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Teaching Mindfulness with Children: Being a Mindful Role Model

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Abstract: Mindfulness is taking a preeminent role in today's education system. In the current study the author explored how experienced MindBody Wellness instructors make sense of teaching children mindfulness. The methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis combined with autoethnography was used to interview eight teachers from the United States and Australia teaching children mindfulness. In this article, the author discusses findings related to the theme of Being a Mindful Role Model. Participants, on the whole, felt that someone looking to teach children mindfulness needs first to connect deeply with the practices. They felt this connection was an elemental foundation in becoming a mindful role model and teaching children mindfulness. The experienced mindfulness instructors also found that cultivating mindfulness with children is enhanced by the creation of a mindful school culture. A number of recommendations are suggested, including the establishment of MindBody Wellness and mindfulness teacher training courses at the university level.

Introduction

A gentle revolution is sweeping schools and out-of-school care settings around the world (Hobby & Jenkins, 2014). This revolution has been given the name of “mindfulness”. Mindfulness attracts a rich array of interpretations and definitions but may be simply described as a natural human capacity, which involves observing, participating and accepting each of life's moments from a state of equilibrium or loving kindness (author reference withheld, 2012). The term is commonly used in the academic literature in three main ways (author reference withheld, 2012). First, it is used to refer to a state, trait or way of being, which has prescribed characteristics, such as; acceptance, authenticity and awareness (see author reference withheld, 2016 for a list of characteristics). Next it is applied to programs that cultivate a mindful state, for example, the Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction program. And lastly it denotes a type of meditation technique – mindfulness meditation.

It is difficult to accurately estimate how widely mindfulness activities are being practised by members of the school system, however, statistics indicate that in some countries such as the United Kingdom, nearly 50% of school-age children engage in mindful activities during classroom time (Stone, 2014). In Australia's largest state of New South Wales, mindfulness is now officially recognised as a fundamental component in enhancing wellbeing (NSW Government, 2015).

This trend to cultivate mindfulness in schools and out-of-school care settings has implications for how we educate teachers. Researchers recommend that mindfulness training needs to be incorporated within undergraduate and graduate studies for individuals planning to work with children (Tarrasch, Margalit-Shalom, & Berger, 2017). Currently, due to the recent popularity of the practice, the approach to mindfulness teacher training is diverse. For example, a by-line from an advertisement for a children's mindfulness program in the United

States (US) describes learning to teach mindfulness after two hours of online training (Mindful, 2014, p. 81). In contrast, Lesley University, also in the US, offers a comprehensive master program in mindfulness education (see <http://www.lesley.edu/master-of-arts/mindfulness-studies/>).

In order to understand the growing field of mindfulness education I interviewed eight teachers from Australia and the US about their experience of teaching children mindfulness. All of the participants had extensive and long-term experience in the practise of MindBody Wellness modalities such as, mindfulness, yoga, guided imagery, Tai Chi and arts-based mindfulness. The research question posed was, “How do teachers who are experienced MindBody Wellness practitioners make sense of teaching children mindfulness?” In the current paper, I discuss findings related to the theme of, *Being a Mindful Role Model*. Other publications (see author references withheld) describe the study in greater depth and extend discussion on the theme related to spirituality and wellbeing. However, before presenting the results, I briefly discuss the nature of mindfulness education, mindfulness research and a conceptual framework for mindfulness teacher competencies. I will then outline research related to mindfulness and wellbeing and explain the epistemology, methodology and methods used to explore the research question.

Mindfulness Education

Since the emergence of the new millennium, mindfulness education has grown rapidly – taking various shapes and forms around the world. In some countries such as Australia, Bhutan and Israel, mindfulness is recognised as an important part of a child’s education, and has been widely integrated within schools (author reference withheld; Bhutan Ministry of Education, 2012; Sheinman & Hadar, 2017; Sheinman, Hadar, Gafni, & Milman, 2018). In other countries, such as New Zealand, Portugal and Singapore the practice is less developed, but is gradually being incorporated within student education (author reference withheld; Bernay, Graham, Devcich, Rix, & Rubie-Davies, 2016; Khng, 2018; personal communication I. Sellers 8th August 2018).

Over the last two decades a large number of stakeholders have contributed to the development of mindfulness education; including – volunteers who are experienced mindfulness practitioners, school teachers, student support staff, parents, principals, academic researchers and lecturers, counsellors, cultural leaders, religious organisations, as well as children (author reference withheld; Garrison Institute, 2005; Semple, Drouman, & Reid, 2017; S. E. Smith, 2010, 2013). In school systems, the development of programs and activities has mainly been directed towards cultivating mindfulness with children (Weare, 2013, 2014), and there are now approximately 80 fiction and non-fiction texts available on the topic and countless free online resources (see <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/mindfulness-education/>). The experience individuals bring to teaching children mindfulness is highly variable. Some teachers have many years experience in education but no MindBody Wellness background (Bakosh, Snow, Tobias, Houlihan, & Barbosa-Leiker, 2015), others have extensive experience in practices such as mindfulness and meditation, but no experience teaching children; a few have both long-term experience teaching children combined with long-term meditation practices, but no background in teaching or guiding children in MindBody Wellness practices (Garrison Institute, 2005). Rarer still are those instructors who have an education background, MindBody Wellness experience, combined with mindfulness teacher training (personal communication N. Sheinman 26th September 2018). For beginner mindfulness instructors Apps, such as Smiling Mind (see <http://smilingmind.com.au/>) and audio-guided programs

such as Inner Explorer (see <https://innerexplorer.org/>) help teachers new to mindfulness share the practices with students.

In classrooms around the world, teachers with a meditation background have created their own mindfulness programs for children (author reference withheld) and there are also numerous commercially available programs (Semple et al., 2017). For example, in the Netherlands, the founder of the International Academy for Mindful Teaching (AMT) Eline Snel (see www.elinesnel.com/en/field/mindfulness-matters-method/) trains educators, health professionals, counsellors and others working with children in the Method Eline Snel – Mindfulness for Children programs. The method has been introduced across 20 countries, with over 1 000 teachers (author reference withheld). Snel, when accepting participants to be AMT teachers, said that they must comply with prerequisites for attendance and have a committed personal mindfulness practice. Before receiving full certification, participants are required to complete at least one pilot course (at no charge) with a group of children and submit a reflective essay of at least 15 pages that includes a detailed description of one full lesson. Additionally, certified teachers must complete 2-4 days per annum of professional development related to mindfulness for young people (personal communication E. Snel 18th August 2017).

Next, the cultivation of mindfulness is targeted at school teachers, at both the pre-service and in-service level, in an effort to: help ease teacher stress and burnout (Bernay, 2012, 2014; Emerson, Leyland, Hudson, Rowse, Hanley, & Hugh-Jones, 2017; Jennings & DeMauro, 2017; Lomas, Medina, Ivztan, Rupperecht, & Eiroa-Orosa, 2017); prepare student teachers for the workforce (Bernay, 2014; Poulin, 2009; Lomas et al., 2017; Soloway, 2017); enhance resilience and general wellbeing (Bernay, 2012, 2014); bring authenticity to the role of teaching (Bernay, 2012, 2014) and contribute to teacher professional development (Rix & Bernay, 2014).

Other individuals in the complex system of the school are also learning mindfulness through a *whole-of-school* approach (see Sheinman & Hadar, 2017). For example, staff from Pinecrest School, located in Quiet Cove, Annandale in the US, wrote in a letter to parents: “One of our intentions for bringing this program to Pinecrest is to not only teach these skills to the students and faculty, but also to support the integration of mindfulness into the daily school culture and the community as a whole” (Pinecrest School, 2014). To this end, Pinecrest additionally offered mindfulness sessions to parents (Pinecrest School, 2014).

Mindfulness program development is proceeding at a rapid pace and the research community is struggling to keep pace with this growth. In the current project, I contribute further to our knowledge base in the field by presenting results from a *whole systems* perspective – exploring how experienced MindBody Wellness practitioners, make sense of teaching children mindfulness. In the next section, I discuss more about the research in this growing area.

Mindfulness Research

Mindfulness research in school systems has grown rapidly over the last decade and has mainly been directed towards measuring the effect of programs for teachers and children using outcome-based study designs (author reference withheld, 2016a; Dariotis et al., 2017). In a recently published systematic review (consisting of 1 981 participants) of research related to how the practice impacts teacher wellbeing, Lomas et al. (2017) found results to be encouraging. The authors discovered that the majority of studies reported statistically-significant improvements in mental health outcomes such as, anxiety, depression and anger. Teachers also experienced enhanced levels of mindfulness and wellbeing. However, Lomas

et al. (2017) suggested that the positive conclusions need to be tempered by a number of caveats – one being that mindfulness should not be regarded as a panacea for stress or a sustainable remedy for an education system that imposes such stressors on its staff. This caveat is vindicated by the review's results. Lomas et al. (2017) reported that only seven out of 11 studies showed statistically-significant improvements in the teachers' levels of distress, stress and strain. In a similar systematic review, Emerson et al. (2017) concluded that "there is only limited evidence of its benefit to the profession for managing stress" (p. 12).

In respect to research related to children's perceptions and outcomes there are now hundreds of studies dedicated to understanding how mindfulness effects children in schools, out-of-school care and clinical settings (author reference withheld, 2016a; Felver & Jennings, 2016). Researchers have studied the effects of mindfulness with children as young as pre-school age, but have predominately focussed on analysing how the practices affect middle and high school students (Zoogman, Goldberg, Hoyt, & Miller, 2015). Outcomes studied include: academic performance; emotional regulation; social skills; anxiety levels; aggressive behaviour; substance abuse; depression; quality of life; general wellbeing; and mindfulness (Arthurson, 2015; de Carvalho, Pinto, & Maroco, 2017; Huppert & Johnson, 2010; Mearns, 2016; Zoogman et al., 2015).

In a review of published and unpublished outcomes-based studies in school settings, Zenner et al. (2014) conclude that practising mindfulness enables children to enhance their cognitive performance and resilience to stress. A review of qualitative studies with children aged five to 12 years of age supports these findings. Mindfulness was found to assist children with concentration, mental focus and clarity when approaching school work (author reference withheld, 2015a). The practice also heightened students' awareness of their body and emotions as well as the ability to express their thoughts and feelings with clarity (author reference withheld, 2015a).

In a meta-analysis of studies on mindfulness with youth (children under the age of 18 years) published in 2015, Zoogman et al. found that mindfulness consistently outperformed active control conditions. Factors such as: study design; practice outside the classroom; instructor experience; session length; the number of mindfulness lessons; type of mindfulness lessons; age of children; sample size and gender had no significant moderating effect on the efficacy of mindfulness. The authors commented that the absence of significant moderation stands in contrast to Huppert and Johnson (2010) and Kabat-Zinn's (1990, 2003) theoretical suppositions; being that a student's mindfulness practice at home and the experience of the mindfulness instructor will play a significant role in outcomes derived when learning mindfulness practices for the first time. Zoogman et al. (2015) hypothesise that fewer moderators may exist for youth than adults when formally learning mindfulness. They write, "Youth may learn more quickly, requiring fewer sessions and less practice; issues of instructor expertise may be less prescient to teaching youth mindfulness." (Zoogman et al., 2015, p. 299)

Children's receptivity and natural inclination to engage with mindfulness is underscored by another review related to the relationship between children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and mindfulness by author reference withheld (2015b). Six of the nine studies analysed showed that children's challenging behaviours improved with *only* their parents practising mindfulness. The majority of parents who undertook mindfulness training reported positive affects in their overall health and wellbeing including feeling happier in their parenting role (author reference withheld, 2016c). A key insight drawn by the reviewers was that mindfulness reveals itself relationally – an individual's level of mindfulness will affect the behaviours and responses of the people around them (author reference withheld, 2016a).

While the body of research investigating the effect of programs on teachers and children new to mindfulness has grown rapidly over the years (Weare, 2013, 2014), there are, at the time of writing, still few published studies where authors listen to the wisdom of teachers – *teachers who have extensive experience* teaching children mindfulness. I only located one other study (Kwon, 2015) that examined the experiences of teachers who have a long-term MindBody Wellness practice combined with experience teaching mindfulness with children. Reviewers of mindfulness studies in school systems suggest that there is a critical need to explore the area in depth, with a focus on phenomena finding explorations that use rich ethnographic descriptions, case studies of exemplars and other forms of qualitative assessment (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012). They also encourage researchers to connect and collaborate with administrators, educators, and school-based clinicians to advance our understanding of mindfulness-based interventions in school settings (Semple et al., 2017). It was with this background in mind that in the current research I explored the research question, “How do teachers who are experienced MindBody Wellness practitioners make sense of teaching children mindfulness?”

Conceptual Framework for Mindfulness Teacher Competencies

Given this is a new research area, there are few studies where authors have focussed on the understanding what qualities, characteristics and experience are needed by a teacher to facilitate mindfulness lessons. A team of researchers in the United Kingdom, headed by Crane et al. (2012) have made the largest contribution to this area, devising *working* guidelines for mindfulness teacher competencies. This knowledge-base is largely based on studies that qualitatively explore the opinions and experience of experts in the field. Recommendations for teachers considering teaching children mindfulness include having: generic teaching skills; psycho-educational training; a long-term and on-going MindBody Wellness practice; training to teach children mindfulness; understanding of mindfulness theory and research; and knowledge of the participant group (synthesized from Crane et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2015; Kaltwasser, Sauer, & Kohls, 2014).

Epistemology and Methodology

The epistemology guiding this study was termed *Whole Systems Mindful Enquiry*. I applied the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) with the autoethnographic method of personal story telling to explore the research question, “How do teachers who are experienced MindBody Wellness practitioners make sense of teaching children mindfulness?” I devised the epistemological guideline by blending aspects of whole systems thinking with a holistic relational enquiry paradigm (see Burrows, 2011). Some of the key factors that combine to form a *Whole Systems Mindful Enquiry* paradigm are outlined in Figure 1. When subscribing to this epistemology, key principles that the researcher needs to keep in mind during the research process are to: maintain and cultivate a mindful presence throughout the data gathering process and during the interpretation stage, sustain a holistic and flexible perspective, and recognise that knowledge is co-created (author reference withheld).

The methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was developed in the 1990s and stems from the concepts of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, which have much longer histories (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It is an experiential qualitative approach to research and is now widely used in a range of disciplines (J. A. Smith,

2011a). The methodology assists researchers to provide a detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of that experience to participants and how they make sense of that experience in particular contexts (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 9). A comprehensive guideline on how to conduct research using IPA is provided in the foundational text on the topic, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, method and research* (see J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

Autoethnography, which I used together with IPA, is simultaneously a way of approaching research and an academic style of writing (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). It emerged on the academic scene over one hundred years ago (Hayano, 1979). However, in contrast to today's modern conceptions, it was not considered to be a specific research technique, method, or theory (Hayano, 1979). The technique was described as lending colour and dimension to ethnographic fieldwork, where the researcher had an insider perspective, that is an identification with the group being researched (Hayano, 1979). Modern conceptions of autoethnography have largely evolved from research work conducted in the 1990s.

Autoethnography invites and encourages researchers to draw on their experience and write in a highly-personalised style in order to convey and extend understanding about a societal phenomenon of importance (Wall, 2006). "A central feature of autoethnography is that the researcher is a highly visible social actor within the written text" (Anderson, 2006, p. 384). The methodology helps writers and readers to shift away from the "distanced and detached observer" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433) role, the default mode that dominates academic enquiry and embrace intimate engagement, involvement and embodied experience with a topic.

What does the finished autoethnographic piece look like? Final products of autoethnography have not followed one common paradigm or distinctive framework (Hayano, 1979). The methods come to life in various shapes and forms and perhaps are limited only by the author's imagination. Findings may be portrayed via poetry, conversations, storytelling, journal writing and live performances (Ellis, 2004). For the current research, I chose to use the autoethnographic method of *storytelling*. In the larger body of work, from which these results are extrapolated (see author reference withheld), I shared some of my own stories, thoughts, feelings and images as I attempted to interpret how my participants make sense of teaching mindfulness. This form of storytelling I feel helps convey the process of interpretation, enables new forms of meaning making and discovery and hopefully finds resonance with the reader.

It is my view that autoethnography complements and extends IPA, shining a light on a researcher's background, preconceptions, biases and the lens through which participants' experiences are being interpreted. It additionally enables both the voice of the participants and the voice of the researcher to be heard authentically as their stories and meaning making converge, diverge and unfold during the research process.

I applied a number of methods to ensure research rigour in this project. The first "port of call" was to ensure commensurability between the methods, methodology and epistemology and clearly delineate and articulate each, while being mindful of their interconnectivity. The second step involved engaging with broad criteria established for qualitative research; that is guidelines proposed by Elliot, Fischer, and Rennie (1999) and Tracy (2010). The final destination was the application of "method-appropriate criteria" (Flick, 2014, p. 481), a method which takes into account the nuances and differences between qualitative approaches. For example, an important aspect to research rigour when using the interview technique, in general, and IPA, specifically, is to ground reporting in examples of verbatim transcripts (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Elliot et al., 1999). For a more detailed description of the epistemology, methodology and methods for evaluating qualitative rigour please see author reference withheld (2016a). In the next section, I outline the methods

utilised to explore the research question, “How do experienced MindBody Wellness practitioners make sense of teaching children mindfulness?”

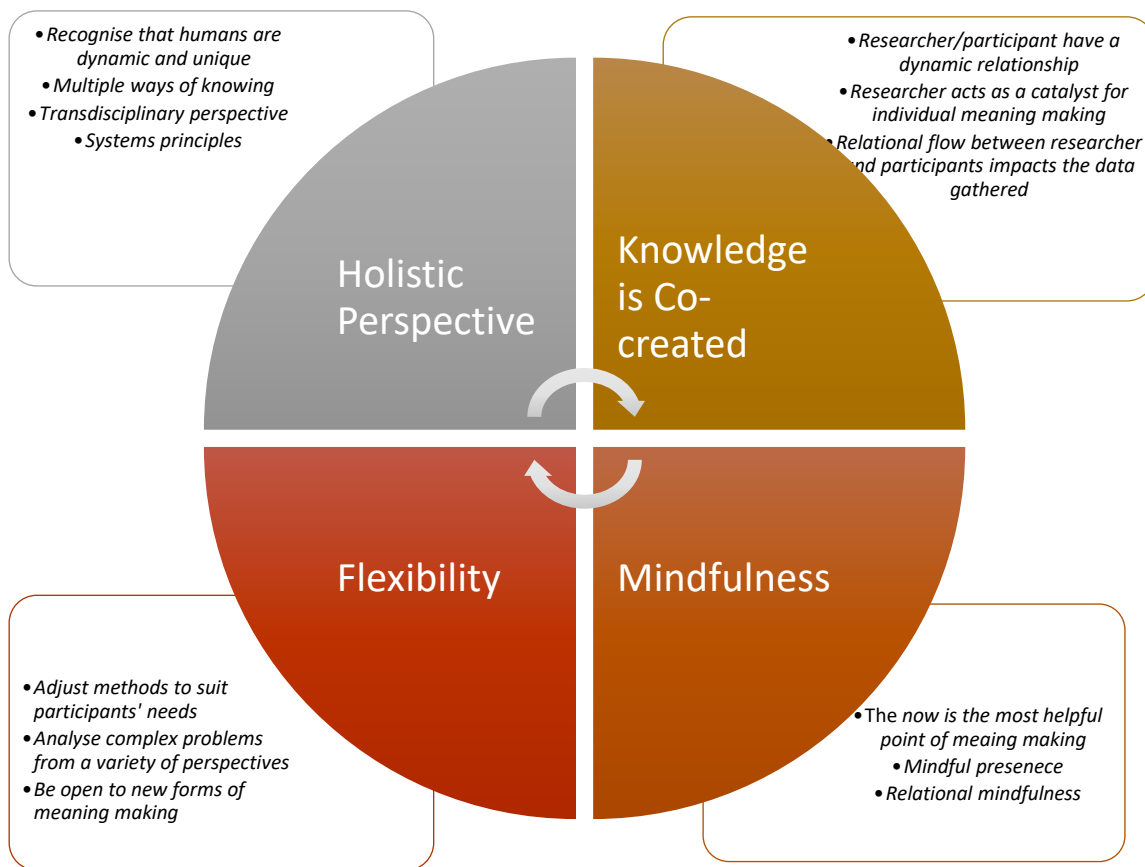


Figure 1: Whole Systems Mindful Enquiry Paradigm

Method

Participants

When using IPA, researchers sample purposively, with the aim to recruit participants who have a common experience that they personally consider to be momentous – an event or life experience of significance and meaning (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Participants in the current study shared the common characteristic of having an established personal MindBody Wellness practice combined with experience teaching children mindfulness in mainstream schools and or out-of-school care settings. In total, eight teachers (one male and seven females) took part in the study. They had a minimum of approximately two years-experience teaching children mindfulness and also personally practised mindfulness on a regular basis. The teachers were aged between 25 to 59 years. Seven participants were born in Australia and one in Germany. Teachers predominately answered that their cultural background was Australian. One Australian-born teacher resided in New York, while all other participants lived in city locations in Australia or towns that were in commuting distance from state capitals. Table 2 lists participants’ pseudonyms, together with their teaching position, years of practising and teaching children mindfulness.

Data Collection

There were three main points of data collection related to the participant group: demographic information; interviews and data illustrative of a teacher's practice, such as unpublished materials, worksheets, journals and photos. Recruitment started in February 2014, when ethics permission was obtained from the xxx Research Ethics Committee to interview participants in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. A pilot interview was conducted with Janet ETTY-Leal to test interview questions and technique. Invitations were sent directly to experienced mindfulness instructors and I explained to the teachers that there was a range of options for participation, with the minimum requirement being to complete a demographic information sheet and participate in a one-and-a-half-hour interview/conversation, which could be conducted face to face (if the researcher lived near the participant), via Skype, phone or email or a combination of communication modes. Details regarding participant interview commitment, duration of the data collection process, mode of communication and illustrative material provided are listed in Table 2 and 3 alongside teachers' pseudonyms. Face to face, Skype and phone interviews were transcribed by a transcriptionist and myself and were checked numerous times for accuracy.

Prior to interviewing, I devised an interview schedule (see Figure 2), which acted as a springboard for conversing with teachers. The questions related to: teachers own personal mindfulness practice; their motivation to teach children mindfulness; favourite mindfulness practices; challenges associated with teaching mindfulness; qualities needed to teach children mindfulness; adaptations needed to teach different age groups and recommendations for teachers contemplating teaching mindfulness (see author reference withheld, 2016a for more details). As well as asking questions, I also made statements, reframing and confirming what the participants had expressed. This method of conversing generated further conversation on the topic and led to an in-depth exploration of how teachers make sense of teaching children mindfulness. One of the most important questions that I asked teachers, often at the conclusion of an interview, was if they would like to raise a salient point that we had perhaps missed during our conversation. This I believe led to rich insights and captured the essence of how they made sense of teaching children mindfulness.

Interview Schedule

Mindfulness Personal Experience and Motivation to Practice with Children

- Q1. What appealed to you about cultivating mindfulness with children?
- Q2. Would you mind describing your own personal experience with mindfulness/meditation etc?
- Q3. What are some of the highlights involved with teaching mindfulness to children? Are there any challenges?

Practice

- Q1. Do you follow a specific mindfulness program? What motivated you to use this program? If not, what activities and/or practices do you use in the classroom?
- Q2. Have you developed any of your own mindfulness activities? What are some of your favourite practices?
- Q3. Are there any practices that you haven't tried but would like to try?
- Q4. How do you integrate mindfulness into daily classroom practice?
- Q5. Are the activities suited to all age levels or do any need to be adapted or altered?

Teacher Qualities

- Q1. Are there any special qualities you think a teacher needs to teach mindfulness with children?
- Q2. What are some of your own qualities that you feel have led you to practice mindfulness with children?
- Q3. If a teacher is new to practising MindBody Wellness but is keen to teach it in the classroom or with children what suggestions would you make to this person?

Figure 2. Interview Schedule (author reference withheld, 2016b)

In terms of the interview technique, the foundational IPA text provides limited guidelines. The creators do mention that when interviewing the researcher is not attempting to elicit “natural interactions” but rather is endeavouring to prompt experiential details,

Name	Teaching Position	Years Practising MindBody Wellness	Years Teaching Mindfulness	Learning Facilities' Spiritual Beliefs
Angelica	Specialist Primary School Teacher (5 to 11 years of age)	4 years	2 years	Secular
Ben	Primary School Teacher (10 to 11 years of age)	14 years	2 years	Secular
Caro	Middle School Teacher and Counsellor (12 to 18 years of age)	7 years	2 years	Faith-based
Faith	After-school Program Developer and Teacher (12 to 15 years of age)	6 years	2 years	Secular
Daniella	After-school Program Developer, Special Needs, Primary and High School Teacher (4 to 15 years of age)	8 years	6 years	Secular, Post-secular and Faith-based
Cerese	Primary School Teacher (5 to 8 years of age)	2 years	2 years	Secular
Tilly	Primary School Teacher (5 to 6 years of age)	20 years	3 years	Secular
Janet (pilot interviewee)	Special Needs, Primary and High School Teacher (5 to 18 years of age)	40 years	15 years	Secular, Post-secular and Faith-based

Table 2: Study Participants' Teaching and MindBody Wellness Experience

Name	Teaching Position	Interview Start and Finish Date	Mode of Communication	Illustrative Material Provided
Angelica	Specialist primary school teacher (5 to 11 years of age)	April to May 2014	Skype conversation followed by emails clarifying meaning in regards to Skype conversation. Angelica additionally sent information via email, providing updates on the progress of her school's mindfulness program.	Journal Examples of mindfulness practices used with children
Ben	Primary school teacher (10 to 11 years of age)	May 2014	Two consecutive emails sent by the myself. One email was sent to Ben with a range of questions, as per his request. I then sent a follow-up email to clarify meaning in regards to some of his responses.	
Caro	Middle school teacher and counsellor (12 to 18 years of age)	February to August 2014	Consecutive emails asking one questions one at a time, followed by a face to face conversation, an email clarifying meaning from the face to face conversation, followed by a phone conversation.	Report on an evaluation of the mindfulness program she developed for her school. Flyers to promote mindfulness program. Student questionnaire examples. Extracts from journal.
Faith	Out-of-school program developer and teacher (12 to 15 years of age)	April 2014	One email sent asking a variety of questions as per the participant's request. No follow up needed.	Thesis Journal article
Daniella	Out-of-school program developer, special needs support, primary and high school teacher (4 to 15 years of age)	February to June 2014	Email asking one question, followed by a face to face conversation and then two phone conversations. The last conversation was used to clarify meaning.	Art work
Taylor	Primary school teacher (5 to 8 years of age)	May 2014	One email asking three questions as per participant request, followed by	

			another email clarifying aspects of the responses.	
Tilly	Primary school teacher (5 to 6 years of age)	May 2014	Email asking a couple of questions, followed by a phone conversation.	Student mindfulness questionnaire examples
Janet (pilot interviewee)	Special Needs, Primary and High School Teacher (5 to 18 years of age)	Test Interviewee December 2013 to January 2014	Four emails asking specific questions.	Photos of mindfulness activities. Web site meditations. Report on an evaluation of her mindfulness program in two schools. Student evaluation surveys. Other email correspondence.

Table 3: Participant Research Commitment

interesting narratives and conceptual frames of understanding (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) suggest that in order to bring to life a rich data set embedded within a participant’s experiential awareness, the researcher needs to be clear and confident, build trust and rapport with the participant, listen with focused attention, give the person the space and time to reflect on questions and view the interview as a one-sided conversation.

From my perspective, these suggestions resonated with wellness coaching techniques, articulated in one of the first wellness coaching manuals of its kind, by Moore and Tschannen-Moore (2010). For a synopsis of the wellness coaching technique please see author reference withheld, (2016). These techniques help a researcher to fosters self-awareness and generate a space for authentic communication. I wasn’t looking to have a “simple chat” with interviewees but wanted to support and encourage teachers to investigate and reflect deeply on their experiences teaching children mindfulness. On the first viewing of data, I made initial exploratory notes in response to the participants’ comments; including descriptive comments, language related comments as well as my preliminary interpretations.

On the second reading and after contemplating the data, emergent themes were identified and specific quotations highlighted. I identified major themes in three main ways: 1) by the participants themselves highlighting the most important and meaningful aspect related to teaching children mindfulness; 2) discovering a fragment of wisdom, which captured the essence of how a teacher made sense of teaching mindfulness with children – known in IPA as a “secret gem” (see J. A. Smith, 2011b); and by taking note of my feelings and intuition during the interview and analysis stage (for further in-depth and detailed information on this process see author reference withheld, 2016a).

Findings

Four main themes captured the essence of how the eight teachers made sense of child-based mindfulness instruction:

- The Spiritual Nature of a Teacher’s Mindfulness Practice

- Re-defining Modern Conceptions of Creativity
- Responsibility for Nurturing a Child's Wellbeing
- Being a Mindful Role Model.

The findings were extensive and due to their length, in this paper, I present results related to *Being a Mindful Role Model*. Other results can be found at author reference withheld. Within this main theme, three sub-themes emerged: 1) Incorporating Formal and Informal Practices; 2) Cultivating a Mindful School and 3) Mindfulness as a Personal Journey. Findings were as follows.

The Theme's Emergence

Discussion on being a mindful role model was prompted when participants spoke or wrote about a variety of topics, such as the challenges faced when teaching mindfulness, how they felt when they shared mindfulness with children and what teacher qualities are important for mindfulness instruction. For example, Angelica, in our Skype interview, when talking about how it feels to bring mindfulness into the school environment, expressed the importance of being a mindful role model:

Yeah and its, you know I have to be the mindful role model because if I'm not then I can't have that expectation that they are going to be mindful.

Likewise, Ben, in an email, when asked about the challenges of teaching mindfulness, wrote about the importance of teachers being at "home" with a mindful way of being:

Getting staff on board as being able to teach or lead students requires the teacher to practice it and develop their skills on their own.

Daniella, in a phone interview when discussing questions related to Session C, reiterated Ben and Angelica's points, which were expressed by a majority of teachers:

Well, I think first of all that it's, um, it certainly, um, more effective if the teacher has a personal interest in mindfulness and I would almost say that, um, you know, definitely to have a practice, because how can you teach something that you don't know much about and you can't teach mindfulness from a text book or just following a CD. I mean you can, but it becomes mechanical. There's got to be that human interaction, and unless a teacher...like how can a teacher who doesn't know much about maths really teach maths effectively?

Janet discussed the difficulties of teaching teachers who have no personal interest in the practice:

One of the most difficult challenges I have faced does not come from the children, but from a small number of teachers. There can be many reasons for this. Sometimes the decision to introduce a Mindfulness program has been made by a Co-ordinator or Deputy Principal and this decision is not necessarily understood or embraced! It is very difficult to teach children with a teacher who is not committed and disinterested and who even may display this by sitting up the back with their laptop on their knee! Wherever possible, I now request that I have an introductory session with staff to provide a theoretical and practical session and allow time for questions and discussion.

Sub-theme 1: Incorporating Formal and Informal Practices

Daniella, in our phone interview, talked about the value of incorporating mindfulness into daily routines (informally) and also making time in the day to practise meditation formally:

...so, using mindfulness in your everyday life and this is what I do, every time I sit down I use that as a cue. If I sit down unconsciously and I get up again and sit down with intention and mindfully. Um, maybe some prompts before you read an email, use that as prompt to take a beautiful deep breath. Um... opening the door, I use that again to breathe, make sure I'm checking into my breathing. Every time I press down the handle of a door I breathe in and out as I enter the door and exit. So, using mindfulness, making sure that I have eye contact with people and that I am actively listening. Um noticing my surroundings when I am walking, to just stop and then walk mindfully. So, using it in your every day, daily life, I think then it naturally flows on. If you don't have a practice, it flows onto your teaching and becomes a habit.

Research questions: Yeah, there is time spent in meditation and then there is time spent incorporating it in your daily life. It seems you need both really to...

Interviewee response (Daniella): And definitely, definitely you know a practice, a meditation practice. Even if it's just for five minutes. Some people practice for four hours, some two hours or an hour, but even five minutes of an intentional sitting, connecting to the heart and breathing and just stilling the mind and body, I think is really essential.

Researcher statement: Yeah, I agree, I agree. I've read that quite a few practitioners, they don't practise meditation and have the quiet time but they might use mindfulness in their professional life, when working with clients. I always wondered how they would go with teaching it, um if they are not taking any time out from their daily schedule to have quiet inner reflection.

*Interviewee response (Daniella): Yeah, and I've seen a lot of teachers on video and everything, you know ring the singing bowl, "Right into meditation ... blah blah blah, let's all close our eyes...", **[expression very rapid as if in a hurry to emphasise her example of the teachers]** (researcher laughs) as a teacher would for something to do – just say they are teaching mindfulness, but they are not with themselves for a second, so how can you teach that? You know, it's the intention. It's the voice, ...and unless you've quietened your own mind and had that time you can't be calm and deliver it in that way.*

Angelica, in a Skype interview discussed how she incorporates mindfulness formally and informally and similar to Daniella emphasises the point of personally embodying mindfulness. Angelica grounds and centres herself through mindfulness before starting each class. Our conversation follows:

Researcher question: Hmm...that's fascinating, isn't it?

Interviewee response (Angelica): Yeah and I'll often...because they have to be walked to my classroom and what not, because they are dropped off by all different teachers. I will now try to make sure that you know um...if I've only got five minutes to go before the kids come to me, what I used to do is, "Oh, I'll quickly do this...oh I'll quickly check that email." I'll quickly...coz you know that's how teacher work. I mean....so stressful really teaching.

But now I stop myself, I catch myself. I say to myself, "You know what, now, you've got five minutes, don't do that just take a moment." And so, I'll put myself in a mindful place and then I'll greet the kids outside the classroom and

so everything just starts off in a more calm and mindful manner and it dictates the rest of the lesson and their learning.

Sub-theme 2: Cultivating a Mindful School

Tilly expressed similar sentiments to Angelica. She said that due to the stresses and demands of teaching, teachers need to become mindful. However, Tilly mentioned that teachers sometimes have trouble committing to a practice when work demands get too high and some teachers, like Janet mentioned, are simply not that interested in being mindful:

Teachers I think run on automatic pilot all the time (mm hum) and we don't take that time to be mindful. So, we started doing some teacher mindfulness sessions in Term 1 that were great. Everyone was right up for it. Well not everyone, but lots of people were interested, but as the term gets busier and the demands get higher, that's dropped off and people can't make it because (exasperation in her voice) it's such a hectic job (I know, I really know and that's why I'm appreciative of your time and yeah it takes its toll, doesn't it?). Yeah.... but the thing is mindfulness is probably the thing that will make the difference. So, I'm not really sure how you do it apart from to do it slowly and just embed it really...it has to be sort of embedded in the culture and language I guess.

Likewise, when Daniella was teaching arts-based mindfulness lessons to children she realised it was necessary to educate parents as well. From the participants' descriptions, it seems that embedding mindfulness in our language and culture requires also educating parents; as a mindful way of being can quickly come undone for children if their parents are functioning in an alternate way. And I imagine it also must create a great deal of cognitive conflict for children if they are learning one way of being at school – a mindful one – and then having this negated and questioned when they return home for the evening.

At Angelica's school parents witnessed the benefits their children were experiencing in her classroom and wanted the same kind of culture created in their son's and daughter's homeroom. They were asking homeroom teachers to also teach mindfulness. Angelica and some supportive staff members slowly started to integrate mindfulness within the school's practices and pedagogy. In our Skype conversation, Angelica discussed how the whole school system was gradually becoming more mindful. In an email correspondence, she elaborated on our Skype conversation. Angelica wrote that because most teachers are also mothers, "they just don't have the time to commit to a six week or year-long mindfulness course."

However, they want to embrace the concept. My school has started with small steps like a 40-minute in-service, a breathing room, a book to read etc. Now it is taking on. I'm meeting with teachers again on Wednesday because they felt inspired by our last meeting and want to know more. It's the ripple effect. Day Two of the new school year - I ran a short workshop on mindfulness which was tailored around teaching the teachers how to "stop and be" and to be aware of the practice of mindfulness. It was a great time of the year to introduce the concept as teachers were stressed (as all teachers are) before they've met their new class. Afterwards some teachers were inspired to: Make Well Spaces in their own classrooms; Create a Breathing Room for other teachers; and Lead the Junior School in a collective breathing activity - very powerful. The ripple effect of mindfulness has happened at our school. It's been just like watching a little pebble thrown in the water. I expect this to continue.

Angelica's conversations demonstrate how the whole school's culture was slowly changing and becoming more mindful, with staff members working collaboratively to create calmer environments in which to learn – “the ripple effect” as she termed it. Her “mindful classroom” modelling led to other teachers wanting to adopt and learn the practice. Key figures (such as the principal and school counsellor) in Angelica's school, like Caro's, supported a mindful culture, unlike one of the schools that Ben worked at. Ben perceived his school environment to be negative and stressful and he thus could not be a mindful role model to his students and teach effectively. Exogenous factors outweighed the internal stability and equanimity he knew could be achieved through being mindful, resulting in cognitive conflict. Moving to a school where mindfulness was respected allowed him to be himself – a mindful role model. Ben's experience shows that in some conditions, some teachers, in order to maximise student wellbeing, need to be supported by a whole-school culture of mindfulness.

Sub-theme 3: Mindfulness as a Personal Journey

Participants, on the whole, felt that someone looking to teach children mindfulness first needs to connect deeply with the practices, in essence follow in the study participants' footsteps. This connection they felt was an elemental foundation to becoming a mindful role model and teaching children mindfulness – transcending the limitations of a six-to-eight-week mindfulness program. Cultivating mindfulness becomes a way of life, a process of self-discovery, with the capacity to influence every aspect of a teacher's personal and professional life. Participants affirmed that becoming a mindful role model requires a personal commitment to self-transformation. Angelica in our phone interview explained:

Well, apart from practising it, I mean doing different courses that are around. They have been valuable. They are either online or at colleges, university. They're all a personal journey within itself. I think that's a really important part of it, because you discover so much about yourself. Um, so there are courses, but practice, reading books, and it's in the living it as well.

Caro in our face to face interview discussed her own personal mindfulness journey, which commenced a decade prior to teaching children mindfulness. She shared her story about the integral role mindfulness has played in her life and how her mindful journey involved a process of self-reflection and self-discovery. This process involved going outside (e.g., undertaking courses) and going within (e.g., applying the practice to handling stress associated with university studies). Her personal journey, which is continuing as she undertakes further courses, reflects what Daniella emphasised, that a mindfulness journey involves undertaking a range of activities: such as courses, reading books and most importantly – “living it”. Janet wrote:

There are so many paths and ways to practice Mindfulness and Meditation. It is wonderful to find ways that speak to individual hearts and minds... and enliven and inspire personal practice.

The participants' conversations indicate that they did not feel there is one prescriptive method for learning how to teach children mindfulness. Teachers setting out on this journey need to listen to their own hearts and minds and find their own special and unique way to cultivate a mindful way of being. And finding their own way – making it their own “personal journey” – is an essential step to becoming a mindful role model. They have lived it!

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to explore the growing phenomenon of mindfulness from a teacher's perspective – listening to teachers who have an established and regular MindBody Wellness practice combined with two or more years of experience teaching children mindfulness. The research question posed was, “How do teachers who are experienced MindBody Wellness practitioners make sense of teaching children mindfulness?” It was discovered through the interview and analysis process that being a *mindful role model* was central to how teachers made sense of teaching children mindfulness.

The participants felt that being a mindful role model requires practising techniques formally and informally and embodying a mindful way of being. Deeply connecting with a mindful way of being through informal and formal mindfulness practices was perceived to be a central element in becoming a mindful role model. The teachers suggested that before teaching children mindfulness, beginner instructors should first connect deeply with the practices by taking a personal mindfulness journey, which involves reflecting on a range of mindfulness texts, theories and practices, as well as taking the time to connect with their own personal wisdom. However, some participants acknowledged that teachers may not have the time to commit to formal mindfulness courses; therefore, it is helpful if schools can provide mindful teacher education at a *mindful* pace. It was also found during conversations that teachers benefited by having mindfulness supported in the whole-of-school environment.

The sentiments expressed by the participants are reiterated by many members of the mindfulness research community. For example, the literature consistently stresses the importance of mindfulness teachers having an ongoing experiential engagement with mindfulness meditation practice in addition to theoretical knowledge in order to be an effective teacher (van Aalderen, Breukers, Reuzel, & Speckens, 2014). Rechtschaffen (2014), a mindfulness program developer and teacher writes:

We often leap forward, wanting to help our kids relax, forgetting to notice how anxious and in need of relaxation we are. A teacher would never try to lead a math lesson if she didn't know the multiplication tables. Similarly, teachers trying to teach mindfulness won't get far with their students if they first don't model good emotional regulation and sensitivity toward their students' needs (Rechtschaffen, 2014, p.151).

Some of the comments made by participants in my study are also remarkably similar to those expressed in Grant's (2017) qualitative study, which examined two school teachers' perceptions of mindfulness instruction. The participants in Grant's (2017) study stated that teachers need to practise mindfulness before they teach children and that mindfulness activities can be misused by novices. One of the teachers in her study expressed almost identical sentiments to Daniella in regards to the use of the singing bowls by novice mindfulness instructors. Participant, Rosemary said:

And so, the teachers all of a sudden are getting the bowl all throughout the day saying, “OK, better listen.” Blang blang blang. And it's not that. They've totally...taken it out of context and they are using it as a tool to control the behaviour they don't like. The kids not listening or whatever it is and they've lost it. It's no longer mindfulness; now it is something else (Grant, 2017, p.151).

These findings indicate that experienced mindfulness practitioners believe that some teachers are using mindfulness in a way that diverges from its original purpose or intention (for more information on the original purpose and intention of mindfulness practices please see author reference withheld, 2012). However, while the evidence base supports the supposition that caregivers practising mindfulness will positively affect a child's wellbeing it does not currently support the hypothesis that a long-term mindfulness practice is a

prerequisite to effectively teaching children mindfulness skills (Zoogman et al., 2015). For example, one program, which is teacher independent and does not require specialist training or teachers to have a committed mindfulness practice was recently evaluated in the US. Researchers explored the effects of using audio-guided mindful awareness training, based on the MBSR program, with students and teachers new to mindfulness (Bakosh et al., 2015). The creators of the program, who have extensive MindBody Wellness training, felt that using the audio program tackles the perceived practical limitations of having to take a long and extensive journey to become an effective mindfulness teacher (Bakosh et al., 2015), as was recommended by my co-researchers and other practitioners/researchers in the area such as Crane et al. (2012).

Bakosh et al. (2015) study's results show that effectively teaching mindfulness in schools does not require classroom teachers to have an extensive and integrated MindBody Wellness practice. Teachers with no mindfulness training can, and are successfully incorporating a *mindful* way of being with their students. This evidence questions what level of training and competence is needed to successfully teach children mindfulness skills and highlights an area for future investigation. Bakosh et al.'s findings also stand in contrast to mindfulness teacher competency guidelines. It may be viable that teachers and students learn mindfulness together. One guideline that could be added to a best-practice approach to teaching mindfulness is a whole-of-school approach to instruction – infusing mindfulness through school processes such as policies and also inviting and making available mindfulness for school stakeholders such as parents and student support workers. A teacher does not often work in isolation, and in the current study teachers noted that *not* having mindfulness supported in a school environment negatively affected their teaching and job satisfaction, causing them to shift to more mindful workplaces.

The Study's Strengths and Limitations

Inherent within research methodologies are both strengths and limitations. However, carefully choosing a methodology congruent with research objectives and aims serves to minimize the restrictions a methodology may impose on the creation and evolution of knowledge in a field (author reference withheld). Additionally, it is necessary for a researcher to ensure that there is a high level of connectivity between the epistemology, methodology and methods in the design and implementation of a research project (Carter & Little, 2007). I devised an epistemological guideline by blending aspects of whole systems thinking with a holistic relational enquiry paradigm. The essence of Whole Systems Mindful Enquiry was highly compatible with the epistemic content of IPA in that it respects and acknowledges: that researchers research *with* people rather than *to* people; knowledge is co-created; there are multiple ways of knowing, such as the use of the intuitive senses; the necessity of keeping an open mind; interactions with others are dynamic and unpredictable; data gathering is holistic; the interpretation of wisdom requires a mindful way of being; observing and understanding the whole, the parts and the interconnection between the parts (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

The epistemology further resonated with the topic being researched – mindfulness education. I applied mindfulness principles and a holistic perspective to understand this multidimensional construct. There were many highlights to using IPA and autoethnography; however, some of the questions that often came to mind during the research journey were: “Is this the way all experienced MindBody Wellness practitioners feel about teaching children mindfulness?”; “How do these findings apply to other teachers?” and “Are the results indicative of the field at large?”. I feel as if these findings may be applicable to many teachers in the field; however, perhaps not all. My participants, in the main, had a commonality that

united their stories. The mindfulness practices they shared with children evolved from an inextricably linked matrix of insights and wisdom derived from a range of sources, namely:

- counsel and information from various cultures, religions, philosophies and meditation practices;
- mindfulness texts and other literature;
- personal meditation, practice and contemplation, to see what “fits” or is congruent with his or her own internal wisdom;
- children’s feedback from classes and
- discussion with other instructors and teachers.

I think the findings might have been quite different if had I interviewed groups who held strong religious or philosophical beliefs. However, there may be core elements that link religious groups in regards to how they make sense of teaching children mindfulness and I believe using IPA to compare groups of teachers who hold strong religious beliefs is another area worthy of exploration. It is an area of research that may help to develop an expanded view of how teachers who are experienced mindfulness practitioners makes sense of teaching children mindfulness.

An area where I felt the IPA methodology imposed some limitations was in regards to recommended techniques for interviewing. The interview is considered to be a one-sided conversation, where the researcher is endeavouring to prompt experiential details, interesting narratives and conceptual frames of understanding, rather than eliciting natural interactions (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Thus, while the conversations did in some respects mimic my natural interactions with teachers teaching mindfulness with children, I believe I was also presented with a “rosier” side of the picture by some participants. This is analogous to the situation where you dress up for an outing, rather than put your cosy and comfortable old clothes on. I was perhaps viewing the dressed-up version. However, other participants came to the interview dressed more casually. This is perhaps a limitation of a number of methodologies. Research has shown that people being studied may be inclined to report mostly what is to their own advantage or what they think the researcher would like to hear (Cropley, 2001, p. 19).

Additionally, in the current research project, material illustrative of practice was included in the analysis stage, supplementing interviews. Material collected ranged from reports conducted by other researchers to personal journals. When this material was supplied by teachers it helped give depth and provided a “more rounded” account of teachers’ experiences. Further, using methods of triangulation to seek convergence, corroboration or correspondence (Verhoef & Vanderheyden, 2007) may be important when understanding and verifying the perspectives of individuals, as van Aalderen et al. (2014) noted.

Conclusion and Research Implications

Mindfulness is taking a preeminent role in today’s education system. The purpose of the current study was to explore this growing phenomenon from the teacher’s perspective – listening to teachers who have an established and regular MindBody Wellness practice combined with two or more years of experience teaching children mindfulness. The research question posed was, “How do teachers who are experienced MindBody Wellness practitioners make sense of teaching children mindfulness?”

I found that four inter-related super-ordinate themes captured the essence of how the eight teachers made sense of child-based mindfulness instruction: The Spiritual Nature of a Teacher’s Mindfulness Practice; Re-defining Modern Conceptions of Creativity; Responsibility for Nurturing a Child’s Wellbeing; and Being a Mindful Role Model. In the

current article, I presented findings related to the theme of Being a Mindful Role Model. Within this super-ordinate theme, three sub-themes emerged: 1) Incorporating Formal and Informal Practices; 2) Cultivating a Mindful School and 3) Mindfulness as a Personal Journey.

The participants, on the whole, felt that it was important for teachers to model mindfulness in order to effectively teach the practice to children. They said that it was important to learn mindfulness authentically and ensure that a teacher takes time out of their daily routine to practise meditation and apply mindfulness to their daily actions. Qualitative research affirms the participants' thoughts and feelings; however, outcomes-based trials do not support these qualitative findings. For example, Zoogman et al. (2015) found that teacher experience had no moderating effect on efficacy and hypothesise that fewer moderators may exist for youth than adults when formally learning mindfulness. What systematic reviews on the topic of mindfulness with children do show is that children's behaviour improves when their caregivers *only* practice mindfulness, suggesting that mindfulness expresses itself relationally. The cumulative knowledge base to date indicates that children may have a natural inclination to cultivate mindfulness skills and can learn quite effectively, even with novice teachers, but the studies also demonstrate that a caregiver's level of mindfulness has a profound effect on children's behaviour. The findings also highlight a potentially informative area of research; that being, to compare the efficacy of child-centric mindfulness instruction in relation to the variable of teachers with mindfulness instruction experience and those that are new to learning the practice.

The results from this study and other qualitative work also supports Tarrasch et al.'s (2017) suggestion that mindfulness needs to be incorporated within undergraduate and graduate studies for adults planning to work with children, and also for those currently working with children. At the university-level, this could translate to first providing: general mindfulness topics such as Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness Self-Compassion; MindBody Wellness; or subjects developed with respect to a Course Coordinator's own unique MindBody Wellness practice. Such courses will provide students with the opportunity to understand the practices from a theoretical and experiential level, provide them with valuable skills for the workforce and enable them to begin their own *mindful journey*. Additionally, universities need to provide students with the opportunity to learn how to *explicitly* teach children mindfulness in an environment linked to evidence-based research and skilled mentorship.

Incorporating mindfulness in schools is more complex than providing mindfulness education at a university-level. Teachers may be resistant to change, resistant to taking on more work, and in some circumstances, mindfulness may not align with their personal religious doctrines. From this study, we discovered how important it was for experienced instructors to be surrounded by a *mindful culture* and have the support of their colleagues, parents, leadership, families, and organisations such as universities and health agencies. When this support is not forthcoming, the implementation of mindfulness in schools may prove difficult or even impossible. When resistance by staff was encountered mindfulness program implementers proceeded at a *mindful pace* – training interested teachers and staff gradually, and slowly incorporating practices into the school day. Conversely, rushing to integrate mindfulness was also perceived by the study's participants to be problematic – with mindfulness being misused with children. In this emerging field of science and practice we need balance – balance when researching and balance when sharing mindfulness with others. That is, the very skills we are hoping to impart to others need to be the foundation of our action.

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