

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**Primary teachers' knowledge, beliefs and  
perspectives on the practice of mindfulness  
in schools**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree  
of

Master of Educational Psychology

In

Education

at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand

Debbie Kenwright

2018

## Abstract

Youth mental health and wellbeing is a complex issue which requires prevention strategies from early childhood through entry into adulthood. Schools are well positioned to promote and develop student's overall capacity for wellbeing and have a responsibility to do so. Mindfulness has been identified as a potential practice to support the development of wellbeing and human flourishing in both clinical and non-clinical settings. There is an increasing body of research which has found mindfulness-based interventions to have positive effects on human wellbeing and academic achievement as well. Mindfulness practice also develops an attitude of acceptance which fosters equanimity, creating space for reflection and perspective taking; allowing for self-acceptance and greater awareness of self and others. Increasingly mindfulness skills and capabilities are being fostered through mindful-based programs designed for school curriculums.

The aim of this study was to gain a greater understanding of primary teachers' knowledge, beliefs and perspectives about mindfulness in schools. Specifically, this study aimed to capture primary teachers' views who have not yet been involved in the training or implementation of a formal mindfulness school based program. Placed within a constructivist epistemology this study included 45 participants (n=45) who completed an online survey. The survey was designed using mixed-method research methodology to gather teacher perspectives. Results revealed most primary teachers in this study were prepared to implement mindfulness in schools, and believed schools should be providing mindfulness programs. The results of this study indicate that the implementation of mindfulness in schools is both supported by teachers and viewed as feasible to implement in primary settings. Teachers understood some of the ways in which mindfulness promotes and develops valuable life skills for students in relation to improving their mental health, building individual capacity for coping, and being resilient, and improving student's overall well-being. Implications for schools and teachers interested in beginning a mindfulness programme at primary school are discussed.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to my research supervisors, Dr Tara McLaughlin and Associate Professor Sally Hansen. Your support, advise, guidance and input into this research project has been second to none. Tara, you always saw through the 'interesting parts' of my writing and kept me focused on what was important. Sally, your attention to detail throughout the entire study was hugely helpful, particularly at the editing stages. I always felt very blessed to have such inspiring, motivating, kind-hearted, warm and intelligent supervisors by my side every step of this journey. The role of a supervisor should never be underestimated; it is critical to every students' learning experience and success, but crucially, to the students' sense of self-esteem and capability. Thank you both for helping me successfully complete this project. Namaste.

To those teachers who participated in my survey, I am grateful. Without your willingness to take time out of your demanding schedules, this study would not have been possible. Your knowledge and expertise has been invaluable to me.

To my study buddies, I am truly grateful to have made valued friendships and connections with you across my years studying. You have been my sounding board at crazy 'student hours', by my side cramming for exams, part of study groups sharing knowledge and understanding, and a wonderful support system when study was tough.

To my family and friends, you are all a unique bunch who have been tortured by my commitment to completing my studies. To my friends, thank you for being patient with me year after year when I had to say, 'sorry I can't, I have to study'. Finally, now I CAN!!! I hope you are all still there to greet me on the other side of this momentous achievement. To my precious family who have all paid the price of my study. As a family, we have all sacrificed so much to see me successfully achieve this goal. Thank you for your patience, understanding and acceptance of my commitments when you were disappointed I had to study. I am grateful for your unconditional love and support over these years. I look forward to being fully focused on loving you all. The successful completion of this research project is a testament of our love for each other. Namaste

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	i
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	ii
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	iii
<b>List of Figures and Tables</b> .....	vii
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	1
Overview.....	1
Background for the study .....	2
Mandates for promoting youth-student wellbeing.....	2
The state of student wellbeing. ....	3
Mindfulness: Framework, definition, potential benefits, and applications.....	4
Framework.....	4
Definition. ....	5
Potential benefits.....	5
Applications. ....	5
Rationale for the research.....	7
Summary.....	8
Organisation of this thesis.....	8
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b> .....	10
What is Mindfulness? .....	10
Origin.....	10
Definition. ....	11
Applications. ....	12
Formal and informal mindfulness practice.....	12
Researched Benefits of Mindfulness.....	13
Mindfulness for children in schools .....	14
Skills derived from mindfulness practice .....	19

Researched Benefits of mindfulness for children .....	19
The Role of Teacher in Promoting Mindfulness .....	21
The influence of teachers’ beliefs and perspectives .....	22
Teachers’ beliefs and perspectives about mindfulness programs in schools. ...	22
Teachers beliefs and perceptions about the utility of the identified skills in the classroom. ....	23
Supporting Factors to implementing mindfulness programs in schools .....	25
Skills cultivated from Mindfulness-based program (MBP) and their generalisability to other contexts. ....	25
Enhanced connectedness. ....	27
Feasibility, acceptability, and fidelity. ....	28
Teachers’ traits. ....	29
Potential Barriers to implementing mindfulness programs in schools.....	29
Tension between curriculum demands and being mindful.....	30
School principals’ endorsement. ....	30
Program logistics.....	30
Teacher training.....	31
Summary.....	32
Research Aims .....	32
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>34</b>
Introduction.....	34
Methodological Theory .....	35
Research Design .....	35
Procedures.....	36
Sampling.....	36
The Sample .....	37
Participating Schools.....	37
Participating Primary Teachers.....	38
Survey Design .....	38
Survey objectives. ....	38

Survey development.....	38
Survey sections.....	39
Validity.....	43
Content validity.....	43
Construct validity.....	43
Survey Dissemination.....	43
Data Analysis.....	44
Ethical Considerations.....	46
Summary.....	47
<b>Chapter 4: Findings.....</b>	<b>48</b>
Sample.....	48
Mindfulness in Schools.....	50
Mindfulness and the Development of Key Skills.....	57
Implementing Mindfulness in Schools.....	59
Views and perspectives of mindfulness and personal practice.....	62
Summary.....	63
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion.....</b>	<b>65</b>
The importance and impact of teacher’s beliefs and perspectives.....	66
The connections between beliefs, motivation and skills teachers value in the classroom.....	67
Understanding skills cultivated by mindfulness and links to the curriculum.....	68
The interface between ‘teachers buy-in’ and implementation.....	68
Supporting factors to ensure successful implementation of mindfulness in the classroom.....	69
The feasibility of implementing a mindfulness program in class.....	71
Limitations of this study.....	71
Implications for practice.....	72

Recommendations for future research .....	75
Conclusion .....	76
<b>References</b> .....	<b>78</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>93</b>
Appendix A: Invitation to participate, including the electronic link to survey. ....	93
Appendix B: Information Sheet. ....	94
Appendix C: Copy of the full survey. ....	97
Appendix D: Ethics notification number: Low risk. ....	108



## List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Descriptions of the skills derived from mindfulness practice.....	18
Figure 2. Words used by respondents for describing mindfulness. ....	50
Figure 3. Teachers responses to ‘should mindfulness be taught in classrooms?’ .....	51
Figure 4. Who primary teachers believe should be responsible for implementing a mindfulness program in the classroom. ....	54
Figure 5: The skills primary teachers reported as being important for students to demonstrate in a classroom setting.....	58
Figure 6: The skills teachers believe students develop from practicing mindfulness. .....	59
Figure 7: Feasibility for implementing a mindfulness program. ....	61
Table 1: Mindfulness Programs found locally and internationally in schools. ....	15