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Teaching Mindfulness to Year Sevens as Part of Health and Personal Development

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Abstract: Recently the adoption of mindfulness or contemplative based approaches has escalated across many sectors, including in education. Proponents argue that mindfulness based teaching programs improve students' life skills, provide emotional balance, reduce stress and enhance classroom climate. To date though there is little evaluation or knowledge of how young people experience such programs introduced to classroom settings. This paper reports some key insights gained from an independent evaluation of a pilot mindfulness based teaching program implemented (over nine weeks) with a class of thirty, year seven students at a private school in Adelaide. The research methods incorporated a self-completed student questionnaire and Smiley Face evaluation sheets, interviews with teachers and classroom observations. The implications for teachers are about who should teach mindfulness in school settings, the sorts of curricula adopted, and recognition that a general school classroom is not an ideal space for conducting mindfulness-based activities.

Introduction

In 1960s Australia when Ainslie Meares (1970) brought meditation to the attention of clinicians, mindfulness and contemplative type activities were still considered somewhat 'fringe practices'. It was a similar situation when John Kabat-Zinn introduced mindfulness into mainstream medicine in the US over thirty years ago. He developed a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR) for adult patients at the University of Massachusetts Medical Centre to assist with relieving stress and pain associated with chronic medical conditions. In this application mindfulness was used to refer to paying attention to the 'here and now' or present moment rather than thinking about the future or worrying about the past (Kabat-Zinn, 1982). It was framed within behavioural medicine as a therapy for pain and stress release rather than seen as a spiritual practice.

Since then mainstream interest in the concept of mindfulness has expanded rapidly in western society. Support for adopting mindfulness approaches has been bolstered by the growing scientific evidence base about the benefits in enhancing human performance and well-being. New scientific research into neuroplasticity has found, for instance, that meditation (one form of mindfulness activity) can change the function of the brain in terms of improving the depth of information processing and the speed with which attention can be distributed and reallocated (Van Leeuwen, Singer, & Melloni, 2012)

The contemporary uses and applications of mindfulness include Western medicine and psychology as part of therapeutic treatment programs for a range of ailments. The corporate

world has also adopted mindfulness practices, popularised by the late Steve Jobs, as a means to an end, with aims of enhancing concentration, complex decision making and performance (Isaacson, 2012). Mindfulness based programs are also being explored in the military (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011) as a way to enhance performance. In turn growing numbers of mainstream educators are beginning to adopt contemplative or mindfulness based approaches to teaching and learning within primary, secondary and tertiary education with another set of aims and meanings.

This study explored a school based mindfulness teaching program implemented (over nine weeks) with a class of thirty, year seven students as part of their Health and Personal Development Course. Before turning to a discussion of the research findings, the literature on mindfulness in education for children and adolescents is reviewed followed by an outline of the methods adopted for the current research. In the final section the implications of the findings for teachers are discussed along with some further considerations and suggestions for future improvements.

Mindfulness and Education

Proponents of mindfulness based educational programs, such as the UK founded Mindfulness in Schools Program, claim they have many potential benefits including assisting students (and teachers) to be calmer and deal with strong emotions, while also supporting learning through increased concentration and awareness (Kuyken et al., 2013). Arguably, the adoption of mindfulness type teaching programs has also become popularised and secularised through the work of the US based Hawn Foundation (i.e. Hollywood actress Goldie Hawn) and the related Mindup program (The Hawn Foundation, 2014). This program is a class room based mindfulness syllabus for school students aimed at increasing prosocial behavior and fostering emotional and social well-being. Nevertheless, it is important to note that mindfulness and contemplative approaches to education are not new as highlighted by the philosophies of alternative education theorists, such as Maria Montessori and Rudolph Steiner.

In reviewing the extant literature (Galantino, Galbavy, & Quinn, 2008) found that mindfulness practices, not only improved children's physical performance but also increased their ability to concentrate and maintain attentiveness. Sines (2009), likewise reported similar effects and in addition that children developed greater awareness of their social and emotional abilities. Other benefits identified included reductions in the need for anger management (Sines, 2009) and decreasing incidents of physical aggression (Ciaramitaro, 2010; Stueck & Gloeckner, 2005). It seems that mindfulness practices lead to increased recognition of when feelings such as anger, and awareness arise and give pause for how to deal with these feelings in non-harmful ways for instance, through taking a deep breathe rather than physically or verbally reacting (Wenig, 2005). Another study (Powell, Gilchrist, & Stapley, 2008) identified small but positive changes in students' self-confidence, social confidence, communication and contributions in class. In a study of an 8-week Mindfulness based stress reduction program (Still Quiet Place) involving 31 children in grades 4-6 and their parents in a community setting, both students and parents reported improved self-reported attention and emotional reactivity (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008).

The evaluation of a mindfulness education program where students participated in mindfulness attention training three times daily indicated improvements in social and emotional

competence, optimism and positive affect (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). Another study investigating the effectiveness of the Mindfulness in Schools Program suggested that there was high acceptance of the program from students and teachers. Furthermore, after participating in the program students experienced reduced stress, greater wellbeing and fewer depressive symptoms (Kuyken et al., 2013).

In combination these findings appear promising within the context of classroom climate as learning is compromised if children's emotional and physical needs are not in balance (Bennett, 2002). However, while programs are increasingly being implemented in schools and the literature on mindfulness is burgeoning relatively few research studies focus on mindfulness based approaches with children (Black & Fernando, 2013, Bernay, 2014). Further, the approaches are only in the very early stages of development (Albrecht, Albrecht, & Cohen, 2012). Burke (2010) argues that there has been little evaluation of the types of activities that are suitable to conduct with children and adolescents as they are not 'small adults' for whom adult type mindfulness practices are necessarily suitable. In building on these foregoing findings the current study evaluated a pilot mindfulness based teaching program that was implemented with children in a year seven class.

The Pilot Mindfulness Project

The pilot project trialed a mindfulness based approach to Health and Personal Development (HPD). The program was piloted with children in year seven at a private school in Adelaide, by a School Counsellor as part of her teaching responsibilities. The school management was interested in exploring mindfulness as an approach for the wellbeing of students. One of the Year 7 class teachers had an interest in mindfulness and volunteered for this class to take part in the pilot project. The focus was to teach some skills of mindfulness that might assist students' well-being, to be calm and deal with strong emotions such as stress, anger and anxiety, while also perhaps supporting their learning through enhanced concentration and awareness. The program was developed through utilising several existing mindfulness program resources, including the Mind-up curriculum developed by Daniel Siegel through the Hawn Foundation (US), which was adapted to the specific Australian educational context, along with material from two Australian resources, Smiling Mind (Monash University, http://smilingmind.com.au/) and Meditation Capsules (Etty-Leal 2010)

The classes were conducted over a nine week period from July-September 2013 and consisted of one 45 minute class per week. The size of the class was thirty students aged between eleven to twelve years. Table one below summarises the basic content of the lessons conducted over the nine-week period.

Lesson-Week	Summary of Content
Lessons 1-2	The Brain (neuroplasticity: • Anatomy/function, • Illustrating stressed brain with glitter jar, • Calming the Amygdala, fight or flight response.
Lesson 3	Progressive Muscle Relaxation: • Effects of different/changing emotions using weather analogy.
Lesson 4:	Body Scan and made stress balls.
Lesson 5- 6	Body Scan, Souls of the Feet Meditation, explored websites about bullying and emotions (e.g. 'Bullying no-way')
Lesson 7:	Mindful eating: • With sultanas.
Lesson 8	Mindful movements, identifying ways to calm heart rate: • Measured heart rates after meditation.
Lesson 9	Recap on the nine-week program.

Table 1: Summary of Course Content over the Nine Weeks

The key questions explored in the study were about whether the mindfulness based learning activities:

- would be useful for the children in dealing with their emotions;
- whether the range of mindfulness based activities that were adopted were suitable for use with children (including their enjoyment/engagement in particular activities);
- whether the children would use the activities introduced in the pilot program in the future (i.e. beyond the duration of pilot program); and
- what sorts of activities were most suitable for a classroom environment.

Evaluation Design

In conducting the evaluation we were especially interested in exploring the teachers' and children's perceptions and experiences of the practices and what from their point of view worked best or not so well, and suggestions for improvements if similar programs were adopted more widely across the school. The benefits of mindfulness may not be immediately obvious and are hard to measure objectively (Zeltzer, 2005, as cited in Goodman & Kaiser Greenland, 2009). It was also important (taking account of Burke (2010) to assess the suitability of the activities conducted with the children. Thus as others have argued a more nuanced study was required of how the children experienced the process of learning mindfulness rather than seeking to quantify or only measure mindfulness in an objective way (Rosch, 2007, as cited in Gause & Coholic, 2010). There were also limitations of resources and constraints to data collection given that some data was generated by the teachers as part of their required administrative records.

In taking account of the foregoing points it was deemed important to hear from the children and teachers themselves in their own words about their experiences of the mindfulness course. To this end a mixed method design was adopted consisting of the following data collection techniques.

Student (self-report questionnaire)

The questionnaire consisted of seven basic questions with some tick boxes (e.g. yes/no answers) and opportunities for the students to contribute extended comments about what aspects of the course they liked or did not like, overall enjoyment (or not) of particular activities, what they found helpful, and whether they were likely to use the techniques they learnt in the future. It was filled out independently and anonymously by the twenty-six students that attended week 10, the final class of the Mindfulness Pilot Program. This was administered by the regular class teacher and the school counsellor that implemented the program.

Smiley Face Emotions Evaluation' sheets

These were completed by the students in class just before the mindfulness based HPD lessons commenced in weeks three, six and nine. The responses were recorded anonymously. The 'Smiley Face Emotions Evaluation' sheets consisted of five faces displaying a range of emotions – happy face, sad face, angry face, stressed face and scared face, with a scale of five options to select from for each face. The options ranged from 'I feel hardly ever' to 'I feel almost always'. The results were analysed for mood and emotions.

Post Pilot Program Interviews

Post Pilot Program interviews were conducted with both the school counsellor that implemented the HPD Program and the class teacher to gather their reflections about the course.

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations were done throughout the program and by the researcher in week 9 of the program.

Findings -Questionnaire

Overall Enjoyment and Popular and Unpopular Activities

In rating their enjoyment overall of the ten HPD classes (with five options ranging from 'enjoyed all classes' to 'did not enjoy any classes') none of the students responded that they did not enjoy any of the classes. Most students reported liking something about the sessions, with the most popular activity identified as mindful eating, (n=7, 29%).[1]

> I found it interesting to do the mindful eating as I hadn't thought about food in that way before.

[1] All percentages used refer to numbers of responses received. Note that not all participants answered every question. Actual numbers of responses for each question are included in relevant places throughout the report.

The next most popular activity was the meditations, especially the full Body Scan and Smiling Mind meditations (n=6, 25%), followed by the relaxation activities (n=5, 19%):

> I liked the relaxing classes. I enjoyed all of them because they got rid of all my stress.

An important finding was that five students (28%) mentioned disliking meditation, although two of these students said that this was only initially to start with because it was new and different. For the other three students, however, their dislike of meditation was identified as an ongoing process as typified by the following response:

> The meditation, every week felt like a meditation session and I honestly hated it!

Several students mentioned experiencing difficulties in concentrating in the HPD classes:

> I didn't like sitting still not doing much, especially when there was work I should finish - also made me tired for the next lesson.

Helpful Activities for Future Use

Of the nineteen students that responded to the question about whether they found the activities helpful, sixteen identified the breathing exercises (84%). Next were the body scans (n=8, 42%) then the soles of the feet meditation (n=6, 32%), and progressive muscles relaxation (n=5, 26%). Under the option of 'Other' some students listed the following activities as helpful: Smiling Mind meditations (n=3, 16%); mindful eating (n=2, 11%) neurobiology/study of the brain (n=2, 11%); and breathing (n=1, 5%).

The reasons the students provided for enjoying breathing exercises related to helping them to relax:

> I enjoyed the breathing exercises (a great deal) because they really calmed me down and made me feel relaxed.

> It helps me to sleep and get through the day.

For those students who did not find the breathing exercises useful, or found them 'slightly' useful, the reasons for these responses included becoming distracted during the exercise, and thinking too much during the exercises:

> I often found my mind wandering as I did these.

> My mind opens up too much, emotions, problems, everything just overwhelms my mind. It has not helped me at all.

Seventy three per cent (n=19) of the students indicated that the skills they learned would help them in the future. Similar to the response about the breathing exercises around half of the students' responses identified the activities as helpful for 'coping with stress' through experiencing 'better sleep', 'relaxing' and 'calming them down'.

> The reason for my answer is that I get uptight very easily so the exercises will help to calm me down.

Several students noted that the techniques learned were useful for coping with bullying behavior:

> In case bullying or stress comes to me in the future, which I hope it won't.

For the minority of students (27%) that did not think the activities would help them in the future the reasons given were that they would soon 'forget' about the exercises (n=1), could not 'think of a reason why' they would help (n=1) in the future or for two of the students because:

> Even after meditation I feel stressed and anxious.

> I was stress free in the first place so I don't have anything to be helpful with.

Other Comments

When provided with an opportunity to provide any other comments about the mindfulness activities only six students (23%) responded. On the one hand three of the responses related to the students' enjoyment of the lessons as typified by the following statement:

> Practicing the exercises is helpful and giving them a try isn't too bad.

On the other hand two students mentioned that they experienced difficulties with participating in the activities:

> When doing smiling meditation I kept seeing pictures in my mind. I can never remember them.

> I just remember feeling sad or uncomfortable.

Findings - Smiley Face Emotions Evaluation Sheets

The main findings for the *Smiley Face Emotions Evaluation* sheets (Table 2 below) were that no students reported being 'almost never happy', 'almost always scared', 'almost always angry' or 'almost always sad'. Many students did, however, report feeling stressed for 'half of the time' throughout their daily lives (41.3%, 48.2%, 42.3% for weeks 1, 3 and 9, respectively). Another interesting finding was that reporting of feelings of anger decreased over the period of the HPD course. For weeks one, three and nine, respectively) 21.7%, 13.8% and 7.6% of students were 'angry half of the time, or 'a lot of the time'.

Emotion		Hardly Ever	Some of the time	Half of the time	A lot of the time	Almost Always
Sad	Week 3 (n=29)	6 (20.7%)	17(58.6%)	5(17.2%)	1(3.4%)	0(0%)
	Week 6 (n=29)	8 (27.5%)	16(55.2%)	3(10.3%)	2(6.9%)	0(0%)
	Week 9 (n=28)	8(28.6%)	15(53.6%)	5(17.8%)	0(%)	0(0%)
Happy	Week 3 (n=29)	0(0%)	3(10.3%)	7(24.1%)	11(37.9%)	8(27.5%)
	Week 6 (n=29)	0(0%)	3(10.3%)	6(20.6%)	13(44.8%)	7(24.1%)
	Week 9 (n=26)	0(0%)	2(7.7%)	9(34.6%)	6(23.1%)	9(34.6%)
Scared	Week 3 (n=29)	17(58.6%)	11(37.9%)	0(0%)	1(3.4%)	0(0%)
	Week 6 (n=29)	16(55.2%)	10(34.4%)	1(3.4%)	2(6.8%)	0(0%)
	Week 9 (n=26)	12(46.2%)	13(50%)	0(0%)	1(3.9%)	0(0%)
Angry	Week 3 (n=23)	1(4.3%)	17(73.9%)	4(17.4%)	1(4.3%)	0(0%)
	Week 6 (n=29)	8(27.5%)	17(58.6%)	4(13.8%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
	Week 9 (n=26)	8(30.7%)	16(61.5%)	1(3.8%)	1(3.8%)	0(0%)
Stressed	Week 3 (n=29)	6(20.7%)	11(37.9%)	6(20.7%)	3(10.3%)	3(10.3%)
	Week 6 (n=29)	1(3.4%)	14(48.2%)	9(31.0%)	3(10.3%)	2(6.9%)
	Week 9 (n=26)	6(23.1%)	9(34.6%)	3(11.5%)	6(23.1%)	2(7.7%)

Table 2: Smiley Face Emotions Evaluation Sheets Findings

Findings - Observations of the Class

The researcher observed the final HPD class (week nine), which commenced with a mindfulness meditation activity. Some students had downloaded the meditation apps from the *Smiling Mind* website (http://smilingmind.com.au/) which wasdeveloped by psychologists with knowledge in youth and adolescent therapy. For the final class the students requested the 'Bubble Meditation' from this site. The dialogue for the meditation refers to lying on the floor, but due to classroom restraints students had to remain seated at their desks. It was observed that some of the students fell asleep, one got a headache, and a few appeared to have problems focusing on the meditation, while the majority appeared to relax into the meditation.

Following the meditation the school counsellor and students reviewed the key learnings experienced over the course of the nine weeks. The students were generally engaged in revising the series of lessons.

Teachers' Reflections in Post Pilot Program Interviews

Both teachers thought that the activities that worked well in the HPD course were 'Smiling Mind' meditations and classes about anatomy and physiology of the brain. They felt that the *soles of feet meditation* and *progressive muscle relaxation* did not work so well, as some students chose not to participate in these activities at all. Nevertheless, as the results of the self-reported questionnaire showed at least some students identified these activities as ones they found most helpful (soles of feet n=6, progressive relaxation n=5).

Flexibility of delivery in the HPD course was a key aspect identified by the teachers for the smooth running of classes. It was often necessary 'to tweak' the planned program slightly to accommodate the students depending on what else had occurred on the particular day, for example, NAPLAN assessments and restraints of classroom space. Barriers identified were distractions from noise from adjacent classes, the lack of a 'special room' and teachers being time poor and already having to squeeze a lot of activities into their day. Over the nine-weeks both teachers felt that the students had progressed from initially fidgeting and moving around a lot to focusing more and enjoying and unwinding into the meditation and relaxation activities. In a similar finding to Bernay's (2014) study, which reported that utilising mindfulness enhanced beginning teachers' personal well-being and reduced their stress, one of the teachers in the current study stated that:

> It was not just the students that benefited from the experiences of the mindfulness based course but also me personally.

Implications of the Findings and Future Considerations for Teaching Mindfulness Based Programs

There are a number of limitations to the current findings that have implications for future evaluations of mindfulness based teaching programs. It is difficult to know what was actually measured by the Smiley Face Emotions Evaluation sheets. Mindfulness is about being in the present moment and awareness of emotions. Thus it is not about being less sad, or less angry and so on but more about being aware of when these feelings arise and then being able to choose what to do next. Future evaluations of mindfulness based teaching programs could benefit from Systematic Observation tools, such as event recording, duration recording and other similar measures that are easily implemented in the classroom context. The results of this study must also be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size and the limited nine week implementation period for the mindfulness based activities.

Range of Activities, Duration and Scheduling

As detailed, overall enjoyment of the HPD classes was rated highly, with the majority of students liking all classes although some students chose not to participate in some activities (Soles of Feet meditations, Progressive Muscle Relaxation). The principal issues here it seems, as supported by previous research findings are first about providing a range of entry points into experiencing mindfulness in order to cater for different needs (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert,

2008), second the recognition that children are not small adults so mindfulness techniques used with adults are not always appropriate (Burke, 2010) and third providing students with a choice of whether or not to participate.

Across a class of students they will prefer a range of different activities. Some, for instance, did not enjoy meditation but they liked other activities that led to mindfulness. Other studies suggest that variation is essential to promote engagement with children (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008). To this end other activities that could be considered in the future that were not utilised in the current pilot project include, sound mindfulness (with music or Tibetan bowls) art based mindfulness activities and some more physical activities, including walking mindfulness, yoga and martial arts (Karate, Akaido, Tai Chi). Incorporating some more physical activities seems particularly pertinent as some of the children mentioned difficulties with just sitting and they already spend a lot of time sitting during classes. The teachers also mentioned that it was useful to schedule mindfulness HPD lessons straight after the lunch break as this meant the students had been physically active, and were not coming directly from other lessons, which made them more receptive to sitting and participating in mindfulness activities than at other times.

In adapting mindfulness techniques so that they are relevant and promote engagement with children one of the teachers observed that more explanation is needed than for adults, specifically in making connections between the activities and their daily lives. Starting the HPD classes with information about the brain (calming the Amygdala, fight or flight etc.) before moving into the meditations seemed the best way to structure the classes as the students needed to know the point of the mindfulness activities before they actually experienced them. Analogies such as the use of the Glitter Jar, for instance, to represent the busy (monkey mind) and then settled mind was useful for illustrating to children the underlying concepts and purpose of mindfulness based activities.

The duration of the mindfulness practice also seems important with young people. Whereas adults may often engage in mindfulness activities for thirty to forty five minutes, it is suggested that activities with young people are for between three to five minutes in the initial stages, and up to ten minutes when the activity is more established (Fodor & Hooker, 2008). This conclusion seemed reinforced in the current study.

Where to Conduct Mindfulness Activities

A major barrier identified by the teachers was that no regular ‘special’ space was dedicated to the mindfulness practices, like the meditations and relaxations, where the students could go and lie down on the floor and it was quiet and comfortable. The teachers said that the students needed their own personal space, a comfortable room that could be darkened, rather than having to sit up at their desks doing the meditations while virtually ‘on top of each other’. In developing such a space it need not be expensive or large scale and could, for instance, adopt some of the principles as described in the UK “A Quiet Place’ project but without the incorporation of therapists. Aspects included decorating a room with scenes such as waves or a forest to create an atmosphere that is calming, peaceful and comfortable (see King & Chantler, 2002).

A Toolbox of Skills for the Future

Some students identified that the HPD classes had assisted them in dealing with emotions like stress and fears about bullying happening to them again. The Smiley Face Evaluation Sheets recorded reductions in feelings of anger in weeks three, six and nine of the course. From the students' viewpoints the activities learned were helpful in assisting them to sleep and calming them down. Importantly they felt that that they could use these activities in the future, and also beyond the classroom context.

The situation whereby over forty per cent of students identified that they were feeling stressed half of the time, or almost always, poses questions about the levels of stress that are acceptable or healthy in children and how this issue should be dealt with. It is well accepted that while moderate stress can be positive for motivation and achieving goals, beyond that level it can cause mental and physical illness. In addition previous research findings highlight that reductions in stress and more balanced social and emotional wellbeing are related to better classroom climate and in turn this facilitates learning.

Although these initial findings appear positive it is important to point out the limitations of the current study and restraints of the data. This study represents only one small pilot program in a single year seven class at one school. In understanding more about these issues it is also suggested that any future explorations compare the results on stress with the broader population (beyond the current school) for age, gender and other demographics.

Some students had difficulties in dealing with emotions that arose during the mindfulness activities. One student, for instance, mentioned being overwhelmed by his/her emotions. Others studies have raised questions about the potential benefits or side effects of using contemplative practices with children in clinical and school settings (Jennings, Lantieri, & Roeser, 2012). Specifically linked to this topic there is a vigorous debate in the field about the specific qualifications required to teach mindfulness in classrooms.

Who Should Teach Mindfulness in Schools?

It is the view of many mindfulness practitioners that teachers and other users of mindfulness should work on a personal practice first before incorporating mindfulness into the classroom with children (see, for instance, Burke, 2010; Coholic, 2011; Crane et al., 2012; Whitehead, 2011). From this perspective, teaching mindfulness is very different to the "see one, do one teach one" type of mainstream model of education. Instead it is argued that "mindfulness requires that we practice it, live it, be it, and practice some more before offering it to others" (Saltzman, 2014, p. 141).

Previous research has found that many teachers do not know how to deal with students that do not take the mindfulness lessons seriously (Joyce, Etty-Leal, Zazryn, & Hamilton, 2010). In a class of thirty or more children it may be difficult for a teacher to know if something has opened up for a child that is a painful emotional experience or the teacher may not be trained to deal with it (Hart, 2004). Goodman and Kaiser Greenland (2009, pp. 420-421), for instance, detailed the situation whereby a child that had experienced sexual and physical abuse in a domestic situation could not lie on the floor or close her eyes with other people around. Clearly the underlying success of the current HPD classes was that the school counsellor had her own well established personal mindfulness practices. This meant she was well versed in its applications and understood how to teach mindfulness because she had experienced it herself.

She was also well equipped to deal with students that did not take the mindfulness lessons seriously and where necessary to cope with traumatised children, such as in the situation described above, for whom emotions may become overwhelming in mindfulness practice. These types of situations need to be managed by those with appropriate skills and training. Overall these findings suggest that not all teachers are qualified or suitable for implementation of mindfulness based teaching programs. Other considerations are that teachers have to focus on achieving targets, they have increasingly high workloads and student demands and if they are required to teach mindfulness will this add to the existing workload.

Another view is that it is better to use a more indirect approach of bringing mindfulness into the classroom through working with teachers first, to develop their own practice. The teacher will then bring this awareness into the classroom with the children as "a felt sense of presence that is embodied by the teacher in everyday classroom actions and instructional strategies" (Meiklejohn et al 2012: 6). Burrows (2011, p. 5), similarly makes the case for what she terms 'relational mindfulness' described as an integration of mindfulness training, experience and counsellor training to develop a deep awareness of the present relational experience. This approach seems to benefit educators that wish to address more fully some of the emotional and teaching challenges of classrooms. Alternatively, a combination of direct (structured programs) with indirect approaches to mindfulness could also be used (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). It seems important to teach these sorts of programs to teacher education students or as part of professional development.

In conclusion the way mindfulness approaches are developed, incorporated and taught will determine whether the practices are adopted as a set of holistic processes or whether they just become another set of teaching tools in the classroom linked to better performance. The promise of mindfulness could be lost if due attention is not given to maintaining its integrity and addressing issues raised, including about the range, duration and scheduling of activities for children and adolescents, and the background skills and qualifications of those that teach mindfulness based approaches as they are rapidly expanding in mainstream education.

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