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**What are children's opinions on practicing  
mindfulness in the classroom?**

**Niamh Stinton**

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**Student number:210039348**

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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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## **1. Introduction:**

This research project explores and evaluates a small-scale mixed-method case study to answer the question, 'What are children's opinions on practising mindfulness in the classroom?'

I chose to explore children's opinions of mindfulness for my research project as I am passionate about practising mindfulness. Mindfulness has become an increasingly popular technique to support children in the primary classroom (Mettler et al, 2024). Literature suggests mindfulness can have a positive effect on children's mental well-being (Mendelson et al, 2012; Gueldner and Feuerborn, 2016; Crescentini et al, 2016) and concentration (Zelazo and Lyons, 2012; Felver et al, 2017). Whilst an abundance of research supports using mindfulness in the classroom, few researchers explore children's opinions of the practice (D' Allesandro, 2022). Research highlights the importance of gaining children's opinions before implementing new school practices (Lundy et al., 2024). This case study explores children's opinions after nine weeks of practising mindfulness every day. This study aimed to understand whether children enjoyed these activities and found them beneficial to their learning. The study was based in a year six classroom of 28 children, who had not previously been exposed to mindfulness techniques. The class was male-dominant in a small school in a deprived area of England. The children's opinions were gathered through a detailed questionnaire containing open and closed questions. From this questionnaire, five children were purposely selected to expand on their thoughts through a semi-structured interview. This thematic data provided, will seek to confirm if the implementation of mindfulness techniques in the classroom is something children support and if they believe it is beneficial.

## **2. Literature review:**

This literature review will explore some key topics:

- What is mindfulness?
- The emotional benefits of practising mindfulness.
- The effect of mindfulness on children's concentration
- What are children's opinions towards practising mindfulness?

### ***What is mindfulness?***

It is argued that before determining the potential value of introducing mindfulness techniques into the primary classroom, it is vital to understand what mindfulness is (Paulson, 2018). Research defines mindfulness as a process that focuses on being aware of the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Davis, Strasburger, and Brown, 2007; Nunes, Castro, and Limpo, 2020). Mindfulness practice often focuses on observing the breath and is frequently used alongside meditation (Reuben, 2012). However, Hooker and Fodor (2008) argue mindfulness should not be confused with meditation which focuses on developing a higher state of consciousness. Kabat- Zinn (2005) agrees arguing that meditation practice is simply one method to develop the skill of mindfulness.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that we are facing a mental health crisis amongst the younger generation in England (Greenberg and Harris, 2012; Giles-Kay et al, 2023; Sorter et al, 2024). It is argued that teachers do not have the time and the resources to deal with children's mental health problems (Walter, Gouze and Lin, 2006; Williams et al, 2007; Canadian Teacher's Federation, 2012). Due to this many teachers are turning to mindfulness techniques to support the mental health of their pupils (Joyce et al, 2010 and Greenberg and Harris, 2012). Research by Shapiro et al (2006) supports this, stating that mindfulness has recently received much attention, and many schools are implementing it in their classrooms. Furthermore, mindfulness has previously just been used with older children; however, research has started to investigate the benefits of mindfulness with primary children (Bender, Lawson and Palacios, 2023). Research into mindfulness-based activities in the primary classroom has found that it has the potential to positively influence behaviour management strategies and children's wellbeing in the classroom (Albrecht, Albrecht and Cohen, 2012). The Department for Education (2019) announced that 370 schools across England will be made to introduce mindfulness techniques into their classroom to observe the effects it may have on

children's mental health. This highlights that mindfulness techniques are becoming favoured for promoting positive mental well-being in schools. However, despite mindfulness techniques being supported by scientific research (Siegel, Germer and Olendzki, 2009), it is also important to recognise that there is still a sense of uncertainty about its effectiveness in impacting children's well-being (Roberto, Campayo and Praticio, 2021). This makes mindfulness techniques an interesting topic to research.

### ***The emotional benefits of practising mindfulness in the classroom:***

A common theme amongst research is that using mindfulness-based practices in schools is promising in promoting emotional growth and positive well-being for children (Mendelson et al, 2010; Gueldner and Feuerborn, 2016; Crescentini et al, 2016). Dunning et al (2019) found in their research that using mindfulness-based interventions can improve youths' mental health and well-being. This is supported by Carsley, Khoury and Heath (2018), who found that changes in children's well-being post-mindfulness interventions were significant compared to their well-being prior. Research also found that children who participated in mindfulness activities felt more relaxed, resulting in a more positive classroom environment (Cardinal, 2020). This is supported by Pyyny (2018), who stated that children reported feeling calm after completing the mindfulness activities. Research suggests mindfulness has this effect because it develops the skill of self-regulation, which allows children to adapt to the classroom environment (Zelazo and Lyons, 2012). This is further supported by Perry-Parrish et al (2016), who argue that as mindfulness-based interventions help with self-regulation, children are better prepared to deal with the psychological symptoms of stress. Additionally, mindfulness is said to be able to decrease negative emotions as it involves inhibiting memories (Deng et al 2019). Mindfulness techniques are unlike other forms of therapy at improving children's well-being, as there are no specific goals to work towards, meaning they are suitable for all children in schools (Joyce et al, 2010). Furthermore, an abundance of research suggests that teachers and parents believe schools should teach mindfulness to improve their pupil's well-being (Joyce, 2010; Flaxman and Flook, 2012; Amundsen et al, 2020; Cardinal, 2020). A study by Albrecht (2019) even suggested that teachers felt mindfulness encouraged positive emotional regulation and helped children develop into compassionate, global citizens.

However, in recent years, positive views towards mindfulness have been challenged, the MYRIAD Project (2022) involved twenty million individual points of data, and they found mindfulness has no impact on promoting well-being. Dove and Costello's (2017) research supports their findings; they found in their research that children's negative emotional symptoms did not improve post-mindfulness interventions. However, this study is small, so it cannot be generalised. Despite this, Goyal et al's (2014) larger study supports these findings, stating that there is no clear evidence to support the fact that mindfulness improves children's mental well-being. Therefore, despite there being an abundance of research to support using mindfulness techniques in the classroom, the extent to which it helps is questioned by recent findings.

### ***The effect of mindfulness on children's concentration:***

Research also argues that practising mindfulness can have a positive effect on children's concentration (Zelazo and Lyons, 2012; Felver et al, 2017). This is supported by multiple research papers which found that children's attention in class increased after practising mindfulness (Hong and Cho, 2012; Muller et al, 2021). Ricarte et al (2015) found that mindfulness can improve children's concentration and can have a positive impact on children's academic performance. Research suggests this is because mindfulness helps children regulate their emotions (Perry-Parrish et al., 2016), consequently improving their concentration in the classroom (Costello and Lawer, 2014). Koch's (2016) agrees with this; they found that by using mindfulness techniques, students could control their anxiety and focus more on school tasks. Tarrasch's (2018) study reflects these findings. However, they also argue that mindfulness specifically reduces impulsivity. Consequently, this improves children's attention. This is further supported by Flook et al (2015), who found that mindfulness helps improve children's concentration by reducing negative behaviour in the classroom.

Shabadi-Shad (2014) further supports this argument; they found that when children with disruptive behaviour participated in a mindfulness programme, their challenging behaviour was reduced, meaning they could concentrate on their work more efficiently. Mindfulness has been shown to be especially useful for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Semple et al, 2010). This is further found that mindfulness helped to improve children with ADHD concentration and attention, despite this being a small-scale study, it is interesting to note the benefits of mindfulness for children with SEND. Concluding, it is suggested mindfulness helps to improve children's concentration as it reduces anxiety or negative behaviour, consequently improving their focus.

However, the idea of mindfulness improving children's concentration is challenged by Kim and Kwon (2018). They found little conclusive evidence to support the long-term effects of mindfulness interventions improving concentration. This is supported by Black and Fernando (2018), who found that overall, children's concentration did not drastically improve post mindfulness sessions. It is, therefore, important to recognise that not all research has found mindfulness can positively affect children's concentration.

### ***What are children's opinions on practising mindfulness in the classroom?***

As previously mentioned, research highlights the benefit of practising mindfulness for children's emotional well-being and concentration. However, D'Alessandro et al (2022) highlight that this is often based on teachers' and parents' viewpoints, and students are not often asked about their view of mindfulness. In educational research, many people worldwide have embraced the decision to include children in their research (Lundy et al, 2024). Children are now viewed in research as valuable individuals from whom we can learn from (Tangen, 2008). The Reggio Emilia approach and education in Scandinavian countries promote the importance of students' voices in research (Smith, 2007). There are clear benefits to including children's voices in educational research (Cook-Santher, 2006); research suggests it has the power to drive change in educational developments (Lewis and Porter, 2007). This is supported by Harcourt and Einarsdottir (2011), who argue that all young children are competent to engage in research as high-level thinkers and that including children in research is essential for improving schools. They further argue that researchers who include children's opinions in their research, gather elicited, first-hand data. Therefore, I chose to base my research on only children's opinions.

The limited range of data exploring students' opinions found that children's views towards mindfulness ranged dramatically; whilst some children enjoyed it, others did not (D'Allesandro et al, 2022). Further research has argued that some students enjoy mindfulness and find it helpful (Parker et al, 2014; Schonert-Reichl et al, 2015; Weare 2018). They found that children state they like it because they feel a heightened sense of calmness and improved focus after the interventions (Whitworth and Currie, 2019). Furthermore, research argues that children claimed they found mindfulness fun, and they enjoyed the activities much more than they initially thought (Cain, 2012).

Research has found that meditation is the most popular mindfulness technique among children (Wilson Kenny and Pena, 2012; Zelazo and Lyons 2012; Vickery and Dorjee 2016). This is supported by Keating (2017), who found that children enjoyed meditation as it enabled them to reflect on their feelings and relationships with others. This is further supported by Routhier-Martin, Roberts and Blanch (2017), who found that children's behaviour and concentration improved after meditating in school. This highlights that meditation is a popular mindfulness technique for reducing stress and improving concentration and behaviour in the classroom. Research has found other mindfulness techniques such as body scans (Semple, Droutman and Reid, 2017), gratitude tasks (Bono, Duffy and Moreno, 2022), journalling (University of Rochester, 2024) and art-based mindfulness activities (Cheung and Hui, 2023), are also popular mindfulness techniques amongst children. Therefore, these activities were used in this research project.

However, Bannirchelvam, Bell and Costello, (2017) directly challenge the view that children enjoy mindfulness, stating many children find it 'boring'. Butterfield et al (2020) recent research supports this

arguing that children often dislike mindfulness. This is supported by Keller et al (2017), who found that one of the challenges facing teachers implementing mindfulness in their classroom is that children often dislike or resist the practice. Whitworth and Currie (2019) agree, arguing that children think mindfulness is 'uncool' and a 'waste of time'. This was reflected in the MYRIAD project (2022), which found that, for the most part, the children did not engage in mindfulness training, and most children did not do the required mindfulness homework. Although this study was based on key stage three children, it is interesting that research found that children do not engage with mindfulness at home. Despite this, research has found that it is essential for children to practice mindfulness at home to see results (Goldin, 2008). However, Burke (2010) supports the MYRIAD project (2022) findings that children were not keen to practice mindfulness at home. Phillips (2016) found that this is often because children do not feel like they have time for mindfulness at home or a quiet space to complete it. This highlights that it is suggested that not all children enjoy mindfulness, and many are reluctant to practice mindfulness outside of the classroom.

### **3. Methodology:**

#### **Research approach:**

This research was centred around answering the question, 'What are children's opinions on practising mindfulness in the classroom?'. Therefore, a case-study approach was used to assess children's opinions of mindfulness. Research argues that a case study aims to understand a case in depth in its natural setting (Punch, 2014). Case studies benefit educational research (Starman, 2013) as they can draw attention to real-life situations while they unfold in practice (Krusenvik, 2016). A case-study approach was used in this research project as it meant children's opinions could be gained after they had just practised mindfulness in their natural setting. However, case studies have limitations; research argues that case studies cannot be generalised to the wider population, and it is often hard to summarise findings gathered from a case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Möller, 2011). However, it was the most appropriate approach for this project, as it involved gaining children's opinions about mindfulness in their natural setting.

To gather a detailed understanding of children's perspectives, this research used a two-phase mixed method design, which was highly effective for producing in-depth data (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2006; Punch, 2014; Almalki, 2016). This is evident in the research project as qualitative data (interview responses) was used to build upon original quantitative data results (questionnaire). However, research does argue that mixed-method approaches should not be considered as immediately valid as it can be a complicated way to gather data (De Lisle, 2011). Despite this, for this research, a mixed-method approach provided the best opportunity to address the research question, whilst also being the most suitable approach for producing elaborate data (Malina, Norreklit, Selto, 2011 and Zohrabi, 2013).

#### **Participants:**

The data was collected from twenty-eight-year-six pupils. All pupils participated in the questionnaire; this ensured the sample size was as large as possible and provided a wide range of opinions (Boynton, 2004). Purposeful sampling was used for the interview process; five children, based on their responses from their questionnaires, were deliberately selected for the interview. More females were purposively chosen for interviews compared to males, as the study took place in a predominately male class. Therefore, it was important to explore female opinions in more detail. Purposeful sampling strategies are effective when the researcher wants to include specific people in their data (Campbell et al, 2020). However, research argues that purposeful sampling can often lead to bias (Sharma, 2017; Bakalbasioglu, 2020). Despite this, purposeful sampling was the most effective sampling technique for this research as this it allowed specific children to expand on their responses from the questionnaire (Palinkas et al, 2015).

#### **Questionnaires (Appendix 1):**

The first data collection method was a questionnaire, which included open and closed questions. Research supports the use of closed and open questions as it means that qualitative and quantitative data can be produced (Punch, 2014; Wellington, 2015). However, a problem with collecting data from a questionnaire is that children often answer questions in a biased way to please the researcher (Moore et al, 2008). Therefore, research recommends using characters to ask the questions in a questionnaire to reduce bias when researching with children (Chi and Pak, 2005). Furthermore, it is argued that children often find questionnaires confusing (Colosi, 2006). Therefore, the Youth Development Executives of King County (2014), suggest that questionnaires should use visual analogue scales with colours to represent each answer. It is further suggested that completely labelled scales produce better responses than partially labelled scales (i.e. where only two extremes are labelled) (Borgers et al, 2000). Furthermore, it is argued that a 'do not know' box should be included in a scale for children, as it reduces the number of misleading selections if children do not understand the question (Ybarra et al, 2006). However, the 'do not know' column cannot be counted as data (Durham County Council, 2017). Therefore, it has been ignored in this project. Research also suggests that questionnaires for children should be written in child-friendly language (Marshall, 2005; Pate, 2012). Therefore, the questionnaire in this project had scales were labelled with colour and the questions were written in child-friendly language presented by characters to reduce bias.

### **Interviews (Appendix 2):**

Finally, qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Research highlights the benefit of semi-structured interviews, stating that as they include open and closed questions, dialogue can flow much more easily (Adams, 2015). Furthermore, it is argued that semi-structured interviews are ideal for children as they are less formal than closed-question interviews (O'Reilly and Dogra, 2017; Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). However, Wellington (2017) argues that interviewing children for qualitative data has drawbacks; the researcher can often influence children, and questions can often leading. Research suggests a way to prevent this is to ensure interview questions are in child-friendly vocabulary (Saywitz, Lyon, and Goodman, 2017). Furthermore, because children often associate leaving the classroom with being in trouble, research suggests that interviews should take place where the children feel comfortable (Morrison, 2013). Therefore, when planning the interviews, questions were made clear, and children answered them in their classroom where they felt comfortable responding honestly.

### **Ethical considerations:**

Throughout the research project, ethical considerations were always made. Firstly, York St John University obtained ethical clearance and the researcher's designated supervisor accepted the research project. The Department for Education's (2023) and The British Educational Research Association's (2024) guidance for carrying out research involving children was adhered to throughout the project. This was evident when arriving at the placement school; consent was immediately obtained from the head teacher (see appendix 3) at the primary school to begin the study as children are seen as vulnerable in research (Alderson, 2005); informed consent in the form of a letter (see appendix 4), was issued to parents to ensure their approval before the children took part. Parents had the right to withdraw their child from the study at any point. Following advice from The Data Protection Act (2018), all participant's data was kept anonymous throughout the study, and all data was stored securely on confidential electronic devices, which were password protected, in line with the university's protected one-drive. The children were informed they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Wiligora, Różyńska and Piasecki, 2016).

### **Limitations:**

It is important to reflect upon research limitations (Ioannidis, 2007). Most studies often have limitations regarding reliability and validity. Leung (2015) states that reliability means the study's findings can be reproducible. This study was only a small-scale study with only twenty-eight



participants. Therefore, research argues that small-scale studies cannot be generalised to the whole population (Gibbons and Hodge, 2012). This study further lacks reliability as it only took place over a nine-week period. Research suggests that studies over a small period can also not be generalised (Hackshaw, 2008) as the results could have changed if the children were exposed to mindfulness over a longer period. Despite the clear limitations of the study's reliability, it still provides a small insight into children's opinions of mindfulness, which could be further researched.

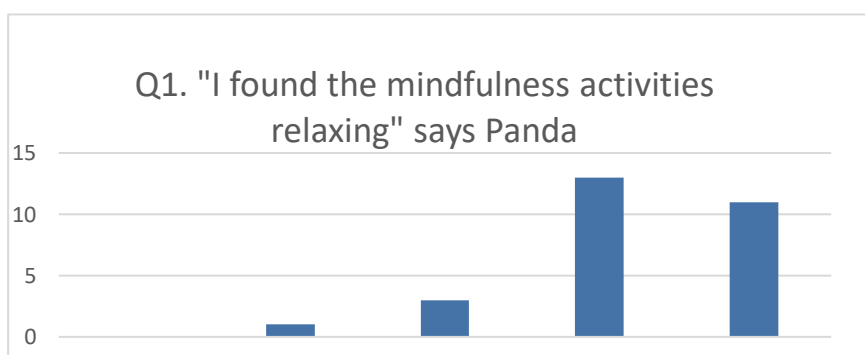
The study also is limited in terms of validity. The research argues that validity determines how well results among the study participants represent accurate findings amongst similar individuals outside of the study (Patino and Ferreira, 2018). As this research involves using students' voices, a multitude of research warns that children's opinions could be based on biases to try to please the researcher (Fargas-Malet, 2010; Dalli and Te-One, 2012; Powell et al, 2018). However, as previously mentioned, a conscious effort was made to reduce bias by using characters to ask the questions in the questionnaire (Cho and Pak, 2005). Furthermore, the study could seem to lack validity as the class had a higher proportion of males than females; it is argued that gender imbalances can significantly create bias in research (Dickinson, Alderson and Owen, 2012). Therefore, the results may be more inclined to a boy's perspective of mindfulness. However, following the questionnaire, a deliberate effort was made to interview more females, to gain a wider perspective of female opinions.

#### 4. Findings:

The findings of this research project have been split into three parts. Firstly, the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire, then the qualitative data from the questionnaire, and finally, the children's responses from the interview. After the nine weeks of completing mindfulness activities every day after lunch, the children were given a questionnaire to gather their opinions. The questionnaire was split into two parts, starting with eight questions, which produced quantitative data. The children were asked to circle how far they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements about mindfulness.

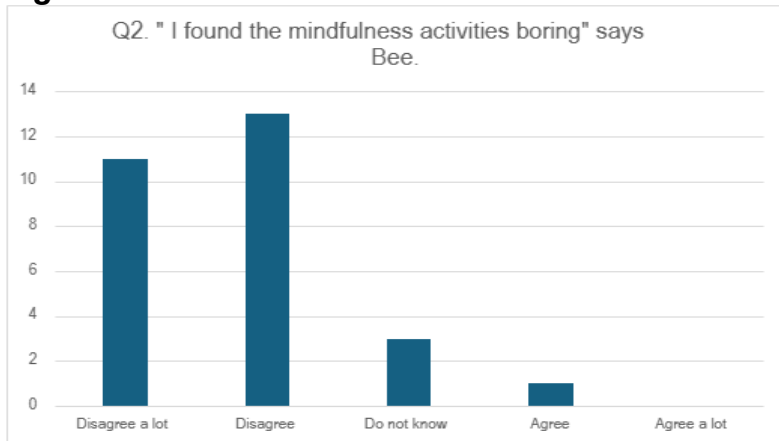
#### Quantitative data from questionnaire findings (Appendix 1):

**Figure 1.1**



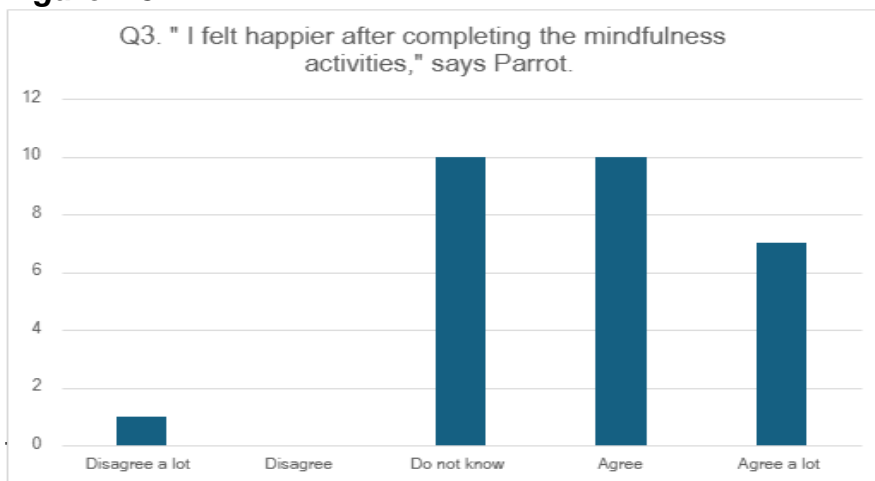
The data in the table (Figure 1.1) suggests that most children (24 out of 28) agree that they found mindfulness relaxing. However, one child did disagree. This implies that most children would argue that mindfulness helped them feel relaxed, with only one child disagreeing.

**Figure 1.2**



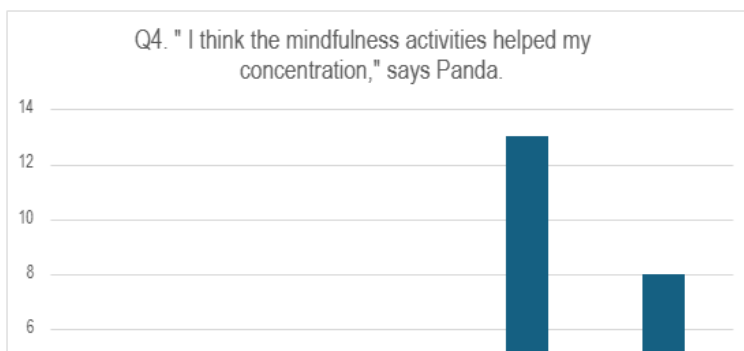
The data in the next table (Figure 1.2), mirrors the findings from question one. Most children disagreed with the statement, arguing that they did not find the mindful activities boring; this suggests that children have a positive attitude towards mindfulness. However, like (Figure 1.1), one child agreed that mindfulness is boring.

**Figure 1.3**



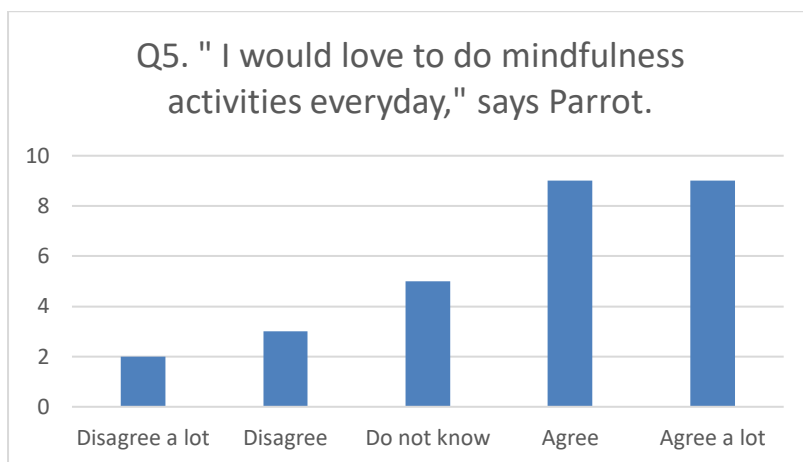
The data from Figure 1.3 suggests that more than half of the children (17 out of 28) agreed that they felt happier after completing the mindfulness activities, with only one child disagreeing. This suggests that mindfulness activities have a positive impact on most of the children's mental well-being.

**Figure 1.4**



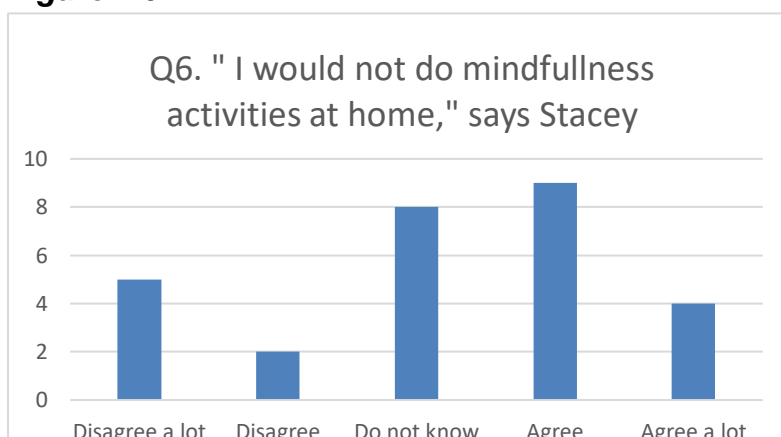
The children were then asked if they agreed that mindfulness helped their concentration. Overall, the data in the graph (Figure 1.4) suggests that most children agreed (21 out of 28). However, four children disagreed that mindfulness did not help their concentration. Therefore, this suggests that whilst most children felt that mindfulness positively impacted their concentration, it is important to recognise that not all agreed.

**Figure 1.5**



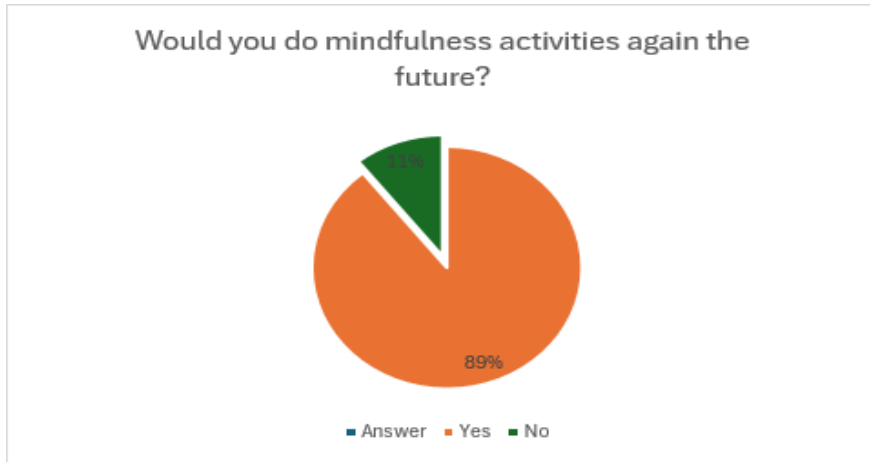
The data in the next graph (Figure 1.5) suggests that most children (18 out of 28) agreed they would love to do mindfulness activities daily. However, five children disagreed with this statement, the highest number of children to disagree so far. This suggests that whilst most children would love to do mindfulness every day, some children who still stated they enjoyed mindfulness would not want to complete the activities daily.

**Figure 1.6**



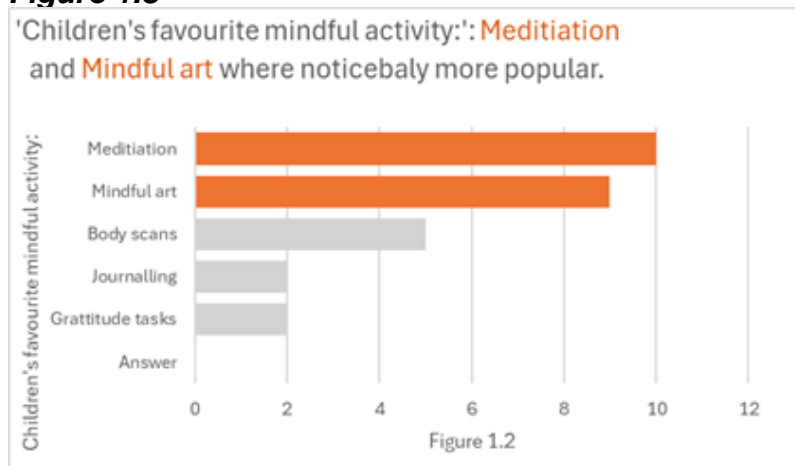
The graph (Figure 1.6) presents interesting data. Unlike the previous questions, in which most children felt positive towards mindfulness, when asked if they would not complete mindfulness activities at home, most students (13 out of 28) agreed. This implies that whilst most children have positive opinions regarding mindfulness, only seven feel they would continue practising the techniques outside school.

**Figure 1.7**



Finally, the children were asked to tick a box that stated, 'Would you do mindfulness activities again in the future?' The data from the pie chart (Figure 1.7) suggests that most children (89%) would practice mindfulness activities in the future, with only 11% of children disagreeing. This data, combined with the findings from Figure 1.6, suggests that, whilst most children would practice mindfulness again in the future, they would not necessarily do this in their own time at home.

**Figure 1.8**



The children were then asked to state their favourite mindful activity (see Figure 1.8). The chart shows that the children's favourite mindful activity was meditation or mindful art.

Overall, the quantitative data from the questionnaire suggests that most children have a positive opinion of mindfulness. The data implies that children liked practising mindfulness as they felt it improved their mental well-being and concentration. However, the data also suggests that whilst most children enjoyed practising mindfulness in school, they would not continue practising it at home.

**Qualitative data from questionnaire findings:**

As this study recognises the value of student's voice (Smith, 2007), the children were also asked open questions in the questionnaire to gather qualitative data. When asked follow-up questions to

explain their response's key themes were recognised, using coding. Firstly, they were asked to explain their favourite mindfulness activity and why. The results from Figure 1.8 suggest that most children stated meditation was their favourite. Most children explained this was because 'it was relaxing' or helped their 'concentration.' One child stated it helped them to 'understand their emotions'. The children who stated mindful art was their favourite said this was because 'it was easy' and 'calming.' This suggests that a common theme towards why children preferred meditation and mindful art as it was 'relaxing' 'calming' or helped their 'concentration'.

Next, the children were asked if they disliked any mindfulness activities. Only two children stated they disliked meditation, while the rest left this blank. One child stated they disliked the meditation because 'it was boring,' while the other child stated it was because 'it did not do anything for me.' This overall suggests that the children who did not enjoy the mindfulness activities suggested it was because they felt no different and it was boring.

Finally, the children were asked if they think mindfulness activities should be practised daily in the classroom. Most children stated yes (24 out of 28), many explained this was because it 'helped me or others to calm down.' Suggesting a common theme among children's explanations is that mindfulness helped them feel calm. Children also suggested it should be practised daily in the classroom as 'it helps me concentrate when I am stressed' or 'it helps me get on with my work.' One child stated they think mindfulness should be practised after every lunchtime because 'it helps us to concentrate after we come in hyper.' This suggests another common theme amongst children's explanations is that it helps them concentrate.

However, four children stated they do not think mindfulness activities should be practised daily in the classroom. When asked to explain their answer, one child stated, "Because it would get boring." The other three children explained, "because we are not always crazy" and "we are sometimes focused." This suggests a common theme amongst children's explanations as to why mindfulness activities should not be practised daily in the classroom: children either find them boring or unnecessary.

### **Qualitative data produced from interviews (Appendix 2):**

Overall, the findings from the questionnaire were supported by the findings from the interview. Three children were purposively selected to expand on their reasoning as to why they liked mindfulness. When these children were asked why they would practice mindfulness again in the future, they responded by saying, "Because it helps my anger" and "It helps me to understand my feelings." The children were then asked if they would recommend mindfulness to their friends. All three children agreed, stating that "it could help them when they are mad" or "it is fun to do when you want to relax." One child expanded on the question, adding, "It could help my friend's concentration." Highlighting the common themes from these children were mindfulness helps them relax, feel less angry and aids their concentration, mirroring the findings from the questionnaire.

However, the other two children were purposively interviewed as their questionnaire demonstrated they had negative views towards mindfulness. When asked if they would recommend mindfulness, one child responded, "Maybe give it a try, but it is not for me." The children were asked if mindfulness helped them at all, and both replied no. One child expanded on their answer by stating, "It just takes too long, and it did not really calm me down." This mirrors the findings from the questionnaire, were the children who had negative feelings towards mindfulness, stated it was either boring or unhelpful.

## **5. Discussion:**

Overall, the findings suggest that mindfulness is popular amid pupils. Common themes among the findings suggest that children like mindfulness, which helps them feel calm and improves their concentration. The findings also imply that children's favourite mindfulness technique was meditation because it was relaxing and helped their concentration. However, interestingly, the findings suggest that although children were keen to practice mindfulness in school, they did not express the same

enthusiasm to continue practising mindfulness at home. This section of the research paper will discuss the reason behind the findings about existing literature.

### **Emotional benefits of practising mindfulness:**

The first theme discussed is how children enjoyed mindfulness as they felt it positively impacted their mental well-being. The findings from the questionnaire and the common themes emerging from the interviews suggest that most children enjoyed mindfulness as they found it relaxing. This was expected as research suggests that mindfulness activities can have a positive impact on children's mental well-being and, as a result, can make them feel more relaxed (Mendelson et al, 2010; Gueldner and Feuerborn, 2016; Crescentini et al, 2016). Additionally, children reported in the interview that "it helps the classroom to seem calm after lunchtime," this is supported by research by Cardinal (2020), who found that, as mindfulness helps children to feel more relaxed, it creates a positive classroom environment. Furthermore, Deng et al (2019), found that mindfulness can decrease negative emotions, making children feel more positive. This is supported by the findings from the questionnaire (figure 1.3), where most children agreed that mindfulness made them feel happier. Perry-Parish et al (2016) and Deng et al (2019) found that mindfulness can also help children regulate their emotions easily and can help them to understand their feelings. This is supported by the findings from the interview, where one child reported, "It helps me to understand my feelings." This highlights that this project findings mirror research, which suggests that children enjoy mindfulness as it helps them to feel calm, regulate their emotions and make them feel happier.

However, it is important to note that the findings suggest that not all children felt mindfulness positively impacted their emotional well-being. When asked during the interviews, one child expressed this view, stating, "It didn't really calm me down." This is not surprising as research has found that not all children find mindfulness activities beneficial for their mental well-being (Dove and Costello, 2017). This is supported by Goyal et al. (2014), who found that mindfulness has no positive impact on children's mental wellbeing. Even though only three children stated, they did not find mindfulness helpful, as this study had a small- sample size, if more children were involved, it would be interesting to see if more children had this opinion.

### **Attention and concentration:**

Many children had the opinion that mindfulness had a positive impact on their attention and concentration (see Figure 1.4). From existing literature, this was expected. An abundance of research supports that mindfulness can positively impact children's concentration (Zelazo and Lyons, 2012; Hong and Cho, 2012; Muller et al, 2021). Costello and Lawer (2014) found that mindfulness improves children's behaviour as it helps control stress, consequently improving children's concentration. This is supported by children's responses from the qualitative answers from the questionnaire where a child stated, 'It helps me to concentrate when I am stressed.' This suggests that mindfulness can improve children's concentration by reducing stress. Research has also found that mindfulness can improve children's concentration as it reduces impulsivity, improving children's behaviour resulting in improved concentration (Tarrasch, 2018). Flook et al (2015) further support this, arguing that mindfulness improves children's concentration by reducing negative behaviour. A common theme in this study was when children were asked in the qualitative section of the questionnaire if mindfulness should be completed every day, they explained their answer by stating, 'Yes because it helps us to concentrate after we come in hyper' and 'It helps the classroom to seem calm after lunchtime.' This suggests that children like mindfulness as it reduces negative behaviour, resulting in a calmer environment where they can concentrate better.

However, not all children believed mindfulness improved their concentration (see Figure 1.4). Black and Fernando's (2014) research supports this; arguing mindfulness did not significantly impact children's concentration. Due to this study's small sample size, more children may have this opinion if a larger sample size was used.

### **Popularity of meditation:**

Many children believed meditation was the best mindfulness technique (see Figure 1.9). This was not surprising as research has also found that meditation is the most popular mindfulness technique among children (Zelazo and Lyons, 2012; Vickery and Dorjee, 2016). In the qualitative section of the questionnaire, children were asked why they liked their meditation the most because 'it was really relaxing' and helped them to 'understand their emotions.' This is supported by research by Keating (2017), who found that children enjoyed practising meditation the most as it enabled them to reflect on their feelings and relationships with others. One child further explained their reasoning by stating it helped to improve their "concentration." This is supported by Routhier-Martin, Roberts, and Blanch (2017), who found that children's behaviour and concentration improved after meditating in school. Therefore, this study's findings support research which has found that meditation is the most popular mindfulness technique amongst children as it has the most impact on their emotional well-being and concentration, compared to other techniques. Suggesting that teachers should implement meditation in the classroom as children enjoy this technique the most.

### **Negative opinions towards mindfulness:**

Some children had negative opinions towards practising mindfulness. Whilst only one child agreed that mindfulness was boring in the questionnaire (see figure 1.2), when the children were asked in the questionnaire if mindfulness should be practised every day, four children disagreed. One child disagreed by stating, "It would get boring." The other three children stated, "Because we are not always crazy," "I am normally calm," and "We are sometimes focused." These negative attitudes towards mindfulness were expected as research by Butterfield (2020) found that not all children enjoy it. Bannirchelvam, Bell and Costello (2017) also found that many children find mindfulness 'boring.' Although only one child in this research had this view, the MYRAID project (2022), found, in their large-scale study, that nearly all year seven children thought mindfulness was boring. Even though this research was based on older children, it would be interesting to see if more children have this opinion in a year's time. Whitworth and Currie (2019) suggest that some children have negative opinions towards mindfulness because they see it as a 'waste of time.' This was reflected in this research project, as when two children were asked in the interview if they would practice mindfulness again in the future, both stated no, with one child explaining, "It just takes too long and did not really calm me down." Although only a few children had negative opinions towards mindfulness in this study, as research has found that many children express these views, it is important not to dismiss their opinions.

Whilst the findings suggest that most children had positive opinions towards mindfulness when asked in the questionnaire if they would practice mindfulness at home, only thirteen of the children agreed (see Figure 1.6). This was slightly expected as research has found that children are often not keen on the thought of practising mindfulness outside of the classroom (Goldin, 2008; MYRAID Project, 2022). Phillips (2016) explains that many children have this view as they feel they do not have the resources or a quiet space to complete the activities at home. However, Goldin (2008) states that it is essential for children to complete mindfulness activities at home, as well as school if they want to see progress. If the children in this research project completed the mindfulness activities at home, perhaps some children may not have believed that "it did nothing for me," when asked in the interview. Overall, this suggests that whilst this research suggests that most children have a positive view towards mindfulness, some children, however, are not passionate enough to practice mindfulness outside of school.

## **6. Conclusion:**

To conclude, this case study has explored children's opinions on practising mindfulness in the classroom. The findings from the research suggest that most children enjoy practising mindfulness, especially meditation, in the classroom as they feel that it positively impacts their emotional well-being and concentration. However, the findings also suggest that some children have negative

opinions towards mindfulness and do not find it beneficial. The study further implies that, whilst most children have positive views towards practising mindfulness in the classroom, most children would not continue the practice in their own time.

## **7.Future considerations:**

This research presents some considerations for teachers and the wider population. Despite the small-scale of this study, it synthesises with previous research, promoting the benefits of gaining children's opinions in research to make changes in education (Lewis and Porter, 2007). As many schools are currently implementing mindfulness in their classroom (Shapiro et al, 2006), it is interesting to note that findings from this research indicate that most children enjoy the practice. The findings suggest that teachers should implement mindfulness in the classroom because children find the practice beneficial for promoting positive well-being and improving concentration. However, teachers should also consider that not all children enjoy practising mindfulness, and mindfulness does not positively impact all children. Suggesting, teachers cannot rely on mindfulness alone to improve all their pupil's well-being. Furthermore, meditation proved to be the most popular mindfulness technique among the pupils. Therefore, teachers should consider their classes' favourite techniques when implementing mindfulness. Whilst most children have positive opinions towards practising mindfulness at school, this study and other research suggest most children do not express the same desire to practice mindfulness at home (Burke 2010). However, as Goldin (2008) highlights the importance of practising mindfulness outside of the classroom, teachers should consider ways to promote practising mindfulness at home to their students.

If this study were not limited to a nine-week period, I would have liked to explore children with SEND opinions towards mindfulness, as research has found that mindfulness is particularly beneficial for children with SEND (Hooker and Folder, 2008; Semple et al, 2010). Furthermore, if I were to complete this study again, I would consider completing the study as an action research project to enable reflection. As children showed disinterest towards completing mindfulness at home, I would repeat the cycle proving mindfulness homework to see if practising mindfulness at home further enhanced their mental well-being and concentration.

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## **Appendices:**

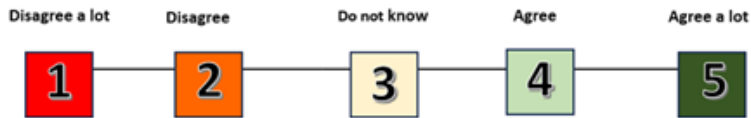


## Appendix 1- questionnaire

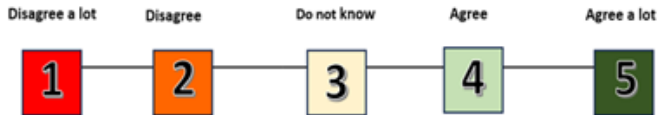
Questionnaire for year 6 children: Opinions on mindfulness.

You are going to read some opinions of animals who have taken part in mindfulness activities. How far do you agree with their opinions 1 being disagree a lot and 5 being agree a lot, circle your answer.

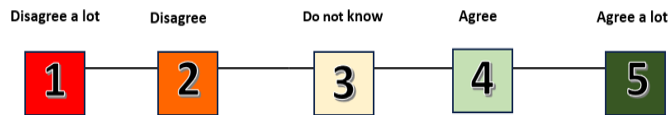
"I found the mindfulness activities relaxing!" says Panda.



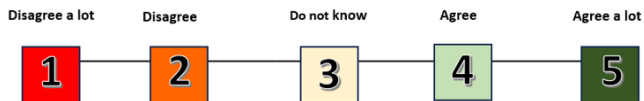
"I found the mindfulness activities boring!" says Bee.



"I felt happier after completely the mindfulness activities." says Parrot.



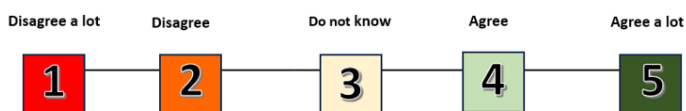
"I think the mindfulness activities helped my concentration." says Panda.



"I did not feel any different after doing the mindfulness activities." says Cat.

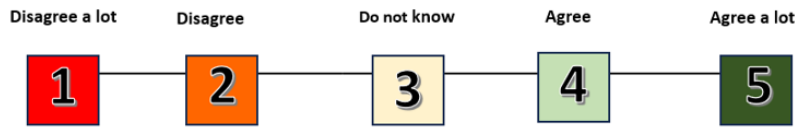


"I would love to do mindfulness activities every day!" says Parrot





"I would not do mindfulness activities at home!" says Stacey.



**Extended questions:**

**What was your favourite mindfulness activity?**

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**Why was this activity your favourite?**

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**Was there an activity you did not enjoy? If you enjoyed them all leave this blank.**

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**If you answered yes, explain why.**

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**Do you think mindfulness activities should be done every day in the classroom? (Explain your answer).**

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**Finally, would you do mindfulness activities again in the future? (Circle Yes or No).**

**Appendix 2**

Yes

No

### **Semi structured interview questions for a small sample of children:**

1. What made the mindfulness activities enjoyable or not? - change depending on participants response to questionnaire.
2. Why did you say you would/wouldn't do the mindfulness activities in the future?
3. What did the mindfulness activities help you the most with?
4. Would you advise your friends to practice mindfulness activities?
5. Do you have any further questions about mindfulness that you would like to ask?

### ***Appendix 3- Letter to Headteacher***

**QTS6004M Research Project Permission form**

Student name: \_\_Niamh Stinton\_\_\_\_\_

SE3 School: \_\_\_\_\_

Headteacher permissions:

I have read this student's ethical clearance form and give my permission for the conduct of this small-scale research project.

Additional parental passive consent is not required/has been obtained (pleased delete as applicable)

Headteacher's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Headteacher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear parent/carer,

I am a student at York St John University currently working in year six at \*\*\*\*\*. Part of my course involves me conducting a research project. For my research project I have chosen to research children's opinions on mindfulness. As part of this project, I would like to collect the children's responses. I would like to do this by:

- Asking the pupils to complete a small-scale questionnaire.
- A few pupils may be selected to participate in a short five-minute interview with me.

Any pupil who participates will be able to withdraw from the research at any time. All the children's names and opinions will be kept anonymous. Any recordings from the interviews will be immediately destroyed. Parents are welcome to access any data from the interviews and questionnaire at any time. The information collected will only be used by me, to aid my understanding of children's opinions of mindfulness.

If you have any further questions feel free to contact the school.

Yours sincerely

\*\*\*\*\*

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**Please return this slip to the school by the 20<sup>th</sup> of March**

**Student name**

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**Please tick the appropriate box:**

- I consent to my child taking part in the research project
- I do not wish for my child to take part in the research project

**Signed:**

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**Date:**

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