhood learning environments (Willis & Dinehart, 2014, 2015; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012) by exploring the use of mindfulness-based approaches as a supplement to social-emotional learning curriculum (Gueldner & Feuerborn, 2015) or by infusing it through exploratory-based environments (Erwin, 2015). SEL is often regarded as the missing "piece" or "link" to education because it represents a set of skills necessary to apply academic knowledge in real-world settings (e.g., focus and self-control, perspective-taking, communicating, making connections, critical thinking, taking on challenges, self-directed or engaged learning; Galinsky, 2010). There is a danger to each of us when children are taught what to think instead of how to think. Hence, a combination of academic learning and SEL is the true standard for effective education for the world as we now face it (Elias, 2006).

The use of mindfulness as a facilitator of development and learning in early childhood has not yet been fully explored in an integrated fashion and it was this gap in the literature that our study, “I Can Be Mindful” (ICBM), sought to address.

### **Thesis Overview**

The aim of this report is to provide a rich description of what it looks like when early childhood developmentally-appropriate practice is integrated with mindfulness-based strategies within an SEL framework in the context of a four-week summer program for young children ages 4-7 in an early learning setting. This paper is divided into four sections: 1) Literature Review, 2) Methods, 3) Results, and 4) Discussion.

A review of the literature was conducted to inform the development, implementation, and ongoing refinement of the four-week summer program. The review provides an overview of mindfulness and its use with adult populations, and discusses the shift toward the prescriptive use of mindfulness with adolescents, youth, teachers, and early childhood populations in educational settings.

To better understand how mindfulness could be used to support early learning and development in early childhood populations and their environments, we chose to explore the development and implementation process of a mindfulness-based summer program using a participant observer research approach (Creswell, 2012), in which the researcher adopts an observational role when they engage in activities at the site being observed (Creswell, 2002).

The study included twelve qualitative data sources: 1) twice daily video/audio recordings of teacher-guided reflective conversations with the children (avg. 30 min. in length), 2) twice daily video/audio recordings of pre/post session with teaching staff

(avg. 60 min. in length, 3) daily video/audio recordings of yoga sessions (avg. 30 min in length), 4) audio recordings of notes made during meetings with advisors, 5) audio recordings of meetings with camp planning committee (research team + teaching staff), 6) weekly parent newsletter, 7) optional end-of-camp parent survey, 8) weekly teaching plans, 9) photographs of camp experiences, 10) drawings created by camp participants, 11) focused observations by the participant observer and teaching staff, 12) research journal. Data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun, 2006). Emergent themes of the study are presented with supporting evidence. Findings, limitations, and implications for future research are discussed in the final chapter.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Overview of Mindfulness**

A preliminary review of the research literature revealed adult populations have served as the prescriptive focus of many mindfulness-based interventions over the last two decades. During analysis, a more focused and thorough review revealed that, in recent years, target populations of mindfulness interventions have shifted from adults in clinical populations, governmental agencies and clinical settings to adolescents, youth, and their teachers in educational contexts (see Burke, 2010, for a review).

There has been a significant increase in the literature exploring the effects of mindfulness in educational contexts with youth and adolescents (e.g., Biegel et al. 2009; Black et al. 2009; Burke 2010; Semple et al. 2010) and with their teachers (Albrecht et al., 2012; Hue & Lau, 2015; Jennings et al., 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 2013; Singh et al., 2013).

The burgeoning literature has shown that it is a promising intervention modality for youth (Zoogman, Goldberg, Hoyt, & Miller, 2014) as it relates to social-emotional outcomes, yet there is limited research on these practices with young children in early learning settings (Carona, Moreira, & Silva, 2016; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008).

## **Mindfulness & Education**

### **Youth and Adolescents**

Mindfulness has been identified as a potentially feasible means of enhancing academic, social, and emotional outcomes for students (children and adolescents K-12) (Burke, 2010; Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012) and addressing psychological symptoms of distress such as stress, depression, and burnout their teachers (Hue & Lau, 2015; Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013; Roeser et al., 2013). With adolescents and youth, the focus of mindfulness-based approaches in school settings has gravitated toward SEL outcomes. SEL is sometimes called “the missing piece,” (Elias, 2006) because it represents a part of education that links academic knowledge with a specific set of skills important to success in schools, families, communities, workplaces, and life in general. Galinsky (2010) identifies the following seven essential life skills that weave together social, emotional, and intellectual capacities, allowing children to make use of the knowledge acquired in school: focus and self-control, perspective-taking, communicating, making connections, critical thinking, taking on challenges, self-directed and engaged learning. A combination of academic learning and SEL is the true standard for effective education for the world as we now face it. Providing a balance of SEL curriculum with academic learning prepares students for “the tests of life, not a life of tests” (Elias, 2001).

Mindfulness, then, has been identified as a possible means of improving certain SEL-related outcomes and has since become a focal point of many studies. A growing body of research has demonstrated that teaching students to use mindfulness practices improved their behavior, time on task, focus, and self-regulation as well as

reduced attention challenges, absenteeism, anxiety, depression, stress, and maladaptive behaviors (Black & Fernando, 2013; Bluth, 2015; Braun, Levy, Collins, & Mogilner, 2014; Coholic, 2014; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, & Davidson, 2015; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Semple, Lee, Rosa, & Miller, 2009).

### Teachers

Mindfulness and teachers have been matched based on the psychological symptoms of distress experienced by many teachers in the current educational climate due to burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). For the purposes of this study, we focused on mindfulness literature and early childhood teachers. Findings suggest that mindfulness training for teachers is an effective means of fostering positive student-teacher interactions (Albrecht et al., 2012; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Singh, Lancioni, Winton, Karazsia, & Singh, 2013), increasing self-efficacy (Jennings et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012), wellbeing (Hue & Lau, 2015; Jennings et al., 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012) classroom management (Albrecht et al., 2012; Meiklejohn et al., 2012), and addressing psychological symptoms of distress such as stress, depression, and burnout (Hue & Lau, 2015; Jennings et al., 2013; Roeser et al., 2013). Further, teachers who develop social and emotional competence through mindfulness practice are more present, more responsive and less reactive, benefitting both themselves and the children they teach (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Meiklejohn et al., 2012).

As early childhood adheres to the social-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986) of development, a teacher's ability to model a mindful way of being is an important component in the implementation and reinforcement of mindful learning

and practices and should be an integral layer in the development of programming and evidence-based practices.

### **Mindfulness & Early Childhood**

There is very little literature available on the use of mindfulness and early childhood (Erwin & Robinson, 2015). Of the studies that have been implemented with early childhood populations, mindfulness has been associated with intrapersonal outcomes for young children (e.g., executive function, self-regulation, stress management, focused attention, Flook et al., 2015; Willis & Dinehart, 2014; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012); managing complexities of interpersonal life in classroom communities (prosocial behaviors and social problem solving, Flook et al., 2015; Willis & Dinehart, 2014); and school readiness and long term academic success (Willis & Dinehart, 2014). These outcomes fall within the SEL spectrum and are of significant importance as recent studies have shown SEL skills, developed in early childhood, serve as reliable predictors of key outcomes in young adulthood across multiple domains of education, employment, criminal activity, substance use, and mental health (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).

Erwin and Robinson (2015) address this “noticeable dearth” in the literature in their review and offer six considerations for a future research agenda with this population (see Table 1). Our study addresses the author’s fourth consideration most specifically, “What conditions or environments are best suited to promote children’s well-being and learning and how can mindfulness practices be incorporated into the existing framework of established early childhood knowledge, goals, and practices?” (Erwin & Robinson, 2015, p. 16).

Table 1 Erwin's Ten Considerations for Future Research Agenda with Mindfulness & Early Childhood

| <b>Consideration</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) How mindfulness is practiced in early childhood is a reflection of the goals of the educational culture in which it is used.                                                                                                                |
| (2) The narrow and focused perspective on quantifiable academic outcomes in the USA may impede the benefits and holistic nature of mindfulness practices.                                                                                       |
| (3) Recognizing the whole child, and the value of 'belonging, being and becoming' in particular, may provide a global mechanism to realize the potential of mindfulness practices.                                                              |
| (4) What conditions or environments are best suited to promote children's well-being and learning and how can mindfulness practices be incorporated into the existing framework of established early childhood knowledge, goals, and practices? |
| (5) What kinds of mindfulness tools can benefit children with learning, behavioral, physical or other disabilities and their families and how are they best used at home and school?                                                            |
| (6) A deeper understanding of how the role of mindfulness and ecology and environmental sustainability influence young children's learning and outcomes.                                                                                        |

Consistent with the paucity in this area of research, Greenberg & Harris (2012) identify the need for a more rigorous scientific base to address the poor quality of existing evidence within contemplative-based programs for children, a problem that can be addressed through well-designed research studies. In order to design developmentally appropriate, mindfulness-based programming for young children, evidence-based practices must be identified. Observational studies and qualitative

approaches can be used to lay the groundwork and document what it looks like when mindfulness is integrated within inclusive early learning environments. Findings from these studies can be used to inform future curriculum and programming, gradually building towards mixed methods approaches in hopes of identifying what ways it might be possible to holistically capture the full potential of mindfulness with early childhood populations.

### **Developmentally-Appropriate Mindfulness Practices**

Young children are naturally mindful and curious about the world in which they live (Erwin & Robinson, 2015). Maria Montessori, Arnold Gesell, and Erik Erikson all focused attention on the young child as an active, self-motivated learner, deserving of intensive study in a thoughtfully planned environment (Jones, 2012).

Developmentally, adults' motivation to learn differs from a child's. According to Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development, young children in the preschool years, having developed a strong sense of autonomy in toddlerhood, have a desire to assert themselves onto their environment through initiative involving pretending, inventing, creating, taking risks, and playing with others (Gestwicki, 1999, p. 259). Contrary to a young child's curiosity-driven motivation for learning, an adult needs to know why they are learning something and that their investment can immediately be put to good use. However, for both the child and the adult, an environment conducive for their respective types of learning is necessary. And while programs like Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Clinic (MBSR; 1990, 2013) are conducive for adults' understanding and application, the practices involved are not necessarily developmentally-appropriate for young children (Greenberg & Harris, 2012).

It is important to note that the mindfulness-based programs that are implemented in school settings are adapted from programming developed for adults. For adults, 8-week mindfulness programs like MBSR are designed to address a lack of awareness or disconnect that has developed between the mind and the body and a lost childhood ability to inquire. Formal mindfulness practices for adults are typically characterized by seated or walking meditation, spanning from 20-40 min. in length (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; Burke, 2010), with the intention of cultivating focus and insight through breath awareness, body scans, loving kindness meditations, and yoga. Over time, these formal practices foster an emerging sense of insight in those who practice regularly. For a young child whose developmental stage is characterized by exploration, a seated meditation or exercise does not offer opportunities for integration or emergent insight. At best, teaching formal mindfulness practices to children may offer an opportunity for the children to cultivate focused attention and awareness. Integrating mindful practices (e.g., mindful listening, mindful breathing) within play-based environments, developmentally-appropriate curriculum and supportive teachers may have greater potential. Isolated practices and modules are not enough.

### **Current Study**

“Children WANT to learn. The key is TOTAL INVOLVEMENT. When a child has put all of himself into an experience - his body, his mind, his emotions, his imagination and his enthusiasm – he will learn and he will grow. He will grow not only in the specific experience at hand, but through his entire personality”. – Anne & Paul Barlin, 1971

## I can be mindful

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich description of the development and implementation of a mindfulness-based program for young children in an inclusive early learning setting using a participant observer approach (Creswell, 2012), in which the researcher adopts an observational role when they engage in activities at the site being observed (Creswell, 2002).

The mindfulness-based summer program, “I Can Be Mindful” (ICBM), at the University of Delaware Laboratory Preschool (UD Lab School) emerged from a long and iterative curricular evolution in Master Teacher Laura Morris’ Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten (Pre-K/K) inclusive classroom. Her goal for the curriculum, together with the UD Lab School, is to help children understand and acquire the social and emotional skills needed to thrive in a complex world.

Throughout the school year, children in Morris’ inclusive Pre-K/K classroom were engaging, understanding, and contributing to their classroom community. They were consistently making connections, taking on challenges, working through problems, and expanding their overall understanding of how to socially navigate their world, essential life skills according to Galinsky (2010); but, something was missing. While the skills they learned seemed to translate into other contexts of the children’s lives, consistent with the micro/meso systems of Broffebrenner’s (1986) ecological theory, the curriculum was not addressing self-awareness. In group discussion with their teachers, children were taught SEL strategies to help them navigate their world socially, as well as information about the brain’s connection to emotions; however, during highly-charged situations, the children were not recognizing “*how*” their bodies were responding and were, consequently, unable to put these skills into action.

During the Spring 2015 semester, Morris was introduced to “mindfulness” when she attended a family yoga class with one of her students and his mother. During the class, the children were asked to pay close attention to the “gong” sound of a Tibetan Singing Bowl (mindful listening), or place a beanie baby on their stomach and watch the animal steadily rise and fall with the “in” and “out” of each breath (mindful breathing). These “mindful practices” are adapted from adult mindfulness practices, which consist of paying attention to one’s breath for a period of time or scanning the body and nonjudgmentally taking note of sensations throughout. Providing a tangible sound or object on which to focus adapts the practice making it less abstract and more concrete. These adapted practices are introduced in hopes of affording the children the opportunity to cultivate the “core aspects” of mindfulness: non-judgmentally noticing one’s moment-to-moment experiences, monitoring attention and redirecting attention when it has wandered, and non-reactively observing one’s thoughts and feelings (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). After observing the practices (e.g., mindful listening, mindful breathing) and minimalist environment in which the class took place, Morris began researching mindfulness as a possible solution to the awareness gap in her social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum. She posited that using mindfulness-based approaches in conjunction with SEL strategies and research about the brain may serve as a means to provide children with opportunities to monitor and recognize how their bodies were functioning and responding.

### An Integrated Approach

As mentioned previously, it is important to adopt a developmental perspective when considering the use of mindfulness with early childhood populations (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). Early childhood is a developmental stage marked by exploration.

Young children are competent and curious and are actively seeking the tools to make sense of their world. This is evidenced through conversation, interactions with the environment, play, and creative arts. According to Dewey (1933), young children learn by exploring consistently and continuously.

The intentionally designed curriculum offered a child-centered approach to mindfulness-based social-emotional learning facilitated within a variety of contexts including art, interactions with nature, sensory and physical activity, child-directed play, and yoga. The curriculum was informed by early childhood developmental (Social-ecological Theory; Bronfenbrenner, 1992) and constructivist theories (Bruner, 1996, 1966; Piaget, 1976; Vygotsky, 1978), Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), the Reggio Emilia Approach (Cadwell, 1997; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Gandini, 1993; Lewin, Baldwin, Barley, Gambetti, & Shoptaugh, 1998), research on social-emotional learning and development (Galinsky, 2010), research on the physiological nature of the brain and how to nurture and support a developing mind (Siegel, 2015, 2011, 2003), Michelle Garcia Winner's "Social Thinking" Curriculum, and literature on mindfulness (J. Kabat-Zinn, 2013; M. Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2009).

***Early Childhood Developmental, Constructivist Theory, & Reggio Emilia Approach.*** Bronfenbrenner's (1986) Social-Ecological model and the bi-directional influences between the micro- and meso-systems informed our intentional collaborative outreach to families and sharing of resources through conversation, via the newsletter, and the end-of-program survey. Constructivist Theory (Bruner, 1996, 1966; Piaget, 1976; Vygotsky, 1978), Developmentally-Appropriate Practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), and the Reggio Emilia Approach (Cadwell, 1997; Edwards,

Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Gandini, 1993; Lewin, Baldwin, Barley, Gambetti, & Shoptaugh, 1998) are fundamental and foundational to the philosophy at the UD Lab School, and thereby the ICBM program. These at their core share a common belief in children's innate goodness and the belief that children are trying to create meaning and understand how the world works.

***Social-Emotional Learning & Development.*** The following social-emotional skills were introduced and supported through ecological experiences and reflective practice: “perspective-taking” (Galinsky, 2010) “self-regulation” (self-control; Galinsky, 2010), “focus” (Galinsky, 2010), and “self-directed learning” (Galinsky, 2010; Gandini, 1993). The following is an example of an intentionally-planned ecological experience supporting perspective-taking: 1) introduced perspective-taking through an interactive read-aloud using Rosenthal & Litchenfield’s (2009) “Duck Rabbit” (a children’s book that uses an optical illusion to provide an opportunity for children to make a concrete connection to perspective-taking), 2) expanded on idea through collaborative construction of yoga affirmations (e.g., “I see myself as a surfer...”), 3) provided further experiential connections to the idea of perspective-taking by intentionally observing a physical space from the ground floor and then from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 4) provided opportunities for integration and connections of ideas with experiences during reflective group conversations between teachers and children.

***Brain Research.*** Dan Siegel’s (2015, 2011, 2003) work on the physiological nature of the brain and the developing mind were also a large part of the integration approach. Children were introduced to their top brain and bottom brain and learned about how they are connected and communicate. They learned that when they “flip their lid”, the top brain and bottom brain are no longer communicating and our bottom

brain is calling the shots. This information offered children the opportunity to make a connection about intentional choices, thoughts and strategies.

***Social Thinking Curriculum.*** Some concepts and language were adapted from the Social Thinking® Curriculum (Social Thinking® is a term coined by Michelle Garcia Winner, CCC-SLP and represents a coordinated teaching framework of curricula, vocabulary, teaching tools and strategies for individuals aged preschool through adults) in order to support the children’s learning and integration. The following excerpt from the Week 2 Newsletter describes language that was introduced through a read-aloud experience and then shared with parents to support the translation of language and practice to the children’s home environment:

In addition to the many levels of perspective-taking, during Week 2, we started to learn about our “social smarts” while reading “You are a Social Detective! Explaining Social Thinking to Kids” (by Michelle Garcia Winner and Pamela Crooke). Through this interactive read-aloud experience, we explored different social-emotional situations and found clues to help us figure out what was going on in each situation. Providing the children with the opportunity to think like a detective as it relates to social contexts is a wonderful way to help support their sense of inquiry. Here is some language you might hear us use during camp:

“What is EXPECTED when we first arrive to our yoga studio?”

“How do the people around us feel when we do something that is UNEXPECTED?”

Feel free to ask any of the teachers about how we are using this language to help guide positive social interactions throughout our camp community.

***Mindfulness.*** In order to provide developmentally-appropriate opportunities to support mindful development and learning, teachers collaboratively integrated adapted mindful practices and adopted a method of reflective documentation and practice. In

addition to their tasked responsibilities, teachers also developed a personal practice as well as engaging in collaborative daily reflective practice through a pre- and post-session at the beginning and end of each day and, during the last two weeks of the program, a daily collaborative mindfulness practice. These practices were adopted to support the teacher's interactions with the children (i.e. modeling the behavior) and to promote a present-minded awareness of themselves, the children, and the environment as a whole. Kabat-Zinn (2013) encourages individuals to engage in mindfulness practice as a "way of being". This is the approach that was taken in the teacher's reflective practice, the teacher-guided interactions, and the intentionally-planned and emergent experiences. The physical and temporal environments were intentionally-designed, and reflected on consistently, so as to support mindful engagement. The program's physical spaces were designed to invite exploration through interactive activities and experiences.

Using this integration approach as a framework and foundation, the ICBM teaching staff and research team integrated mindful practices (e.g., mindful breathing, mindful listening) transitions (chime indicating a transition and cueing children and teachers to stop, hand on heart/hand on belly, breathe "in" and "out" 3x's [3 mindful breaths], and then proceed), and opportunities for learning to develop the 4-week mindfulness-based summer program, "I Can Be Mindful".

### **Chapter 3**

## **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich description of the development and implementation of a mindfulness-based summer experience for young children in an early learning setting using a participant observer approach (Creswell, 2012), in which the researcher adopts an observational role when they engage in activities at the site being observed (Creswell, 2002). Understanding factors which may support or compromise children's development and integrating this knowledge into one's work with children and their families are crucial towards cultivating more supportive environments (Armstrong, Ogg, Sundman-Wheat, & Walsh, 2014). Documented observations of children analyzed within the context of early childhood development afford the observer the opportunity to understand what it is a child is attempting to convey and then use that information in the development of effective programming (Forman & Hall 2013).

This study included twelve qualitative data sources: 1) twice daily video/audio recordings of teacher-guided reflective conversations with the children (avg. 30 min. in length), 2) twice daily video/audio recordings of pre/post session with teaching staff (avg. 60 min. in length, 3) daily video/audio recordings of yoga sessions (avg. 30min in length), 4) audio recordings of notes made during meetings with advisors, 5) audio recordings of meetings with camp planning committee (research team + teaching staff), 6) weekly parent newsletter, 7) optional end-of-camp parent survey, 8) weekly teaching plans, 9) photographs of camp experiences, 10) drawings created by camp

participants, 11) focused observations by the participant observer and teaching staff, 12) research journal.

### **Population**

A sample of convenience based on interest in enrollment in the newly developed ICBM program was used for this study. Camp participants were recruited by the UD Lab School via email and the school's website as well as from the local community via word-of-mouth. The initial date of approval for this study's IRB protocol and consent at the University of Delaware was 6/10/2015. The project, due to its inclusion of a vulnerable population (children), was submitted and approved as an expedited review (IRB Title: [763341-1] Implementation of a mindfulness-based camp for young children in an early learning setting). A voluntary parental consent form, in addition to a voluntary photo/video/audio release waiver was obtained for all participants included in the study's analysis and reporting. This release clearly explained the study's purpose, objectives, rationale, and procedures. The photo/video/audio release waiver emphasized that no identifying information beyond that contained in the video/audio recording would be used and that granting permission to use video recording, audio recording and/or still photograph was voluntary and not required to participate in the study.

### **Curriculum**

Curriculum should encourage children to explore consistently and continuously (Dewey, 1944). ICBM curriculum was designed to support mindful interactions between the children and their physical, social, and temporal environments. These interactions were facilitated through intentionally-planned

ecological experiences with nature (e.g., garden, stream), the built-environment (e.g., classroom, playground), and the local community (e.g., field trips to UD campus and local yoga studio).

Kabat-Zinn (2013) defined mindfulness as “paying attention on purpose, in the present-moment, and nonjudgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.” Formal mindfulness practice with adult populations is typically characterized by prolonged periods of seated or walking meditation (20-40 min.; (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008; Burke, 2010), where the participant practices cultivating intentional focus on various physiological, sensorial, and cognitive sensations through breath awareness practices, body scans, mindful Hatha yoga, or loving kindness meditations (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Over time, adults who practice mindfulness experience emergent insights within the context of their daily life experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Research has shown that adolescents benefit by practicing similarly to adults; however, young children are at a completely separate developmental stage, one that is marked by exploration. It is, therefore, imperative that developmentally-appropriate mindfulness practice (adapted mindful practices) be introduced to young children in the context of experiences and exploratory, play-based environments, while also providing opportunities for children to integrate the “how’s” and the “why’s” behind the practices and their experiences.

Adapted mindful practices, like “mindful breathing” (e.g., children place a Beanie Baby on their stomach and watch the animal steadily rise and fall with the “in” and “out” of each breath, “mindful listening” (e.g., children pay close attention to the “gong” sound of a Tibetan Singing Bowl or chime and raise their hand to indicate when they can no longer hear it), and “mindful walking” (e.g., while walking in the

hall, children remain as quiet as possible and are asked to pay attention to each step or what it feels like to move slow) allow children the opportunity to develop an awareness of their ability to focus attention on different physiological and sensorial stimuli. Practices, therefore, should not only be adapted for young children, but also integrated into exploratory learning and play-based environments.

This program was piloted as a summer experience for young children, which allowed the staff to experiment, adapt, and modify an emergent<sup>4</sup> mindfulness curriculum freely without the curricular constraints and demands of a school-year program. The curriculum goal of ICBM was to provide campers with opportunities to increase their sense of awareness as it related to their surroundings, their relationships, their emotions/actions, and their physical bodies.

The master teacher and co-teachers worked together with the research team to co-develop and implement the mindful learning and exploring curriculum. The teaching team was expected to modify and adapt the curriculum as needed to provide flexibility and opportunities for both intentionally-planned and in-the-moment experiences to support children's growing abilities to be mindful (see Appendix A). According to Goffin and Wilson (2001), children engage in problem-solving activities in collaboration with an adult who structures and models ways to solve problems. Using Mindfulness-based approaches in conjunction with research about the brain in the context of group discussion served as a way to help the children understand how to be aware and responsible for their bodies and actions

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<sup>4</sup> The goal of emergent curriculum is to respond to every child's interests. Its practice is open-ended and self-directed. It depends on teacher initiative and intrinsic motivation, and it lends itself to a play-based environment (Jones, 2012).

The intentionally designed curriculum offered a child-centered, *integrated approach* to mindfulness-based social-emotional learning facilitated within a variety of contexts including art, interactions with nature, sensory and physical activity, child-directed play, and yoga.

The following social-emotional skills were introduced and supported through ecological experiences and reflective practice: perspective-taking (Galinsky, 2010) self-regulation (self-control; Galinsky, 2010), focus (Galinsky, 2010), and self-directed learning (Galinsky, 2010; Gandini, 1993). Ecological experiences were designed to help children build on their current experiences and foster connections to help make sense of their physical, social, and temporal environments. In other words, the experiences were designed to help children further understand how these three aspects of their environment are connected to one another and, in turn, how they as children are connected to their physical, temporal, and social environments.

### **Environment**

ICBM was implemented in an inclusive early learning setting at the UD Lab School. The construction of the environment was an integral element in our integrated approach (see p. 28 for detailed description) and drew on central tenets from the Reggio Emilia Approach (e.g., environment as 3<sup>rd</sup> teacher; Cadwell, 1997; Edwards et al, 1998; Gandini, 1993; Lewin et al., 1998), social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The environment was designed holistically and intentionally, with physical (e.g., classroom space), social (community building), and temporal (e.g., schedule) aspects in mind.

## Physical

The design and use of space encourages encounters, communications, and relationships (Gandini, 1993). The design of the classroom was constructed in such a way so as to invite investigation. At the beginning of each day (during pre-session), teachers would intentionally place activities on the classroom tables that invited exploratory engagement. Some examples of the activities available to children within the classroom included the following: light table, block area, library, overhead projector with baskets of different colored objects to place on it, sketch books, marble run, science center (included microscopes), the classroom rabbit, named “Bunny”, and play-doh/clay (see Appendix B: Weekly Plans, Choice Time; Figure 1).

**Classroom.** Teachers wanted the classroom to reflect a minimal aesthetic by juxtaposing open space with engaging activities, allowing the space to serve as a 3<sup>rd</sup> teacher (Caldwell, 2003; Gandini, 1993). The classroom was designed to invite investigation and support children in mindful inquiry and exploration. Mindful components of inquiry included: “noticing” (e.g., looking closely at objects through microscope, drawing bunny with pastels on sketchbook), “acceptance/letting go” (e.g., Buddha board: paint on the surface with water and watch it gradually fade away), “nonjudgment” and “compassion” (e.g., learning to socially navigate classroom activities like “Marble Run” and “Trains”). This was documented through photographs of the children engaging with the activities and photographs of the children’s documentation and artwork.

Teachers chose these activities (see Figure 1) in hopes of supporting children in mindful inquiry and exploration. Mindful components of inquiry included: “noticing” (e.g., looking closely at objects through microscope, drawing bunny with pastels on sketchbook), “acceptance/letting go” (e.g., Buddha board: paint on the

surface with water and watch it gradually fade away), “nonjudgment” and “compassion” (e.g., learning to socially navigate classroom activities like “Marble Run” and “Trains”).

Figure 1      Arrival & Choice Time Activities. Figure 1A shows “Bunny” (the classroom rabbit). Figure 1B shows Light table. Figure 1C: Marble Run. Figure 1D: Buddha Board. Figure 1E: Library. Figure 1F: Overhead Projector. Figure 1G: Science Table. Figure 1H: Zen Garden.

Figure 1A



Figure 1B



Figure 1C



Figure 1D



Figure 1E



Figure 1F



Figure 1G



Figure 1H



**Yoga Studio.** The yoga studio was a space separate from the classroom, designed to communicate openness and invite calm, intentional whole-body

interactions. Yoga mats were not laid out for the children ahead of time, nor were the children told where to place their mats. Instead, teachers shared expectations about the studio: 1) we take our shoes off as we enter the studio and place them in a cubby, 2) we choose a yoga mat, and then 3) find our space. Some children shared mats, other chose to be on their own. If they could make it work in their space then that was sufficient for the teachers. This physical space was designed to support mindful movement and whole body learning. The supportive culture that was maintained in this space afforded opportunities for mindful reflection and collaboration in the construction of the yoga affirmations.

### Social

We form ourselves through interaction with peers, family, teachers, and environment (Lewin et al., 1998); therefore, education should focus on each child in relation to their peers, family, teachers, and environment (Gandini, 1993).

Social aspects of the ICBM environment were informed by ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1972; Bruner, 1966), and the Reggio Emilia Approach (Cadwell, 1997; Edwards et al., 1998; Gandini, 1993; Lewin et al., 1998). Paralleling the Reggio Emilia Approach (Cadwell, 1997; Gandini, 1993), our program's social environment consisted of three protagonists: the children, their teachers and families. A great emphasis was placed on community-building through the sharing of ideas, language, and experiences with these three groups. The ideas, language, and experiences that were shared were centered on and facilitated by mindfulness. This was evidenced in the content of the newsletters and the daily structured reflective conversation between the teachers and the children and

the reflective practice between the teachers and the unstructured, emergent conversations between children, their teachers, and families.

***Children.*** Amongst the three groups, the children remained the focus and driving force of interactions that occurred, consistent with the bi-directional interactions between Brofenbrenner's (1986) micro and meso systems. Hill et al. (2002) point at the value placed on these relationships in the micro- and mesosystems: peers, teachers, parents, families, administrators, and community. As the focus, children were consistently provided opportunities to reflect on their experiences mindfully (e.g., "noticing", "reflecting", "drawing conclusions", "making connections")

***Teachers.*** The teaching staff consisted of a trans-disciplinary team: a master lead teacher/supervisor, two co-teachers newly certified in early childhood education, and a behavior health specialist. Teachers were fundamentally collaborative in their conversations with the children and their families and in the planning and sharing of experiences (e.g., field trips). This collaboration was informed by reflective practice during pre- and post-sessions, the teacher's personal mindfulness practices, active engagement in the children's experiences, and conversations with families. The teachers were co-learners and collaborators with the children, supporting them in mindful inquiry and exploration of their world. Teachers supported the children's learning through modeling and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1972; Bruner, 1966), and by interpreting the children's innate curiosity as an intrinsic motivator of learning. The teachers' documented observations of the children's engagement served to inform the ongoing refinement of the curriculum and planned experiences.

***Family Partnerships.*** Family partnerships were established gradually through integrated efforts of outreach and sharing of resources. These efforts were initiated both by teachers and families through conversation and via email. Resources were shared with families through digital media: weekly blog on UD Lab School website and a weekly newsletter. The blog provided a descriptive narrative of the children's experiences from one week to the next. The newsletter (see Appendix C) was a more targeted area of outreach: teachers contextually constructed the newsletter around the children's experiences, including specific explanations of the concepts that were being introduced in camp (e.g., perspective-taking, focus, self-control, mindfulness) and applied examples of how to support the children's learning at home. Teachers hoped that by providing parents with the tools to support and collaborate in the children's learning, it would help acclimate children *and* their families to the concepts, thereby allowing the practices to translate to the children's home environment. It is important to note that family outreach was not one-sided or isolated; on the contrary, there was a continuous ebb and flow to the partnerships that formed between teachers and families through integrated efforts of outreach and sharing of resources.

A voluntary, open-ended survey was shared with the parents during the last week of camp. The survey was developed by the research team. The team designed the survey using open-ended questions to elicit parental perceptions. The intention was to use responses in the refining and development of future programming. The survey (see Table 2, item 7; Appendix D) consisted of seven open-ended questions: 1) What were your expectations in regard to the mindfulness camp? 2) Has your child talked about any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples? 3) Has your child used any mindfulness-based

strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples? 4) Have you used any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home with your child? If yes, could you provide some examples? 5) What were the benefits of the mindfulness camp to your child? 6) Would you be interested in a “Mindful Parenting” workshop? 7) Please provide additional information about your child’s mindfulness camp experience here.

### Temporal

***Schedule.*** In building a diverse social community of curiosity-driven learners, it was important to complement teacher-structured mindfulness learning experiences with child-led exploratory opportunities to independently practice mindfulness. The teacher-structured experiences consisted of yoga, twice-daily reflective conversations, and weekly field trips. Exploratory opportunities took place on the playground, in the classroom, and at the stream as children engaged in their own ways in teacher-prepared activities designed to afford opportunities to practice mindfulness. It was within these contexts that social-emotional skills (e.g., perspective-taking, focus, self-control; Galinsky, 2010) and formal mindfulness practices (chime, mindful breathing, and yoga) were introduced and reinforced.

The camp ran for four weeks with a one-week break between the second and third weeks. Families were able to choose between half day and full day attendance, and 1-4 week attendance (see Table 2 for weekly attendance; see Table 3 for age distribution of daily/weekly attendance). The camp took place both indoors and outdoors and was planned so as to provide the children with ecological learning experiences (e.g., yoga, nature walks, exploring the garden, reflective conversations) and time for play and independent learning; during this time, the children were free to

explore their environment. The structured components of the day allowed for flexibility in others, in that the structured aspects provided opportunities to collaboratively reflect on and integrate the children's experiences allowing them freedom to explore and "try on" what they had learned.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection took place within multiple camp contexts over the course of five weeks. These contexts included: the classroom, the playground, the stream, at various field trip locales (Gore Hall, the Farmer's Market, etc.), and in the yoga studio. Data sources included: 1) twice daily video/audio recordings of teacher-guided reflective conversations with the children (avg. 30 min. in length), 2) twice daily video/audio recordings of pre/post session with teaching staff (avg. 60 min. in length), 3) daily video/audio recordings of yoga sessions (avg. 30min in length), 4) audio recordings of notes made during meetings with advisors, 5) audio recordings of meetings with camp planning committee (research team + teaching staff), 6) weekly parent newsletter, 7) optional end-of-camp parent survey, 8) weekly teaching plans, 9) photographs of camp experiences, 10) drawings created by camp participants, 11) focused observations by the participant observer and teaching staff, 12) research journal.

Participant observer and teaching staff were tasked to document instances (focused observations) of mindful interactions between the children and their social (e.g., self, peers, teachers, parents), temporal (e.g., response to schedule changes and/or continuity), and physical environment (e.g., classroom, playground, stream, garden) throughout the day. Mindful interactions could include using SEL strategies and language introduced or reinforced during the program: "identifying emotions",

“perspective taking”, “taking on challenges”, “safety” [emotional and physical], “what’s expected”). Focused observations of mindful interactions also included documentation of children using mindful practices such as, “mindful breathing” (e.g., recognizing need to take a breath or choosing to use “mindful breathing” as a strategy), “noticing” (e.g., reading environment, observing and making connections), “compassion” (e.g., displaying pro-social behavior toward themselves, others, nature, and the physical environment), “mindful listening” (e.g., hearing distinct sounds and inquiring or making connections), “mindful walking” (e.g., quiet walking and paying attention to sounds and how your body feels), and “mindful eating” (e.g., making connections about how your body feels when you’re hungry, what food feels like when you first put it in your mouth, what it feels like or tastes like when you chew it, recognizing you are full, paying attention to how you feel after you eat). This documentation lens set a tone of continuous reflexivity for the pre/post sessions at the beginning and end of each day. These pre/post sessions would then inform the teachers’ planning of experiences, which were ultimately designed to support and invite children’s mindful interactions with their social, temporal, and physical environments.

Table 2      Data Inventory

| Type                                                                  | Frequency of Collection | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Audio/Video Recording of Reflective Conversations with Children    | Twice Daily             | <p>Reflective group conversations led twice/day by student/master teacher (once prior to 12pm dismissal and once prior to 3pm dismissal). Discussions were designed to help children develop, practice, and apply skills in social-emotional learning and mindfulness. Conversations were prefaced by an activity or read-aloud and loosely structured around the following questions:</p> <p>“Can you think of a time when your body felt _____ today (angry, anxious, calm, proud)?”</p> <p>“How did you know?” (May need to provide prompts and/or scaffolding)</p> <p>“Can you think of a problem/challenge that you experienced today?”</p> <p>“How was your body feeling?”</p> <p>“What did you do? AND/OR What strategy did you use?”</p> |
| 2. Audio/Video Recording of Reflective Conversations between Teachers | Twice Daily             | Teachers collaboratively and reflectively discussed curriculum planning, refinement as it related to campers and their day-to-day experiences. Pre/post sessions were recorded in classroom twice daily (once in morning and once in afternoon).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 3. Audio/Video Recording of Yoga Session                              | Daily                   | Daily yoga sessions led by student teacher. Co-teachers participated alongside children. Session duration: ~30 min. These sessions were recorded.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                                                                                 |                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4. Audio Recordings of Meetings with Advisors                                   | Weekly               | Research staff discussed conceptual planning, progress, and analysis of camp. Meetings between research team took place on weekly basis and were recorded using a Tascam Audio Recorder.                                                                                                       |
| 5. Audio Recordings of Camp Planning Committee (research team + teaching staff) | Monthly              | Research team (two advisors and undergraduate researcher) and teaching staff (master teacher, two co-teachers) met twice throughout the course of the study. Once, prior to start of study, to discuss camp planning and once, at the midpoint, to discuss progress and refinement.            |
| 6. Parent Newsletters                                                           | Weekly               | Newsletters provided a tangible resource parents could use to reinforce [at home] strategies and content that were introduced at camp. Newsletters drafted by teaching staff and emailed to parents on a weekly basis.                                                                         |
| 7. Parent Survey                                                                | Once Upon Completion | Purpose was to elicit feedback for development of future programming. Open-ended anonymous survey delivered via Qualtrics, consisting of seven questions (see Appendix D).                                                                                                                     |
| 8. Weekly Teaching Plans                                                        | Weekly               | Each Friday, teaching staff would eat lunch together and plan the next week's activities, trips, and curricular content. Allowing time throughout the days for impromptu activities that might further support children's learning experiences and connections.<br>(for sample see Appendix B) |
| 9. Photographs of camp experiences                                              | Weekly               | Visual imagery was a major part of the camp curriculum and helps to portray an accurate representation of the children's experiences and the camp as a whole. Photographs of children, teachers, and the environment were taken, logged, and saved.                                            |
| 10. Drawings created by                                                         | Weekly               | Art was used as a medium of reflective                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

|                                                    |        |                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| camp participants                                  |        | expression. Drawings (and photographs of children's drawings) were documented and saved on a weekly basis.                                                                          |
| 11. Field Notes/Focused Observations               | Daily  | Researcher and Teaching staff recorded focused observations of children and teaching staff using or supporting mindfulness-based approaches, transitions, and mindful interactions. |
| 12. Research Journal                               | Daily* | Reflective journal where researcher would record notes about daily camp experiences and progression of personal practice and collaborative practice.                                |
| * Documentation/Collection exceeded four week span |        |                                                                                                                                                                                     |

### **Data Analysis**

In order to identify the key themes and patterns that unfolded during implementation, inductive (bottom-up approach) thematic analysis was used to code and analyze these data. Inductive thematic analysis is a process of coding participant interviews or interactions without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2006). ). The conjunctive use of the participant observer approach reinforced by the data-driven nature of inductive thematic analysis allows for a holistic, ethnographic representation of the culture, the participants' experiences, and the essential elements (themes) identified as a result.

Upon completion of the program, field notes and focused observations were transcribed, reviewed, and assigned preliminary codes (1<sup>st</sup> stage of analysis, see table 5). As a result of the initial codes that were emerging from the transcribed field notes and focused observations, the research team chose to transcribe the audio/video

reflective conversations (23 videos, 552.08min, see table 3 for description) that had been recorded twice daily during the program. Transcriptions were outsourced to GMR Transcription and checked for quality and accuracy by the undergraduate researcher. Transcriptions were read and re-read, and initial codes were reviewed by research team. When tested against the data set as a whole, it was determined that the codes emerging from the reflective conversation transcriptions were too narrow and did not provide a holistic representation of the children's experiences and the program environment. The researcher then went about re-reading transcriptions and field notes, generating themes that were inclusive of codes from reflective conversation transcriptions and from codes that emerged across the data set as a whole. This refining process helped to clarify the overarching themes.

Triangulation in qualitative research is a method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003). Data triangulation, which according to Denzin (1978) involves time, space, and persons, was achieved through analysis and comparison of teaching staff and participant observer's focused observations, transcriptions of reflective conversations between the teaching staff and the children, notes from pre/post sessions created during the observation periods, and comments from the teacher regarding events during the observation.

After preliminary analysis was completed (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stages, see table 3), a thorough review of the literature was conducted in search of both confirming and disconfirming evidence for the emergent and key themes identified during analysis. To further test these themes, a thematic map was constructed and refined to reflect an accurate visual depiction of the themes identified during analysis and how they

connect to one another. These themes and supporting evidence from the data are discussed in the next section.

Table 3 Stages of Qualitative Analysis

| Stage                                                                                                                                            | Code/Theme                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Stage:<br><br>Transcription (field notes, summative debriefing, 10hrs reflective conversations);<br><br>generating initial codes | - Identifying Emotions                                                                                                                                        | - Making Connections                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                                                                                                                                                  | - Prosocial Behavior                                                                                                                                          | - Listening                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                                                                                                                  | - Emotional Safety                                                                                                                                            | - Body                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Stage:<br><br>Re-reading data;<br><br>Testing/<br>Collating Codes                                                                | - Rushed interactions leading to missed opportunities (teacher w/ student or group)                                                                           | - Perspective Taking<br><br>- Breathing as transition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                  | - Present Interactions leading to new insights/connections (teacher w/ student or group)                                                                      | - Weather as Emotions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                  | <b>SEL Content</b> (making connections, perspective taking, identifying emotions)<br><br>- <b>Environment</b> (social, physical, temporal) (emotional safety) | - <b>Formal Practice</b> (seated breathing practice, yoga, alert plant pose)<br><br>- <b>Integration of mindfulness</b> (weather as emotions [SEL], breathing as transitions [temporal environment], progression of student-teacher interactions [teacher practice, social environment], physical environment/activities invite reflective, calm, aware interactions [marbles, trains, drawing/painting, bunny], children practicing yoga at home [parents noticing; social environment], children using language at home [parents noticing, social environment]) |

|                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Stage:<br><br>Inductive Thematic Analysis;<br><br>Identifying themes across entire data set | <b>Environment</b><br>- Social<br>- Physical<br>-Temporal<br><br><b>Teacher Practice</b><br>- formal/informal personal practice<br>- formal collaborative and reflective practice | <b>Infusion of Mindfulness</b><br>- SEL & MBP<br>- environment (social, physical, temporal)<br>- community building<br><br><b>Community</b><br>- parental involvement<br>- conversations between teachers and parents re: emotions, yoga, behavior, mindfulness |
| Thematic Map                                                                                                | Visual representation of themes                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Final Analysis for report                                                                                   | Final analysis of themes<br>Chose which data extracts to include in report                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

“You need only watch children at play to see the veracity of living inside each moment.” – Susan L. Woods, MSW, LICSW

Nineteen children attended the 4-week camp [12 female; age 5.11 (1.20) years]. The camp population was inclusive and consisted of early childhood age participants (4-7), both male and female (see Tables 4-6).

Table 4      Distribution of Demographic Characteristics Among Participants

| <b>Variable<br/>N(%)</b> |           |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Total                    | 19 (100%) |
| Age                      |           |
| 3                        | 1 (5.3%)  |
| 4                        | 6 (31.6%) |
| 5                        | 5 (26.3%) |
| 7                        | 3 (15.8%) |
| Gender                   |           |
| Male                     | 7 (36.8%) |

Table 5 Weekly Attendance

| Weekly Attendance |                     |                     |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Week              | Total # of students | Half Day Attendance | Full Day Attendance |
| Week 1            | 14                  | 4                   | 10                  |
| Week 2            | 14                  | 5                   | 9                   |
| Week 3            | 13                  | 4                   | 9                   |
| Week 4            | 13                  | 4                   | 9                   |

Table 6 Mean, Standard Deviation, & Age Distribution of Daily/Weekly Attendance Among Male and Female Participants

| Groups | Age          | # of Weeks Attended | # Days/Week |
|--------|--------------|---------------------|-------------|
| (N)    | Mean (SD)    |                     |             |
| Total  |              |                     |             |
| 19     | 5.11 (1.20)  | 2.84 (1.38)         | 4.58 (1.01) |
| Male   |              |                     |             |
| 8      | 5.25 (1.165) | 2.50 (1.41)         | 5.00*       |
| Female |              |                     |             |
| 11     | 5.00 (1.27)  | 3.09 (1.38)         | 4.27 (1.27) |

## **Emergent Themes**

Through inductive thematic analysis, the following themes emerged from the data: 1) Integration of mindfulness, 2) Reflective Practice, 3) Teacher Engagement 4) Family Partnerships

### **Integration of Mindfulness**

Mindfulness was intentionally integrated through the physical and temporal environment to holistically support young children's mindful learning and development in the context of planned and emergent experiences shared between teachers, children, and their families. Integrating mindfulness within the environment and the children's experiences offered opportunities for children to cultivate awareness through the use of reflective practice. This integration was documented through focused observations by teaching staff, audio recordings of reflective conversations between children and teachers, audio recordings of reflective conversations between teachers during pre/post session, photographs of the children and teachers in the context of planned and emergent experiences, and photographs of the children's artwork, a reflective medium.

***Physical Spaces.*** Every space has an identity and a purpose — rich in potential to foster communication (Cadwell, 1997).

***Classroom.*** Teachers wanted the classroom to reflect a minimal aesthetic by juxtaposing open space with engaging activities, allowing the space to serve as a 3<sup>rd</sup> teacher. The classroom was designed to invite investigation and support children in mindful inquiry and exploration. Mindful components of inquiry included: “noticing” (e.g., looking closely at objects through microscope, drawing bunny with pastels on sketchbook), “acceptance/letting go” (e.g., Buddha board: paint on the surface with

water and watch it gradually fade away), “nonjudgment” and “compassion” (e.g., learning to socially navigate classroom activities like “Marble Run” and “Trains”). This was documented through photographs of the children engaging with the activities and photographs of the children’s documentation and artwork.

*Yoga Studio.* The yoga studio was a space separate from the classroom, designed to communicate openness and invite calm, intentional whole-body interactions. Yoga mats were not laid out for the children ahead of time, nor were the children told where to place their mats. Instead, teachers shared expectations about the studio: 1) we take our shoes off as we enter the studio and place them in a cubby, 2) we choose a yoga mat, and then 3) find our space. Some children shared mats, other chose to be on their own. If they could make it work in their space then that was sufficient for the teachers. This physical space was designed to support mindful movement and whole body learning.

***Temporal Transitions.*** Mindfulness was integrated through the temporal environment in the form of a chime, which indicated that it was time to transition and cued both the children and the teachers to stop, place one hand on their heart, the other hand on their belly, and breathe “in” and “out” 3x’s [3 mindful breaths], and then proceed. In tandem, these mindful practices (listening cueing breathing) provided a tangible sound on which to focus, and a breathing practice (three mindful breaths) to provide an experiential connection to the act of transitioning, making the act itself less abstract, and more concrete. It also affords the child an opportunity to consistently pay attention to a sensory cue and intentionally respond with their breath.

This temporal transition practice was utilized regularly in the classroom and in the yoga studio, but the children responded similarly to the practice when it was used

on field trips in unfamiliar contexts, such as the UD Shuttle Bus and on campus while transitioning from eating lunch outside the Farmer's Market to the next leg of the field trip, Gore Hall. In the following excerpt transcribed from a research team meeting during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, the master teacher reflects on the use of the chime during their field trip to Gore Hall:

“The young teachers were able to use it [the chime] several times when we were moving from one place to the next... just the hearing of that sound and then you moving them into the breathing... you really noticed a whole shift. The example that stands out most clearly in my mind was when you had them on the blanket after lunch... and we had finished reading the story and they were just all, squirrely about, like, you know... ‘Where are we gonna go?’ and ‘How are we getting to Gore Hall?’ And you stopped and brought that transitional component [the chime] in and that was great...”

***Intentionally-Planned Experiences.*** Through intentionally-planned experiences with the local community, the teachers offered the children opportunities for social interaction and engagement. Ecological experiences offered a concrete structure upon which children could foster connections to better make sense of how to navigate the environment.

***Local Field Trips.*** Throughout the 4-week program, the group went on local exploratory field trips. These included a visit to the local university campus farmer's market, a shuttle bus ride to a local yoga studio, and an end of camp trip to the reservoir. Teachers planned the trips locally for economical purposes, but also to support an ecological connection to the children's local community. The curricular purpose of the trips was to provide concrete opportunities for children to expand their understanding of the concepts introduced in the classroom and try out some of the

strategies for self-control and mindfulness and making connections that were being introduced in class.

During the second week of the program, the teachers and the children, along with some of the children's parents, walked to the local university's farmer's market and to one of the lecture halls (~1.3mi walk). These trips offered additional contexts upon which the children were afforded opportunities to build on the concepts that were introduced in the classroom.

The teachers had introduced the concept of perspective-taking as part of the SEL curriculum. For some children, perspective-taking was an entirely new concept, and to others it was being reintroduced. An example of how perspective taking was integrated into the camp and was facilitated both in and outside of the classroom would be our use of developmentally-appropriate literature in the classroom and our reflection on that literature outside of the classroom as part of everyday experience. To provide acclimation to the concept for all children, the teachers had led a read-aloud experience using Rosenthal & Litchenfield's (2009) "Duck Rabbit" (see Figure 2). This book provided a developmentally-appropriate example of perspective-taking through the use of illustrations and optical illusion.

Figure 2 Child Reading Duck Rabbit



To further build on this concept and provide an experiential component, the teachers planned a trip to a local lecture hall. Inside the building, there is a large compass on the center floor of the hall that is easy to miss if one is simply walking through, but the compass is clearly visible from the second or third floor. In an effort to offer another level of perspective, the teachers asked the children to lay down on the floor and look up at the ceiling. Next, they ventured up to the second, and then the third floor. On the way up, the master teacher asked the children to pay special attention to what one of the teachers (who was remaining on the first floor) looked like from ground-level. Upon arriving to the second and third floors, respectively, the children excitedly looked down and made the connection that the floor was actually a

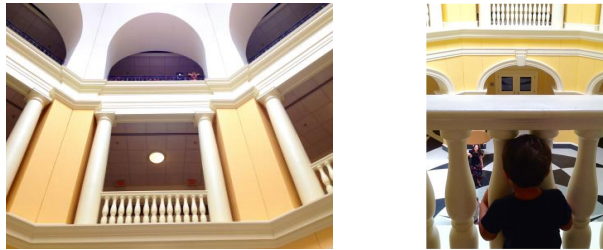
compass. During the group's reflective conversation later that afternoon, the children shared what they thought the teacher on ground-level looked like (see Figure 3):

"You looked like a dot to me."

"I thought you looked like a little ant!"

"You looked like a tiny line."

Figure 3 Lecture hall looking up, lecture hall looking down



The children also had a few theories about whether one of the letters on the compass was an "M" or a "W" (see Figure 4):

Teacher: "Some of our friends say they saw a 'M' when they looked down, but some say they saw a 'W'..."

Child 1: "And an E and a S."

Child 2: "Not an M!"

Teacher: "Well... If you looked at it one way, it was an M, and if you went around the other way, it was a W."

Child 2: "But, it was a compass so it had to be a W."

Teacher: "So – yes. If you only look at the W and the M, it could be either one. But when you look at the big picture, like when you went up on the third floor and looked down, you could see that it was a compass. So what would it make sense for it to be, a W or an M if it's a compass?"

Child 2: “W.”

Teacher: “Tell me more...”

Child 2: “West.”

Teacher: “West, I see. What did the W-M thing remind you of? Did it remind you of anything we read?”

Child 3: “The duck rabbit.”

Teacher: “The duck rabbit. That’s exactly what it reminded me of. And our perspectives, right? Like when two people have two different ideas and see two different things. Some of our friends saw an M, some saw a W.”

Child 2: “I saw a W.”

Teacher: “You saw a W. All right.”

Figure 4 Lecture Hall Compass



### Reflective Practice

Children and teachers both engaged in reflective practice through a variety of mediums, which included: yoga (children & teachers), art (children), reflective conversation (children & teachers), and meditation (teachers).

For the children, reflective practice offered a supportive and integrative context in which mindful connections were fostered and shared.

**Yoga.** In an effort to support a collaborative daily yoga practice with the children, teachers invited the children to create affirmations for 5 poses over the course of the 4-week camp. These affirmations were collaboratively constructed with the children during the daily yoga sessions. Each week another affirmation was added to the mix. The affirmations were documented weekly in the newsletter in addition to the daily video/audio recording of the yoga session. This was a foundational experience on which other activities were based or reinforced. The following are the end result of the collaboratively constructed affirmations (see Figure 5: Yoga Affirmations and Figure 6: Collaborative Yoga Practice) 1) “I see myself as a surfer: I am focused, I am balanced, I am strong”, 2) “I see myself as a tree: I am colorful, I am tall, I am leafy”, 3) “I see myself as a skier: I am strong, I am brave, I can PERSEVERE!”, 4) “I see myself as a dog: I am cute, I am cuddly, I can dig” 5) “I see myself as an owl: I am calm, I am wise, I can FLY”.

Figure 5      Yoga Affirmations

Yoga Affirmations:

I see myself as a surfer (warrior 2):

- I am focused
- I am balanced
- I am strong
- I am brave



I see myself as a tree: (tree pose)

- I am colorful
- I am tall
- I am leafy



I see myself as a skier: (chair pose)

- I am strong
- I am brave
- I can PERSEVERE!



I see myself as a dog: (downward dog)

- I am cute
- I am cuddly
- I can dig!



I see myself as an owl:

- I am calm
- I am wise
- I can FLY



Figure 6 Collaborative Yoga Practice. 6A shows Cobra Pose. 6B shows Tree Pose. 6C shows Forward Bend.

Figure 6A Cobra Pose



Figure 6B Tree Pose



Figure 6C Forward Bend



Holistically, yoga was an activity that invited focus and intention in the children's movement. Collaboratively constructing the affirmations offered an opportunity to integrate experiential whole body learning with reflective conversation. The daily collaborative yoga practice supported children with opportunities to develop awareness of their bodies and the affirmations served as integrative strategies that supported the translation of the yoga practice into separate contexts, including the classroom and the home as reported by parents on the end-of-program survey:

In response to Question 2 on the survey, one parent responded:

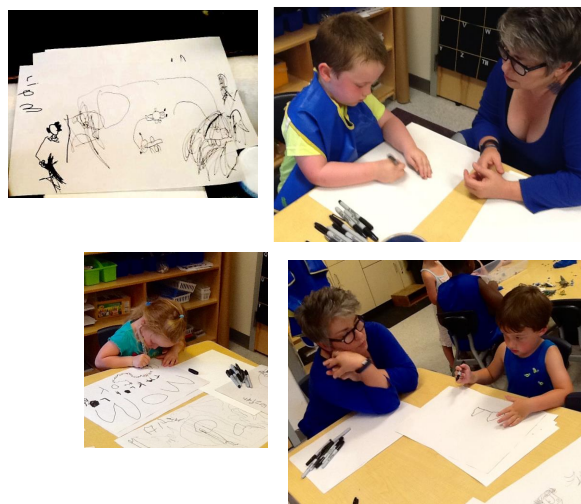
My child would often would practice the breathing and also would say some of the affirmations (Especially "I can perservere!"). She would also say things such as "I need some alone time" or "Breathe" when parents would get stressed.

**Art.** Art played a foundational role in the camp’s environment and the intentional activities made available throughout, but it served an especially important role as a reflective medium. Children were constantly engaging in experiential learning by immersing themselves in their environment. Some children were excited to use their words to describe their experiences, others preferred to reflect creatively. The children’s artwork was saved and also documented through photographs.

The following is an excerpt from the Week 2 Newsletter, which documents the story of the children’s grasshopper sighting and how they chose to use art to tell their reflective story (see Figure 7):

“While we were outside last week, one of our friends found a grasshopper on the ground. The children were ecstatic and worked very hard to remain still and observe the grasshopper in his natural environment. Our favorite art teacher made a surprise visit later that day and the children excitedly told her ALL about the grasshopper sighting. She asked them if they would like to draw the grasshopper and what they took away from that experience. You can find these drawings on the wall directly outside our classroom.”

Figure 7 Grasshopper Sighting



***Reflective Conversation.*** Stories are a powerful way for humans to learn, as we tend to represent experiences as narratives (Bruner 1990).

*Children & Teachers.* Reflective group conversations between the children and their teachers occurred twice daily and were characterized by a storied narrative, which could be initiated by the teacher within the context of another activity (e.g. interactive read-aloud) or elicited from the children at the end of the activity (e.g., “think of a time today where you had to work really hard at something...”). Typically, the first conversation (AM) was centered around introducing or expanding on a SEL concept (perspective-taking, self-regulation, identifying emotions, self-awareness) and the second conversation (PM) involved an integrative activity designed to offer opportunities for children to acclimate themselves to new concepts (e.g., interactive read-aloud). The children’s experiences throughout their camp day laid the foundation for these conversations.

Discussion was not isolated, but organic and flowed from the content of the story or activity. Teachers helped the children unfold their experiences and helped to elicit connections between the children’s experiences and their emotions. They did so by helping children to describe their experiences and then asking how the children felt during or at the end of their experience.

Reflective conversations between the teachers and the children offered opportunities for children to connect strategies and concepts they were learning to their ecological experiences both at home and at camp.

For example, during an afternoon reflective conversation, one of the children was having a difficult time focusing on the group. One of the supporting teachers (who expounded on this during post-session) went to correct him and, noticing her

immediate response, hesitated. Instead, she observed him continuing to wriggle his body and then heard him say very quietly to himself: “the wise owl would stay calm and be quiet.”

During the morning yoga session, the children had shared what characteristics personify an owl in their affirmations (see Figure 4). This child had said that an owl is ‘wise’. During Free Choice in the afternoon, he decided to draw and color (with pastels) the calm, wise owl (see Figure 8). In the past, he had not been a student who finished art projects without support. While he was drawing the owl, the teacher working with him was called away and Liam chose to finish the drawing on his own. At the end of free choice, he had colored in the entire drawing and excitedly shared his work with all of the teachers. During group, he was able to use these connections to embody the behavior expected while participating in group conversation. He came up with and used these strategies without support from a teacher. At the end of the discussion, the master teacher posed the following question to the group:

Master Teacher: “Think of a time today, where you had to work really hard at something.”

When it was this child’s turn, he responded, smiling, “My wise owl.”

She then elicited further: “So did you stick to it until you finished it?”

He responded, “Yeah. It was really hard to color, but I really wanted to color the whole thing, so I still was trying to.”

The teacher then asked him to describe how it made him feel, “All right. How did you feel when you finished it?”

He responded, “Happy.”

She then expanded on the interaction from her perspective by describing what she saw:

“You know what I noticed?”

“What?”

“When I came in [to the classroom], you were showing it to me, and you had this big smile, and I was thinking, he looks proud. He feels good about what he did.”

“Yeah.”

Figure 8      Calm, Wise Owl



Reflective group conversation offers a social context in which all participants, both children and teachers, had the opportunity to practice strategies and make new connections through interactive activities (e.g., songs, read-alouds). The children's experiences both at home and at camp informed the reflective conversations. These conversations offered a supportive context in which mindful connections were fostered and shared.

*Teachers.* Teachers engaged with mindfulness through meditation and reflective practice, both personally and collaboratively. Collaborative reflective practice was documented through focused observations and through the twice daily pre/post sessions, which in turn served to inform the teachers' practice and their interactions with the students.

Pre-sessions and post-sessions occurred an hour before the children's arrival and after dismissal, respectively. This was a time for the teachers to not only reflect on the curriculum plans and the children's experiences, but also to check-in with themselves and with one another – an opportunity for self- and interpersonal investigation. This twice-daily collaborative, reflective practice expanded to include a short meditation in their pre- and post-sessions during the last two weeks of the program.

Pre-sessions were often geared toward honing focus and intention, while post-sessions were centered on reflection. The topic of conversation during post-sessions was often informed by focused observations documented by the teaching staff throughout the day. Additionally, these conversations were recorded twice-daily and saved onto the study's local server.

The following is an example of a focused observation documented by a teacher, the second excerpt includes notes taken from the post session meeting later that day:

6/17 Focused Observation from

Teacher 1: Child putting shoes on after yoga: struggled and insisted that he needed help [even though he had successfully accomplished this task the day before]

Notes from 6/17 Post-Session:

Teacher 1 Reflection on Focused Observation: “He was repeating the same thing over and over, so I walked him through each step, but I wasn’t sure how to help him next or what strategy to offer him that might help him in the future...”

Master Teacher: “You walked him through each step of the task. The *next* step is walking him through the feeling. Help him recognize how he was feeling when he was struggling, what changed, and how he is feeling as a result. You could say, ‘you were having a lot of trouble with this and you got through it!’ ‘I see you smiling.’ ‘You look proud.’ One step further might be asking him if he *likes* how it feels.

The master teacher shared strategies that would help support the child in mindful learning by asking him to “stop” and “notice” what has just occurred and the child’s associated response (smiling), support future interactions by providing language to describe how he’s feeling (‘You look proud’), and finally asking him to “reflect” or “expand” on how he is feeling now that he has accomplished the task. She acknowledged the young teacher’s positive interaction and supported her with integrative developmentally-appropriate strategies to support mindful learning and awareness: 1) physically help the child by walking him through the steps, 2) offer opportunity for integration: describe the interaction and his response, and 3) support

the child in his development of awareness by offering an opportunity for him to recognize how the interaction makes him feel.

Being able to reflect and elicit advisement from the master teacher in a safe and collaborative environment helped the teachers to grow in their practice as well as cultivate their own self-awareness and ability to notice in-the-moment opportunities to support children in mindful learning. Collectively, these documentation, mindfulness, and reflective practices shifted the way in which teachers interacted with the children. Just as the focused observations served to inform the pre/post sessions, the reflective practice in the pre/post sessions supported the teacher's interactions with their students.

For the teachers, personal and collaborative reflective practice shifted the way in which teachers interacted with the children. The following transcription is an excerpt from a research staff meeting that occurred during the break week of one of the teachers reflecting on her interaction with student:

"I am starting to respond to the children differently. During group last week, when one of the children moved from 'criss-cross applesauce' [seated position, legs crossed], my knee-jerk response would have been to remind him of "what's expected" during group; but, instead of immediately responding, I hesitated and waited to see what he would do next. He moved into, like, a rocking-crab pose and moved his body back and forth, but his focus remained on the lead teacher and the book she was reading aloud... Our teaching environment has reinforced a more open mindset for me and I am, now, better able to see the children's actions within the context of the environment and each passing moment."

### Teacher Engagement

Teachers were engaged with the children in both planned and in-the-moment experiences throughout various contexts and, thus, were able to play a collaborative

role in the children's mindful exploration and navigation of their physical, social, and temporal environments. Teachers' engagement with the children was documented through focused observations, photographs of experiences, video/audio recording of reflective conversations between teachers during pre/post sessions, video/audio recordings of reflective conversations between children and teachers. Specifically, interactions where teachers were providing a language ("What is expected?" "I notice" "It looks like" "I am feeling..." "Think of a time today when your body felt...") or modeling desired behavior (e.g., modeling yoga pose, modeling mindful breathing by placing one hand on their heart and the other on their belly).

Throughout the course of the 4-week camp, interactions between the teachers and the children became less hurried and the young teachers began to notice opportunities to support children in their experiential reflections. The following is an excerpt from a transcription of a reflective conversation between a young teacher and the children during the first week of the program:

Teacher: "What made you choose that book? Because we read it yesterday?"

Child 1: "We read it yesterday."

Child 2: "Probably because it was funny."

Teacher: "Because it was funny. Is that one of the reasons? You look pretty happy in this picture."

Instead of waiting for an answer from the children after posing the first question, the teacher offered her own suggestion and when a child offered an alternative answer, the teacher ignored a potential opportunity to elicit further connection and conversation, and quickly moved on to another topic.

The following is an excerpt from a transcription of a video/audio recording of a reflective conversation between the same young teacher and the children during the 4<sup>th</sup> week:

Reading “Mindful Monkey, Happy Panda”<sup>5</sup>:

Teacher leading group [Reading Panda’s line] “ ‘When I eat, I am just eating.’ Hmm, that reminds me... [engages a specific child], do you remember when we practiced our mindful eating?”

Child: “Yeah.”

Teacher: “When we smelled the food, and listened to the food when we took a bite?”

Child: “I do not want to do that again.”

Teacher: “You know... I am noticing your nose is scrunched and your eyebrows are down. Your expression is telling me that the experience [mindful eating] was not so fun for you.”

Child: “I hate vegetables.”

Teacher: “Yeah, and there were a lot of vegetables to taste.”

[Pauses and continues reading]

“When I play, I am just playing.”

Contrasting the example from the first week, this interaction demonstrated intentionality behind the teacher’s questioning and an engaged awareness.

### Family Partnerships

Family partnerships were established gradually through integrated efforts of outreach and sharing of resources. These efforts were initiated both by teachers and

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<sup>5</sup> Alderfer, L. (2011). *Mindful Monkey, Happy Panda*. Simon and Schuster.

families through conversation and via email. Resources were shared with families through digital media: weekly blog on UD Lab School website and a weekly newsletter. The blog provided a descriptive narrative of the children's experiences from one week to the next. The newsletter (see Appendix C) was a more targeted area of outreach: teachers contextually constructed the newsletter around the children's experiences, including specific explanations of the concepts that were being introduced in camp (e.g., perspective-taking, focus, self-control, mindfulness) and applied examples of how to support the children's learning at home. Teachers hoped that by providing parents with the tools to support and collaborate in the children's learning, it would help acclimate children *and* their families to the concepts, thereby allowing the practices to translate to the children's home environment. It is important to note that family outreach was not one-sided or isolated; on the contrary, there was a continuous ebb and flow to the partnerships that formed between teachers and families through integrated efforts of outreach and sharing of resources. To support future programming, an optional open-ended survey was also shared with parents upon completion of camp.

Parents engaged collaboratively in the following ways: attending field trips, exploring the classroom with their children during arrival, initiating conversations with teachers about children's use of strategies, language, and yoga practice during arrival and dismissal, completing a voluntary, open-ended survey, and engaging in reflective conversation with teachers and research staff at the end-of-program celebration.

**Newsletter.** The weekly newsletter was specifically constructed as an integrative resource for parents. The teachers were hoping to support the translation of

these practices into other contexts. The newsletter provided descriptive explanations of the concepts that were shared with the children in the program and provided supporting examples of how the children and teachers were implementing various strategies and supporting mindful learning.

Each newsletter featured Jon Kabat-Zinn's (2013) definition of mindfulness, "paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment to moment." The newsletters shared experiences from children's week, but the experiences were used to demonstrate how we were building on a concept. The documentation provided a lens with which to view the children's growth and the potential translation of practice into different contexts.

**Survey.** The survey was developed and administered using Qualtrics. The survey was anonymous and completing the survey was optional. Responses were used to inform the development and refinement of future mindfulness programming at the UD Lab School. Six families completed the survey.

Survey responses were read, re-read, and coded using NVivo. Findings from the survey responses indicate: 1) family interest in mindfulness workshops, 2) children were practicing yoga at home, 3) children used breathing as a strategy at home, 4) children were talking about their emotions with their families at home.

*Family interest in mindfulness.* Responses from the survey indicated that some families were interested in additional resources for their own self-care. In response to question number 6, "Would you be interested in a "Mindful Parenting" workshop?" families wrote:

"YES!!"

"Maybe"

“YES!”

“Yes”

“Possibly”

“Yes”

*Children practicing yoga at home.* Responses from the survey indicated that practices from the program’s daily yoga sessions were translating to the home environment with the children.

In response to question 2, “Has your child talked about any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples?” families wrote:

“My child talks about and practices yoga.”

“No, maybe a little about yoga, but that's it”

In response to question 3, “Has your child used any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples?” families wrote:

“She would sing the yoga songs "Sun Salutation" and "color song" and would practice some of the yoga. She also liked to find some quiet time on her own.”

“Practices yoga, including repeating mantras such as ‘I am Brave, I am Strong, I am Persevere’ ”

In response to question 5, “What were the benefits of the mindfulness camp to your child?” families wrote:

“Yoga practice was great we often 'see ourselves as a surfer, tree, skier, etc.’”

“She has learned valuable skills (breath awareness and control, yoga, and practicing being in the moment)”

“...continue to work on balance and strength and learning to calm oneself by practicing yoga”

*Children using breathing as a strategy at home.* Responses from the survey indicated that children were using “mindful breathing” (placing one hand on their heart and the other on their belly, breathe “in” and “out”) as a strategy at home.

In response to question 2, “Has your child talked about any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples?” families wrote:

“Child would often would practice the breathing and also would say some of the affirmations (Especially "I can perservere!"). She would also say things such as "I need some alone time" or "Breathe" when parents would get stressed.”

In response to question 3, “Has your child used any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples?” families wrote:

“She would breathe (by holding her hand on stomach and chest). She would sing the yoga songs "Sun Salutation" and "color song" and would practice some of the yoga. She also liked to find some quiet time on her own.”

In response to question 5, “What were the benefits of the mindfulness camp to your child?” families wrote:

“She has learned valuable skills (breath awareness and control, yoga, and practicing being in the moment)”

*Children talking about their emotions with families.* Responses from the survey indicated that children were talking about or identifying their emotions: how different things make them or others feel (i.e. happy, sad, etc.). This was evidenced through the families’ following responses:

In response to question 2, “Has your child talked about any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples?” families wrote:

“Yes, my child has mentioned things at home about exploring the world, talks about feelings while doing certain activities, mentioned his calm bracelet.”

“My child talks about and practices yoga, talks about thinking of sad things, or happy things, (theory of mind, memories, etc.) Says things like “I’m thinking about something sad” or funny or happy, etc. Then will tell me something when I ask her what she is thinking of.”

In response to question 3, “Has your child used any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples?” families wrote:

“...talks about thinking, how her memories and thoughts make her feel and her emotions.”

In response to question 4, “Have you used any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home with your child? If yes, could you provide some examples?” families wrote:

“I ask about feelings. Talk about what we see at that moment...things like that.”

“Noticing things around us using different senses, reminders about kindness to others and trying to understand how others feel.”

“Discussed what is talked about in camp, talking about ‘what is expected’, how things make us feel”

Overall, the responses provided evidence that practices (yoga), language (identifying emotions), and strategies (breathing) were translating to the children’s home environment and being used by some of the children and their families.

## **Chapter 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

“Are we disrespecting children by not allowing them the space and time to fully inquire, imagine, and create?” - Kim Timothy, 2013

Our contemporary physical, social, and temporal climate is teeming with technological advancement and an emphasis on individual outcomes and productivity. For adults, workplace environments demand that individuals constantly shift between tasks and, increasingly, employees are expected to be available via email once they go home (Rosen, 2008). For youth, due to education policy changes and reform, academic environments are focused on outcomes, and the pressures to perform are steadily increasing (Scheffler et al., 2009). These charged environments are now beginning to affect young children, whose development is marked by exploration and a driving sense of inquiry (Capel, 2012; Erwin, 2015). When we limit mindfulness practice to isolated dosages so as to extract a desired outcome, we may be, in turn, limiting the full potential of the practice, itself (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). It is extremely important to keep this fundamental and informed perspective in mind when considering the use of mindfulness in educational settings with vulnerable populations (young children).

The purpose of this study was to provide a rich description of the integration of mindfulness through the physical, social, and temporal environment and experiences in an inclusive early learning setting.

## **Findings**

Documentation suggests: 1) mindfulness was integrated through the physical, social, and temporal environment, 2) reflective practice was used as a means of informing planning and refining as well as integrating experiences for children and teachers, 3) teachers engaged with the children and their families through: teaching, planning, documentation, and implementation of planned and in-the-moment experiences 4) family partnerships were formed through collaborative participation in camp activities, which included: participation and engagement on field trips, the sharing of camp resources introduced within the context of the summer program (e.g., language, conversation, experiences) via a weekly newsletter drafted by teachers, and a voluntary end-of-program survey.

### **Integration of Mindfulness**

In ICBM, the SEL curriculum offered a unifying mode of communication that could be consistently shared and understood amongst all participants. Exploring and mindfully engaging in social activities like unstructured play and physical activity offered foundational concrete experiences that could then be integrated using the shared language in the context of reflective practice. Documentation from this study provides one example of what it looks like when mindfulness is integrated throughout the curriculum and the environment -- physically, socially, and temporally.

Exploratory ecological experiences that are supported by children's innate curiosity and facilitated using mindful inquiry may have the ability to enhance the development of social-emotional skills in early childhood, but we need to apply a more expansive and holistic lens so as to include all aspects of development and need,

not just those outcomes that are of interest to the researcher and his or her background (Greenberg & Harris, 2012).

### Reflective Practice

Children are competent learners, but as teachers, we have to slow down, carefully observe, and study our documented observations in order to understand the ideas that they are attempting to convey (Forman & Hall, 2013).

During the development and implementation of ICBM, teachers cultivated their own personal mindfulness practice as well as sustaining a reflective, collaborative practice through twice daily pre/post sessions and, during the final two weeks of the program, twice daily collaborative mindfulness meditation. The teachers' personal, collaborative, and reflective practice (meditation, yoga, reflective conversation, etc.) resulted in a heightened awareness of opportunities to support the children in mindful learning and exploration.

### Teacher Engagement

The mindful lens of the teaching staff's documentation set a tone of continuous sensitivity and reflexivity. Ritchhart and Perkins (2000) recognize sensitivity as an awareness of and alertness to occasions for engaging in certain behavior. This was evidenced in the teachers' ability to be present and engaged with the children while facilitating intentionally-planned experiences, as well as their ability to consistently recognize in-the-moment opportunities to engage and support the children in mindful interactions with their environment (see Appendix A). The teachers expanded on their experiences through reflective discussion during twice daily pre/post sessions, which occurred at the beginning and end of each day. These pre/post sessions informed the

teachers' intentional planning and refining of experiences, which were ultimately designed to support and invite children's mindful interactions with their social, temporal, and physical environments. Mindfulness can lead to a greater sensitivity to one's environment, which includes both the human (collaborative partnerships) and physical (socio-cultural) environments (Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000).

### Family Partnerships

During the program, teachers communicated information back and forth with families through different venues: by sharing conversations, ideas, action plans, mindfulness practices, and the life of the camp contextually. A great emphasis was placed on community building and safety (both physical and emotional) through the sharing of ideas, language, and experiences between the children, their teachers and families.

It is important to note that family outreach was not one-sided or isolated; on the contrary, there was a continuous ebb and flow to the partnerships that formed between teachers and families through integrated efforts of outreach and sharing of resources. One of the considerations that was brought up by a senior investigator during a summative camp planning committee meeting was how can we support the translation of this practice to the children's home environment? To quote him directly:

“What's their gong [sound of chime] going to be at home?”

During the 2016 edition of ICBM, “supporting family partnerships” and “translation of practices” are primary focuses.

### **Limitations**

As is consistent with qualitative methodology, the findings from this program are generalizable only to this specific group of children, their teachers, and families. Using a participant observer approach (Creswell, 2012) and a developmental perspective, we sought to contribute to the lack of prior research (Erwin & Robinson, 2015; Greenberg & Harris, 2012) by documenting and describing the developmentally-appropriate integration of mindfulness with young children, ages 4-7, in an inclusive early learning context.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Mindfulness is a way of directing one's attention that originates in Eastern meditation traditions (Baer & Krietemeyer, 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). It is important to know and understand the context and origin when utilizing mindfulness-based practices in secular contexts. When practiced in the Buddhist tradition, mindfulness is more than a tool; it is a way of being in the world and understanding the world (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Children are naturally curious about their world, let us ponder how we can best support young children's natural states of joy, wonder, and engagement – or at the very least move out of the way so they can experience their world mindfully (Erwin & Robinson, 2015). It is with this supportive lens that we sought to explore the development and implementation of a developmentally-appropriate mindfulness-based program for young children in an early learning setting.

Kabat-Zinn (2013) refers to mindful inquiry as a nonjudgmental curiosity or awareness of one's experiences moment-to-moment. Over time, Adults practicing this nonjudgmental curiosity during formal practice (yoga, breath awareness, body scan, etc) have often reported emergent insight in their daily experiences (Kabat-Zinn,

2013). However, there is a clear developmental disparity between adults and young children. Practices that are feasible for adults (45 min. seated meditation) are not developmentally-appropriate for children (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Why is it, then, that we continue to adapt practices from clinical interventions, originally designed for adults, and prescriptively apply them to young children's educational contexts?

In order to support children in mindful development and inquiry, we must take into account the many ways in which adults and young children differ. Dr. Nimrod Sheinman (2014), of the Israel Center for Mindfulness in Education, identifies the following key developmental differences between the two populations: age, circumstances, goals, contexts, motivations, and environments. Young children – across all types of diversity – have an intrinsic desire to make sense of their world. In other words, they are innately mindful (Erwin & Robinson, 2015). Our goal in investigating the use of mindfulness with this population should not be to impose a pre/post intervention on them, but instead through thorough observation and documentation, identify the ways in which mindfulness can be integrated and nurtured within the environment (physically, socially, and temporally) to bolster children's desire and ability to mindfully inquire.

### **Conclusion**

“The children's innate curiosity drove them to ‘seek the tools’, it was our job as teachers to provide them.” – ICBM Teacher (during summative debriefing), 2015

The programmatic goal of ICBM was to support children in their curiosity through mindful learning and exploration. At the beginning stages of development, the goal in using mindfulness as a part of an emergent curriculum was to support

social-emotional learning outcomes. In order to promote the positive development of social-emotional skills in early childhood, it is imperative to provide children with the opportunity to explore, create, and inquire “consistently and continuously” (Dewey, 1944). These play-based, self-directed interpersonal connections between the child and his or her environment enhance the development of social-emotional skills, which can later be applied to other abstract contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dawson & Guare, 2004; Erwin, Robinson, McGrath, & Harney, 2015; Willis, 2015).

By actively engaging in the integration of mindfulness through collaborative reflective practice, teacher engagement, the elicitation of family partnerships, and continuous documentation, it became clear that an outcomes-based agenda was far too limiting. Supporting children’s innate mindful curiosity and inquiry should be the developmental goal of programming. Mindfulness is not a tool, it is a state of being that we, as adults, have to rekindle; but, for children, it needs to be supported. Their curiosity drives them to mindfully inquire, but they need exploratory spaces that invite investigation, and integrative experiences that expand their knowledge and understanding of the world around them, as well as diverse and supportive communities to model for them what it looks like when someone responds to themselves and others in a nonjudgmental and compassionate way. Young children share an intrinsic desire to make sense of their world. We need to provide the tools, and let their curiosity and desire to mindfully inquire direct their learning.

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## Appendix A

### Compassionate Release of Our Good Friend the Toad

On Monday morning, we decided to do things a bit differently by meeting outside for our AM Arrival. After removing the sandbox cover, one of our friends spotted a toad camouflaging himself alongside the wooden edge of the sandbox. Our teachers immediately recommended that we bring him in the classroom for closer observation; they asked the children to be social detectives of the toad's environment and think about how we could create a comfortable habitat for our friend — the children enthusiastically split off into a number of groups to gather stones, sticks, and a shallow dish for water. The younger teachers were very apprehensive about our reptilian addition to the camp: “How long are we going to keep him?” “How do we tie this into the idea of ‘keeping our environment safe?’” “Are we *really* keeping him safe?”

Our [master] teacher advised us (younger teachers) to slow down and think about the mindfulness concepts we are teaching the children. She encouraged us to “flip our thinking”. View this interaction as an opportunity to tune in to the children's perspectives and help them work through their ideas. With this guidance, we were able to slow down our thoughts, shift from perspectives of worry and concern, and view the experience through the children's eyes. The list below reflects a number of questions and connections made by the children during this time of thoughtful observation:

*“We won't know the frog's gender until it reproduces.”*

*“Frog could be croaking because it is hungry or angry. That’s why I would croak.”*

They had a few different ideas about how our friend might be feeling in the classroom environment:

*“I think he feels happy with his home — he likes his sticks, mulch, and rocks.”*

*“I think he feels happy because he popped up [in tank].”*



### **Mindful Camp Newsletter Week 3**

**UD Lab School July 12, 2015**

On Day 2 of the Toad’s stay, we read “Moody Cow Learns Compassion” (McLean, 2012)— in this book, Moody Cow and his friend (Bully) capture a snake and are faced with a number of dilemmas: they want to keep the snake, but they have to

feed it... What do snakes eat? They eat crickets! They search and find a cricket, but when moody cow goes to feed the innocent insect to the snake, he hesitates. Upon witnessing his hesitation, Moody cow's friend calls him a wimp! The book goes on to cover a number of different concepts covered in our program including, compassion for creatures in our environment, empathy (perspective-taking), and an overarching but subtle nod to the way in which ecosystems function outside of our control. After reading this book, the children's perspectives on our friend, the Toad, changed a bit...

*Teacher: "What do you think the toad needs in order to survive?"*

*"He needs to eat, drink, and be taken care of."*

*Teacher: "What do you think we should do with the toad?"*

*"I don't want to keep him, I think he misses his family."*

*"I have an idea... let's take him back to his family."*

Later that afternoon, the children happily set the Toad free in his natural environment. Our experience with "The Toad" turned out to be a lesson in mindful awareness and compassion for both the children and the teachers.

Mclean, K. L. (2012). *Moody Cow Learns Compassion*. Wisdom Publications.  
Retrieved from [http:// www.wisdompubs.org/book/moody-cow-learns-compassion](http://www.wisdompubs.org/book/moody-cow-learns-compassion)

## Appendix B

### I Can Be Mindful Weekly Plans: Week 3

#### UD Laboratory Preschool I Can Be Mindful Camp 2015 Week 3

| Week                                                    | MONDAY 7/6                                                                                                                          | TUESDAY 7/7                                                                                                                                  | WEDNESDAY 7/8                                                                                                                                                                                                | THURSDAY 7/9                                                                                                                                                                                                      | FRIDAY HALF DAY 7/10                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9:30-9:45<br><br>Wash Hands                             | MORNING ARRIVAL -- OUTSIDE                                                                                                          | MORNING ARRIVAL -- OUTSIDE                                                                                                                   | OLD SCHEDULE<br><br>*Morning Arrival in classroom (9:00-9:30)<br>*Yoga (9:30-10:00)<br>*Outside time (10:00-10:45)<br>*Choice time (10:45-11:30)<br>*GD (11:30-12:00)<br>*Lunch (12:00-12:30)<br>*Field Trip | OLD SCHEDULE<br><br>*Morning Arrival in classroom (9:00-9:30)<br>*Yoga (9:30-10:00)<br>*Outside time (10:00-10:45)<br>*Choice time (10:45-11:30)<br>*GD (11:30-12:00) *Lunch (12:00-12:30)<br>*Afternoon schedule | MORNING ARRIVAL -- OUTSIDE                                                                              |
| Yoga 10:00-10:30<br><br>*Tuesday-Gardening with Carrie* | Greeting Sun Salutation<br><br>Colors<br><br>I see myself as a surfer... tree...skier... dog... owl...<br><br>New Children Arriving | *Gardening with Carrie*<br><br>Power color<br><br>Greeting Suns Salutation<br><br>Yoga affirmations as a story per sitting still like a frog | Greeting Suns Salutation<br><br>Colors<br><br>I see myself as a surfer... tree...skier... dog... owl...                                                                                                      | Greeting Suns Salutation<br><br>Colors<br><br>I see myself as a surfer... tree...skier... dog... owl...                                                                                                           | Greeting Suns Salutation<br><br>Colors<br><br>I see myself as a surfer... tree...skier... dog... owl... |

|                                 |                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                      |                                                  |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
|                                 | *Add name game                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                      |                                                  |
| Choice Time<br>10:30-11:15      | Light table Block area Library Overhead Sketch books                  | Light table Block area Library Overhead Sketch books                                                                                                                                                        | *Large group then pull Small Group Sketch Book Intro.*                                                                                                                                        | Light table Block area Library Overhead Sketch books | Stream                                           |
|                                 | Marble Run Science Center Bunny Play-doh/Clay                         | Marble Run Science Center Bunny Play-doh/Clay                                                                                                                                                               | Light table Block area Library Overhead Sketch books Marble Run Science Center Bunny Play-doh/Clay                                                                                            | Marble Run Science Center Bunny Play-doh/Clay        |                                                  |
| Choice Time/Snack 11:15 - 11:30 | Wheat Thins/Apples & Cheese                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Thinking Thoughts & Feeling Feelings                                                                                                                                                          | Goldfish & Juice<br><br>Rock Exploration             | Pretzel Crisps & Oranges<br><br>Rock Exploration |
| Clean up 11:30 - 11:35          | Deep Chime Calming Song                                               | Deep Chime Calming Song                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>AWARENESS</b><br><br><b>CENTER</b><br><br><b>FIELD</b><br><br><b>TRIP</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• visit</li> <li>• talk about the center</li> <li>• yoga class</li> </ul> | Deep Chime Calming Song                              | Deep Chime Calming Song                          |
| Guided Discovery AM             | Thinking Thoughts & Feeling Feelings<br><br>Full book for whole week? | Thinking like researchers(scientists)<br><br>Toad was found in an unexpected place -- why?<br><br>discuss purpose behind removing toad from his natural habitat<br><br>Thinking Thoughts & Feeling Feelings |                                                                                                                                                                                               | Weather Meditation                                   | Weather Meditation                               |
| Half Day Dismissal 12pm         | Half Day Dismissal 12pm                                               | Half Day Dismissal 12pm                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                               | Half Day Dismissal 12pm                              | Half Day Dismissal 12pm                          |

|                      |                                                                   |                                                               |                                                                       |                                                            |    |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Lunch<br>12pm        |                                                                   |                                                               |                                                                       |                                                            | -- |
| Trail/Outside/Stream | <b>Katelyn<br/>Obstacle<br/>Course</b>                            | <b>Relay Race</b>                                             |                                                                       |                                                            | -- |
| 12:30                |                                                                   |                                                               |                                                                       |                                                            |    |
| Choice Time          |                                                                   | Choice Time<br>Follow up on<br>light show idea<br>Irish Dance | <b>AWARENESS</b><br><br><b>CENTER</b><br><br><b>FIELD</b>             | What do you think of when you think of flexible? (animals) | -- |
| Guided Discovery PM  | Social Thinking Discussion based on activities throughout the day | Guided Discovery Conversation:<br><br>Frog/Toad Questions     | <b>TRIP</b><br><br>• visit<br>• talk about the center<br>• yoga class |                                                            | -- |
| Dismissal<br>3pm     |                                                                   |                                                               |                                                                       |                                                            | -- |

**Appendix C**  
**Parent Newsletters**

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# I CAN BE MINDFUL

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## Mindfulness Camp Weekly Newsletter



Pictured left:

Observing a slug  
during our nature walk  
on the trail!

Welcome to week 2 of our “I can be mindful” camp! We are so delighted to have you with us. We wanted to share with you some of the mindfulness activities we have been working on as well as some strategies we are using to help us “be present”.

In addition to this week’s regular scheduled activities (yoga, gardening, stream, trail), we are also planning to visit the UD Farmer’s Market on Thursday in Mentor’s Circle on campus in Newark (field trip permission slips will be available in the classroom on Tuesday morning). Half day campers’ dismissal will be at the UD library at 12pm. We will be back at the Lab School in time for 3pm dismissal (hopefully with lots of stories and vegetables!) Families and friends are welcome. Please do not hesitate to join us on our trek to further understand our campus community, how to make good choices when it comes to food, and where/how our favorite foods are grown!

Mindfulness as defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn means “paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.”

An easy example of this as it relates to children might be, paying attention to the steps involved in putting on and tying/fastening your shoes.

Our goal is to help campers increase their sense of awareness as it relates to their surroundings, their community, their emotions/actions, and their physical bodies. Perspective-taking, self-regulation strategies, and focus/attention awareness are included throughout the camp’s curriculum activities.

During the first week, we focused on exploring our environment. This included interactive experiences with both the classroom and the yoga studio (pictured below), the trail and the stream (pics available on blog, see link at bottom of page), and vegetable gardening with one of the Master Gardeners (UD Cooperative Extension).

Our yoga routines have proven to be calming for both the children and the teachers. You can check them out at the following links:

["Dance for the Sun" by Kira Willey \(Sun Salutation\)](#)

["Colors" by Kira Willey](#)

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**Pictured: Yoga session in our studio performing sun salutation, tree pose and “hang down low, TICKLE YOUR TOES!”**

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In addition to our yoga routines and mindful breathing activities, we have developed our own mindfulness yoga affirmations. We, as a group, started with an idea (surfer, tree, skier, etc) and fleshed out what we see when we picture or embody that idea. This is what we have come up with so far:

### Yoga Affirmations:

I see myself as a surfer (warrior 2):

- I am focused
- I am balanced
- I am strong
- I am brave



I see myself as a tree: (tree pose)

- I am colorful
- I am tall
- I am leafy



I see myself as a skier: (chair pose)

- I am strong
- I am brave
- I can PERSEVERE!



I see myself as a dog: (downward dog)

- I am cuddly
- I am friendly
- I can dig!



# I CAN BE MINDFUL

## Mindfulness Camp Weekly Newsletter

Happy 4th of July weekend everyone!

Next Wednesday, we are going on another field trip! This time, to a local studio in Newark for a private yoga session! Parents are welcome to join. The studio's children's yoga summer series focuses on story-telling and emotions.

Mindfulness as defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn means "paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment to moment."

Throughout the first two weeks, we talked a lot about **perspective-taking** both in our reflective conversations and in yoga. We first learned about perspective-taking while reading "Duck Rabbit"<sup>1</sup> (book about two people with two different ideas). We expanded on this concept through the development of our yoga affirmations. Picturing yourself in someone else's shoes — "I see myself as a surfer: I am focused, I am balanced, I am strong." During our field trip on Thursday, we were able to physically observe the same space from two different perspectives —

Gore Hall, looking up...



Gore Hall, looking down...



Pictured: Caden taking a look at his mama waving up at him! Can you spot her?

<sup>1</sup> Rosenthal, A. K., & Lichtenheld, T. (2009). Duck! Rabbit! San Francisco: Chronicle Books.

In addition to the many levels of perspective-taking, we started to learn about our “social smarts” while reading “You are a Social Detective! Explaining Social Thinking to Kids” (by Michelle Garcia Winner and Pamela Crooke). Through this interactive read-aloud experience, we explored different social-emotional situations and found clues to help us figure out what was going on in each situation. Providing the children with the opportunity to think like a detective as it relates to social contexts is a wonderful way to help develop their sense of inquiry. Here is some language you might hear us use during camp:

- “What is EXPECTED when we first arrive at our yoga studio?”
- “How do the people around us feel when we do something that is UNEXPECTED?”

Feel free to ask any of the teachers about how we are using this language to help guide positive social interactions throughout our camp community.

Art is yet another vehicle that is used in mindfulness-based practices to help tell a reflective story... While we were outside last week, one of our friends found a grasshopper on the ground. The children were ecstatic and worked very hard to remain still and observe the grasshopper in his natural environment. Our favorite art teacher made a surprise visit later that day and the children excitedly told her ALL about the grasshopper sighting. She asked them if they would like to draw the grasshopper and what they took away from that experience. You can find these drawings on the wall directly outside our classroom.



**Pictured: Children working on their grasshopper sighting drawings during a surprise visit from our favorite art teacher!**



Last Thursday, we took a BIG field trip and visited the UD Farmer's Market, explored the fountain near the UD Library, enjoyed ice cream from the UDairy Creamery, and ended the day at Gore Hall.



The fountain was an excellent opportunity to explore a piece of architecture within the campus community. We were able to use almost all of our senses (no **taste**): we **felt** the water blasting out of the fountain with our hands, **smelled** the distinctive scent of chlorine, **observed** the various distances the water traveled and how

the distance was related to the pressure with which it was propelled, and finally we **heard** the calming sound of the water as it reached the center of the pool.



Our campers did an EXCELLENT job of using self-regulation (self-control) and keeping one another safe during the day's exciting events. WE WALKED EVERYWHERE. They were absolute troopers and simply loved, loved, LOVED the UD shuttle ride home.



In addition to our yoga routines and mindful breathing activities, we have developed our own mindfulness yoga affirmations. We, as a group, started with an idea (surfer, tree, skier, etc) and fleshed out what we see when we picture or embody that idea. This week, we added the owl! Feel free to ask the kids about them and practice at home!

### Yoga Affirmations:

I see myself as a surfer (warrior 2):

- I am focused
- I am balanced
- I am strong
- I am brave



I see myself as a tree: (tree pose)

- I am colorful
- I am tall
- I am leafy



I see myself as a skier: (chair pose)

- I am strong
- I am brave
- I can PERSEVERE!



I see myself as a dog: (downward dog)

- I am cute
- I am cuddly
- I can dig!



I see myself as an owl:

- I am calm
- I am wise
- I can FLY

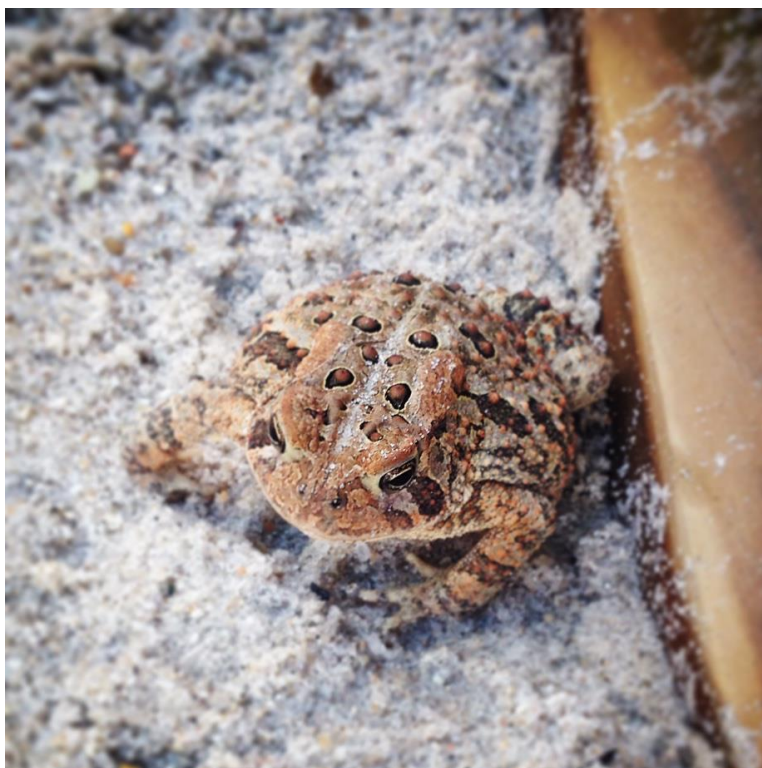


# I CAN BE MINDFUL

## Mindfulness Camp Weekly Newsletter

Mindfulness as defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn means “paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.”

During Week 2, we talked about perspective-taking and how to be a social detective. Building on these concepts, Week 3 was dedicated to discovering and identifying our EMOTIONS. We transitioned from “how is your engine running” to “how is your body feeling?” We made this connection a number of ways: through song, “your brain is where you think your thoughts” taken from the [Incredible Flexible You](#) social thinking curriculum; through discussion, talking about how your brain and your heart are connected; and finally, through exploration, compassionate release of our good friend **the Toad**.



On Monday morning, we decided to do things a bit differently by meeting outside for our AM Arrival. After removing the sandbox cover, one of our friends spotted a toad camouflaging himself alongside the wooden edge of the sandbox. Ms. Laura immediately recommended that we bring him in the classroom for closer observation; the younger teachers asked the children to be social detectives of the toad’s environment and think about how we could create a comfortable habitat for our friend — the children enthusiastically split off into a number of groups to gather stones, sticks, and a shallow dish for water. The younger teachers were very apprehensive about our reptilian addition to the camp: “How long are we going to keep him?” “How do we tie this into the idea of ‘keeping our environment safe’?” “Are we *really* keeping him safe?”

Our master teacher advised us (teachers) to slow down and think about the mindfulness concepts we are teaching the children. She encouraged us to view this interaction as an opportunity to tune in

to the children's perspectives and help them work through their ideas. With this guidance, we were able to slow down our thoughts, shift from perspectives of worry and concern, and view the experience through the children's eyes. The list below reflects a number of questions and connections made by the children during this time of thoughtful observation:

*"We won't know the frog's gender until it reproduces."*

*"Frog could be croaking because it is hungry or angry. That's why I would croak."*

They had a few different ideas about how our friend might be feeling in the classroom environment:

*"I think he feels happy with his home — he likes his sticks, mulch, and rocks."*

*"I think he feels happy because he popped up [in tank]."*

On Day 2 of the Toad's stay, we read "Moody Cow Learns Compassion"<sup>1</sup> — in this book, Moody Cow and his friend (Bully) capture a snake and are faced with a number of dilemmas: they want to keep the snake, but they have to feed it... What do snakes eat? They eat crickets! They search and find a cricket, but when moody cow goes to feed the innocent insect to the snake, he hesitates. Upon witnessing his hesitation, Moody cow's friend calls him a wimp! The book goes on to cover a number of different social thinking concepts including, compassion for creatures in our environment, empathy (perspective-taking), and an overarching but subtle nod to the way in which ecosystems function outside of our control. After reading this book, the children's perspectives on our friend, the Toad, changed a bit...

*Teacher: "What do you think the toad needs in order to survive?"*

*"He needs to eat, drink, and be taken care of."*

*Teacher: "What do you think we should do with the toad?"*

*"I don't want to keep him, I think he misses his family."*

*"I have an idea... let's take him back to his family."*

Later that afternoon, the children happily set the Toad free in his natural environment. Our experience with "The Toad" turned out to be a lesson in mindful awareness and compassion for both the children and the teachers.



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<sup>1</sup> Mclean, K. L. (2012). Moody Cow Learns Compassion. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.

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**Pictured: Mindful Camp Crew posing for a group shot while waiting for the bus to the Awareness Center**

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On Wednesday, July 8, we took a yoga field trip to the Awareness Center in Newark, DE. During our session, we took an exciting adventure to the

beach! Together, we brainstormed items we needed to pack, applied our sunscreen, and hopped on our plane. The class was filled with yoga poses that helped the children use their creative thinking and imagine what it would be like to spend the day at the beach. As a group, they exhibited excellent self-regulation (self-control), flexibility, and mindful awareness of their bodies and their emotions. They thoughtfully participated in the class and did a great job adapting to different poses, a brand new environment and teacher. We were very proud.

The chime that we use in the classroom and at Ms. Barbara's yoga studio has proven to be an effective transitioning tool. When the children **see** the chime, they understand what is expected: hand on your heart, hand on your belly (helps them tune in with how their body is functioning/feeling). When they **hear** the sound of the chime, they know to take one deep breath in, and one deep breath out. Throughout our camp, the children have been able to identify the slowing down that occurs within their body and mind after we take three mindful breaths together. This attuning to the energy within their minds and bodies is not only an integral component of practicing mindfulness, but it also helps them understand how their bodies and minds are working together to respond to various stimuli (emotional: sadness, physical: falling and skinning a knee; environmental: thunder/lightning storm) and which steps to take to work through it.



**Pictured: Yoga teacher (left) took us on a beach trip! We flew to Hawaii and surfed the waves, found shelter from the torrential downpour, and ended the day camping out on the beach.**



In addition to our yoga routines and mindful breathing activities, we have developed our own mindfulness yoga affirmations. We, as a group, started with an idea (surfer, tree, skier, etc) and fleshed out what we see when we picture or embody that idea. This week, we added the owl! Feel free to ask the kids about them and practice at home!

### Yoga Affirmations:

I see myself as a surfer (warrior 2):

- I am focused
- I am balanced
- I am strong
- I am brave



I see myself as a tree: (tree pose)

- I am colorful
- I am tall
- I am leafy



I see myself as a skier: (chair pose)

- I am strong
- I am brave
- I can PERSEVERE!



I see myself as a dog: (downward dog)

- I am cute
- I am cuddly
- I can dig!



I see myself as an owl:

- I am calm
- I am wise
- I can FLY



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# I CAN BE MINDFUL

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## Mindfulness Camp Weekly Newsletter

Mindfulness as defined by Jon Kabat-Zinn means “paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.”

As teachers, we felt it important to dedicate Week 4 to the reinforcement of concepts introduced throughout the previous weeks, and sharing them with you through the newsletter.

### Keep it safe!

Emotional safety played an integral part in our camp. During the first week, we talked with the children about how we are a classroom community, and within that classroom community there are three rules: Keep yourself safe, keep others safe, keep your environment safe. We are all individuals within a community and in order to find out how you fit and what you can offer, you need to feel safe and secure.

### Mindful Tools

There were a number of resources and tools that we utilized to encourage the children to mindfully explore and reflect on their environment. Some of these included:

- **sketchbook** (expressing emotions/telling a story through drawing/painting or some other artistic medium): if this outlet seems as daunting to you as it does to me, but your child benefits from expressing themselves artistically, it might be worth reaching out to Diane Lawler (see her contact info below) for some guidance or even a few art sessions.
- **reflective writing** (helping them to write or scribing)
- **reflective conversation** (social thinking language), (Prek/K Master Co-teacher) is an expert in helping parents to effectively engage in conversation with their children to resolve issues. She is a big fan of Dan Siegel’s work, “Parenting from the Inside Out” and “Whole Brain Child”. Much of her social thinking curriculum encompasses the concepts discussed throughout these books.
- **puppet/stuffed animals** (some children find that telling their story using a puppet is safer than telling it firsthand): we did not use this approach during camp, but certainly hope to in the future

## Outdoor arrival

Halfway through camp, we made a switch from indoor arrival to outdoor arrival. The driving force behind this change stemmed from our yoga sessions — a few of our friends were having trouble maintaining control of their bodies enough to do the poses. They would get frustrated and, as a result, yoga would from time to time stop working.

During the spring semester, a professor recommended reading “Spark” (a book that explains the connection between exercise and the brain’s performance), in which the author describes the numerous positive effects that intense physical activity has on the brain and emotional regulation. It’s an easy read and an eye-opener — perfect for summer vacation. After reflecting on why the children might be struggling and how it is our responsibility as teachers to provide the most conducive environment for the children’s success, we switched the schedule so that the kids had the opportunity to run and play outside before coming in to yoga. It certainly wasn’t the silver bullet (what ever is?), but it made a big difference in affording our guys the opportunity to be successful in an area they found to be difficult and challenging.



## Yoga

In addition to our yoga routines and mindful breathing activities, we have developed our own mindfulness yoga affirmations. We, as a group, started with an idea (surfer, tree, skier, etc) and fleshed out what we see when we picture or embody that idea. This week, we added the owl! Feel free to ask the kids about them and practice at home!

### Yoga Affirmations:

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- I am colorful
- I am tall
- I am leafy



I see myself as a skier: (chair pose)

- I am strong
- I am brave
- I can PERSEVERE!



I see myself as a dog: (downward dog)

- I am cute
- I am cuddly
- I can dig!



I see myself as an owl:

- I am calm
- I am wise
- I can FLY



I see myself as a frog:

- I am watchful
- I am still
- I can hop



Appendix D  
Parent Survey

UD Lab School

# MINDFUL CAMP

## Parent Survey

What were your expectations in regard to the mindfulness camp?

Has your child *talked about* any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples?

Has your child *used* any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home? If yes, could you provide some examples?

Have you *used* any mindfulness-based strategies and/or social thinking language at home with your child? If yes, could you provide some examples?

What were the benefits of the mindfulness camp to your child?

Would you be interested in a “Mindful Parenting” workshop?

Please provide additional information about your child’s mindfulness camp experience here:

My child attended camp during the following weeks (please check all that apply):

Week 1 ☐

Week 2 ☐

Week 3 ☐

Week 4 ☐