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How can the use of mindfulness techniques
promote self-regulation in Year 1 pupils?

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

Self-regulation is a skill that is important for children's development and well-being (Development Matters (2021); Ikävalko et Al (2022)). This research project draws upon the previous findings of researchers that have studied the effects of mindfulness on children's ability to self-regulate (Berti and Ciagla (2022); Thierry et Al (2016)), in an attempt to gain an understanding as to whether mindfulness strategies can provide a benefit to pupils in their ability to self-regulate.

Key themes emerged such as teacher's knowledge and understanding of mindfulness, differing definitions of self-regulation and barriers to pupils' ability to self-regulate. It is important to note that the cohort of pupils studied were greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and face many economic hardships due to the cost-of-living crisis.

The research was carried out at my final school experience placement setting. Using a case study approach, a triangulation of data was collected. Surveys were used to understand the opinions that staff have of mindfulness and their responsibility and role to play in pupils' development of self-regulation. Two small scale interviews with pupils gained information about their views on mindfulness strategies. Childrens drawings informed my research on pupils' emotional literacy and their understanding of how their emotions may be affected by external factors.

The research findings suggest that with further professional development, teachers will be able to promote self-regulation through mindfulness. Pupils enjoy mindfulness strategies and notice the positive effects that they can have on their own and their peer's behaviour. This paper offers an additional perspective to the existing literature and provides suggestions for the future practice of teachers in their implementation and promotion of self-regulation.

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Introduction

The ability for children to be able to undertake self-regulation is crucial for their development and wellbeing (Development Matters (2021); Ikävalko et Al (2022); Kangas et Al (2015)). It has become increasingly important in recent years as the UK has undergone significant challenges causing negative consequences to children from the COVID-19 pandemic to the ongoing cost of living crisis; children face increasing pressures in their daily lives. Although there is disagreement, the meaning of self-regulation can broadly be defined as the ability to focus attention, manage emotions and behaviours in order to cope with one's environment (Fuji & Sugimura (2023); Pahigiannis & Glos (2020); Williford et Al (2013)). It is noted by Williford et Al (2013), that when a child begins school there are new pressures and expectations for them to self-regulate. This is becoming increasingly difficult for pupils due to the coronavirus pandemic, because children have not been exposed to the same social situations (Buchanan (2022); Shorer, M. & Leibovich, L. (2022)). Moreover, 56% of children between the ages of 6-15 have felt more anxious since Covid-19 and others described feelings of sadness and loneliness (YouGov 2021); clearly the lack of socialisation has had a detrimental effect on children's social and emotional development, children have struggled to understand and regulate their own emotions. Furthermore, it is crucial that pupils are supported and encouraged to develop their abilities to self-regulate.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how the use of mindfulness techniques can be applied in the context of a KS1 classroom to aid pupils' self-regulation. The study will take the form of a case-study set in a Year 1 classroom in a school in Yorkshire where pupils facing economic and social hardships is common, and in the context of the issues introduced above. It will seek to re-affirm the need for further implementation of mindfulness in schools while also uncovering the main barriers faced by teachers and schools.

Literature Review

Academic research into the theory and implementation of mindfulness in schools has grown in recent years. The concept of mindfulness, which Perrier et al (2020) broadly defines as directing one's attention to be present in the moment, is rooted in Buddhism and the practice of trying to achieve a state of higher consciousness through meditation (Hooker and Fodor, 2008). It is generally understood by researchers that engaging in mindfulness can improve children's ability to self-regulate their emotions (Kaunhoven and Dorjee, 2017). Though, Greenberg and Harris (2011) note that adapting mindfulness for children is a relatively new phenomenon, and that common activities consist of meditation and yoga.

Despite the increasing level of positive findings towards mindfulness for children, the Department for Education's (DfE) statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) as well as the National Curriculum in England do not outline the need to teach mindfulness to children and place little focus on self-regulation or mental health – it may therefore be an area which is overlooked by teachers (DfE, 2014; 2021). Though, in the context of recent societal issues, such as the cost-of-living crisis, the knock-on effects from the COVID-19 pandemic and strains on school budgets, it is arguably more important than ever to support children with these pressures impacting their lives.

This literature review aims to discuss and critique the existing literature on the topics of mindfulness and self-regulation in relation to children, which in turn will help to justify and inform this research.

Mindfulness In The Classroom

Books promoting the use of mindfulness in the classroom have become increasingly popular over the last few years (Albrecht 2019). Prince (2017) highlighted the impactful report released by the UK Government 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools'. They found that

1 in 10 pupils aged 5 to 16 has a clinically diagnosed mental health disorder and around one in seven has problems undiagnosed. One of the key points made in the document is that in order to help children succeed, schools have a role to play in supporting them to be resilient and mentally healthy. Since this research was published in 2017, the total NHS spending on mental health in England has consistently risen each year, from £11.9 billion across 2017/18 to £15.5 billion projected across 2022/23 (NHS, 2023). Additionally, the DfE introduced extra measures including a £1,200 grant for eligible schools to train a staff member as a mental health lead (Gov.uk, 2021). Despite this, survey results show that the number of 7-10 year olds with a 'probable mental health disorder' has risen from 10.6% in 2017 to 15.2% in 2022 (NHS, 2022). It demonstrates that simply 'throwing' money at the problem is not enough. Furthermore, it presents an opportunity and increased necessity for schools to turn their focus onto mindfulness in the classroom. At present, the DfE's statutory framework for Early Years and the National Curriculum do not set out any specific requirements for pupils' mental health (DfE, 2014; 2021). Schools would have therefore not prioritised nor truly implemented mindfulness in the classroom and in turn, are not aware of the importance or potential benefits.

Mindfulness does not have to be expensive or difficult for schools to implement. Simple activities like finger breathing, mindful colouring, yoga, and meditation have been identified as helpful examples for schools to quickly and affordably utilise (Prince 2017). Mindfulness is simple to apply, and there are numerous online resources available to teachers. According to Albrecht (2019), mindfulness is frequently misinterpreted by teachers, who, despite having good intentions, are misled by different ideas and assumptions. Some schools may have been put off by the prospect of making a mistake or incurring excessive costs.

The benefits of mindfulness in the classroom have been extensively researched. Holt et al. (2022) explored the use of mindful activities in an EYFS environment with a high number of EAL pupils. They observed numerous positive effects on children's wellbeing and confidence. It is worth noting that the activities were child-led and were continually assessed

and amended. For staff, this would be a highly time-consuming process. According to Bryce-Clegg and Prince (2019), children in the EYFS have a natural predisposition to be mindful; they listen to their body and take great care when performing any task. They recommend that teachers capitalise on this natural ability and nurture it further. The child can be encouraged to develop healthy mental health strategies by building on the physical style of mindfulness that is apparent in his or her behaviour while performing activities. The authors argue that as a child's education progresses, teachers will promote mindful behaviours and strategies less. Both Holt et al. (2022) and Bryce-Clegg and Prince (2019) agree that as teachers develop their own practice, they become more mindful, more positive, reflective, and calmer. Teaching mindfulness improves the well-being of teachers.

It may appear that mindfulness is more beneficial and easier to apply in EYFS. Felver and Singh (2022) build on previous research with Alzheimer's patients and adults with poor mental health. They investigated the application of the same strategies to disruptive secondary school students. Despite issues from peers and feelings of humiliation, they indicate that providing the pupil with autonomy and focusing on the use of mindfulness to prevent disruption can be very beneficial. There is a need for routine and commitment from the teacher, but pupils can benefit from mindfulness and begin to recognise and regulate their habits. Mindfulness may be taught to pupils of all ages, and they will all benefit from it.

Self-regulation

There are many models to explain how one self-regulates (Razza et al., (2015); Siegel, (2009); Willis & Dinehart, (2014)). Researchers agree that self-regulation requires a deliberate and thoughtful response to an external factor; one must control their emotions to achieve goals and function in society, it has also been linked to one's wellbeing. Montroy et Al (2016) found that between the ages of 3-7, children rapidly develop the ability to self-regulate. They discuss potential obstacles such as the child's language, family background, and gender. The COVID-19 pandemic may have accelerated and strengthened these

barriers, making interventions that schools and nurseries may have put in place impossible. Routine checks by agencies and services were unable to take place, allowing vulnerable children to fall through the cracks. Children and their parents did not have the same support from health outreach services that they were previously entitled to; early identification of need and risk, health and development reviews with screening assessments, immunisations, promotion of social and emotional development, support for parenting, promotion of health and behavioural change, prevention of obesity, and promotion of breastfeeding (Rosenthal et al 2020). Pupils in KS1 will have been 2 to 4 years old when the COVID 19 pandemic began - this is a prime time for socialisation and when pupils may have learnt to regulate their emotions.

The ability to self-regulate was first introduced as an Early Learning Goal in the 2021 EYFS reform. It was mentioned alongside 'managing self' and 'building relationships' (page 12). Willis and Dinehart (2014) link self-regulation to school readiness; they state that it is essential for pupils in order to have a fulfilling and successful education. However, this also might suggest that the process should have started before attending school. This process must be promoted and fostered by schools, as suggested by the EYFS guidance. As mentioned before, there are many models of self-regulation and different but overlapping definitions. As early as 2001, there was confusion surrounding the multiple definitions of self-regulation and the ways to develop and promote self-regulation (Bronson 2001). Bronson states that the definition may alter with the child's age, culture, independence and the social setting. The lack of clarity has grown with further research and different definitions. McCellend et al (2019) warns of the added concepts often included when discussing self-regulation and how pinpointing a simple definition can create theoretical issues in research. The volume of research, definitions and the researchers own disagreements may have made it difficult for practitioners to understand.

The new focus on personal, social and emotional development is global. Researchers have credited self-regulation in having a positive effect on both the school performance and

academic achievement of pupils (McClelland & Wanless (2012); Becker et Al (2014)). However, it must be noted that neither of the aforementioned studies were long term. Arguably, they still prove the importance of self-regulation; the immediacy of the effects and thus the need for self-regulation strategies to be implemented. Philpott-Robinson et Al (2023) found that although the ability to self-regulate is hard to measure (or define), self-regulation can be linked to academic success and positive mental wellbeing. The importance of self-regulation is clear, however misunderstood it may be.

How Mindfulness Can Promote Self-Regulation

Research into the use of mindfulness to promote self-regulation has been very positive. Thierry et al (2016) found that the use of a mindfulness programme had a positive effect on pre-school pupils executive function skills. They examined emotional regulation and working memory and found links to children's academic performance and self-regulation. For four years, the children practised mindfulness three times a day, following a programme based on neuroscientific research. Parents were overwhelmingly positive, reporting a significant improvement in their children's behaviour. The majority of the children were EAL, and their parents had little to no education. This could imply that mindfulness is extremely beneficial for vulnerable children and families. However, it should be noted that this could have resulted in an unequal power dynamic, with parents feeling pressured by researchers to provide desired answers, resulting in a response bias. Yet the parents voices should still be credited as they noticed a positive change in their children's behaviour.

As well mindfulness having a positive effect on children's executive functions, their physical ability to regulate and control their behaviours, researchers have found that mindfulness activities have improved children's emotional literacy (Devchich et al 2017). Emotional literacy is essential for children; when children can recognise, understand and express their emotions it will increase their life chances (Sharp 2000). Bezzina and Camilleri (2021) state that emotional literacy and wellbeing are closely intertwined, highlighting that there is a lot to

gain from children learning to name and understand their emotions. Further, when pupils understand and can name their emotions, they are able to better self-regulate (Yükçü and Demircioğlu 2021).

Berti and Cigala (2022) carried out research into the use of meditation and mindful activities based around focussing the senses. They intended for pupils to develop self-regulation and improve their empathy. Activities involved the senses and direct observations found a positive effect, children's behaviour was compared to a control group. Arguably, scores may be biased as they were carried out by the instructor. It is also important to note that the research only lasted 6 weeks; researchers suggest a need for a longer term research. The use of the senses and story books was extremely engaging for pupils and can inspire other teachers. Kenwright et al. (2021) conducted a survey of teachers' beliefs and opinions regarding the implementation of mindfulness into the curriculum. They discovered that teachers were generally positive; they cited benefits such as social and emotional regulation, resilience, and the importance of these qualities in modern society. Teachers believe that incorporating mindfulness into the classroom is both feasible and important for students' future success.

It is also important to note the benefits of mindfulness in SEND classrooms. Smith and Douglas (2022) accumulated evidence for the use of mindfulness strategies and suggestions made by Occupational Therapists. Their work is encouragement for teachers to engage with mindful strategies when working with pupils with additional needs. Pupils with SEND often struggle to process their emotions and have sensory issues that prevent self-regulation. Yoga, journaling and breathing activities can aid pupils to regulate their emotions and behaviour. Smith and Douglas (2020) did note the importance of a calm classroom that is not overwhelming for pupils with SEND. They suggest that teachers need more training and schools should take a more holistic approach to education. They encourage interprofessional collaboration with Occupational Therapists as they have great expert knowledge. However, there may be issues with time constraints and schools having enough

funding to work with Occupational Therapists. It is also important to state that teachers may not have the authority to make such changes, structural changes would have to be made by senior leadership.

Overall, the evidence in favour of schools implementing mindfulness is substantial. It is clear that mindfulness can help students learn to self-regulate. The main issues identified in this review of the literature that researchers have come across involve difficulties with teachers' knowledge and understanding, as well as how to execute strategies. Funding and time constraints have also been shown to have constrained its implementation in many cases.

There has been a lack of research on the use of mindfulness in KS1. It should also be noted that research on the self-regulation of children has been centred around children of various ages and not focussed on KS1 pupils. The focus of this research paper will be the use of mindfulness to promote self-regulation in KS1 pupils. It is extremely important to monitor children's ability to self-regulate at five and six years old; researchers have noticed that this is a prime time in the child's development of this key skill (Montroy et al 2016). Pupils in KS1 should have met the Early Learning Goal of managing self (DfE 2021). This paper should address the abilities of pupils in KS1 to self-regulate.

Research Method

Denscombe (2017) defines case studies as research carried out in order to understand the complex relationship between factors as they operate within a particular social setting. The approach taken to this study takes the form of a case study to investigate the relationship between mindfulness and children's ability to self-regulate in a primary school. The school in which the case study is centred around is in a small suburban ex-mining town in West Yorkshire. Due to this, there is a strong sense of local community though a high level of deprivation and this was reflected in the classroom, with many pupils suffering social and economic hardships.

As part of the research, a survey was sent to teachers around Yorkshire and the Northwest. 10% of the participants had leadership roles in their schools, which will provide some insight into the beliefs of senior leadership who have the authority to make change in their schools. 10% of the participants were teaching assistants or support staff; teaching assistants often have close relationships with pupils with SEND due to their additional needs (Farrell et Al 2010). The opinions of different staff at school are all valuable and important to the study - they are all stakeholders that have different kinds of relationships with pupils that can provide insight into pupil's abilities to self-regulate.

Data Collection

Mixed methods were used to ensure valid and appropriate data was collected. Surveys of teachers, interviews with children and the use of children's drawings have informed the analysis. Interviews with children were kept short due to their young age and limited concentration (Bushin 2007). During the study, pupils were encouraged to use drawings to explain their complex feelings and emotions. Cameron (2005) found that children's art and drawings can provide insight into their unconscious mind and gives the opportunity for reserved pupils to express their ideas. Yet, Cameron notes the challenges associated with interpreting children's drawings as children can let their imagination take over and draw completely fabricated events. Though, this can be addressed by having conversations with pupils about their drawings and then annotating them.

The study uses data triangulation, with both quantitative and qualitative data collected and given equal weight in the survey. Qualitative data, including open-ended questions, allowed teachers to clearly express themselves. Braun and Clarke (2013) argue that qualitative data helps put the humanity back into research. Building on this, Braun and Clarke (2021) note that thematic analysis raises the reliability of the data. Overall, including questions that allow

teachers to define concepts in their own words will allow the data of this study to offer insight into teachers true understanding of mindfulness. The data is rich and takes many forms.

Ethical Considerations

Boden (2021) highlights the importance for research involving children to be ethical as children's voices need to be heard in research surrounding them. As this study is researching children's ability to self-regulate, it was essential to involve them and encourage them to express their true thoughts and feelings. Allowing them to draw and express their feelings artistically was age-appropriate and enjoyable (Cameron 2005). Furthermore, keeping children happy and safe during the research was a priority. Pupils were also made aware that they had the option to refuse participation or withdraw at any time, and those who shared their opinions and values were respected (Abebe and Bressell 2014).

Moreover, the study adhered to the York St John University ethical guidelines. Informed consent was gathered through a gatekeeper who in the context of this study was the headteacher of the school. This was deemed more efficient than individual parental consent. The data collected for this study's purposes was anonymised and protected through the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) - data files stored on any electronic devices were password protected and any written data was securely stored.

Findings

Survey of teacher's opinions

In the first question of the survey¹, the majority of school staff surveyed agreed that pupils learn to regulate their emotions at school. 15% remained neutral and one disagreed. However, 68.8% agreed and 12.5% strongly agreed. This would suggest that teachers

¹ The full list of questions in the survey can be found in Appendix 1.

mostly agree that school is an important time for social and emotional development of pupils. All of the staff felt that students should be taught how to manage their emotions at school; this may reflect a consensus on the need for additional time and resources to adopt ways to teach self-regulation in schools, as well as the importance of this for students.

Pupils are taught to regulate their emotions at school.
32 responses

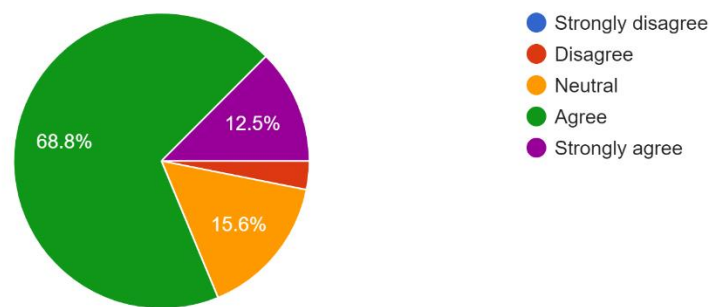


Figure 1 – Teachers' views on whether self-regulation is taught at school.

It should be noted that most respondents think that the social and emotional development of students is primarily the responsibility of parents. However, the evidence suggests that teachers are aware of the importance of pupils' ability to self-regulate and agree that it is refined and developed throughout their time at school. Staff clearly believe they have a role to play but emphasise the importance of the child's homelife and the influence of families. 30 out of 32 respondents agreed that self-regulation should be included in the national curriculum.

It is a parents responsibility to teach their child to regulate their emotions.

32 responses

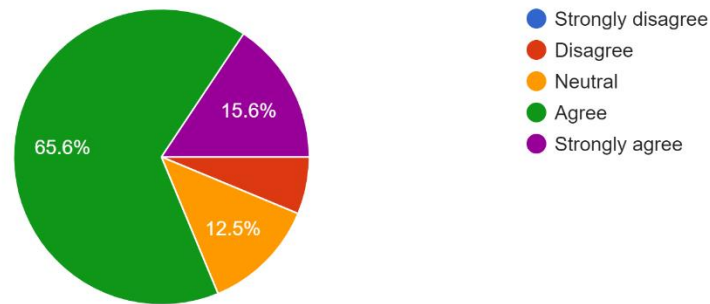


Figure 2 – Teachers' views on whether it is the parents responsibility to teach self-regulation

There were various definitions and ideas about what 'mindfulness' could be. Responses ranged from the awareness and focus on one's body and mind to being kind and positive to oneself. Many different ideas were mentioned, suggesting that there is some confusion; some stated it was the use of calming activities and others referenced 'understanding the impact of your behaviour on others' and 'building resilience'. All agreed that there is a place for mindfulness in the classroom and mindfulness can be used to teach self-regulation in primary schools.

Interviews with pupils

Pupils were interviewed after short yoga sessions. The first interview took place after the first session and the second interview took place after the final session. Pupils had taken part in yoga or meditation sessions frequent and often.

In the first interview, half of the pupils described themselves as feeling 'calm' after the session. Another child used the phrase 'relaxed and chillaxed' and another suggested that they were 'tired'. The language used suggests that they felt at peace; this is the purpose of mindfulness. When asked if they felt 'ready' for the next lesson, they stated that they were.

After the final session. The pupils were asked again how they felt after yoga or meditation sessions: they used vocabulary such as calm, peaceful and quiet. The increase in vocabulary may suggest the impact of talking about emotions and practicing some mindfulness activities has developed pupils' emotional literacy.

Pupils were asked when they thought it was best to carry out mindful activities. They stated when the classroom was 'too loud' or when they 'finish their work and are bored'. A child noted that it was often used to restore peace when pupils became too boisterous. The pupils noticed the effects of yoga and meditation on the classroom climate as well as its effects on them personally. One child stated that they would like to carry out mindfulness activities at home, whereas another stated that it would be 'too loud' in their home. The activities were popular and valued time for the pupils.

Children's drawings

Pupils were encouraged to draw different emotions and feelings. The phrases 'I feel happy when...', 'when things don't go to plan, I feel...', 'I feel calm when...', 'when I go somewhere new, I feel...' and 'I feel safe when...' to prompt discussion.

'I feel happy when...'

Three pupils drew sunshine and rainbows, linking their emotions to the weather. This is a practical and visual way for pupils to represent their emotions. Some pupils drew events such as celebrations like weddings or birthday parties and another drew a visit to a soft play centre, another event that they would find enjoyable. A child with autism drew a bus and described how much he enjoyed bus rides. Pupils' connected their feelings of happiness to physical experiences that they have observed, such as the weather or events in their lives.



Figure 3.

'When I feel happy there are sunshine's and rainbows'

'When things don't go to plan...'

Pupils described many different emotions: mad, sad, worried and angry. It is difficult for pupils to cope when things don't go to plan, so there are many different feelings and emotions referred to by pupils. The drawings were mostly of faces. It could be suggested that children recognise this scenario as more of an emotional experience rather than the prior question. They were able to draw faces and recognise emotions. A red face represented anger, a wobbly line mouth represented worry and long, drooping arms represented sadness.



Figure 4.

'When things don't go to plan I feel worried, sad and angry'.

'I feel calm when...'

Children referred to states of physical calm; they noted times after exercise or before they go to sleep when they are 'comfortable' in bed. A child also mentioned times during exercise, mentioning swimming explicitly. Weather was again referenced, describing the sound of rain as having a calming effect. These are all sensory experiences for children. No children mentioned school as a calming environment, suggesting more must be done by teachers to create a calm environment for pupils.

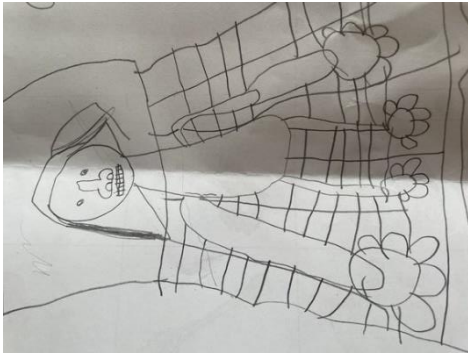


Figure 5. 'I feel calm in bed'

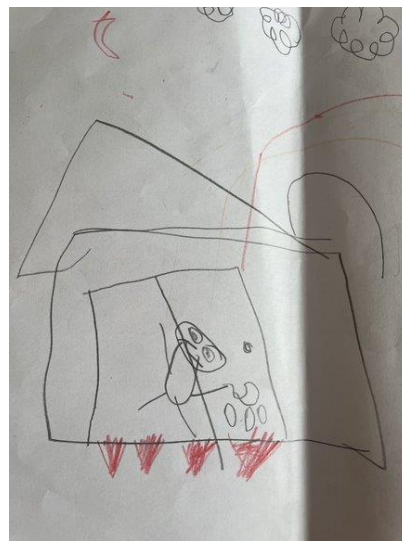


Figure 6.

'I feel calm at night in my house, when it's raining outside.'

'I feel safe when...'

Children made drawings and talked about their family and friends, although it was noted that none of the children specifically mentioned school as a safe environment.



Figure 7 - Both children drew themselves with parents or other family members.

It was a deliberate choice to not question pupils about sad or upsetting emotions. It would have been unethical to pressure pupils to share potentially upsetting memories. However, a child drew their own 'sad picture' independently and chose to share this. The child drew two figures crying. One was bigger than the other, they had long hair and there were two cars. The child told me 'I am sad when my sister leaves'. It is evident from the data that family relationships are significant in pupils' lives.



Figure 8.

'I feel sad when my sister leaves.'

Discussion

As noted by researchers there are many different definitions of mindfulness. This creates complexity for teachers (Albrecht 2019). As found in my survey, teachers had an array of different definitions. The degree of uncertainty and potential lack of confidence in one

definition may deter some teachers from practicing mindfulness. Further development should be encouraged to ensure that teachers have a greater understanding of mindfulness, to encourage and give teachers confidence. Hyland (2015) encourages schools to engage with continual professional development that is rich in knowledge, rather than surface level programmes that have morphed into insufficient schemes that couldn't be further from the spirituality promoted by Buddhist mindfulness. There is a need for ongoing study and ongoing training for staff (Huppert and Johnson 2010). Staff researched agreed that there was a place for mindfulness in the classroom (Kenwright et al 2021).

Most staff surveyed agreed that parents have a responsibility to teach their children to regulate their emotions. It is important to note that 2 members of staff also stated that self-regulation should not be a part of the National Curriculum, this could suggest that they strongly believe that self-regulation is the responsibility of pupil's parents. A study in Alabama measured children's ability to self-regulate and found a direct correlation between parenting and self-regulation, they suggested that parenting classes would have a positive effect on developing children's ability to regulate (Büyüктаşkapu Soydan and Akalin 2022). Many of the pupils described feeling safe and calm with their families, this might suggest that they also see their parents as having a greater role in their social and emotional development than school. If they feel safer and happier at home, then they will be able to learn and develop with confidence. It has been found that the social and emotional behaviours of the child's parents and guardians has a significant effect on their development and effects their own behaviour in school (Ziv et Al 2018).

Anxious thoughts about attending school are very common for children; shockingly González et Al (2020) found that 28% of students have refused to attend school at one point in their academic studies because of this. This clearly conveys the importance of creating a peaceful and welcoming environment for students. Nutall and Woods (2013) list potential reasons that may create anxiety and result in school refusal, difficulties with routines or teacher relationships, low academic self-concept, separation anxiety, bullying

and many others. It has been found that mindfulness increases students self-perceived academic proficiency (Gao 2023). Through practising mindfulness and having open discussions with teachers, pupil will gain stronger relationships with their teachers. As found by many researchers, teachers that promote mindfulness to their pupils will have more positive wellbeing themselves (Bryce- Clegg and Prince (2019) and Holt et Al (2022)), they will be better prepared for dealing with pupil's personal issues and may seem more approachable and happier to students.

Interviews with pupils may suggest that pupils developed their emotional literacy. This finding is supported by other research that suggested pupils' emotional literacy is fostered by mindfulness strategies (Bezzina and Camilleri (2021) and Devchich et Al (2017)). The emotional literacy of pupils is detrimental for their academic success (Sharp 2000). Figueroa-Sánchez (2008) stress the importance of a warm and welcoming classroom environment to promote good emotional literacy, they also encourage teachers to build strong relationships with pupils and their families.

Although many children drew simple faces to describe their feelings, some drew experiences or events. Often one must link their feeling to a corresponding context or event in their life (Hoemenn et Al 2020). Researchers suggest that the ability to link abstract emotions to our own experiences is mature and develops with age (Hoemenn et Al 2020). Pupils in the study described feeling 'calm' as being in many different contexts such as in bed or swimming, they had a greater depth of emotional literacy. This is reinforced by Nelson and Russel (2016) who draw upon research suggesting that younger children conceptualize emotions as simple facial expressions, but as children age, they can link emotions to their own life experiences. They also state that children must have experienced an emotion to understand it, this may be the reason why children referenced life experiences when describing emotions. Many children described their emotions using the weather. This is a universal experience for children, they have all experienced the rain, sun or storms and can easily

reference how they felt in those contexts and link this to an emotion (Hoemenn et Al 2020, Nelson and Russel 2016).

It is also interesting to note that a child with Autism described feeling happy when being on the bus. It has been found that children with Autism have a keen interest in sensory aspects of everyday life and that this may become impractical for their communication (Derakhshanrad et Al 2022). However, in this instance, it may be argued that the child was able to use a sensory experience to communicate his emotions. Autistic authors explain the intense enjoyment that they experienced from mundane sensory experiences and how they understood this enjoyment a lot more than others' emotions (Conn 2015). It may explain the child's reference to a sensory experience when asked when he felt happy.

Conclusion

To conclude, the use of mindfulness techniques to promote self-regulation appears promising. The results of this study suggest that mindfulness can be engaging for pupils and teachers, and that school staff are welcoming of it in the classroom. However, teachers may need further professional development to ensure that children experience the best mindfulness techniques available.

Mindfulness techniques have the potential to engage pupils and promote emotional literacy, which are important factors for pupils in regulating their emotions. This study highlights the importance of a warm and welcoming classroom environment and the need for staff training to support the effective implementation of mindfulness. As a practitioner, the research has emphasised the significance of mindfulness and potential issues that may arise when implementing mindful techniques in a primary school. This will inform my practice as I will commit to participating in continual professional development and my pedagogy will always be centred around children's wellbeing.

It must be noted that the small-scale nature of the study means that the findings are not generalisable to the wider population. However, issues raised such as time, money and resources for mindfulness may be relatable to other primary schools. There is a need for further study to look at the use of mindfulness over a greater amount of time. The next step in research would be to measure pupils' ability to self-regulate and the development of their emotional literacy. It would be interesting to further research the use of mindfulness for pupils with autism.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

12/05/2023, 11:45

Can the use of mindfulness promote self-regulation in primary school pupils?

Can the use of mindfulness promote self-regulation in primary school pupils?

Self-regulation involves children's developing ability to regulate their emotions, thoughts and behaviour to enable them to act in positive ways toward a goal. It has been noted as a goal for 5 year old children in Birth to 5 Matters (2021).

1. What year group do you currently work in?

2. Pupils are taught to regulate their emotions at school.

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

3. Pupils should be taught to regulate their emotions at school.

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
 Disagree
 Neutral
 Agree
 Strongly agree

4. It is a parents responsibility to teach their child to regulate their emotions.

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

5. Children should be taught to regulate their emotions as part of the National Curriculum.

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

6. I understand what 'mindfulness' is.

Mark only one oval.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

7. Define 'mindfulness'.

8. What activities come to mind when you hear the word 'mindfulness'?

9. Do you believe there is a place for mindfulness in the classroom?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other: _____

10. Do you believe that mindfulness can be used to teach self-regulation in primary schools?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Other: _____

Thank you for completing my survey!

Appendix 2

Transcript: Interview after the Yoga Session

Small focus group. They were chosen at random from the class. 6 children; children O, B, A (6 years old) and E, R, D (5 years old).

Boys- B, R, D.

Girls- O, A, E.

Interviewer: Can you describe how you are feeling now?

O: I feel calm and happy.

R: I feel relaxed and chillaxed.

E: Really really calm.

Interviewer: Did you feel this way before the activity?

B: I felt bored and now I feel calm.

A: I feel tired. I could go to sleep.

Interviewer: Do you feel ready for Phonics?

B: Yeah, if we have to.

A: Yes.

Interview at the end of the placement

Note: R had left the school.

Interviewer: Can you describe how it feels to do yoga or meditate in our class?

B: Its nice. I like it. It makes me calm.

D: Quiet and peaceful.

Interviewer: When is it best to do our activities?

E: When we get too loud.

A: When we finish our work and are bored.

O: After we do it, we are all quiet and calm.

Interviewer: would you like to do them at home?

D, B: I would.

O: It's too loud in my house.