

Thought Bubbles: The Theory

**A Narrative Exploring the Development of a
Mindfulness Programme for Children aged Five to Seven.**

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Introduction

For this dissertation I have implemented a basic programme of mindfulness-based skills that I have written. The programme was delivered to two classes in Key Stage One, one year one class and one year two class. Each class is made up of thirty-one pupils. The programme was delivered over a four week period following which I evaluated the programme from the perspective of the practitioners who delivered it. The setting in which the programme takes place is a primary school of approximately two hundred and seventy pupils in a semi-rural location close to the city of Wolverhampton. The pupils are of predominantly white-British ethnicity so it is largely mono-cultural but the children come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Mindfulness-based programmes for adults are becoming increasingly well established, particularly in the United States and there are some programmes that have been developed for children. However the majority of these programmes have been developed fairly recently and while some of them are designed to be used with primary age children, the emphasis has been on working with older children in the primary age range. As a mindfulness practitioner I am passionate about the potential benefits for mental health and wellbeing that incorporating mindfulness skills into daily life can have and I am eager to explore the development of a mindfulness-based programme for younger children in the primary age range. I believe that introducing such skills at a young age and therefore giving children a foundation of skills that can be further developed could benefit their wellbeing in the future.

My own interest in meditation and mindfulness has developed over the last five years and I have a well established daily practice. I have taught and led in primary schools across different authorities over the last fourteen years and my experience has led me to believe that there is a need to introduce children to strategies that both enable them to begin thinking about their mental wellbeing and also how to manage it effectively.

Literature Review

In reviewing the literature I initially focus upon defining mindfulness and how the concept has been extracted from a Buddhist context and developed within the field of health and wellbeing. Although it can be said that all major faiths practice mindfulness in some form much of the literature that is reviewed in this dissertation focuses on secular mindfulness that has evolved out of a Buddhist context. Prominent practitioners of Mindfulness like Kabat-Zinn and more recently Puddicombe both have a Buddhist background which has influenced their practice. Following this there will be a synthesis of recent research in this field followed by specific research about the development and implementation of mindfulness programmes. The majority of literature considers the impact of mindfulness for adults however there is a growing body of work that discusses the use of mindfulness as a

tool to promote wellbeing for children. Then I will review the literature on programme design for children both within the context of mindfulness and with regard to initiatives that have been embedded within the primary curriculum.

To remain pertinent to education this literature review will be initiated through educational databases such as Education Research Complete and Education Research Information Centre. However as research into this specific field is in its infancy a wider range of sources will be investigated including peer recommendation.

What is mindfulness?

In The Chambers English Dictionary (2007) mindfulness is defined in the following way:

mindful adj (usually **mindful of something**) keeping it in mind; attentive to it.
mindfully adverb. mindfulness noun.

This provides a useful starting point as it includes key words and phrases that are used to define mindfulness and its practice in both a religious and secular context.

The concept of mindfulness has been present within the practice of Buddhism for the past two and a half millennia and our current understanding of mindfulness owes much to Theravada Buddhism and the Vipassana movement (Wallace, 2002). The Theravada Buddhist worldview is originally based on the Pali Buddhist canon (Wallace, 2002) and the term mindfulness is an English translation of the Pali word 'sati'. Sati connotes awareness, attention and remembering. In English the word meditation has the rather limited connotation of simply being still and calming the mind while the Buddhist Sanskrit term bhavana means cultivation as in cultivation of the mind (Wallace, 2002). This alludes to the potential richness of the practice and its links to an ethical code of behaviour and furthermore behaving wisely. Mindfulness therefore has the potential to be more than just awareness of the present moment and it is important to distinguish it from mere consciousness. The principal meditative practices within the Theravada tradition are those of samatha, quiet contemplation and vipassana, contemplative insight (Wallace, 2002). However they were rarely practised by the layperson as it was thought that they required rigorous monastic training (Wallace, 2002). For most people in western societies this is not feasible but there has been an increasing desire to experience the benefits of mindfulness within the framework of a busy life.

As Buddhism developed over the previous two and a half millennia it spread into the diverse societies of Asian countries and a diverse range of practice (Wallace, 2002). Consequently within these different Buddhist traditions the concept and practice of mindfulness also varied. The diversity of practice was further accentuated as migration assisted in bringing Buddhism to wider audience in the west. An increasing interest in Buddhism and its practices among western societies saw, in some cases, elements of mindfulness taken from different Buddhist traditions and used in combination by western practitioners.

Furthermore western practitioners have adapted these techniques and made them accessible to a 'time-poor' society. It is therefore inevitable that secular mindfulness practiced within a limited time frame does not retain all the aspirations and richness associated with practice in a monastic context (Burnett, 2011). Those aspirations were closely linked to religious beliefs many of which would be quite alien to the average westerner who is likely to live in a country with a Judeo-Christian background that in many cases is becoming increasingly secularised. Prominent mindfulness practitioners like Puddicombe and Kabat-Zinn have therefore taken mindfulness out of its traditional religious context to reassure people that practicing mindfulness is not seen as receiving 'Buddhism through the back door' (Burnett, 2011). They do not deny its Buddhist roots particularly as both men have at one time identified themselves as Buddhists but there is a view that although mindfulness techniques have Buddhist origins 'there is nothing inherently Buddhist about them' (Puddicombe, 2012). From an ethical viewpoint, for young children in a non-denominational setting, it is important to place mindfulness in a secular context so there is no question of them subjected to subconscious religious instruction. The national curriculum (non-statutory) guidance for Religious Education (DCSF, 2010) allows for the opportunity for children to learn about a range of religions including Buddhism and while a mindfulness programme might complement this area of study it must not be part of it.

Mindfulness based programmes such as Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Programme and Headspace's 'Take Ten' programme are designed for implementation as a manageable part of a daily routine and they have assisted me in arriving at a secular definition of mindfulness that might help form the basis of a programme for young children. Furthermore the popular appeal of mindfulness reflects two interrelated trends: the steady increase in consumer demand for alternative healing practices (Eisenberg et al., 1998 cited in Barker, 2014), and the vast proliferation of popular health information in print and electronic media (Seale, 2003 cited in Barker, 2014).

Our definition of mindfulness therefore removes it from any religious context but also recognises its potential as going beyond providing time and space for being still, quiet or just thinking. Rather mindfulness provides the practitioner with a different way of relating to thoughts and the sometimes frantic, activity of the mind. In this context mindfulness can be described as 'the intentional cultivation of moment-by-moment non-judgemental focussed attention and awareness' (Meikeljohn et al, 2012). The intention here is not to rid the mind of thoughts, feelings or sensations but to develop a clearer awareness of moment-to-moment experience with acceptance with a gentle curiosity that is not hindered by judgements about the experience. (Meikeljohn et al, 2012). This is echoed by other definitions that relate to secular practice that describe mindfulness as 'intentional non-judgemental awareness of present-moment experience' (Broderick and Metz, 2009). The focus on being aware of the present moment features heavily in definitions of mindfulness that are central to well known contemporary programmes. In perhaps the most well known definition

of mindfulness as a tool to promote wellbeing Kabat-Zinn describes it as ‘paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.’ (Kabat-Zinn, 1996). This consistent with Puddicombe’s definition of mindfulness as being “present in the moment, undistracted. It implies resting the mind in its natural state of awareness, free of any bias or judgement.” (Puddicombe, 2012). There is a paradox at the heart of this definition. On the one hand mindfulness requires the mind to rest and not to strive or focus on thoughts or distractions too intently yet it is itself a highly disciplinary practice (Foucault, 1977 cited in Barker, 2014). Indeed it brings the level of required therapeutic surveillance down to an ever-smaller increment of time: moment- to-moment or breath-to-breath. There are a host of phrases that capture these contradictory impulses: “One needs to try less and be more” and “intentionally cultivating the attitude of non-striving” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005b, cited in Barker, 2014). One must engage in “doing nothing, on a regular basis, on systematic basis, in a disciplined way” (Kabat-Zinn, 2006 cited in Barker 2014). The true essence of mindfulness can therefore be hard to capture. This is perhaps not surprising when consideration is given to the many interpretations mindfulness has been given over such a long period of time. It is also entirely possible that there is an ambiguity that was present within the early teachings. Gunaratana, who provides what is apparently the most complex (of the definitions above, argues that ‘Mindfulness is extremely difficult to define in words; not because it is complex, but because it is too simple and open’ (Gunaratana 1992: 154 cited in Mace, 2008). He states that in any field, the most basic concepts are the hardest to pin down, precisely because they are the most fundamental, with everything else resting on them (Mace, 2008).

Though it cannot be considered to be mindfulness as defined by a Buddhist or Buddhist-inspired secular perspective, many of its principles sit comfortably within Judeo-Christian monastic traditions and contemplative western philosophy. Even within our increasingly secular society many school children are used to the notion of sitting calmly and still to pray or to contemplate an aspect of a school assembly. Government guidance issued in 1994 required schools to implement a daily session of collective worship and in one form or another schools have continued to adhere to this (DFE, 1994). Although collective worship is by no means entirely contemplative, elements of it certainly are. Religious experience outside of schools, though in decline among certain religious groups, still contributes to the contemplative experiences of some children. Writers like the American Henry David Thoreau incorporated a sense of quiet contemplation and reflection into their work. Thoreau’s description of sauntering through the countryside in order to preserve his health and spirits while contemplating the natural world (Thoreau, 2006) echoed aspects of mindful practice. Contemplative writing in the twentieth century arguably reached its zenith with the publication of Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1957) though later works like *The Dharma Bums* (1958) were more explicitly linked to the Buddhist tradition.

Ideas of being aware of the present moment, having awareness of thoughts, feelings and sensations and being able to view them non-judgementally and with a sense of

gentle curiosity are central to the precepts upon which my programme for young children is based. Placing these ideas against the backdrop of a space and time for children to have the opportunity to be quiet and still, as mindfulness does, might also have benefit children who in this case operate in a busy, sometimes pressurized, data rich environment.

What are the potential benefits of a programme of mindfulness for children?

In order to consider the potential benefits of mindfulness upon well being for children it is necessary to think about why it might be necessary at all. In this dissertation I focus upon the subjective aspects of well being. I define well being as the combination of feeling good and functioning well (Huppert, 2009; Keyes, 2002). Feeling good includes positive emotions, such as happiness, contentment, interest and affection. Functioning well includes a sense of autonomy or self-determination (i.e. the ability to make choices)(Huppert, 2010) competence and self-efficacy (i.e. capability in under-taking daily activities), resilience in the face of challenge or adversity which involves the awareness and management of thoughts and feelings and positive relationships, which encompasses empathy and kindness. In this way mindfulness is another form of 'self-help' that promotes individuals as agents for their own wellbeing (Barker, 2014).

In recent years there has been an increase in the rates of mental illness among young adults (Huppert, 2010) and this corresponds to levels of low rates of well-being, both objective (e.g. health, educational attainment) and subjective (e.g. life satisfaction) among children in economically advantaged countries, such as the UK and the US (UNICEF, 2007) (Huppert, 2010).

Programmes that use mindfulness to promote wellbeing amongst children, though they are growing in number, are a relatively recent phenomena while programmes for adults have existed for some time. In this section I will consider the effectiveness of the programmes for adults first before examining the outcomes of programmes that have been used with young adults and children.

The Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Programme (MBSR), also known as the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Programme (SR&RP), designed by Jon Kabat-Zinn was one of the first programmes to use mindfulness to promote wellbeing and academic discussion regarding its outcomes are well documented. The strategies it uses have been taken out of its original context by other professionals and used in other settings including prisons and schools.

For the purpose of this study I will discuss and analyse the evidence regarding the impact of mindfulness programmes upon mental health in a range of settings. Due to the age of the participants in the programme I have designed most (though not all) of them will not have experienced serious disease or illness and the programme is predominantly designed to give them strategies that might, initially at least, benefit their mental health and well being.



Jon Kabat-Zinn, who previously identified himself as a Buddhist, founded the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society and was the Director of the Center's MBSR programme which began delivery in 1979 (Proulx, 2003). The Center conducted MBSR courses in inner city locations and within the Massachusetts state prison system. Its use spread and hundreds of clinics use the MBSR model along with prisons in other states (Gazella, 2005). By 2006 over sixteen thousand people had completed the programme (Kabat-Zinn, 1996) not only to alleviate the symptoms of daily stress but also to treat a wide range of physical and psychological illnesses (Proulx, 2003). These can range from headaches and back pain to the effects, both physical and psychological of cancer and AIDS (Kabat-Zinn, 1996). It is a programme that is readily adapted to a variety of settings (Proulx, 2003) involving a range of social groups (Proulx, 2003) alongside institutions like sports teams (Kabat-Zinn, 1996).

In general the programme will last from between eight to ten weeks with at least one day being taken as a retreat (Proulx, 2003). Participants are expected to practice the techniques for a certain amount of time outside of the sessions (Kabat-Zinn, 1996) and this is designed to be manageable within the context of their daily lives (Kabat-Zinn, 1996). These exercises include formal sitting meditation, walking meditation, eating meditation and yoga meditation that is guided by audio tapes (Proulx, 2003). Since the programme's inception there have been both qualitative and quantitative research studies related to MBSR interventions (Proulx, 2003).

Studies suggest that the practice of mindfulness develops the ability to observe and describe present-moment experiences nonjudgmentally and nonreactively and to participate with awareness in ongoing activity. Increased mindfulness, in turn, appears to mediate improvement in psychological functioning, probably by cultivating an adaptive form of self-focused attention that reduces rumination and emotional avoidance and improves behavioral self-regulation (Baer 2009).

Outcomes from MBSR related programmes echo these findings. In their study of the effect of MBSR programmes upon the reduction of depression, anxiety, stress and mindfulness in Korean nursing students, Song and Lindquist divided a group of forty-four students into two groups. One group, comprising of 21 students received the eight-week MBSR programme while another group of 23 students acted as a control group and did not receive the programme (Song and Lindquist, 2015). Depression, anxiety and stress were measured with the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21; Psychology Foundation of Australia, 2013 cited in Song and Lindquist, 2015). There was a baseline test for both groups of students using this scale and they were then tested against this scale at the conclusion of the programme.

The study found that when compared with the control group those who received the programme reported significantly greater decreases in depression, anxiety and stress (Song and Lindquist, 2015). Like many studies of the benefits of mindfulness the results of this study cannot be generalized due to the small non-representative

sample size however there are encouraging themes across a range of mindfulness interventions that suggest a positive impact upon well being.

This evidence is supported elsewhere and Neuroscience is beginning to offer some insights into how and why mindfulness training might offer such support. Studies using the eight week MBSR programme in the workplace have found that the subjective sense of stress is reduced while participants have a and enhanced sense of well-being. Tests have shown a decrease in brain activity in regions associated with negative emotion while showing an increase in activity in regions of the brain associated with positive emotion (Goldin and Gross, 2010). This is further supported by clinical studies in the US that have examined the effects of mindfulness on emotional regulation. A study designed to measure the effects of mindfulness was conducted with participants suffering from Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD). The sixteen participants underwent an MRI scan prior to the programme to provide a baseline measurement and another scan was conducted once the programme had been completed. Following the programme 14 patients completed neuroimaging assessments. Compared with baseline, those who completed the programme showed improvement in symptoms of anxiety and depression as well as improved self-esteem. While focusing on the breath participants also showed decreased negative emotion experience, reduced activity in the amygdala, as well as increased activity in brain regions implicated in attentional deployment (Goldin and Gross, 2010). The authors of the study postulated that MBSR training in patients with SAD may reduce emotional reactivity while enhancing emotion regulation. These changes might facilitate reduction in SAD-related avoidance behaviors, clinical symptoms, and automatic emotional reactivity to negative self-beliefs in adults with SAD (Goldin and Gross, 2010). While the results are promising this study was limited to a relatively small sample group and a control group of participants not suffering from SAD was not used (Goldin and Gross, 2010). The study was also restricted to focusing on certain aspects of mindfulness training and could not reflect the possible effects of other aspects of the discipline.

The potential for mindfulness training to assist in the development of sustained attention that was made reference to in the study above, has been the subject of further research. The ability to sustain attention is crucial to success in a number of tasks and within a school setting there are potentially academic benefits. A study conducted in the by psychologists in the US examined the effect of an intensive meditation programme based upon contemplative Buddhist meditation practices (Shamatha). Shamatha practitioners learn to stabilize their attention on a chosen stimulus, such as the tactile sensation of breathing, and enhance the perceived detail of that stimulus in order to cultivate non-task-specific skill in regulating and controlling voluntary attention (Wallace, 1999 cited in Mclean and Ferrer et al, 2010). Practitioners use introspection to monitor their quality of attention, recognize when attention has wandered, and guide attention back to the chosen stimulus. This metacognitive or meta-attentive aspect of *Shamatha* training may support the transfer of meditation skills to other domains (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006 cited in

McLean and Ferrer et al, 2010) and lead to the improvements in perception and attention that are reported in practitioners' daily lives (Wallace, 1999 cited in McLean and Ferrer et al, 2010).

The results suggested that this type of meditation training can improve aspects of attention. This research also found that mindfulness training had a positive effect upon other cognitive processes, such as working memory capacity and nonverbal intelligence (McLean and Ferrer et al. 2010). The research suggested that meditation training can produce general improvements in mental function that can benefit daily activities (McLean and Ferrer et al. 2010). The research was longitudinal and control measures were implemented (McLean and Ferrer et al. 2010). However there are factors outside of meditation practice that could have influenced the results. Changes in personal motivation towards sustaining attention could have been one factor as could the influence of regular interactions with a committed teacher (McLean and Ferrer et al. 2010). With reference to my own research, it is important to note that I am not implementing a programme with the same intensity. Participants in the research above had to commit to a three month retreat in a remote setting (McLean and Ferrer et al. 2010). This is far removed from the programme I have developed that is designed to be integrated into a school's daily timetable.

Research has also focused upon the potential mindfulness has for alleviating 'cognitive rigidity'. The term 'cognitive rigidity' can be defined as a resistance to change in beliefs, attitudes or personal habits, or the tendency to develop and certain mental or behavioral mindsets that an individual is unable to change or modify (Greenberg J, Reiner K, Meiran N, 2012). Cognitive rigidity has been linked to the inability of suicidal individuals to consider alternatives that may be accessible to another person as well as to rumination, a risk factor of depression. Forms of cognitive rigidity were also indicated in obsessions, alcohol dependence, eating disorders and Attention Deficit Disorder (Greenberg J, Reiner K, Meiran N, 2012). The research, conducted in Israel, employed a control group of non-meditators to be compared with a group of experienced meditators (Greenberg J, Reiner K, Meiran N 2012). The programme was an adapted version of MBCT and was conducted over a period of six weeks that included a retreat held over half a day (Greenberg J, Reiner K, Meiran N, 2012). In both experiments following repetitive experience with a complex problem solving method, experienced mindfulness meditators were less influenced by experience and were better able than pre-meditators to identify the simple new solution. The researchers concluded that the findings lend support to the notion that the elements of mindfulness that involve the cultivation of a "beginner's mind" (Greenberg J, Reiner K, Meiran N, 2012) along with an awareness of the present moment can reduce cognitive rigidity. The type of cognitive rigidity that causes an individual to overlook simple novel solutions to a situation because of rigid and repetitive thought patterns formed through experience (Greenberg J, Reiner K, Meiran N, 2012). Limitations similar to those of other research projects exist. The sample size was small, particularly in the case of the first experiment and other potential benefits of mindfulness were not explored. The research was also restricted

to a specific task and future research might consider whether similar results occur over a wider range of tasks or activities.

Research about the potential benefits of mindfulness, having originated in a clinical and health care setting has diversified into an educational one. This is unsurprising given the potential benefits identified within health care provision. Self regulation of emotion, higher attention span, reduced feelings of stress and an improved sense of well-being are all desirable traits in themselves but when placed against the backdrop of poor mental health and high levels of stress, such as those experienced by educational professionals and pupils, they might be seen by some as essential. Furthermore at a time when budgets for healthcare are under extreme pressure a relatively low cost and potentially effective treatment like meditation deserves further scrutiny. In their report written in support of the use of mindfulness to promote positive mental health, The Mental Health Foundation commissioned research to discover more about attitudes towards and practice of Mindfulness in health services, and to gain a better understanding of wider public attitudes towards meditation as a way of promoting and maintaining well-being (The Mindfulness Report, 2010). In support of making mindfulness-based courses more available to people the report suggests that at least thirteen million working days are lost to stress each year. As well as the obvious distress to people's lives there is the additional and considerable cost to health services and the economy. The report indicates that nearly eighty per cent of General Practitioners think it would be a good idea if their patients learnt mindfulness techniques (The Mindfulness Report, 2010).

Research in Canada has examined the effects of mindfulness-based training on groups of teachers using three separate programmes. These studies were typically carried out over a longer period of time. In the first study the Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE) programme was used with teachers over a period of two years (Meikeljohn et al., 2012). The programme was devised by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and came about as a response to increasing rates of stress and burnout. The MBWE programme was based upon the MBSR programme used within a clinical setting (Meikeljohn et al., 2012). The target group were trainee teachers and took the course as part of an initial teacher training programme (Meikeljohn et al., 2012). Results taken from those who participated in the programme were compared to a control group (Meikeljohn et al., 2012). The study indicated that those who had undertaken the programme showed increased self-efficacy and an increase in physical health ratings (Meikeljohn et al., 2012). These initial findings are promising and have formed the basis of a longer study that is currently taking place. Mindfulness based programmes like CARE and SMART have been used with teachers in different areas in America and have yielded similar results. Preliminary studies of both programmes suggest that they have a positive impact on teacher's well-being and skills that are essential to their practice like empathy and listening. However studies of this kind are relatively recent and more research about the impact of mindfulness based interventions in the longer term needs to take place. For example further investigation is needed to better understand

the impact of such programmes for teachers on the pupil's learning and what professional development is needed to sustain 'mindful teaching'. (Weare 2013) also makes the point that so many mindfulness-based programmes incorporate other disciplines like Yoga and elements of a citizenship curriculum and this can make it difficult to separate the effects specific to mindfulness from other factors.

There is a danger that mindfulness falls into cynical hands and becomes a tool for unscrupulous employers to assist their employees in adapting to unreasonable conditions or demands. The Marxist perspective (Stokes, 2003) might view mindfulness as another tool by which the bourgeoisie maintain their hegemony and ensure that their workers do not demand radical change. While there are circumstances in which this might occur mindfulness is not a tool that is used only with reference to the world of work. The increasing proliferation of mindfulness in western society is, at least in part, a response to the pressures of modern life in the west as a whole. The rise in the use of technology along with long working hours, higher expectations of what life should offer alongside a busy social schedule mean that people can increasingly move from task to task without the time and space to think about anything else. In this context mindfulness can offer time to think and allow new thoughts to develop. From this a response to the Marxist perspective can be formed as any new or transformative action relies on a the perspective brought by new thoughts.

Studies on the effects of mindfulness on children are not as extensive as work with adults but the number of programmes aimed at children and the number of studies is growing rapidly, particularly in developed countries including the UK and the results are promising (Weare, 2013). Despite the limited number of studies research suggests that mindfulness programmes are popular with staff and children there are some tangible benefits that might lead to improved well-being and none of the studies have reported any harmful effects (Weare, 2013). The evidence suggests that some interventions for children and young people can have at least a modest impact on improved mental health and wellbeing, reduce stress, anxiety and depression, and enhance academic, cognitive, social and emotional skills (Weare, 2013). This view is supported by Broderick and Metz (2009) who reviewed the Learning to BREATHE programme. The mindfulness based programme was implemented with 120 students who were approximately seventeen years of age in America. When compared to the control group, students who had undertaken the programme reported an increase in feelings of calmness, relaxation and self-acceptance. In addition to this there was also an increase in emotion regulation after the programme had been completed. Children completing the programme indicated that they were more aware of their feelings and better able to let go of thoughts or feelings that caused them distress (Broderick and Metz, 2009). Some students also reported some physical benefits and overall reductions in tiredness and aches and pains (Broderick and Metz, 2009). The study was limited in similar ways to other studies about mindfulness interventions. The group tested was a fairly homogenous one and limited in size. Further research could focus upon the impact of these

interventions upon a more diverse ethnic and social group. Similar programmes could also be trialled with much younger students. However the authors of the study suggest that the benefits that mindfulness based programmes have brought to adults like improved attention, concentration and creativity are central to the 'goals of education' (Broderick and Metz, 2009). They also point to the fact that there is evidence to suggest that childhood is a critical point for the preventing and reducing the risk of stress negatively affecting their lives (Broderick and Metz, 2009). Given what we know about the benefits of early intervention in other areas of learning like speech therapy it would seem to make sense to begin to think about giving children some basic contemplative skills that they can then build upon at an early stage in their education. Getting children into the habit of thinking about their mental well-being as well as their physical well-being at an early age may help improve their chances of better mental health in the future. However the potential academic benefits that may result from mindfulness practice cannot be ignored and it must be said that due to the pressure on all schools to improve their pupil's academic performance, mindfulness programmes will be more attractive to schools if these benefits can be demonstrated. In drawing together various strands of research, Weare (2013) suggests that initial results from different studies show an improvement in executive functioning similar to that experienced by adults undertaking mindfulness. Of all the potential benefits of mindfulness I have discussed, the ability to improve children's ability to sustain their attention appears particularly prescient to our society. The distractions for everyone, including children, are multiple. Mobile phones and games consoles are ubiquitous and as well as their primary function they enable access to emails and an enormous array of other applications. Many of these operations require only fleeting attention and our minds can become used to an almost permanent level of distraction. There are inevitably some consequences that are problematical for our mental health and at times our academic performance. Firstly the mind may struggle to maintain focus on any one particular activity. For a child this may result in underperformance at a certain task and an inability to become immersed in a subject and thereby not fully understand or enjoy it. It may also result in an inability to 'switch off' which may affect sleeping patterns with a subsequent emotional and physical impact. It can be hard to switch off when you're permanently plugged in (Puddicombe, 2012). Mindfulness interventions would appear to be starting to find ways to help students learn to pay mindful attention and there is now evidence of the impact of mindfulness training on awareness and clarity (Weare, 2013). Some of this evidence with regards to adults has been discussed earlier but the potential that mindfulness might have on benefitting children's ability to maintain attention has only recently begun to be explored.

This suggests that mindfulness based intervention is more about prevention and treatment. In short there are potentially effects that are transformative. Much of the discussion regarding mindfulness and its impact on children has focused upon its use as a tool to prevent and treat mental health issues however might it also be something that assists children in flourishing by creating an optimum mental state (Weare, 2013). Mindfulness has been linked to improving pupil's ability to avoid

impulsive behavior, improve the choices they make and improve their goal-setting and resilience (Weare, 2013). The potential benefits of mindfulness as a tool to improve behavior through better emotional regulation and an increased sense of empathy has influenced specific elements of educational programmes unrelated to well-being. Lampe and Engleman-Lampe (2012) hypothesise that mindfulness leads people to act from compassion and the insight it brings can lead to ethical intention and ethical action. Their classes begin with a short guided meditation in order for business students to be in a better position to consider the ethical perspectives of what they are being taught (Lampe and Engleman-Lampe, 2012).

What emerges from the research are some fundamental principles that must be adhered to for anyone who is introducing a programme of mindfulness into schools. I am measuring the success of the programme from the perspective of the practitioners who are delivering it. Nevertheless the principles are relevant to both practitioner and participant. In the first instance it is important that those who are teaching mindful techniques have an understanding of what mindfulness is and the ways in which it might impact. We have uncovered some paradox within its practice and Weare (2013) suggests that while becoming more aware of thoughts and feelings children will at times be more aware of negative thoughts and feelings. From an ethical perspective these need to be dealt with by an empathetic practitioner who understands this might be the case. Furthermore there is a need for practitioners to be able to adapt programmes and ensure they hold the interest of children. For the programme designer it is imperative that there is an element of professional development for teachers included within the structure. The process of sitting in quiet contemplation may be quite alien to many and adaptations might be necessary to the differences between cohorts of children. There are implications for the design of the programme. For very young children it may be necessary to include sounds or movements and the programme might benefit from having a visual element that enhances understanding of the 'mindfulness process'. Consideration must also be given to when teachers are going to implement the sessions, how long these sessions last and how much preparation is needed for each session. If due consideration is not given to these factors then given the pressure put upon teachers and the timetable the programme is unlikely to be implemented effectively if at all. Most school leaders will be aware of the number of initiatives that have not succeeded because not enough time or thought was given to staff professional development and general feasibility. At the beginning of a new set of skills notes for the teachers are included to give them guidance regarding implementation. With regards to children it is important that mindfulness is located within the reality of their everyday lives. Concepts within mindfulness should be discussed with reference to objects or ideas that can easily be understood. The Headspace programme (2012) compares thoughts to cars coming and going along the road and to ripples in a pond, all tangible images that anyone might quickly grasp. The programme also includes some simple animations that aptly illustrate the position that mindfulness might have within regular life. In all the programmes featured, time was a key factor and the need to make the practice of mindfulness a realistic proposition. While the structure of the programme owed a certain amount to mindfulness programmes already

established, due to the age of the children I was working with I also examined the way in which other programmes were designed. The programme is designed to introduce basic mindfulness skills and gradually build upon them by introducing a new concept after a number of sessions. The programme relied upon repetition and practice and new concepts were introduced in addition to the core set of skills that were being developed. This is similar to courses in infant massage (McClure, 2005) in which skills are repeated and gradually added to. From the perspective of the practitioner this approach assists in building their confidence, something that is crucial when introducing new skills to children that might also be new to practitioners. Within the guidelines for working with parents and practitioners new to infant massage there is the opportunity for discussion and feedback something I have included in my research design that I will discuss later. This approach allows practitioners to develop a sense of empowerment; a transformation through practice (Freire, 1993). Inherent to the course in infant massage is a person-centred approach in which importance is placed upon understanding and responding to the needs of the infant (McClure, 2005). A client centred approach can lead to greater self-confidence and self-direction (Rogers, 1979). The programme evolves through collaboration between the practitioner and the learner and the practitioner has the opportunity to make adjustments to the programme in order for it to work in their context. Elements of the programme can be co-constructed with the learners and their feedback is vital. The term 'co-construction' suggests the child is a powerful player in their own learning (Jordan, 2009). There is the opportunity for practitioners and pupils to make sense of the world, interpret and understand activities and observations as they interact with each other (Jordan, 2009). There are a menu of activities, like natural sounds and bubbles, that can support the children's mindfulness practice but the extent to which they are used is flexible and depends upon the children's response and subsequent feedback. To a certain extent the programme is designed to produce a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) albeit with certain layers. On the one hand there is mutual engagement and a sense of joint enterprise between the practitioner and the learner and to some extent a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998) although the practitioner, due to the input prior to the programme commencing, retains the mantle of expert though they may be relatively new to the practice. Another layer to this community of practice exists between the practitioners who are implementing the programme and their joint reflections about how the effectiveness of the programme will help to shape it going forward. The programme has the advantage of not being subject to formal assessment, the learners do not have to be 'done to' in quite the same way as when they are being taught how to use a particular mathematical method or grammatical clause. However this serves to highlight the aforementioned paradox within the practice; all the potential benefits of mindfulness are in themselves by products of the practice and not necessarily easily measurable in a non-clinical setting. For practitioners this requires a shift in perspective from working towards clearly defined measures of success to using more ambiguous measures. In this research piece they will not explicitly measure the impact of the programme upon the children though the response of the children is likely form an integral part of their viewpoint upon

completion. As the research focuses upon the practitioner's perspective there is likely to be a need for the practitioners to communicate and mutually develop their own practice. In education communities of practice are increasingly used for the development of practice as a model of professional development (Bussye et al. 2001 cited in Anning, A. et al. 2009). By introducing new skills as the child develops the programme recognizes Piaget's stages of development but perhaps its closest links are with Vygotsky's zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The programme takes into account a general developmental level, particularly with regards to how long they are expected to spend focusing quietly on the breath and the length of time before new concepts are introduced. This may not reflect the actual developmental level of each child (Vygotsky, 1978) but the flexibility inherent to the programme allows for the teacher to make adaptations if the children are ready to learn new concepts more quickly or if the teacher feels the need to spend more time embedding core skills they can. In this way the programme allows for the children to 'solve the problem' (Vygotsky, 1978) of mindfulness skills with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other (the practitioner). The greater possibilities for children's learning inherent to Vygotsky's work are reflected in the programme. Only a handful of mindfulness-based programmes have been made accessible to children within key stage one. Part of my reasoning for introducing mindfulness at an early age is based on the idea that children are less likely to have developed resistance caused by learnt prejudice or misconceptions and therefore there is a greater chance of children being open to learning the techniques. Furthermore thinking about strategies to manage thoughts and feelings might become a routine part of the school curriculum that is accepted as they move through the ages and stages. Research shows that children are able to develop key skills in numeracy and literacy at an early age, prior to attending school, these are then continuously developed as they move through formal education. Children's perception of their ability in these areas develops concurrently and in many settings grouping by ability is the norm. This directly contributes to the discourse surrounding each child and has the potential to reinforce learning dispositions. Foucault (1980a cited in Leese, 2011) suggests that a 'discourse' is a particular way of discussing a subject that can occur through writing, language and thinking. The potential that mindfulness has for self-regulation of emotions and changing the way that thoughts are related to and the subsequent impact on behaviour allows for the possibility of changing the discourse that exists around a child. Foucault proposed that certain dominant discourses acquire the 'stamp of truth', otherwise termed as 'regimes of truth' (Leese, 2011). Locations like schools and other providers of education are prime locations for 'regimes of truth' to develop and they play an integral part in the way that children and families are viewed and this, subsequently affects the interactions between practitioners and children that take place. In this way mindfulness could play a role in producing a 'generative discourse' that opens up the possibility of new ways of thinking about a given subject or in this case a particular individual. A programme that teaches mindfulness skills represents a new learning opportunity and the possibility for the child of finding a new skill that they have an aptitude for and that they can experience success with. Prior to a child embarking on their formal

education, families transmit a complex range of influences to their children (O'Connor, 2011). The French Sociologist Bourdieu used two key terms to define these influences, 'social capital', which in basic terms means *who* you know and 'cultural capital', which in basic terms means *what* you know (O'Connor, 2011). Intertwined with these concepts is another concept, that of 'habitus'. This is a child's social inheritance, their 'unthinking disposition' to act in a certain way, something that is acquired in the family and the community (O'Connor, 2011). Dispositions to learning are strategies to learning that have become habits of the mind (Jordan, 2009), tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways (Jordan, 2009). By the age of four or five children's disposition towards their learning has developed, primarily, in two ways. These are a disposition towards learning goals, demonstrating the desire to continually improve their knowledge and skills and understand new situations and challenges, or a disposition towards approval of their work or learning by others (Jordan, 2009). The latter is characterized by the tendency to choose easier options to maintain the appearance of competence less they fail and are perceived negatively by others (Jordan, 2009). Of course in the minds of children their view of their ability in certain core subjects like literacy and maths is well developed at an early stage and they can quickly judge themselves against their peers. However the introduction of a new skill, in this case mindfulness, presents the opportunity to level the playing field to a certain extent as few children will have had any experience of learning these skills before. While their overall disposition to learn may be unaffected it is an opportunity for confidence to be developed and the 'discourse', both internal and external about their ability to learn to change. The outcome of a mindfulness programme is not measured through formal testing or results so negative associations with that kind of process will not exist and for some this may remove another barrier to learning. By increasing children's knowledge and skills in this way there is the possibility of influencing their social capital and in turn their habitus. The child that is considered easily distracted and a fidget might adapt surprisingly well by being given an opportunity to be calm and still with a light focus on the breath. Such opportunities might not have been previously available and the child's new knowledge and skill might alter the perceptions of those around them. Furthermore introducing a new subject allows for a greater possibility that a child will find something that they have a natural aptitude for and are therefore able to fulfill their potential. If their confidence in their own ability to learn is boosted this might also have a positive affect on their confidence in other areas of learning. A positive self-concept is necessary for healthy development and learning (Siraj-Blatchford, 2001 cited in David, 2004). From Bourdieu's perspective change can only be achieved through a fair education system that gives children the opportunity to fulfill their potential regardless of the social or cultural capital they have inherited (O'Connor, 2011). The ability of a child to self regulate, an attribute potentially developed by mindfulness can also be linked to the development of a child's autonomy. Autonomy in this case means acting in accordance with oneself (Rogers, 1998). Autonomous actions are those actions that are freely chosen, self-regulated and those for which the proponent accepts full responsibility (Rogers, 1998). The degree to which an act is autonomous is determined by the person's motivation not the action itself (Rogers,

1998). In order for an action to be autonomous it must be committed in accordance with their system of values and beliefs and not merely a response to the pressures applied upon them by others or committed because they are seeking approval from others (Rogers, 1998). An understanding of how to look after their mental health or an understanding that mental health is something that needs to be looked after is an important part of a person becoming a well-adjusted adult who makes a positive contribution to society. Piaget (1965 cited in Rogers 1998) suggested that the aim for schools should not merely be to prepare children for academic testing but rather to prepare them more fully for life in the world around them. He believed the aim for education should be autonomy. This is an interesting concept because if children grow into adults who behave as a result of coercion as opposed to autonomy then their behavior may change depending on what they are being coerced into leaving them open to behavior that might not benefit themselves or society around them. At the opposite end of the spectrum to coercion is co-operation. This most often occurs outside the practitioner-child relationship with peers on a more equal footing (Piaget, 1965 cited in Rogers, 1998). Co-operation occurs in an atmosphere of mutual respect where there is an exchange of perspectives and this encourages reasoning and the development of values, beliefs and understandings that constitutes autonomy (Rogers, 1998). A mindfulness -based programme has the potential to do this as the programme allows them the opportunity to assist in its development and the opportunity to reflect on their feelings and consider the reactions they invoke allowing them to come to their own conclusions about how they might react to feelings differently. This process has the potential to support the development of a child's autonomy. Hutchins and Sims (1999 cited in David, 2004) suggest that when practitioners allow children to assert some power and control over aspects of their lives, they learn to be self regulating and autonomous.

Methodology

This research sits within a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm (Robson, 2011) as it recognises that knowledge is a social construction and it recognises the plurality of truth. I used an action research methodology that began with a problem and then followed a series of actions to address the problem followed by an evaluation at the end.

It was concerned with events that sat within a natural setting rather than an experimental design and it gathered thoughts and opinions rather than numerical data. As the researcher I was the 'interpretive authority'. This principle suggests that the researcher acts as a type of 'cultural interpreter', responsible for the analysis and interpretation of data (Markham, 2012 cited in Kara, 2015: 49). The setting was the school that the children attend on a daily basis and the research took place within a classroom environment familiar to them. This was important for a number of reasons. Firstly, one aspect of the research was to test how well the programme could be integrated into the timetable and the daily curriculum and what links with other subjects could be made. Secondly, I wanted the research to be carried out in a situation that had emotional significance for the children (Dunn, 2005 cited in

Mukherji and Albon, 2011:26) so they were comfortable. They learnt new skills and though I was not measuring their responses, the practitioner's delivery of the programme might have been affected if the children were adjusting to a different environment. In a similar way a change in environment that caused a shift in routine might also affect the practitioner's views of the programme and this might have caused unnecessary logistical difficulties. From an ethical perspective the programme was delivered to whole classes as the reasons for teaching it to groups would have needed thorough investigation and parental consent. It is worth mentioning that at no point in the programme were there any formative or summative assessments made of the children's mindfulness skills. Their opinions were sought but not recorded and the programme did not form part of a report to parents at the end of the academic year. This was important for two reasons. Firstly, the outcomes of mindfulness are subjective and mindfulness provides a private space for personal thought and reflection. There are different systems for measuring well-being but the shorter duration of the course and the age of the children would have made this challenging. There were opportunities for the children to discuss how the exercises made them feel but this was not recorded or subject to assessment against a given scale. Furthermore a result of testing is often ranking both amongst children themselves and by practitioners and settings. This goes directly against the ethos of the programme. The programme has been designed to introduce children to skills that might be beneficial to their well-being over many years. It may be the case that some children find this set of skills particularly useful at this stage in their development while others might find it less useful or relevant to them. Either response was welcomed and it does not necessarily indicate whether or not the children choose to engage with mindfulness and develop their skills in the future. It would appear counter productive if, as a result of a negative outcome of a test, a child then decided that they didn't want to access mindfulness again because of this association. Included within the literature for mindfulness programmes for adults are suggestions to assist them in maintaining their practice. Part of the reason for this is there are times when it is possible to feel distracted or feel that a session has not gone well. This does not mean that a person is inherently bad at meditating or is unable to acquire mindfulness skills but rather that learning mindfulness skills follows patterns similar to learning other skills. There are times when a lot of progress appears to be made while at other times the learning is consolidated or plateaus. The second consideration is the workload of the practitioners. Assessment tends to be time consuming both to implement and then to collate the results and time for this would be restricted by the frequent assessment of numeracy and literacy skills that is already part of school life. Furthermore there would be the added complication of practitioners learning to implement a new type of assessment and given that I am interested in their perspective rather than the perceived aptitude of the children, any assessment of the children would not be included within my research. This study also recognised that there is not 'one truth' to promoting and maintaining positive well-being in children or adults. Mindfulness has the potential to be a useful tool in promoting well-being but it is both inevitable and right that some people will find it more useful than others. This programme does not include any aspect of physical

exercise that is also an important component to maintaining both physical and mental health. There are many other therapeutic interventions like play therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and yoga that are not within the remit of this study. As well as perceived failure, the perception of being coerced into an activity could contribute to a child's negative perception of mindfulness and adversely affect their view of it going forward.

Research Design

The programme is one that I have written myself and it aims to teach basic mindfulness skills to children in Key Stage One. The programme has been delivered to two classes of children in Years One and Two over a four week period. Three teachers delivered the programme because, in Year One, two teachers share responsibility for the class. The programme consisted of twenty sessions lasting for approximately ten minutes each and it was delivered to a whole class. The sessions could have been delivered at any point in the school day and I left this to the teachers professional judgement though I suggested that they tried to find a regular time slot so that pupils knew what to expect and it became part of their routine. Despite the differing ages of the children the content of the programme was the same for both cohorts and part of my research has focussed upon whether the teachers felt that the content of the programme was appropriate for the year group that they delivered it to. Consent wasn't sought from parents because the programme was delivered as part of the school curriculum within the normal timetable. Any child who appeared distressed by the programme or who did not want to take part was allowed to opt out. However it was not the views of the children that were being evaluated but the views of the teachers who delivered the programme. The consent of the teachers to deliver the programme was sought along with the consent of the leadership team. The teachers were able to withdraw from the research at any time.

Prior to the programme I met with each practitioner to:

- What mindfulness is and provide a definition of the concept that is appropriate to the context.
- Discuss how a mindfulness programme might potentially benefit the children.
- Discuss the content of the programme and how they might be able to incorporate it into their weekly timetable. Address any concerns they might have regarding the content and how it might be delivered.
- Provide each practitioner with a journal
- Discuss any potential ethical concerns and ask for their ethical consent to take part in the programme. All participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the programme at any time.
- Allow them time to discuss any other issues or concerns they might have wanted to bring to my attention.
- Provide each practitioner with the opportunity to learn more about mindfulness by signposting them to appropriate reading materials that they

could access if they wish. From an ethical perspective this was necessary to ensure that practitioners were aware of any potentially negative outcomes like heightened awareness of emotions that might have caused upset as mentioned previously. Furthermore research discussed previously demonstrated the need for practitioners to be fully engaged in the process in order to provide a high quality learning experience for the children.

I evaluated the effectiveness of the programme from the perspective of the practitioners who delivered it. Data was gathered from two focus groups (Mukherji and Albon, 2011) conducted with the practitioners at two points in the programme. One took place after ten days (mid point review) and one took place after the programme had been completed. I then analysed the outcomes of the focus groups and used them to draw some conclusions about the effectiveness and appropriateness of the programme that was then amended accordingly. The focus groups were recorded through written minutes and all participants had access to the minutes and had the opportunity to make amendments if they didn't think they were an accurate reflection of their comments or views.

During the first focus group each practitioner had the opportunity to discuss all aspects of the programme and address any concerns they might have had including any amendments they thought might be suitable. The practitioners had the opportunity to discuss any ethical concerns they might have arisen as the programme continued.

The focus groups were conducted with all three practitioners together so that they had the opportunity to discuss the programme with each other while responding to the prompts that I had prepared. The prompts, while making the focus group semi-structured in nature (Mukherji and Albon, 2011), were designed to be open ended and provided the practitioners with the opportunity to freely discuss all aspects of delivering the programme. In the context of this research project time to meet with practitioners was limited and a focus group was an efficient technique for collecting qualitative data. Collecting data from multiple participants at the same time is not only time efficient but it also allows for a greater amount and broader range of data to be collected (Robson, 2011). I was aware that as the facilitator I was responsible for ensuring that all participants had the opportunity to share their views. I didn't want the group to be dominated by one or two individuals (Mukherji and Albon, 2011). In addition to this I wanted to ensure that the views of an individual did not overtly influence the views of anyone else. A dominant and confident personality can cause bias and more extreme views (Robson, 2011). Power struggles between participants of a different professional status can cause conflict and detract from the process (Robson, 2011). This was relevant as one of the participants involved in this research was a senior leader while one participant was a newly qualified teacher. From an ethical perspective it is important to give consideration to perceptions of power that might exist within the focus group. As both a school leader and an

experienced meditator I was aware that my position might affect the responses of the practitioners and the validity of the data. In a study of inter-professional working between agencies Leese (2011) discovered that the knowledge imparted by certain practitioners (viewed as more powerful) was afforded more weight than the knowledge of other practitioners.

Initially I considered gathering their views through a questionnaire that I had prepared. However I felt that fixed questions could restrict the responses of the participants and limit the amount of information gathered. A questionnaire requires the respondent to interpret the question and to use relevant information to construct an answer (Robson, 2011), in doing so other information deemed irrelevant to the question but of interest to the researcher might be lost. I also considered conducting semi-structured interviews but this does not promote a group discussion that can enable participants to clarify their thoughts and views and new ideas and meanings are generated through this interaction (Mukherji and Albon, 2011). In addition to this taking part in a focus group enables the participants to recall aspects of the research that, as individuals, they might have forgotten.

As well as the focus groups, over the course of the programme I kept a journal with notes from any informal discussions held with practitioners along with my own thoughts and reflections. Journals can be used to record qualitative or quantitative data (Kara, 2015) although in this case the data will be entirely qualitative. There are different types of journal used in research that use a variety of media. In this case the journal can best be described as a field journal (Kara, 2015) with hand written notes similar to that of a diary. In order for the programme to be used effectively practitioners might have needed to make minor alterations to the programme at which point my advice might be sought. It is these discussions that could provide an invaluable source of data and form the basis of the prompts for the focus groups. The journal acted as a record of events during the research and was designed to ensure that nothing was forgotten and no data was subsequently lost. Journaling can document initial and changing thoughts about a new way of working (Mukherji and Albon, 2011) as well as being used to account for any decisions made with regards to the research methods (Mukherji and Albon, 2011). As a researcher I wanted the journal to be a reflective tool that I used to reflect upon the impact that the research is having (Mukherji and Albon, 2011). Journals can be entirely private for the researcher's own use (Kara, 2015) but in this case the data from the journal was used in the evaluation of the research. That data included the views of the practitioners and, from an ethical perspective, the practitioners involved all had access to the notes in the journal and the opportunity to suggest amendments if necessary. In this way the practitioners were member checking the data to guard against researcher bias as well as demonstrating that their views were valued (Robson, 2011). The journal was relatively unstructured and this means the interpretation of the information within it lay predominantly with the researcher (Robson, 2011). However member checking and an additional source of data (the focus groups) should provide a triangulation of data that enhances its validity and trustworthiness (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). It is intended that this research project is

the first stage in the development of a programme that will benefit the well-being and self-efficacy of children from a young age.

Results

Week One

In week one the children from both cohorts began the programme by viewing a presentation designed to introduce the concept of mindfulness (see appendix one). The presentation discusses the different emotions that a child might go through during the day through a character. The character is shown experiencing the different emotions and then sitting calmly and peacefully at the end. My journal notes (Ludlow, 2015) indicate that both sets of children liked the character and found it engaging. However some children in year two became excited by the character and the practitioners found it difficult to then introduce the meditation exercise. It was also felt that the presentation was presented the concept simply and in a way that children could understand. The practitioners in Year Two felt that it would have been beneficial for the children to have had more time to discuss the different emotions that they go through in a day and what situations cause different emotions. Following the presentation the children performed some simple stretches and then took part in a short and simple meditation exercise that introduced them to the idea of focussing on the breath (see appendix two). The following two sessions begin with the simple stretches and then move into the breathing exercise while the children slowly count the breaths; the practitioners model this approach to the children. At the end of the third session the practitioners felt that the sessions had been relatively easy to model and administer and that the children had enjoyed having some time to sit calmly and quietly. The practitioners in year two found that some children struggled to be still and became quite fidgety though the majority enjoyed it. The practitioners in year one felt that the children took to the exercises really well and enjoyed the repetition. All practitioners found the repetition within the programme a useful tool to developing their own confidence and practice. In year one they felt the exercises provided a nice 'bridge' between lunchtime and afternoon lessons and that children settled more easily into their learning as a result. Practitioners in both year groups felt that the end of lunchtime was an appropriate time of day for the programme to be implemented as they felt under less pressure than in the mornings before literacy and maths. At this point in the programme both sets of practitioners reported that they were happy that the timings were appropriate and manageable within the daily structure. The week ended with the exercises being completed as previously.

Week Two

At this point the programme continued to focus upon breathing and breathing exercises through blowing bubbles. The children were invited to explore what happened to the bubbles when they blew slowly and for a longer time as to when they blew at a faster pace for a shorter amount of time. The exercises were designed

to enable the children to think about their breathing in a different way and the bubbles featured in another part of the programme where they were linked to thoughts. The practitioners felt that the bubbles motivated the children and provided a different way of them thinking about the breath and breathing. They were effective in illustrating the different ways you could breathe and the bubbles engaged the children. However all practitioners also felt that using the bubbles served as a distraction and it was more difficult for the children to be calm and quiet afterwards and in this way it detracted from the purpose of the exercises. In my own reflections I felt that there was a sense in which the practitioners viewed mindfulness as an effective method of controlling the children or enabling them to be calm for learning and while this might be a useful by product of a mindfulness-based programme it is not the core aim. I reflected upon the possibility that the aims of a mindfulness based programme may not have been explored enough with the practitioners prior to the programme starting. While we had discussed potential benefits to some extent we may not have discussed the possible challenges that some of the exercises might bring in enough depth. From a personal viewpoint I was happy that the children were engaged and enjoyed the activity as well as gaining a better understanding of the different effects of breathing in certain ways. During this week year one practitioners made some useful links with the Physical Education programme. Physical Education was delivered by a sports coach from an external provider and they were keen to incorporate the mindfulness based exercises learnt by the children in their classroom sessions into the beginning of their Physical Education sessions. Further possible links to other curriculum areas were discussed, in particular science and it was encouraging to see that the Year One practitioners saw enough in the programme to warrant its use elsewhere.

During this week the concept of scanning the body to recognise how each part of the body feels was introduced, the children were encouraged to take a breath for each body part. Both cohorts found this challenging initially and the practitioners felt that it was too early to introduce a new skill.

First Focus Group

The first focus group held with all three practitioners was designed to gather their initial thoughts through discussions that were structured around two prompts.

They were first prompted to discuss how appropriate the content of the programme was at this point while the second prompt promoted discussion about the integration of the programme into both the school day and the timetable as a whole.

The practitioners reported that the content of the programme in Year One had been appropriate up to the point where the bubbles were introduced in the second week. During the first week the children had engaged with the programme to the extent that several children asked about it in the morning to make sure that they would get the opportunity to participate after lunchtime. They had enjoyed the presentation and in particular the practitioners felt that the character was an effective way of engaging the children in thinking about mindfulness skills. Both practitioners felt that there should be a greater emphasis upon the children discussing the different kinds of

feelings they experienced throughout the day and the situations that caused them. They reported that this would link effectively to circle times that the children participated in during PSHE lessons. The practitioners felt that the bubbles were effective in enabling the children to think about breathing but that this should exist as a 'one off' session as the children became over excited and it was then difficult to settle into calm mindfulness sessions. They felt that the programme moved too quickly and the children would benefit from continuing to practice the basic mindfulness skills that they had been enjoying. They felt that it was too early to introduce new skills into the programme at this point. They re-iterated that the children had really enjoyed practicing the key skills of focussing on the breathing calmly and they had found the children were more focussed in the afternoon lessons as a result.

Week Three

At the beginning of each session over the course of the week the children repeated the breathing exercises (without the bubbles) and the body scan and the practitioners felt that this built effectively on their prior learning and the older children began to settle in to using the body scan to a greater extent. The week began with a presentation about thoughts using the same character as previously used at the beginning of the programme. For both cohorts of children the feedback from the practitioners about the presentation was similar to that about the previous presentation. Once again the children engaged enthusiastically with the character and the practitioners felt that the presentation was an effective way of introducing a new concept. All the practitioners felt that it was too soon to introduce a new concept and wanted to adapt the programme so more time was focussed upon the breathing and the body scan. The practitioners wanted to give the children more time to discuss the kind of thoughts they had and how it affected the way they felt. I reflected upon the fact that the practitioners needed to be more confident in adapting the materials and the sessions. I also reflected that possible ways in which the programme could be adopted needed to form a much greater part of the work with practitioners that took place prior to the start of the programme.

The presentation compared thoughts travelling through the mind with bubbles to make a link with prior learning and the response of the practitioners was positive to this method of repetition and felt it had helped the children to understand the concept more fully. The programme continued to use simple stretches as a way of both marking the beginning of the session and the end of the session. The feedback about this was positive. The practitioners felt that in the first instance it enabled the children to ensure that they were comfortable and ready to start and it also mirrored the stretches that they were asked to perform at the beginning and end of their P.E. lessons. I reflected upon the fact that this further developed the link to that area of the curriculum and this allowed the programme to fit more seamlessly into the

timetable. In addition to aspects of the body scan were similar to areas of the body that were focussed upon during P.E. The practitioners felt that their leading the body scan by gently naming each area was effective and similar to both P.E and some songs used by the children in other areas of the curriculum.

Week Four

The sessions continued in the same way, beginning with simple stretches, the body scan, a quiet focus upon the breath, reference to thoughts and finishing with simple stretches. All practitioners felt that this effectively consolidated the children's skills though the programme had moved on too quickly. Week four saw the introduction of a positive thinking strategy designed to allow children to reflect on aspects of their day or their lives that made them happy or for which they were grateful. These consisted of three reflections namely the three stars. Reflections from the practitioners evidence that the children engaged with this effectively though they felt that they could have started with one thought or reflection and then gradually built upon this. They felt that many children had struggled to think about three separate things for which they are grateful. As with the introduction of other new concepts the practitioners would have welcomed the opportunity to discuss the kind of reflections the children might have with them to a much greater extent and initially at least due to time constraints this could be separated from the meditation and then brought into the meditation later on in the programme when the children were more secure with the concept. However it was also noted that the three stars linked to circle times that were conducted as part of PSHE and citizenship lessons and the idea of stars mirrored the marking policy (a star and a task). It was felt that these links helped the children to understand the concept more easily. Throughout the week both cohorts looked forward to the programme and were keen to engage with it. The practitioners in Year One expressed the fact that they thought it was a good thing and the programme gave the children the opportunity to think about their mental health at a very basic level. There is an emphasis on physical health through P.E. and aspects of the science curriculum while issues surrounding emotional health are addressed as part of the PSHE curriculum though this the teachers indicated that PSHE sessions were generally used to discuss disputes that may have occurred and did not specifically encourage children to think about how to look after their mental health. The teacher's also indicated that due to curriculum constraints PSHE was not delivered systematically whereas the mindfulness programme, that took up a smaller amount of time could be. This final point was of particular interest as the programme gradually introduces ideas of empathy and positive actions towards others at a later point and the programme could be developed to address issues surrounding feelings and behaviour towards others to a greater extent. Part of the premise of the programme was that children learnt better when they were able to practice new skills little and often as opposed to within a 'spiral' system where they learnt a skill and then revisited it at a later date.

Second Focus Group

The final interview was held after the conclusion of the programme with all three practitioners and was designed to draw together their thoughts about the programme that they had developed over the preceding four weeks. The practitioners were given seven prompts designed to frame their discussion.

The first two prompts were designed to promote discussion about timings. They were first prompted to discuss how they felt the programme worked as a regular part of the school timetable and secondly about how appropriate the length of the sessions were and how this changed as the programme continued.

Prompts three and four were designed to promote discussion about the content of the programme. The practitioners were prompted to discuss how appropriate the material was for the children in both cohorts and how effectively it developed their skills.

The fifth prompt asked practitioners to consider what links were made with other subjects and they were then prompted to discuss whether they felt that there was a need for a mindfulness programme for children in Key Stage One.

Finally they were prompted to discuss any changes they felt might be needed to make the programme more effective.

The programme as part of the regular school timetable

All practitioners agreed that the timetable worked well after lunch and they felt it was important that the time allocated for the programme was the same each day so that the children knew when it would happen and they would be prepared for it. Both Year One practitioners reported that the children asked whether or not the sessions would take place each day. All practitioners agreed that the programme worked well after lunchtime as there was too much pressure on the timetable in the morning whereas the afternoon session allowed them time to implement the programme without being under pressure to get it done too quickly. The year one practitioners felt it provided a different type of activity for the children and this helped the children and the practitioners to cope more effectively with the longer afternoon sessions. All practitioners felt that the programme was relatively easy to administer because it did not rely on worksheets or complex digital resources.

The length of the sessions over the course of the programme

For both cohorts of children the sessions lasted for between five and ten minutes. Both the year one and two practitioners reported that they felt the timings were appropriate. The year one practitioners felt that ten minutes was probably the maximum amount of time that the children were able to focus on the skills for. The year two practitioners agreed with this reflection though they felt certain children could have focussed for longer. The new skills that were introduced did not affect the timings greatly though the sessions involving bubbles required more time for preparation and tidying before and after the sessions. All the practitioners felt this was an argument for making a session with bubbles a 'one-off' occurrence rather than an integral part of the programme. This could then be planned in connection

with afternoons when they had more time and it could be connected to other activities or topics.

How appropriate the course material was for the children in both cohorts

The year one practitioners felt that the initial presentation and the key breathing skills were entirely appropriate and the children enjoyed having the time to it calmly and quietly. The children enjoyed learning through the character introduced in the presentation and it helped them to learn some basic skills. However they reported that as the programme continued the children found the purpose of some concepts more difficult to understand and the practitioners felt that they would have liked more time to spend on the breathing skills only before moving on and adding to the children's skill set. Both sets of practitioners felt that the bubbles was an interesting and engaging way of enabling the children to learn about their breathing but it should be taught separately and not as a regular part of the programme. The year two practitioner felt that the children could understand new concepts but they would have valued more time spent on embedding the breathing exercises only. The practitioners felt that a slower pace would also allow them to further develop their own mindfulness skills and they would then learn more effectively alongside the children. The year two practitioner felt that the presentations were effective in introducing mindfulness skills but the some children engaged with the character to such an extent that they found it difficult to engage with the breathing exercises. The year two practitioner felt the materials could have allowed for a greater amount of discussion about feelings and what might cause them. The year one practitioners felt that it was beneficial for the children to see them modelling the skills rather than the skills being modelled digitally by someone the children were unfamiliar with. They felt this encouraged pupil engagement.

How mindfulness skills were developed over the course of the programme

Practitioners from both year groups felt that, while the programme allowed for a clear and understandable progression of skills, it moved at too fast a pace. They felt it would have been more beneficial for each skill to be taught and practiced over a longer period so that both the children and the practitioners were more secure in their practice. However both sets of practitioners reported that certain children appeared to be ready to move on at a faster rate and they felt that the programme could also be effectively delivered to groups of children as well as a whole class. Both sets of practitioners reported that the progression of skills made sense but needed to be introduced more gradually.

How did the skills taught link to other areas of the curriculum?

Both sets of practitioners felt that the sessions linked well to the physical education programme that was being delivered. The children used the breathing exercises in the same way at the beginning of P.E. sessions and at the end. They reported that for this to take place the person delivering P.E. needed to see the value of these

skills and might need training in mindfulness as well. Some links were also made with PSHE circle time sessions and both sets of practitioners felt there were links that could be made with the science curriculum though none were over the course of this programme. The practitioners reported that the timings of the programme made it easier to make these links because the sessions were relatively short and were able to be integrated at other times of the day if necessary.

Is there a need for mindfulness skills to be taught to children in Key Stage One?

All practitioners felt that the skills that were introduced to the children during the programme were necessary because they effectively introduced the children to the concept of looking after their own mental health. The year one practitioners felt that it promoted the children's autonomy because it gave them strategies that they could use themselves and some children had begun to talk about using them at other times of the day and in other situations. Both sets of practitioners felt that the children benefitted from having a period of quiet reflection during the day and that no other curriculum area provided this in quite the same way. However they also agreed with one another that mindfulness skills should be part of a broader strategy for enabling children to manage their mental health and other practices like yoga, Tai Chi and therapeutic play strategies should also be made available to young children.

Are there any changes that could be made to the programme to make its delivery more effective?

Both the year one and two practitioners reported that the programme introduced new skills too quickly and for both themselves and the pupils a greater emphasis on embedding the breathing exercises would be beneficial. The year two practitioner felt that the programme should allow more time for children to discuss their feelings and what might situations might cause them in order to generate some 'real life' examples and give the sessions a greater sense of purpose. The year one practitioners felt that the initial breathing exercises could be further developed with the addition of sounds from the natural world and possibly some simple movements. They felt this could then be linked even more closely with P.E. sessions. The use of the bubbles was effective and engaging but both sets of practitioners felt it should be restricted to one session that could be taught separately or as part of the programme as this distracted from the key purpose of the sessions. All practitioners agreed that there was a need for more in-depth training in mindfulness skills if the programme was to be effectively delivered as it became more complex and this training would need to be delivered more widely so effective links to other curriculum areas could be made. It was also felt that the programme could be effectively delivered in smaller groups and not just as a whole class and that some children were particularly enthusiastic about the programme and might benefit from longer and even more

focussed sessions. The practitioners felt it could be used to target certain children who might be in particular need of strategies to improve their mental health.

Conclusion

In this section I will draw together my conclusions from the research about:

- How effective a mindfulness-based programme is to deliver to children in key stage one within the current system of education.
- What strategies might enhance the delivery of a programme of mindfulness-based skills to children in key stage one.
- The need for the implementation of mindfulness-based programmes to children of this age.

My research has examined the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based programme from the perspective of the practitioners who have delivered it. However their perspective is, in part, informed by the pupil's reactions to different aspects of the programme and this is reflected in the results of the research and, as a consequence, some of the conclusions made.

The results of the research indicate that children in this age range are not only capable of understanding and practising basic mindfulness skills but some children actively welcomed the opportunity. The delivery of the programme was enhanced by the initial simplicity of its design, there were no worksheets to copy and few digital resources to access that might extend the preparation time and might require passwords to remember and a fully functioning network of computers. Teacher's workload has become an increasing concern for teachers and teaching unions over the past twenty years. Government responses with the introduction of planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time have, in part, reflected this but the issue is far from resolved. For the programme to add, in any way to this workload could have had a negative impact upon delivery affecting both the attitude of the teachers and putting such pressure on their time that delivery might have been extremely difficult to facilitate. In the context of this research this could be considered on the one hand unethical and on the other hand it would not create the optimum conditions for the programme to be effective. There is a further reason for such a programme to be designed in this way. Photocopied resources and remote digital delivery do not always allow for teachers to learn alongside pupils and co-construct the learning. This co-construction is particularly relevant to something that different cohorts of pupils will respond in different ways. What emerges through co-construction is a programme that is bespoke to the needs of the pupils and of which both teachers and pupils have ownership. Mindfulness-based programmes, without the need to prepare children for a test allow for communities of learners (Wenger, 1998) to develop and this was seen to a certain extent during this programme as teachers and pupils learnt new skills together. However the results also attest to the fact that, while the skills were probably being developed in the right order the pace of their

development was too fast for the children and more time was needed for children to develop the more basic skills before moving on. The results also attested to the fact that more needed to be done to prepare the practitioners prior to the programme. Most mindfulness programmes require that those teaching them are not only trained in the programme material but also have an established personal practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1996). An established practice enables the practitioner to gain an understanding of the more complex mindfulness skills and concepts. The results of the research point to the fact that the practitioners were not entirely comfortable with teaching aspects of the programme as it progressed. The Vygotsyan model (Vygotsky, 1976) requires the presence of a more knowledgeable other and while this was true of the earlier stages of the programme it might not have been true as the programme progressed. In addition to this some of the practitioners feedback suggested that the aspects of the programme they deemed effective was partially based on the fact that the children were calmer and easier to work with as a result. Aspects of the programme like the character in the presentations and the bubbles were less favourably received and this was partly as a result of the children becoming excited and less easy to control. While calmer children might be a desirable bi-product of a mindfulness-based programme it should not be considered a sole aim in itself though in the interests of making it easier to facilitate the programme within a hectic timetable re-structuring the use of bubbles is an obvious consideration. This does though suggest that more time was needed to prepare the teachers to deliver the programme that goes beyond its mechanics and focuses more on developing the practice of those who are willing to deliver a mindfulness-based programme to enhance their understanding of the possible benefits for children of these skills. There is evidence in the results that the character in the presentation and the bubbles engaged the children in thinking about mindfulness and its purpose for these strategies not to be discarded altogether. Children's television programmes that have had success as educational tools such as Sesame Street include visual characters that engage children (Huston and Wright, 1998) and given the proliferation of devices that rely on visual images like i-pads and games consoles that children are exposed to some visual element is necessary. There is a growing body of evidence that valuable learning does occur through communication technologies (QUOTE) and the programme must allow for the fact that some children might find the character and the presentations an effective introduction to learning the skills. In a similar way the bubbles provide a way for children to learn about their breathing through experimental play. Given that at least half the children to whom the programme was delivered had only recently experienced a curriculum (EYFS, 2014) that emphasise the role of play in learning a practical element that is also fun might be important in aiding the understanding of some children. As stated earlier, it is when and for how long this strategy is delivered that need to be considered rather than abandoning it altogether. One of the potential enhancements that emerged from the results is the introduction of music or natural sounds in order to help the children consolidate their skills and provide a background to their focus on the breath. While this is not a progression of skills it allows for the possibility that for some children it might enhance their experience and make practising the skills easier or more

pleasurable. In year one it was clear that the programme moved the children on too quickly and the introduction of sound might provide another interesting aspect of mindfulness that does not mean they have to learn something new. Introducing sound gives the programme an audio dimension that provides practitioners with another tool with which to deliver and something else they can adjust and adapt to ensure the programme is bespoke to their cohort of children. All of the elements of the programme could be delivered to groups of any size and it might be possible to use mindfulness-based programmes to target or be made more accessible to groups of children in the future but both ethically and practically that goes beyond the scope of the research conducted for this assignment. There should always be the possibility for additional exploration of the concepts and practices of mindfulness by those pupils who feel that it is particularly beneficial or who have fostered a curiosity in the subject as there are with other curriculum areas. However this would require a carefully considered commitment to a mindfulness-based programme and a rigorous consultation with parents. In general certainly at this age any attempts at differentiation within year groups would I feel give the wrong message to children and would ethically contradict the core aims of the programme. Promoting the idea of looking after your mental health and then providing a some strategies to do that should be made available to all though I am in agreement with the practitioners who took part in this research that mindfulness skills should be presented as one tool among many as a way of doing this. It is clear from the results that the there are differences between how the programme might be delivered to children in different year groups within the key stage.

One question still remains; has this research project given any indication as to whether or not teaching mindfulness skills has a place in the curriculum? In short are any of these skills necessary or useful to either practitioners or children? The practitioners gave some indication that the programme did provide some evidence that teaching these skills to young children might be useful and some of these findings echo those found in previous research. The practitioners indicated that the programme offered the children two distinct opportunities that did not already exist. In the first instance the opportunity, for a relatively short time to sit calmly and quietly in a space of focussed attention during which time they were not learning through work or play. Secondly it offered the children the opportunity to consider their thoughts and feelings and the effect they had upon them in a systematic way. The practitioners had reported that pressure upon curriculum time meant that 'circle time' activities were restricted for use as a reaction to specific incidents and did not have a fixed place within the curriculum. In this way circle time was used as a reactive measure while the mindfulness-based programme was used as a *proactive* measure for children to consider thoughts and feelings and develop strategies to manage them. As indicated earlier the feedback from the practitioners suggests that a mindfulness-based programme has the potential to be a valuable tool in promoting positive mental health in children. One of the positive aspects of this research project was the links that were made with the physical education programme and this cross- curricular approach is important to the effectiveness of mindfulness-based strategies. The



danger of such a programme is that children use the strategies only within the time allotted to the daily sessions. Experienced practitioners emphasise the importance of disseminating those strategies into everyday activities (Hanh, 1976). When discussing the reaction of the children to the sessions the practitioners hinted at the potential for children to develop their autonomy (Rogers, 1998) and begin to manage their own mental health but in order for this to be fully realised an integrated whole curriculum and whole school approach is needed. In order for this to be effective the results indicate the need for more in-depth training for the adults delivering the sessions and training that takes into account other practitioners within the school. In conclusion this research project indicates that there could be a place for a mindfulness-based programme for young children but its success depends on the commitment and approach of the setting so that it does not become a strategy used nominally to 'tick a box' and satisfy higher educational authorities or an inspection regime.

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