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Conscious Teaching

Strengthening teacher well-being and supporting
sustainable classroom management

Master thesis at Master: Teaching and Leadership

Jona Wilhelm

Department of Communication and Learning in Science

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Abstract

Teachers in Swedish schools are increasingly experiencing high levels of stress and professional strain, contributing to a growing number choosing to leave the profession. This trend has significant consequences for the learning environment and student outcomes. The aim of this thesis is to explore how mindfulness-based techniques can support teacher well-being and contribute to improved classroom management. The research was conducted through an ethnographic field study in Koh Phangan, Thailand, where the author participated in a leadership retreat led by educator and leadership expert Rick Smith. In addition, a literature review was performed to identify relevant theoretical and practical perspectives. Based on insights from the field study, interviews, and literature, a mindfulness toolbox was developed and tested in a small-scale intervention involving three in-service teachers working in challenging school environments. The results of the intervention indicate that mindfulness practices can increase emotional awareness, enhance presence, and improve relational dynamics in the classroom. Teachers reported greater calmness, patience, and self-reflection in their professional practice. Although mindfulness is not widely implemented in Swedish schools, the findings suggest that it may offer a low-cost and accessible approach to strengthening teacher resilience and pedagogical effectiveness. As a practical outcome of this research, the toolbox was translated into Swedish and adapted into a card deck format to support teacher-led reflection and workshop activities. This thesis contributes to the growing body of research on mindfulness in education and highlights its potential role in addressing the well-being challenges currently facing the Swedish school system.

Keywords: Teacher well-being, Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), Classroom management, Emotional regulation, Inner authority, Ethnographic research, Micro-phenomenological self-inquiry.

Acknowledgements

Well here we are. This thesis idea has been in the making for almost a year now. In the classroom, managing students has been my favorite aspect of teaching. And when I started my spiritual journey about two years ago, I began to notice a shift, both in my ability to lead and in the way I was perceived as a leader. This realization sparked a deep curiosity within me. I also had the privilege of spending time with teacher, author, and facilitator Rick Smith at the No Mind Festival in Ängsbacka, Sweden, during the summer of 2024. He spoke about *inner authority* as a mindfulness tool for leaders, and I was captivated. What is that? How does it work? And most importantly: could this be applied in Swedish classrooms?

Now that this thesis is coming to an end, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Rick Smith for inspiring me to pursue this work and for generously sharing his knowledge. I also wish to extend my gratitude to my supervisor, Christine Räisänen, who has been very open-minded and professional throughout the process. Additionally, I would like to thank the teachers who participated in the study, especially one teacher who was particularly welcoming of my presence in the classroom and receptive to my input as a researcher.

This thesis was written with the support of artificial intelligence tools, which were used for language formulation, editing, guidance, and inspiration throughout the writing process.

I wish you a pleasant reading experience and some new perspectives.

With Love

Jona Wilhelm, Gothenburg, May 2025

*“What is unconscious runs us around,
and what's conscious we have agency
over”*

- Rick Smith (personal interview, March 2025)

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1

Introduction

Recent findings from a study conducted by the Swedish teachers' union, Sveriges Lärare (2025), indicate a significant increase in workload for teachers in Swedish schools. The study reveals that teachers in Sweden bear a disproportionately high workload compared to other professions requiring a similar level of competence. Notably, over half of the surveyed teachers report feeling emotionally drained at least once a week due to their workload (Sveriges Lärare, 2025, p. 4). Furthermore, 36% of teachers exhibit symptoms of burnout, as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a widely recognized instrument for assessing burnout. This situation has severe implications, not only for the health and well-being of teachers but also for the quality of education and the overall classroom environment (Sveriges Lärare, 2025, p. 4). Teachers frequently lack adequate training to effectively address the stress and symptoms of burnout they experience (Kennedy, Haley, & Evans, 2023, p. 1). Limited access to resources for managing their emotional well-being can negatively influence the teacher-student relationship, subsequently impacting student engagement and learning outcomes.

Mindfulness and mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have demonstrated promising outcomes in supporting teachers (Kennedy, Haley, & Evans, 2023, p. 2). Meta-analyses indicate that MBIs may effectively alleviate stress and anxiety while enhancing teacher self-efficacy and resilience. Furthermore, recent studies suggest that mindfulness positively impacts teachers' emotional regulation (Kennedy, Haley, & Evans, 2023, p. 2). Defining mindfulness presents a challenge due to its inherently subjective nature. According to Bishop et al. cited by Kennedy, Haley, and Evans (2023, p. 2), mindfulness is defined as:

attentional self-regulation focused on the present moment, and an 'orientation towards one's experience in the present moment...characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance

Teachers who practice mindfulness might therefore be better equipped to adopt adaptive behaviors by responding from a more self-regulated state. This could for example affect the reaction a teacher has to a distressful situation. By embracing acceptance of the present moment and cultivating curiosity about how various responses might influence a situation, they can alleviate emotional distress. Scientifically proven, mindfulness has demonstrated positive effects on various aspects of the profession, including stress reduction, alleviation of anxiety, enhancement of self-efficacy, and improvement in emotional self-regulation (Kennedy, Haley, & Evans, 2023).

1.2 Problem formulation

Recent statistics show that many teachers are experiencing burnout, and an increasing number are choosing to leave the profession. This points to serious problems with teacher well-being that need urgent attention. Teacher well-being is also closely connected to what happens in the classroom. On one hand, difficult classroom conditions can negatively affect a teacher's mental health. On the other hand, when teachers feel well, they are better able to create a positive classroom environment and support student learning.

To address these issues, this study will explore how mindfulness practices could enhance teacher wellbeing and contribute to the development of a sustainable classroom environment.

1.3 Aim and research question

The aim of this project is to develop mindfulness-based techniques to support teachers struggling with their well-being, classroom management or both. The research question is formulated as follows:

In what ways can mindfulness techniques support Swedish school teachers well-being and ability to create sustainable classroom environments?

The development of these techniques is informed by a retreat in Koh Phangan, Thailand and is intended to be compiled into a toolbox designed for easy use by schoolteachers.

Upon return from Koh Phangan the toolbox is tested through an intervention with in-service teachers in Sweden. This intervention consists of five steps with the purpose to evaluate the tools and support and inspire the participating teachers.

This aim is fulfilled in three parts: literature study, Field study, embodied practice and an intervention with teachers.

1.4 Limitations

This project does not examine student-teacher relationships from the students' perspective. Instead, the proposed classroom management techniques developed focus on the teacher's role and position in the classroom. Hence, teachers are seen as a generic group rather than differentiated based on teaching environments.

The study is conducted with school teachers in mind, but may have broader applicability to educators working with adult learners. While the study is limited to Swedish schools, its findings may be relevant in international contexts. Additionally, as interventions are conducted with a limited number of teachers, which results in exploratory rather than well proven findings.

Classroom management encompasses a broad range of strategies, including lesson planning, classroom structure, and the implementation of consequences. However, these aspects are not the primary focus of this thesis. Instead, this study emphasizes the role of teacher well-being, as a strong sense of well-being can enable teachers to apply various classroom management techniques with greater confidence and effectiveness.

2

Previous studies

The aim of this section is to provide an overview of existing research on the topic of mindfulness in education. It is divided into three parts, beginning with the issues of teacher well-being, and progressing to examine how these factors influence the classroom climate. Thereafter mindfulness within education is presented briefly.

2.1 Teacher well-being

Jennings and Greenberg (2009, pp. 492–495) demonstrate a strong correlation between teacher well-being and the quality of the classroom environment. They argue that social and emotional competence is a key factor in effective teaching. Teachers with high levels of self-awareness and social awareness are better equipped to set and maintain behavioural expectations and to foster student motivation. These competencies support effective classroom management and contribute to a positive and productive learning climate.

In contrast, teachers who lack social and emotional skills often face significant challenges in managing classroom dynamics. This may result in reduced student engagement, lower academic performance, and a negative classroom atmosphere. Over time, such difficulties can increase the risk of teacher burnout or lead to the use of overly punitive disciplinary strategies (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, pp. 492–495).

Neumann and Tillott (2022, pp. 4–6) offer an alternative perspective on teacher well-being, focusing on the development of resilience rather than social and emotional competence. In their view, resilience refers to the capacity to effectively withstand emotional stressors and challenges encountered in the educational environment. According to Neumann and Tillott (2022), a high level of resilience is associated with improved well-being, characterized by emotional stability, mental clarity, and reduced stress levels. Central to their approach is the cultivation of mindfulness, which they identify as a foundational skill in building resilience. Mindful engagement with one's environment enables individuals to respond to stressors with

greater awareness and intentionality. This, in turn, fosters both personal and contextual resilience. Neumann and Tillott (2022, pp. 4–9) argue that such mindfulness practices contribute to the development of enhanced coping strategies, ultimately leading to a redefined sense of self marked by increased self-esteem, confidence, self-efficacy, and self-belief. The process from mindfulness training leading to resilience as suggested by Neumann and Tillott (2022, p. 9) is shown in *figure 1*.

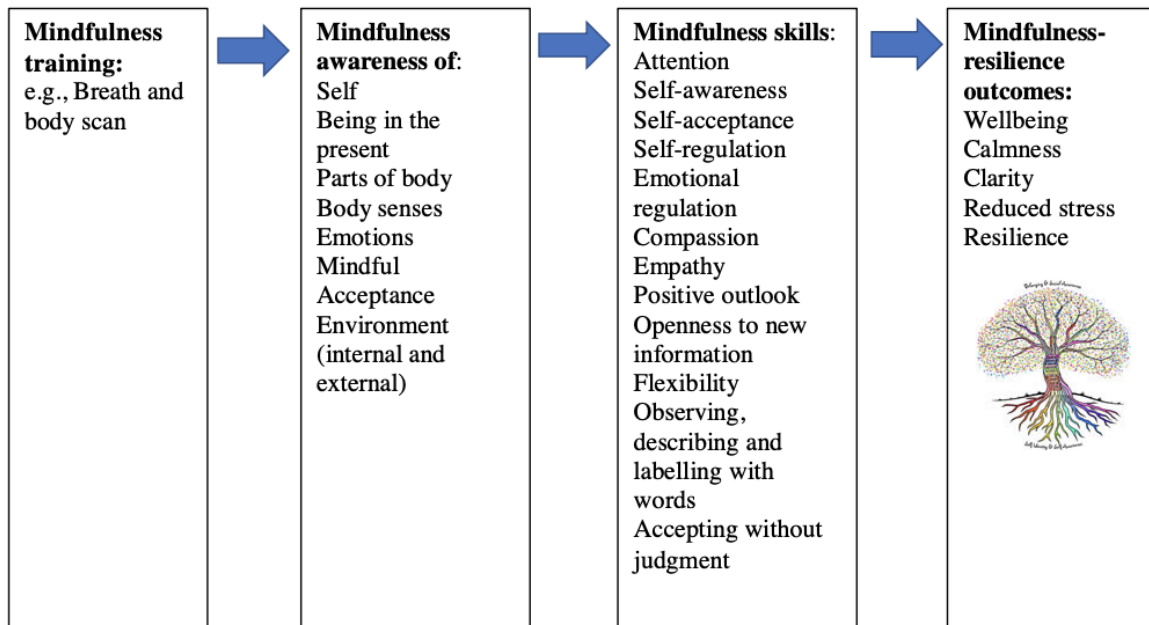


Figure 1: The process of reaching resilience as suggested by Neumann and Tillott (2022, p. 9)

2.1.2 Classroom climate and student outcome

Society not only expects teachers to effectively deliver subject content but also to manage the emotional well-being of their students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, pp. 497–499). This dual responsibility contributes significantly to emotional exhaustion, and, over time, may lead to burnout. Unlike many other professions, teachers are continuously exposed to emotionally challenging situations. The psychological burden is further amplified by the fact that teachers cannot easily remove themselves from such environments to process their emotions independently they are required to remain with their class. This sustained emotional strain can negatively impact teachers’ cognitive functioning and intrinsic motivation (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009, p. 497). As a consequence, students often mirror the teachers’ emotional state, leading to a decline in the overall classroom climate. Evidence indicates a direct

correlation between teachers' emotional well-being and the overall classroom climate (Greenberg, 2009, pp. 498–499). While the social environment of the classroom undeniably impacts the teacher, this relationship can also be understood from another perspective: the teacher's capacity to regulate emotional turbulence hinders the classroom climate from deteriorating. Teacher emotional regulatory competence is essential not only for maintaining a positive classroom climate but also for safeguarding their own well-being and enhancing student outcomes. When teachers are able to effectively regulate their own emotions, they are also better positioned to cultivate positive relationships, even in challenging or disruptive classroom environments.

2.1.3 Mindfulness in the context of teaching

Traditional mindfulness practices are rooted in Buddhist meditative principles and have been shaped by various spiritual traditions, including Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, and Judaism (Albrecht, Albrecht, Cohen, 2012, p. 2). Neumann and Tillott (2022, p. 4) describe mindfulness as the intentional act of being fully present in the current moment. This involves observing one's experiences, thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations without judgment and with a non-reactive, curious awareness. Practicing mindfulness requires cultivating an attentive presence, characterized by acceptance and patience toward all internal experiences. According to Neumann and Tillott (2022, p. 4), such practices enhance self-awareness and promote a sense of calm, particularly in stressful situations. Furthermore, individuals with mindfulness experience appear to exhibit reduced emotional reactivity. For teachers, mindfulness could also help shift focus away from anxieties about the future or past experiences and instead anchor attention in the present moment (Neumann and Tillott, 2022, p. 4).

Albrecht et.al suggest several mindfulness practices as beneficial for teachers. One such practice is *Mindful Eating*, which involves engaging in the act of eating with full attention, typically for approximately five minutes a few times per week (Albrecht et al., 2012, p. 5). Another technique is *Mindful Focus*, where mindfulness is applied to routine activities such as washing dishes or running, thereby integrating present-moment awareness into daily life. In addition to these individual practices, *Reflection and Sharing* are also considered valuable for educators. These can take the form of reflective writing or verbal discussions with colleagues or friends. Through these reflective processes, teachers are encouraged to

articulate the challenges and benefits they encounter while engaging in mindfulness exercises, thereby deepening their understanding and enhancing the integration of mindfulness into their professional practice.

Kennedy et al. (2022) propose additional mindfulness techniques aimed at supporting teachers in managing stress and regulating emotions. Among the methods highlighted are *sitting practice* (meditation), *walking practice*, and *breath awareness*. These practices are designed to cultivate a heightened sense of presence and emotional stability, enabling teachers to respond to challenging situations with greater calm and clarity. According to Kennedy et al. (2022), incorporating such techniques into daily routines can contribute to improved emotional resilience and overall well-being in educational settings.

3

Methodological approach and methods

Firstly two methods are described more in depth: Ethnography and Micro-Phenomenological Self-Inquiry. Thereafter the process of the thesis is explained in six steps: Recruiting teachers, Koh Phangan, Toolbox, From fieldnotes to toolbox, Intervention and Ethical considerations.

3.1 Ethnography

During the retreat, the primary data collection employed was ethnographically. Observational notes were taken during Rick Smith's mini-lectures, which constituted another component of the data collection process. Ethnography, as defined by Gobo (2011), is a method of direct observation in which the researcher actively participates in the environment under study. The fieldwork I conducted in Koh Phangan aligns with ethnography, as it involves sustained engagement within the setting being examined. Unlike more detached methods such as surveys or interviews, ethnography does not rely on brief, extractive approaches but instead requires a continuous presence in the field (Gobo, 2011). According to Gobo, participant observation in ethnography is characterized by five defining features, which are outlined below.

1. The researcher establishes a direct relationship with the social actors
2. Staying in their natural environment
3. With the purpose of observing and describing their social actions
4. By interacting with them and participating in their everyday ceremonials and rituals,
and

5. Learning their code (or at least parts of it) in order to understand the meaning of their actions.

During my stay, I observed both the impact of the retreat and its associated exercises on myself and the other participants. I also paid close attention to how the facilitator, Rick Smith, managed the various challenges that emerged during the sessions. Although I maintained a heightened level of awareness and engaged in systematic observation, I remained a full participant in the retreat activities. To support the accuracy and depth of my observations, I wrote fieldnotes throughout the retreat. These notes were subsequently refined through reflective analysis conducted for each entry.

3.2 Micro-phenomenological self-inquiry

Micro-Phenomenological Self-Inquiry (MPSI) is a methodological approach derived from the work of Terje Sparby (Sparby, 2025), who presents it as an extension of Micro-Phenomenological Inquiry (MPI). MPI is a qualitative research method designed to access and explore detailed descriptions of lived human experiences. It typically involves two individuals: an interviewer and an interviewee. Unlike traditional interviews, the objective of MPI is to guide the interviewee into a focused recollection of a specific moment, aiming to uncover the subtle sensations, thoughts, and perceptions associated with that particular experience (Sparby, 2025).

MPSI builds upon this foundation by adapting the process for individual use, allowing the researcher to conduct the inquiry on themselves. This adaptation enabled me, as the researcher, to utilize my own experiences as data for this study. This approach was particularly appropriate given that a significant portion of the data collection took place during an ethnographic field study. As an aspiring teacher participating in exercises during the retreat, my own experiential insights provided valuable context for understanding how similar activities might influence teachers within the Swedish school system.

Sparby emphasizes the importance of applying MPSI with methodological rigor and self-awareness. To ensure the integrity of the process, I developed a structured manual to guide my self-inquiries and to maintain consistency throughout the data collection (Sparby, 2025). The following section presents the manual I designed and employed for this purpose:

Manual for MPSI:

Time: 20 - 40 min

1. Ask yourself if you are ready to start.
2. Intuitively recall the experience.
3. Verbalize what you have experienced internally.
4. Verbalize what you have experienced externally (voice or writing).
5. Describe the experience. Ask yourself questions like: “What am I experiencing” and “How do I experience this”.
6. Are there parts missing? Any events or experiences? Are all parts of the body considered?

3.3 Recruiting teachers

Participant recruitment was conducted through two primary channels. First, numerous school principals in the Gothenburg area were contacted directly, which led to the initial engagement of three teachers. However, two of these participants withdrew before completing the study. Second, the project was promoted in various teacher forums on Facebook, resulting in the recruitment of four additional teachers. Of these, two also discontinued their participation. In total, three teachers completed the full intervention.

The teachers who chose to participate expressed that they experienced challenges in their classrooms and were seeking new approaches to manage these difficulties. After establishing contact, an initial meeting was arranged with each participant, and the intervention was initiated.

3.4 Koh Phangan

In Koh Phangan I conducted the main part of the data collection for this thesis through participating in a retreat. I also had an interview with Rick Smith, read some literature and did two MPSI:s. The western side of Koh Phangan is recognized as a hub for yoga, meditation, ecstatic dance, and various other spiritual and consciousness-oriented practices. Immersing myself in this environment provided a more profound and embodied understanding of consciousness, an insight that is difficult to acquire solely through theoretical study.

3.5 Toolbox

The development of the toolbox was informed by data collected during the Awakened Leadership retreat held in Koh Phangan, Thailand. The retreat was facilitated by Rick Smith, an author, educator, and educational consultant. Smith is also the author of the book *Conscious Classroom Management* which partly inspired this thesis. Over the past two decades, he has conducted workshops focused on consciousness, embodiment, personal development, and meditation. The Awakened Leadership Retreat was a five- to seven-day program centered on practices such as deep listening and intentional release (Smith, n.d.). Throughout the retreat, participants are offered opportunities to enhance their leadership capacities, engage with and integrate disowned or shadow aspects of themselves, and cultivate both self-love and compassion for others. In addition, Smith imparted his expertise in facilitation, addressing topics such as managing difficult student behavior, effective communication strategies, and the ability to maintain presence while leading a group.

Participation in the retreat transformed my personal perception of leadership and the experience of being in a position of authority. Various exercises conducted during the program contributed to a normalization of the vulnerability associated with standing in front of a group, fostering a sense of confidence and emotional presence. In parallel, I engaged in ethnographic data collection throughout the retreat, which informed the development of the first 17 tools in the toolbox.

The second component of the toolbox was developed from a semi-structured interview conducted with Rick Smith. I transcribed and reviewed the interview, identifying key pieces of advice and topics that appeared particularly relevant and applicable to teachers in the Swedish educational context. After a thorough review of the notes, I refined and consolidated the material, ultimately formulating nine distinct tools derived from the content of the interview.

The third component of the toolbox consists of five tools identified through a review of relevant literature three from Hwuag et al. (2017) and two from Kennedy et al. (2023). Both articles analyze mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) within educational contexts. Kennedy et al. (2023) linked specific teacher needs with corresponding skills that should be cultivated. For instance, they proposed practices such as walking meditation as a way to support emotional regulation and stress management. Hwuag et al. (2017) presented a

meta-analysis comparing the outcomes of various MBIs. One example highlighted is the use of reflective diaries, a method that appears across several interventions examined in the study. Among the literature reviewed by Hwuag et al. is a study conducted by Burrows (2011, as cited in Hwuag et al., 2017), which reported the outcomes of four mindfulness strategies: verbal instructions, self-practice, reflective sharing, and reflective journaling. This study was conducted with six experienced teachers over 10 weeks. The results were described as follows:

“Enhanced capacity to be aware of the reality of the present moment Changes in felt experience of thoughts, feelings, listening, observing, slowing down, being grounded, self-awareness, and their own and others' reactions.”

This may be interpreted as an indication that these four practices, collectively, contribute to positive outcomes for teachers, and that each of them may also hold individual potential for impact.

Mindful eating was another practice examined in a study presented by Hwuag et al. (2017). In this case, the original research was conducted by Bernay (2014, as cited in Hwuag et al., 2017). Mindful eating was one of six mindfulness-based practices included in the study, alongside breath awareness, body scan, sitting meditation, walking meditation, and mindfulness in daily life. The study was carried out over a period of three years and involved five early-career teachers. The findings of the study were described as follows:

“...Enhanced personal wellbeing (stress reduction) Increased ability to focus attention on lesson planning and individual students' needs.”

In a similar manner, two additional tools were extracted from the two articles. Together, these five tools represent a relatively small portion of the overall toolbox, yet they are grounded in deeper, evidence-based research compared to the other components.

3.6 From fieldnotes to toolbox

The initial component of the toolbox was developed based on ethnographic field notes collected during the retreat in Thailand. An excerpt from these notes is presented in *figure 2*. This excerpt serves as the foundation for the tool *Vulnerability is the only true power*.

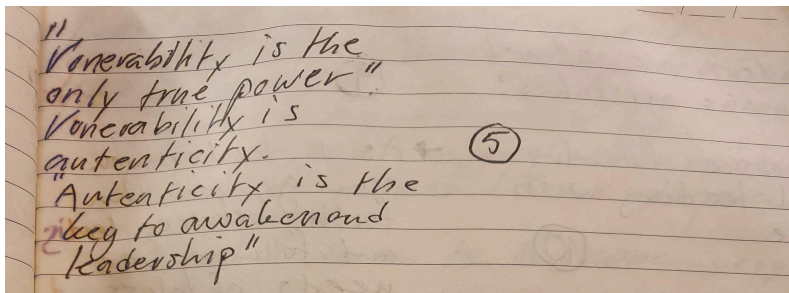


Figure 2: Excerpt from initial notes taken during the Awakened leadership retreat

Following the retreat, I conducted a more in-depth reflection on each of the topics covered. This process included considering how the various methods presented could be adapted for use within the context of my intervention. Figure 3 provides an example of this reflective process for the tool *Vulnerability is the only true power*.

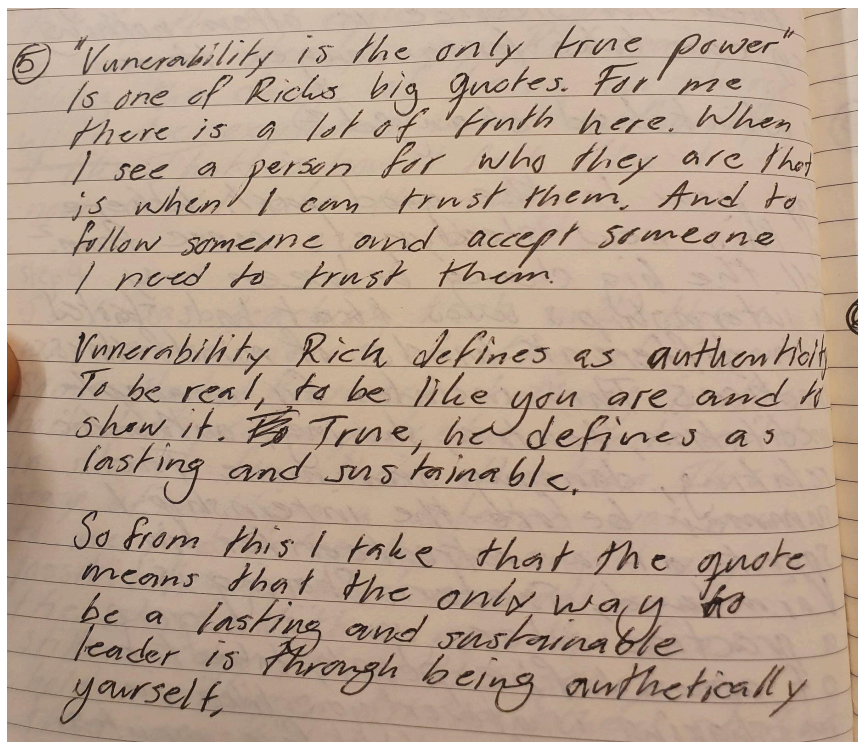


Figure 3: Excerpt from reflection done after the retreat. Same topic as Figure 2.

Based on these reflections, I was able to identify methods that appeared particularly relevant or beneficial for teachers and therefore warranted inclusion in the toolbox. See figure 4. I then applied the same reflective approach to the interview with Rick Smith and to the academic

literature I had reviewed. Through this I identified a total of 68 tools that could potentially support teachers in their practice.

During the initial construction of the Toolbox for Conscious Teaching, more than half of the identified tools from the retreat were excluded. This was primarily due to their lack of clarity, conceptual complexity, or abstract nature, which made them difficult to present in a practical and accessible way to teachers. The aim here was to introduce mindfulness-based techniques in a manner that educators could readily understand and apply, without feeling too alienated by unfamiliar terminology and concepts.

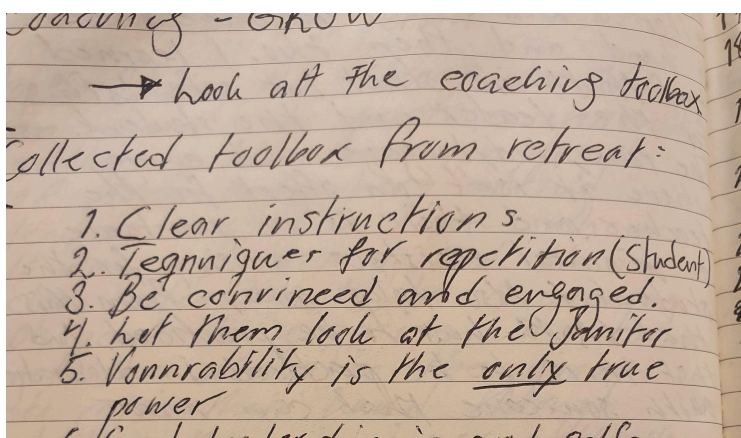


Figure 4: Excerpt from first listing of tools for the toolbox.

3.6 Intervention

The intervention was implemented through a combination of remote (via video or telephone calls) and in-person sessions. This approach was closely aligned with the framework of the *Toolbox for Conscious Teaching*, with the primary objective of testing and evaluating the tools in the developed toolbox. In one case, an additional in-person meeting and classroom visits were arranged to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the participant's context. Nevertheless, the overall process remained consistent across participants. The following steps outline the procedure through which the intervention was conducted.

Step 1: Overview

An initial discussion with the teachers offered a general overview of their current situation. During this phase, we also examined various challenges they encountered in the classroom and considered the formulation of a preliminary goal to guide the forthcoming intervention period.

Step 2: Choose tools

In collaboration with each teacher, one or more tools from the *Toolbox for Conscious Teaching* were selected for implementation. Initially, teachers were given time to independently review the toolbox and identify tools that resonated with them. Subsequently, I provided a tailored selection of tools, accompanied by a brief rationale for each recommendation. These suggestions were based on insights gained during the initial conversations with the teachers, aiming to align the tools with their specific needs and classroom contexts. Below is an example of one tool that was recommended, along with the motivation behind its selection.

Tool from toolbox: 21. Complaint and curiosity

A lot of teachers get stuck in a cynicism towards their students. The difference between complaint and curiosity can be very strong for a teacher. For example thinking “i wonder what triggered that student” instead of “today i had to deal with that annoying student again”

Motivation written to teacher:

While several classes may function effectively, one or more groups can present greater challenges. It is natural to experience a sense of fatigue or frustration when faced with a more demanding class, especially when other groups are progressing smoothly. However, rather than attributing the issue solely to the group, it may be more constructive to adopt a stance of curiosity. What specific needs does this class have in order to improve its dynamics? It is valuable to reflect on which motivational strategies could be tailored to support and engage this particular group more effectively.

Step 3: Implement tools

At this stage, the teachers began to implement the tools in their classrooms. The duration of this phase varied, ranging from a single lesson to an entire week, depending on what the teacher deemed most appropriate. During the implementation, teachers were encouraged to document their observations and reflections, particularly if the trial extended over multiple sessions.

Step 4: Evaluation

At this stage, teachers were invited to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the tools through a semi-structured interview. This interview served as a basis for a preliminary evaluation of the toolbox. Additionally, teachers were given the opportunity to share their impressions of the toolbox as a whole, including any thoughts on tools they did not have the opportunity to use.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The participating teachers must be properly informed about the purpose of the collected data and its use within this thesis. Before gathering any data, I will clearly explain its intended purpose and present the fundamental GDPR regulations that I will adhere to. For example, teachers will be informed that they have the right to request the deletion of their data at any time. Their consent will be documented either through a recorded statement, a written agreement, or digitally via email. Due to the sensitive nature of this study and its connection to both health and the participants' professional strategies, it is essential that I, as a researcher, approach the process with care and remain mindful of the power dynamics involved. It is crucial that the teachers do not feel pressured in any way. My intent is to maintain a non-judgmental and supportive stance throughout the research process.

In relation to society, this project has the potential to contribute to a more sustainable work environment for teachers and, in turn, improve students' learning experiences. The current shortage of teachers in Sweden is a significant issue, largely driven by stress and burnout. With this project, I aim to address these challenges and contribute to solutions that support teacher well-being, thereby strengthening the overall school organization.

To address ecological ethics, I will primarily collect data digitally to minimize environmental impact. However, the most significant ecological concern remains the flights to Thailand. At present, there is no plan to compensate for these emissions. In the long run, however, this project might have the potential to support teachers' well-being in a way that allows them to integrate sustainability issues more often into their curriculum.

4

Results

The results are presented in four parts. The first section presents the Toolbox for conscious teaching, the second part presents the outcomes of the intervention, the third section presents five pieces of advice from Rick Smith on inner authority and the last part presents the results from the MPSI:s.

4.1 Toolbox for conscious teaching

The toolbox presented here is the result of a synthesis between empirical insights gathered during fieldwork conducted in Koh Phangan and a review of relevant scientific literature. This section provides a description of each tool included in the toolbox. Additionally, a more accessible, educator-oriented version of the toolbox has been developed in the form of a card deck (see example in appendix A). The tools will here be presented by origin. In the card deck which represents a more accessible version for teachers the tools are translated into Swedish and sorted by colour in the following six categories: Self-awareness & Emotional Regulation (orange), Leadership & Communication (Turquoise), Cognitive Reframing & Mindset (Purple), Reflective Practice (Blue), Pedagogical Flow (Pink), Micro-Practices for Everyday Awareness (Yellow). Observe that the purpose of the Toolbox isn't to scientifically explain a phenomenon but rather to give a seed of inspiration that can grow differently for every reader. In addition to the tools themselves you will here find a short motivation for each tool.

Tools collected by author during Awakened leadership retreat:

1. Clear instructions

Clear step by step instruction brings structure to the classroom. When the students know what to do at all times it calms them down and makes them trust the teacher. Repeat instructions at least two times.

Structure is important. Structure calms the students down. For a teacher it is important to stay with the rules that are set up even when the students are challenging. Repeating instructions can be annoying but it helps the less attentive students.

2. Be convinced and engaged

It is essential as a teacher to be fully convinced and engaged by what you teach.

Almost everyone I talk to has experience from a boring teacher who didn't care at all. If the teacher is not giving off a good energy through being engaged then it's very hard for the students to learn anything.

3. Vulnerability is the only true power

The only way to be a lasting and sustainable leader is through being authentically yourself.

Students see through roles that teachers try to play. To gain students' trust the teachers need to be themselves. They need to be true. Also for the teacher it will be too exhausting in the long run to play a role.

4. Good leadership is good selfcare

Leadership is about how we feel as leaders. The authentic self needs to be well regulated.

From the previous tool we know that a teacher needs to be authentic to be able to teach well. To be authentic is very hard when your authentic self is hurt or

in pain somehow. Or if the teacher's authentic self has a really bad confidence. So to be able to be authentic a teacher needs to take good care of themselves and regulate emotions well.

5. Slowing down to the speed of love

When there is distress in the classroom, slowing down helps. Slowing down until there is space to understand the students needs and space to self regulate as a teacher.

Distress in the classroom often leads to stress. Stress for the teachers and for the students. As a teacher it can help to slow down. Slow down and calm down yourself. Go so slow that you can see what is going on. Go so slow so that you have time to truly care.

6. Always motivate instead of punishing

When possible use motivation instead of punishment. Become a master of different motivational strategies.

Teachers tend to become lazy after a while and use the routine punishments that are in place. There are a lot of motivational strategies to be found. Teachers need to stay creative as the needs of the students change.

7. A good leader makes mistakes

A good leader makes mistakes, a good leader is insecure and a good leader is overwhelmed sometimes. This is part of being authentic and it is better to show this to the students than to have a non-authentic facade. To stay authentic in these challenges builds trust and strengthens the relationship.

Teachers tend to be hard on themselves. As a teacher you are allowed to be yourself! It can help to keep in mind that mistakes are part of being a leader and that it doesn't mean that you are a bad leader.

8. Teaching is a dance with the room

Where is the classroom right now? As a teacher it is important to be aware of the needs of the students. What “move” is possible right now? In which direction can you move? How fast? How slow?

Sometimes the plan for the lesson just isn't compatible with the class. Teachers can usually sense this. A teacher can then either power on with the lesson plan and lose the class or adapt the lesson and stay with the class.

9. Inner authority and inner apology

Inner authority is when you're grounded in your values, present in your body, and connected to your students without needing to control them. It's the quiet strength of authenticity, calm, steady, and clear.

Inner apology is what happens when you're pulled out of that grounded state. It's how we act when we feel off-center either by shrinking back (over-apologizing, hesitating) or tightening up (overcompensating, becoming harsh or controlling).

A helpful practice:

Ask yourself, “*What pulls me out of my grounded self?*”

Write down 5 things that trigger your inner apology. Naming them is the first step toward returning to your center your inner authority.

This tool takes some more practice than the others but getting in awareness about this can be life changing. Especially for leaders that need to exude trustworthiness this is key. It is recommended to read the *Five advice from Rick Smith on Inner Authority* in section 4.3 for deeper understanding.

10. Silence does the work

Being able to hold silence is a great tool for a teacher. Not every comment from a student needs an answer, go slow in presentations and take breaks to take in the reaction of the classroom to what you are teaching.

Silence and eye contact can be a good way to get a student back in line. As a teacher it is good to learn to hold silence; it gives you a natural advantage in the classroom.

11. Welcome the resistance

Don't get personally attached to your classroom situation. Rather be curious about what is happening. Students will always challenge teachers to begin with. Take it!

It usually takes some time before a classroom works well. Students will always challenge the teacher at first. It is important that the teacher stands tall and receives resistance from the class. Also through being aware that this is the case the teachers can take the charge of a chaotic class without blaming themselves too much.

12. Make it conscious

Just bringing awareness to what is going on can relax the situation. What is going on? Say it out loud or write it down without judging or thinking about solutions.

The things that are conscious we have agency over. This tool is about the act of making something conscious. Making something conscious can change the situation even though there is no apparent change happening.

13. Making friends with the voices in our heads

What are the voices in your head telling you? Maybe "I am a bad teacher!" or "I will never reach this kid!"? While these voices aren't true it can be beneficial to "make friends with them". Hear them, acknowledge them and accept them as they are. Make it conscious.

This is a part of the need for teachers to take care of themselves. Voices in our heads can be very discouraging and take a lot of energy. Through making friends with them they can lose power.

14. Check-in

Check-in is done together with a colleague or several. Ask each other how you are doing today. Take some time to listen to the other and to share about your current situation.

This is a great way to help each other out as teachers. Check-in is a way to express yourself without looking for answers or solutions. This is also a great way to connect to your colleagues. Finally this is a great way to bring up things from the subconscious to the conscious.

15. Self connect

Self-connect means focusing on yourself for a few seconds, how are you in this moment? Feel in and bring awareness to your current experience. This can be done a few times a day and helps you stay aware of yourself.

Staying aware of yourself continuously gives you the chance to notice how you are in different circumstances. It's also a moment just for you during a day full of others. It brings you back to yourself.

16. Deep breath

Deep breaths are good to relax the nervous system. A deep breath helps to regulate yourself when the classroom is challenging. Stop, take a deep breath and continue.

This can sound elementary but how many deep breaths do you take a day? Really doing it can make an important difference. A deep breath gives perspective.

17. The distance between experience and self

The difference between “this happened to me” and “this happened because of me” can bring relaxation for a leader. Observing your experiences with some distance can help to be less reactive in the classroom.

This is a skill that comes with meditation. A distance between what is happening right now and you as a being. This skill gives time between experience and reaction which can be very valuable and relaxing.

18. Interactive elements

Always plan interactive elements. The human brain is not made for hour long presentations. Let the students discuss, let them work on a question for a while or do a small quiz to wake them up.

Planning a lesson with interactive elements helps the students to learn and to keep focused.

19. Assume the best

In the classroom assume the best about the students. They are not your enemies and they are doing their best even if it doesn't look that way. When you as a teacher assume the best, the classroom becomes more calm and the students feel seen.

It doesn't matter if it is true or not. Treating the students as if they are doing their best helps the classroom environment and also the teachers wellbeing. The students are not out to get you.

Tools collected from an Interview with Rick Smith

20. Avoid anger display

When you get what you want through anger it is never a win-win. What is the cost? You as a teacher get strained and the students don't feel safe. It's like squeezing a balloon, it might work for a while but not in the long run.

Being angry and strict can sometimes feel like a necessity. An angry teacher can be scary for the students and damage the relationship. Instead teachers can work on their inner authority.

21. Good lesson design

Design a lesson that is fun and engaging with enough brakes and active elements.

When a classroom is challenging, focus on a more fun and engaging lesson plan. This one class might need some more attention than other classes. A good lesson plan can help the students to refocus and to behave.

22. Complaint and curiosity

A lot of teachers get stuck in a cynicism towards their students. The difference between complaint and curiosity can be very strong for a teacher. For example thinking “i wonder what triggered that student so much” instead of “today i had to deal with that annoying student again”

This tool together with assume the best (tool 19) can really get a teacher out of the suffering victim position and into a more curious state. What can help in this class? How can I take care of myself in this environment?

23. Can you please teach me behaviour?

A student is acting out because every single teacher before you has failed in teaching them behaviour. So a different way to look at a student causing issues in the classroom is that they are asking you to be taught how to behave!

Helping a student to learn behaviour rather than punishing. This is a perspective that helped me in the classroom. A student acting out is actually asking for help.

24. Go under the wave

When a student is acting out in some way. Go under the wave. Lower the tone and volume of your voice and assume the best. This de-escalates the situation.

It craves some awareness to do this. The initial reaction many teachers probably have is to become loud and strict. This can escalate the situation and probably damage the teacher student relationship. Going under the wave is one way to calm a situation down.

25. Two minutes a day

Two minutes just for yourself can make a big difference. This could be looking out of the window, a small meditation or just sitting at your desk. Two minutes where nothing needs to happen. Two minutes just for you.

This is a small meditation. A moment for yourself. A moment to ground and breath.

26. Start a mindfulness practice

Start some kind of mindfulness practice. Research has shown that mindfulness is a great tool for teachers to enhance their wellbeing.

This is probably the most powerful tool in the toolbox. Starting a mindfulness routine for example 5 min meditation a day can make a huge difference.

27. 2x10

If you have a challenging student. Do 2 min of positive interaction for 10 days in a row with that student. This can change your relationship completely.

Having only negative interaction with a student creates a rough relationship where the student probably avoids all contact with the teacher. These two minutes of positivity can change everything.

28. What and how

Take in consideration how you are doing not only what you are doing. Both of them directly affect your ability to teach. The students get influenced by both.

If there is a task at hand the usual thought is about the how. How should I get this task done? This tool motivates teachers to think about how they are doing while they work with the task. This could mean putting on some nice music during a planning session but also to be aware of yourself while teaching in the classroom. How are you doing?

Tools collected from paper by authors Hwaug et.al (Hwaug et.al, 2017)

29. Reflective diary

Keep a diary where you reflect on your teaching experience.

Reflection is a great tool to understand what is going on. In a diary a teacher could write down everything that happened and how it affected them. This way there can be a release of negative emotion at the same time as the teacher gains a better understanding on how to deal with different situations.

30. Coaching

There might be someone with more experience that can coach you.

At a school there are usually some teachers that have been teaching for decades. Younger teachers could ask for tips and trick or even have regular coaching sessions.

31. Mindful eating

A mindfulness practice might be hard to fit into your workday. Eating in a calm environment and focusing on your food is a good way to relax.

A good alternative to having a dedicated mindfulness session is to do usual everyday things in a mindful way. For example, eating.

Tools collected from paper by authors Kennedy et.al. (Kennedy et.al, 2023)

32. Get feedback

Get a colleague to give you feedback on your teaching. They could for example join you during your class and sit in the back.

During teacher education it is common to get feedback from other teachers joining the classroom. This could be used for in-service teachers as well.

33. Walking practice

Take a walk by yourself. Preferably in nature. Turn your awareness to your senses. What do you feel, smell, hear and see?

This is also a great mindfulness technique that might come easier than a dedicated meditation. Nature can be very helpful.

4.2 Intervention

Although many teachers were contacted and seven completed the initial stage of the intervention, in the end only three teachers completed the entire process. The result will be presented in five categories for each teacher: Background, Chosen Tools, Implementation, Reported outcomes and Reflections.

Teacher 1: Automotive mechanics

Background:

This teacher works with a particularly demanding group of high school students enrolled in a vocational programme in automotive mechanics. A significant number of these students have special educational needs, and issues such as frequent tardiness and disruptive behaviour are prevalent. Despite these challenges, the teacher demonstrates effective classroom management and is held in high regard by the students. The final interview was conducted after the teacher had used the intervention tools for a full week. This was also the only case in which in-person meetings were feasible. In retrospect, it appears that this contributed to a more professional impression of the intervention and may have enhanced the teacher's motivation to engage with the study. No goal was agreed upon but rather focus on curiosity and development.

Chosen Tool:

16. Deep breath

Deep breaths are good to relax the nervous system. A deep breath helps to regulate yourself when the classroom is challenging. Stop, take a deep breath and continue.

29. Reflective diary

Keep a diary where you reflect on your teaching experience.

32. Get feedback

Get a colleague to give you feedback on your teaching. They could for example join you during your class and sit in the back.

Implementation:

The teacher initiated a daily reflective writing routine, documenting their teaching practices and experiences. These reflective notes were compiled into what the teacher referred to as a "handbook," which served as a valuable resource for lesson planning. The teacher reported using the reflective diary in conjunction with the *Deep breath* tool. In challenging situations, the teacher described their approach as: "...take a breath and reflect on everything." The deep breathing technique was practiced both within and outside the classroom environment.

Feedback was conducted collaboratively with a colleague, as intended by the design of the intervention. These two teachers further developed the approach by planning to conduct both pre- and post-intervention feedback sessions. The colleague would observe one lesson before the implementation of the reflective and breathing tools, and another afterward, to evaluate any changes. However, due to time constraints, the results of this component are not presented in this report.

Reported outcomes:

The teacher reports that the experience of using the intervention tools has been positive. Regarding the deep breathing technique, however, the teacher notes that some students have expressed concern, occasionally asking whether something was wrong. As a result, the teacher concludes that such techniques may be more effective if practiced in a more discreet manner. The teacher illustrates a reflective thought process translated from Swedish as follows: *“Okay, now I’m stressed. This is too much. Hold on. What should I focus on first? Take it easy. You are not solely responsible...”* This example highlights how reflective thinking, combined with deep breathing, can help to defuse tense situations according to the teacher.

Furthermore, the teacher notes an increased awareness of systemic issues at the organisational level within the school. They also acknowledge a tendency to respond too quickly without adequate reflection. As a result of the intervention, the teacher now consciously takes a deep breath before allowing the other person to finish speaking and formulating a more considered response. As they state: *“I am more aware of myself; I listen more to the student. I understand their questions and I analyze their questions better”*

Reflections

The teacher expresses strong appreciation for the toolbox but also emphasizes that its effectiveness depends on the willingness of teachers to embrace change. In their view, it is particularly suitable for educators who are open to experimentation and willing to engage with new methods. The teacher also highlights a need for clearer guidance, noting that implementation would likely have been more challenging without my guidance. They suggest that the toolbox could benefit from a clearly defined entry point such as step-by-step instructions to initiate its use. Additionally, the teacher expresses a desire to see the toolbox translated and adapted into a simplified version, which could be shared and applied within their teaching team.

Teacher 2: Swedish

Background

This teacher operates in highly demanding classroom settings at an upper secondary school. In one class, the teacher reported that only four out of sixteen students are expected to meet the academic requirements to pass the year. The overall classroom environment is described as particularly challenging, with multiple students in each group struggling to follow rules and frequently engaging in disruptive behaviour. In addition, several students require extensive support, further increasing the demands placed on the teacher. These conditions result in considerable emotional and physical strain, often leaving the teacher with minimal energy by the end of the school day. The primary aim of the intervention was therefore to support the teacher in conserving energy throughout the day.

Chosen Tools

7. A good leader makes mistakes

A good leader makes mistakes, a good leader is insecure and a good leader is overwhelmed sometimes. This is part of being authentic and it is better to show this to the students than to have a non-authentic facade. To stay authentic in these challenges builds trust and strengthens the relationship.

17. The distance between experience and self

The difference between “this happened to me” and “this happened because of me” can bring relaxation for a leader. Observing your experiences with some distance can help to be less reactive in the classroom.

12. Make it conscious

Just bringing awareness to what is going on can relax the situation. What is going on? Say it out loud or write it down without judging or thinking about solutions.

26. Start a mindfulness practice

Start some kind of mindfulness practice. Research has shown that mindfulness is a great tool for teachers to enhance their wellbeing.

Implementation

One clearly articulated implementation of the intervention tools reported by the teacher relates to the tool *Start a Mindfulness Practice*. In this context, the teacher describes a change in their daily routine: replacing herbal tea with a variety that has a smoky scent. The teacher recounts opening the thermos and mindfully inhaling the aroma of the smoky tea while seated in front of the class. Another mindfulness practice mentioned involves gazing out of the window to regain calm during stressful moments. The teacher shares an anecdote about observing a seagull chick that appears to believe it is a dove following the doves when they take flight despite the difference in species.

The other two tools from the intervention are described more as guiding mindsets rather than concrete practices. The teacher reports an ongoing effort to reduce stress and cultivate greater self-acceptance, particularly in relation to making mistakes. They describe attempting to lower both internal expectations and external pressures through the adoption of these tools.

Reported outcomes

The teacher reports experiencing a greater sense of calm as a result of using the intervention tools. They describe a specific incident involving a missing football and a student who wished to leave class to retrieve it. The teacher reflected that, due to their increased calmness, they recognised that the student would likely be unable to concentrate during the remaining 15 minutes of the lesson unless allowed to search for the ball. *“And in that moment of interaction, the fact that I truly listened to him meant that it never even turned into a conflict,”* the teacher explained. They noted that, in the past, they would have become stressed in a similar situation and likely responded with, *“Who cares? We have class!”* However, they were now able to pause and genuinely consider the student’s perspective. They described a subsequent situation in which the same student appeared to mirror this calmer and more

responsive attitude. When the teacher became visibly stressed due to a technical issue with a computer, the student responded in a supportive manner. *“It felt like how I handled the situation last Friday, in a way, made a ripple effect,”* the teacher remarked, suggesting that their own behavioural shift had influenced the student's response. The teacher clearly states that they have lowered their expectations on themselves and now actively remind themselves that it is okay to make mistakes and that they, too, are human. In interpersonal interactions, the teacher reports an increased ability to reflect before responding, describing a shift from reactive behaviour to a more deliberate, tool-informed approach. For instance, in situations involving provocation, they now find themselves thinking: What did the tools say again? Rather than reacting with anger.

When asked about the role of practices such as mindful tea drinking and awareness to the scent of the tea, the teacher described them as *“quite important because it helps me to find back,”* and added, *“I have a chance to get away from here.”*

Reflections

The teacher expresses that they find the toolbox both interesting and engaging, and they believe it holds clear potential benefits. They emphasise that relational work with students is difficult to achieve if teachers are operating under high levels of stress. According to the teacher, a certain degree of calmness is necessary in order to listen attentively and be receptive to subtle emotional cues that, in turn, enable the use of professional intuition. They argue that this intuition plays a critical role in helping teachers decide what is appropriate or necessary in a given situation.

Teacher 3: Math

Background

This teacher teaches students in an introductory program at an upper secondary school. This introduction program is for students that didn't pass upper secondary school. The teacher describes that the students have a hard time with the subject math and that they need to find methods to teach the student so that they don't get scared. The teacher also expresses challenges with having a foreign mother tongue. Even though the teacher faces several challenges, they receive substantial positive feedback from both the school administration and the students' parents.

Chosen Tools

26. Start a mindfulness practice

Start some kind of mindfulness practice. Research has shown that mindfulness is a great tool for teachers to enhance their wellbeing.

Implementation

The teacher has incorporated a five-minute daily meditation into their routine, using a YouTube clip provided by me, the researcher. This meditation is practiced at the workplace. In addition, the teacher has initiated a personal yoga practice at home. *"I have forced my body to slow down and to breathe for a while without doing anything,"* the teacher explained.

Reported outcomes

The teacher reports experiencing increased energy during the lesson following the meditation practice. However, they also note that it has been challenging to find five uninterrupted minutes in which to meditate, and that achieving a sense of mental calm often proved difficult within such a short time frame. Despite these challenges, the teacher describes noticeable improvements in the classroom, including enhanced focus and greater patience in interactions with students.

Reflections

The teacher believes that more individuals would benefit from incorporating similar breaks into their routines. They suggest that colleagues could combine brief meditation sessions with seated yoga exercises.

4.3 Five advice from Rick Smith on Inner Authority

Inner authority is a concept that might be hard to grasp. These five advice are a helping hand for the teacher who wishes to work with tool 9. These tools come directly from the interview with Rick Smith.

1. Slowing down. Noticing where you're making the *what* more important than the *how*.

The *what* of your life "I've got to get this done. I've got to get to the bank in time" versus *how am I with myself* as I'm going fast to get to the bank?

So focusing on the *how* rather than the *what* is very important.

2. By bringing awareness to the things that bring you toward inner apology. And either changing that or bringing conscious awareness to them and trusting that that will be enough.
3. Assume the best about yourself and others. There are no problems, just patterns. There's just curiosity and exploration.
4. Leading with curiosity as opposed to complaint. In every moment, we can meet life in either capacity. Slow down and see where you are complaining.
5. A small ritual that can help to get into inner authority: Stand with both feet on the ground. Imagine your legs extending to the center of the earth and your head is facing the vast sky above you. Take a deep breath.

4.4 Micro-Phenomenological self-inquiry

The following section presents the results of two MPSI:s conducted during my stay in Thailand. The first focuses on my personal experience regarding how mindfulness has influenced and transformed my approach to leadership within the classroom. The second explores my experience of inner authority and the insights gained through that process. The “steps” are the steps in the MPSI manual described in the frame of reference chapter.

MPSI 1: My mindfulness in leadership

Step 3

I had a moment during my 2nd school internship where I realized that something had changed. Compared to my first internship, I want to say that I could hold space in a more steady way. Rick says: “taking the charge of being in charge”, which he explains as inner authority. That is how I felt. Like I now could take the charge.

Step 4

So I was teaching tech and there was some noise in the classroom. Some students were talking in the back. I stopped my lecture and waited in silence for their attention. This way of holding a silence was new to me. And it really changed my possibilities to have control over the class. Within me this was still a scary thing. It’s scary to hold a silence. All the other students that aren’t disturbing are waiting for me to continue. But as I started to experiment I found a great strength in this. Maybe because teenagers are even more uncomfortable with holding a silence. If you argue with them you can do that all day but looking at them in silence is often nothing they can take for a longer time.

So what had changed?

Okay now to the good part. Where did this new steadiness come from?

Well the big change between my two internships was that I had started with different kinds of mindfulness practices. This includes for example meditation, tantra, sharing, authentic relating, dancing and more. The summer before the internship I spent at a retreat center in Värmland, Sweden. Sharing is a practice where you in a group of around five people take turns in sharing whatever you like in a monologue for about five minutes. You don’t have to say anything though. So I often sat in silence. This was a daily practice so I didn’t always have something to say. This was for me maybe a chance to practice taking charge. Everyone

was looking at me. Some with love. All of them with direct eye contact. That is a lot of charge to take. I realize now.

Another thing that changed for me during this first month of active practice is my own wellbeing. After the summer I had a strong foundation in self-love, love for the world, acceptance of what is and a deepened faith in God. These things made me stand tall and rooted in life. Rick says that being a good leader is about taking good care of yourself. I knew how to, maybe for the first time in my life.

So to conclude this:

The mindfulness practices helped me to be able to take charge while staying in my inner authority. This happened through sharing practice and other practices that gave me self-love, through a stronger understanding of love and life.

I believe to lead others we need to be experts at leading ourselves. And to lead ourselves we need to be aware and true. Be receptive of yourself, what is going on within you, and regulate it before you act on it.

MPSI 2: Inner authority

Check-in step 4: I experienced what I think inner authority is in person.

Step 5:

During the retreat we had an exercise to practice inner authority. We were in groups of three and were acting leaders one at a time. When it was my turn I had the clear intention to be convincing.

Oh yeah, the exercise was to get the others in the group to raise their hand through telling them in inner authority. If the “audience” felt inner authority they should raise their hand.

So I was trying to be strong and clear and sure of myself like I would be to make students follow my lead in the classroom. The audience participants in the group did not raise their hands.

Later they told me that they perceived me as angry.

So I changed my tone, took a breath and tried again and again.

After a while the audience raised a hand and then two.

I learned that truth isn't strict but safe both for the leader and the student.

The tone, body language and energy where it isn't an effort for the teacher and there is no resistance or minimal resistance arising for the student.

Also take away from this that truth has to be practiced and that it is to be practiced in collaboration with someone that can mirror.

Step 6:

I felt some shame for not succeeding in the beginning.

There are also some worries that this is gonna be hard to learn.

And I would have liked to practice it more.

5

Discussion

The discussion is presented in three sections. The first section discusses the outcomes from the field study conducted in Thailand, including a discussion of the development and structure of the toolbox. The second section discusses the outcomes of the Micro-Phenomenological self-inquiry (MPSI) and the third section focuses on discussion and reflections on the intervention carried out with in-service teachers.

5.1 Field Study

The field study took place on the island of Koh Phangan in southern Thailand and included a five-day retreat led by teacher Rick Smith. This was followed by time spent in a community where many people actively practiced mindfulness and conscious living, which helped me experience and internalize these practices on a personal level. Data was collected through an ethnographic approach, where I participated directly in the retreat. The purpose of the study was to explore mindfulness techniques that could help Swedish teachers improve their well-being and strengthen their ability to lead a classroom. The techniques identified through this process are presented in the toolbox found in the results chapter. The tools from the toolbox were then adapted into a card deck consisting of 33 individual cards. Since the full toolbox can feel overwhelming, the card format allows teachers to engage with one tool at a time in a more manageable way. The deck is designed for use by in-service teachers. For instance, a teacher might draw a single card and treat it as their focus or "mission" for the week such as deciding, "This week, I will try walking meditation." The deck can also be used in a more interactive, playful way. Two or more teachers could draw cards at random and then take time to reflect individually before sharing how they might apply the selected tool in their teaching practice. These conversations may spark meaningful discussions, especially when teachers interpret the same tool differently or have varying perspectives on its use.

The purpose of this card deck is to invite teachers into a reflective state, one that engages not only the mind, but also the heart and intuition. It is designed to serve as a pause in the midst of a demanding day, offering a moment of stillness and perspective. In challenging situations, a teacher might recall a tool they previously explored or focus on the card they selected that day. This small act of remembrance can create space between stimulus and response, helping them respond with greater awareness rather than reactivity (tool 17). While the themes explored in the cards are not light and breezy, the overall aim is to guide teachers out of unhelpful patterns and into a more grounded, hopeful, and sustainable approach to teaching. The card deck can be integrated into various aspects of a teacher's professional life as a source of inspiration and reflection. For instance, it may be used during staff meetings to open a space for shared dialogue and mindfulness. Two colleagues might choose to draw a card together, using it as a prompt for personal reflection or mutual support. The deck can also serve as a gentle resource for a teacher navigating a particularly challenging moment drawing a card at random, much like a tarot reading, may offer unexpected insight or encouragement. In quieter moments, the deck might simply rest on a teacher's desk, ready to be picked up whenever there is a need for a pause, a shift in perspective, or a small reminder of intention.

A commonly suggested solution to the issue of Swedish teachers being overworked is the addition of more staff. However, the approach presented in this report offers an alternative path: one that aims to enhance teachers' well-being through inner work rather than external resources. While this method may require fewer financial or organizational resources, it still demands time, commitment, and openness from the teachers themselves. One potential challenge is that the card deck may seem too abstract or unfamiliar to some educators, and could be dismissed as too "alternative" or unconventional. This approach invites teachers to reflect inwardly, rather than seeking external factors to explain or fix the challenges they face. In Swedish culture, which tends to value evidence-based, concrete solutions, mindfulness may still be seen as marginal, despite growing research supporting its benefits for teachers. Nevertheless, the initial feedback has been very encouraging. Both fellow students and in-service teachers who took part in the intervention have expressed positive responses, and many appear to be genuinely inspired by the toolbox, much like I am. This will be discussed further in the following section.

What might conscious teaching look like in an overburdened and fast-paced school environment, and how could the card deck contribute? One possibility is that a teacher draws a card reminding them that it is, in fact, okay to make mistakes. Strong leadership includes the ability to acknowledge errors and move forward with resilience. Another teacher might select a card encouraging them to slow down to pause long enough to truly see and understand the challenges they face. A third teacher could pick a card inviting them to take a walk in the forest and simply notice the scent of autumn leaves falling. These small practices may not solve the systemic issues within schools, but they can offer brief moments of relief or a shift in perspective. Even a subtle change in mindset can influence a teacher's presence in the classroom, and in turn, benefit their students.

As anticipated, some of the tools included in my toolbox are not novel; rather, many of them are present in Rick Smith's *Conscious Classroom Management*. Specifically, tools 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, and 28 are directly referenced in his work. These tools were identified during the field study, either through participation in the retreat with Rick Smith or through the interview conducted with him, which accounts for the overlap.

Some tools included in the toolbox are also supported by other research. For example, Tool 27, the *2x10 technique*, is discussed in a study by Gragg and Collet (2021), which examines its effectiveness as a relationship-building strategy between preschool teachers and their pupils. Tool 16, *Deep Breathing*, has been investigated by Penzenstadler, Torkar, and Montes (2021), who report promising results regarding its benefits for software developers and computer workers. Tool 3, the *Reflective Diary*, is also grounded in empirical research; Ukrop, Švábenský, and Nehyba explored its role in fostering the professional development of novice teachers. Additionally, Tool 33, *Walking Practice*, has been examined by Shi et al. (2019), who studied the outcomes of a mindful walking intervention for adults with insufficient physical activity.

Overall, many of the tools featured in the toolbox have been referenced in prior research. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that a more extensive literature review if time had permitted would have strengthened the academic foundation of the toolbox by further validating the tools through existing empirical studies.

The toolbox is not yet complete, nor does it need to be. Given more time, I believe I could have developed significantly more cards. In the future, I envision continuing this work by

using the cards myself in my role as a teacher, and evaluating their impact through practice. I could also invite colleagues to try the methods and incorporate their feedback. As I grow in the teaching profession, I expect to discover new strategies worth capturing on cards. This deck has the potential to evolve over the course of my career supporting not only my own development but also that of fellow educators, contributing to a more sustainable and reflective teaching environment.

5.2 Micro-Phenomenological self-inquiry (MPSI)

The MPSI method was employed to explore the subject matter at a deeper level than traditional qualitative methods typically allow. As described in the methodology chapter, this approach involved the researcher engaging in a structured, introspective examination of lived experience. Two MPSI sessions were conducted, and the insights generated were found to align with, and further enrich, the findings from the intervention. The first MPSI, presented in the results chapter, illustrates how mindfulness practices can gradually transform an individual's leadership capacity. Specifically, it highlights the development of abilities such as maintaining silence, sustaining a grounded presence, and responding intentionally rather than reactively. The second MPSI focused on the concept of inner authority investigating what it feels like, how it operates, and how it differs from traditional notions of strictness or control. Both MPSI sessions serve to further validate and inform the tools presented in the mindfulness toolbox. The first session underscores the long-term benefits of sustained mindfulness practice for educators, suggesting that self-care, self-compassion, and awareness can lead to a more grounded and authentic professional presence. The second session provided experiential insights that shaped the development of tools related to *inner authority* and *inner apology*, demonstrating that embodying authority from within differs fundamentally from being externally forceful or authoritarian. The use of MPSI offered a valuable lens for understanding how the internal processes of a teacher may be activated through mindfulness practice.

MPSI must be conducted with great care and methodological rigor. Even under such conditions, it is essential to acknowledge that the method does not yield objective data in the traditional sense. Rather, it provides a structured approach to exploring and documenting deeply subjective experiences. The insights gained through MPSI should therefore be

understood as illustrative of my individual experience, not as generalisable truths applicable to all teachers engaging in mindfulness or inner authority practices. While MPSI offers a deep access to personal reflections, it does not produce broadly applicable findings. In the context of this thesis, undertaken in part due to my own experience of the transformative impact of mindfulness on my teaching and leadership, the method has added a valuable dimension. It complements the empirical data by offering an introspective layer that deepens the understanding of how such practices may affect an individual practitioner.

5.3 Intervention

The purpose of the intervention was to explore the practical application of selected tools in collaboration with in-service teachers. The intervention was conducted with three teachers, each with different professional backgrounds, subject specialisations, and employed at different schools. Two of the participants worked in high school education, while one was based at an upper secondary school. A common feature across all settings was the presence of challenging classroom environments, where the primary focus often shifted from subject content to managing student behaviour.

The outcomes of the intervention point towards several experienced benefits as well as some challenges resulting from the use of the tools. Teachers described an enhanced sense of calm and an increased ability to pause, reflect, and regulate their emotional responses and stress levels. For instance, Teacher 2 shared how, during moments of student misbehaviour, they would deliberately look out of the window to regain composure. Mindfulness practices were reported to provide new strategies for remaining grounded, present, and intentional in classroom leadership. Through brief moments of mindfulness such as savouring the scent of tea or participating in five-minute meditation sessions teachers were able to create emotional distance from immediate reactions and maintain focus and calm. Teacher 2 described their experience with mindfulness as both “a way to find back” and “a way to get away.” While this may initially appear contradictory, it captures the dual function of mindfulness: simultaneously grounding oneself in the present moment while gaining a degree of perspective. Teacher 3 similarly noted that brief mindfulness exercises not only contributed to improved energy levels but also enhanced their patience in classroom interactions.

Teachers also observed that changes in their own behaviour had a direct and noticeable impact on the classroom environment and student relationships. Teacher 2 described how a

student appeared to mirror the teacher's previous display of patience and understanding during a later situation, suggesting a ripple effect. Similarly, Teacher 1 reported becoming more self-aware, which allowed for deeper listening and more thoughtful engagement with student questions. These observations point to the potential of mindfulness practices to influence not only individual well-being but also broader relational dynamics within the classroom.

At the same time, several challenges were identified. The tools were seen to require a relatively open-minded and reflective approach, which may limit their effectiveness among teachers who are less receptive to such practices. Teacher 1 emphasized the need for clearer guidance and more detailed instructions to support implementation, suggesting that without additional support, some tools may feel too abstract or demanding. Teacher 2 mentioned the difficulty of finding uninterrupted time during the school day to engage in mindfulness, raising concerns about the compatibility of certain practices with the fast-paced and often unpredictable nature of school environments.

The selection process regarding which tool was assigned to which teacher is an aspect of the study that could be made more generalisable in future research. During the initial meeting, the teachers expressed interest in certain tools, and all participants contributed to the final selection. However, due to time constraints, the tools were ultimately chosen based largely on my subjective assessment of each teacher's work situation following a brief introductory conversation. A more robust approach would have allowed teachers to independently select and justify their choice of tools, which may have enhanced the objectivity of the intervention and the generalisability of the findings. This researcher-driven selection process may have influenced the outcomes in two ways. First, it is possible that the tools selected were not the most suitable for each individual teacher's context. Second, my role as a researcher may have unintentionally shaped teachers' perceptions, leading them to believe that a particular tool was especially relevant or beneficial for their situation thus introducing a potential bias or preconception about its effectiveness.

The research question is stated as follows:

In what ways can mindfulness techniques support Swedish school teachers well-being and ability to create sustainable classroom environments?

The findings indicate that several teachers reported noticeable changes following the use of the tools, even within the short duration of the intervention. The changes described align with the intended goals of the intervention, namely, to support teachers' personal well-being and their ability to lead a classroom. Teachers noted increased resilience in the face of stress and challenging student interactions, largely attributed to being more grounded and reflective in their responses. Although mindfulness is not yet a mainstream practice in Swedish schools, there was a sense of curiosity and openness among the participating teachers. This suggests that while such interventions may present certain challenges particularly due to the novelty of the concept within the school system they also hold significant promise for promoting positive change. In relation to the research question, this study demonstrates a practical approach to integrating mindfulness techniques in support of teacher well-being and classroom management. However, it is important to acknowledge that mindfulness remains a somewhat contested topic in broader society, and that successful implementation of such tools may require guidance and contextual adaptation to ensure accessibility and acceptance.

6

Conclusion and recommendation

This thesis aimed to identify mindfulness-based techniques that support teachers in Sweden in both their well-being and classroom management. These techniques were developed through an extensive field study on conscious leadership conducted in Koh Phangan, Thailand, complemented by a review of relevant literature. To explore the practical application of these techniques, an intervention was carried out with three in-service teachers. The results indicated that mindfulness practices can enhance calmness and emotional self-regulation. Teachers reported that the mindfulness and reflection tools provided a structured approach to becoming more intentional in their professional practice. Additionally, improvements were noted in classroom climate, along with increased self-awareness and resilience in interactions with students. However, several barriers to implementation were identified, including the necessity for an open-minded attitude among educators and the need for clear guidance to effectively understand and apply the techniques. The intervention demonstrated promising results after only one week of implementation, suggesting that mindfulness can serve as an effective method for supporting teachers in an increasingly demanding school environment. Compared to other interventions, mindfulness practices offer the advantage of being relatively cost-effective and feasible to implement without requiring significant structural changes to existing school personnel or organisation. Furthermore, there is potential to scale this approach to reach a larger number of teachers over a longer period of time.

For practicing teachers, a sincere recommendation is to personally engage with some of the tools presented in this thesis. Begin by reviewing the list and selecting one or two techniques that resonate with you. Allow sufficient time to explore each tool in depth, recognising that understanding and integration may require patience. There is no definitive right or wrong way to begin, rather, the process benefits from a willingness to listen inwardly and reflect on what the tool evokes. Consider how a given practice might be applied both within and beyond the classroom context. Additionally, I recommend reading *Conscious Classroom Management* by

Rick Smith. This book provides a deeper exploration of several techniques included in the toolbox and offers practical examples to support their implementation. Finally, I would like to emphasise the importance of self-care, particularly for educators working in demanding environments. Effective leadership depends on mental and emotional well-being. Reflect on what brings you calm and joy, and prioritise activities that support your own sense of balance. Make time for these practices, they are essential not only for your personal well-being but also for your capacity to support others.

For school administrators, I recommended introducing mindfulness practices into the daily routines of both teaching staff and leadership teams. As leaders of educators, school administrators play a critical role in shaping a supportive and reflective work culture. One practical suggestion is to organise a workshop using the card deck developed in this thesis. Each participant could select a card and take turns reflecting on its relevance and implications for their context. Additionally, tools such as *Check-in* could be integrated into staff meetings or adopted as a regular practice among colleagues, allowing sharing of brief personal or professional reflections. This can serve as a means of strengthening team cohesion and promoting emotional well-being. Mindfulness routines may also be introduced as shared practices such as short meditations, reflective silence, or even a silent walk to foster collective presence and alignment at the workplace. As demonstrated in this thesis, such practices can contribute positively to teachers' well-being and promote a more balanced and responsive professional climate.

I recommend that future research conducts a larger-scale intervention to gain deeper insight into the benefits and challenges associated with the implementation of mindfulness-based tools in educational settings. In such an intervention, particular attention should be given to the selection process of the tools used by participating teachers. Ideally, participants should be allowed to select the tools themselves and provide a motivation for their choices, thereby promoting a greater sense of ownership and relevance. However, it is also important to note that the implementation of these tools will likely continue to require guidance from a coach or facilitator to ensure effective integration into practice. I also recommend that the intervention be carried out in multiple iterations, giving teachers the opportunity to either continue using their chosen tools, after evaluating their effectiveness, or to select new tools from the toolbox to trial in subsequent rounds.

The tools developed in this thesis should be regarded as a starting point for a broader mindfulness-based toolbox. Future research could expand on this foundation by developing additional tools or creating alternative versions of the card deck tailored to specific contexts or professional needs.

Addendum

The work has received some very pleasant feedback. For example, one of the teachers asked me to come and present my work to the entire teacher team. I was pleasantly surprised by the offer and decided to design a small workshop for them instead. At first, I presented myself and my work briefly, and then I had the teachers each pull one card from the toolbox. Next, I calmly guided them through an inner journey with their card reading it, feeling it, and exploring the possible benefits it held for them. Afterwards, I instructed them to share their reflections with each other in groups of four.

No research was conducted during this workshop and no data was collected, but as I could tell from the group, their experience was mixed. Some of them gruffed and told me that they are already doing these things and that it's nothing new. Others seemed interested and wanted to know more. For me, getting this opportunity to lead a workshop was a huge honor. Creating this toolbox has been a very personal journey, and hearing the teachers engage in meaningful reflection through these tools almost made me tear up.

Additionally, the feedback on the card deck has been amazing. From classmates to family, teachers and more. I have received very positive responses. One teacher had a lot of ideas on how to modify the card deck, such as adding a front card with instructions and a short text about me, the author. One person who is studying medicine was impressed by the toolbox and suggested that this kind of tool could be of great use for hospital personnel. Likewise, a social worker asked if there could be a similar card deck designed more specifically for social workers.

I feel the deepest gratitude for this chance to conduct my research, including the amazing trip to Koh Phangan and, all in all, for being able to conclude it with a product that I believe in and am proud of.

Thank you for reading my work.

With love,

Jona

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Appendix A: Card deck example



Appendix B: Interview questions Rick Smith

Question:

1. Could you tell me in your own words what your work on Awakened leadership is about?
2. During the retreat we spoke about inner authority and inner apology. What is inner authority?
3. What is inner apology?
4. Am I in my inner authority during this interview so far? How do you tell?
5. How do we reach inner authority? (Inquiry)
6. How has mindfulness/spirituality/tantra also helped you to become a good leader? Do you remember a shifting moment?
7. During the retreat you mentioned that it is how well we take care of ourselves that is crucial to become a good leader. What does “take care of ourselves” mean?
8. Do you have any suggestions for practical exercises for Teachers?
9. You have read my planning report. What do you think is important for me to consider within my research? You have mentioned, “assume the best” and “inner authority”.
10. What effect have you experienced that the awakened leadership work has on leaders and aspiring leaders? What change happens through this work?
11. In ängsbacka we did an exercise where we held each other's back. Could you elaborate on what we did there and how that could help teachers?

Appendix C: Interview questions intervention

Questions:

1. Would you like to share which tools you have used?
2. To what extent have you used the tools?
3. What is your general experience of using the tools?
4. Have you noticed any changes in your well-being?
5. Have you noticed any changes in your classroom leadership?
6. Do you have any additional input or feedback for the toolbox?