

# Inquiry-Based Stress Reduction Meditation Technique for Teacher Burnout: A Qualitative Study

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**ABSTRACT**—An inquiry-based intervention has been found to have a positive effect on burnout and mental well-being parameters among teachers. The aim of the current study was to qualitatively evaluate the effect of the inquiry-based stress reduction (IBSR) meditation technique on the participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted before and after the IBSR intervention and were analyzed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis method. Before the intervention, the teachers described emotional overload caused by two main reasons: (1) multiple stressful interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and the educational system, and (2) the ideological load of their profession—trying to fulfill high expectations of performance and the manifesting educational values. Following the intervention, the teachers described a sense of centeredness and a greater ability to accept reality. They reported improvements in setting boundaries, thought flexibility, and self-awareness. These improvements assisted them in coping with the complex and dynamic nature of their profession. These positive effects suggest that IBSR is an effective technique in reducing teachers' burnout and promoting mental well-being.

*Burnout* is defined as a response to a chronic emotional strain due to dealing extensively with other human beings, particularly when having to deal with recurring problems as well as reduced coping resources (Maslach, 2003; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Its components are *emotional exhaustion*, defined as a lack of mental resources due to an emotional overload; *depersonalization*, defined as an alienated and negative attitude toward the surroundings; and *decreased personal accomplishment*, defined as reduced ability to accomplish desirable results due to lack of external or internal resources (Awa, Plaumann, & Walter, 2010; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Friedman, 1993; Maslach, 2003; Maslach et al., 1996). Burnout has been researched intensively in the field of education, and various studies have described its prevalence among teachers (Brackenreed, 2011; De Heus & Diekstra, 1999; Friedman, 2000; Honkonen et al., 2006; Luk, Chan, Cheong, & Ko, 2009; Schaufeli & Buunk, 2002), as well as its significant personal and social implications, such as low level of performance, reduced commitment to teaching, high turnover (Friedman, 1993; Gold & Roth, 1993; Melamed, Shirom, Toker, Berliner, & Shapira, 2006; Sorek, Tal, & Paz, 2004), and physical morbidity (Ahola, Väänänen, Koskinen, Kouvonen, & Shirom, 2010; Bauer et al., 2006; Honkonen et al., 2006; Melamed et al., 2006; Shirom, Toker, Melamed, Berliner, & Shapira, 2013).

Teachers need to maintain high levels of mental well-being in order to fit social expectations, professional expectations, and their own expectations (Awa et al., 2010; Pillay, Goddard, & Wilss, 2005). The optimal state of mental health, which is best described as “mental well-being,” related to health, optimism, contentment, hope, and happiness, is when an individual fulfills his/her capabilities and functions well under standard pressures of life so that he/she can be productive and effective and can contribute to society (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; World Health

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Organization, 2004). Promoting psychological well-being focuses on the individual's positive and optimal functioning (Bolier et al., 2013; Keyes, 2007). Theorists have defined the nature of positive psychological functioning in a variety of ways; however, there is consensus around six common factors that need to be addressed in order to avoid mental weariness, frustration, anxiety, nervousness, depression, emotional exhaustion, and psychosomatic problems (Keyes, 2007; Ryff, 1989, 1995; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Tylee & Wallace, 2009; World Health Organization, 2004). These are *self-acceptance*, *positive and reciprocal relationships with others*, *autonomy in thought and action* (the ability to resist social pressure and to regulate behavior and thoughts according to personal standards), *environmental mastery and competence* (the ability to manage complex external surroundings, to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values), *purpose in life*, and *personal growth and development*.

The umbrella term of *well-being promotion* includes several types of intervention, including approaches such as the psycho-behavioral methods used in the corporate business world (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy, coaching), positive psychology intervention (PPI) methods (e.g., practical gratitude, art therapy, music therapy), and mindfulness techniques (e.g., meditation, breathing practice; NCCAM, 2010; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Tylee & Wallace, 2009).

Mindfulness-based interventions are designed to enhance the mind's capacity to be aware of the present moment and to accept one's current experiences without judgment or elaboration (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Without compelling the suppression or alteration of emotions, mindfulness enhancement enables the individual to have greater control of thoughts and emotions while dismissing old habits and automatic reactions (Chambers, Gullone, & Allen, 2009). Research has demonstrated that different forms of meditation can enhance well-being across diverse populations within (and beyond) the education sector. For example, student educators were taught simple meditation using sound as a focusing tool, and practiced it for 45 min per session, four times. Questionnaires filled by the participants who practiced this meditation have shown a significant reduction in their stress symptoms in the posttest measurements when compared to the control group in the domains of emotional, gastronomic distress, and behavioral manifestations (Elder, Nidich, Moriarty, & Nidich, 2014; Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Kemeny et al., 2012; Ospina et al., 2008; Winzelberg & Luskin, 1999). Practicing transcendental meditation was reportedly effective on psychological measures, such as stress and exhaustion, among special education teachers in the United States (Elder et al., 2014). Mindfulness practice of one and a half hours once a week during 10 weeks among teachers in Spain significantly enhanced well-being measures and the effective functioning

of teachers in stressful situations; positive effects persisted 4 months following the conclusion of the intervention program (Franco, Manas, Cangas, Moreno, & Gallego, 2010).

The ability to acknowledge and consider the emotions of others was shown to improve among intervention recipients during an intensive study of U.S. teachers receiving mindfulness training combined with emotional adjustment. The participants also showed a decrease in blood pressure in conjunction with increases in mindfulness practice (Gold et al., 2009). A study conducted in Germany involving the practice of breathing techniques showed participating teachers demonstrated an improvement in 9 out of 11 functional and emotional measures (Loew, Götz, Hornung, & Tritt, 2009). An intervention involving the practice of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and the practice of tai chi was studied in a school in Boston after being recommended and results showed it to be an effective technique for increasing peace of mind and improving the quality of sleep, focus, and well-being measures (Wall, 2005).

A direct link has been established between mindfulness-based techniques and enhanced brain activity in the frontal cortex areas that are responsible for focusing attention and positive prosocial emotional states, such as empathy, communication, and socialization (Davidson & McEwen, 2012; Goleman & Gurin, 1993). Davidson and McEwen (2012) described emotional capabilities, self-inspection, and mindfulness as dynamic, acquired, and adaptive processes, which can be enhanced in the same manner as other skills in the fields of music, mathematics, and sports. Their study showed structural and functional changes in the brain as a result of cognitive therapy and training certain forms of meditation.

Practicing mindfulness or meditation enables the individual to be less reactive to negative experiences and more focused on positive aspects as the consequence of enhancing the activities of specific brain areas (Davidson, 1992; Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008).

Taken as a whole, such studies demonstrate that, across multiple contexts and countries, well-being promotion techniques based on mindfulness can be used beneficially among teachers. However, broader and longer term research is still needed in order to establish the effectiveness of these techniques in burnout-related exhaustion prevention and treatment.

### **Inquiry-Based Stress Reduction**

Inquiry-based stress reduction (IBSR) is a meditation technique developed by Byron Katie in 1986. Its aim is to identify the thoughts that cause stress and suffering in a systematic and comprehensive way, and to meditatively "investigate" them by a series of questions and turnarounds. This technique does not require any intellectual, religious, or spiritual preparation, but rather a will to deepen and

reach self-awareness (Katie & Mitchell, 2003). It has been practiced by many individuals worldwide (Landau et al., 2014; Lev-Ari, Zilcha-Mano, Rivo, & Geva, 2013). Its effectiveness was demonstrated on various psychological scales among cancer patients and cancer survivors. IBSR was also tested in a nonclinical population and it was shown to be effective in improving scales of depression and anxiety (Leufke, Zilcha-Mano, Feld, & Lev-Ari, 2013). A constant evaluation of current efforts and an examination of new efforts are required in order to maintain and develop mental well-being of teachers in the education system. Systematic and individual means must be combined in order to effectively treat exhaustion problems among teachers, with emphasis on mental health promotion (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013). IBSR is classified as a meditation technique based on mindfulness and is therefore applied as a mental well-being promotion technique. However, to the best of our knowledge, its effectiveness has not been tested among teachers in particular (Leufke et al., 2013). We hypothesized that IBSR has the potential of reducing exhaustion levels and increasing well-being levels among teachers. This would be consistent with the benefits seen from other types of mindfulness programs.

## METHODS

### Recruitment and Participants

The current study is the qualitative part of a controlled trial designed to statistically and qualitatively assess the effects of IBSR on burnout and well-being levels among teachers. The study was carried out at a high school in a large city in Israel. All the teachers on its staff were eligible to participate in the study if they agreed to sign an informed consent form and had no previous experience with the IBSR technique. The study was carried out with the support of the school principal and was approved by the Israeli Ministry of Education (MOE).

An advertisement for recruiting teachers to participate in the study was published on the teachers' billboard (at school and online). In addition, the invitation was announced during a teachers' meeting. Teachers who were willing to participate met the main researcher at the school and were informed about study objectives and procedures. The first 27 teachers to sign the consent form were included in the 12-week IBSR intervention group in order to ensure a full group. The rest of the teachers ( $n=27$ ) were included in the control group. To reduce dropout rates from the control group, those who continued through until the end were told they would receive an IBSR kit (a book and a CD) at the end of the study. The assignment procedure was fully detailed in the advertisement.

The intervention arm ( $n=27$ ) included two groups who met on different days of the week. All the participants ( $n=54$ ) completed four psychological questionnaires before and after the intervention. Before the intervention, all participants of one of the intervention groups ( $n=11$ ) were contacted by telephone and were informed about the qualitative part of the research. All of those teachers agreed to participate. This led to a smaller sample appropriate for the analysis method chosen for this research (interpretive phenomenological analysis; Smith & Osborn, 2003) as a relatively small sample size of between 6 and 12 is sufficient to arrive at conclusions (Baker & Edwards, 2014). Two teachers did not participate in the first interview due to a busy schedule and one teacher joined the intervention group one day before the beginning of the workshop, leaving insufficient time to complete the interview. A third teacher did not complete the second interview due to a busy schedule. The total number of subjects who completed all components of the qualitative study were eight.

The participants of this study, all high school teachers in the same school, held different positions. The smaller sample is shown in Table 1.

### Intervention Method

The first stage of the IBSR technique is to systematically identify the thoughts that cause stress and suffering, and to record the specific thoughts about various stressful situations by using the *Judge Your Neighbor* worksheet (see the appendix). The next stage is an inquiry of the stressful thoughts by a series of questions and turnarounds. Participants choose the main thoughts they had written down on the worksheet and investigate them by four guided questions: (1) Is it true? (2) Can I absolutely know that it is true? (3) How do I react when I believe that thought? (4) Who would I be without the thought? This self-investigation enables the individuals to examine their emotional and physical responses during stressful situations. This stage is meditative, and the participants are guided to be in a state of *witnessing awareness*, in which they observe the thoughts that come into mind without trying to control or direct them (Katie & Mitchell, 2003). In the turnarounds, the participants experience a revised interpretation of reality. For example, if the original thought was "My pupils don't like me," possible turnarounds can be "I don't like my pupils" (turnaround to the other), "I don't like myself" (turnaround to myself), or "My pupils do like me" (turnaround to the opposite). The participants are guided to find three genuine examples in which the turnaround is as true as the original thought. By doing so, they can understand that they do not have to automatically believe the stressful thoughts, but can choose different interpretations of reality (Katie & Mitchell, 2003).

**Table 1**  
Sample Group

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Educational field</i>	<i>Years of experience</i>	<i>Interviews completed (Before and after the intervention)</i>
Rosette	48	Math, special education homeroom teacher	7	Before + After
Hen	45	English	12	Before + After
Yehudit	56	English	15	Before + After
Tamar	40	Arabic	10	After
Yaela	42	Physics	8	Before + After
Keren	45	Literature, homeroom teacher	18	Before + After
Ricky	42	Drama	11	Before + After
Paula	38	History, homeroom teacher	13	Before + After
Shira	44	English, homeroom teacher	9	Before + After
Neriya	35	Bible teacher	6	Before
Shaked	39	Educational counselor	10	Before

The IBSR intervention lasted 12 weeks and included weekly group meetings (3.5 hr/meeting) and weekly individual sessions with a facilitator by telephone (1 hr/session). All the sessions were standardized according to a training manual, and each session was assessed afterwards for maintaining consistency during the program. The workshop was adapted specifically to homeroom teachers. The group forum training was designed to address teaching-related issues, such as self-esteem as a teacher, the student–teacher relationship, work under noise and pressure, professional development, and others. More personal issues were addressed in the individual sessions on the telephone with the facilitators. Participants were included in the final study analysis if they had been present in at least 75% of the group meetings and completed 50% of the home practice. All of the participants complied with these basic terms.

### Data Collection

The data were collected from semi-structured interviews which were conducted during the 2 weeks before and after the intervention, and each interview lasted for 1 hr. The goal of a semi-structured interview is to create an open dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee, and to provide the opportunity for people to tell their story openly and freely with minimal interference (Smith & Osborn, 2003). At the first interview, the participants were asked the following questions: “Can you describe your everyday experiences at school? What is your main motivation in teaching? What is important for you? What are your main difficulties? How do you cope with them?” In order to estimate their expectations from the workshop, they were also asked: “What benefits do you wish to achieve from the intervention?” At the second interview, they were asked to describe their general impressions: “Please tell me about your experience in the workshop.” Elaboration or clarification was requested as

needed. The interviews were conducted and recorded by one of the researchers. The recordings were then transcribed by an objective third party who issued the textual interviews used in the research while ensuring that personal information remained confidential.

### Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed using the interpretative phenomenological analysis method (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This method aims to investigate people’s experiences from a subjective point of view, while emphasizing the way they make sense of their personal and social world. It includes several phases. In the first phase of this study’s analysis, two of the researchers (the interviewer and the medical psychologist) interpreted the transcripts. Each transcript was carefully read several times, significant topics were marked, and attention was focused on language and the use of key words or metaphors. In the next phase, the main topics of each interview were identified and conceptualized into *themes*, as expressed by specific phrases that aimed to reflect the meaning of the text. Analytical or theoretical connections between the themes composed the *superordinate themes*.

## RESULTS

The results of the analysis show the interview data provide a rich description of teachers’ reflections about the effects of the 12-week IBSR intervention on the individual teacher with an emphasis on the development of subsequent abilities to cope with the unique challenges of their profession. The results are separated into three parts: (1) themes that were revealed before the intervention; (2) themes that were revealed after the intervention; (3) the limitation of the workshop, as described by some of the participants. Parts 1 and 2 consider the description of the psychological state and



the outcome behaviors of the participants in the classroom, in the school environment and at home, and provide some interpretation based on other published literature.

### Main Themes: Abstract

Before the intervention, the teachers described multiple social interactions as being part of their daily routine. Despite the positive and supportive relations with their colleagues, they also described an emotional overload and difficulty in dealing with the complicated reality. Moreover, they expressed a sense of frustration due to their unfulfilled expectations and the gap between their professional ideology and the daily reality. After practicing the IBSR, teachers described two main experiences—a more centered and focused self and a greater ability to accept reality. The workshop's structured and systematic format was suitable in this context, and it was described by them as being highly beneficial. Details of teachers' responses—before, during, and after the intervention—are presented in three separate panels over the next few pages.

### Pre-Intervention Interview Results

Analysis of the interview data collected prior to delivery of the intervention revealed two superordinate themes, as described in Figure 1. They represent the complex and stressful dynamic of the profession as detailed by the teachers. The participants' names and data remained confidential.

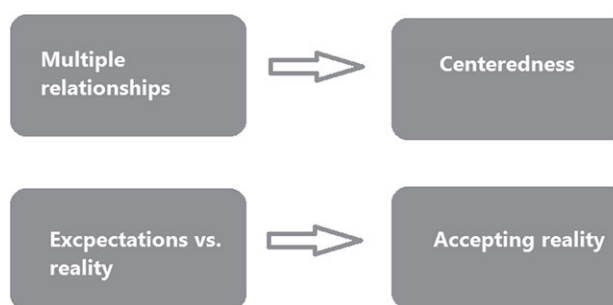


Fig. 1. Main themes before and after the IBSR intervention.

After the intervention, the teachers detailed various technical aspects about the workshop that enable them to experience the emotional process, such as the group format and the weekly phone calls with the facilitators. They all emphasized the importance of the practical tools given to them during the workshop (e.g., the “three types of business,” the four questions). Given the teachers' complicated and chaotic experiences and their lack of emotional resources, their need for a systematic and focused practice is understandable:

The intervention was very systematic from the beginning. ... It is a systematic process, which repeats itself. ... I like it a lot. (Shira)

Very clear rules were set, and suddenly you realize it works if you are consistent. (Paula)

### Multiple Relationships

The teachers described various interactions and dynamics as part of their daily work routine with colleagues, pupils, and the pupils' parents. These relationships were described as personal and having an emotional involvement, rather than professional.

*Relations with colleagues and school management:* support and understanding.

Paula “There are a couple of teachers, who are much more than friends. ... it's relaxing, it helps. ... You are not alone.”

Rosette “We have a great staff, supportive. ... Advice from a colleague is worth a lot ... the cooperation is great.”

Yehudit “She (the principal) is very nice. ... I can always tell her how I feel.”

Yaela “The principal and the staff are great and supportive ... it feels like a family.”

*Interactions with pupils and parents* were usually described as highly demanding and intensive, with considerable emotional involvement that made it challenging to set clear boundaries.

Yehudit “Spoiled kids ... unable to postpone gratification ... unable to deal with difficulties. ... Sometimes parents tell you, teach him, that is your job. ... I tell them let's do it together, I can't do it without you.”

Tamar “I beg them to stop disrupting the class. ... it is very difficult. ... I sometimes tell them to please be quiet, I want to speak ... that is so insulting. ... I teach them properly, they are always ready for tests ... but sometimes it is very difficult to control them.”

Ricki “I constantly cope with boundaries issues ... pupils text me during weekends and holidays ... it's difficult for me to set any boundaries. ... There is a conflict between the need to be available for them and the need to be with my family.”

Keren “If a parent calls you in the evening, how can you not answer him!? I cannot do that, it concerns children, not computers and papers. I had pupils who tried to commit suicide. Others ran away from home ... how can I ignore that!?”

Rosette “I need to work harder on setting boundaries ... they are not so clear ... I need to be more assertive.”

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### Expectations vs. Reality

*Positive attitude toward the profession* was noted by most of the teachers. This included ideological reasons for choosing this profession and a positive perception regarding a teacher's contribution and role.

Rosette "Teaching is a way of life. It's a great privilege. ... The pupils' success is our success. ... It's like therapy, you touch people's lives."

Hen "I wanted to pass on my knowledge. ... It's a childhood dream. I had a geography teacher, whom I appreciated a lot, the way she taught, her caring and interest."

Yehudit "Each teacher is an educator. ... Not just preparing pupils to the final exams. ... You need empathy, love for children. ... Understanding their uniqueness. ... They will learn only if you create a personal contract with them."

*Overload:* Their daily routine as teachers was described as highly demanding and stressful.

Yaela "There is a lot of stress, many things to do ... How can I function with all these tasks?!"

Keren "When you enter the class you have to be focused. ... with 40 pupils. ... You have to be extra-focused and concentrated, to ignore your personal problems. ... You always have stuff on your mind. ... You don't rest even at home. ... No rest."

Paula "You need a lot of energy. ... You work many hours and it is natural to be burned out. ... The work is very difficult. ... A stranger won't understand it. ... All my friends have nine-to-five desk jobs. The only noise they hear is the air conditioner ... while I haven't eaten anything the whole day."

*Frustration:* The busy schedule, full of tasks and commitments, limited their ability to deal with the meaningful educational issues. This gap between their ideology and personal expectations vs. their daily routine was experienced as a source of frustration and exhaustion.

Hen "I have many ideas ... but it is difficult to accomplish them. ... Time is so limited. ... I start my day, from one lesson to the other. ... I hardly have time to go to the bathroom. ... There is so little energy available for new ideas ... you can accomplish only 10 percent of them."

Ricki "All the bureaucracy. ... I don't do what I am supposed to do. ... I am working so hard ... I am exhausted ... they expect me to achieve goals."

Keren "I was very motivated ... I did so many things. ... (Now) I wake up every morning and I don't want to go to work. ... I wish the day will be over as quickly as possible."

Yehudit "I don't want things to concern me ... to affect me. ... I want to deal with my own business and not to get hurt ... it will make things much easier for me."

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### After the Intervention

After the workshop, two super ordinate themes emerged, which represented a more focused and structured perspective toward their profession and its unique aspects, as described by the teachers (Figure 1), *accepting reality* and *centeredness*.

*Accepting reality—increased awareness:*—The teachers described an increased awareness of their reactions and perceptions of reality.

This awareness helped them accept reality as is and avoid futile attempts to change or confront it, thereby reducing their level of frustration and stress. The teachers experienced a higher level of satisfaction with themselves as well as with their surroundings.

Yaela "The workshop helped me to stop arguing with reality. ... Today I truly understand how to love what exists and there is a lot to love! ... The bad is always there, you just need to focus less on it ... , when I don't argue and accept myself ... it is like going out of jail in some ways."

Neriya "When [pupils] talk—I don't immediately freak out. You know what I mean? Until now every little twit drove me crazy. But now I say it's okay, it's okay for them to talk, so what if they are talking, keep teaching."

Shaked "The workshop helped me to focus my awareness on various situations ... not to automatically complain but to understand when there is a genuine pain that I need to work on so it won't hurt anymore ... for example, when it is difficult for my children, it hurts me physically ... so I tell myself that I need to think about the situation differently."

Shira "It [the intervention] confirmed that I am on the right track and that is important. ... In the complexity of teaching, you need to adjust yourself ... it confirmed that my instincts are correct."

Hen "One thought terribly bothered me. I sat down and devoted some time to it. I actually took the 'Judge Your Neighbor' sheet and applied The Work. Things I'm familiar with, I use the turnarounds on. Others which I'm not, like when I'm in a midday overload, I tell myself to pay attention to bad feelings and take them on an inquiry."

*Accepting reality—flexible thinking* The participants described their improved ability to interpret and perceive various situations in a more flexible manner, with no rigid assumptions or emotional involvement. This was achieved mainly by the technique of the turnaround, which enabled the participants to acknowledge the subjectivity of their thoughts and beliefs.

Shaked "Many times during stress ... we have a thought that causes us to get stuck and it (the turnarounds) was very easy. ... Now I turn the situation to myself or to the other, and it releases something in your way of thinking ... it is important for me that the house will be clean, so my son does not have to do the dishes. ... It changed the way I act in my house, with my children and with my husband."

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- Yehudit “I understand that children are sitting in front of me in the classroom, not adults ... and so my expectations should be different. ... I don't need to judge them according to my values; they are in a different place than me, so I need to treat them differently.”
- Paula “Mainly doubting your thoughts, instead of blaming someone else. Asking the questions, and the turnarounds, creates doubts and takes you elsewhere. Neutralizes all kinds of variables: when you are in the middle of a storm, you are certain it is intentional and devious, and then when you turn it around, you realize—wait, I contribute to this situation as well!”
- Centeredness: The teachers described a more focused and centered self, which helped them to deal better with the various relationships and dynamics in their daily routine. This experience was different from the former experience of splits and complexity, which was described by them before the intervention. During the workshop they were trained to set emotional boundaries in various daily interactions, in particular, the technique of “the three types of businesses,” which was described as highly practical and helpful.
- Ricki “We checked whose ‘business’ were they, and it was clear that they were the pupil’s. ... I was frustrated that I cannot help her, but another teacher helped me understand that I am dealing with her business. ... I could not help her because I was too emotionally involved ... setting boundaries was what she needed the most.”
- Rosette “For me it was a problem that lasted for years ... and then things surfaced here during the workshop. Being very clear, set boundaries, speak assertively. I left with a large toolbox. Sometimes I feel we are kind of slaves of our thoughts. ...”
- Yehudit “It really changed the way I act in the classroom ... my pupils’ behavior affects me much less, which is a significant benefit for me. ... I respond less to their behavior ... emotionally. ... Once if there was noise, if they didn’t listen ... I used to get so upset and scream. ... Now I don’t get nervous and aggressive. ... Three months ago, I was crazy, bitter, nervous. ... I used to react very intuitively ... very aggressively. ... Now I take my time. ... I am more relaxed and I think. ... I explore it my way.”
- Yaëla “The thing that affected me the most was the issue of the ‘business.’ ... Many times you discover you are not dealing with your own ‘business.’ ... You deal with those of others and you neglect your own. ... This workshop can help teachers to avoid misunderstandings with pupils ... to reduce conflicts ... using the four simple questions we learned. ... Investigating our thoughts as teachers can reduce stressful situations in teaching. ... I am much more attentive, I try to understand what the other person wants.”
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### Limitations of the Workshop

Although the teachers were satisfied with the intervention, they described several limitations of the workshop. First, most of them were skeptical about their ability to practice the technique without regular group meetings. They expressed a need to integrate it into their routine. Second, some teachers were concerned about the exposure of personal issues in front of their colleagues, with whom they have an ongoing professional relationship.

## DISCUSSION

Before the intervention, the interviews revealed a state of emotional overload and exhaustion among the participants. This finding was described in previous studies as a characteristic of teaching and as a source of emotional stress for teachers (Sorek et al., 2004). A study by Friedman (2000) demonstrated that unaccomplished expectations and shattered dreams have a significant role in the process of burnout among teachers. After the intervention, the positive effects described above can be evaluated by the theoretical framework of *psychological well-being* (Keyes, 2007; Ryff, 1989, 1995; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Tylee & Wallace, 2009; World Health Organization, 2004). This model includes six dimensions of wellness, manifested in the results of the study as follows. (1) *Self-acceptance*, demonstrated in the current study by the teachers having reported higher levels of self-awareness and a more peaceful inner self

after the intervention, as well as by acknowledging their abilities as well as accepting their weaknesses. (2) *positive and reciprocal relationships with others*, expressed as the capability of empathy, affection, and intimacy. The teachers described better interactions with their surroundings after the intervention due to their enhanced ability to set boundaries with less emotional involvement and by having a more flexible attitude. In addition, the positive and close relationships that were formed with the rest of the participants helped the teachers to feel more acknowledged and appreciated, which improved their daily interactions at work. (3) *Autonomy in thoughts and action*, demonstrated by the ability to resist social pressure and to regulate behavior and thoughts by personal standards. The improved ability to set boundaries and sustain centered, self-helped teachers maintain their personal standards and values with less pressure from external surroundings. (4) *Environmental mastery and competence*, which translated into the ability to manage complex external surroundings and to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values. The teachers’ increased ability to set boundaries with a more flexible position improved their ability to perform in the classroom and handle interpersonal dynamics. (5) *Purpose in life*, which replaced ideology and meaning as significant and inherent features of their profession by personal values and goals, and redefined them as a current resource of meaning and fulfillment. (6) *Personal growth and development*, as defined by feelings of realizing one’s

potential and openness to new experiences. The meditative process of the intervention focused on personal aspects and helped the teachers to acknowledge their abilities and inner strength, thereby initiating a process of personal development.

### Limitations of the Study

We are aware of several limitations of this study. The participants were all from a single high school in Israel. It evaluated only the short-term effects of a short mindfulness intervention. The data were collected by conducting two personal interviews with the researcher, which may have had an additional effect on the participants' responses. It included only one IBSR group from the two intervention groups. However, the group was selected randomly which minimizes the risk of bias. In addition, as described in the Results section, the teachers themselves described several limitations of the workshop, such as the need for regular practice as an integral part of their work and their ambivalence about its implementation in a professional setting with colleagues.

To conclude, the current qualitative study demonstrated the positive effects of the IBSR intervention on unique aspects related to teaching. These results should be further evaluated in large-scale studies with longer follow-ups in order to widen the understanding of the technique's potential efficacy as a tool for improving well-being among teachers.

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APPENDIX: JUDGE-YOUR-NEIGHBOR WORKSHEET\*



Judge-Your-Neighbor Worksheet

**Judge your neighbor • Write it down • Ask four questions • Turn it around**

Think of a recurring stressful situation, a situation that is reliably stressful even though it may have happened only once and recurs only in your mind. Before answering each of the questions below, allow yourself to mentally revisit the time and place of the stressful occurrence.

1. In this situation, time, and location, who angers, confuses, or disappoints you, and why?

I am \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_  
emotion name

*Example: I am angry with Paul because he doesn't listen to me about his health.*

2. In this situation, how do you want them to change? What do you want them to do?

I want \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
name

*Example: I want Paul to see that he is wrong. I want him to stop smoking. I want him to stop lying about what he is doing to his health. I want him to see that he is killing himself.*

3. In this situation, what advice would you offer to them?

\_\_\_\_\_ should/shouldn't \_\_\_\_\_  
name

*Example: Paul should take a deep breath. He should calm down. He should see that his actions scare me and the children. He should know that being right is not worth another heart attack.*

4. In order for you to be happy in this situation, what do you need them to think, say, feel, or do?

I need \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
name

*Example: I need Paul to hear me. I need him to take responsibility for his health. I need him to respect my opinions.*

5. What do you think of them in this situation? Make a list.

\_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_  
name

*Example: Paul is unfair, arrogant, loud, dishonest, way out of line, and unconscious.*

6. What is it in or about this situation that you don't ever want to experience again?

I don't ever want \_\_\_\_\_

*Example: I don't ever want Paul to lie to me again. I don't ever want to see him smoking and ruining his health again.*

**The four questions**

*Example: Paul doesn't listen to me about his health.*

1. Is it true? (Yes or no. If no, move to 3.)
2. Can you absolutely know that it's true? (Yes or no.)
3. How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought?
4. Who would you be without the thought?

**The turnaround for statement 6:**

I am willing to \_\_\_\_\_ (Example: I am willing to have Paul lie to me again.)

I look forward to \_\_\_\_\_ (Example: I look forward to having Paul lie to me again.)

**Turn the thought around**

- a) to the self. (I don't listen to myself about my health.)
  - b) to the other. (I don't listen to Paul about his health.)
  - c) to the opposite. (Paul does listen to me about his health.)
- Then find at least three specific, genuine examples of how each turnaround is true for you in this situation.

**For more information on how to do The Work, visit [thework.com](http://thework.com)**

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