Mindfulness?

An Exploration of Teachers' Reflections on 'Mindfulness' and its Practice in Today's Primary Classroom.

Michelle Larkin

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Student No.: 18342610

Name: Michelle Larkin

Supervisor: Dr. Clare Maloney

Dr Clare Maloney

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Michelle Larkin

May 11th, 2020

Abstract

With the increasing popularisation of mindfulness in society, it is important to seek an understanding of this influence on the traditional practice of mindfulness. Research on the effects of mindfulness has increased in recent years, especially in education on elements such as stress, behaviour, and anxiety. However, we must seek to critically analyse the personal understanding and knowledge of those who are implementing the practice. This research study examines the experiences of ten mainstream primary school teachers and their understanding of the practice of mindfulness, the influences that may have affected their attitudes towards mindfulness, and their opinions on its role within education. The findings of this study illustrate that a broad and contemporary understanding of mindfulness is held by all participants, however, they lacked understanding and knowledge of the traditional elements of the practice. Societal influences were seen as a burden as they were surrounded by a constant pressure to practice, which affected their relationship with mindfulness at times. Mixed viewpoints were explored on the topic of mindfulness in schools and a lack of time, training, and understanding was evident as a hinderance to their practice. The researcher concluded that there is a need for personal training on the fundamental elements of mindfulness before it can be explored with others. Care needs to be taken when implementing a whole school policy, as the participants suggested, as since the objectives must try and be aligned with the fundamental aims of mindfulness and not just be used as a scientific/behavioural tool to combat classroom behaviours. All staff opinions must be considered before the implementation to assure that it is an agreed upon practice and that it is adaptable and suitable for each classroom level and teacher. Mindfulness holds many benefits for a range of people and if practiced correctly can be a lifelong discipline.

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I would also like to express my genuine gratitude to the teachers who kindly volunteered their time to participate in this research study. This research could not have been achieved without their open conversations and willingness to contribute truthfully to the study.

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Abbreviations

ABBREVIATION	MEANING
CPD	Career Professional Development
DES	Department of Education and Skills
MBI	Mindfulness Based Intervention
MBSR	Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
MMFT	Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

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Chapter One: Introduction

This study seeks to investigate the current attitudes of mainstream primary school teachers towards the practice of Mindfulness. Specifically, it seeks to explore the teachers' personal experiences of mindfulness, what they believe mindfulness to be, how their beliefs and practices may have been influenced, or if they feel that it has a role – or not – within the primary school setting.

The researcher chose to undertake this investigation because of an interest in the fundamental elements of the practice. Having been exposed to the practice through family members who would use it regularly, and throughout a master's degree course, she had also personally practiced and studied it in lectures. The researcher chose to ask specific questions exploring teachers personal use of mindfulness and their opinions on it within the education system. These questions were chosen in order to open up to further investigate the current popular rise of mindfulness theories and practices within contemporary society. The researcher also seeks to question a possible lack of research into people's perceptions of its modern-day use. The researcher hoped to gain a deeper understanding of what the impacts of a highly popularised traditional practice was on the lives of teachers who may be asked to implement it within their classroom.

At the beginning of this investigation, significant research was being undertaken on the topic of mindfulness within education. However, there was a lack of research based on personal opinions and experience. A high volume of literature was published based on scientific studies on the effects of mindfulness on things such as stress, anxiety, or behaviour in the classroom. The researcher found these fascinating but questioned their ethical positioning within the education system. Nevertheless, she began with an open mind as Cohen et al. (2011) states, "highly reflexive researchers will be acutely aware of the ways in which their selectivity, perception, background and inductive processes and paradigms shape

the research" and she did not want her preconceived notions of the practice to cloud her judgement. For this reason, focus groups were chosen to enable an open discussion between teachers with a limited amount of input from the researcher to combat any sway in the data. In terms of the data analysis, this was carried out in a subjective manner and as multiple themes became apparent, the most relevant, appropriate, and interesting ones were chosen to discuss further.

This dissertation is compiled of five chapters. Chapter two seeks to explore the current literature on the topic of mindfulness, concerning mindfulness in general as well as its practice in corporate structures and education. Chapter three provides a description of the broad aims and elements of the research design, as well as the ethics and practicality of the focus group method that was employed. Following this, the data analysis in chapter four will discuss the main reported findings of the research with relevant references being made to recent literature. Lastly, chapter five presents the succinct culmination of the findings and provides relevant recommendations for future research into mindfulness studies, both in general and within the education system.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Mindfulness has been receiving more attention in popular culture that ever before, with it being adapted and integrated into universities, government agencies, corporations, school districts and the leisure industry (Robinson & Erwin, 2016). There has been a significant surge in research, especially among educators, over the past few years on different methods being used to explore the effects of mindfulness on children in schools. Much of this research has focused on elements such as children with additional needs, children's behaviour, stress, or anxiety levels in classrooms and many more. With this range of diversity in studies, we are clearly faced with questions relating to the definition, meaning, and interpretation of the term 'Mindfulness'. In saying this, the definitions of Jon Kabat-Zinn seems to be used as the most popular choice as he is internationally known for his work as a scientist and meditation teacher, while also being involved in bringing mindfulness into the mainstream of medicine and society (Kabat-Zinn, n.d.). He is also the creator of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme and the Centre for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society. Kabat-Zinn (2004) has referred to the term mindfulness as; "the ability to direct attention to experiences as they unfold, moment by moment, with open-minded curiosity and acceptance". This modern view stems from traditional Mindfulness techniques that come from original Buddhist teachings where one tries to notice present thoughts, feeling and sensations without judgement (Farias & Wikholm, 2015). Even though over the years it has been adapted and has assumed many different forms, its purpose has tried to remain constant, focusing on the individual's inner experiences and looking at how they can centre themselves to end suffering (Fossas, 2015). Yet, as the Buddhist tradition has transitioned into the contemporary world a question arises as to whether or not we might be concerned about the secularisation of practices that were once rooted in spiritual, ethical, nonviolent and faith-based traditions.

Researchers Contrasting Opinions

     Differing opinions have been generated among researchers over the past few years exploring such questions on the role of mindfulness in society and education in combating different individual problems such as anxiety, depression, or certain behavioural problems. O'Donnell (2015) would object to its functionalist use by saying, it has been "uprooted from a rich wisdom tradition and has lost sight of its ethical orientation by focusing solely on symptoms rather than the causes of suffering". Others suggest that an emphasise needs to be placed on the value of the practice of mindfulness and its effects on our wellbeing, not as a prescribed 'fix' for a problem or the enhancement of our abilities, but to nurture experiences that are fundamental to our state of wellbeing (Robinson & Erwin, 2016). Jones (2011) discussed the importance of mindfulness and how he thinks that it has as much of a place in our society and education system as exams do, as it prepares students for facing life's difficult challenges outside of school. However, he also warns of potential barriers to mindfulness in schools, such as parents, carers, or teachers who may feel that using mindfulness would label their children as having problems that need fixing (Jones, 2011). Largely concurring with O'Donnell (2015), Grossman (2011) has been outspoken in his criticism of mindfulness and its different measurement scales, particularly those who would rely on self-reports by Mindfulness Based Intervention (MBI) course participants. The main weaknesses from such sources he suggests is that they were taking mindfulness out of its ethical and traditional foundations to measure only specific aspects of it that they sought to focus on, such as the capacity to stay in the present moment, consequently risking the distortion of mindfulness as he would present it (Grossman, 2011). Mindfulness in some ways has been chopped into bitesize interventions or management tools with measurable outcomes in the pursuit of a short-term outcome to comply with societal views of how we as a society should act or feel in certain circumstances. Mindfulness practice requires the longitudinal perspective and the development of knowledge and understanding, that only

practice brings, to gain long-term benefits (Batchelor, 2014). It is therefore being suggested that mindfulness is in danger of being assessed according to strictly evidence-based criteria that can be studied, measured, progressed and registered in a linear-like progression from step to step. This evidenced based view is at odds with original teachings and has therefore been adapted to suit modern interpretations and certain interventions of practice.

Corporate 'Modernisation' Of Mindfulness

Corporations such as Apple and Google have co-opted this practice for its employees by running mindfulness trainings and events in the hope of gaining optimal work productivity and to enable its staff to discover their full work potential (Thomson, 2016). Consequently, this outlook on mindfulness looks at how the employee can improve their situations themselves, without looking at the factors that may be causing unrest or problems with productivity in the workplace itself. O'Donnell (2015) states that "in corporate mindfulness in particular, the focus is explicitly on managing 'inner conditions' without critical interrogation of the workplace". Outer conditions of the workplace are of lesser consideration or investigation; hence the responsibility is placed on the employee to deal with and fix their circumstances themselves so as not to impact on their productivity within the workplace. These mindfulness trainings, however well intentioned, also show a hierarchical system in corporations. Apple's mindfulness programmes have been openly available to its employees working in their main corporate structures, but their availability and accessibility to workers on the shop floor is less evident (Stone, 2014). It is therefore possible that certain workforce staff are being excluded from their corporate practice. Apple has also been shown to give incentives to its employees to begin using these mindfulness practices, such as the possibility of achieving or winning material objects like t-shirts, pins or an apple watch band (Broussard, 2018). This usage may serve to undermine the value and tradition of the practice by placing

monetary gain as the main aim, rather than self-reflection, regulation, or wellbeing.

Mindfulness in our contemporary world has been seen to adapt and re-construct itself to try to

suit the needs of the masses rather than allowing us to alter practices to focus on our own

individual situations

Mindfulness Usage In The Army; Strategic Or Unethical?

Other ways in which the use of Mindfulness has been taken out of context and used in

unethical and non-traditional formats would be its integration into the training of soldiers in,

for example, American army regimes. It raises many issues about the misuse and, in some

cases, outright abuse of MBIs since foundational mindfulness values such elements as non-

violence, loving-kindness, compassion and non-materialism (Hyland, 2015). These are self-

evidently and fundamentally at odds with aspects of the core business of corporations and the

military. Purser (2014) points to the absurdity of separating mindfulness from its ethical

foundations of compassionate non-harming in order to train soldiers to be more alert and

efficient while at war. It has been taken and transformed into a coping technique to deal with

a world of sensory and information overload (O'Donnell, 2015). The programme

'Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training' (MMFT) is what the army is implementing, and

it is a clear adaptation of Jon Kabat-Zinn's well-established MBSR course. MMFT is a

twenty-four-hour program taught to cohorts of soldiers over an eight-week period prior to

deployment (Richtel, 2019). Army infantry soldiers at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii began

using mindfulness techniques to improve shooting skills, for instance, focusing on their

breathing and using this to determine when to pull the trigger amid chaos to try to avoid

unnecessary civilian harm (Richtel, 2019). MMFT has received some positive media

attention for its focus on mental health and what it can do to combat Post-Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) in soldiers. This positive attention, however, has managed to take attention

away from the obvious ethical question of employing mindfulness training for achieving 'optimal warrior performance' (Purser, 2014). In ethical frameworks there is a strong contradiction between the world of 'military ethics', that discuss sparing the lives of civilians while taking better aim at the designated enemy, and in Buddhist practice where the ethical decisions are made based on intentions of non-violence and not harming others (Purser, 2014). The US army is emphasizing the MMFT practice as a component of readiness and stress-reduction, but the option of not putting soldiers in traumatic situations to begin with as a stress-reduction strategy is largely being omitted (Stone, 2014).

The MMFT practice is consequently seen to be at odds with the Buddhist teachings of non-violence. As Gandhi was a strong believer in non-violence being the 'law of our species' and subsequently being the bond that unites all human beings (Mathai, 2012), this MMFT practice would thus contradict his teachings on ethics and non-violence. Gandhi strongly objected to violence, not just because unarmed people had little chance of success in an armed war, but because he considered violence a weapon which created more problems than it solved (Nanda, n.d.). He spoke about the subsequent trail of hatred and bitterness that was then being left in these war-torn areas after the violence making it impossible for genuine reconciliation to take place (Nanda, n.d.). Mathai (2012) states that normally nonviolence would be understood to mean non-hurting, non-injuring, and non-killing but this was not what Gandhi had really meant. For Gandhi, nonviolence was not a negative concept but a positive one which meant love in the sense of selfless service to one and all human beings (Mathai, 2012). While the MMFT programme is being referred to as mindfulness training, this is at odds with the teachings of non-violence in Buddhist mindfulness teachings.

Positive Effects Of Mindful Based Practice In PTSD

This argument on the ill-effects of the use of MMFT, however, is not to be misconstrued as an attack on the use of mindfulness by all army personnel. There have been many positive studies done on the effects and benefits on the use of mindfulness by soldiers suffering from PTSD. One such study, "*Changes in Mindfulness and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms among Veterans Enrolled in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*", looked at the effects of MBSR on PTSD victims. The study explained how PTSD can have significant negative impact on the overall functioning and quality of life of its suffers, but it suggested that increases in mindfulness practices were associated with significant reductions in PTSD symptoms (Stephenson, Simpson, Martinez, & Kearney, 2016). Other studies have shown similar results, such as the study *"Mindfulness in the Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder among Military Veterans",* which explored the effects of mindfulness practices on PTSD symptoms and showed enhanced emotional regulation and decreases in both anxiety and depressive symptoms among its participants (Vujanovic et al., 2013). With these positive outcomes, every effort should be given to further develop and investigate these studies to help provide relief to those who suffer from PTSD or similar disorders, not just within the army but for the general public also.

The Rise And Possible Fall Of Mindfulness In Education

Similar successful studies have been undertaken in education settings where researchers have looked at elements such as anxiety, depression, or behavioural problems within the classroom. Many teachers who have implemented mindfulness into their classrooms claim to have noticed a significant decrease in negative student behaviours with a corresponding increase in academic engagement (Byrne, 2017). However, this is open to question. Mindfulness in schools is extensively used as a management tool to combat daily

stressors without looking into the underlying causes and triggers for these stressors. How the practices are used and viewed in the school from the management to the teaching staff is particularly important. It must be seen and used as a valuable tool that may enable both the staff and children to thrive long term, to experience agency in their lives and work, to learn to speak more honestly, and to listen carefully and respectfully to others both in and out of school (Byrne, 2017). If it is seen as just another item to be forced into an already packed curriculum then it may be unlikely to be effective, as students and teachers will be much less likely to practice it (Byrne, 2017). A 2010 study that looked at the effects of a 'mindfulness meditation programme on the mental health of upper primary children' stated that teachers were mainly positive about the programme and its effects, where the children were enabled to not challenge their negative thoughts but accept them as abstractions without the accompanying emotional distress (Joyce, Etty-Leal, Zazryn, & Hamilton, 2010). Yet, teachers found that the biggest barrier to the visible success of the programme was the lack of time to implement it properly (Joyce, Etty-Leal, Zazryn, & Hamilton, 2010). A balance needs to be found among the curriculum for the teaching of the main curriculum subjects and the teaching of the hidden curriculum, such as wellbeing. Over the past few years, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) have researched the emphasis and promotion of children's wellbeing within schools. In the 0042/2018 circular, "*Best practice guidance for primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education and Skills' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice"*, we see how the policy outlines ways in which schools can develop a Wellbeing Promotion Process and implement it through the use of a self-evaluation processes (Department of Education and Skills, 2018). However, apart from this policy document there is a lack of Governmental direction and guidance on the implementation of wellbeing policies and initiatives within a school setting. Without the guidance and training to properly implement these structures, the practice may be at risk of miseducation by

focusing on more behavioural management policies rather than building up an appreciation for the practice while learning and understanding the meaning and usage of it in their lives.

One UK study, used the Paws. B programme, to explore the effects of a whole class mindfulness programme as it teaches pupils techniques to help them manage their emotions and relax. At the end of the study pupils reported "being more attentive and less distractible; better able to utilize their metacognitive skills; better able to self-regulate; and were more relaxed in school" (Atkinson & Thomas , 2017). In an American study, we see similar results from a lower socio-economic area where classroom behaviour and mindfulness training were the focus. The results showed improved classroom behaviour of students with regard to paying attention, self-control, participation in activities, and caring for others (Fernando & Black, 2013). A question arises in relation to these studies about whether the children are receiving beneficial long-term strategies in which to deal with their own thoughts and behaviours, or if they are being supplied with self-management tools to enable them to perform in a more desirable way while in school. However, it is difficult to determine if they are being viewed as opposing goals of practices or not. Students may just be learning self-pacifying skills, but not questioning and acting to rectify the sources of stress in society is not a beneficial strategy for them long-term. They risk being trained to be 'functional cogs in a brutal machine', but instead they could be empowered to change its workings (Simpson, 2017). In some instances in schools, mindfulness practices can be seen to be used as a tool to mould compliance in students (Simpson, 2017) rather than build understanding and acceptance through individual beneficial usage. This is not to say that all mindfulness practices in schools are using this framework. Many have the ability to build lifelong connections for its pupils with the practice if it is taught sensitively to the students while using elements of the traditional practices. Yet, with it currently having such a focus on gathering evidenced based measurable data on specific behavioural instances within school, how can what be truly beneficial for the children, and what is not, be objectively established.

Conclusion

The significant growth in interest in the study and usage of mindfulness must be looked at from a critical viewpoint, as we must consider the possibility that it may be creating a seemingly cheap remedy for surface problems while not reaching into underlying factors. Elements of mindfulness being used within social media, apps such as headspace and wearable technology such as Fitbit devices are bringing mindfulness to the forefront every day. There is now a constant reminder of how we should be more mindful within our day to day tasks. Yet, this poses the question if these easily accessible mindful minute apps and technology are beneficial to combat our daily stressors or if they are adding to our 'anxious guilt' if we do not complete our daily mindful task. As stated above, Kabat-Zinn (2004) referred to the term mindfulness as; "the ability to direct attention to experiences as they unfold, moment by moment, with open-minded curiosity and acceptance". However, as he does not state what those experiences must be, nor does the researcher believed he aimed to or ever could, it leaves the practice open to personal interpretation. Getting lost in a task or hobby such as singing, swimming, or knitting to the point where time is not a considered element anymore could also be considered a mindfulness moment. The calming rhythm of the knitting needles, the repetition of the pool laps, or the controlled rhythms and cadences of the music, for example in a lullaby, along with one's own voice joining with others in chorus may enable the same meditative state as meditating silently focusing on your body and breath for a period of time. This is not to say that the benefits of meditating are not highly valued and sought after, but looking at the benefits and enjoyment of these other tasks poses the question of if we have undervalued the tasks listed above and many others like it. The process of mindfulness has been studied and replicated all over the world, with many benefits of its practice outweighing the negatives. However, this does not mean that we must ignore those negative elements as we must use them to open our eyes to the world of mindfulness around us. We must seek to understand if our usage of it personally, or with others, is truly beneficial

or if it is being influenced or distorted by outside forces contradicting the traditional values

out of which it has grown.

Chapter Three: Methodologies

Introduction

   This chapter will aim to outline the research design and methodology that was used to conduct this research study. It will begin by stating the overall objective and specific aims of the study. Based on these aims, a discussion on the research design and the method used to collect the data will follow, along with the researchers rationale for these choices. The design and organisation of the data collection method will be explored and sections on ethical considerations and the limitations of the study will be discussed at the end.

Objective And Aims Of The Study

   This research study seeks to explore what teachers general attitudes are towards mindfulness. It will look specifically at

   ➢ Whether or not they have any personal experience with mindfulness,

   ➢ what they believe mindfulness to be,

   ➢ how they feel their views have been informed or influenced and

   ➢ their attitude towards its role – if any- within schools.

Mindfulness has been seen to be adapted to suit the needs of the many rather than the needs of individuals themselves, and with this study it aims to gather teachers views towards this and its use within the education setting.

Research Strategy

   In the proposal stage of the study, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were proposed to collect the necessary data from teachers. However, after discussions with supervisors and with different elements, such as the timing available and the possible

reluctance of participants to speak in a one-on-one setting being taken into consideration this decision was changed. The researcher concluded that a focus group method was deemed to be the most appropriate for generating the qualitative data required to answer the research question and fulfil the specific aims of this research study. As Bell (2010) states 'Qualitative data collection is better for understanding the perceptions of the world' and the focus group set up allows for discussions, follow up questions and clarifications to be shared among the group on the given research topic.

The time constraints of the project were a major consideration to look at while choosing the method of research. As Denscombe (2014) states, "a strict deadline will greatly influence the feasibility of a given research strategy". This given time frame narrowed the window of opportunity to conduct individual interviews with teachers. However, focus groups are often quicker than individual interviews and hence are time saving (Cohen, Morrison, & Manion, 2011). They can also bring together people with varied opinions, or as representatives of different collectives to share and discuss their own opinions and ideas.

Research Methodology

Qualitative approaches were chosen above quantitative for this study as it is primarily concerned with the attitudes and opinions of specific individuals. Qualitative research explores the attitudes, behaviours, and experiences of the individuals and it attempts to get an in-depth opinion from its participants on the specific topic being discussed (Dawson, 2009). As Denscombe (2014) puts it, "Decisions about which methods to use should be based on how useful the methods are for addressing a particular question, issue or problem that is being investigated". For the purpose of this study focus groups, being held both in person and online in synchronous sessions, have a distinct advantage over other types of research. They are flexible by design, they capitalize on the ability of the researcher to talk to their target

subjects directly, and they give the researcher concrete insights into the interviewees

knowledge of the topic while allowing them to discuss and give opinionated statements on

specific aspects of the research (Devault, 2019).

Devault (2019) states that the purpose of a focus group is not to arrive at a consensus,

a level of agreement, or to decide what to do about something in particular. Focus groups are

designed to identify the feelings, perceptions, and thoughts of the group about a particular

topic or subject. Focus groups are beneficial because they utilize qualitative data collection

methods and just as in the dynamics of real life, the participants are able to interact,

influence, and be influenced by those around them (Devault, 2019). For these reasons, the

researcher felt it would be the most beneficial to gather data in this format. However, the

decision about who will be in the groups, how to recruit them and the type of questions that

will be asked will have a major impact on the success and quality of the data that is collected

and analysed (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Advantages Of Focus Groups

The researcher decided on semi-structured focus groups containing between 4 and 6

people. They would be held both online and in person. This qualitative research method

allows for the generation of a rich understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs on

the topic of Mindfulness. Having the option for online focus groups allows professionals who

have little time during normal hours to participate and provides for a convenient and a

comfortable way of participating (Rezabek, 2000). Focus groups allow considerable

flexibility among the discussion and how questions are asked from group to group. In

addition, the nature of the responses is up to the participants themselves which enables a

varied response rate from all groups (Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Watts and Ebbutt (1987) state that the advantages would include the potential for discussions to develop and yield a wide range of responses. They also state that 'such interviews are useful where a group of people have been working together for some time or common purpose'. This could be advantageous as there may be a close relationship between some teacher that will allow for a more comfortable discussion setting and a more open floor for them to voice their opinions. However, the opposite may also be true as their close working relationship may hinder their willingness to disclose personal information. Focus groups are often times said to not be suitable for sensitive topics but they are an unusual group setting where an interviewer is encouraging everyone in the group to share their thoughts and experiences about a topic that interests them (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). Researchers must make plans to both encourage appropriate self-disclosures and to discourage disclosures that go beyond the legitimate aims of the research (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). This will enable the continuation of discussion that is beneficial to the original research. The online element provides for a different sense of anonymity which can lead to greater openness among the group discussion and can be explored with teachers from different geographic locations all at one time (Rezabek, 2000). Reid & Reid (2005) state that the "visual anonymity and psychological distance of the internet could stimulate group participation and encourage self-disclosure, particularly for individuals who might otherwise hesitate to participate in a face to face group meeting".

Focus groups have an unnatural setting that focuses on a particular issue and on participants' individual opinions and therefore, will yield insights that might not otherwise have been available in a straightforward individual interview (Cohen, Morrison, & Manion, 2011). Having more than one interviewee present can provide differing versions of events or ideas and one can complement the other with additional points, leading to a more complete and reliable record (Cohen, Morrison, & Manion, 2011). However, it is also true that having

more than two interviewees present can provide opposing ideas and accounts which is also beneficial for this study as it allows for a wider scope of data to be observed and collected.

Disadvantages Of Focus Groups

Even though the structure and elements of a focus group are what suit this study the best, there are some draw backs to its choice. The data that is collected from focus groups differs greatly to similar research methods. Even the briefest individual interview generates far more data about the person than you would get from an equivalent group interview (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). However, the volume of data may be greater with individual interviews but that does not in turn suggest that the data is of more value than that produced from a focus group.

Care must be taken in bringing together participants who are capable of comfortably participating in an electronic medium focus group, that is, individuals who already have a comfort level with technology (Rezabek, 2000). Inviting those who do not have as much expertise as the rest within the group may inhibit their ability to participate or get their responses heard on time. This may exclude possible participants if they do not have an adequate understanding of the technology to participate.

Making sure that each participant gets the chance and possibility to speak for the same amount of time is key to a diverse and fair data set. Occasionally the speaking time of some participants may be considerably higher than others, making their contribution disproportionate to the rest of the group (Schwab, 2016). This may lead the gathered data in a specific direction or conform to one main idea.

Focus groups have the possibility to produce conformity among the group. This can happen quickly and may produce 'group think' discouraging individuals who hold a different

view from speaking out in front of other group members (Cohen, Morrison, & Manion, 2011). Generating a wide ranging discussion that encourages people to share different points of view is key to combatting this.

It is believed by some that focus groups operate more successfully if they are composed of relative strangers rather than friends or colleagues (Cohen, Morrison, & Manion, 2011). This poses a threat to the research as some of the teachers within the study are situated in a close working environment or have had previous dealings with each other. This may impede on their willingness to disclose unpopular opinions on mindfulness with those who support it for fear of rejection or judgement.

Question Design

Careful consideration was given to the wording of the questions being asked during the focus groups. Words were chosen carefully so as not to ask leading questions or to influence the participants answers in any way. The ordering of the questions was designed to ease the participants into the discussion, beginning with their own teaching career, their experience with mindfulness in general and then into the more in-depth questions about their influences and personal opinions. Structuring the group in this way was seen to enable the participants to relax and be more willing to open up to the group as we moved through the questions.

Sample Population And Size

As this was a small-scale research project conducted under tight time-constraints, a non-probability convenience sample was used. This would be common practice among educational research to target one or two schools, and due to the small sample size would not

seek to generalise its findings beyond the sample in question (Cohen, Morrison, & Manion, 2011).

All participants in the sample were female mainstream teachers, however there was a mix of fully qualified teachers and student teachers. Half of the participants were from School A, a mixed Roman Catholic junior school in South Dublin. Face to face focus groups were conducted here. The other half of the sample were mainstream teachers that were situated around the country. An online focus group was chosen to explore the opinions of this group.

Distribution And Collection Of The Information Sheets And Consent Forms

To begin the face to face research, the Principal of School A was contacted for permission to conduct this study. Approval was granted and information letters and consent forms were distributed to all teachers explaining the aim and reasoning of the study and how they can get involved.

A gentle reminder was given to all staff about the study during the following days and the research was discussed in depth with teachers that had questions. Teachers returned their consent forms to the researcher and all consent forms that were gathered were contained in a sealed folder on the researcher until they could be stored in a locked box at their home. A focus group timetable was laid out, scheduling Junior class teachers together and senior class teachers together to suit their timetabling and the wishes of the principal.

For the online focus groups the teachers were contacted about the study and the information sheets and consent forms were emailed to them. Details were discussed with each participant and the consent forms were filled in and emailed back to the researcher. A common time of availability was chosen and agreed upon by all participants. Fox, Morris, &

Rumsey (2007) have suggested that "hosting a real-time focus group requires a virtual venue such as a chat room" and so the application 'Skype' was chosen and agreed upon by participants to fulfil that need.

Data Collection

Face to face focus groups were held on school grounds for ease of access for teachers and to provide an environment that is non-threatening and receptive to the interviewees (Devault, 2019). Online focus groups were held at a convenient time for all participants and Skype was used as the medium for it. Consent forms were checked and filled in again if not done properly. All focus groups were recorded using a Dictaphone and recording app for future analysis and transcription.

The researcher acted as the group's moderator for the duration of each focus group. Dawson (2009) states that the role of the moderator is to introduce the topic, ask specific questions, control digressions, and stop breakaway conversations. They make sure no one person dominates the discussion whilst trying to ensure that each of the participants gets the chance to contribute (Dawson, 2009).

The researcher conducted two focus groups, one face to face and one online, with five participating teachers in each. Each lasted approximately 35 to 45 minutes and allowed adequate time for each participant to have their say.

Data Analysis

Each focus group recording was saved on a secure device and transcribed to a word document where the qualitative data could be further analysed. Each group was saved and transcribed into a different document and was numbered and laid out in an easy to read

format. Thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes within data (Clarke & Braun, 2006) was used and the main findings will be discussed in a later chapter.

Limitations And Recommendations

The researcher realises that this was a small-scale study with a limited number of participants recruited through convenience sampling. A greater number of respondents from a probability sample might have yielded different results. Qualitative researchers might usually seek to describe what is happening within a smaller group of people and apply these insights into the behavior of the wider research population (Dawson, 2009). However, the researcher must accept that everyone is different and if the research were to be conducted with another group of people the results might not be the same. For this reason, this research cannot be generalized to the wider population of teachers.

As stated in the disadvantages of focus groups above, the dataset for one of these focus groups contained close working colleagues in a single school. This may have impacted on the participants willingness to truly share their opinions on mindfulness that contrast the opinions of others in the group. Effects of 'Group think' and collective conformity to one idea could begin to be seen in some groups but with help and direction from the moderator this was slowly eradicated. This may have led the data in a specific direction and effected the end results.

For future studies, the researcher would suggest expanding the research dataset. Given this wider data set the researcher would then recommend mixing the focus groups to contain teachers from different schools to give an element of anonymity to the participants and not feel that their answers may impact their working relationships. This may be done both in face to face groups and online. This may open the floor to a more diverse range of opinions and

ideas. The researcher may also benefit from hosting follow up individual interviews from participants that held strong opposing views to the groups, whether for or against mindfulness. This may give them a deeper insight into their thought process and develop a greater understanding for their viewpoint.

Due to the timing of this research and it being conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher had to adapt methodologies from just face to face focus groups to include online groups as well. The researcher would have preferred to stick with just face to face groups, but reality had to be considered and adjustments needed to be made. For future research they would suggest sticking to one method for consistency among methods and findings.

Ethical Considerations

Morgan and Krueger (1998) state that focus groups inevitably involve the sharing of information; hence, privacy is one of the biggest ethical concerns in its research. Firstly, access to information that reveals the participants' identities outside of the focus group must be restricted. Procedures for maintaining confidentiality must ensure the participants can safely share their experiences and opinions without having their statements used against them (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). Seeing as focus groups are frequently recorded, they must be kept in a secure location at all times.

A different privacy issue concerns what the participants learn about each other as the information is not only shared with the researcher but also with other participants during the discussion (Morgan & Krueger, 1998). There is also our very real danger of over-disclosure and this is a serious threat to privacy when there are ongoing relationships among the participants. This information can possibly influence their future dealings with each other so

the most effective way to deal with this problem is to call attention to it from the start

(Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Many researchers are divided as to whether doing research online presents unique

ethical risks. Pittenger (2003) states though that "although the impossibility of guaranteeing

confidentiality online has been stressed, the ethical issues might be no more hazardous than

those associated with conventional methods". All focus groups have their elements of ethical

risks; however, these must be understood by the participants before they begin to partake in

the study.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an outline of the rationale for choosing the qualitative research

method of focus groups for this study. It outlined the advantages and disadvantages of this

choice and how they compared to other research methods. It also discussed the sample

population of the study, the administration of the research instrument, data collection and

analysis, limitations of the study, recommendations for future studies and some ethical

considerations regarding the research.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Introduction

There is a lack of research based on mindfulness practices that examine the personal experiences and understandings of primary school teachers. With there being a visible increase in the societal importance surrounding mindfulness, there is a need for research to enable further development in our understanding and perception of what mindfulness is. This chapter will address the relevant findings of this research topic on the attitudes of teachers towards mindfulness. The data being discussed was obtained from two semi-structured focus groups, one face-to-face and one online, with five participating teachers in each group. The data collected was coded and analysed, and from this many different themes emerged. The most prominent themes will be discussed within this chapter with references being made to current literature. However, as stated in the previous chapter, due to the small sample size being studied, the researcher will not be seeking to generalise these findings beyond the sample in question.

To begin, the teachers personal experiences and understanding of mindfulness will be discussed, including different activities they consider to be mindfulness and the external influences that may have impacted these opinions. The different considerations a teacher may face while deciding to implement mindfulness practices within their classroom will be explored, such as time constraints, children's ability to take part appropriately, and the effects of having children with additional needs within the classroom. Finally, the viewpoints of teachers in regard to school policies, Career Professional Development (CPD) training and a whole school approach to mindfulness will be discussed.

Understandings Of Mindfulness

To begin, the researcher explored each teachers' personal understanding and use of mindfulness. While the participants found it difficult to strictly define the term mindfulness, as current literature also does, they generally had the same broad understanding of it as being able to be present and pay attention to the current moment. For example, Deirdre stated "I just take it to be, to take a couple of minutes for yourself, calm down and just slow the pace of life". This understanding, along with Roisin's where she defines it as "what's happening here and now", is in line with modern literature definitions (Kabat-Zinn, 2004; Farias & Wikholm, 2015). This general understanding enabled the researcher to establish a base of what each participant believed mindfulness to be.

While many participants did not refer to where they believed this understanding of mindfulness came from, Roisin did mention Buddhism and how mindfulness is "like a Buddhist kind of thing, like live in the moment now, forget about later". This spiritual link brings forth the question of whether or not it is still being used as a spiritual teaching or if it has morphed into a scientific tool being used to combat internal pressures, such as stress and anxiety. This links with current literature that poses the idea of how society has altered mindfulness to withstand internal experiences and end suffering (Fossas, 2015). Sinead's description of when she uses mindfulness is in line with this idea, "So then when I get stressed over everything that is happening at the one time I just kind of sit aside and do like five minutes of colouring". This viewpoint is seen across both groups as a main element of their understanding of mindfulness as they discuss their use of it to be a sense of calm to their busy and stressful lives.

Personal Use Of Mindfulness

Out of the ten participants only two stated that they deliberately practiced mindfulness regularly; Sinead through mindfulness colouring and Áine through a daily gratitude journal, "I do like a little bit of mindfulness. Like I try, like be grateful for everything so like just 10 minutes before I go to bed". However, with further discussion and analysis of what they each believed mindfulness to be, it was discovered that three other participants also subconsciously practiced some of the described underlying features. Louise explained how she was listening to mindfulness podcasts yet did not class this as a mindfulness practice as she was not partaking in the described activities. However, she came to believe that the act of taking the time to listen to them was becoming her mindfulness,

> "Actually, in fact … If I was going on a long journey and if Sean was asleep. I'm like you know what I'm going to put on listen to a conversation of two other people. And it's actually been so lovely to hear other people talk. And when you're not able to you know, yeah so actually, that is my mindfulness."

Gillian also reflected upon her belief of what mindfulness was and stated that her weekly presence in church has come to be a time of reflection and stillness for her. This time has become her sense of mindfulness and allowed her to be present in her own life,

> "I go to church once a week and I find that that 45 minutes is my mindfulness, like I sit still and actually just reflect on like what I've done for the week or what I want, like, what my hopes are for that coming week and kind of I just take my time that way."

Through these explorations of diverse activities, Julie came to realise that her relationship with music has become that of a meditative activity allowing her to "zone out" of stressful situations, "So that's sort of like when I get stressed, I'm like, okay, music, like, that's sort of my go to like straightaway. So, I suppose if that counts, like as mindfulness."

Each of the participants have stated different activities that they believe to be mindfulness. With the definition and understanding of mindfulness being so broad it allows for the personal interpretation of the practice. With this understanding, the researcher explored how mindfulness could be used in different ways outside that of the stereotypical meditation. Aoife, who did not practice mindfulness personally, stated that she "thought mindfulness was just meditation". However, she concluded that "just doing one thing and concentrate on it" may also be a form of mindfulness. Activities such as yoga, walking, and even mindful eating have been discussed in recent literature with publications in these areas soaring over the last few years. Roisin mentioned that she had recently taken part in a yoga and mindfulness course that had a mixture of meditation and mindful activities, such as mindful eating. This diversification in activities may open mindfulness up to a wider, more diverse audience. However, it is hard to know if these activities are in line with mindfulness teachings or if they are a secularisation of traditional Buddhist practices.

The other five participants stated that they did not personally practice mindfulness due to lack of interest, understanding, or time. Beth expressed all of these reasons, "Don't have the time, probably lack of interest on my part and lack of knowledge of how to do it", yet Gillian found herself ill-equipped to practice but was willing to learn, "I think if I went to like a course on mindfulness, I feel like I'd be more equipped and enthusiastic to try it at least". In spite of half of the sample not practicing mindfulness they found themselves exposed to it in their everyday lives.

Societal Influences

Mindfulness has been brought to the forefront of society recently as we move into a faster paced working lifestyle. It has become "such a buzzword at the minute", as Louise stated. Julie describes the difference by saying that "years ago, you would have maybe heard

about mindfulness through a psychologist. Whereas now you're hearing more about it like on social media". Sinead agreed as she declared that "Even in like the secondary school and stuff, if anyone would have mentioned mindfulness, I can say that as like, only you practice mindfulness if there was something wrong with you". Jones (2011) warned of this possible limitation, as children may be labelled as having a problem that needs fixing. This viewpoint has changed through the years as it has now become a daily practice for many people. Yet, the question still stands on if they are truly focusing on being mindful or if they are using it to combat specific pressures.

Apps, such as 'Headspace', along with wearable fitness trackers like Fitbit have incorporated mindfulness into a daily activity. These, along with the presence of bloggers and influencers on apps such as Instagram create a sense of ease with the practice that isn't always there, "I think they make it look easier than it actually is", Roisin explained. However, this ease of access is both beneficial in a sense that we have constant access to it when needed, and detrimental as we tend to stray to unnecessary apps, as Sinead expressed,

> "if I get a notification or something on my phone, that's it…I'm on my phone for 15-20 minutes just scrolling through Instagram and stuff like I can't...and it's not letting me take up the time that they need…it doesn't feel like it's relaxed".

This is similar to Louise's statement, "it's probably a time when you shouldn't have your phone, you know that you're not scrolling for the sake of scrolling". However, with technology moving quickly in this direction, it is unlikely to stop producing these products.

The online persona of an influencer is not always seen as truthful. Roisin states that "Even all the influencers, the bloggers, you know, they're probably getting paid to do that right now. They're not actually driven to do it intrinsically". However, people such as Bressie, as Julie mentioned, that have been coined as being online spokespeople for mindfulness may facilitate a more positive exposure,

"I think having people like that, um, you sort of learn about a lot more and it's a lot

more out in the open and you're like, 'Okay, what is this thing' and you're more

inclined to have a look at it a bit more"

Nonetheless, with this constant reminder about mindfulness, participants stated that it is

adding more pressure to their lives to try and fit it in. Louise portrayed her guilt due to lack

of participation as she said "when I listened to the podcast, and I'm like aww I should be

doing that or that sounds so easy", and Gillian described that it "would just be another job"

if she was being reminded of it constantly. This added pressure is counterintuitive to the

practice of mindfulness, yet we see similar circumstances in education and current

workforces like Google and Apple. Their corporate mindfulness structure, that O'Donnell

(2015) discusses, creates personal responsibility and blame for lack of prosperity within the

workplace. This may also be seen by participants if they are not completing their daily

mindfulness session. Incentive schemes, like Apple's, also places similar pressure on

employees to practice mindfulness to gain monetary benefits (Broussard, 2018). These

pressures can create a stressful relationship with mindfulness and even though it gives

awareness to the practice, it doesn't always allow users to gain full understanding of it. With

the societal influence around mindfulness growing, this pressure is now being transferred to

teachers to begin practices within their classrooms.

Mindfulness In The Classroom

Despite only half of the teachers stating that they practiced mindfulness personally,

seven teachers expressed that they have used it within the classroom, albeit not regularly.

Their different activities included Yoga, colouring and meditation, where sessions were both

teacher led and teacher independent using online videos. However, the majority of both

focus groups explained how they found it challenging to implement. A major factor that the

researcher discovered was that their aim wasn't strictly to be mindful but to get the children to sit still and be quiet, "I kind of see mindfulness is colouring or mindfulness is sitting for 30 minutes, trying to be quiet" Gillian explained. Yet, through her practice she realised that "sitting still for like 30 seconds is a struggle" so decided against using it. Grossman (2011) argues against this delivery of the practice as it presents a false perspective of what mindfulness is. Research has mainly followed the practices of meditation, mindful breathing, and yoga within education to combat either stress, behaviour or children's emotions (Joyce, Etty-Leal, Zazryn, & Hamilton, 2010; Atkinson & Thomas, 2017). This was analysed within this research as teachers admitted that mindfulness is used "just to calm them" particularly after lunch or as Gillian states that in her class it was "very much about like behaviour management and crowd control". This inconsitent usage may lead to confusion for the children around the aim or idea of the practice.

Many teachers reported that messing during the practice was also a big problem. Roisin found that in her class there were "children who think it's funny, see it as a moment the class is quiet I'm going to really show off here". Gillian expressed that she refused to practice it after the messing she experienced during meditations, "the idea of them just sitting there giggling and going completely out of control I'm like, nah". However, with teachers stating that they are mainly just using meditations, it poses the question of if the chosen practice is right for the class. How can we expect children to sit still and be quiet for long periods of time if we find it difficult ourselves? Some teachers posed the thought that their problem was that the children "just didn't care about sitting down and actually thinking about their life". This lack of interest may be true, yet, it may just be a lack of interst in the chosen activity rather than the practice of mindfulness in general.

Mindfulness In Children With Additional Needs

As part of the integration of mindfulness practices into the classroom, teachers must try and assess what is and isn't working well for their children. As part of this research, teachers disscussed the effects of mindfulness practices on children with additional needs. The responces were varied, such as Julie's confusion on how it may affect the child and if they would disrupt the other children,

"a few children in the classroom that like, would have like, you know, ADHD and things of that and I don't know how they would sit down, even for that length of time. Because there was definitely…just constantly running around the classroom. So, just that would distract like a lot of the other kids".

Yet, Roisin describes it as being a success for specific children by having their own time and space to practice it as needed,

"the person held up a card, and then the child was brought over to their own little area, they had a timer on, they had the breathing, and then five minutes of mindful colouring".

Messing became less of a concern as challenges around differentiation and confidentiality arose. Áine questioned if every child should participate in the same activities as they may not all recieve the same reported benefits. Costello & Lawler (2014) discussed this idea as negative effects such as "increased stress and some sadness" were reported during their study, indicating that the practice may not be suitable for all children. The teachers in this research agreed, however, they found confidentiality an issue if only one child was practicing it, "They were asking as well 'Why does so and so get to do it?'. Its sustaining that too, without telling them another child's problems or issues". Attitudes varied on this topic as Gillian expressed that occasionally teachers seemed to focus on giving some children more leniency over others, "they're given the space and the time to…to have time

for themselves, whereas the other kids are kind of like, 'oh, you're not on the spectrum so come on, you should be able to sit there still". This attitude may be detrimental to some children with differing issues, such as children with English as an additional language as Sinead described how positively they reacted to the practice, "they just get to sit and relax and take a minute. They don't need to panic and say, 'How do I say this in English?". In contrast to this, Sineads also found that she seemed to time mindfulness breaks for when certain children went on their movement breaks. This poses the question of if these children are then missing out on a possible essential "life skill", as Julie described it.

Time Constraints And Integrated Practices

The teachers expressed many concerns but found the main one to be the lack of available time. This is in line with literature where Joyce, Etty-Leal, Zazryn, & Hamilton (2010) found that the biggest barrier to the success of their programme was the lack of time to implement it. Participants explained how they're constantly being asked to teach more elements of the curriculum but don't have the available time to complete it all, "What has to give?", stated Louise. Sinead felt that they "would be missing out on doing so many other things" if they were to implement mindfulness lessons into the timetable, however Julie found that integration would probably work better than an isolated session. Louise agreed as she always thought of mindfulness as a big thing but throughout the discussion realised that "its actually smaller bites. Where then you can probably bring that into the classroom because it's not a whole lesson". Sinead, whos school has a mindfulness policy, described how they used it within Aistear during their reflections and through Religion as guided meditations and prayers. Yet, this idea of an integrated practice may only work if it is consistent. Nevertheless, while curriculum integration is supported by the literature, it is

questionable how children will learn the basic techniques to integrate it into other curriculum areas without a discrete timeslot.

This added element to the curriculum, integrated or not, is another feature that teachers must learn. Much like the pressure being placed on people to practice mindfulness personally, there is now an added pressure within classrooms. Roisin describes how she feels that teachers must be one step ahead at all times and this constant pressure to perform can become debilitating. Without the proper information and training to implement new elements of the curriculum, added stress and possible teacher burn out may become a regular occurance.

Mindfulness Training And A Whole School Approach

Along with lack of time, the teachers expressed a lack of resources and space, but also of understanding and training. Apart from Roisin none of the other teachers had taken part in any formal mindfulness training, however, Gillian, Julie and Sinead noted that they had a few lectures on it throughout their master's degrees. This lack of training may lead to stereotypical usage and a lack of true understanding by the children. Shonin & Van Gordon (2015) believe that teachers should be familiar with the core teachings of mindfulness in order to be confident teaching it. Sinead agreed as she stated that "If they want us to implement mindfulness in school, we need to know more about what it is and how to do it". But without formal mindfulness policies being set up in schools the access to training is minimal if not done personally outside of school.

The teachers discussed the possibillity of adjusting the DES circular 0042/2018 on wellbeing to create a mindfulness policy. Sinead's school has implemented one and she described its activities as a bell that rings before lunch for five minutes and the teacher then picks an activity to do, either colouring, yoga or meditation. This discrete lesson is follow

by subject integration and runs from Junior infants to sixth class. The literature supports this approach as it explores discrete lessons working along with the integration of mindfulness in subjects like S.P.H.E. and Religion (Cheek et al., 2017; O'Donnell, 2015). Most teachers agreed that they should begin in the younger classes, with "exposure to the language, explaining things, and not having it as a big deal" and then implement a more applied policy in senior classes to help them with more prevelent issues, such as anxiety. This impression of its practicallity in the senior classes is supported by the study carried out by Joyce et al. (2010) that revealed how mindfulness can influence anxiety and depression levels among children in senior classes. However, this aim of building an environment of awareness and accepance around the practice of mindfulness is still a far reach from what is currently being implemented. A whole school policy also brings the issue of personal interest in the topic. The question must be asked if all teachers will be made incorporate this practice into their daily lessons despite their personal interest or opinions on it. Byrne (2017) discusses this issue as she states the importance of how mindfulness is viewed by all staff members, because if it is seen as just another item to be forced into an already packed curriculum then it may be unlikely to be effective.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the experiences of teachers practising mindfulness, both personally and in the classroom were reported and discussed. The teachers' understanding of mindfulness at the beginning were found to be broad and followed a more modern stereotypical mindset than those of traditional practices. Developments in their definition of mindfulness can be seen as they expand their understanding of the practice. The teachers' opinions on the societal influence on the practice were discussed and as a result the

researcher found that guilt and extra pressure were being felt by the participants due to their percieved lack of participation.

The teachers' views on the use of mindfulness in schools was explored and the ideas of creating a calmer working environment and combatting stress and unwanted behaviour were found to be main factors of use. Implementation factors were also presented, with working with children with additional needs, time available, and lack of training appearing to be the main challenges. Finally, the teachers' viewpoints on a whole school approach were reported, detailing logistical issues and if mindfulness should be an optional or mandatory practice within schools.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

The objective of this research was to investigate the attitudes of teachers towards mindfulness, both personally and within the education system, and their opinions on its popularization within society. The findings revealed that a broad and generalised understanding of mindfulness was held by the participants. This raises the question about their understanding of the varied roots of the various mindful and contemplative traditions, and if they risk facing a distorted view of the practice without that understanding. The teachers' reasons for use varied, however they tended to be based mainly on scientific reasoning, to combat stress or to create a calm environment. This justification of use may be seen to undermine the fundamental aims of the traditional practice (Hyland, 2015) however, research studies on these areas are growing exponentially among educational settings.

A mixed level of openness to the use of the practice was examined throughout the research as the teachers explored the different activities that they classed as mindfulness. They began with a stereotypical idea of what mindfulness activities were, such as meditation, yoga, and colouring, but developed their understanding to include exploration of a vast array of activities such as praying and listening to music. The generic views that were discussed in both groups may represent the influence of societal beliefs and popularised practices. Without knowledge being spread about the history and roots of the traditions, a semi-understanding of contemporary activities may become the norm. Mindfulness must not be seen as a specific prescribed activity but as a propensity achieved through disciplined practice, towards a state of mind that allows a person to be present in and accepting of moments and experiences as they unfold (Kabat-Zinn, 2004).

It is clear that mindfulness has become a societal buzzword and is becoming extremely popular among technology giants. The teachers found that the influence from online apps and bloggers was subconscious at times but ultimately added an undue pressure to their already busy lifestyles. The possible monetary benefits being received to promote,

and practice mindfulness may be undermining the tradition and further spreading the popularised idea of using mindfulness to try and place yourself in a better situation. This corporate mindfulness structure, discussed by O'Donnell (2015), can be seen penetrating a high percentage of online and workplace based practices and it does not go unnoticed by those around them.

It is clear that mindfulness is becoming a new feature of the primary school routine, yet the teachers have presented an array of issues that they faced while implementing it into their day-to-day routine. Lack of time became a big concern among the teachers as they discussed how integration might allow them to cover the practice. However, we need to look further into the curriculum and ask if teachers are being overloaded with material and not enough time to complete it. Adding mindfulness into an already full and stressful day, whether it be in a discrete or integrated format, may be counterintuitive to the aim of their practice of reducing stress among the children and themselves. Teachers may feel more stress towards the practice as Byrne (2017) discusses, if it is seen as just another element forced into a packed timetable then it is likely to fail. Priorities need to be looked at and the curriculum may need to be reassessed.

Mindfulness in education is being encouraged by researchers, yet the training to back up the practice is not there. Many of the teachers expressed a desire for training to be provided but stated that they do not see that happening within schools without a set policy. A whole school approach, like in Sinead's school, was discussed as an option. The teachers saw positives in this as the practice and language would be normalised among students, however they also saw issues with the possibility of teachers being forced to implement a practice that they did not believe in. Yet, this raises the question of who has a say over what is and is not taught within the curriculum. School ethos and parental pressures can influence a practice within a classroom despite teachers personal views. Many may look at mindfulness in this light and agree that teachers must follow what is given to them. People are beginning to see

issues within children, such as behaviour, and seek to rectify them through the education system. However, with an increasing curriculum load, external issues being brought in, and pressures being felt from societal influences it is hard to see where teachers can draw the line to ensure that the curriculum is taught.

Future Research

The limitations of this study were stated in the methodologies chapter and a detailed list of opportunities for further research was discussed. As this study was conducted with such a small sample size of mainstream teachers, the researcher would recommend expanding the sample size to include a wider range of faculty from multiple schools. By mixing the focus group participants a greater sense of anonymity will be created and possibly increase the participants willingness to speak among the group. Considering children's opinions and ideas on the practice within their school and classroom may be beneficial to creating a well-rounded study and evoke a more varied discussion around this topic. Finally, both researchers and teachers may need to explore how different mindfulness assessment strategies and techniques can be used within the classroom, as they may currently be over emphasising measurable outcomes above others. Studies must consider the possibility of internal benefits that may not be measured by assessment strategies and adjustments must be made.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Statement of conversation and how the focus group is based on open conversation, there is no right, or wrong answers and no judgement will be experienced throughout or after the study.

Questions:

1. How long you have been teaching and what year do you teach?

2. Do you have any experiences yourself with using mindfulness?

    Prompt: Do you have any opinions on using it yourself? Do you use it at home? Do you not use it? Do you have a reason for not using it? Training?

3. What do you believe mindfulness really is?

    Prompt: what is your aim? is it a big or small thing? is it a specific activity or practice?

4. How were your views on mindfulness influenced?

    Prompt: By online apps, influencers, other people, research, articles

5. What are your opinions on the role of mindfulness within education?

    Prompt: Have you used it within your class? How has it worked? What did you do? How did the children react to it?

6. Do you feel that mindfulness in education is aimed at specific children, in particular children with additional needs? Do you see an equal response from, or benefit gained by each child?

    Prompt: Have you ever experienced the practice with children with additional needs? How did it work? Do you feel they understood the practice or benefitted from it?

7. How best do you see mindfulness fitting into the primary school curriculum?

    Prompt: policies, training, integration, Whole school approach

8. Does anyone have anything else they would like to contribute to the discussion that we have not yet covered?

Appendix B: Information Letters
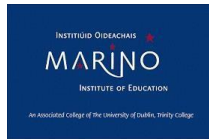
Dear Teacher,

My name is Michelle Larkin and I am a Professional master's in education student in Marino Institute of Education. I am writing to ask for your help with a dissertation study that investigates the attitude of teachers towards Mindfulness. This research project involves learning more about what your general opinions are on mindfulness, how they have been informed, and if you believe mindfulness should have a role in the education sector. I hope that the findings of the study will inform future studies taking place in schools about mindfulness-based practices.

There is just one part to this study: a semi-formal focus group based on your own teachings and opinions on mindfulness. The group will consist of between 4 and 6 teachers. The focus group has two parts. The first part is some general questions about your background in teaching. The second part asks you to respond to questions about mindfulness and your opinions on it. In total it will take between 30 and 40 minutes to complete the interview and it would be recorded on an audiotape. You are under no obligation to complete the focus group, or to answer all questions presented in it. If you come to a question you do not wish to answer, you may skip it.

I hope you will be willing to participate as your responses are important and are a valued part of the study. Your participation will remain strictly confidential. Your name will not be attached to any of the data you provide, and a pseudonym will be used during the written analysis portion within the dissertation document. Every effort will be made to ensure your identity is protected; the interview transcripts and recordings will be kept in a secure location on an encrypted device without your name attached to it and the recording and transcripts will be retained only for the purposes of the current study. Once the study is completed, the recording and transcript will be destroyed based on the schedule outlined in the Institute's data retention schedule. There are no risks or direct benefits in participating in the interview. You will be asked to sign a form indicating agreement to participate in the study, however, you are free to discontinue participation in the study at any time, should you wish to do so, without any questions or judgement.

If you agree to participate please contact me in one of the following ways: by returning the signed consent form to me in person or by emailing me on mlarkinpme18@momail.mie.ie.

If you are willing to participate, it would help me greatly to know this as soon as possible so that focus groups can begin. Your participation in this project is sincerely appreciated as I understand that your time is extremely valuable. All efforts will therefore be made to accommodate your schedule and the free time that you may have.

Should you have questions regarding your participation, please contact me directly, either in person, by phone on 085 168 1078, or by email on mlarkinpme18@momail.mie.ie. You may also contact my advisor for the project, Clare Maloney, on clare.maloney@mie.ie if necessary.

Yours Sincerely, Michelle Larkin.
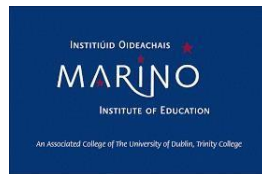
Dear Principal,

My name is Michelle Larkin and I am a Professional master's in education student in Marino Institute of Education. I am writing to ask for your permission to run an investigative study within your school that looks at the attitudes of teachers towards mindfulness. This dissertation involves learning more about what activities teachers' class as mindfulness, if and how they use it within their classroom, and their opinions on the popularization of mindfulness. I hope that the findings of the study will inform future studies taking place in schools and show how these can be interpreted and used in additional schools.

There is one part to this study: semi-formal focus groups based on the teachers own usage and opinions on mindfulness. They would consist of between 4 and 6 teachers. The focus group has two parts: general questions about their background and teaching and then responding to questions about the use of mindfulness and their opinions on it. In total it will take between 30 and 40 minutes to complete the focus group session and it would be recorded on audiotape. Teachers are under no obligation to complete the focus group, or to answer all questions presented in it. If they come to a question they do not wish to answer, they may skip it.

Responses are important and are a valued part of the study and participation will remain strictly confidential. The school and teachers' names will not be attached to any of the data provided, and a pseudonym will be used during the written analysis portion within the dissertation document. Every effort will be made to ensure identities are protected; the interview transcripts and recordings will be kept in a secure location on an encrypted device without names attached to it and the recording and transcripts will be retained only for the purposes of the current study. Once the study is completed, the recordings and transcripts will be destroyed based on the schedule outlined in the Institute's data retention schedule. There are no risks or direct benefits in participating in the interview. Teachers will be asked to sign a form indicating agreement to participate in the study, however, they are welcome to discontinue participation in the study at any time, should they wish to do so, without any questions or judgement.

Participation in this project is sincerely appreciated as I understand that teachers time is extremely valuable. All efforts will therefore be made to accommodate the schedules of all teachers. If possible, I would be looking to conduct the interviews on school grounds, either before or after school, for the convenience of the teachers.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and should you have questions regarding participation or methods, please contact me, either in person, on 0851681078, or by email on mlarkinpme18@momail.mie.ie. You may also contact my advisor for the project, Clare Maloney, on clare.maloney@mie.ie

Yours Sincerely, Michelle Larkin.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Statement of Consent

Please read the statements below and indicate, by means of ticking the box for either yes or no, whether or not you would be willing to participate in the study as described.

	Yes	No
I have read and understood the information sheet linked with this consent form and am willing to take part in the study by participating in the focus group described above.	☐	☐
I consent to have the focus group recorded on an audio device for the purposes of analysis.	☐	☐
I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis or publication that comes of this research.	☐	☐

Participants name (Please print): _____

Participants Signature:_____   Date: _____

Researcher's name: _____

Signature of Researcher:_____Date: _____

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.