

A Brief Self-Compassion Training Boosts First-Year Teachers' Resilient Mindset and Growth Orientation Toward Teaching Six Months Later



Rebecca N. Baelen¹, Brian M. Galla², & Rebecca A. Maynard

¹Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania

²School of Education, University of Pittsburgh



Study Background

Literature Review:

- First-year teachers face significant challenges & uncertainty during the transition to teaching--challenges that can lead to questioning their self-worth & worrying whether they have what it takes to be successful in their classrooms (1-2).
- High expectations, challenging demands, & uncertainty can take an emotional and psychological toll sapping motivation, undermining self-efficacy, and ultimately increasing the risk of experiencing stress, burnout, and leaving the profession (3-7).

Our Hypothesis:

- Instilling self-compassionate beliefs through a brief training during the transition to teaching can help reduce the common worries of beginning teachers & bolster adaptive beliefs & a growth orientation toward teaching, thereby reducing burnout & boosting commitment to teaching.

Primary & Secondary Outcomes

Primary & secondary outcomes (immediately post-training & 6-month follow-up)

	Immediately Post-Training	6-Month Follow-Up
Primary Outcomes		
Self-Compassionate Beliefs	X	X
Resilient Mindset ^a	X	X
Growth Orientation toward Teaching ^a	X	X
Efficacy Beliefs	X	X
Teacher Self-Efficacy ^b		X
Growth in Teacher Self-Efficacy		X
Avoidance & Proving Goal Orientation	X	X
Secondary Outcomes		
Change in Self-Compassion ^b		X
Teacher Self-Compassion		X
Change in Mindfulness ^b		X
Well-Being ^c		X
Change in Perceived Stress ^b		X
Occupational Stress		X
Occupational Burnout		X
Job Satisfaction		X
Change in Commitment to Teaching ^b		X

Notes: ^a Composite outcome measure derived through both Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Outcome also assessed at baseline. ^b Composite outcome measure derived through Confirmatory Factor Analysis only.

Research Design

- Double-blind, placebo-controlled longitudinal field experiment.
- Teachers recruited in months leading up to their first year of teaching.
- Study analyses were pre-registered with Aspredicted.org and described plan to analyze treatment main effects and explore heterogeneity of treatment effects by baseline characteristics and pre-existing dispositions.

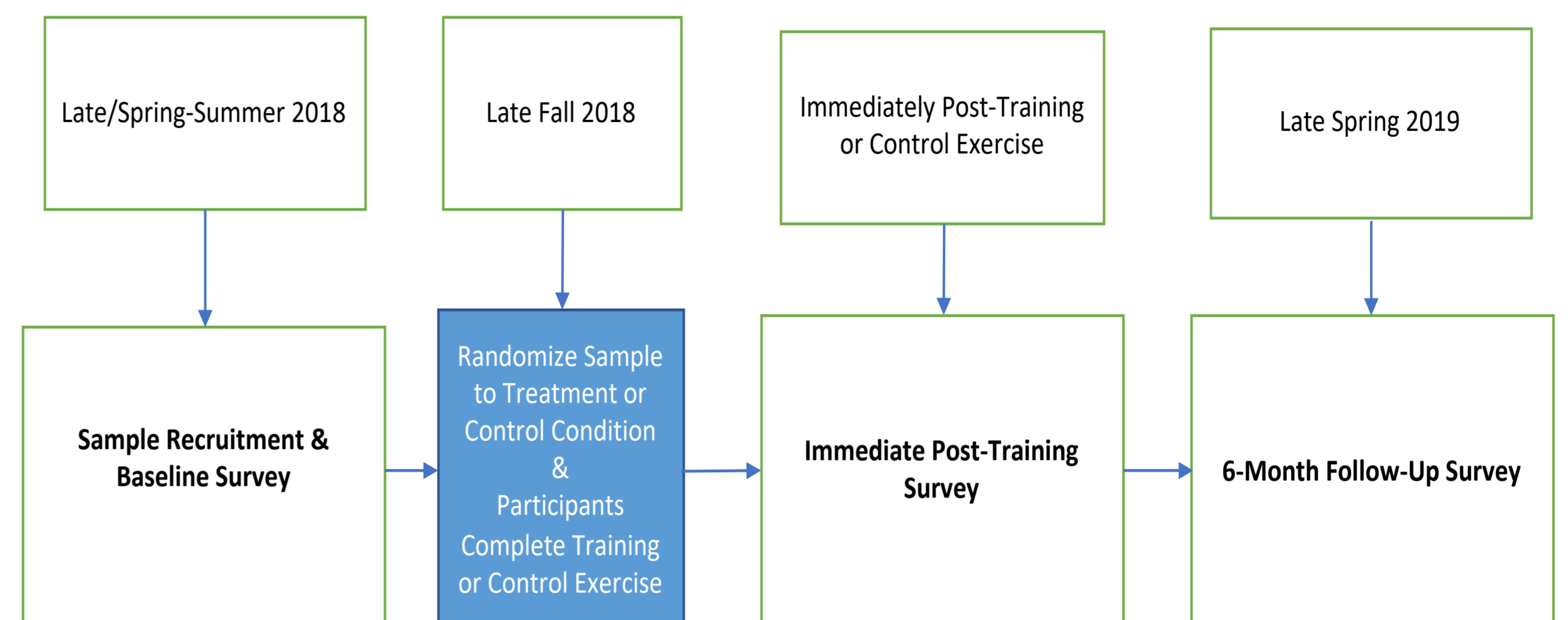


Figure 1. Study timeline

The Sample

- 119 teachers from three teacher education programs completed either the training or control activity & the immediate post-training survey
- 118 teachers completed a 6-month follow-up survey

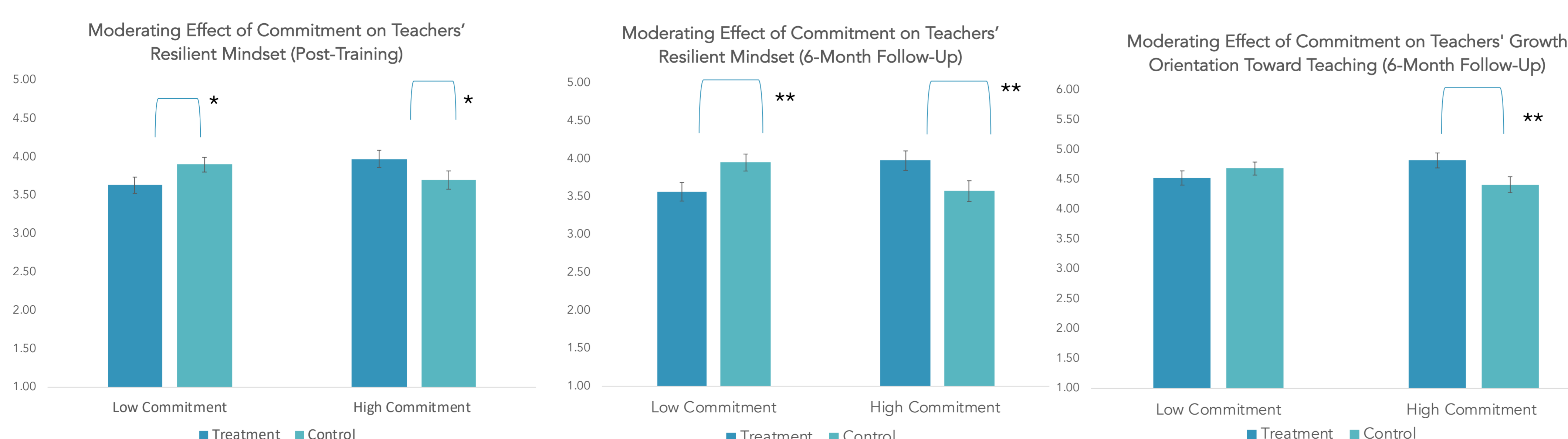
The Self-Compassion Training

Training integrated techniques from social-psychological interventions & insights from contemplative science to tap into and alter participants' pre-existing beliefs about adversity in teaching. The training included three key components:

1. "Psychologically wise" framing, where participants were made to feel like the benefactors, rather than the beneficiaries.
2. Teacher testimonials - developed from focus groups with teachers in each participating teacher education programs. Testimonials were deliberately infused with self-compassionate language (8).
3. 2 written exercises: 1) identifying common themes in the testimonials; and 2) writing a letter of advice to a future first-year teacher in their program (i.e., "saying is believing" technique").

Findings

- No main effects of the self-compassion training on primary or secondary outcomes.
- Training generated positive & significant impacts on a range of primary & secondary outcomes for teachers who reported high baseline commitment to teaching and high baseline perceived stress, as well as for male teachers.
- Training led to adverse & significant impacts for teachers low in baseline commitment to teaching and teachers teaching in private boarding and day schools.



Conclusions

- This self-compassion training represents a novel integration of contemplative science & social-psychological interventions.
- Findings suggest there is value to this integration.
- Future studies should consider treatment heterogeneity when developing and testing these types of trainings (9).
- Given teachers' pre-existing individual differences and the wide range of school contexts, trainings should be designed with teachers' specific adversities in mind.

Contact:

Rebecca N. Baelen
University of Pennsylvania
Email: rnyquist@gse.upenn.edu

References:

1. Friedman, I. A. (2000). Burnout in teachers: Shattered dreams of impeccable professional performance. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 56*(5), 595-606.
2. Hoy, A. W., & Spero, R. B. (2005). Changes in teacher efficacy during the early years of teaching: A comparison of four measures. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(4), 343-356.
3. Haberman, M. (2005). Teacher burnout in black and white. *The New Educator, 1*(3), 153-175.
4. Hong, J. Y. (2010). Pre-service and beginning teachers' professional identity and its relation to dropping out of the profession. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*(8), 1530-1543.
5. Ingersoll, R. (2012). Beginning teacher induction: What the data tell us. *Phi Delta Kappan, 93*(8), 47-51.
6. Liu, X. S. (2007). The effect of teacher influence at school on first-year teacher attrition: A multilevel analysis of the Schools and Staffing Survey for 1999-2000. *Educational Research and Evaluation, 13*(1), 1-16.
7. Richards, J. (2012). Teacher stress and coping strategies: A national snapshot. *The Educational Forum, 76*(3), 299-316.
8. Neff, K. (2003). Self-Compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity, 2*(2), 85-101.
9. Yeager, D. S., Hanselman, P., Walton, G. M., Murray, J. S., Crosnoe, R., Muller, C., ... & Paunesku, D. (2019). A national experiment reveals where a growth mindset improves achievement. *Nature, 1-6*.