Abstract
Mindfulness in schools has emerged over the past few years as an intervention strategy for increasing emotional awareness and emotion regulation and managing student stress. However, in the literature, the affordances and constraints of introducing mindfulness in schools to improve youth well-being has received little attention. This research aims to address this gap by exploring the feasibility and benefits of using mindfulness and yoga to foster well-being (i.e., greater emotion regulation and less perceived stress) among secondary school students. For the purposes of this study, mindfulness is defined as a present-moment, non-judgmental attention and awareness of the ongoing activity of internal and external stimuli. Two phases of this study focused on developing action initiatives for a Youth Wellness Program (YWP) and examining the effects of youth participation on emotion regulation and stress using a mixed-methods convergent design. A collaborative approach to fostering well-being combined participant feedback with mindfulness education to inform the development of a relevant and effective program. Twenty-nine secondary students participated in eight 45-minute mindfulness sessions and eight 45-minute yoga sessions during lunch and after school hours over eight weeks. Four additional weeks of 45-minute sessions that combined mindfulness and yoga were optional and attended by 23 participants. Participants completed measures at three points in time: pre-intervention, during the intervention and post-intervention. It was expected that participation in the mindfulness- and yoga-based program would yield an increase in emotion regulation and a decrease in perceived stress among participants. Quantitative results indicated that an improvement in emotion regulation, perceived stress, self-regulation, mindfulness and perceptions of well-being was observed as a result of participation in the YWP for all participants. There was a negative correlation between mindfulness and emotion regulation indicating that as mindfulness increased difficulty in emotion regulation decreased. The baseline measure of positive youth development (i.e., measures of self-confidence and empathy) revealed that the junior grade level participants had higher than average empathy prior to the YWP while self-confidence was similar between the two grade levels (junior and senior) in terms of comparison. Qualitative analyses of the participants’ feedback yielded eight categories with 21 themes and 107 sub-themes that reflected and provided a deeper understanding of the improvements found in the quantitative data. The implications of these findings for education and future research are discussed.