

# Accessing Resiliency at a North Florida Freedom School: A Mindful, Mixed-Methods Approach

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## Abstract

Stress experienced by school-aged children (SAC) is often trivialized and placed on the sidelines in the world of research (Sotardi, 2016). Students growing up in low socioeconomic communities are exposed to more stressors, increasing their likelihood to be adversely impacted by the cumulative stressors in their lives (Ackerman, Brown & Izard, 2004). Prolonged exposure to stress in children has been connected to the development of behavioral problems in addition to psychological and/or physical pathologies (Appleyard et al., 2005).

To combat the adverse effects of chronic stress, mindfulness can be used as a technique to assist in the development of adaptive coping mechanisms (Keng & Tong, 2016).

Mindfulness is the “moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a specific way, that is, in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgmentally, and as openheartedly as possible” (Kabat-Zinn, 2015, p. 1481). Past literature has linked the use of mindfulness to increased cognitive functioning and emotion regulation in adults (Jha et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2014; Lakey et al., 2011), but there is limited data concerning mindfulness and children. Literature shows that children may benefit from a mindfulness intervention, but there is a need for more mindfulness research concerning children and adolescent populations (Liehr & Diaz, 2010).

## Aims of the Research

This study is exploratory in nature, hoping to inform an experimental intervention on resilience and mindfulness in school aged children.

## Research Questions

- Will the participant’s resiliency score be different pre/post mindfulness intervention?
- What are the participant’s perceptions of a mindfulness intervention?

## Research Design

As a mixed-methods case study, age-appropriate mindfulness lesson plans created by Mindful Schools (MS) were used as an intervention. I proposed a case study assessing the resiliency, pre/post intervention, of a student attending a North Florida Freedom School (NFFS). I conducted an informal interview after the intervention to gain insight on the scholar’s perceptions of mindfulness. Quantitative data was collected initially via the pretest, then qualitative data in the form of field notes and observations. The posttest was administered followed by the final round of qualitative data collection (interview). The mixed methodology gives a greater lens to the scope of this project by linking the two fields of resilience and mindfulness.

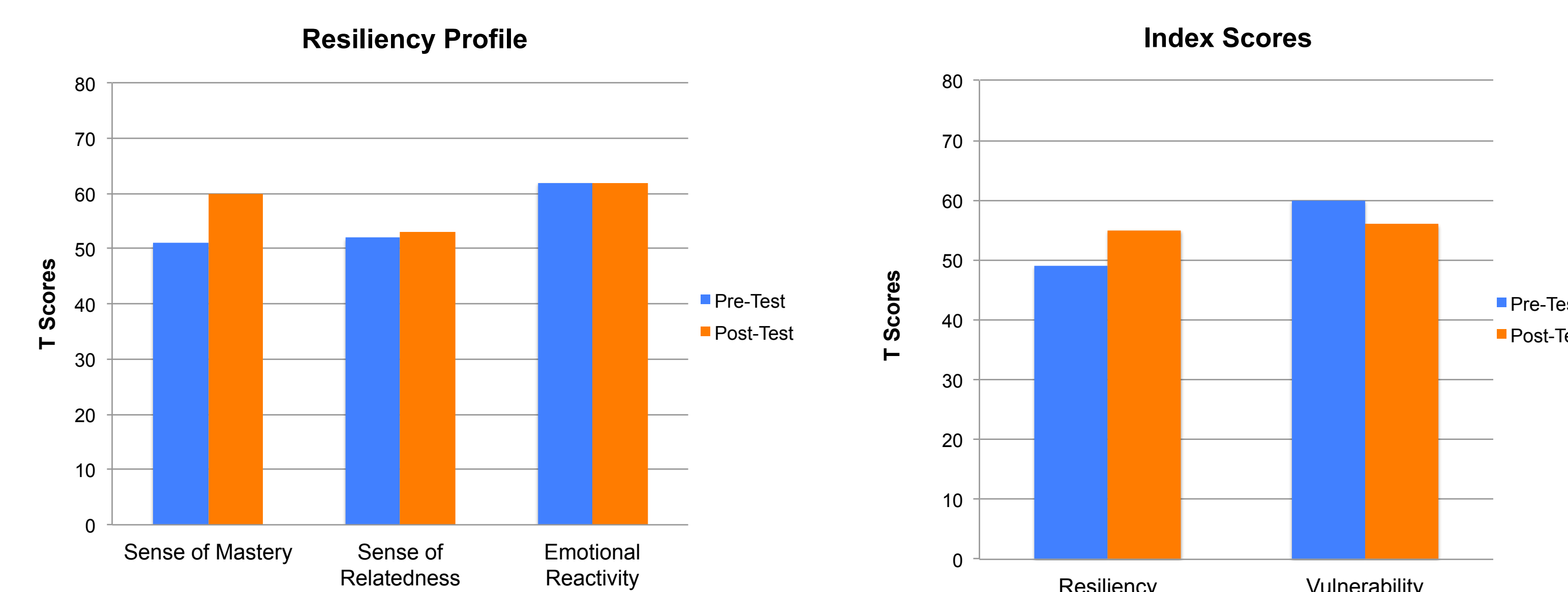
The MS lesson plans were tailored to the 6-week timeline of NFFS. Convenience sampling was used to select one student to participate in the study. Once selected, the scholar’s current resiliency was assessed using the Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (RSCA). The RSCA was administered once more after the 6-week mindfulness intervention.

To address the scholar’s perceptions of the intervention, I made use of informal interviews, probing for elaboration as needed. The interview will inform me whether or not the scholar was receptive of the lessons, based on self-report and conceptualization of ideas, allowing the scholar to express their own meanings/values of their mindfulness intervention.

## Participants

One NFFS participant was chosen based on the following criteria: attained written parental consent, attained verbal assent, and the scholar attended extended care for a minimum of 14 days. The participant was 9 years old.

## Results



Results show an overall increase in the student’s resilience score and a decrease in vulnerability as determined by scoring the RSCA pre/posttests.

## Results cont.

“We learned about mindful eating. Like a lot of times I be smacking... people tell me stop smacking and I be like you know I can’t stop smacking that’s just how I eat but when we learn... Like how does that feel? How does it sound? I was like ‘Ok now I hear myself smacking and it’s getting annoying to me too’... so I just found a way to stop smacking.”

“I learned like... when we did like mindful breathing... when you see how you feel... like when you said hold your stomach. I was like ‘oh it goes up and down’ like I knew that my stomach goes up and down but I never knew like how it felt.”

“[I]f there comes a time where I need to do one of those mindfulness [activities] then I will have a moment where I will do it and I might share this mindfulness stuff with my family in the future.”

## Discussion

Parental consent was a major limiting factor, which is why my sample consists of one participant. Another limiting factor was attendance and the pick up times of students. There is a potential threat to credibility (internal validity) due to the lack of mindfulness assessment using an established and validated tool; this is addressed via unstructured interviews in an attempt to determine if the student was receptive of the lessons. However, the transferability (external validity) of this study is high due to the use of the RSCA and the Mindful Schools curriculum; both are available for purchase. Pre and post-assessment data has been analyzed for a net difference in resiliency.

## Key References

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