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The price of paying attention; Teachers' perspectives on the implementation of mindfulness in the Irish primary school classroom.

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the award of the degree of Professional Master of Education, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. I further declare that this dissertation has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this Institute and any other Institution or University.

Signature

Rebecca Lennon

Date: 07/05/2019

Abstract.

This research project investigates the implementation of mindfulness into the primary school classroom. It specifically refers to its relationship with a child's well-being and academic success. The study draws on the perceptions of current primary school teachers as a factor in successfully addressing the topic at hand.

This study aspires to add to the expansive existing literature on the topic of mindfulness. It hopes to be a valuable addition to the research topic in an Irish context. The research draws on qualitative research methods by conducting four one-to-one interviews with current primary school teachers. Additionally, (it selected) a mixed sample of practitioners and non-practitioners of mindful practices in order to prevent bias in results.

The research project implies that the selected teachers appreciate the implementation of mindfulness in the Irish primary school classroom. Specifically, the participants support reviewed literature that suggests there are linked benefits with the implementation of mindful practices and a child's well-being and academic success. Explicitly, increased levels of concentration and focus and a decrease in difficult feelings and emotions such as stress. The findings also reveal factors which the teachers suggest inhibit their desire and ability to implement mindfulness into the classroom, such as teacher training or a lack of. In addition to this, it seems (understandably) that mindfulness is not a key area of concern for Irish primary school teachers as it is not a part of the curriculum. Overall, the findings seem to illustrate an appreciation amongst the selected primary school teachers for the implementation of mindfulness into the Irish primary school classroom. Nevertheless, this appreciation could possibly be enhanced if mindfulness was introduced or integrated into the current curriculum.

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Chapter One- Introduction

This research examines teachers' perceptions of the implementation of mindfulness in the primary school classroom. There is a specific focus on the relationship between mindfulness and a child's well-being and academic achievement. The research question is: "*The price of paying attention; Teachers' perspectives on the implementation of mindfulness in the primary school classroom*". The research specifically explores primary school teachers' perceptions of the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom, explicitly its correlation with children's well-being and academic success

'Mindfulness is not new. It's part of what makes us human—the capacity to be fully conscious and aware' (Siegel R.D., Germer C.K., Olendzki A., 2009, p.17). Research indicates that mindfulness is a key element of humanity. It seems this viewpoint is being reviewed through an educational lens by researchers. An array of research has been conducted in the area of mindfulness and its place in the classroom however it seems Irish research is limited. Therefore, the rationale for this study is based on a gap in research of Irish primary schools. The research is also of personal relevance. The researcher has a particular interest in the area of mindfulness, having begun engaging in the practices to aid with the increased pressures associated with studying a professional masters. After recommendations being made for the researcher to engage in the practices, she was critical to begin, with however began to see personal benefits.

When beginning the project, the researcher was familiar with mindful practices having engaged in them personally. During school placement observations throughout the two years, the researcher noticed how mindful practices had become a more central

part of the children's day. Based on these observations the researcher decided to examine ways in which teachers implement mindfulness into the classroom and if they feel the practices are beneficial for the children. The researcher also aimed to identify areas of difficulties teachers' have when implementing mindful practices in their classroom. The researcher found it of the utmost importance to remain objective throughout all aspects of the research. Every chapter aims to provide an in-depth yet balanced viewpoint on the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom.

Chapter one is based on the context of the research. It specifically outlines the focus of the research and the research question in hand. The rational and positionality of the researcher is also stated.

Chapter two consists of the Literature Review. It presents a review of both national and international literature from a variety of articles, books, and journals as a means to develop an understanding of the topic.

In **Chapter three**, the methodology is discussed. This chapter presents the research paradigm selected by the researcher, specifically the advantages and disadvantages of selecting qualitative methods. The chapter also explores the sampling process and discuss key and identifying factors and features of the sample. When beginning this study, the researcher hoped to identify factors that affected a teachers' implementation of mindfulness in the classroom and compare and contrast practices used by practitioners and non-practitioners of mindfulness. The research methodology aims to identify teachers' views on the relationship between the implementation of mindfulness in the primary school classroom with children's well-being and academic success. The chapter also allows for a brief overview as to how the data will be analysed.

Chapter four provides a thematic analysis of the data received through the use of

the above methodology. The researcher also discusses how these findings aid and develop her research question. While **chapter five** provides a brief summary of the main findings. The researcher also presents suggestions for future research.

Chapter Two- Literature Review

Introduction

This research project examines teachers' views on the implementation of mindfulness in the primary school classroom and its effect on child well-being and academic achievement. This literature review explores mindfulness in the classroom under the following headings;

- What is mindfulness?
- The benefits of mindful practice.
- Mindfulness in the Irish classroom
- The implementation of mindfulness in Irish primary schools.#

What is Mindfulness?

'Mindfulness is a 2,500-year-old tradition which focuses on individual inner experiences' (Costello, E., & Lawler, M., 2014, p. 23). Although it is a long-standing practice, there are various descriptions of the word which make the tradition difficult to define. Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness as 'the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment' (2003, p. 145) is upheld by many. Mindfulness is a practice that is held in many religions such as Buddhism and Catholicism. Within Catholic practice, meditation is centred around strong monastic traditions specifically meditation and contemplative prayer whereas the Buddhist tradition is 'fundamentally centered on the practice of meditation to produce calm and meditation to produce insight' (Kelly, B., 2008, p.3). While many view mindfulness as a religious practice, others suggest that it is a secular practice; 'mindfulness is not

religious, it's a secular practice' (Afzal, U., 2018, n/p) acknowledging all the while that most religions do contain a component of mindful reflection.

In relation to children, mindfulness is regarded as 'paying attention with kindness and curiosity to what is happening inside and around oneself, such as being fully present and compassionate with oneself and others' (Viafora, D., Mathiesen, S., & Unsworth, S. 2015, p. 1179). The array of definitions of mindfulness do not come without their limitations, in addition to a growing fear that 'mindfulness' may be becoming a 'catch-all' for a consumer self-help product. Due to the lack of in-depth research on the capacities that mindfulness addresses, the practice may tend to be regarded as something one can just 'do' neglecting the fact that it is a complex process; 'there is a general failure among the public to recognize that scientific consensus is a complex and disciplined process requiring considerable time, effort, debate, and (most important) data' (Van Dam, N. T., van Vugt, M. K., Vago, D. R., Schmalzl, L., Saron, C. D., Olendzki, A., ... Meyer, D. E. (2017)). It is important for teachers not only to be aware of the broad spectrum of definitions mindfulness has but also to be aware that it is a complex process that requires a true understanding and an educational rationale to be conducted effectively with children.

The Benefits of Mindfulness in School

Mindfulness and academic performance.

'Mindfulness-based interventions with children holds promise, particularly in relation to improving cognitive performance' (Zenner et al., 2014, n/p). Recent studies suggest that the growing body of awareness and curiosity with regard to improving health and well-being through mindful activities is due to the increase in evidence stating that mindfulness has positive effects on cognitive abilities (Maynard, BR., et al.

2017). Smiling Minds' 2018 Mindfulness Guidelines outline three ways in which mindfulness improves a child's ability to learn.

Firstly it improves a child's capacity for attention. Ramsburg, J. T., & Youmans, R. J. (2013) state how 'mindfulness, the ability to maintain one's attention in the present moment, has long been theoretically associated with success in higher education' (p.n/p). This can be reflected in the primary school classroom as the children similarly become 'more capable of taking in new information without being distracted by internal reactions or preconceived perspectives' (Smiling Minds, 2018, p. 7).

Secondly, it improves the child's working memory and reasoning abilities; 'it improves working memory, cognitive flexibility, reasoning, planning, goal-directed behaviour and self –regulation' (p.7). Working memory is a central part of teaching and learning. NEPS (2015) describes working memory as 'the ability to hold and manipulate information in the mind over short periods of time' (n/p). A key element of working memory – an element which distinguishes this type of memorisation from long and short term memory is manipulation 'working memory is used to hold information in the mind and manipulate it for brief periods of time (Gathercole, S., and Alloway, T., 2008, pg.18). Children's working memory and its development is a key area of enquiry. Research has been conducted based on the relationship between working memory and various elements of primary school curricula including literacy and numeracy. Multiple studies have been based on the relationship between a child's working memory and reading comprehension. It seems that a child's working memory is a predictor of the development of their language skills (Swanson, H. L., & Berninger, V. W.,1996) and reading comprehension (Seigneuric, A., & Ehrlich, M.-F.,2005, Swanson, H. L., & Berninger, V. W.,1996). Hence, studies indicate that working memory plays a central role in a child's academic achievement.

NEPS (2015) suggest that a child with poor working memory may struggle with concentration and may often zone out of lessons. However, it must be noted that this does not allow for a child's intrinsic motivations and interests which can also lead to a child disengaging with lessons and activities. This disconnection can have deeper effects on children; 'educational disengagement is strongly associated with student beliefs about their academic ability' (Deed, C., 2008, pg. 3). Furthermore, these beliefs may increase a child's feelings of boredom and avoidance of schoolwork (Miserandino, M., 1996). Yet, it should be maintained that a child's working memory is important and must be fostered and developed within the primary school.

Studies have been carried out based on how to improve a child's working memory in the classroom. St Clair-Thompson, H., Stevens, R., Hunt, A., & Bolder, E. (2010) study explored how to improve a child's working memory using direct training, specifically memory strategy training. Using strategies such as 'memory booster' illustrated significant improvements in children's working memory. There seems to be very little research into the effects mindfulness-based practices have on the working memory of primary school children. However, a study conducted by Quach, D., Jastrowski Mano, K. E., & Alexander, K. (2016) investigates the impact mindful meditation has on the working memory of adolescents. The study proved how participants who engage in such practices illustrated significant improvements in terms of their working memory. Nevertheless, it must be stated that the introduction and implementation of such practices into the primary school classroom are not easily warranted. Quach, D. et al do acknowledge that to incorporate mindfulness practices into school resources and funding are needed; 'the incorporation of mindfulness practice in schools is inextricably linked to the availability of adequate resources. Low-cost programs integrated into existing curricula are likely to be the most feasible,

particularly in schools with limited resources' (pg.2).

The above research seems to suggest that all child practitioners of mindfulness will reap the above benefits. Grossman (2008) acknowledges this in his work stating 'very apparent biases may apply to long-term practitioners of mindfulness meditation or to those who undergo a mindfulness-based intervention'. Yes, mindfulness may aid cognition however it must also be acknowledged that simply with greater experience may come greater success.

Mindfulness and well-being.

McLellan and Steward (2015, p. 307) argue that there is no concrete definition of well-being, however, it is often associated with words such as "'happiness', 'flourishing', 'enjoying a good life' and 'life satisfaction'". There is increased awareness and interest in the implications and positive effects of engaging in mindfulness practices have on one's well-being. Smiling Minds' Mindfulness Guidelines (2018) suggests that mindfulness 'reduces emotional reactivity, behavioural issues, anxiety, and depression' (p.7).

Engaging primary school children in mindful practices not only positively affect a child's well-being but also their academic success. Children with high self-esteem and positive self-attitudes are more likely to indulge in opportunities to grow and learn (Growing up in Ireland, 2009). Research has revealed how 'children suffering from social, emotional difficulties and behavioural problems are more likely to struggle at school, underperform academically and drop-out' (Costello, E., & Lawler., M. 2014, p.22). Mindfulness helps tackle this problem by 'enabling children to become familiar with the workings of our mind, including the ways we may either try to avoid or else become completely consumed by difficulties' (Byrne, H., n/d. p. 1). The practice allows

children to focus on what is happening in a calm and considered manner instead of becoming anxious in the face of potential difficulties.

Children can become less impulsive in the classroom through the use of mindfulness. An element of impulsive behaviour is ‘rapid, unplanned reaction to stimuli before complete processing of information’ (Moeller et al., 2001 p.1784). A study conducted by Kempson, JR., 2012 examined ‘pupils’ perceptions of how helpful mindfulness techniques are for relaxation and remaining calm’. The study revealed that 37% of the students in the study found that it was ‘very effective’ in doing so. The data revealed 2.2% of participants responding that the methods did not help at all. Suggesting that in terms of feelings of unease, anxiety and unwanted behaviours mindfulness cannot be considered the ‘fix’. Teachers and educators alike cannot say that feelings of anxiety amongst children in the classroom can suddenly disappear once one engages in mindfulness. Bhikkhue (2007) notes that when one is feeling unwanted emotions such as anxiety or frustration one must be aware of what is missing that is causing these emotions and it is through the path of mindfulness that one may discover this (p.4). He acknowledges that ‘mindfulness isn't the end point’ but it is leading to somewhere (p.4). In this sense teachers must be aware that allowing children to be mindful in a class will not remove the problems from a child's life. However, it may lead them to a deeper awareness of what is missing, what it is that they may learn and adapt to from the difficulties they are experiencing. Kabat-Zinn mirrors these views when describing what paying attention to the moment allows for. He describes mindfulness as a means to navigate and control one’s life without allowing unwanted emotions and feelings to control it;

‘...it allows us to know what’s happening or to know that we don’t know what’s happening and to find ways to be in a wiser relationship to things that are going on in

our lives rather than being in the mercy of our own emotional reactions, crazy thoughts and fears’

(Psychalive, 2013)

While studies suggest that mindfulness can be linked with the reduction of difficult feelings and emotions such as stress it must be noted that some amounts of these feelings are needed, (Byrne, H., n.d.) mirrors this. She states that some feelings of stress is good and suggests that without it one could not study or sit an exam. Byrne argues that the area of concern is ‘the perception that this situation is more than we can handle that overwhelms us’ (pg. 3). Mindfulness is a means to control and reduce this sense of overwhelming stress and manage it.

Conclusion

‘Mindfulness can be considered enhanced attention to and awareness of current experience or present reality’ (Brown, K.W., et al. 2003, p. 822). The above literature suggests that a child's academic performance is enhanced due to this increase in attention. Children have better-honed reasoning skills and are enabled to bring what they have learned with them into new and unfamiliar situations (eg. Smiling Minds, 2018 & Napoli, M., et al. 2005). The research also illustrates that mindfulness results in less impulsive behaviour which in turn leads to a greater opportunity to learn (eg. Kempson, J.R., 2012). The above research is not without its limitations. One must acknowledge that mindfulness is a life-long discipline, the purpose of engaging in which is not to ‘achieve removal of problems in life’ but to develop a sense of openness to life and to become more at ease with not being the ‘controller’. Mindfulness is an aid through difficult times however after partaking in mindfulness practices one’s problems will not simply disappear. The above literature indicates that mindfulness is a means to

control unwanted emotions rather than being overcome by them. This is important for teachers to understand and acknowledge when introducing their classes to mindfulness practices.

Mindfulness practices in the Irish classroom

O' Cleirigh and Greaney's (2014) recent study suggests an increased awareness, openness, and understanding of mindfulness and mindful practice within Irish society. The DES reflect these attitudes through the introduction of guidelines – 'Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion. Well-Being in Primary Schools'.

As previously stated, mindfulness has been linked with an overall improvement in well-being and mental health. Given the time children spend daily in school, it can be argued that 'one of the most important settings for the promotion of a young person's mental health and well-being is the school' (Grogan, M., 2015, p.8). The Department of Education and skills have acknowledged this through the development and introduction of the aforementioned guidelines. The guidelines are available for all members of the school community and address the issue of well-being within the Irish primary school system.

Although the above suggests an increased awareness and openness towards mindfulness-based practices it is difficult to source national research based on mindfulness in the classroom, yet on an international level, the field of research is expanding. A study conducted by Caulfield, A. (2015) explores how mindfulness-based practices can lead to a reduction in stress amongst Irish primary school teachers rather than children. The study showed how mindfulness positively contributed to the reduction of stress within primary school teachers. Although the research focused on

adults, teachers specifically, the findings suggest that including mindfulness as part of the daily or weekly timetable may promote positive outcomes in terms of the ‘social and emotional classroom climate and pupil outcomes’ (p.95).

Given the above research, it can be suggested that teachers who engage in mindful practices can affect the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom. Based on this teacher training is certainly a critical element in the effective implementation of mindfulness in the Irish primary school classroom. Organisations such as the Mindfulness Teacher's Organisation, Mindfulness Matters and Bright Sparks are allowing for this. Mindfulness Matters notes an increase in enthusiasm and interest towards implementing mindful practices into the classroom. The facilitators of the programme engage in workshops throughout primary schools in Ireland. Notably based on the increased levels of calmness and focus the principals in one of the schools in question choose to implement mindfulness as a concrete part of the S.P.H.E. curriculum in their school (Mindfulness Matters, 2014). Although the DES has introduced student well-being as a standalone subject in secondary education there is no such opportunity in the primary curriculum. As mentioned above, principals and teachers are having to choose to integrate the practices within other subjects such as S.P.H.E.

Implementing mindfulness in the classroom

Thus far previous literature has suggested that mindfulness in classrooms has an array of advantages however these advantages are not without their limitations. Mindfulness must be introduced to the classroom by the teacher; however, what are the implications if the teacher is not a regular practitioner of mindfulness?

Napoli, M., (2004) explains how the role of the teacher has shifted over time.

Teachers are no longer solely concerned with a child's cognitive development but must also be aware of a child's emotional development and how to respond to them. Kabat-Zinn (2006) upholds strong views on the matter stating that 'mindfulness cannot be taught to others in an authentic way without the instructors practicing it in his or her own life' (p.149). This suggests that in order for children to reap the benefits of mindfulness practices, the teacher implementing the practices must be confident and credible.

A study conducted by Napoli, M. (2004) investigates the effects that teachers who practice mindfulness have on teacher behaviour and overall classroom life. The study revealed that teachers who engaged in mindfulness training programmes found that when implemented correctly there was an overall improvement in classroom life in terms of the quality of the lessons delivered, the level of learning by the children within these lessons as well as an improvement in conflict resolution. Yet, an important element to the teacher's implementation of not only mindfulness into the classroom but any curricular subject is highly dependent on his or her own personal interests and subject preferences. Bulger, S., Mohr, D., Walls, R. (2002) list teacher enthusiasm, with effective teaching and student interest. The piece places emphasis on the connection between teachers' competence and confidence with a subject area with their intrinsic enthusiasm; 'more effective teachers display a high level of enthusiasm that reflects their professional competence and confidence' (n/p). This enthusiasm then has positive effects on child engagement with the lessons and activities of the subject; "if you hate to teach it, your students will hate to learn it." Conversely, if you love to teach it, your students may very well love to learn it. Enthusiasm is contagious' (n/p). In relation to the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom this suggests that the more competent and confident a teacher is in the area, the more enthusiastic he or she

will be when implementing it in the classroom. This enthusiasm may then have positive effects on how the children in the class receive and value it. This may be relative to all subject areas not only mindfulness.

It is important to address what the Irish Education system is offering teachers in relation to mindfulness training. It is not formally addressed in by the DES however there are programmes such as ‘Bright Sparks’ and ‘Mindfulness Matters’ available to teachers who wish to become mindful practitioners. Both of these programmes acknowledge that a mindful approach begins with a mindful teacher. They offer courses for teachers to develop their level of mindfulness as well as providing an array of tools for teachers to create a mindful space rather than providing concrete outcomes one might gain from engaging with the practices. It must be noted that these programmes are not funded by the DES and can be suggested that although the department is encouraging schools to introduce and implement the practices there is nothing being done to aid this development.

In conclusion, research seems to suggest that in order to create and facilitate mindful classroom and a mindful approach school teachers must be practitioners of mindfulness themselves. There is a gap in the research illustrating the implementation of mindfulness programmes conducted in Irish schools however international research illustrates that these programmes begin with the teacher’s mindful experiences.

Conclusion

This literature review focuses on the various understandings of mindfulness, the alleged benefits of mindfulness practice in the classroom, the implementation of mindfulness in Irish classrooms and in schools in addition to the relevance of the teacher as a practitioner.

Mindfulness was defined above as being fully present and giving complete attention in the given moment. Through doing this it seems the child becomes less stressed and anxious, and has an increased ability to learn and develop positive relationships with others. The growth of attention allows an enhanced learning opportunity for the child.

The above literature is not without its limitations. Mindfulness is not a 'cure all' for life's difficulties. What one gains from practicing mindfulness may be different from one child to another; this may be due to experience, or the level of social and/or emotional difficulties the individual is experiencing at the time. As well as this, in order for a mindful classroom to be facilitated, it seems a teacher's individual value and experience of mindful practices are a significant influence.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Introduction

This study investigates how teachers' perspectives on the implementation of mindfulness in the primary school classroom with a specific focus on child well-being and academic achievement. This chapter presents the methodology for the study.

Kumar states that '*research methodology is a way to systemically solve the research problems*' (2008 P:5). The methodology for this study will be examined under the following headings;

- Epistemology
- Research paradigm
- Research methods
- Advantages and disadvantages of the chosen method(s)
- Interview structure
- Sampling
- Sample
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Reliability, validity and representativeness of the findings.

Epistemology:

The researcher will adopt a qualitative approach while conducting the study. All questions asked will be open-ended and focused on the Interviewees' personal and teaching experiences. Therefore, qualitative phenomenological research will be the model. Lester, S., states that;

'epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasise the importance of personal perspective and interpretation' (1999, p:1).

This is adapted within this research through the use of open-ended questions in the interviews, allowing the Interviewees to voice their opinions without undue limitations.

Research Paradigm/methods & the advantages/ disadvantages;

This research has adopted a qualitative paradigm. Experienced and current teachers were interviewed. The researcher conducted three question sets. Each question set has been designed based on the experiences of the teacher's in relation to mindfulness practices both inside and outside of the classroom. Question set A has been designed for practitioners of mindful methods. Similarly, question set B serves the same purpose however there are more in-depth questions based on the implemented practices. Question set C has been designed for non-practitioners of mindfulness. The similarities in all questions sets, however, are how the teachers view the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom.

There are both advantages and disadvantages in relation to conducting the research through interviews. Evidence Base (2006) outlines how interviews are beneficial in obtaining insight into personal feelings, opinions, and experiences. Advantages of the interviews are as follows:

Unlike a questionnaire, there is no limit to how much the interviewee may say. This enables all of the Interviewees to give detailed and developed answers. Responses from questionnaires may be limited due to space.

Interviews allow for the development of alternative and/or added follow-up

questions where suitable, depending on answers given by the Interviewees.

If Interviewees fail to develop on answers efficiently, the interviewer asked appropriate follow-up questions in an attempt to develop on these answers further.

Interviews also allow for the Interviewee to remain focused throughout the entire process. In comparison to conducting questionnaires where the Interviewee is open to distraction and/or forgetting to complete the questionnaire, the researcher can ensure that this does not happen during an interview.

Disadvantages of the interviews are as follows:

Difficulties in terms of arranging a time to meet to conduct the interview may arise with Interviewees which can result in a delay in receiving data and conducting the rest of the research. Interviewees may feel limited/uncomfortable to give their honest opinions on certain topics. As questionnaires have do not have to be conducted face-to-face this may prevent such an instance from occurring.

Sampling Process:

Sampling refers to the way in which the researcher decides on the Interviewees for their study. Thompson argues that '*sampling consists of selecting some part of a population to observe so that one may estimate something about the whole population*' (2012, p:1). Categories of sampling include probability, simple random sampling, systematic sampling, random sampling, cluster's random sampling, non-probability sampling, accidental sampling, and multi-stage sampling. All of these processes differ in how the researcher decides on their sample.

Purposive sampling is the method of sampling that was used in this research project. This type of sampling was selected due to the fact that there were limited numbers of possible subjects. The researcher hoped to interview current teachers who

practice mindfulness outside and inside of the classroom. As well as this the researcher wished to interview teachers who do not partake in mindfulness-based practices outside of the classroom yet implement the practice in the classroom. The researcher then compared both views of mindfulness and its implementation within the classroom.

Sample:

The sample in this research consists of four primary school teachers. These teacher's levels of experience range from two to six years teaching and an age range of twenty-seven years old to thirty-one years old with a mixture of both male and female Interviewees. Interviewee one is a male teacher with two years of full-time teaching experience. He is currently teaching fourth class. This Interviewee received training on the topic of mindfulness and chose to engage in an optional course in the area during his time in college. This was appreciated when the researcher was choosing appropriate candidates. The sample also consists of another male teacher who is currently teaching senior infants. This interviewee has engaged in continuous professional development courses in the area of mindfulness in the lives of teachers. Both of the teachers mentioned above are valuable to the sample as although they admittedly do not engage in mindfulness practices they express their personal appreciation for the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom.

The sample also consists of two female teachers who engage in mindfulness practices in their own lives. One is a female primary school teacher who is currently teaching fifth class. This educator has four years teaching experience. The Interviewee stated that she engages in her own mindfulness practices outside of the classroom. She places great emphasis on the importance of mindfulness in terms of the overall well-

being of children and their academic success while also appreciating that implementing mindfulness in the classroom is not without its shortfalls and limitations.

The second is another female educator who spent six years teaching – two in Wales and four in Ireland. This interview focused on the areas mentioned above however also compared the implementation and value of mindfulness within primary education in Wales to Ireland.

From the above interviews the researcher establishes the methods and practices teacher's use to implement mindfulness in the classroom, the things that trigger teachers to implement these practices, how these practices benefit the children in terms of well-being and academic achievement as well as the limitations of mindfulness and the role the DES plays in the introduction of mindfulness into the primary school curriculum. The above sample allows the researcher to compare and contrast the views of teachers who engage in mindful practice personally and those who do not.

Ethical considerations

All researchers must reflect all ethical considerations. In relation to this research project, the researcher distributed plain language statements and informed consent forms to participants. In addition to this, a consent form was given to the school principal of the school in question. The researcher hoped that these form would provide participants with all necessary information; '... all participants in the research (must) understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported' (British Educational Research Association, 2019, pg. 5). The researcher ensured to notify all participants that their involvement in the research was voluntary and they could withdraw at any stage.

Interview process:

Interview One:

The first interviewee was a primary school teacher, a recent graduate. He has been teaching full time for two years. The teacher partook in a seminar based on mindfulness which focused on mindfulness in the classroom. This interview explored mindfulness in the classroom, the benefits in terms of well-being and academic achievement, the limitations in relation to mindfulness as well as the role of the department of education in the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom. The following themes arose from this interview: lack of time in the school day, the importance of teacher training in the area, the role of the DES in its introduction and implementation, the academic benefits- increased focus and increase in test scores, well-being benefits in terms of increased desire to share and discuss worries and concerns, the need for trust between peers.

The interview took place in his school in order for them to be uninhibited by strange surroundings. The interview was recorded on the researcher's phone and then transferred to their laptop. The interview took approximately 27 minutes and occurred without any disruptions or hesitations by the Interviewee.

Interview Two:

The second interviewee was a teacher with six years experience. The interview was conducted in the interviewee's place of work. This interview was recorded on the researcher's phone and transferred to their laptop. The interview took eighteen minutes and again occurred without any major disruptions and/or hesitations by the Interviewee. The interview examines the ways in which this teacher implements and values mindfulness in the classroom. Similar themes arose from this interview to interview one

with slight differences in the methods used and his views on the limitations of mindfulness.

This interview highlights the need for increased teacher training and funding by the DES in order for mindfulness practices to be introduced as a concrete element into the primary school curriculum. Again, the interviewee highlights the increased levels of concentration and focus amongst the children after engaging in mindfulness activities. In contrast to interview one however, the interviewee argues that these are only short term benefits rather than long-term.

Interview Three

The third interviewee was a teacher currently teaching second class. In contrast to interview one and two, this interviewee engages in mindfulness practices in their personal lives and conscientiously brings these experiences into the classroom. This interview was conducted in the Interviewee's school and was also recorded on the researcher's phone and then transferred on to their laptop. The interview took approximately fifteen minutes. This interview examined the teachers' awareness of mindfulness practices, how their experiences have effected how they implement mindfulness into the classroom as well as the over-arching themes from interviews one and two.

Interview four:

The fourth interviewee was a teacher currently teaching fifth class. This teacher has five years' experience. Similar to interviewee three, this interviewee engages in mindfulness practices in their personal lives and there was a strong emphasis on the influence this has had on the teacher's views of mindful practices in the classroom and their implementation. Again, this interview was conducted in the Interviewee's school and was also recorded on the researcher's phone and then transferred on to their laptop.

The interview took approximately twenty-two minutes. This interview examined the teacher's awareness of mindfulness practices and the practices they engage in. This interviewee detailed how she feels these practices have positively influenced her teaching career. The interviewee also discusses how their experiences have effected how they implement mindfulness into the classroom as well as the over-arching themes from interviews all other interviews.

The structure of these interviews was developed in order to promote developed and detailed answers in relation to the implementation of mindfulness in the primary school classroom and its effects on child well-being and academic achievement.

Data Analysis

Data will be analysed through creating transcripts of all interviews, reading through these transcripts and drawing out the key themes that emerge and coding of these themes. The researcher adapted thematic analysis as an approach of data analysis, Boyatzis, R., (1998) describes thematic analysis as *'a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit "code". This may be a list of themes'* (p; vi) The themes drawn from this research project were analysed by the researcher and used as headings within the findings and discussion chapter. Further analysis was conducted in order to inspect whether or not the findings support or contradict the findings within the literature review of the researcher.

Reliability, Validity, and Representativeness

This research project is reliable within the context of the school in question however due to the small sample size other Interviewees may agree with the information given. If the research was to be conducted in other schools different

perspectives may be obtained by Interviewees in terms of the role and implementation of mindfulness within their school/environment. The researcher believes that the data received from Interviewees were valid and very helpful in the completion of the research project.

Chapter 4- Data Analysis

Introduction

This research focuses on the perspectives of teachers on the implementation of mindfulness in the primary school classroom. The research specifically focuses on the relationship between mindfulness and child well-being and academic achievement. This chapter presents the findings of the research under the following headings:

- Understanding of Mindfulness
- Benefits of mindfulness – academic achievement and well-being
- Implementation of mindfulness in the classroom.

Understanding of Mindfulness

Each participant's understanding of mindfulness was drawn from a close analysis of his/her entire interview. The data suggests that although some participants may have more knowledge about the religious foundations of mindfulness, all Interviewees acknowledged and addressed the role of mindfulness as paying attention to the current moment.

‘When they’re closing their eyes and being part of the moment which is what mindfulness is all about really. If they’re going to try and escape the world that they’re in currently and seize the moment...’ (Interviewee One).

‘I find these practices help to re-focus children’ (Interviewee Three) The above responses were similar to the other Interviewees' replies. This awareness supports various definitions of mindfulness particularly that of Kabat-Zinn (2003). Yet based on the response from Interviewee One it seems that there may be a slight contradiction. Although the participant acknowledges that mindfulness is about being present in the

moment he continues by stating that the children are going to 'escape the world they're currently in' and still 'seize the moment'. This suggests confusion in relation to the purpose and definition of the practice. A common theme that arose from the interview is that when engaging the children in mindfulness-based practices, the teachers do not address its religious origins. Although all participants acknowledged and noted that mindfulness can be a religious practice, they emphasised that they do not implement it from that point of view;

'Every religion has a mindful practice somehow. So take meditation, so that's mainly Buddhist but from what I know it's also part of Christianity. So if I did ever take part in the Learn Together curriculum I would be careful not to connect it directly with one religion' (Interviewee One)

'As long as there's no religious aspect to it, so if you take out the religious aspects to it then that's fine, a lot of the time you don't even have to. Say for example mindfulness colouring there's no religious aspect necessarily to that or say for example Cosmic Kids Yoga' (Interviewee Two)

'What I would say is that I would never associate it with one specific religion. So for example, it's a Buddhist practice. I would never say to the children we'll engage in mindfulness today based on our study of Buddhism.' (Interviewee Four)

These views support those of Afzal, Uz., (2018) which suggest that mindfulness is a secular practice and does not necessarily have to be viewed as a religious practice.

Throughout all interviews, the participants noted an increased sense of calmness amongst the children and the overall classroom environment (analysed below). These responses support Kelly's (2008) description of the Buddhist tradition. Contrastingly, Interviewee Three seems to acknowledge the religious roots within mindfulness but notes how she gives children the option to partake in the practice or to opt-out;

‘We include other aspects of different religions into our learning and I’ve made sure to tell the children that they don’t have to do this practice’.

Conclusively the above data illustrates allows the researcher to identify each participants understanding of mindfulness and its religious origins. The data also aids the researcher's understanding of how these religious origins affect the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom. It seems that all participants are aware of the religious origins of mindfulness however they emphasise that this is not brought into the classroom, emphasising that within their educational rationale, mindfulness is implemented as a secular practice rather than a religious one. The participants also demonstrate an understanding of what mindfulness is, describing it as being a practice that allows the children to re-focus and be a part of the moment. This supports various understandings of mindfulness as clarified in the literature review (Brown, K.W., et al. 2003). The data also gives the researcher insight into the participants' views and perceptions of mindfulness. It seems all contributors illustrated an openness towards the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom while indicating its use is to re-focus the children throughout the day.

Academic Achievement

Each Interviewee was asked to discuss their opinions as to whether or not mindfulness-based practices within the classroom impacts on children's academic achievement. Interestingly each Interviewee seemed to respond with similar observations with some slight differences. Interviewee One – expressed an awareness of how engaging in brief mindful activities illustrated an increase in test scores;

‘It definitely has an effect. Just to give an example as well, when we do our assessments on Friday morning I implement a mindful break between the maths and

dictation. I noticed that there was an uptake in scores which was interesting’.

This supports and reflects Smiling Minds’ Mindfulness Guidelines (2018) belief that engaging in mindfulness practices improves working memory. Although the children are given a list of spellings to learn each week, these words are manipulated through dictation in assessment. Interviewee Three supports this response in terms of recognising long term academic benefits highlighting the importance of increased concentration and focus;

‘I find that the children are a lot more focused in the class when mindfulness practices happen. They can concentrate for much longer, especially the ones that found it difficult to concentrate at the beginning of the year. I find that they can concentrate for a lot longer whereas before it would take a long time to do a particular activity. Now I find they are more able to engage in tasks for longer spells of time’ All other participants appreciate the increase of focus, attention, and concentration, however, have not assessed or observed any long term academic benefits;

‘In terms of getting them (the children) to concentrate it definitely helps... They might focus more on the next task that they're about to complete if they've done a mindfulness activity beforehand. I haven't noticed the long term benefits because it's not something I've been assessing myself’. (Interviewee Two)

‘I do find that it increases a child's concentration level and ability to focus. That's why it works great as a transition activity... I do find after transition activities through mindfulness the children are a lot more focused and re-energized too... So yeah, all in all, I think mindfulness does have good effects on a child's academic achievements’ (Interviewee Four).

Effectively all participants seem to link mindfulness with increased levels of concentration and working memory while engaging in tasks and activities. Their overall

views support the opinions of Ramsburg, J.T., & Youmans, R.J., (2013) who argue that mindfulness increases one's ability to sustain their attention and focus in the current moment. The above data illustrates to the researcher that half of the sample see the long-term benefits of the implementation of mindfulness into the primary school classroom and it's relationships with a child's academic achievement while the other half, not the short term benefits. Interviewee One aids the researcher's study on how a child's working memory can be developed through mindfulness practices. The interviewee notes how weekly spellings are manipulated in the form of dictation. This supports the study at hand as it aids the researcher's investigation on how mindfulness can develop a child's academic achievement.

The above data supports Gathercole, S., and Alloway, T. (2008) belief that a key element of working memory is one's ability to manipulate information. In this sense, the children in question had to manipulate their words into sentences. The interviewee noted his observations of increased test scores after a mindfulness break. Thus, re-enforcing St Clair-Thompson, et. al., (2010) findings on how mindfulness increases one's working memory. This develops on the research topic in question while also building on previous research. The data suggests that through engaging in mindfulness practices a child's working memory can be developed further.

Well-being

All Interviewees were asked if they believed mindfulness-based practices within the classroom had positive effects on children's well-being. Key themes that transpired from the responses given were the calming effects of mindful practices particularly yoga, mindful moments and mindful colouring as well as the need for teacher training for the children to truly benefit.

What stands out the most from the findings is that all respondents instinctively say that they do believe that mindfulness has positive effects on children's wellbeing. Interviewee One and Two credited mindfulness and its connection with well-being with increased calmness which in turn positively affects academic achievement; *'Even if it's just a two or three-minute breathing exercise between lessons just to get them to calm down especially after activities like Aistear where they might have been a bit hyped up'* (Interviewee Two).

'I find that later in the day even, you can still see the effects in terms of giddiness it seems to get rid of it for the duration of the day'. (Interviewee One).

These views support Kempson, J.R., study of how mindfulness is helpful for remaining calm. It supports the findings of the study which illustrated that mindfulness does help students to remain calm. These understandings also confirm Growing up in Ireland (2009) stating that though mindfulness benefits a child's well-being, in turn, it also aids children throughout their development and learning.

Interestingly Interviewee One continues to discuss the benefits that mindfulness has in relation to giving the children time to think about their concerns and worries. He believes that giving the children this time increases the likelihood that they will share these problems with the class teacher or guardian;

'children have been more forthcoming with problems or things they might want to confide in me personally... I've often thought that it was a result of been given the time to sit and think about things, their sense of place and what's going on basically. It might give them time to think about things that they maybe haven't been bringing to my attention otherwise'.

Although these views reflect those of Byrne, H., (n/d) that mindfulness helps tackle the problem of 'enabling children to become familiar with the workings of our mind' the

interviewee suggested that the benefits may be limited;

‘In terms of mindfulness, I don't think it's all it's cracked up to be. While there are definite benefits, and it might calm children down in the long term, it's not going to remove a child's problems from their lives...for example the likes of anxiety. That anxiety will probably repatriate. So no I don't think it's completely a fix all methodology in any way’ (Interviewee One). The limitations mentioned support the literature findings (Bhikkhue., 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Byrne, H., n/d) that ‘mindfulness isn’t the end point’ (p.4) but perhaps a methodology to be used as a means to manage and develop a sense of control over these unwanted emotions.

Interviewee Three and 4 share similar perspectives towards the effects of mindfulness on well-being. The participants found that through engaging in the practices children can reduce feelings of stress and anger;

‘I do a lot of counting and breathing exercises if they feel angry which comes down to self-soothing’ (Interviewee Three).

‘I find for my class, in particular, it's a great way to tackle stress in the classroom... giving the children a few minutes just to reflect and to be in the moment can work wonders if done correctly’ (Interviewee Four).

Feelings of stress and anger amongst children are not addressed within the literature review and may be an area for further research. The effects of mindfulness practices on teacher stress reductions are addressed in research, and this work may be of use in developing and assisting future research into the benefits mindfulness has on stress reduction amongst primary school children.

The above data supports the researcher in positing a link between mindfulness and a child’s well-being, endorsed by teachers’ opinions. The above responses indicate that all participants believe that mindfulness-based practices within the classroom *do*

benefit children's well-being. Participants addressed their beliefs in terms of the way mindfulness aids academic achievement in conjunction with promoting a willingness to be more forthcoming with worries and feelings of stress and anger. The data also aids the researcher in analysing and address teachers' views on the limitations in the area. Interviewee One does appreciate the link between mindfulness and a child's well-being however he does acknowledge its limitations. The respondent states that mindfulness will not result in children overcoming areas of difficulties in their life, yet he does acknowledge that it may help.

Implementation of Mindfulness in the classroom

Speckled throughout all interviews, participants discussed how mindful practices are implemented into his/her classroom. Interestingly, three out of four participants selected both teacher-led and teacher independent practices such as guided breathing, mindful moments, mindfulness colouring, yoga, and nature walks. In total half of the participants personally, partake in mindfulness practices. Notably, they share how these personal experiences have helped them implement mindfulness in the classroom; *'because it's a natural thing for me to do, I find it quite easy to transfer this into my classroom and I think the children seem to really enjoy it'* (Interviewee Three). These views are in line with the literature, specifically Bulger, S., et al., (2002) suggests that a confident and enthusiastic teacher has positive effects on child engagement with lessons and activities. The data also supports Kabat-Zinn's (2006) views that mindfulness can only be taught authentically when the instructor is a practitioner of the method themselves. Admittedly Interviewee One notes how although he does not engage in mindful practice personally, he feels that these practices would be beneficial towards his implementation; *'No I don't but I wish I did. I think if I did engage in mindfulness it*

would probably be more beneficial for the children'. When further questioned about this the interviewee noted that even satisfactory teacher training in the area would increase the benefits that the children receive.

Throughout all interviews participants noted some limitations to the implementation of mindful practices into the classroom; a lack of teacher training specifically. Interviewees noted that for mindfulness to be implemented more efficiently in the classroom sufficient teacher training is crucial. *'It definitely has to be properly managed and implemented and I think that teacher training in the area is essential'* (Interviewee One). While Interviewee Four notes how she feels the children would benefit more in terms of their well-being if teachers were more adequately trained; *'There's a lot to be said for teacher training in this instance...I do think they would be more effective in terms of reducing stress and the child's overall well-being if I had more training in the area'*. The above responses support Nampoli, M. (2004) findings in relation to the overall improvement in classroom life once a teacher has engaged in mindfulness training programmes. When asked about the role of the DES in the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom participants seemed to be critical overall. The Interviewees noted how the DES must increase funding and the availability of CPD courses in the area of mindfulness in the primary school classroom in order to aid its implementation however this is not being done. However, when asked if it should become a part of curriculum Interviewees noted how they would rather the return of drama as a stand-alone subject and implement mindfulness through integration with that subject area; *'I would have always used drama. So when you're cutting the likes of drama mindfulness is a hard one to squeeze in'* (Interviewee One). Interestingly when asked, all participants stated that they would engage in CPD courses based on implementing mindfulness practices into the classroom. However, when further probed

about CPD courses, three out of four participants noted how they would rather develop their training for a core subject rather than mindfulness; *‘Do I want to be more adequately trained to team teach maths or mindfulness? I’m going to pick the more common one’* (Interviewee One)

‘I think when push comes to shove I would more than likely choose to develop on an area that I’d be teaching more often’ (Interviewee Four).

The above data provides crucial information to the researcher based on teachers' perspectives on the implementation of mindfulness into the primary school classroom. The discussion and identification of both teacher dependent and independent practices allow the researcher to examine the methodologies used by the teachers to produce the previously mentioned benefits. The data also allows the researcher to establish the variation in the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom between those who are personal practitioners of mindfulness practices and those who are not.

Overall the data builds on previous literature. It seems to suggest that practitioners implement mindful practices more naturally and easily into the classroom than non-practicing teachers. They also tend to implement teacher dependent practices such as guided breathing and yoga more readily. The data allows the researcher to identify some limitations that the teachers acknowledge when implementing mindfulness into the classroom, particularly the lack of CPD courses. Although the literature provides information based on Irish CPD courses available the Interviewees suggest that more is needed. However, when push comes to shove the Interviewees did note how they would be more likely to engage in a CPD course based on a core subject rather than of mindfulness. This suggests to the researcher that if the DES formally addressed and introduced mindfulness as a core part of the primary school curriculum teachers would be more inclined to develop their learning and training in the area. Thus

improving the quality of its implementation in the classroom.

Conclusion

The above data displays the opinions of current primary school teachers based on the question sets. The question sets were focused on eliciting each teacher's personal experience of mindfulness and how this affects its implementation in the classroom. The question sets also probed whether or not the Interviewees believed that there is a link between the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom and the overall well-being of children and their academic success.

The key finding from this particular question set is that there is a sense of great openness towards the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom from practitioners and non-practitioners of mindfulness alike. The overall sense is that mindfulness does have positive effects on a child's overall well-being and academic achievement, however, it must be noted that the Interviewees have no concrete evidence for this, it is solely based on personal interpretation of their observations.

The data also suggests that teachers feel they need more training in the area in order to implement it more effectively in the classroom. However due to the fact that mindfulness is not a core and concrete part of the primary school curriculum the majority of respondents noted that they would prefer to receive training in a core subject area.

Chapter Five- Conclusion

What is the price of paying attention? This study researched teachers' perspectives on the implementation of mindfulness in the Irish primary school classroom. In particular, it examines the relationship between the implementation of mindfulness and its overall relationship with a child's well-being and academic success. The findings of this research study propose that even though all Interviewees are not practitioners of mindfulness they do feel it has a valuable place in the primary school classroom. Through implementing mindfulness as secular rather than religious, the teachers in question believe that implementing it has positive implications on a child's well-being and academic achievement.

The research finds that within this context, mindfulness is implemented as a secular practice to allow for the inclusion of children from all religious backgrounds. The teachers view mindfulness as paying attention to the current moment, supporting Kabat-Zinn's definition. Various practices are used by all teachers regardless of their own mindful experiences- both teacher dependent and independent. A common theme arising from the study is that the purpose of implementing mindfulness into the classroom is an approach to increase concentration levels and improve a child's overall well-being.

The findings imply that there is a connection between the implementation of mindfulness with a child's well-being and academic success. In relation to well-being, the research indicates that children may be more forthcoming to teachers about concerns that they have, reduce feelings of undesired, perhaps difficult emotions, increase children's ability to self-soothe and have an overall calming effect on the classroom environment. Notably, the research suggests that such benefits are limited. Rather than being a 'cure-all', mindful practices aid the development of skills needed to

control and regulate challenging emotions. In relation to academic success, the research insinuates that mindfulness has positive long-term and short-term effects on working memory and concentration skills.

The findings indicate that mindfulness increases a child's concentration and focus. Interestingly there was a failure to comment on a child's own interests and motivations. Particularly on their desire to focus and concentrate during a specific lesson or activity. The literature suggests that intrinsic interests and motivations play a key role in a child's desire to engage fully in a lesson yet this is not addressed by the participants.

It should be noted that, given the small sample size, the opinions and views given do not represent all faculty members in the selected school. Due to their own personal interests in the area of mindfulness, some biases may be held by the Interviewees that engage in mindful practice.

The topic in question provided some limitations for the researcher. There seems to be a lack of literature available based on Irish studies of the field. Those of which were Irish based studies, focused on mindfulness for adolescents and/or adults.

Therefore, the researcher depended on international studies on the area of mindfulness for primary school aged children. This lack of Irish research may possibly reflect the emphasis placed on mindfulness within not only Irish society but within Irish primary schools. This investigation suggests that mindfulness has a positive effect on a child's overall well-being. Mental health is a key element of a child's welfare. Mental Health Ireland (2019) reveals that approximately one in every ten children experience mental health problems in Ireland. Research has indicated how early intervention is key in developing resilience to handle such illnesses. Therefore it may be suggested that primary school is an important environment for children to explore and discuss mental

health, possibly through mindful practices. Although there are guidelines for primary schools to address mental health, there is no specific time in the curriculum given to addressing such an important subject. The research found that this was a significant area of concern for the participants. A crucial finding was that the jam-packed school curriculum does not allow for the inclusion of mindful practices. Perhaps, implementing mindfulness as a core area of the primary school curriculum would allow Irish primary school more time to address the subject of mental health with children. In addition to this it may also increase the level of Irish research on the topic.

This research project illustrates, that the selected Irish primary school teachers, believe that there is value in implementing mindfulness into the primary school classroom as a secular practice. The study indicates that there are strong connections between the implementation of mindfulness with a child's increased feelings of well-being and academic achievement. Specifically, teachers suggest that mindfulness increases levels of concentration and focus in both the long term and the short term. Teachers' personal observations are supported by the reviewed literature. That being, by engaging in mindfulness practices may develop a child's working memory and difficult emotions may be better controlled and regulated by children. The research also illustrates that in order for mindfulness to be implemented effectively in the classroom, teachers must be trained accordingly. However, personal subject preferences must be regarded. Despite the above views and opinions of the selected teachers, crucially, the majority of the participants would choose to develop on a curriculum subject. This suggests that although teachers identify clear benefits of mindfulness practices in the classroom, it will not be fully valued unless it is introduced as a core area within the Irish primary school curriculum.

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Appendices

Plain Language Statement.

This research project focuses on the implementation of mindfulness within the Irish primary school classroom. In particular, it examines the relationship between the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom and its relationship with child wellbeing and academic success.

Interviews will be used as the method in this project to achieve effective results from the interaction with the participants.

Confidentiality will be protected as I will not mention the names of any of the participants involved in the research. Participants will be acknowledged through their job title/ the role that they have rather than their names.

Participants may gain personal satisfaction from partaking in this research as they are contributing to the gains in the given research. Given the topic, participants may begin to consider the importance of mindfulness within the classroom and may consider this from then on.

Involvement in this research study is voluntary. Participants may withdraw from the study at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the study are completed.

Informed Consent Form.

This research project focuses on the implementation of mindfulness within the Irish primary school classroom. In particular, it examines the relationship between the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom and its relationship with child wellbeing and academic success.

Interviews will be used as the method in this project to achieve effective results from the interaction with the participants.

This piece of research is important in developing an awareness of how teachers can increase the benefits that children receive from engaging in mindfulness practices. Specifically through having an increased awareness and in-depth knowledge to what true mindfulness is and its limitations as well as its advantages.

The research will require participants to complete an interview.

Participation is completely voluntary and it is important to understand the following:

I am aware that if I agree to take part in this study, I can withdraw from participation at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

I wish to assure you that any data collected from participants will be destroyed once the research has been completed in full.

Participant – Please complete the following (or an appropriately phrased variation)

(Circle Yes or No for each question).

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement?	Yes/No
Do you understand the information provided?	Yes/No
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	Yes/No
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	Yes/No

I have read and understood the information in this form. The researchers have answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participant's Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Witness:

Date:

Letter of Consent to principal

Dear _____

This research project investigates the implementation of mindfulness into the Irish primary school classroom. The project hopes to discover teachers' perspectives on the implementation of mindfulness and its relationship with a child's well-being and academic success.

This research is very relevant at the minute due to what seems to be an increase in the use of mindfulness within education. However, there seems to be a lack of Irish research based on the subject area. I hope to add to the limited research currently available based on an Irish primary school context.

I would be extremely grateful if I could base my research on your school. Specifically, I it would be greatly appreciated if you would allow me to interview some of the teachers in this school. Given the teachers permission I would interview them on the topic. I will provide a draft copy of the interview questions to ensure all of the teachers are comfortable with them. Of course, the participants can withdraw from the research project at any time.

I wish to assure you that any data collected from participants will be destroyed once the research has been completed in full.

I appreciate your support. If you agree to allow me to interview teachers within your school please sign below;

Signature

Date

Interview Question Sets

Research project: Interview Questions

Set B

1. Name: _____
 Age: _____
 Gender: _____
 Years teaching: _____
2. What are your experiences of mindfulness practices (do you engage in mindful practice, if so how)?
3. Have these experiences impacted how you implement mindfulness within the classroom? How so?
4. Based on your experiences how do you feel engaging children in mindfulness-based practices impacts on their well-being?
5. Based on your experience, how do you feel engaging children in mindfulness-based practices impacts on their academic achievement?
6. Are there any other benefits children may gain from engaging in mindfulness-based practices?
7. In your opinion are there limitations to the benefits of mindfulness practices in the classroom, please explain.
8. Overall, what classroom observations do you make in relation to the children after they have engaged in mindfulness practices (e.g. in behaviour)?
9. If the teacher training was available based on implementing mindfulness-based practices into the classroom would you avail of it and why?
10. Do you think more should be done by the DES to increase teacher awareness of mindfulness in the classroom? How might they do this?
11. The DES have introduced 'Well- Being' as a curricular subject to the Junior Certificate. Should more be done to introduce well-being/ mindfulness into the primary school curriculum? If so how can the DES implement mindfulness to a higher degree in the primary school (in your own opinion)?
12. Mindfulness is a Buddhist practice. As a teacher working in an Educate Together school are there restrictions to how you can implement mindfulness in the classroom? If so, please explain how

1. Describe your background in relation to teaching (i.e. years teaching, class levels you have taught, etc.).
2. What is your knowledge (if any) of mindfulness-based practices?
3. What are your experiences of mindfulness practices (do you engage in mindful practice, if so how)?
4. Have these experiences impacted how you implement mindfulness within the classroom? How so?
5. How do you implement mindfulness-based practices in the classroom?
6. Based on your experiences what are the benefits the children gain from experiencing mindfulness in the classroom?
7. In your opinion are there limitations to the benefits of mindfulness practices in the classroom, please explain.
8. Based on your experiences how do you feel engaging children in mindfulness-based practices impacts on their well-being?
9. Based on your experience, how do you feel engaging children in mindfulness-based practices impacts on their academic achievement?
10. The DES have introduced 'Well- Being' as a curricular subject to the Junior Certificate. Should more be done to introduce well-being/ mindfulness into the primary school curriculum? If so how can the DES implement mindfulness to a higher degree in the primary school (in your own opinion)?
11. Mindfulness is a Buddhist practice. As a teacher working in an Educate Together school are there restrictions to how you can implement mindfulness in the classroom? If so, please explain how.
12. As a teacher that engages in mindfulness-based practices, do you feel it has benefited you in your teaching career? Please explain.

1.Name:

Age:

Gender:

Years of teaching:

2. What is your experience of engaging in mindfulness practices? How do you feel these experiences have influenced how you implement mindfulness practices into your classroom?

3. In your opinion, what is the purpose of implementing mindfulness practices in the primary school classroom?

4. The children engage in mindful colouring at the beginning of each school day. What is the purpose of this? In what way do you think the practice is beneficial to the children?

5. Do the children engage in any other mindful practices within the school day? Please explain these practices and their function.

6. You trained to become a teacher and worked as a primary school teacher in Wales. Do you feel there is a greater emphasis on mindfulness within primary education in Wales? If so, in what way?

7. Do you think there are limitations to what the children can gain from engaging in mindfulness practices? Please explain.

8. You make a point of timetabling mindfulness practices such as yoga into the children's weekly school timetable. Do you think all teachers should do this? In your opinion, how may the children be limited to benefiting from mindfulness practices if mindfulness is not a timetabled by teachers each school year (i.e. you may be the only teacher that engages the children in mindfulness practices. Next year the class teacher may decide not to do so. How might this limit the benefits that the children gain?)

9. Based on your experience, how do you feel engaging children in mindfulness-based practices impacts on their well-being?

10. Based on your experience, how do you feel engaging children in mindfulness-based practices impacts on their academic achievement?

11. Mindfulness is a Buddhist practice. As a teacher working in an Educate Together school are there restrictions to how you can implement mindfulness in the classroom? If so, please explain how.

12. As a teacher that engages in mindfulness-based practices, do you feel it has benefited you in your teaching career? Please explain.

