UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

A Preliminary Investigation into Children's Experiences of Mindfulness Meditation:

A Qualitative Analysis of Children's Perspectives of Mindfulness

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of East London for the Degree of Doctor of Counselling Psychology.

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted for any degree and it is not being concurrently submitted for any degree.

This research is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctorate of Counselling Psychology.

This thesis is the result of my own work and investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit reference in the text. A full reference list is appended.

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ABSTRACT

Interest in Mindfulness Meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) has exploded in recent years. It is therefore timely that the field of counselling psychology explores what mindfulness might have to offer, not only in terms of treating mental ill health, but also in building resilience and strength within a vulnerable population. The purpose of this study was to explore children's experience of meditation from a critical realist perspective, using Thematic Analysis to investigate how they describe their experiences.

Nineteen school children (a non-clinical sample), aged 9-10 years old, took part in 10-minute meditations facilitated by the researcher, daily for nine consecutive school days. They were then interviewed about their experiences. Eleven children were interviewed individually and eight participants were interviewed in two groups of four. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using Thematic Analysis. From the analysis, four main themes were identified in terms of the participants' experiences: Meditation is a Process, A Positive Impact, Effects of Self-Awareness and Identity and Improved Functioning. A model of Psychological Endurance is proposed which is based upon these findings. The results supported the use of mindfulness with this population group, both in mental health and in educational settings, to help deal with stress, build strength and resilience. A comprehensive literature review and a critique of this study are included and research implications are considered.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to Thesis

My interest in meditation came about through personal experiences of the benefits and how it helps with self-awareness and personal development. During my time as a trainee counselling psychologist, I completed a placement with a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service within the NHS, and developed an interest in working with children. I currently work in the private sector with adults and some adolescents across a range of presenting issues, and I also use some of the techniques and principles of mindfulness in my clinical work with patients. The lack of qualitative research in the area, in addition to some previous research that I carried out, which included obtaining children's views (Cain, 2004), an idea to combine the two was reached and prompted the idea behind this project.

In Chapter One, I will present an outline of how meditation is relevant to the field of Counselling Psychology and explain in further detail how meditation embodies the concept of Mindfulness. A comprehensive review of the literature will be discussed in Chapter Two, which will include an outline of the methodological difficulties that research in meditation presents. In Chapter Three, a detailed description of how a series of meditation experiences were carried out with a group of children, followed by a description of how the data was collected and analysed, will be presented. The results of the data will be outlined in Chapter Four, which will include details of how the results emerged from the original interview transcripts. Finally, in Chapter Five, a discussion of the findings will be presented including links to theory and other literature. The implications for counselling psychology, along with the limitations of this study, will also be considered.

1.2 The Role of Meditation in Psychology

Interest in meditation (specifically mindfulness) has expanded in recent years amongst clinicians and researchers throughout many fields of psychology. Meditation is a term for different techniques frequently used in formal spiritual and religious traditions. This study refers throughout to insight, or vipassana meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1994), where attention is focused upon registering feelings, thoughts and sensations as they occur, and includes mindfulness meditation. As the popularity of mindfulness is increasing, it is timely that the role of meditation in counselling psychology and in the treatment of psychological disorders be explored.

The aim of Counselling Psychologists is to attend to the meanings and beliefs of individuals that are constructed through cultural contexts and personal processes, and to ultimately develop the respect and understanding of the personal, subjective experience of people (Division of Counselling Psychology, 2001). These values lie at the core of the practise of counselling psychology. It has been argued that meditation could be used alongside Western psychological therapies to facilitate awareness that may expand the understanding of an individual and therefore help to alleviate psychological distress (Bogart, 1991). The role that meditation could play is of particular interest to Counselling Psychologists, given the way in which it may be applicable to the humanistic vision upon which their philosophy is based. In this sense, it is thought that meditation can be a way of assisting clients elicit and understand the way in which they view the world, their own sense of purpose, meaning and role within their world (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003), and therefore could aid an effective response to difficult life events that arise.

Psychology has traditionally become a science devoted to healing, and has mainly concerned itself with the understanding the origins of psychopathology. Psychologists sometimes talk of 'dysfunctional' ways of being, 'disorders' and 'disease', which could be characterised as the negatives

of human life that psychologists seek to correct (Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2003). Society as a whole is becoming increasingly efficient at correcting, curing or neutralising these negatives. Life for many people is being made easier in terms of material wealth and physical health, but this appears to be coinciding with a large increase in modern disorders such as depression and anxiety.

The World Health Organisation states that there is more to good health than merely being symptom free (WHO, 1952). In contrast to a focus on psychopathology, interest is building in a new emerging perspective of Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), which seeks to examine the building of strength and resilience, and argues that this could provide more answers to increasing wellbeing. Positive Psychology tries to redress the emphasis on the negative, disorder focus that has prevailed until now, and instead promote a more balanced focus on positive subjective experience. Personal abilities to hone social skills and talent become important, and are argued as helpful for providing a fulfilling and meaningful life. Deeply subjective and individual aspects of human experience, such as values, love, life force, and relationships, are usually explored within number of traditional psychotherapies. This also resonates with the humanistic perspective of counselling psychologists, particularly where the aim is to work in a holistic way with people as individuals, with an emphasis on optimal functioning (McLeod, 2003).

The research described in this thesis proposes that mindfulness meditation could be another, experiential avenue to explore how to help children build resilience against stressful life events. It may be possible to conclude that Mindfulness may offer an additional and complementary route for counselling psychologists in their work with both adults and children. Essentially, this thesis is about mindfulness meditation and what role it could play in clinical practice. A further exploration will follow below regarding the concept of mindfulness and a discussion of the different definitions.

1.3 What is Mindfulness Meditation?

Meditation is an umbrella term for a range of concentrative (known as Transcendental) and insight (known as Vipassana) techniques that have been in practice in The East for over 2000 years. The concept of Mindfulness (an observational or insightful state of mind) can be cultivated and re-enforced through the practice of a range of different mindfulness meditations.

The concept of Mindfulness is associated primarily with Buddhism and has remained relatively unexplored in Western science. Until recent years, it has not received much attention in psychological research literature. It was not until Jon Kabat-Zinn (et al., 1985) brought the concept of mindfulness to western medical practice in the mid eighties in the form of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) that it started to gain attention from the field of medicine and science. The key to this was the adaptations he made as he attempted to make it accessible to patients suffering from chronic pain. As he distilled the essential elements of mindfulness from the religious and philosophical features of Buddhism, he opened it up to a secular population. As mindfulness stands today, it can be practiced by anyone from any faith, religious or philosophical background, without any prerequisite to subscribe to any particular belief system. Although other known philosophical traditions and practices in the West (for example, the Montessori Educational Approach), claim to have been practicing using mindfulness principles for a long time before Kabat-Zinn, the key difference that has made mindfulness so accessible could precisely be the down to earth approach, language and the emphasis on the integration of the body and mind.

The preliminary results of Kabat-Zinn's MBSR interventions (1985) within the area of chronic pain seemed promising, and prompted much curiosity about the concept within the fields of medicine, psychology, education and health. Today, clinicians and researchers have attempted to apply the concept to many areas of clinical practice and research across different populations.

Teasdale et al. (2002) integrated practices from MBSR with Cognitive Therapy to form Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which was used as an intervention to prevent relapse in depression. Other mindfulness-based approaches include Dialectic Behaviour Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993), often used to treat borderline personality disorder, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Hayes et al., 1999). The two latter approaches do not include formal meditation practices, thus are outside the scope of this review.

Briefly, the unique features of MBSR and MBCT include experiential meditation practices, which feature formal meditations and informal meditations taught in weekly group sessions and reinforced by daily home practice. Examples of formal meditations are the body scan and sitting meditations (see p.53 for a detailed explanation), where the participant brings attention to details of self-experience. These observational skills can then be transferred to informal practices where the same quality of attention is brought to every day activities such as brushing teeth, shopping, and eating. Through these exercises, participants learn mindfulness skills such as sustaining and focusing attention, feeling and accepting sensations in their bodies, and regulating emotions. Through group discussions of their experiences, they may also learn universal truths such as the wandering mind. MBCT would also include psycho-education and exercises specific to the condition (e.g., anxiety, depression, eating disorders), which can be applied to the group.

As research into mindfulness is growing, attention so far has mainly focused on outcomes for clinical applications and interventions for various psychological conditions and across different populations. Another developing area in the mindfulness literature, although still in its infancy, is the development of theories that describe and increase the understanding of the underlying process, meaning and expression of the concept itself.

Furthermore, there has been very little written about how mindfulness relates to and differs from other concepts that Western psychology is more familiar with, such as attention and concentration. As mindfulness can be both thought of as a practice (in terms of meditation) and a quality of awareness (Shapiro, 2009), there are widespread opinions of what an accurate definition might be. Several definitions have been proposed in the literature, some derived from its Buddhist roots, others from the nature of what is being studied in research. The next section will look at several definitions of mindfulness and attempt to explore the concept of mindfulness further in relation to similar concepts in Western Psychology.

1.3.1 Definitions

Emerging mindfulness literature is highlighting the difficulties in nailing down the notion of mindfulness to a definition, which describes the concept and process adequately across all the traditions and interventions that uses mindfulness in their approach. The various definitions that have been proposed have, on the whole, been operational definitions for the purpose of an article or research study, attempting to explore a particular facet of mindfulness, or used in an approach with an emphasis on a particular aspect of mindfulness.

Jon Kabat-Zinn's original definition aimed to make it accessible to patients suffering from chronic pain, by extracting the essential elements from the religious and philosophical features of Buddhism. It was described simply as a method of:

> "Paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally."
>
> (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4)

This is also the definition used in Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (Teasdale et al., 2002). Leary & Tate (2007) further broke this down into five distinct features, namely Mindful Attention, Diminished Self-Talk, Non-judgement and Non-doing, all practiced within a spiritual, philosophical or even a therapeutic framework (originally Buddhism). This was an attempt to describe the components that produces the effect of mindfulness has on emotion and behaviour.

Recently, as the concept has gained interest from researchers, other definitions have been suggested. Linehan (1994) described mindfulness as an acceptance skill, and Bishop et al. (2004) described it as a meta-cognitive skill, i.e., a skill that involves regulating attention, by switching attention, sustaining attention, and inhibiting elaborate processing. However, these definitions are perhaps more operational or theoretical, and influenced by the clinical approach adopted by the researcher.

The differences in conceptualisations of mindfulness in western science have added to the difficulties of definition. It has been conceptualised as a technique, a psychological process that can lead to an outcome, and as an outcome in itself (Hayes & Wilson, 2003). Brown & Ryan (2003) proposed a formal definition of mindfulness as:

> "A receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience."
>
> (p.212)

However, this definition lacks the crucial non-judgemental attitude that underpins mindfulness practice. Shapiro (2009) defines it as:

> "The awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, accepting and discerning way to whatever is arising in the present moment."
>
> (p. 556)

This is a good definition, as it places emphasis on the outcome as well as the process. Bishop et al. (2004) proposed an operational definition of mindfulness meditation as:

> "A process of regulating attention to bring awareness to current experience and relating to that experience in an open, curious, accepting and non-judgemental way."
>
> (p. 234)

This definition places emphasis on the act of adjusting attention as well as the outcome, and highlights how to relate to the experience. Along with Shapiro's and Kabat-Zinn's definitions, this appears to be the one most frequently referred to in the existing literature.

As the debate about definitions continues and the complexity of mindfulness emerges, recent articles have attempted to reconnect with the original Buddhist roots of mindfulness. An attempt to integrate Buddhist understanding has been suggested by Kang & Whittingham (2010):

> "Mindfulness is nonreactive, nonlaborative, nonreified awareness that has meta-cognitive functions, monitoring ongoing awareness and discriminating wisely between aspects of awareness content so that awareness and behaviours can be directed according to the goals of happiness, virtue, and truth."
>
> (p.170)

This definition, whilst cumbersome, does bring to the forefront the goals that Buddhism refers to as enlightenment.

As there are subtle differences in the concept of meditation across traditions and philosophies according to where the emphasis is placed, psychology may have to accept that it may be difficult to gain a universal consensus about one definition of mindfulness, and be open to subtle differences according to what is being studied and where the emphasis lies in relation to the intervention proposed. However, whilst the debate continues, it is the definition of Shapiro (2009), described above, that this study will refer to throughout, as it is fit for the purpose of this study, in that it addresses the outcome as well as the process. Although this concept of mindfulness appears relatively simple and straight forward, attempts to scratch beneath the surface to understand the concept further reveals its more complex nature.

1.3.2 Core Mechanisms of Mindfulness

As the field of Mindfulness is still emerging, the process of developing a theoretical model has only recently started. Dorjee (2010) points out that, as the exploration of mindfulness in psychological research continues, the gradual removal from its original Buddhist roots could be causing the difficulty in conceptualisation. The goals of mindfulness practice differ across traditions and interventions. As the field of mindfulness in psychology is moving forward, it does require further refinement. Theory development and subsequent research has tended to focus on one aspect of mindfulness and

this could be a reason why such differences exist between these concepts. However, creating a theoretical model that fully describes mindfulness is proving to be difficult, because the work carried out so far has focused on a particular aspect rather than observing mindfulness as a whole concept. Even the concepts of mindfulness-based interventions (see section 1.3) do not encompass the whole concept of mindfulness as described in Buddhist literature. Mindfulness originating from Buddhism is a far richer concept than what is described in the research and theoretical literature. It may be that the ideas developed are fit for purpose based on the different outcomes desired, rather than based on one universal understanding. Descriptions of two theoretical models of mindfulness follow below.

The Intention Attention and Attitude Theory (IAA)

Shapiro et al. (2006) suggest a formal theoretical model of mindfulness, which attempts to explain the mechanisms behind the change that accompanies Mindfulness Meditation practice. Based on Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition, Shapiro describes three axioms (fundamental elements) of Intention, Attention and Attitude (IAA – see also Kabat-Zinn, 1994), which, when they occur simultaneously, results in the moment-to-moment process that is mindfulness. This process (mindfulness) leads to a significant shift in perception, which Shapiro calls *reperceiving* and can also be thought of as an overall *Meta-Mechanism*, which encompasses four direct mechanisms of change:

1. Self-Regulation
2. Value Clarification
3. Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioural Flexibility
4. Exposure.

Mindfulness seeks to cultivate a clear awareness of our inner and outer world experiences, including thoughts, feelings, sensations, actions and our

surroundings as they present themselves at any given time. The non-judgemental lens through which this awareness is *reperceived* separates out our conditioned, automatic tendency to evaluate, compare, and attach labels to our experience (such as bad, good, pleasurable, neutral, etc.) and facilitates insight into reality, including those realities that are hidden because they are too uncomfortable or threatening to the self-concept. This means that *Self-Regulation and Self Management* as automatic, maladaptive behaviours become less controlling, and that the self becomes more stable and adaptable in the face of unpleasant internal states. In other words, mindfulness creates space to develop the ability to observe experience, whether it is emotional or physical pain, thoughts or bodily sensations. If, through practice, an ability to *reperceive* (develop clear awareness and insight in an accepting, non-judgemental way) is developed, it is then thought to reduce counter-productive defensive and automatic reactions to difficult experiences, and facilitate a more adaptive, flexible and constructive response (*Cognitive Emotional and Behavioural Flexibility*). These responses can then be made according to individual needs and values (*Values Clarification*), and not by conditioning from previous experience or from social or familial aspects, which may be unhelpful (Shapiro et al., 2006).

An example of this may be an individual who craves approval from other people, who may overly seek reassurance, and ignore his own needs in favour of other people's opinions in order to defend against potential rejection. If, through reperceiving, this individual is able to see how continually ignoring his own needs creates long term unhappiness, he may see how risking short term rejection (emotional flexibility) by setting personal boundaries (a more constructive response) according to his own values may result in more appropriate relationships that better serve his needs.

Another function of reperceiving is that it can enable an individual to face exposure to an unpleasant internal or external experience. Our minds have the ability to skip forwards and backwards in time, which removes us from

present experience. It can be argued that this has a protective function when present experience is particularly painful, or that it can be an enhancing function in the pursuit of goals. However, if our consciousness remains in a mode of ruminating about the past or the future in an attempt to avoid negative emotional states, an opportunity is missed to learn that these states are survivable, and will eventually pass away. Giving in to fear responses and avoidance in the long term perpetuates negative emotional states. Reperceiving means that it is possible to use exposure to break this negative cycle (Shapiro et al., 2006). In conclusion, if we are able to strip our experiences to merely an observation of what is, through applying the concept of reperceiving, we may develop an increased capability to cope with these experiences.

In the literature review, one major study (Carmody et al., 2009) has attempted to test the Shapiro's Theory. This study analysed responses from 309 participants in a seven-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Program, and found that the four variables of change (Self-Regulation, Cognitive, Behavioural and Emotional Flexibility, Values Clarification and Exposure), increased significantly over the course of the treatment, and that psychological symptoms were significantly reduced. However, increases in reperceiving were not found to mediate the relationship between improvements in mindfulness and the other four variables. The authors suggest this may be because the constructs of Mindfulness and Reperceiving are too similar, and both change with the participation of MBSR. Alternatively, it may suggest that reperceiving may not be the vehicle for change. However, more research is needed to establish this.

Gavbovac et al. (2011) is critical of this theory, because of the lack of explanation of how mindfulness meditations can reach new insight. He proposed a theory based on a Buddhist understanding, which is explained below.

The Buddhist Psychological Model (BPM)

The BPM (Gavbovac et al., 2011) attempts to describe the mechanistic details of the change process that occurs in mindfulness through linking the relationship between mindfulness and cognitive processes and the changes that occur to these cognitive processes as a result.

The BPM characterizes awareness as a continuous stream of consciousness, which arises and passes away, and can be in the form of a physical sensation, thought or emotion, as well as external events/situations. As an external or internal event enters into our awareness, we evaluate this as a 'feeling state', characterising it as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Our habitual reaction to these feeling states is to avoid what is unpleasant and attach to what is pleasant, and this is the process that can lead to suffering. According to Buddhist theory, attachment and aversion arises in reaction to the *evaluation* of the event that has entered into consciousness, not the event itself. For example when we see a cake, our evaluation of this being pleasant, unpleasant or neutral will depend on our past experiences. We may, therefore, react with thoughts, emotions and behaviours related to the evaluation, for example either to prolong the state of having a pleasant experience by obtaining and then eating the cake, or to end the unpleasant feeling state by avoiding the cake. The mental event (thought or feeling) that follows could also be a trigger for another feeling state (evaluation) of pleasant, unpleasant and neutral and a further reaction of attachment and aversion. When a series of these events occur, this may result a cycle which can be characterized as mental rumination and which takes on a life of it own, removed from the initial trigger that started the process. This can be seen in many instances of anxiety where phobias have developed through a pattern of aversion (or avoidance), which has served to maintain an unhelpful habitual cycle and, in the longer term, creates suffering.

The BPM states that through mindfulness meditation one becomes aware of three important insights:

1. The events contained in our stream of consciousness are transient.
2. We become aware of our natural tendency to attach or avert to feeling states generated by these events.
3. These events in our consciousness do not contain any form of a self.

These three concepts are referred to in Buddhism as Impermanence, Suffering and Not-Self (Nyanaponika, 2010). According to the BPM, improvements in well-being come from allowing events in the stream of consciousness to arise and fall away, and being aware of how we evaluate these without resorting to any of the behaviours through attachment or aversion.

Whilst the exploration of the concept of Mindfulness and Mindfulness Meditation practice is in its infancy in psychological literature, little attempt as of yet has been made to understand the underlying processes that appear to foster the links to improved well-being reported in the research outcomes. An outline of the research findings will now follow, which will include an exploration of some of the methodological difficulties that are encountered in meditation research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Process of Review

A search of EBSCO electronic databases was conducted at various stages throughout the planning and writing of this thesis. More specifically, the databases chosen were PsychInfo and PsychARTICLES, which are widely used for psychological publications. In addition, searches were conducted in Science Direct, Pep Web, Web of Knowledge and in Education Research Complete. The author conducted searches using the terms 'mindfulness' and 'meditation', both alone and with 'children', as well as MBSR, MBCT, 'Thematic Analysis' and 'qualitative'. The searches on the electronic databases were carried out in April 2005, February 2006, July 2007, September 2009 and January 2012. An additional search using Google Scholar was conducted in September 2009. In addition to the electronic databases, a search of the thesis catalogue of the University of East London produced two unpublished, qualitative studies of Mindfulness, and they in turn were the source of further unpublished material.

During the planning and writing of this study, the amount of literature for Mindfulness has quietly exploded. This is indicative of the scale of interest this concept is gaining not only within psychology, but also in fields such as education, medicine, health and sport. In addition to books on the subject, only four journal articles about meditation and mindfulness were found when the literature search for this study commenced at proposal stage in 2005. During the latest search, over 10,000 references were displayed using the key words, and over 1582 references have appeared since 2009 (PsychInfo search on 17/03/12). Mindfulness now also has its own peer-reviewed journal, which was first published in 2010.

A specific search was also carried out to identify articles about mindfulness or meditation in the field of Counselling Psychology (both the American and British spellings). 13 results in total were listed, with eight articles about mindfulness in particular, all of which were published in the UK.

2.2 Research History

Although meditation has been practiced in The East for thousands of years, it is only since the sixties that the effects and benefits of meditation have started to receive interest in The West and become subject to scientific exploration. Early studies involved Electroencephalographic (EEC) studies of experienced Zen meditators (for example Kasamatsu & Hirai, 1966). It was, however, difficult to draw any significant conclusions as samples were small, uncontrolled and homogenous, and therefore difficult to generalise to a wider population. However, these early studies indicated that a meditative state was different from a relaxed state, and this was the inspiration for further study of this phenomenon.

The research activity increased when Kabat-Zinn introduced MBSR to a wider, secular population, suggesting that the benefits of meditation could be separated from its religious and philosophical roots. These studies (e.g. Kabat-Zinn, et al., 1985) included populations with medical conditions such as chronic pain, heart disease and cancer. Again, the studies carried out at this time were considered preliminary, as studies were often either uncontrolled or compared with a treatment as usual (TAU) group. It was difficult to attribute the findings to MBSR particularly; however, it was found that participants self-reported a decline in subjective pain experience as a result of attending a course in MBSR.

As interest in mindfulness was combined with Cognitive Therapy to form MBCT, and the research took a further step forward with randomized controlled trials (RCTs) testing the effect on patients with depression.

Teasdale et al. (2002) showed that patients continuing mindfulness meditation as part of their daily practice are better able to observe and acknowledge their thoughts as 'mind events' as they occur, and not an experience of reality. This observation seemed to increase awareness of how these thoughts contribute to depression, and the researchers suggested this could lead to a significant reduction in relapse rates in depression (Teasdale et al., 2002). This effect was found with patients who had experienced three or more depressive episodes, but not with patients with two or fewer episodes of depression. A later study by Ma & Teasdale (2004) replicated these findings. These two studies are considered to be significant in their findings, as the randomization was carried out by a statistician external to the research team, a good number of participants took part in these studies (e.g. n=75), and they included active (psychotherapy outpatients), although not comparable, controls. However, the measures used were the Becks Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck et al., 1961) and HAM-D (Rabkin & Klein, 1987) which are both self-report measures of depression, and the extent to which the patients complied with the homework exercises was not measured. Furthermore, it is difficult to attribute findings to MBCT because of non-specific factors such as group support and therapeutic alliance. However, the replication of the 2002 study did strengthen the idea that MBCT could significantly reduce risk of relapse in depression when administered in a recovered state, and therefore justified further study.

Toneatto & Nguyen (2007) undertook a review of all controlled research (a total of fifteen studies at the time) of MBSR and MBCT that had been published in peer reviewed journals, but apart from the two above mentioned studies, had found inconsistent and ambiguous results. They concluded that, due to the large variability in the way the studies had been conducted, they were unable to draw any firm conclusion as to the effect of mindfulness. A recent review of mindfulness studied in relation to psychiatric disorders only was recently published (Chiesa & Serritti, 2011), and showed that the call for more rigour in methodology had been heard. This included 16 studies in total

that were considered to be of sufficient quality, 13 of which were with patients suffering from major depression. The remaining three studied major depression in combination with bi-polar, social phobia and patients with both personality disorder and generalised anxiety disorder. The conclusion from this meta analysis is that the evidence for using MBCT in addition to TAU for relapse prevention in depression is strong, as it was found the number of relapses at the one year follow up was significantly reduced and there was a difference in the length of time before relapse between the two comparison groups. In other words, the initial findings from Teasdale (2002) have been replicated several times, which strengthens the case for the use of mindfulness as an intervention for major depression. On the other hand, no studies have been conducted to date that can exclude the effects of group and therapeutic alliance. Furthermore, criticisms have arisen due to the lack of comparable active controls, such as for example a relaxation group, and the reliance of self-report measures (for example the BDI) to report outcomes, which makes it difficult to draw objective conclusions regarding the effects of mindfulness.

Jain et al. (2007) performed an interesting study on the effects of mindfulness on distress, positive states of mind, rumination and distraction, which included a comparable active control of relaxation training. They concluded that there were no significant differences between mindfulness and relaxation on distress and positive mood states, which appeared to contradict findings of the mid-sixties studies that indicated a difference between meditation and relaxation states. However, it could be argued that the exercises chosen for the two groups were similar (a body scan for the mindfulness group and progressive muscle relaxation for the relaxation group), and that the overlap may explain the large effect sizes discovered for both groups. They did, however, discover that mindfulness was unique in reducing distractive and ruminating thoughts and suggested that this may be how meditation reduces distress (Jain et al., 2007). This study was excluded

from the Chiesa & Serritti (2011) review because these effects were not studied in relation to a particular psychiatric disorder.

The overall conclusion from RCT efficacy studies shows that MBCT is effective in relapse prevention for those who have suffered three or more episodes of major depression. Similar results are reported for anxiety, but fewer studies have been carried out, which suggests that evidence on this topic so far is only preliminary.

2.3 Qualitative Research

Most research into the effects of meditation has been in clinical outcome trials for efficacy and effectiveness, as a treatment for conditions such as depression and anxiety (Teasdale, 2002). Some unpublished qualitative research has been carried out, which consists of the effects of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) in a Buddhist setting (Sherlock, 2007), and two studies on MBCT for mental health professionals and therapists and the impact on their clinical work (de Zoysa, 2006, Nanda, 2005). Mason & Hargreaves (2001) carried out a grounded theory study, in which seven participants taking part in an MBCT course for depression were interviewed over two stages. Their aim was to highlight the underlying process of MBCT as described by the participants themselves. The main themes discovered were initial negative experiences of MBCT and difficulties in engaging in homework exercises, which seemed to exacerbate negative thoughts towards the self. However, a process seemed to occur where the expectations seemed to change and allowed for an altered perspective. Other key themes included changes in attitude, the support of the group, and being able to generalise the skills to situations outside of the therapy. Mason and Hargreaves (2001) concluded that the level of development of mindfulness skills was seen to hold a key role in the development of change. As there were only seven participants in this study, it is difficult to generalise these findings to the general population; however, it did give good insight to the individual,

subjective experience of the effect of MBCT. The themes seemed robust and appeared to resonate with the theory that suggests that changing the relationship to the thoughts, rather than the thoughts themselves, appeared to be a significant factor for change in depressive symptoms (Ma & Teasdale, 2004).

Finucane and Mercer (2006) is the only mixed methods designed study that has been carried out in this field. A thematic analysis revealed that motivations for joining the group included a desire to avoid medication, as well as trying a novel form of treatment to see if it would work. The participants in this study were experiencing current depressive symptoms. They revealed that the normalising process of the group was helpful, and some participants admitted experiencing difficulties with homework. Furthermore, several participants experienced difficulties in continuing practicing mindfulness skills after the course had ended.

Allen et al. (2009) also used qualitative methods to examine experiences of MBCT as a relapse prevention treatment, and found similar themes to the above-mentioned studies. They discovered that the effects of MBCT included feeling in control of depression through being able to accept the associated feelings, rather than trying to change them, and being able to express and meet needs in personal relationships were core explanations. The analysis also revealed several struggles with the practice, including difficulty in carrying out homework exercises.

When pulling together the overall themes from these three key qualitative studies, it seems that the normalising effect of the group was important, as well as the cultivation and application of key mindfulness skills. Furthermore, most participants experienced difficulties with engaging with the mindfulness practice initially, as well as the motivation to continue after the group ended. The small sample sizes, which are normal for qualitative studies, do not allow for generalisation to a wider population, but does provide a direction for

future research. When considering this evidence against the background of the RCTs that have not been able to exclude the possible effects of group support, it may be argued that the active ingredient of mindfulness may be less responsible for the positive outcomes reported than initially thought.

2.4 Mindfulness with Children

Given that the efficacy studies of mindfulness with adults are proving promising, it would be natural for interest to emerge in how mindfulness concepts might be applied with children. This could be of interest in clinical settings, as well as a potential method to increase resilience, promote prevention, and aid learning across different settings.

There is anecdotal evidence that mindfulness has been used in a few schools for some time, and that teachers have reported positive results (Murdock, 1978). However, Semple et al. (2005) carried out an initial feasibility and acceptability open trial of a mindfulness-training programme with five students aged 7-8 years old. The study reported positive findings based on teacher ratings, self-report measures and clinical observation. They found that the students in this study were able to engage with a mindfulness programme and suggested that an adapted MBCT programme could be used to treat anxiety symptoms. The small sample size and lack of control group limits these findings, but this study is a good example of the cautious approach recommended when introducing novel treatment programmes to a vulnerable population such as children.

A strong RCT was then reported by Napoli et al. (2005) where 194 non-clinical participants aged 5-8 years old took part in a 24 week training programme which consisted of adapted mindfulness activities. The active control group took part in quiet activities such as reading. Another strength of this study is the three different measures employed, which consisted of teacher ratings of behaviour, attention, hyperactivity and social skills, as well

as a children's self-reported measure of anxiety administered pre and post training. In addition, an objective measure of performance in visual and sustained attention tasks was also included. The results suggested that there was a significant improvement in all measures apart from sustained attention. A limitation, however, is the potential for bias in the teacher ratings as they were not blind to what group the participants were allocated to.

Lee et al. (2008) also conducted a feasibility study of MBCT with children, and found that there was an effect on parental ratings of behaviour, but there was no effect on the children's self-report measures of anxiety and depression. The limitations make conclusions regarding efficacy difficult, because again parent ratings could be biased and the use of self-report scales of anxiety and depression is questionable in a non-clinical sample, where change may not be expected. Nevertheless, these three studies suggest that the use of adapted mindfulness approaches with children is appropriate. This has opened the door for clinical efficacy and process orientated studies to be carried out.

The use of MBSR was carried out in a trial with adolescent psychiatric outpatients diagnosed with mood and anxiety disorders (Beigel et al., 2009). The participants received the intervention in addition to their normal psychological treatment plan, and were compared against TAU (treatment as usual) controls. The measures consisted of self-report measures of psychological symptoms, self-esteem and perceived stress as well clinician reports of mental health. The clinicians were blind to which participants were allocated to each group, and therefore eliminated a possible confounding bias. The results indicated that MBSR is an effective adjunct to TAU when compared to the TAU-only controls. A three-month follow up showed that the effects were still evident. The objective reports from the blind clinicians, in addition to the usual self-report measures, strengthens the findings of this study.

Mindfulness has also been gaining attention within the field of educational psychology. For some children, attending school may be a potentially stressful experience, and it is the challenge of educational professionals to understand the potential barriers to learning. One way of doing this is by understanding how attention and awareness in children can be improved through mindfulness, and may have a wider effect on children's behaviour, learning and executive functioning. Semple et al. (2010) found a strong relationship between attention difficulties and behaviour problems. They discovered that a reduction in attention difficulties through the use of mindfulness accounted for 46% of the variance of changes in behaviour problems, and concluded that MBCT for children was effective in reducing attention-related problems compared to the control group. Reductions in anxiety and behaviour problems were also reported, but at a non-significant level. A reason for this could be that the researchers used an anxiety measure with children who were not experiencing anxiety difficulties of a clinical severity. The effects were therefore found across groups. A small sample size, and the presence of the potential for participants to be influenced by other group members, limits the conclusions that can be drawn, but indicates a call for larger-scale randomized controlled trials with further methodological rigor.

Flook et al. (2010) suggests that mindfulness may increase the level of executive functioning, as reported by teachers and parents when participants who were compared with active controls (reading). Children's views were not considered in this study. Furthermore, the teachers were not blind to which group participants were allocated to, which could indicate a bias; however, the parents were blind and reported similar patterns of change. There is a case for further exploration into the effects of mindfulness in children, perhaps as an additional tool to existing interventions that deal with problems such as ADHD and anxiety. Davis (2012) also suggests that there is a role for mindfulness, not only in work with children, but also to help parents and teachers in how they deal with children. Moreover, further research could be

carried out to determine whether other potential populations, such as children with special educational needs, could benefit.

There have been two recent studies that have attempted to assess and validate scales for mindfulness in adolescents. Brown et al. (2011) used an adapted version of the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS, Brown & Ryan, 2003), and Greco et al. (2011) reported the development of the more specific Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM) over four separate studies. The adaptation of the MAAS turned out to be minor (the removal of one item), and this study therefore adds weight to the growing body of research that now considers this measure valid and reliable. The CAMM was developed using statements from the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS, Baer et al., 2004). Although both of these measures have been adapted from the two measurement tools most commonly used for adults, they both need to be replicated with a younger population to strengthen the validity and reliability of the measure.

In addition to the treatment of psychopathological conditions in children, it is also appropriate for counselling psychologists to consider the use of mindfulness techniques in other aspects of their work with children. Fitting with the humanistic value base of beginning with the individual, mindfulness could potentially offer insight and awareness to the inner workings of a child's mind and the way they see the world, and therefore allow for a better response to difficult situations.

Greenberg and Harris (2011) make an observation of the enthusiasm with which mindfulness-based approaches with children have been promoted. They suggest that more caution may be appropriate, as there is currently limited research of substantial quality that can confidently demonstrate beneficial effects. In addition, there is little research that evaluates the effectiveness that these programmes promise, or the effectiveness of the adapted techniques that are already in use.

2.5 Mindfulness and Counselling Psychology

The clinical implications of the limited research into mindfulness, and criticism of the over reliance on CBT in current NHS treatment protocols, has resulted in a call for counselling psychologists to consider 'third wave' (Hayes, 2004) mindfulness based therapies for treatment of psychological disorders, and depression in particular. Bhanji (2011) argues that mindfulness is particularly (but not exclusively) suited to the philosophical and therapeutic emphasis of counselling psychologists in four key areas. Firstly the mindful emphasis on 'being' rather than 'doing' is reflected in the observation of process and reflecting this back to the client to promote insight, which may lead to greater awareness and facilitate change. Secondly, the holistic focus of counselling psychologists may facilitate the transfer of effects to areas of a client's life. For example, experiences of critical thoughts that may emerge during a session may also be applicable to difficulties in relationships. Thirdly, mindfulness can be seen as a standalone therapeutic intervention or as an adjunct to other therapies, and is particularly suited to the integrative approach used by many therapists to best serve the needs of the individual. Finally, the emphasis on personal development and practice of teachers of mindfulness fits with the element of ongoing personal and professional development through therapy that is required for ethical practice.

Given the suitability of the use of mindfulness-based approaches to counselling psychologists, it is now appropriate to give thought to the impact that mindfulness could have on clinical practice. The above review shows the effects on human functioning that mindfulness is suggested to have in populations and settings where the input of counselling psychology is useful. The philosophical background of counselling psychology suggests that professionals are concerned with not only improving human functioning, but also increasing human well-being, quality of life and happiness. Kabat-Zinn (1994) emphasises that the goal of mindfulness is to be mindful of each and every moment to experience life as a whole, without necessarily attempting to

change the bits that are unpleasant. Kabat-Zinn goes further, to suggest that being able to control attention allows people to focus on their goals for functioning despite pain and chronic illnesses, and is crucial for maintaining a functional life, which in turn increases well-being. Counselling psychologists are also interested in how this might apply to emotional and behavioural barriers to functioning that arise from other challenging life events. It can be questioned whether well-being and quality of life is always linked to 'fixing' life problems, and whether a way of living and functioning with such problems may be another avenue to explore. Mindfulness could be what is missing from what we presently know about functioning and well-being (Hamilton et al., 2006).

One study has attempted to test the assumption that increased levels of mindfulness will have an impact on subjective well-being (Collard et al., 2008). The measures that were used to detect any correlating relationships with mindfulness were the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) (Walach et al., 2006), in addition to established positive psychology measures of affect and satisfaction of life (all of which were self-report measures). The population consisted of non-clinical counselling students. This study did not find a clear causal link, despite detecting a significant increase in mindfulness and a significant decrease in negative affect. As the trends found in the data were strong, although statistically insignificant, the authors suggested that mindfulness may have an important role in increasing well-being. There are criticisms, such as using a small (n=16), homogenous, population where there may have been participant bias, which render these findings as tentative, but worthy of further research.

2.6 Critique of Research in Mindfulness and Summary

Evidence Based Practice (Department of Health, 1991) is a framework designed to use research findings to inform clinical practice so that people seeking treatment can be ensured that they receive the best of what psychology has to offer, and so that they can be confident that the interventions proposed are based on sound scientific findings. The Division of Counselling Psychology (2001) states that clinical practice should be concerned with the subjective accounts, beliefs and meaning-making of the individual, whilst using interventions for treatment guided by a sound research base. The Department of Health (1991) holds randomized controlled trials (RCT) as the 'Gold Standard' of research, with four other categories of research following below in a hierarchical structure, suggesting that there is a preference for the rigorous and objective over the relative and subjective (Corrie, 2010). This also reflects the tension that Counselling Psychologists have to manage in clinical practice. Consequently, there is a call for a wider range of evidence to be considered, including phenomenological-based research, which considers what it means to be human (Newnes, 2001). The research described above will be considered in relation to the evidence based practice framework.

The nature of mindfulness, being a highly individual and subjective experience with many variables that are difficult to control, presents design and methodological issues with the research that has been carried out to date. Most of the research that has been described comprises efficacy studies of using mindfulness-based approaches as a clinical intervention. In many of the RCTs that have been mentioned in this review, the controls have often been waiting lists, or treatment as usual (TAU). Early trials suggested that when active, comparable controls were included, the effects of meditation were not significant, although strong trends were detected. This suggested that the benefits of MBSR/MBCT only appeared to be most evident in studies where no active control group was included. An explanation for this could be

that that the benefits of MBSR may be due to non-specific confounding variables, such as the therapeutic alliance or group effect. Only one study has been found to include a comparable active control (Jain et al., 2007), and although this study did not find any significant difference between mindfulness meditation and relaxation, more research needs to be carried out that includes a suitable placebo control to help distinguish mindfulness from similar kinds of treatment. Furthermore, considering the themes extrapolated from the qualitative research that has been carried out so far, there is a suggestion that group effects and therapeutic alliance are influencing factors that need to be controlled for in future studies in order to further establish the efficacy of mindfulness meditation.

The effectiveness determined in current RCTs is also dependent on pre-defined, self-report measures that may not be valid across different populations and cultures. Recent research with children in particular has started to include more objective measures, such as reports from teachers and parents. However, there is still a possibility of a bias confounding the results where teachers/parents were not blind to the group the participants were allocated to, and this therefore weakens the claims that this research makes. More research that uses unbiased, objective measures is needed.

Bearing in mind the abovementioned limitations that current research into mindfulness interventions presents, the volume of research showing strong trends is promising, and has been influential in the decision of NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2006) to include mindfulness-based approaches as a treatment option for three or more episodes of relapse in major depression, and as a treatment option for hypertension.

These promising results in mindfulness research make a case for further investigation of the concept. A call to move research beyond the preliminary stages to larger scale randomized controlled trials over longer periods of time has been made (Burke, 2010) and echoed (Greenberg & Harris, 2011). As the majority of the reviewed studies are quantitative, a research direction is made by the author to increase the use of other methodologies to include subjective perspectives and to help improve the understanding of the multifaceted nature of mindfulness and further develop theory.

2.7 Rationale for Present Study

From the above literature review, it can be seen that there has, in recent years, been a phenomenal increase in research into mindfulness meditation. Methodological issues in meditation indicate that there are few good quality research studies in mindfulness to date. This could be because, historically, people who are interested in alternative practices such as meditation have shown little interest carrying out research under rigorous research criteria. This, however, is changing.

A growing number of schools have started to offer students experiences of meditation and other similar practices such as yoga. The literature on mindfulness meditation with children as a participant group is growing rapidly, which suggests that using the approach with children is worth pursuing. However, the widespread use of mindfulness in clinical practice, and the interest in teaching the method to children in schools (as reported in Carelse et al., 2010) is suggested to be premature (Greenberg & Harris, 2011).

Qualitative research can be helpful in several ways, especially in a newly emerging field, as it can indicate the range of experiences that are likely to be reported, and indicate common elements across accounts that could help shape a conceptual framework and theory (Capsi & Burleson, 2005). Research

with children is important in increasing adult's understanding of their world, because adults design the vast majority of the structures that are in place for children. More qualitative research with children would give them a voice, and thus an ability to contribute to areas that concern them (Irwin & Johnson 2005). There are presently no formal research studies that use qualitative methods to investigate the perception of children who have experienced mindfulness meditation.

Children aged 9-10 years old have been chosen as the participant group for this study, as in the author's experience, this age group tends to be open to novel and experiential forms of learning. School children have been chosen to participate, as this reflects non-clinical samples who are less likely to be suffering from psychopathological symptoms, which is important, as the experience of meditation being offered in this study is not a form of intervention for treatment. As meditation can offer a non-linguistic experience of the world, it could therefore provide important insights for children to understand themselves and their internal processes.

The aim of this research is to add a different dimension to the existing body of quantitative research in meditation by investigating the personal experiences of children. This may be a way for children to experientially engage with their own internal processes, and may facilitate counselling psychologists and other professionals working with children to understand the way children view the world and their place in it.

To conclude, there is a strong case for further research into meditation, and with children specifically, as literature, theory and anecdotal reports suggests that meditation can be beneficial for children across different settings (psychopathological and educational). The research questions below were selected to in order to explore mindfulness from the perspective of a novice non-clinical population, to understand how children may perceive meditation, and how they may experience potential benefits from it, while understanding

the perceived features that may also provide direction for further research and theory development.

2.8 Research Aims

The aims of this study are:

1. To see how children make sense of their experience of meditation by looking at how they describe their experiences.
2. To expand research into the topic of mindfulness into a non-clinical population using a qualitative methodology.
3. To increase the qualitative research base with children and see how this preliminary research could outline a further direction for research in mindfulness meditation and children.

2.9 Research Questions

This study will be examining the following research questions:

1. What do children say about their experience of meditation?
2. What are the experiential features of mindfulness meditation from the perspective of children?
3. What do children say about the perceived effects of meditation?

The following chapter will outline the research methodology in detail.

3. METHOD

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the concept of mindfulness in detail, evaluated the research and indicated how the present study aimed to add to the existing literature about the subject. This chapter will describe the research methodology. Below follows a description of the design of this study, the participants, and how they were recruited, an outline of ethical considerations and a discussion of the rationale for the chosen method of analysis, including the epistemological position of the study. Finally, an outline of the analysis process will follow.

3.2 Research Design

Since the earliest days of applied psychology, psychologists from all fields have been committed to using information and knowledge gained from quality research to inform clinical practice. As was shown in the earlier literature review, there appears to be an overreliance on randomized controlled trials, which assumes that objective knowledge is what we should strive to achieve and upon which evidence based practice seems to be justified. This view is being challenged with the development of qualitative methodologies for use in psychology, and the increasing interest in using this approach, evident in the publication of journals now dedicated to the cause (Ponterotto, 2005). Since 2005 there has been a significant shift in the field of counselling psychology to consider qualitative research methods (Ponterotto, 2005). Considering that the defining contribution of counselling psychology is its humanistic vision, whereby respect for the personal, subjective experience is central, a qualitative design would seem to be particularly appropriate.

Research in meditation needs to consider a number of methodological challenges because of the uniqueness and difficulties in standardising,

quantifying and authenticating experiences for a given number of research participants. Capsi & Burleson (2005), in their review of research methodology for meditation, state that a qualitative study may enable insight into what is happening behind the scenes of a study. They therefore recommend both qualitative and quantitative studies aiming to investigate the effects of meditation. The review in Chapter 2 showed that most existing mindfulness research literature describes efficacy studies using a quantitative design. This study aims to fill the gap, allowing further understanding of the effects of mindfulness from a subjective perspective.

Research with children has largely followed a quantitative approach. However, this does mean that the parameters of a child's experience are largely defined by adults (Hennessy, 1999). Given that meditation is a largely individual and subjective experience, and given that a theory of mindfulness is still under development, it is important that the perspective of individuals from different populations, including children, is elicited in order to further develop theory. For these reasons, a qualitative design has been chosen, with the additional aim of informing and improving future potential research within mindfulness meditation and with this participant group.

In summary, a strong case for using a qualitative design in this study can be made, given the fit with the philosophical underpinnings of counselling psychology, and the possible illumination of underlying processes to develop theory and provide direction for further qualitative studies. Qualitative research relies on language, which can be limited in some children, and this is arguably a reason why little qualitative research is conducted with children. However, evidence from studies that have used qualitative research methods with children shows that they have valid and informative contributions to make when they describe their experiences (for example, Earley et al. 2007).

3.2.1 Epistemological stance

It is important to determine the parameters of any research study in relation to the context of the knowledge it seeks to obtain and the relationship between the researcher and participant. Traditionally, researchers using quantitative methodologies see reality as something that can be objectively observed and measured by a detached and distant researcher, and they therefore adopt what are widely known as positivist and post-positivist epistemologies. The positivist seeks to explain an event by relating it to a universal, causal law, which can be observed objectively. Post-positivists have the same aim. However, unlike positivists, they acknowledge that biases occur, given that it is impossible for researchers not to be influenced by theories and background knowledge. Post-positivists therefore attempt to control biases as well as accepting that research is imperfect and fallible. Furthermore, they accept that one research study therefore cannot be reflective of the truth, however if several studies point in the same direction, stronger conclusions can be drawn (Robson, 2011).

An alternative view is the social constructionist paradigm, which stipulates that knowledge, or reality, is socially constructed from the subjective perspective of the individual (Howitt, 2010), and through interactions between people (Robson, 2011). Qualitative researchers differ in their view of how this knowledge is constructed. Burr (2003) differentiates between reality constructed between people through daily interaction and regular living processes such as conversation (which he calls micro-social constructionism), and reality that is constructed as a result of the use of language within social and cultural groups that may create social power differences (macro-social constructionism). In other words, social constructionism involves an active participant in the conversation, which contributes to the process of construction of the idea of interest. West (2011) goes even further, to argue that it is impossible to control research bias, even if it is acknowledged, and makes a case for counselling psychologists to use their bias, and other highly

subjective concepts such as the tacit dimension, in their research. This would make the researcher's personal view a valid part of the research, and the researcher a co-constructor of knowledge. In critical psychology literature especially, the participant in conversation is relatively powerless to influence and create social change (Howitt, 2010), and researchers in this field seek to uncover how language is used to maintain the powerlessness of certain social groups (such as women in feminist research, as in Letherby, 2003), and inform, influence and challenge policy.

Between the two epistemological positions described above is a third, namely Critical Realism (Howitt, 2010). Critical Realism assumes that there is an objective reality, which is observed through the subjective lens of the participant. The researcher uses conversation to elicit this view. However, critical realists believe that although an objective reality exists, it is impossible to access in its true form due to the lens of the participant and the lens of the researcher analysing what the participant is saying (Howitt, 2010). Each of these lenses represents a further distortion of reality, and is openly acknowledged as the researcher's personal view that will have an influence on the way the data is interpreted. Qualitative researchers see language as the main tool to view this reality. This tension between one objective reality, several subjective perspectives, and the method used to ascertain knowledge in critical realism, is one that is highly relevant to counselling psychologists, as it mirrors the tension that we have to manage as we attempt to integrate evidence based practice with humanistic values in our clinical practice.

The goal of this present study is to understand experience from the point of view of those who live it, in particular the experience of meditation from children's perspective. This study aims to uncover the experience of the children who participate in the mindfulness meditations and who process and label this experience. There is one objective reality that the participants experience (the meditation instructions given by the researcher), and there is the subjective view of the participants, which is uncovered through

conversation with the researcher. The hermeneutical approach is central to the process of uncovering what these experiences are. This maintains that the meaning of experience is hidden and is discovered through reflection, which is stimulated by the researcher-participant dialogue (Ponterotto, 2005), and then interpreted through the lens of the researcher. Furthermore, the analysis of the data will consider meanings across the whole data set, rather than focusing on specific theoretical ideas. This study therefore adopts a critical realist epistemological position.

3.2.2 Rationale for thematic analysis

Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is "an analysis of the major themes to be found in interview and other qualitative data." (Howitt, 2010, p. 163) and is a method widely used in qualitative research within psychology. It is often seen as a foundational method for novice researchers who then may progress on to more complex qualitative methods, such as Grounded Theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1992) which is defined as "a theory which develops out of a close interaction between the data and the developing understanding of the data." (Howitt, 2010, p. 187) or Discourse Analysis which is the study of how talk and texts are used to perform actions." (Potter, 2003, p.5). Finding and coding themes is a task that is carried out across all qualitative methods. It has therefore been argued that thematic analysis it is not a stand-alone methodology, but a process within the more traditional qualitative methodologies (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). However, thematic analysis can also be thought of as a method in its own right, as long as the study is defined and clearly positioned within a theoretical and epistemological framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One of the strengths of thematic analysis is its flexibility in how it can be applied to different types of research given these parameters. A major criticism is that, because there is little written in terms of guidelines on how to carry out a thematic analysis, there are many examples of poorly executed research using thematic analysis because inadequate

attention has been paid to the quality and rigour of the analysis, and there was no detailed description of how it was carried out (which there will be in this case). Thematic analysis has therefore perhaps not earned the reputation for being distinct and robust methodology in the way that other approaches may have (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The aim of this study is to understand what children make of their experience of mindfulness meditation by analysing their descriptions, views and opinions. Other qualitative methods were considered. Both Grounded Theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1992) and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (defined as "qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of the major life experiences." (Smith et al., 2009, p.1) require strict adherence to a process that deals with a rich data set. When considering methods of analysis for my study, I became aware that IPA may not be suitable, as the experience that the children were interviewed about was arguably not an 'everyday lived experience', but a novel experience that I, as the researcher, had provided for them. In other words, IPA tends to be attached to a phenomenological epistemology, which seeks to understand people's everyday lived experience in relation to a phenomenon, in order to improve understanding of the phenomena in question. Furthermore, IPA is useful to explore the perspectives and meanings of participants who have a richer, more embedded experience to draw from than the children who participated in my study. IPA was therefore rejected. Grounded Theory is often used with the intention of generating a theory, which is closely tied to the data. This is not the aim of this present study, so Grounded Theory was therefore rejected, although it is acknowledged that findings will be reported in relation to existing theory.

Thematic Analysis was selected for this project because it provided a framework for exploring new areas of research and has a focus on describing what is going on in the data. Furthermore, it applies no single a-priori theoretical assumptions about what knowledge may be learned from

participants (Willig, 2001) (arguably an impossibility), and its theoretical flexibility fits with the non-specific aim of this study and can be used with groups and individuals. Braun & Clarke (2006) also acknowledge that the researcher impacts on the research, by making explicit that analysis does not emerge, but is constructed by both parties. In this instance, it is also important to highlight the researcher's context and position (see section 3.9) in relation to the study, and recognise that information that is newly constructed is seen as interpreted against this background of prior knowledge.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Many of the ethical issues that need to be considered when embarking upon research with children also arise when using participants of any age. For example, there is a need to obtain informed consent, confidentiality, and to ensure the researcher's responsibility for the welfare of participants. These issues become particularly highlighted when considering research with children, because of the power and status imbalance that exists between adults and children. Part of the researcher's task is to redress this imbalance so that children are able to participate in research on their own terms (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). This is in order not only to safeguard their well-being and protect them from abuse, but also to make the research valid and useful, in that it represents a true reflection of the participants themselves and not a reflection of what the children believe is expected from them under these circumstances. Throughout this section, I will explain how I attempted to overcome these difficulties.

3.3.1 Recruitment process and informed consent

Ethical clearance was given by the University of East London (see Appendix 4). The BPS Guidelines for conducting research with human participants were followed (BPS, 2009). The Guidelines cover the following points in detail:

- Consideration of Risk
- What constitutes valid consent
- Confidentiality
- Giving advice
- Deception
- Debriefing

All of these points were considered in addition to further published guidelines for working with a vulnerable population such as children.

The United Nations Charter on the Rights of Children (1989) states that children should be involved as legitimate contributors in decision-making and policy developing within areas that concern them. Children should, therefore, be recognised as competent and capable contributors. This is a reason why it is important to carry out research with children. On this basis, it could be further argued that researchers have a moral duty to obtain formal agreement from the children themselves, and that the way in which children are involved in decision-making processes should also be applied to their involvement in research studies.

The process of recruiting participants was carried out in three phases. Given the nature of this study being a non-clinical sample, and in recognition of children being as autonomous as possible, I felt that it was appropriate that the initial decision of whether or not to participate lay with the children themselves. It was therefore important that the children were first informed

about the study and what it entailed, so that they could make the initial decision about whether or not participating would appeal to them. Phase one of the recruitment process was an informal talk that I was invited to give to year five students about meditation and about participating in this study. This gave me an opportunity to establish some rapport with the children, and gave them an opportunity to ask questions about the study and about what they would be asked to do, before they considered whether or not to take part.

The second recruitment phase considered the requirement of formal consent from their parents or guardian. During the informal talk, all the children who indicated that they wished to take part received parental permission letters (Appendix 2) to take home. All children who brought with them signed consent forms from their parents or guardian before the indicated deadline were selected and took part in the study.

The final phase of the recruitment process included another, more formal consultation with the children to explain their rights and allow them to make the final decision to participate. Before the study commenced, the children were given a consent form (Appendix 3), which I read out aloud and explained to them. They were given the opportunity to ask any questions or indicate whether they were unsure or unclear. This provided the children the opportunity to decide whether to participate (or not) on their own terms. Those who agreed to participate were asked to write their names on their forms.

Another important aspect of informed consent is that the opportunity to withdraw consent throughout the study is given and made explicit, as this is part of the participants being aware of their rights during the process (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). The children were told that they have the right to change their mind about their participation in the study at any point. The participants, their parents and the Head Teacher were aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and leave any meditation at any time

without giving a reason, and that should they choose to do so, it would be without consequence. This was also highlighted in the consent forms to all parties. No participants exercised their right to withdraw at any point of the study.

The issue of confidentiality is also an aspect that can influence the decision of informed consent. The children were made aware during phase three, before they agreed to participate, that their interviews would remain confidential, that there would be nothing on their school record to indicate that they had taken part in this study, and that their names would not appear in the write up of this thesis. They were also told that the interview tapes would be destroyed when finished with.

In summary, the issue of informed consent was addressed in that both parents and children formally signed a consent form, which made them aware of their rights, and they were given every opportunity to participate (or not) on their own terms without consequence.

3.3.2 Protection from abuse and harm

When assessing any project for risk of abuse and harm to its participants, it is important to consider what possible risks might be present, the probability of harm occurring, and the severity of consequences for the participants. This would also include risk of distress, humiliation or anxiety (Alderson & Morrow, 2011).

Exercises or even simple questions such as 'Who do you live with?' might cause distress, for example, if there has been a recent death in the family. For this study, the participants were required to take part in a number of different meditations and an interview, and it was important to consider what effect this might have on them. As I was not in a position to assess this adequately, the Head Teacher was asked to conduct an initial screening

process in consideration of whether any of the participating children were likely to get upset or have difficulties with the procedure against. No children were excluded on these grounds.

Meditation can at times have mood-altering effects. However the probability of risk of negative (or distressing) experience was deemed to be low because the meditations carried out for this project were short and varied in type. The opportunity to share their experiences in a safe environment was part of this study, although this may have prevented the participants talking about any negative effects experienced. For this reason, further precautions were made in the event of any child become distressed or upset. An agreement was made with the School Secretary that they could seek assistance from her at any time during the study. The School Secretary was present for the full duration of study and she was deemed an appropriate person to seek assistance from, as she would have knowledge of the school policy, and would escalate to the Head Teacher if necessary. None of the participants became distressed, although one mentioned that he had become emotional during one meditation. He was immediately offered to speak about this away from the group, and was given the offer of speaking to the School Secretary about this, but he declined. He seemed ok and he decided to continue with the meditations.

For the protection of the children participating, I obtained enhanced clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau. Furthermore, the meditations took place in the school assembly hall, which had glass doors and could be observed at all times. In addition, the interviews took place in the music room, which had large glass windows and door, and was observable from the dining room at all times. There were no difficulties or problems that occurred.

3.4 Participants

The Head Teacher at a North London Primary School was approached for permission to recruit participants for this study (Appendix 1). The school was a non-religious primary school situated in a suburb of Greater London with approximately 250 children in total from a mix of cultural backgrounds. All of the participants were from year 5 (aged 9-10). The final 19 participants consisted of 12 boys and 7 girls (n=19). The 19 participants were allocated (by the Head Teacher) to three groups of five children and one group of four children, and the children remained in the same groups for the duration of the meditations.

3.5 Data Collection

A pilot study was carried out with two children, a girl aged 13 and a boy aged 11. They took part in a ten-minute body scan meditation before they answered questions from the semi-structured interview (Appendix 5). Minor amendments were made to the interview schedule.

One group of 4 children and 3 groups of 5 children were invited to take part in a 10-minute daily meditation for in total 9 consecutive school days. The meditations were predominantly mindfulness meditations, as described and referenced in section 3.5.1.

For the semi-structured interviews, the children themselves were given the choice of whether they preferred to be interviewed individually or in a group, and the interviews for each participant occurred according to their preference. This allowed for some choice and control to be exerted by the children, and I believe it was helpful for the children to consider how they might feel when talking to me. This also allowed them some autonomy in deciding how they would like to talk about their experiences. Some children liked the safety of

being with their friends and others enjoyed one to one attention. 11 individual interviews and two group interviews were carried out.

3.5.1 The meditations

All meditations started with the children sitting on cushions in front of a lit candle. A sheet of paper stating the ground rules (Appendix 6) for the meditations and for group interaction was shown and explained to the children. Agreement to these rules was obtained by a show of hands. These ground rules were visible for the duration of the meditations and the group sharing. Each meeting started with two deep breaths as a grounding exercise before the meditation was explained to them. I checked with the participants to see if there might be any problems with the meditation (e.g., allergies to raisins). The meditation was then guided by the researcher before the group re-convened around the candle for comments and discussion. This was tape-recorded (Please see Appendix 7 for an example.) The following meditations took place:

Day 1: Eating a raisin mindfully (Brantley, 2007 & Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

During this meditation, each child received two or three raisins and was guided by the researcher in what to do with them. They were instructed to examine one raisin as if they had never seen one before, by holding it up close, rolling it around in their fingers, holding it up to their ears as they do this, holding it up to their nose and finally placing it in their mouths allowing their tongues to explore the surface of the raisin, before finally biting into it whilst noticing the sensations happening in their mouths.

Day 2: Walking Meditation (Brantley, 2007)

The children were instructed to find a space in the room away from others, and begin walking at a normal pace. The researcher then instructed them to

gradually slow down so that they could feel the sensations of taking each step, feeling their body weight transfer from one foot to another, and feel the floor underneath their feet.

Day 3: Body Scan (Brantley, 2007)

The children lay on the floor with cushions to support their heads. They were instructed to pay attention to their toes and feel any sensation in this body part. The researcher led them through feeling in order all parts of their bodies up to their heads. They were then told to imagine a flap in the top of their heads through which they could draw breath, and to feel it travel all the way down their bodies, through each body part, and feel the breath exit through their feet.

Day 4: Drawing Meditation (Charney, 2006)

The children were blindfolded and asked to use their opposite hand to draw whatever came into their minds. They were asked to feel the paper with their fingers and notice sensations as they drew.

Day 5: Mountain Meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

The children sat cross-legged and were led through a mental visualisation of a mountain. They were instructed to let their bodies take the shape of a mountain, and feel the solid base and extend their bodies to allow their heads become the peak. The facilitator read an abbreviated version of the script found in Kabat-Zinn (1994).

Day 6: Lake Meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

The children sat on their cushions and were led through a mental visualisation of a lake, as described in Kabat-Zinn (1994).

Day 7: Bell in Space Meditation (Germer, et al., 2005)

The children sat upright on their cushions. The facilitator asked them to imagine themselves sitting inside an invisible egg, which stretches out into all directions. They were asked to imagine blowing a bigger and bigger bubble in which they were cocooned, that reaches all the way into space. They then observed a few silent breaths before the facilitator rang a bell at different strengths and intervals. They were instructed to try and listen to the bell until the very end of the vibration of each ring.

Day 8: Groups chose their favourite meditation out of those they had previously participated in.

Day 9: Kundalini Meditation (referred to as musical statues at some points in the transcription). This was an abbreviated version of Part 1, described in Osho.com.

The children remained standing for this energetic meditation, which can be described as a moving body scan. They were instructed to start bouncing their heals on the floor, and move and shake each body part in turn until they reached their heads. The facilitator then shouted stop and the children stopped moving. They were then asked to feel and notice the sensations in their bodies.

3.5.2 The interview process

All interviews were audio-recorded and took place in a quiet room in the dining hall of the school. As has been mentioned previously, the children themselves indicated whether they preferred to be interviewed individually or in a group, and the split occurred according to their preference. Eleven individual interviews and two group interviews (please see Appendix 8 for a

transcribed example of this) of 4 children each were carried out. The interviews lasted between 10-20 minutes.

Before the interviews began, the participants were encouraged to think of a way to let the researcher know if they did not want to answer a question, for example by tapping the table. None of the children declined to answer any of the questions.

Simple, short questions were used, which were mainly open-ended. Some probing questions were also used to facilitate the children's answers. The participants were asked if they wanted to ask me any questions at the end of the interview. A couple wanted to know why I was doing this and how their involvement was helping me. I offered the children a 'debriefing,' which gave them an opportunity to reflect on their interview experience.

3.6 Materials

The materials included:

- Digital Voice Recorder
- CD Player and CDs of relaxation music
- Cushions to sit on
- Sheet of paper stating the ground rules
- A single lit candle
- Incense
- Bell
- Raisins
- Coloured pens and pencils, paper

3.7 Data Analysis

Observations, thoughts and reflections were made after each day of meditation, and after each interview that took place.

The procedure detailed in (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data. The stages are described as follows:

Stage 1: Transcription

The audio recorded data from each meditation and interviews was transcribed by the author. The researcher listened to each interview again, to check for fit with the original recorded interview. Corrections to the transcripts were made, and any identifying information was removed.

Stage 2: Coding

The transcripts were then formatted so that the analysis could take place. The initial coding included all of the data across the three data sets. Initial descriptive themes were recorded on the right hand side of the transcript, and included any relevant features of the language used. The initial coding involved sorting the data into thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours. This was then linked to a further sub-ordinate theme on the left hand side of the transcript, which described the content of the first theme. Each transcript was worked through in this way individually. All the sub-ordinate themes for each transcript were brought together on a separate sheet of paper. After each transcript was worked through in this way, and examined for patterns and similarities. The sub-ordinate themes were then scrutinized and interpreted into possible further super-ordinate themes and cross checked against each other. A worked example is to be found in Appendix 9.

Stage 3: Analysis

In order to see how the themes might link together, the themes were recorded on index cards, and moved around on a large board, over a period of time to see the connections. A strong relationship between the themes was discovered and a story emerged in relation to the topic of meditation. The themes were then organised into the story and key excerpts were chosen to illustrate each theme and checked for consistency.

Stage 4: Report

The themes are reported in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

3.8 Quality Control

When considering what makes good quality research, Braun & Clarke (2006) acknowledge the difficulties that using a loosely defined method such as Thematic Analysis can pose. They suggest that the reputation for poor quality research that Thematic Analysis appears to have gained is due to the lack of consideration of what makes for good qualitative research. They argue that, in order to benefit from the flexibility of the approach, clarity and specificity is needed to make sure that the positioning and execution of the study are congruent.

I have also used followed criteria for assessing quality in qualitative research, following the principles presented by Yardley (2000) which are as follows:

- Internal Coherence
- Transparency of Evidence
- Transferability
- Research Journal

Each will be discussed in turn, and an assessment of each section can be found in section 5.6.

3.8.1 Internal coherance

This refers to how the themes stay true to the account given by the participants and, how they are reflected in the data as a whole (Smith et al., 2009). A number of verbatim transcript extracts are presented in Chapter 4 to illustrate the emergent themes. Furthermore, the frequency of terms seen across transcripts, for example the words calm and relaxation, can also be thought of as a form of data validation. Moreover, as interviews took place individually and in groups, in addition to the recordings from the sharing, themes could be seen to be occurring in both instances. In other words, the same themes, in the main, emerged, despite participants being interviewed in different formats. This can be thought of as a form of validity. Consideration was also given to contradictions and opposite perspectives within the text. This was included whilst writing the narratives for each theme – for example, in the theme of Positive Effects (Section 3.5), the link was made to an earlier sub-theme that not all experiences were positive and that some negative effects might naturally follow.

3.8.2 Transparency of evidence

Transparency of Evidence refers to how the process of analysis took place and how the themes are shown to be originating from the data sets. The process of analysis has been previously described, and an audit trail (see Appendix 10) showing how the main themes relates to the original data has been provided in order to show transparency of the process and how the analysis moved from a description of what can be observed in the data to an analysis of what it means. One example of a worked transcript has also been provided (Appendix 9), and copies of all the transcripts are available from the author upon request. Furthermore, a colleague was asked to analyse two transcripts to check that the themes corresponded with my own. They were found to be similar. This also forms a sense of internal validity and suggests that the emergent themes are robust.

3.8.3 Transferability

Guba & Lincoln (1989) suggest a parallel concept to the post-positivist notion of external validity where the findings can be generalised to the population. The burden of this falls upon the reader of the research to determine. However, the level of detail in the description of the time, place, culture and context of the study will allow the reader to make this decision. Please see section 3.3.1. The participants in this study were of a heterogeneous, non-clinical sample.

3.8.4 Research journal

Although it is not a requirement for the chosen methodology, given that the researcher was positioned as active in the process, a research journal was completed throughout the procedure. This allowed for the thoughts and feelings of the author to be acknowledged throughout in the phases of data collection, analysis, and write up. This provides the reader with some information on how the author may have impacted upon the research process and the results of this study (see chapter 4 for a more comprehensive discussion about this) and a method for recording reflexive awareness (discussed in the next section). An extract of the journal has been provided in Appendix 11.

3.9 Reflexivity

Applied to research, reflexivity can be thought of as the self-aware evaluation of the dynamic interaction between the researcher and the participant, both in terms of the dialogue during the interview and in terms of how the researcher engages with the transcribed data (Finlay, 2008). It is not possible to eradicate researcher bias completely. However it is possible to be

critical and self-reflective on the researcher's background, assumptions and behaviour may have impacted on the research process. Given the author's own positioning as the researcher of this topic, and active, it is important to acknowledge that the knowledge obtained will also come from the researcher making sense of what the participant is saying, requiring reflexive awareness.

The researcher's impact on this research:

1. The fact the researcher has step-children of approximately this age.
2. Her role as a trainee counselling psychologist.
3. Her personal experience of mindfulness and other meditations.
4. Her position as a researcher.
5. Her position as facilitator for the meditations.

This is further discussed in Chapter 4.

The presentation of the results of this study will follow in the next chapter.

4. Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present four super-ordinate themes that were identified from Thematic Analysis performed on transcribed interviews with children. The super-ordinate themes and their sub-ordinate themes are thought by the researcher to reflect the participants' described experiences of meditation. Each section will consider these themes by grounding them in the interview narratives using quotes from the children. A summary of the themes is presented in Table 1, below.

Attention will be drawn to any connection between the themes. The ideas related to these themes may also not be exclusive and have elements in common with other themes. At this point it is important to highlight that this represents *the author's* understanding of what children said about their experiences of meditation and is therefore open to alternative interpretations of others.

The themes are derived from across the three data sets and in general reflect the overall, majority view of the participants. Key themes in relation to the research questions are considered and themes that appear to capture an important aspect of meditation, even thought it may not be reflective of the experience of the majority of the participants, are also considered. This will be discussed and referred to throughout the analysis.

Quotations from transcribed material are presented to illustrate the sub-themes found. Square brackets indicated omitted or inserted information. Ellipses indicate a short pause in speech. Underlining is used to highlight words that were emphasised by the participant more than others. In extracts of dialogue, 'I' refers to the interviewer, and any other letters indicate the first letter of the pseudonym of the participant. It is indicated at the end of each

quotation whether it was taken from an individual interview [I] or from a group interview [G].

The main story concerns how the participants experienced meditation as a process and what observed implications this may have for their well-being in the immediate sense. Consideration for possible longer term and wider development is also highlighted in the themes.

Table 1: Super-ordinate and Sub-Ordinate Themes.

Super-Ordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Process of Meditation	Mental Activity Positive Experiences Uncomfortable Experiences
A Positive Impact	Effects of Sharing Effects on Feelings Increase in Sensory Awareness
Effects on Self-Awareness and Identity	Access to different experiences of self Access to view of present self experience
Improved Functioning	Helpful Skills Applicable across contexts Increased self-efficacy

4.2 Process of Meditation

This main theme considers the ideas the children expressed about what they actually did during the meditations, and how they experienced it. There were many preconceptions of what they thought meditation entailed and were, on the whole, limited to descriptions of what people who meditate look like they are doing. A passive activity of just sitting in a specific posture was the original overall view. Most of the participants expressed surprised that meditation involved so much more than they thought. Furthermore, they appeared to express that there were some comfortable and positive aspects to these activities. This will be explored further in the sub-themes of this section.

4.2.1 Mental Activity

There seemed to be an overall view that you use the body and the mind in an active way and the emphasis on activity seemed to be important in their descriptions. Although many referred to the nature of activities that were carried out, there was also an overall acknowledgement that the mental aspect of focusing and concentration was part of this activity as illustrated by Katie and Hannah below.

> *Katie (lines 1287-1291): Well, basically, it's just basically an activity that you can go and you can relax… and you can just be who you want to be. So you know you… can do whatever…there are loads of things in meditation that you can do. You can do…you know…you can do one on focusing. You can do one on focusing on different things, different areas of your body and stuff…and it's just a really good way that you can calm down, but be yourself.* [I]
>
> *Hannah (line 202): Yeah, because all of them made you relax, because it made you think…and concentrate.* [I]
>
> *Ash: Ummm…you can do like active things when you meditate, and it doesn't have to be active things…it doesn't have to be a quiet thing, it's just how you do things…it's a bit of a mystery thing….* [I]

Ash seems to refer to meditation as to "how you do things" which suggests that he seemed to understand that it is the quality of mind that he brought to the activity that makes meditation unique, even though he couldn't quite express this and concluded it was a bit of a mystery to him.

All of the children were asked how they experienced the relaxation in meditation compared to the relaxation they normally experience, an example of this suggested was what the kind of relaxation they experience just before they go to sleep to give them a familiar, but similar activity to compare with. Most of the participants appeared to experience some kind of difference between the two, which appeared to be the level of mindful engagement and activity involved in meditation.

> *Jade (lines 328-329): Yeah, it is different…because when you are relaxing when you go to sleep…you wouldn't be doing something really hard…em…it's really weird…it's different…* [I]
>
> *Katie (lines 1236-1242): Yeah, it's different, it was a different sort of calmness so like when you go to sleep you feel tired when you go to sleep. With this it was like an energetic…you know what I mean…an energetic calmness…So like instead of it when you go to sleep you are sort of like a tired, sort of sluggish calmness. In meditation it would be like an energetic like…*
>
> I: Alert?
>
> *K: Yeah, alert calmness.* [I]

In the above extract Katie does very well in explaining her experience of difference by contrasting the different energy levels she associates with each state. The word 'alert'[1] also suggests a level of a connection to and an awareness of the self and the environment that is not present with 'sluggish', and therefore perhaps indicative of a mindful and present sense of being. Daisy offered an elaboration of this point below.

[1] The author is aware that the word 'alert' is her interpretation of what was being said. Please see appendix 11 for self-reflections regarding this.

Daisy (Lines 749-764): *It's different because we're focusing on something and when I'm in bed I don't really focus on something…If I go to bed and I'm not really tired, I just look around my room thinking…I don't know…thinking about what's happening tomorrow or something.*

I: Ok, so you think about other stuff and then while you're meditating…?

D: Yeah, or what happened before…

I: Oh right, so you're thinking about something either that's going to happen tomorrow or something that happened before?

D: Already…yes.

I: And when you're meditating you're concentrating on…?

D: More like what we have to concentrate on. [I]

During the above extract, Daisy described staying in the present moment as something that is focused and therefore different to when she is going to sleep. Unlike Katie, Daisy seemed to experience the contrast between the two as letting the mind go or letting it jump to the past and the future as opposed to a sluggish tiredness. These two accounts of meditation described different facets of mindfulness, and they both have in common an associated sense of activity. In other words, there seems to be a sense of mental activity present in meditation that is appears to be different to other kinds of activities such as relaxation.

Jade, took this concept further and suggested that when she lets her mind wander (perhaps more of a passive form of focus), it is not relaxing at all:

Jade (lines 335-336): *What I do is like…just think about things…my week or something…and then in the end after 10 or 20 minutes, it's hard enough to go to sleep.* [I]

This sense of activity was present in other sections of the transcripts too, for example, one participant used the term "doing meditating" (Katie, line 1168)

and many spoke of using the mind to concentrate and focus and using the body to move around.

There was also consensus that the quality of these activities involved a certain level of mental energy to engage in the process of focusing or, as Katie further explains: "…it was like and energetic…you know what I mean….an energetic calmness" perhaps meaning that the energy came from the mental activity aspect and calmness in the physical sense.

4.2.2 Uncomfortable Experiences

As the participants engaged with the meditation activities, there seemed to be an aspect of meditation that could be described as uncomfortable. All of the children expressed some sort of difficulty experienced as they became aware of reactions and urges that were contrary to the instructions given. For example Hannah voiced an opinion, which gained consensus amongst her group members:

> *Hannah (lines 157-157): Sometimes…like on the mountain one…it…because you had to like lie down and imagine it…the brain just wanted to do stuff…but I didn't like not being able to do stuff…*
>
> *I: Ok…so you felt that it was difficult and the least thing you liked…would you all agree with that? I can see you're nodding your heads…* [G]

Although Hannah does not say what her brain wanted to do, but as the instruction was to keep bringing the mind back to the point of focus, it could be assumed that her mind or brain simply wanted to wander off. Taking this point further, as most children voiced difficulty (rather than dislike) with fidgeting and wandering minds, continually being aware of and attempting to resist these urges may be an aspect of meditation that the children may have experienced as uncomfortable. Raj explains his experience, which he became aware of during the Body Scan meditation:

Raj (lines 1363-1366): I felt stressed and then it felt relaxing…

I: Ok…you felt stressed to start with…? In what way…? What happened when you were stressed?

R: Well, my mind would wander…and I couldn't stop fidgeting… [G]

Raj's experiences may have been a reflection of how awareness of his mind and his body was giving rise to uncomfortable feelings. It may be that he felt that he was not performing well or doing what he was supposed to do during this meditation and as a result started to feel stressed. Others said that distractions such as noise outside and hearing people talking made it difficult to concentrate.

Another point that was also raised in the group interview alluded to some group members thought that meditation may after a while get a bit boring.

I: Meditation after school club? Well, that's an interesting idea…do you think a lot of people would go?

Josh (lines 179-183): Some people might not after a while, they might think that it is a bit rubbish…I thought it was really fun. [G]

*Charlie (lines 1098-1099): If we did them [*the meditations*] five times again it might get a little bit boring, but if you did it once or twice then it's still quite exciting.* [G]

Josh and Charlie made the point that uncomfortable feelings such as boredom, may outweigh the positives (described later), and result in the desire to attend meditation sessions dwindling.

Although participants in the examples above emphasised how this was not applicable to them at present, the very fact that they are mentioning boredom as potential experiences of others is likely to be reflective of some aspect of their own experience of meditation. A further urge to reject (or avoid)

uncomfortable experience (boredom) and attach to positive experience (excitement) may also be indicated.

Most of the participants experienced difficulties with the practicalities of meditating, but few referred to the emotional difficulties that may have been present. It could be likely that others found practical difficulties had stressful aspects, but perhaps found it difficult to express, unlike Katie below:

> *Katie: Umm… the drawing was difficult because I didn't know what I was like…what I was drawing myself as so… like how I am presenting myself so it was almost a bit like worrying because you didn't know what you were drawing and you didn't know how it would affect…*[I]

Katie was concerned about what she might be revealing about herself, how that might be viewed and the consequences that this may have for the future. She seemed to be worried and afraid of being judged. This shows that meditation can have a revealing effect and as it often takes place in a group setting, it would be natural to have some anxiety about the very issues that Katie raised.

It was also interesting to observe that none of these uncomfortable or difficult aspects were raised when asked during the interview whether there were any aspects of meditation that they didn't like. This may indicate that although uncomfortable feelings were experienced as part of the meditations, they don't appear to form the overall outcome or view of the experience as a whole.

4.2.3 Positive Experiences

This theme refers to the positive experiences of the actual process of meditation. Some of the descriptions over-lap slightly with the later theme of Positive Impact (section 4.3), however the difference between these themes refers to the experience of participating and the perceived outcome.

All the children voiced overall enjoyment at participating in the different meditations; in particular, the words such as "fun", "energetic" and "exciting" frequently were used. There was also some evidence to suggest that they enjoyed the experience because it was novel to them, as indicated by Daisy in the extract below.

> *Daisy (lines 695-696): I thought it was really fun, the way people think and the way you just do certain things that you won't do every day…and it's nice to just relax…* [I]

There were divided opinions about which were the favourite meditations. Some liked the more energetic meditations, which required them moving around, for example the Kundalini Meditation and the Walking Meditation, and others liked the Body Scan, Drawing and Raisin meditations. Although the majority seemed to engage well with the visualisations, sitting still may have proved challenging as nobody voted for the Mountain and Lake meditations as their favourites.

The majority of the participants stated that they experienced feeling very calm during the meditations.

> *Raj (lines 1384-1385): Well, you feel it and it is really calm and you don't feel stress about anything…well nearly anything…and maybe everything…and it just keeps everything off your mind…* [I]

Although Raj is a little unclear, he does make a connection between being calm and having a clear mind, which for him results in less stress and worry.

4.3 Positive Impact

This main theme explores what the participants noticed about the impact the meditations may have had on them. There are three sub-themes that have been identified which will explore the experience of sharing after each meditation, as well as what they noticed about themselves in general as a result of meditating.

4.3.1 Effects of Sharing

After each meditation the participants were invited to share with the other group members anything they wished to. The researcher gave no direction as to what they might want to talk about. The space was opened, and an invitation to say anything they liked was issued.

It seemed that the overall feeling was that the sharing was a good part of the experience, which served positive functions.

> *Raj (lines 1369-1372): Well, because you get used to being with other people and telling them about it and then you are more confident about speaking publicly…*
>
> *I: Ok…and so you feel confident?*
>
> *Raj: Yes.*
>
> *I: So, did you find you spoke more in class?*
>
> *Raj: A lot more.* [I]

In this transcript, Raj was talking about the impact the group sharing after each exercise had on him. Although it could be argued that the researcher here asked a somewhat leading question, the emphasis in Raj's answer was surprising, and perhaps indicated that this was a genuine impact he felt the sharing part of the meditation had had on his confidence.

A couple of participants liked being able to share their feelings after each group as illustrated by Katie and Charlie below:

> *Katie: It was quite good because sometimes… I am one to be known for keeping things up inside me, so it was quite good to be able to express your feelings, but in a good way.* [I]

> *Charlie: Yeah, just to let you al the feelings and they wouldn't be stuffed up inside you all day…so it was quite nice.* [G]

Other participants said that it was nice to hear about other people's experiences.

> *Ben: So you know who you are with. So you get to know what people think about better and I think that's good.* [I]

Ben's opinion seemed to point to a function of getting to know people better, how they think and perhaps what they are about. Other participants enjoyed hearing about the experiences of others, perhaps to be able to compare and normalise their own experiences.

> *Rose: Umm, it was nice to see what other people think about each thing…and it was nice to see what other people experienced as well…* [I]

The word "weird" was used a lot during the sharing, and one participant suggested that the rules and boundaries that were agreed upon created a safe space to talk about "weird" experiences.

> *Jack: It was good because you knew that you could trust people around you and that if you said something, it wouldn't be embarrassing… you knew they wouldn't tell anyone else…* [I]

Overall, this sub-theme appears to suggest that the sharing part of the meditation had several positive effects such as to increase confidence,

normalise experiences, get to know fellow students better and relief in expressing and externalising feelings.

4.3.2 Effect on feelings

This sub-theme refers to both physical and emotional feelings that the participants expressed. The two words used by almost everyone at some point during their interviews was "calm" and "relaxed".

> *Raj (lines 184-1385)): Well, you feel it and it is really calm and you don't feel stress about anything…well nearly anything…and maybe everything…and it just keeps everything off your mind…* [I]

Although Raj is a little unclear, he seems to make a connection between being calm and having a clear mind, which for him results in less stress and worry. Other participants make this connection also, reporting that meditation produces a calm and peaceful state of mind, and the ability to release stuff from the mind.

> *Jade (lines 405-406): I think that everyone should have the experience of doing meditation so that they can get themselves all calm and relaxed.* [I]

There also seemed to be an overall consensus that there were differences to how they normally feel, and they believe that this was a result of meditating as illustrated by Katie:

> *Katie (lines 1166-1167)): Well, after I had done it…I felt really, really, calm, like nothing could almost make me feel like fidgety or agitated or anything like that….* [I]

Katie's account was particularly striking as it emphasised the feeling of calmness, and the words she used to describe it had a very physical quality and she described herself as very stable, grounded, and almost unmovable. This seemed to be quite a different experience for Katie (see section 4.4.1).

4.3.3 Increase in Sensory Awareness

Throughout the transcripts, there were many examples of how the participants appeared to experience sensations more vividly than usual:

> *Charlie (1077-1082): Ummm…it made me concentrate, when we were doing the raisin, it made you…it made it suddenly more tasteful and made it look a bit more fascinating than if…you wouldn't just go up to a raisin and start staring at it usually…and when you do, it's quite odd at first, but then you see that there's tiny little wrinkles in it and it's a bit more interesting than just going up to it and just eating it…and then you …I believe it tastes a lot more. [G]*

> *Simon: Well, with normal raisins, you just put them in your mouth, you just taste the juice… but if you do it in a meditation way, you taste it, you feel it, you smell it, you do everything… [G]*

The raisin exercise appeared to provoke a lot of surprise in the intensity of the taste, and also the difference in taste between the two raisins and delight in the discovery that raisins had a noise.

> *Leo (lines 308-1390): I didn't realise that you could actually feel how heavy your body was and now I know… I don't know how…I did feel more heavy. Now I know that I can feel how heavy I am when I'm lying down. [G]*

This participant described his experience of his body during the Body Scan exercise, and gave the impression that he discovered an aspect of his body that he was previously unaware.

The children also noticed that they felt bodily sensations in many of the meditations they took part in. Some expressed tingling sensations, feeling a difference in temperature, both in the room and in the body.

> *Philip (lines 1355-1356): Umm, it was very relaxing…umm…when we did our toes, my toes kind of tingled a bit…and so did my fingers… [G]*

Charlie: (lines 1015-1017): Yeah, I felt when were doing the mountains…I really did feel like I was a mountain. I felt like if a mountain where it's cold on the top…I felt quite cold…my head felt quite cold…It was quite unusual… [I]

Philip (lines 465-466)): Well, one thing was when the bell rang, I sort of felt like…it felt quite weird because the vibration…and it felt like I was shaking…. [G]

Philip described his experience of the Bell in Space Meditation where he reported feeling the vibration of the bell in his body in the form of shaking.

Ben (Lines 931-932): *It was fine and relaxing because most of the times in my life there is lots of noises, but in here there wasn't really any noise.* [I]

Throughout Ben's transcript he referred to noise being very present in his life. Earlier in the interview Ben had referred to sound being more pronounced when he meditated, but meditation seemed to have given him an experience of less noise. He referred to his life as being noisy, which perhaps meant a busy and hectic life. Meditation appears to have been a good experience for him and an opportunity to create space and a break from the noise.

In summary of this main theme, it appears that overall the children seem to be aware that meditation had a calming and relaxing effect on them and that this was a positive effect. Some children also appeared to express that other outcomes they noticed was an increase in their confidence, which allowed them to better engage in class, and a heightened awareness of their experiences through their senses. The sharing afterwards seemed to form an important part of the meditation practice where they could safely talk about their feelings without fear of ridicule and thereby normalise their experiences.

4.4 Effects on Self Awareness and Identity

Following the previous theme of the overall positive impact that meditation appeared to have, the next theme explores any wider effects on how children view themselves. There are two aspects that are explored which consist of the possibility of new discoveries and confirmation of current self-view. These themes are clearly linked, as knowledge of current identity is needed to be able to observe and notice a contrast.

4.4.1 Access to view of present self-experience

This sub-theme refers to how meditation helped the participants observe and notice themselves, and their ways of being. During the interviews, many participants were able to express their experience and compare and contrast with how they experience themselves and how perhaps their families experience them in their daily lives. Meditation seemed to give them opportunity to make observations. Katie offers a view that perhaps people have told her before, as someone who finds talking about her feelings difficult.

> *Katie: I am one to be known for keeping things up inside me….* [I]
>
> *Daisy: That was one of my favourites because I'm always quite lively and sporty. I like being energetic.* [I]

Daisy has a strong view of herself as full of energy and she confirms her enjoyment of this way of being. There is another part in her transcript where she talks about her family being similar which may point to an awareness of strong family identity of this nature.

A view that was offered by many of the participants was that meditation could allow them to explore different facts of themselves, whilst being themselves.

The concepts of 'being yourself' seemed important to the participants. Natural was a word that was used frequently.

> *Katie: …it is just a really god way that you calm down, but be yourself.* [I]
>
> *Susie: I felt calm, peaceful and natural… [G]*

4.4.1 Access to different experiences of self

Some of the children were able to experience aspects of themselves that were perhaps more unusual. They reported, as seen in the previous theme, that being calm and relaxed was a positive effect, and Daisy gives a good illustration of how this is a rare occurrence for her and what she makes of it.

> *Daisy (lines 780-781): …but it's still nice just to see how it is just being really calm, because I'm never actually really calm.* [I]

Daisy does not seem to have a view of herself as someone who is calm, but through meditation she has managed to experience herself as someone who is capable of moments of calmness. This seemed to be a good experience for Daisy. A similar experience was reported by Peter:

> *Peter: At home I usually seem really like…like really…eyes open and like really hyper, but due to meditating I wasn't actually that much… [G]*

Philip seemed to see himself in a different light and discover something new about himself.

> *Philip: …when I was doing the drawing, I never thought I would have done that…* [I]

This main theme refers to meditation's possible effects on the participant's sense of identity and self-awareness. As the majority of the participants were

able to reflect on their processes and understand their experiences, it seems plausible that over a period of time, meditation could have beneficial effects on their identity and in turn allow them function better. This will be explored in the next theme.

4.5 Improved Functioning

This main theme refers to the children's view of how the effects of meditation may be helpful to achieve goals and to transform experiences into positive ones.

4.5.1 A helpful skill

This sub-theme is closely linked to the other sub-themes in this category. This is because the children were able to make links between how skills learned in meditation may be helpful in different contexts and result in a greater sense of self-efficacy.

> *Katie: …and quite a good experience just to be able to sit there and… and just do something that makes you much calmer…and like probably help you with something or maybe when you go back to class being able to focus properly on what you are actually meant to be doing.* [I]

Other children did talk of feeling calmer and using meditation to not feel so stressed about tests (eg. Charlie, lines 1064-1074). Paul in the below extract, described how meditation helped him concentrate on what he was doing and not be distracted by others.

Paul: It's like concentrating on…what you're doing…so it's really helpful like…not what other people are doing, I don't know what they're doing when I'm doing meditation…but I know what I'm doing…. [I]

Although he does not relate this to anything specific outside of meditation, he does appear to find this helpful in some way and taking this interpretation

further, it is clear how meditation might be a way of him being able to focus and concentrate better in class.

These examples show that the children are able see how some of the principles can be applied to their lives in different ways and be helpful to them.

Several participants mentioned meditation as helpful in relation to undertaking a difficult task or experiencing a difficult emotion (for example in the above section).

Simon (Lines 342-344): *It was nice, but when it was like…something that was hard and it was like…when we were doing something particularly difficult or you are getting annoyed or something…it was nice to just like…it was nice to have meditation and like…to have time out a bit…* [I]

From the above extract, it seems likely that Simon was referring to a time in class when he left to take part in the daily meditation at some point during the two week data collection. This points to an important insight where he is able to see that meditation could be used as a 'time out' function or tool to help him through difficulties, both practical and emotional.[2]

> *Hannah: Yeah, because all of them made you relax because it made you think and concentrate…* [I]
>
> *Raj: …but with meditation it makes you calmer so you are more confident to do stuff…* [I]

There also seemed to be an overall view that meditation is a tool to make you relaxed and calm so it allows for more resources to be directed at the difficult task in hand. This shows greater functioning and therefore, as Raj suggests, increases confidence.

[2] See Appendix 11 for Extract from Refelective Journal relating to this.

Other functions of meditation that were mentioned related to emotional states of that it helps release feelings, helps you worry less and makes you calmer. Furthermore, one participant mentioned that it could serve in schools as a method for the teachers to use to balance the atmosphere of a classroom.

Sarah (lines 821-825): …I think we should have it…if everyone is really lively when they come in from lunch because my teacher called Miss (name of teacher) is always telling us to calm down and everything. Or if we're all really sleepy in the morning I do think we could take turns and like you have to jump about everywhere. [I]

These examples show how the participants were able to see how meditation could be helpful for them in different ways. They told me that it could be used as a tool to help deal with difficult situations or emotions and that it could help them improve their performance at school, in class and in tests. Furthermore, meditation appeared to be an opportunity to have a break from hectic and busy lives.

4.5.2 Applicable across contexts

Overall, the participants were able to make links to how the application of meditation skills may be beneficial in other contexts such as at school, to manage emotions in difficult situations

> *Simon (lines 389-390): It would be good if you could…like…do it just before a test…like to check your brain just before a test….* [I]
>
> *Louise (lines 383-386): …and you can really calm down…*
> *Ash: and then you can think about your ideas…and you can spend half of your time thinking of ideas.*
> *Louise: …and you can check your work…* [G]

The three participants in Group Interview 2, talked about meditation as something they could do to help them at school. Simon mentions 'checking the brain' before a test, and presumably to help him do better in the test,

perhaps by being able to focus the brain (or mind). Louise and Ash talked how being calm may help boost creativity as perhaps mental capacity is made available.

> *Charlie: Well when we were playing football and stuff…I was a lot more… well I wasn't so confident with people… I wasn't… I just calmed down a bit more. If someone was winding me up or something, I wouldn't lash out at them, I would just calm myself down again and then leave them alone.* [I]

Charlie seems to have experienced through meditation a method to control his mood and behaviour and made the link that this is something that could be useful in other contexts with potential for positive outcome.

4.5.3 Increased Self-Efficacy

The participants were asked whether they had noticed any differences in themselves outside of meditation. Some participants expressed that meditation enabled (or could enable) them to alter their current state of mind or state of being in a way that might be useful to them. This was illustrated particularly well by Katie in the following extracts:

Katie (lines: 1198-1201) …I had got maybe angry in the morning, I would really, really try to concentrate like hard, so because I knew that… it would be hopefully calm me down, so I could go out at school… and maybe with my sister…or something like who I had the argument with…just stay calm with her…just be normal with…. [I]

Katie seemed a little muddled here, but there is a sense that she could see that concentrating on something might, through distraction, alter her mood. She appeared to be aware of an ability to induce calmness, which then may influence her mood in a difficult situation, such as arguing with her sister. She seemed to realise that skills learned in meditation may help her to transform her mood and perhaps avoid negative consequence.

Charlie (lines 1088-1090): If someone was winding me up or something…I wouldn't lash out at them, I would just calm myself down again and then leave them alone. [I]

Katie (lines 1255-1257): Oh today is going to be a good day because I know that I will be able to go and calm down in a room and I will be able to enjoy my day more. [I]

Both Charlie and Katie gave the impression of awareness that meditation could help them gain a sense of control over their emotions by calming them down, and enabling them to decide on a better response in difficult situations. There seems to be a heightened sense of self-efficacy, a sense of control and ability to change feelings and behaviours with positive outcomes. It seems important to both of these participants to be able to go and calm down.

Throughout this section, it is evident some aspect of learning seemed to take place during the two week experience of meditation. The participants appeared to make important links between the effects of meditation and how they may be applicable to other contexts. The children also seemed to visualise themselves as more effective and able to exert some control in difficult situations they normally might feel powerless in, and overall this may lead to better functioning in their lives.

4.6. Summary

This chapter presented the views of the children who participated in meditation exercises for this study. The themes presented pointed to a journey where a mental activity seemed to start engagement in a process. This process includes experiences that appear to have been evaluated by the participants as uncomfortable and positive. The immediate outcome of this process was positive, as no participants seemed to report any negative or uncomfortable outcomes. In other words, despite the participants experiencing uncomfortable feelings during the process, the outcome is reported as positive. Whilst understanding the wider effects of meditation, it seems that the children were able to explore and perhaps understand other

aspects of themselves in relation to other people's experiences through the sharing at the end of each meditation. This served to increase self-awareness and identity. This self-knowledge seemed also to link to a vision that the children expressed of being able to function better by utilising skills learned in meditation in different settings so that they can achieve goals, manage their feelings and therefore stand a better chance of achieving a more positive outcome for themselves in their lives. Fig. 1 below shows the links between the themes discovered.

Stage 1: The Actual Process of Meditation.

Initially, the *Mental Activity* of focus and concentration allowed them to engage in a *Process* that included the experience of *Positive Experiences* and *Uncomfortable Experiences,* both emotional and physical.

Stage 2: The Immediate Impact of Meditation.

The children described the immediate impact of meditation as a *Positive Impact*. This included the sub-themes of positive *Effects of Sharing,* an *Increase in Sensory Perception and* positive *Effects of Feelings* such as calmness and relaxation.

Stage 3: Longer Term Impacts of Meditation.

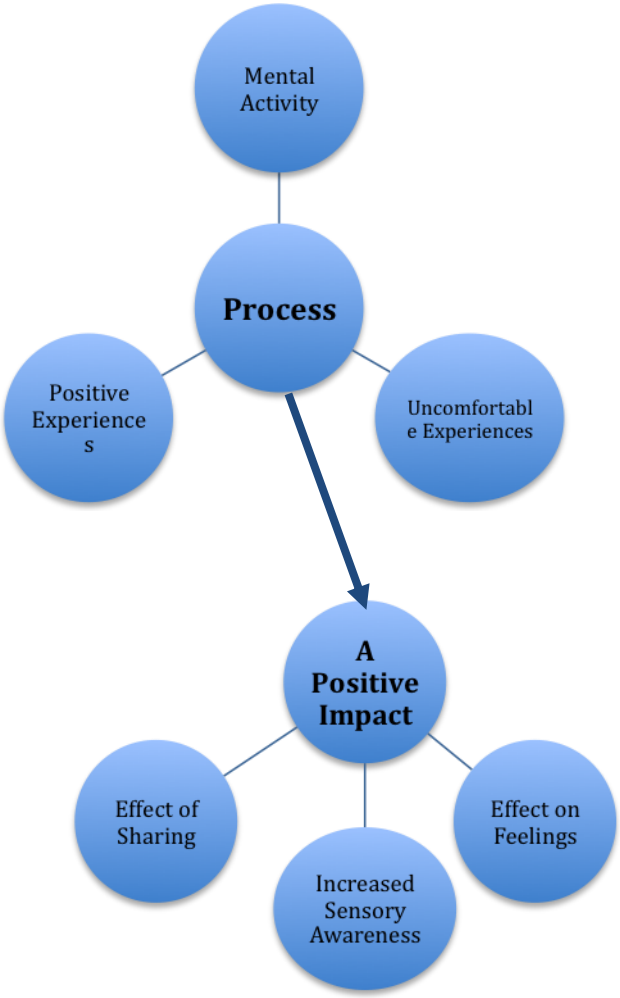
The above two stages appeared to be influential in two longer term impacts that were described. The first was the possible *Effect on Self-Awareness/Identity* through *Access to Present Self-Experience* and *Access to Different Self-Experience*. The other longer term impact involved a potential for *Improved Functioning* as they discovered that they could use meditation as *A Helpful Skill* to cope with their emotions in situations *Across Contexts* which ultimately may result in an *Increased* sense of *Self-Efficacy.*

These results will be discussed in relation to theory, existing literature and the research questions in the next chapter.

Figure 1: An Analysis of Children's Perspectives of Meditation

Stage 1:

The Actual Process of Meditation

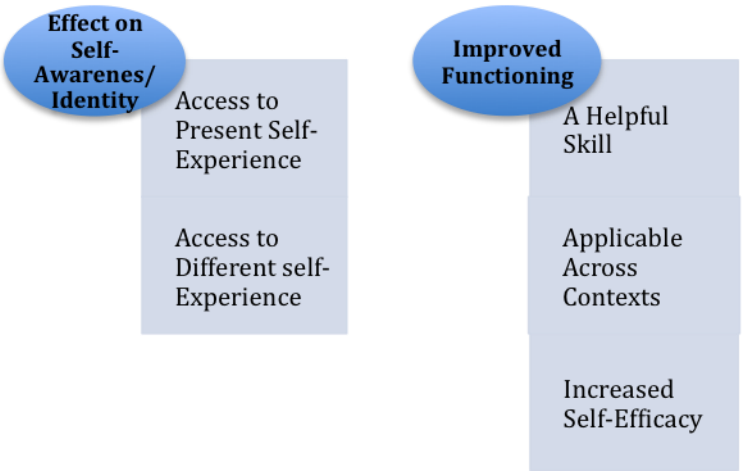


Stage 2:

The Immediate Impact of Meditation

Stage 3:

Longer Term Impacts of Meditation



5. DISCUSSION

This study explored children's perspectives of meditation by asking them about their experiences and how they understood them. A brief summary of the study's key findings will be presented. They will then be considered in relation to each of the research questions, and explored in more detail in the context of the literature. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the study will be discussed, and implications for counselling psychology practice and future research will be presented.

5.1 Key Findings

19 children, aged 9-10 years old, took part in a series of 10-minute meditations held daily for nine consecutive school days. They were then interviewed about their experiences, eleven participants individually, and eight participants in two groups of four. These interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed using Thematic Analysis, the process of which was described in Braun & Clarke (2006).

Four main themes for the analysis were derived from the participants' accounts of their experiences and perceptions of meditation. These were labelled as follows: Process of Meditation, A Positive Impact, Effects on Self-Awareness and Identity, Improved Functioning.

The first main theme described the Process of Meditation as perceived by the participants. Although none of the participants had experienced meditation before, they had all heard of it, and had ideas in their mind about what it might be. These expectations were, for the majority of participants, different from what they actually experienced. The participants seemed to understand that it was the

quality of mind brought to the activity that appeared to set meditation apart from just doing the activity (i.e., just eating the raisin). They identified these qualities as focus and concentration, and concluded that meditation was an active process rather than a passive process of quietly sitting cross-legged, which was their original perception, and that it felt different to ordinary relaxation such as sleep. As they engaged with trying to focus their minds and concentrate on the activity, they seemed to become aware of uncomfortable feelings as they struggled to resist natural urges to fidget, and as they struggled to keep their minds focused. Alongside these difficulties, the participants also told me that they had positive experiences, in that they thought the activities were fun and exciting. However, this may have been due to the novel experience, and a few of the participants mentioned that they might find it boring after a while.

The second main theme identified the immediate positive overall impact that they described. They particularly seemed to enjoy the sharing aspect of the experience, as they were able to compare and normalise experiences with other group members, as well as share their private feelings without fear of being ridiculed. This seemed to increase their confidence. The general feelings that the meditations seemed to elicit were those of calm and relaxation. The participants also expressed great delight in the discoveries that they made through increases in sensory perception. The interesting point about this theme is that, despite the fact that the process of meditation included uncomfortable experiences, they were not reported as part of the outcome or immediate impact.

The third and fourth main themes concerned the possible wider effects of meditation. Meditation appeared to allow the participants to experience themselves, confirming familiar facets and exploring new, less experienced facets of their characters and personalities. This may have longer-term effects on their self-awareness and identity development, as they are able to explore and reflect on their experiences. The fourth main theme told the story of how meditation

could be a useful skill to utilise in different contexts to influence their mood and concentration and promote a better outcome. It could also have the wider effect of increasing their sense of being able to exert a higher level of control and influence in their own lives.

A key finding of this analysis points to the process of gaining a better life experience for the participants through continued practice.

These four themes represent an overall view of the children's perception of meditation and possible effects and outcomes. A more detailed discussion will follow below, in the light of the research questions, and including links to the literature.

5.2 Links to Research

5.2.1 The process of meditation

The participants described their experience of mindfulness as something that you were active in 'doing', and that this provided a different type of relaxation (described as alert and energetic calmness) than what would normally be experienced in, for example, watching TV or just before going to sleep (described as sluggish, tired calmness). Early experiments in EEG (Electroencephalographic) studies (e.g. Kasamatsu & Hiri, 1966) reported that meditative states are different to sleep states, and suggested that meditation was a physiological twilight condition between waking and sleeping (Fenwick et al., 1977). Recent findings (Cahn & Polich, 2006) observed decreases in alpha coherence in drowsiness and increases in theta and alpha coherence above baseline resting wakefulness commonly found during meditation. In other words, there appears to be a difference in EEG studies between sleep and meditation in

that different brainwave activity can be observed. The subjective findings in the present study support the notion that sleep and meditation are not equivalent states.

When using self-report measures and a comparable active control, no significant difference was found (Jain et al., 2007). However, as discussed in the literature review, the exercises carried out in the relaxation and meditation intervention groups were both extremely similar (e.g. Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique vs Body Scan), and both contained the same degree of required active concentration. This may be a reason why similar effects were found. In the present study, however, the children seemed to experience a difference.

The overall pattern of the participants' responses when they considered their experiences of meditation was the description of a mentally active process of focusing and concentration. They seemed to be aware that it is the quality of the attention that it brought to the activity that differentiates meditation from relaxation. This appears to fit with Jon Kabat-Zinn's (1994) definition of mindfulness, where the quality of the attention applied is highlighted. Many of the children said they were 'concentrating hard', which implied that they were trying not to let their minds wander off. In other words, they were trying to remain present in the moment by focusing their attention and they were doing this purposefully through determined action.

Linden (1973) appears to be the only existing study that mentions the phrase 'relaxed alertness', which is similar to the characteristic 'alert calmness' which was used by Katie (lines 1236-1242) to describe the quality behind the active nature of meditation. 'Relaxed alertness' was used to characterise the moment by moment flow of ongoing process and bodily experience, which further embodies the notion of connectivity. This shows that Katie may have been describing this particular process in terms of her experience of meditation. These

descriptions appear to capture an important aspect of the quality of attention brought to mindfulness.

Engaging in mindfulness meditation through focusing the mind seemed to give rise to other experiences, some of which may have been unwanted. The majority of the participants voiced some level of discomfort as they tried to control their minds and stop themselves from fidgeting (although there were no explicit instruction to do so). There is little mention of uncomfortable experiences in the research literature, even in the qualitative literature. Several participants in the grounded theory study by Mason & Hargreaves (2001) also reported difficulties with fidgeting, trying to control the mind, and feeling that they were not doing what they were supposed to do. The participants found that these initial negative experiences decreased with ongoing practice, as they realised they had unrealistic expectations of themselves and managed to alter their perspective.

Shapiro (1992) found that 62.9% of his sample of 27 long-term meditators reported adverse effects before and after meditation. These included 'relaxation-induced anxiety and panic, paradoxical increases in tension, less motivation in life, boredom, pain, impaired reality testing, confusion and disorientation, feeling 'spaced out', depression, increased negativity, becoming more judgemental and feeling addicted to meditation (p. 290). However, these seem to describe outcomes rather than experiences during the process.

Considering this, as mindfulness increases the awareness of internal states, a heightened awareness of uncomfortable experiences would follow. This could even be regarded as an essential part of the process. Being able to experience the impermanence of these experiences would provide an important element of learning and growth as the element of non-judgemental observation increases.

One way of transforming uncomfortable experiences is by the notion of acceptance, which is a proposed underlying mechanism of mindfulness (Baer, 2003). Acceptance generates the ability to tolerate, or even approach, unwanted internal experiences rather than avoid them (which can often maintain unpleasant states such as anxiety). Unwanted feelings such as boredom are part of the meditation experience, and they give an opening to see how difficult or unwanted situations are dealt with, and an opportunity to transcend them. Acceptance is one of the core skills developed in Mindfulness Meditation, through mindful attention to internal experiences. These adverse experiences may therefore be an essential part of the meditation practice. Acceptance is believed to be one of the main processes related to positive change in psychological functioning (Orzech et al., 2009).

The ability to notice the mind and its behaviour is a key mindfulness skill, and being able to bring it gently back to focus is an important component in training the mind. Chambers et al. (2007) suggests that sustained attention and the ability to switch attentional focus between stimuli both have a significant positive impact on attentional control with a non-clinical sample. Tang & Posner (2009) suggests a model where an untrained mind oscillates between a state of mind-wandering at one extreme, and mental fatigue (experienced as efforts of control over the mind is exerted) at the other extreme. Daisy's experience (lines 730-733) of frustration, and becoming weary of having to keep on bringing the mind back to focus, also provides subjective evidence for this theory. Daisy's mind was still untrained, and her statement could be seen as her movement between mind wandering and mental fatigue.

Attention training by continuing to exert control over the mind, over time results in an attention balance, at which point optimal performance in cognitive tasks is produced (Tand & Posner, 2009). Research evidence for this is still limited, but some evidence was found that children with ADHD, after five weeks of training,

showed areas of brain activity that had changed in an fMRI study (Westerberg & Klingberg, 2007). Furthermore resisting the attention pull of 'background noise', and maintaining focus on an object or process, has also been shown to increase a general disposition to perceive and think in an articulated manner (as opposed to a non analytic manner) in children (Linden, 1973), as measured by The Children's Embedded Figures Test (CEFT).

Related to the theme of Uncomfortable Experiences, most of the children were able to observe their attention being pulled away from the focus of the meditation by a mixture of internal and external stimuli. Along with urges to fidget, they reported distractions such as noises outside, and hearing people talk. It has been found that focused attention towards an object naturally incurs a de-selection or inhibition of attention towards an alternative object (Bishop et al., 2004). This inhibition is different from the maladaptive suppression or avoidance of unwanted stimuli. Insufficient inhibitory control (of the adaptive sort) results in attention being hijacked, or pulled by irrelevant internal or external stimuli such as fidgeting or noise as experienced by the participants in this study.

The children in the present study did not express experience of their perspective changing, apart from Raj (lines 1363-1366), when he said he felt stressed and then relaxed. It seemed that some kind of transformation of perception may have happened, although it could be argued that the duration of meditation practice (ie, the two week experience) was not long enough for mindfulness skills to become embedded sufficiently to have such an effect. Being able to notice and express the difficulties experienced, is undoubtedly an important first step in being able to sustain control attention. The ability to reflect on these experiences and non-judgementally accept the feelings that arise in response, rather then attempt to push them away, which is a more common response, is an important second step in facilitating change.

5.2.2 Positive impact

The participants of this study seemed to find mindfulness meditation to be an enjoyable and fun experience. They appeared to enjoy the variety of activities that could be included in meditation, and finding it surprising that meditation could involve much more than sitting quietly in the lotus position. They also expressed preference for the physically active and more sensory focused meditations, rather than the contemplative, which seemed developmentally appropriate. Semple et al., (2005) discovered that it was challenging for young children to sit and observe their breath for more than three to five minutes.

The raisin exercise in particular seemed to open their minds to experiencing familiar objects in a new way, and they found this fascinating. Through its association with higher quality sensory experiences such as those evoked in the raisin exercise, mindfulness has been found to enhance well-being. Individuals whose attention was focused on the sensory experience of eating chocolate reported more pleasure than those engaged in a distraction task whilst eating chocolate (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

The raisin exercise is often used as a safe introductory exercise to mindfulness as a first step to open the mind to familiar stimuli, and thereby start the journey of discovery. The children's insights and enthusiasm for the raisin exercise in particular also indicated that there is a potential for learning that a more mindful approach to many situations may result in unexpected experiences. In this sense, the participants experienced something new to add to their existing perceptions of both themselves and of other objects. Leo mentioned discovering how heavy his body felt, and Philip talked about how he felt physical vibrations during the bell exercise.

Many of the participants also described noticing bodily sensations such as tingling, vibrating or a temperature difference in the room or in certain parts of their bodies. None of the few qualitative studies of mindfulness that exists in the literature has focused on this aspect of meditation, and only one has mentioned Enhanced Sensory Experience as a theme that emerged in a single case study of a 17 year old female (Delbridge & Lubbe, 2009). It may be that research questions have not been concerned with this aspect in either qualitative or quantitative studies. One article (Murdock, (1978) which, described a teacher's experience of facilitating regular meditation in with children in schools, did report bodily sensations such as tingling. Fredrickson (2009) suggests that being in the moment to savour positive sensory experiences is not only enjoyable, but also elicits positive emotions that feed into overall well-being.

Connecting to the body and being able to observe sensations in the body was a key aspect of the practice that Jon Kabat-Zinn carried out with his patients suffering with chronic pain. However, the bodily sensations experienced in that context were more likely to be ones of pain, as opposed to those reported in this study, which could be interpreted as pleasurable. Being able to feel and accept bodily sensations, whether they are pleasant or painful, is a mindfullness skill. The children in this study showed an ability to observe, report and reflect upon their bodily sensations.

All of the participants mentioned how meditation had made them feel calm and relaxed. Although this is not an aim of mindfulness meditation, it is this outcome that initially attracted Western psychologists to the concept. Interest in other outcomes of mindfulness developed, as well as the desire to reveal the underlying processes that contribute to these outcomes. Cahn & Polich (2006) report that the short-term changes that occur as a result of meditation are shown to include a deep sense of calm, peacefulness, cessation, or slowing of

the mind's internal dialogue. Raj suggested that having a clear mind results in less stress and worry (lines 1384-1385).

Few other studies appear to mention the obvious finding that mindfulness generates a sense of calm in the mind and bodily relaxation. This may be because these aspects are assumed if mindfulness has already been shown to reduce psychological symptoms of depression and anxiety, and therefore they are not explicitly mentioned in research studies. However, mindfulness has been shown to have an important role in increasing well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003), which was confirmed by Collard et al. (2008), using well-known positive psychology self-report measures. Huppert & Johnson (2010) completed a pilot study at two boys' schools in Tonbridge and Hampton, where they taught mindfulness skills to the students. A significant increase in well-being was reported. Furthermore, students who were found to be initially low in emotional stability (i.e., anxious or neurotic) seemed to benefit the most.

One key finding of this study is the impact that sharing after each meditation appeared to have on the children who took part. They described several functions this part of the meditation seemed to have, which included normalising experiences, increasing confidence in speaking in front of people, and getting to know fellow students better which seemed to create a sense of inclusion and belonging. One of the major criticisms of the efficacy studies that have been carried out is that group effects have not been controlled for. The present study replicates other similar qualitative findings (e.g. Mason & Hargreaves, 2001 and Langdon et al., 2011),that suggest that group support has an important function. It was found that the support of the group helped participants keep up home practice, and offered a safe space in which to learn skills and benefit from the experience of others. In light of these findings, it is important that qualitative studies control for group effects and therapeutic alliance, as it may be shown

that mindfulness could be less responsible for positive change than originally thought.

5.2.3 Effects on self-awareness and identity

Self-Awareness is defined as the capacity to focus attention on the self as an object and thus to self-evaluate (Silva & O'Brien, 2004) This study implied that mindfulness could have a wider impact on how the children may gain self-awareness by exploring different facets of themselves. There were many examples in the transcripts of how mindfulness seemed to confirm the children's present view of themselves, and also enable them to become aware of other facets of themselves by participating in different kinds of meditation. Daisy voiced a preference for energetic and active meditation, as she was aware of her lively personality. She also experienced what it was like to be calm, which she reflected was a rare occurrence.

The concept of identity appears to be changing, as it no longer appears to be something rigid according to social background, religion, or family, but something that is more flexible, and in constant development as rapid changes in society demand a readiness for change from individuals (Skårderud, 1999). Mindfulness seemed to help the participants make sense of themselves by allowing exposure to their own internal worlds and a safe space to reflect on their experiences. Children are frequently pushed and pulled in directions based on cultural or familial conditioning. Shapiro el al. (2006) suggest that self-awareness and identity development can help children to make decisions that are driven by what is important in the context of independent thoughts and feelings. How children make sense of themselves in the context of the world they experience is of great interest to counselling psychologists working with children,

as this knowledge can assist children choose behaviours according to their own needs and values.

The ability to 'reflectively choose' instead of 'reflexively adopt' (Shapiro et al., 2006, p. 380) behaviours would increase the potential to facilitate appropriate change and increase functioning levels in an individual.

5.2.4 Improved functioning

There seemed to be an understanding by the participants in this study about how the skills learned in meditation could be helpful in other contexts. Several children suggested that meditating before important tasks such as tests or being creative might be helpful in terms of initiating a sense of calm and focus on the task. This replicates anecdotal findings in Lee et al. (2008) where the children discovered that they could use breathing exercises to alleviate tension before an exam. In addition, Fisher (2006) argues that meditation is a proven means to still the mind and therefore provide optimum conditions for creative thinking. In this study, Simon also suggested that mindfulness could have a 'time out' function to help when difficult tasks become frustrating. A technique taught in MBCT as 'The Three Minute Breathing Space suggests that problems such as anxiety can be dealt with directly and as they are developing (Segal et al., 2002).

Furthermore, the participants described how meditation can reduce distractibility, by 'being able to focus on what you are actually meant to be doing' (Katie, line 1213). It is suggested by the participants themselves in this study that mindfulness meditation helps to control attention by developing the ability to focus sustained attention on specific stimuli and inhibiting non-important stimuli. The duration of meditation practice seems to be related to the improvements in multiple aspects of attention, which in other words include sensitivity,

concentration, openness to experience, and the ability to inhibit distracting stimuli (Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007). This supports the findings of the present study that the participants have some understanding of the role meditation can play in enhancing their performance at school. There is further evidence for this in the evaluation mindfulness programmes that have been piloted in schools. Biegel & Brown, (2010) found that children improved their scores on a cognitive control measure (ANT-C), and that effects were still evident three months later. Furthermore, mindfulness skills have endless possibilities when extending the concepts from therapeutic possibilities. Jones (2011) suggests that mindfulness for some children may be about how they manage anxiety and stress, but for others it may be about how they practice music, play on the field, or maintain concentration during homework.

Another key finding of this study was the evidence of an increasing sense of self-efficacy that was reported by some participants. Self-efficacy is the belief held by an individual about their ability to perform an action or achieve a goal successfully (Bandura, 1995), as well as a sense of autonomy and mastery over the environment. It appeared that being able to apply mindfulness skills in other contexts gave the children in this study a sense of being influential and more in control in their own lives, and therefore being able to influence a better outcome. Rosenfield (1992) discovered an association between a low sense of personal control and lower general psychological well-being, especially amongst disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, low levels of autonomy, and low self-esteem, are likely to lead to poorer health (Marmot, 2003).

In this study, Katie mentioned how another aspect of mindfulness may be helpful. She described how the knowledge that she was able to calm herself down when she needs to through focusing seems to have given her a sense of control over her mood, and has provided the possibility of altering her subsequent behaviour towards her sister. Charlie also mentioned how, since her

meditations began, she didn't lash out as much when people were winding her up. They both appeared to report an increasing internal locus of control with regards to their emotions and their subsequent behaviour towards other people. Heppner & Kernis (2007) report that people with a high but fragile self-esteem can be quick to engage in self-protective and self-enhancing strategies, including aggressive behaviour. Mindfulness has been shown to reduce such reactivity to threat and lower aggressive behaviour. One theory is that awareness through mindfulness results in outcomes characterized by low levels of ego involvement, and is less likely to resort to aggressive behaviour to restore a damaged self-image. Some evidence has been found for this theory, as the mindfulness appears to be negatively correlated with self-reported aggression (Heppner & Kernis, 2007), but more research is needed to replicate these findings. It might be difficult to attribute significant findings such as these after a relatively short mindfulness experience, such as that administrated in the present study. However, promising research conducted by Heppner & Kernis (2007) found that, after a very short exposure to mindfulness in the form of eating a raisin mindfully, participants displayed less aggressive behaviour when receiving social rejection feedback, compared with participants who did not take part in the mindfulness experience. The experiences reported by Katie and Charlie above appear to corroborate these findings.

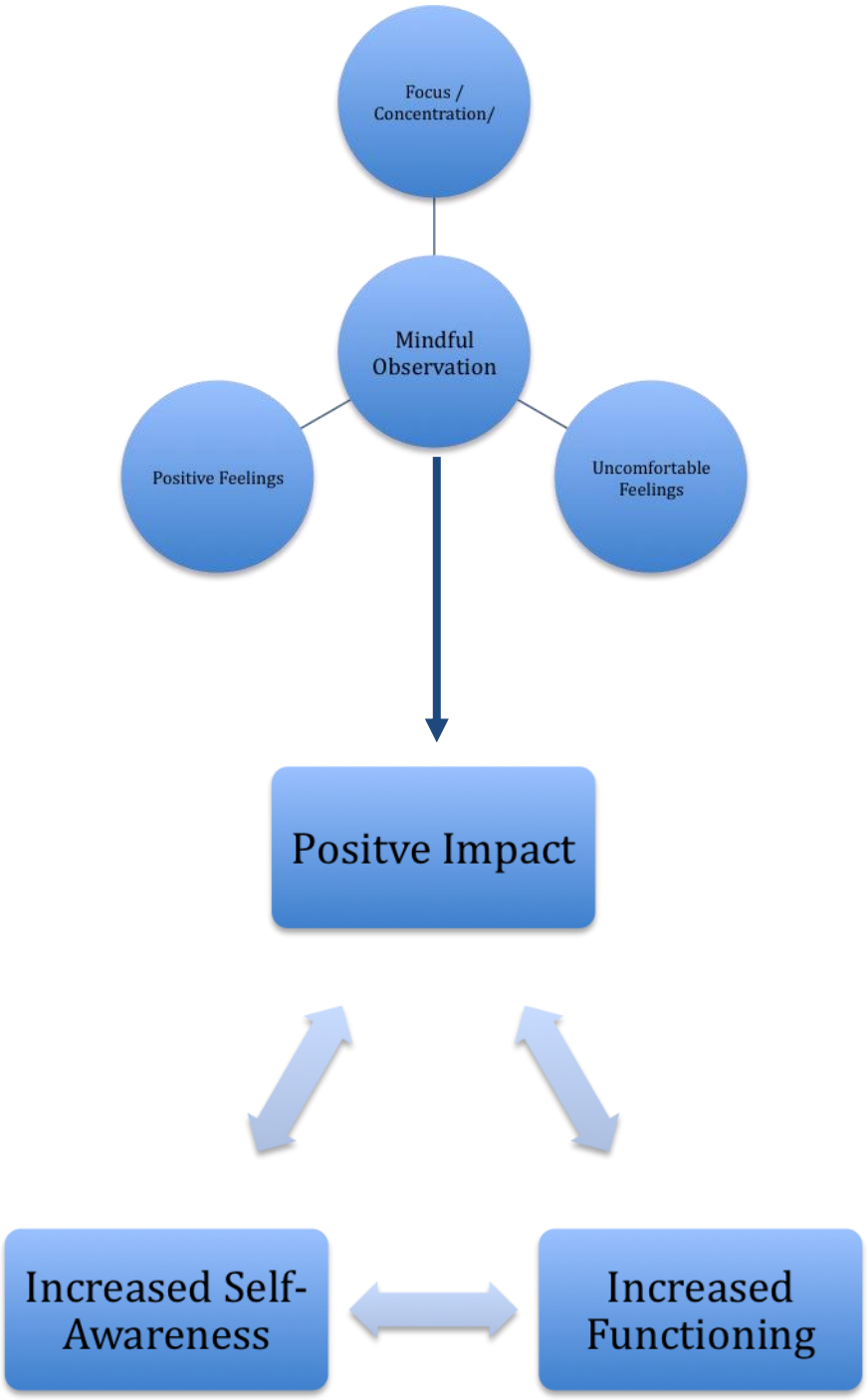
5.3 A Proposed Model of Psychological Endurance

A summary of the findings, as presented in figure 1, p. 83, could be depicted in three major stages. Stage 1 concerned the children's experience of the actual process of meditation. Stage 2, described the immediate impact, and Stage 3 presented indications of wider, longer term outcomes. Mindfulness can be seen as a process that could be beneficial in increasing the quality of life experience of children. This thesis proposes that, given mindfulness practice over time, a

positive cycle would start, which would develop an increasing ability to tolerate demanding life situations. Psychological endurance refers to the ability to tolerate demanding situations and override behaviours driven by uncomfortable emotions (urges to avoid) for a longer term, positive outcome. Figure 2 shows the Psychological Endurance Model in detail.

The mental activity of focus and concentration that is mindfulness would allow engagement in a process that enables uncomfortable as well as positive feelings to arise. The observation and processing of these feelings (both emotional and sensory) occurs during the sharing aspect of the meditation. This results in an immediate positive impact as exposure to and tolerance of uncomfortable feelings increases and the individual becomes less reactive to unhelpful automatic behaviours driven by the desire to avoid unpleasant emotions and attach to positive emotions (Grabovac, et al. 2011). Positive new behaviours, and an enhanced mastery of difficult circumstances, increases the knowledge the individual has of their capabilities, and thereby increases self-awareness. As self-awareness increases, and through regular practice, this in turn allows for more efficient psychological functioning. Resources can be directed to make more appropriate decisions for the future and facilitate change and/or acceptance, instead of being used in avoidance or attachment behaviours. This in turn may increase the probability of a more desirable outcome and improve functioning.

Figure 2: A Proposed Model of Psychological Endurance



This model proposes that, through mindful observation of thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and any urges to attach to or avoid them, an enhanced mode of functioning will follow, providing the ability to make better decisions during difficult circumstances. The tolerance of difficult feelings will therefore increase and promote psychological endurance. In other words, this thesis proposes that the mental activity of mindfulness can increase psychological endurance, and therefore promote resilience to mental illness, using the analogy of the way that the physical activity of exercise increases physical endurance and promotes physical resilience to illness and injury.

The next section will consider this model in the light of existing theories of mindfulness.

5.4 Links to Theory

The proposed model for psychological endurance is a simplistic, macro overview of how active mental processes such as mindfulness use the available resources more efficiently to develop better responses to difficult life situations, and thus increase resilience.

The idea of Reperceiving (Shapiro et al., 2006) suggests how shifts in identity and self-awareness may come about. Being able to observe our experience enables us to see the present moment as it is. In order to observe our experience, a shift occurs which creates a distance between us and our experience and thus creates a move from a subjective perspective to an objective perspective. This shift in perspective increases the capacity for objectivity about one's experience, and results in greater clarity. We become aware that our inner experiences are not fixed and stable, but transient and ever-changing. Grabovac, et al. (2011) refers to this as not-self: one of the three

insights of Buddhist mindfulness practice. The insight of not-self suggests that transient thoughts and feelings do not contain anything that can be called a self or an identity.

Shapiro et al. (2006) also suggests that a continued developmental process occurs through mindfulness practice, which involves moving from constructing the self to de-constructing the self as one becomes aware that we are not our thoughts or our feelings.

The participants in this study suggested that meditation allowed them to discover a different facet of themselves. This seemed to allow them to challenge perspectives that had perhaps been as a result of conditioning from the environment. An example of this is Daisy's observation of herself being really calm seemed to be the opposite of how she normally is. Developmentally, the participants appeared to be in the stage of constructing their subjective selves, as can be seen from the concrete, literal descriptions of themselves that they expressed (such as 'I am an energetic person, I can be calm, I am usually hyper'). Perhaps in order for re-perceiving to take place, one has to have a constructed self-awareness and identity to de-construct.

There is further evidence for re-perceiving being a possible developmental process in this study. The Mountain Meditation and the Lake Meditation were the least favourite meditations. Although they appeared to connect with the visualisations as they described how they felt and what they imagined, it was evident in their sharing they were not able to embody the more abstract qualities of the mountain (such as stability) and the lake (such as depth). Their descriptions remained literal ('My head was cold…'), which suggests that these meditations may have been developmentally inappropriate for this group of participants. Further research would be needed to determine whether this was due to their inexperience of meditation, or whether this may be linked to age.

Grabovac et al. (2011) suggests that uncomfortable experiences are necessary to illuminate the understanding of the three insights central to the Buddhist Psychological Model. When dealing with uncomfortable feelings (physical or emotional) we become aware that trying to avoid them creates more suffering. As we continue to observe discomfort, a shift in perspective occurs as we notice that uncomfortable feelings are impermanent, and that we are not our feelings. This in turn may have a de-stabilising effect, where depressive symptoms and intense negative emotional states may occur. It is suggested that the guidance and support of someone more experienced is very important. The views of the participants of the current study pointed to the sharing after each meditation as being important for normalising the experiences of the group members. This suggests that access to support and a safe space to reflect is important to facilitate the benefits of mindfulness meditation. Controlling for group effects in future efficacy studies of MBCT/MBSR may render the mindfulness component less significant than originally thought. Further research would be needed to determine this.

The field of sports psychology has long known about the benefits of observing uncomfortable experiences. A classic paper by Morgan & Pollock (1977) investigated the psychological strategies of marathon runners. It was found that elite distance runners consistently reported paying close attention (a strategy known as "association") to physiological sensations of exertions such as muscular pain and fatigue, hydration, body temperature and respiration and they were therefore better able to optimise level of pace than non-elite marathon runners (Raglin, 2007). In other words through observation of uncomfortable experiences, their detailed self-knowledge about their physical sensations allowed them to make better decisions about the level of efficiency they could adopt, enabling maximum functioning. Non-elite marathon runners tended to adopt a strategy of "disassociation" whereby they would intentionally distract

themselves fro the discomfort of intense physical exertion. They would also be more likely to "hit the wall", perform below expectation or sustain injury (Raglin, 2007). This suggests that by adopting a mindful approach to running, better performance was likely, and would increase resilience to injury.

This thesis argues that the proposed Psychological Endurance Model gives a good overview of how mindfulness may lead to resilience. The AAI Theory and The Buddhist Psychological Model both give good explanations of the micro processes involved.

5.5 Conclusion in Relation to the Research Questions

5.5.1 What do children say about their experience of meditation?

The participants in this study were able to describe their experiences in great detail. They expressed that meditation could be fun, and that it seemed to involve much more than they originally thought. They were able to identify the mental processes of focus and concentration that made carrying out an activity (such as eating a raisin) a meditation. They also told me that they found that their overall experience of meditation had been a good experience, even though there were aspects that were difficult and uncomfortable. They told me that they found it hard to sit still, and that they felt that it was difficult to try and control their minds (although these were not instructions that had been specified). They also said that it might become boring after a while if they were to continue the same meditations time after time. They seemed to favour the more active and sensory engaged meditations over the visualisations. They expressed great delight at the discoveries they made about raisins and about their bodies.

5.5.2 What are the experiential features of meditation from the perspective of children?

The most common features of meditation that the participants of this study reported were those of calmness and relaxation. Although they had told me that meditation required great effort and activity, the outcome appeared to be positive. They reported a greater awareness of sensory perception, in that they experienced bodily sensations (such as tingling), became aware of distractions, and the physical urges that were challenging to control. This seemed to result in a greater self-awareness and an opportunity to experience their own preferences and reactions for themselves.

5.5.3 What do they say about the perceived effects of meditation?

The children in this study concluded that meditation was a positive overall experience. They were able to see how the principles of meditation could be used in different contexts to influence a more positive outcome for themselves. This was both in regard to managing their mood and managing their state of being. It seemed important to a few of the participants to be able to calm down. Perhaps this is something they are told to do quite often, but without them knowing how they might achieve this. In this sense, meditation appeared to give them a useful skill. The perceived ability to influence their mood and control seemed to increase the children's belief that they could be more influential in the things that happen to them.

The aim of this study was to explore what children say about their experiences of mindfulness meditation, with a view to understanding their perceptions as to whether mindfulness could be beneficial to them.

It has been shown that the benefits of positive psychology interventions such as mindfulness tend to increase with age, perhaps due to greater wisdom (i.e., the ability to apply principles to the wider aspect of one's life), and an ability to more effectively regulate emotional reactions (Sin & Lyubormirsky, 2009). There is also a suggestion that older participants treat mindfulness with greater seriousness and maturity, and apply more effort. The findings of this study, however, show that the children who participated (aged 9-10 years old) were committed, able to make links between meditation and their life in general, and able to see how meditation could benefit them in terms of managing emotions, improving performance, developing concentrations skills and generating an overall feeling of relaxation and well-being. Mindfulness interventions, for these reasons, should not be limited to the adult population. It may be suggested that that the benefits increase with age due to the fact that more adversity is experienced with age, rather than an increasing wisdom and ability to apply the principles. Nonetheless, a logical conclusion would be that frequent and long-term practice would increase perceived positive outcomes in terms of well-being.

Another aim was to determine the feasibility of carrying out mindfulness interventions with children by gaining insight to their experiences. It could be argued that, whilst long-term benefits and changes would need much longer to consolidate, the purpose of this study was to see whether children were able to engage and derive any benefit from a short-term intervention in order to inform future research. From the results of this study, it can be seen that children of 9-10 years of age had sufficient observational and reflective skills to be able to make sense of their experiences of mindfulness meditation and be able to make relevant links between the practice and wider aspects of their lives. The ability to engage and gain benefit from a self-awareness practice such as mindfulness is an important first step to change. Furthermore, mindfulness provides a helpful access to how children see themselves in the world, which is interesting for

counselling psychologists when thinking about clinical interventions for work with both adults and children.

The themes discussed in this chapter provided evidence that children appeared to gain subjective benefit from meditation by being able to practice mindfulness skills. They reported a process whereby they mindfully observed and reported both uncomfortable and positive experiences, which lead to an overall immediate positive impact. It was also seen that this had wider benefits on their sense of self, which could lead to improved functioning. A Model of Psychological Endurance was proposed to illustrate how mindfulness could lead to improved functioning. Overall, the children appeared to understand how the principles of meditation could be helpful in the wider aspect of their lives, and provide an avenue to gain an overall feeling of relaxation and calm. Below will follow further evaluation of this study and it's implications.

5.6 Critique of Study

This section will present a critique of this study, highlighting its limitations and strengths. I will comment on the sample, the interview process, the methodology chosen and the analysis research design, the process of interviewing the children and analysing their responses, and finally consider the plausibility and transferability of the results. I will then present some of my reflections on the research process, and lastly offer implications for future research and practice.

5.6.1 The sample

One weakness of self-report studies, which applies to the majority of the existing body of meditation research, is that it is difficult to control for expectations and performance motivation in the sample. This study included year five school

children, who were selected randomly, and who were of a non-clinical population (please see section 3.3, regarding ethical considerations). It could be argued that their motivation for taking part in this research could not be due to a prior interest (and therefore bias), or to an expectation of any particular outcome as a result of participating in this research. Although the participants in this study reported some expectations, they also reported that their actual experiences were vastly different from their expectations. It can be argued, therefore, that a strength of this study was that confounding variables of this nature were kept to a minimum.

Given the age of the children, i.e., 9-10 years of age, their ability to report and describe their experiences were, for a few participants, limited. However, the researcher attempted to overcome this aspect by selecting a larger than normal sample size for qualitative research, and by offering everyone two different opportunities to talk about their experiences (during the group sharing immediately after each meditation, and during group and individual interviews). One participant replied 'I don't know.' to every question on the interview schedule, but was more expressive during the sharing, and others were very articulate in describing their experiences.

A strength of this study is that the period of research lasted for two weeks where the participants engaged with meditation on a daily basis. This allowed the experience of mindfulness to become more integrated rather than if this had been a study of a single episode of mindfulness. In other words, extended time was spent with the participants to establish trust and an understanding of the culture and context of the participants.

5.6.2 The interviews

During the interview process, the interviewer was aware of the power difference between the participants. The researcher was also aware of having facilitated the actual meditations, and being an adult researcher, she was aware of the power difference between the participants and the researcher. The notion of social desirability bias (Lee, 1982), and the participants' eagerness to please, may have resulted in personal conflict, and impacted on their uncertainty, given their eagerness to please. Attention should be drawn to the group interview, where, due to the number of participants, the power difference may have been less, and the participants appeared to be braver in voicing negative opinions. Furthermore, the researcher encouraged negative opinions, by saying it was important to hear about these as well as positive opinions.

5.6.3 The methodology and analysis

It was challenging to use a language-based method of analysis. Children also communicate with gestures and sound effects, and some aspects of their accounts were lost by their reduction to words on paper. All of the participants reported experiencing meditation for the first time during these exercises, and their accounts seemed to describe the meditation as unique and something entirely new to them. In addition, meditation is primarily a non-verbal experience. Consequently, some participants found it at times difficult to find the language to accurately convey their experiences, perhaps because they lacked a reference point. This resulted in their answers being unclear at times, and a little muddled. The researcher was aware of 'filling in gaps', in terms of helping the children find words to describe their experiences. Given the researcher's role as a trainee counselling psychologist, it is acknowledged that report-building skills

were used during the interview, which included empathising and reflecting back the children's responses, using the researcher's own words.

In line with the epistemology of critical realism, this study represents a window through which the children's perspectives of mindfulness were viewed. Thematic Analysis also recognises that the researcher has an influence on the themes that are identified. An extract of the research journal is provided in Appendix 11, which shows how the feelings and thoughts could have influenced the analysis had the researcher not been aware of these. Furthermore as bias is impossible to eradicate, it is important to highlight that the analysis represented the author's views of what the children said, and is open to interpretation from others.

The analysis highlighted patterns across three different data sets and each child had several opportunities to talk about their experiences throughout the study. Furthermore, it is a strength of this study that similar themes were found in both the individual interviews and the group interviews, which suggests that themes are robust.

5.6.4 Plausibility

The recommendations for quality control in qualitative research were considered (Yardley, 2000). The detail outlined in the methodology section will aid future attempts to replicate this research. In addition, procedures to enhance the validity of the data analysis were considered. A colleague familiar with Thematic Analysis, but not experienced in meditation, reviewed one interview transcript, and similar themes were found. This process also highlighted areas where the researchers' influence was apparent, for example in the language the researcher chose to describe the themes (e.g., Increased Self-Efficacy). An attempt to check

for testimonial validity was not considered by the researcher, because the themes found involved an interpretation process of the participants' narratives. A concern was that the children may not recognise the interpretations attributed to their words. In addition, the power imbalance and social desirability bias referred to earlier would still be present, and it was thought that this would be reflected in any reply received. However, the researcher has attempted to be transparent about the interpretations through providing an audit trail of emergent themes (Appendix 10) and this provides evidence (along with the detailed description of how the themes were uncovered) of the fact that the data can be traced to it's original source.

5.6.5 Transferability

With limited qualitative research on such a new topic area, it has been difficult to compare the findings from this study with other qualitative findings on experiences of meditation. There is some quantitative research that has been referred to throughout the discussion, to which the findings in the current study can be compared. For example, meditation being different to sleep. Furthermore, children described their experiences of meditation as fun, unusual and different. In this sense, it is possible to consider the transferability of these findings to other populations, although with such a small sample size it is not possible to make detailed claims about all children's experiences of meditation.

Mertens (2010) suggests that transferability can also be determined in whether the description of the context, time, place and culture is sufficient for the reader to make a judgement about the applicability of the research findings to their own situation. A detailed description can be found in Chapter 3.

5.6.6 Personal reflections on the research process

Throughout the process of facilitating the meditation (data collection), the author was aware of her wish to make meditation an enjoyable experience for the participants. This may have influenced the choice of meditation presented in this study. The kundalini and the drawing meditations (although strictly not part of the mindfulness repertoire) were included, and contained a mindful slant, as it was felt that the children should experience a wide variety of meditations, including ones where they were more physically active. This did indeed result in reports from the participants that they found meditation to be fun and enjoyable.

The author was also aware of her status as a novice meditator, and at times wondered whether the facilitation and instructions of the meditations were adequate to provide a 'good enough' experience for the participants. However, the participants appeared to engage well with it, and were able to report interesting experiences as a result.

5.7 Implications of Study

5.7.1 For clinical practice

This study has shown that children of 9-10 years of age are able to participate in meditation, and reflect on their experiences. Furthermore, it has also shown that they have the potential to apply mindfulness principles to their lives as a whole, as they made appropriate links with situations where they might find meditation helpful. As therapies such as MBCT and MBSR have been shown to be effective for various mental health issues, there is an argument for using these therapies with this population. There are an increasing number of studies that have piloted the use of mindfulness with children, for example Lee et al. (2008) and Semple

et al. (2005), which used a mindfulness programme with a non-clinical sample of children aged 9-12, and found that it was both feasible and acceptable. However, when considering feasibility, no study has to date investigated the perspectives of children, which also need to be taken into account. The present study finds preliminary support for using mindfulness-based clinical approaches with children.

Mindfulness meditation does appear to allow children to experientially become aware of their internal and external processes. It could therefore be argued that mindfulness skills develops a greater sense of self-awareness, and can provide another pathway for counselling psychologists and other professionals working with children to better understand their perspectives of themselves and their views of the world in which they exist.

The proposed model of psychological endurance shows that mindfulness could be a method through which a greater tolerance to feelings that arise in difficult life situations can be gained, with the ultimate aim of increasing resilience. The model also has implications for how mental illness is viewed. If, for example, depression can be seen as 'mental unfitness', a step by step training manual involving regular mindfulness practice would be appropriate.

5.7.2 For education

The findings of this study, along with other findings in mindfulness research, prove to be promising in terms of developing resilience and self-esteem in children. The participants in this study reported improvements in their behaviour, potential performance at school, and an increased sense of well-being through calmness and relaxation. This makes a case for teaching mindfulness at an early age in order to help students manage their emotions, cope with stress and

increase their performance. In other words, the facility to learn mindfulness meditation in schools could result in enhanced life skills and happiness for students, rooted in self-esteem gained through awareness and experience of the self. This is in line with the philosophy of positive psychology, which looks to methods of developing strengths.

Mindfulness also appears to meet many of the government's Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) objectives, set out by the Department of Schools, Children and Families. The goal is to increase social and emotional skills in secondary schools, and, consequently, mindfulness is has been piloted in secondary schools. This study provides evidence in support of teaching meditation in schools.

5.7.3 For research

This study aimed to fill a gap in the mindfulness literature, and to inform future mindfulness research with children. This study has shown that mindfulness with children is a viable and valuable aspect to consider. Children of this age are able to take part in, reflect upon, and report their experiences in meditation. Future, more formal, mindfulness research with children should be considered in order to replicate and build on the findings in this study.

Qualitative and mixed method studies will also be needed to further reflect the subjective account of the process of developing mindfulness, and how it can be seen to apply to the wider aspects of life in order to facilitate change. This is necessary in order to inform the theory of the underlying processes of mindfulness that facilitates the experiences of the benefits. Furthermore, it would be interesting to determine the developmental pathway of self-awareness, and how mindfulness may assist in this regard.

Further research has also been indicated with regard to the proposed Model of Psychological Endurance, to see whether mindfulness increases tolerance of difficult experiences in a quantitative study. This could be done for example by timing the length of time children are able to sit still through a series of meditations over a period of time to see if there were any significant increases.

It is an exciting time for research into mindfulness as interest is increasing at a phenomenal rate, but little quality research has of yet been carried out. A useful direction would be to continue to develop theory as research into efficacy and into process continues. Mindfulness from the perspectives of children is important, not only for feasibility, but also to see their view on the process. There is great value in the direct simplicity children's views can provide for a perspective on a complex process.

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7. APPENDIX

1. Head Teacher's Consent Form for School Participants
2. Parental Permission Letter
3. Child Consent Form
4. Ethical Clearance (Available on request)
5. Semi-Structured Interview
6. Ground Rules of Group Interactions
7. Example of Transcript of Group Sharing
8. Example of Transcript of Group Interview
9. Example of Worked Transcript of Individual Interview
10. Audit Trail of Themes
11. Extract of Research Journal

Appendix 1: Head Teachers Consent Form for School Participants

Dear Head Teacher,

I am writing to request your assistance to carry out research into children's experiences of meditation, by inviting willing students to take part in a ten minute meditation, every day for two weeks and later take part in an interview about their experiences of that. All interviews will be tape recorded.

Thank you for your assistance in carrying out this important research, which will help us to determine ways of eliciting children's views.

Yours sincerely

Monica Cain
MSc Counselling Psychology Student

I formally consent to allow Monica Cain to carry out research in connection with her Doctorate in Counselling Psychology using willing student participants from my school.

I agree to write to the parents of selected pupils to ask for consent and ensure that consent from the parents and the student themselves is obtained before the study commences.

I also agree to provide assistance in form of a teacher's assistant known to the students to be present during the experiment should any student feel distressed or uncomfortable during the experiment or subsequent discussions.

I understand that students can subsequently withdraw consent at any time and will proceed to contact Ms Cain (tel: 07723372716) should this occur so that data can be removed and destroyed.

Name of Head Teacher:

Signature: Date:

Appendix 2: Parental Consent Form for Children Participants

Dear (insert name)

I am pleased to inform you that your child has been selected to take part in research carried out by East London University.

Your child will be asked to take part in a daily 10 minute meditation guided by the researcher together with 4 other children for the duration of two weeks. Afterwards he/she will be invited to take part in an interview about what the meditation was like for them. This discussion will be tape recorded.

This research complies with the strict ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society and the University of East London.

We are now seeking your consent for your child to participate. Your child's participation is completely voluntary. He/she may answer as many questions as they like, and will be free to withdraw from the research at any time.

We would also like to assure you that any information obtained from the group discussion will be completely confidential, and will only be viewed by the researcher and the research supervisor. No names of children will be identified in the final write up of this study, and your child's responses will not form any part of his/her school record.

If you have any questions about this, please contact Monica Cain (tel: 07723372716) who is the Doctoral Counselling Psychology Student working on this project and she will be happy to help.

Thank you for your help in allowing your child to participate, we hope that the results will be of future benefit to children, parents and teachers by a greater understanding of how we might best listen to children and what their views and opinions are.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

I have read and understood the above letter and hereby agree to my child participating in the research described.

Name of Child:

Name of Parent:

Signature: Date:

Appendix 3: Children's Consent Form

Student Consent Form

I_ (print your name)

I have been told that the University of East London is doing a project on meditation and my experiences of it. I have been asked to take part in this project. Students who take part will be asked to take part in a 10 minute meditation daily for two weeks and then answer some questions of what that was like. The interviewer will record my answers on a tape recorder.

I know that whether or not I take part is up to me and that whatever I decided will not affect my grades or be noted in my school record. No one except the people working on the project will know that I have answered any questions, and papers describing this project will not have my name on it. I also know that even if I decided to take part in this project, I can change my mind at any time and it will not affect my grades or be noted in my school record.

I would like to take part and agree to take part in a meditation and later in an interview.

I would prefer to be interviewed: In a group ☐
Individually ☐
Don't mind ☐
(please tick)

_ _
Sign your name

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
Date

Name:

School:

Appendix 5: Semi-Structured Interview

I am now going to ask you some questions about what it has been like for you to meditate. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions, I just want to know what you think.

1. Have you had any experience of meditation before?

2. How would you describe you experiences of meditation?

Possible Probes

3. (Did you notice anything about how you felt before, during and after the meditation? What?)

4. Was it difficult / easy? What was difficult / easy about it?

5. How did you feel whilst you were meditating?

6. Did you experience anything unusual? If so, what?

7. What kinds of images did you picture? What did you see?

8. Did you feel different during meditation compared to when you normally relax with your eyes closed, for example when going to sleep? How? What?

9. What was it like for you to do the meditation every day for a week?

10. Did you notice any differences outside of meditation during this week? (Eg. at school or at home.) If so, what?

11. Does meditation help you think about things differently? What things? How?

12. Have you noticed anything different about yourself? If so what?

13. What did you like / dislike about meditating?

14. What was it like for you to share after the meditation? Did you like it? What did you like / dislike?

15. Is meditation something you would like to continue doing at school? Do you think it helps you in any way? How?

16. Is there anything you would have liked to have changed about the way we meditated? If so, what?

17. Finally, if you were to tell someone who has never meditated before about meditation, what would you say? How would you describe it? (What would you say about how it feels?)

18. Is there any thing else you would like to say about mediation that I haven't asked about?

GROUND RULES

- RESPECT EACH OTHERS SPACE
- NO LAUGHING AT OR TEASING OTHERS
- PLEASE SPEAK ONE AT A TIME
- CONFIDENTIALITY – DO NOT REPEAT TO OTHERS WHAT IS SAID IN THE GROUP

Appendix 7: Example of Transcript from Sharing

Group 3 – Body Scan

I: Would anybody like to say anything?

Simon: Umm, when we were like doing the toes…it got like…trapped…trapped in my sock…

I: Right…trapped in your sock?

R1: Yeah..

I: Ok…and what did that feel like?

Louise: It was kind of…(unclear)

I: It was…?

Louise: Stressing

I: Stressing?

Simon: Umm…like umm… being trapped inside something…

I: Just like you toes…they are trapped all day inside your shoes and your socks aren't they?

Simon: Yeah…

I: Perhaps they wanted to break free?? Anybody else?

Philip: Umm, it was very relaxing…umm…when we did our toes, my toes kind of tingled a bit…and so did my fingers…

I: Umm, energy…

Hannah: It felt like my knees were…really heavy…

I: So if felt like your knees felt heavy?

Hannah: No, like something really heavy was on my knees.

I: Oh, so it felt like something on them was heavy?

Hannah: Yeah…

Raj: I felt stressed and then it felt relaxing…

I: Ok…you felt stressed to start with…? In what way? What happened when you were stressed?

Raj: Well, my mind would wander…and I couldn't stop fidgeting…

I: Ahm…

Louise: I felt really comfortable…

I: You felt comfortable? Umm

Hannah: I felt like really heavy…like I can't really get up, or lift my head up…

(Unclear)

I: Ahh, so you heads all felt quite heavy today?

Several: Yeah…

I: What about your minds today? Where were they?

(Unclear)

I: Umm, the winds…ok so some thoughts about outside…and what was it like to bring your attention back to the body?

Raj: It was hard to bring it back…

I: Well, meditation is a very simple thing, but it can be hard sometimes especially when we're feeling a bit tense and fidgety…. Would anybody like to say anything else?

No?

End of recording

Appendix 8: Example of Group Interview Transcript

I: Have any of you ever meditated before?

R2: Yeah, have done a bit like that

R1: Yeah, we done it at another school…

R3: Yeah…

R1: Yeah, did you do it at (name of infant school)?

I: Oh right…

I: Is (name of infant school) your previous school?

R1: Yeah…

I: So at your previous school, did you have one experience or did you do it often?

R3: One or two…

I: One or two…ok….Did you hear of meditation before?

R several: Yeah,…

I: Ok you have heard of it before…What do you think it was before?

R3: I just thought it was sitting down…sitting like that (gesturing with hands)

I: Ok, you thought it was sitting cross-legged with your hands like that….

(thumb and forefinger together)

R2: And not thinking of nothing…and emptying my mind…

R1: Yeah….

I: Ok..so…how would you describe it…and now that you have been meditating for two weeks, what would you say about it, what was your experience of it?

R3: Ummm…you can do like active things when you meditate, and it doesn't have to be active things…it doesn't have to be a quiet thing, it's just how you do things…it's a bit of a mystery thing…

I: Ok…it's a bit of a mystery thing..

R1: and it's sitting down and that…with your

I: Ok…what else?

R1: It was relaxing…

I: Relaxing…

R4: It was thinking about certain subjects…

I: Thinking about certain things…

R1: Calm…peaceful…

I: Calm and peaceful…

R3: It's different from what you would expect…not quite what you would expect…

R4: yeah…like drawing with your left hand blindfolded…

R3: ..you wouldn't really think like… being like… musical statues and then being like an octopus…would be meditation…

I: Ok…um… what did you find easy or difficult about meditation?

R2: Um…the difficult bit was actually really trying to be like a mountain and things…

I: It was hard for you to try to be like a mountain…

R4: Every time open my eyes…my mind kept…my mind would wander…I had to keep my eyes closed to I could really concentrate…

I: So you noticed that your mind would wandered off?

R several: Yeah…

R1: …and it was easy to do a left handed and blindfolded picture…the only hard thing was putting the lids on the pens and finding the paper…and finding the pens… (laughter)

R3: I thought it was ok for the most of it…but I was colouring in and I was using my pencil to draw…I was drawing a TV and a chocolate bar next to it and I wanted to colour in my chocolate bar, brown, and instead of colouring it in brown, I coloured to TV orange…

R2: Yeah, it was difficult to colour in…

I: Ok…so there were some practical difficulties in the drawing…

R several: Yeah, yeah…

R1: You would need to draw in 3D to actually know what you are colouring in…

I: Were there actual difficulties about meditating in general?

R2: Umm, on the body scan…

I: The body scan…

R1: Yeah…

R2: Yeah, while I was lying down, I kept thinking about the floor and how cold it was…

I: Oh ok… the temperature in the room… it was a bit cold…

R4 : I found that I couldn't imagine the mountain…em… because…um.…I just find it hard to imagine something…

R2: Yeah…I found it hard…in a way it was thinking…but when we were doing the drawing…like it was what are you going to do? What are you going to do? What am I going to do…

R3: …it was hard to pick it up with your right and take it off of your eyes, and put it into your left…

R2: Yeah, it was very hard for me because I kept on drawing with my right hand, and I was supposed to draw with my left hand…

I: So you noticed that your mind wanted to control…

R2: Yeah, on the first one…

I: The raisin?

R2: No, on the first drawing one, I decided not to do it with my left hand because I'm right handed, and at the end I just wanted to see how good my left hand was, so I drew with my left hand…

R1: On the raisin one…um…it was really weird… the first one we had there was like… no juice left in it… and the second one there was juice left in it…

I: Ok…um…how did you feel after you meditated?

R2: Umm…Relaxed…calm…

R4: Umm…I kind of…umm...let all of my thoughts out of my head and stuff…

I: …and you were able to let go of your thoughts?

R4: Yeah…

R2: Yeah…

R3: Umm. You can't exactly say it was quiet or…because… you end up looking around…but if you think about it, it would be quiet…

R2: It's a quiet thing…because when you are concentrating you are quiet…or when you have like loud music…the other day when we were in the park, when we were doing (inaudible) and we had like pop music on, we couldn't concentrate…it was hard to concentrate…

I: Oh right...so a calm environment helps you concentrate, it helps you think…about different things…

R several: Yeah…

I: What was your favourite meditation?

R1: Ummm, I liked drawing…

Rs: Yeah…

I: Drawing…

R3: Umm, I liked...being an octopus

I: The one with all the shaking…the Kundalini

R4: I liked the more energetic ones…

I: The more energetic ones…

R2: My favourite was the raisin one…I like eating…

(giggles)

I: Um, did any of you experience anything unusual…anything you haven't experienced before?

R3: Umm, the meditations…

R2: Well, with normal raisins, you just put them in your mouth you just taste the juice… but if you do it in a meditation way, you taste it, you feel it, you smell it, you do everything…

R several: Yeah…

R1: I felt something in my left arm…

I: Ok, but in terms of the experience, did you notice anything in your body, or…anything like that?

R1: I on kept seeing the colour green, which is my favourite colour…whenever my mind wandered, I would always see green…

I: Ok…

R2: In the lying down one, um…whenever my mind wandered off…it wandered off…to… like the lesson… to what we were doing in the lesson….

I: Ok…so you were thinking about what was going on in class…

R2: Yeah…

R3: When we were meditating that we were in an egg…when you said it was like really big… I imagined a whole different world… like with pink trees and green flowers… and different colours...

I: Ok…did you feel anything different during meditation compared to when you relax to go to sleep?

R4: Um…In the lying down one…I kind of….felt like...um…I suppose I wanted to go to sleep… and in the energetic one I felt like I actually wanted to just run around all the time... and then when we stopped I kind of felt the opposite way…

I: Opposite in terms of?

R4: so…um…in the energetic one I wanted to just kind of go to sleep and in the lying down one I just wanted to get up and run around…

I: Ok…I was wondering whether…well, you know you said earlier that meditation was quite relaxing…I wondered whether you thought that the relaxing in meditation was in any way different to the relaxing in when you for example go to sleep?

R1: Yeah, it is different… because when you are relaxing when you go to sleep…you wouldn't be doing something really hard…em…it's really weird…it's different…

R3: Yeah, it's a good experience because you won't do it like every single day of your life…so…it's a good experience…

I: Ok…

R4: Well, when you are going to sleep… you don't listen to really calm music… What I do is just think to myself sometimes…

R1: What I do is like…just think about things…my week or something… and then in the end after 10 or 20 minutes, it's hard enough to go to sleep…

I: Ok…so what was it like to meditate every day for two weeks?

R1: I really enjoyed it…

I: You really enjoyed it….

R4: It was really different…because usually I'd be in my classroom doing some work, but it was nice to just have time out and take a break…

R3: It was nice, but when it was like… something that was hard and it was like…when we were doing something particularly difficult for you or you are getting annoyed or something…it was nice to just like…it was nice to have meditation and like to have time out a bit and meditation…

I: **Ok..it was nice to have time out when things get difficult?**

R several: Yeah…

I: Ok, did you notice any difference outside of mediation? At home or in class?

R1: Sometimes, when I had just come back from meditation, in class, I felt all tingly…

I: You felt tingly?

R3: When I came back from meditation, I was like I don't know what to do right now…because sometimes the groups were doing other things…

R2: Yeah… they had started something, or in the middle or just ended…

I: So, did you notice anything different about yourself?

R1: Um, Yeah…it was like…not exactly too strong, but (inaudible)

I: Ok, did anyone else notice any differences at home or in class?

R1: I think our teacher was expecting us to be more like calm and relaxed…

I: Ok..And were you?

R1: Yeah.. and we were better behaved…

R4: When I came back from meditation I felt…like really relaxed.

R1: I felt really relaxed…compared to how I am in the hour until lunch time… and then after lunch time I'm alright…but I'm not like relaxed, because I am running around in the play ground…

I: Ok…what was like to share after each meditation?

R4: Umm, it was nice to see what other people think about each thing…and it was nice to see what other people experienced as well…

R2: It was annoying… because on the last time, I didn't get to speak.

I: Oh, I'm sorry…

R2: Suddenly someone just said…

I: Oh, did someone say what you wanted to say?

R2: No, I was just about to say something and then somebody else said something…

I: Oh, ok…

R1: In a way…I liked it…but what everyone else seemed to do was PE… in the other class, they didn't seemed they were like English or maths or something…

R2: They didn't seem to be doing the same test…

R1: They were lucky…lucky…

I: Ok, so what we are talking about is the sharing…about what it was like to share… do you have any thoughts about what it was like?

R4: I really think that em… afterwards…when everyone brought back their pictures I always wanted to look and see what the other people had done…

I: Ok…so it was interesting to see what other people had done…Ok…do you think that meditation would be something that you would like to do at school?

R several: Yeah, yeah…

R1: Um…yeah…after people are quiet….(inaudible)

R1: …and you can really calm down…

R2: …and then you can think about your ideas…and you can spend half of your time thinking of ideas.

R1: …and you can check your work….

I**: Was there anything about meditating that you would have liked to have done differently?**

R4: Umm, I would really have like to do it more often because I really enjoyed it…

R2: It would be good if you could like do it just before a test…like to check your brain just before a test…

R1: Yeah, just before a test, in the middle of a test, and after a test…and all the time (giggles)

R3: And all we have to do is that….

I: Now tell me…if you were to say to someone…tell someone about meditation who has never done it before what would you say?

R1: It's calm, relaxing…you can do… em…you don't have to be active, you don't have to sit down and do it…

R3: Umm, you are not going do like…you don't have to be unactive, you can be active as well…

R4: I'd say that…um…well…you don't just sit…well you can think about anything, you don't just have to sit there and let out your thoughts…you can…you can run around…think about your body…think about a mountain or what a raisin feels like and stuff like that…

I: Ok…anybody else? How would you describe it?

R3: Umm, I rekon some people would describe it that they can sit down and do it…and when they done that and different bits of it, you can do this and that… you can be really calm and relaxing…

R4: I think that everyone should have the experience of doing meditation, so they can get themselves all calm and relaxed…

I: So do you think it's something that everyone should do?

R several: Yeah, yeah…

I: Ok…would anybody like to say anything else about meditation…perhaps something I haven't asked about?

R4: Um..I really like the sound of the raising, cause I never knew that a raisin like had a noise…

R2: What was the noise of the raisin?

R4: Well, it just had a kind of crackling noise when you rolled it…

R2: Oh yeah…

R1: Do you think that would happen to a grape if you did that?

I: Well, you can do it with anything really…

R1: Umm, would it work with an apple?

(giggles)

End of recording

Appendix 10: Audit Trail of Themes

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Elements of themes
Pre-conceptions	Involves a specific posture Mental and Physical	**Posture** Sitting cross-legged Thumb and index finger together **Mental** Doing nothing Passive Sitting quietly Relaxing Sitting and humming – a bit weird About relaxing and thinking about stuff. Thought it would be smaller exercises. Surprised to be moving around so much.
The Process	Energetic Activity Negative Perspectives Positive Perspectives	Unexpected Different **Physically Active** Use your body a lot You can do lots of different things **Mentally Active** Think about things a lot Much more than doing nothing Energetic and alert Calm and Energetic Something powerful – a powerful skill You're not just laying there bored. More than just sitting cross legged. – more fun Focusing and concentrating An active process – do lots of activities. **The Process – Negative Perspectives** Worrying – about how participant will be perceived – lack of control – uncertainty – not knowing how it will affect things. Difficult / Challenging Difficult to sit still Distractions made it difficult Uncomfortable Restless Tiring, exhausting Sometimes it's easy to concentrate, sometimes it's hard Might get boring – less interesting if it was the same every day. I was really desperate to see what it was going to be like – strong urges. Noticed noise distractions. Difficult to do visualisations because you had to be still. My mind kept wandering off. Drawing difficult – struggled – uncomfortable feeling Aware of distractions - noise **The Process – Positive Perspectives** Dancing was easy – I enjoyed it more. Easy

		Fun, enjoyable Letting go – a relief. Fun and relaxing at the same time. Daily practice made it easier, able to participate without mind wandering all over the place. Exciting and unusual. Would like more. Relaxing – no noise Relaxing – a space to be quiet and still. Felt really calm and relaxed Felt energetic Calm and peaceful It felt natural. Quite Easy Liked the meditations. You feel calmer.
	Increase in Sensory Awareness	**Sensory Awareness** Absorbed, focused, concentrative More awareness, depth and detail of experience. I felt like a mountain where it was cold on top – my head felt quite cold. Vivid images – visualisations Concentration makes it more tasteful, look more fascinating than usual. It's a bit more interesting. I believe it tastes a lot more. Tingly in the body Raisin was lumpy – it was weird. Vivid visualisations. I wouldn't think about a raisin like that – it was crunchy Felt vibration of the bell, felt body shaking.
Impact of Meditation	**Effects of sharing**	**Sharing** Nice to compare experiences Nice to hear other people's opinions Felt good to be able to express your feelings and talk about the process. Nice to let out feelings. Get to know people and what they are about. People copied my ideas, it was a good idea. Unsure of sharing – felt different than in class, but ok. – Unfamiliar. Felt more comfortable in small groups than in class.
	Effects in general	**Effects in General** Positive Calm Quite calming – the feeling… Relaxed Calmed mind down Peaceful Grounded - unshiftable Increased self-efficacy Makes you calmer – more confident to do stuff. Confident to talk. More confident with people

		Makes her more reflective More relaxed than usual New Discoveries – self Should have it school – we can calm down when we want and become more energetic when we want. Fun and relaxing Enjoys trying new things. Calm and relaxing, Doing activities makes you calmer. More relaxed than usual.
Learning Implications	Helpful Skills and Functions Applicable across contexts Increased self-efficacy Increased distance common in observation	**Helpful Skills and Functions** Ability to re-focus Ability to re-direct attention Ability to concentrate on what you are meant to. Ability to calm down A powerful skill Helps me calm down a bit more and relax. I brought my mind back really fast. **Applicable across contexts** At home when angry with sister Increase concentration in class Increased confidence in class – spoke more Calmer in tests Ability to concentrate in a lesson more easily by meditating Less reactive if someone was winding her up. Wouldn't lash out – go and calm down **Increased self-efficacy** I know that meditation would calm me down. Ability to change feelings and behaviour with positive outcome. **Increased distance common in observation** Body wants to move about
Possible wider Effects on Self Awareness / Identity	Access to different experiences of self Access to view of present self experience Normalising / comparing	**Different experiences of self** Able to be natural – be yourself I was able to express my energetic calmness – physical expression of energy, but with control and calmness. Calm down and be yourself. It's still nice just to see how it is just being really calm – I am never actually really calm. Natural – be herself. **View of present self experience** I am usually hyper at home Normally I would be so worried about the work. Feel stuffed up inside normally. Always being told to calm down – hyper? I am known for keeping things up inside. I like being energetic I'm always quite lively and sporty **Normalising / comparing experiences**

	experiences	Nice to hear what other people think / experiences / their opinions Get to know what people think about
	Did not like the research process	Missed out on class Felt left out – felt behind. Missed favourite lesson Didn't know what was going on. Disliked leaving the lesson. Frustrating to leave the class.
Other	Meditation is Active Sleep is passive Favourite Mediation	Sleep is a sluggish calmness. Meditation is an alert calmness. Both make you feel tired. Active Thought process involved in meditation, not in sleep relaxation. Focusing and concentrating in meditation **Favourite Meditation** The dancing one Eating the raisins

Group Interviews:

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Elements of themes
Pre-Conceptions	Position / Posture Passive Internal Activity	**Involves a specific posture** Sitting with arms wide and fingers together Cross Legged **Passive** Sitting quietly **Internal Activity** Thinking of nothing Emptying the mind
Process	Use of body and mind and concentrating on what you are doing Experience of Distractions Noticing Urges (attachment / avoidance) Evaluation of Process	**Use of body and mind and concentrating on what you are doing** Use of body - Active Much more than sitting Walking about Thinking about things Visualisations Concentrating / focusing Felt cold during mountain meditation. **Experience of Distractions** People outside were off putting **Uncomfortable Urges** I wanted to keep on walking and moving about My body wants to move about I can't sit still Constant fidgeting. **Evaluation of Process** Easy I liked doing it Fun Difficult to resist urges Difficult to carry out meditation (eg draw with opposite hand) Difficult because of constant fidgeting. Hard to keep bringing back the mind Could be boring if it was the same one all the time. Some people might think it's rubbish. I didn't like not being able to do stuff. An enjoyable experience they would like to repeat. Meditation after school club. Liked the boundaries / rules which created trust. Confidentiality facilitated expression Liked comparing/ normalising experiences. Liked hearing other people's opinions / thoughts.

Outcomes	**Outcomes Physical** **Mental** **Increased sensory Awareness**	**Outcomes Physical** Relaxed Really tired After the two weeks, more relaxed. It helps you relax More energy, less sluggish **Mental** Calm Increase of confidence – you just do it. – staying in the present. It helps you focus and concentrate More focused in every day life Awareness of worry and stress – trying to get it right (work) Calmer than usual **Outside of meditations** Spoke more in class – more active. Calmer in class Much happier with friends Optimistic and positive Go out and play more rather than sit and watch TV. Meditation makes me worry less. **Increased sensory Awareness** Ooh yeah, it's ham…
Learning	A Skill Decentering / observing	**A skill** Able to come back to it (the meditation) Ability to change mood (I calmed myself down) **Decentred Perspective** My body wants to move about The brain just wanted to do stuff.
Identity	Self-efficacy View of Self Awareness of thought processes	**Self-Efficacy** I calmed myself down I will be able to go and calm down in a room. Increase in confidence in speaking in public. Speaking from own mind and experience in a safe environment. **View of self** Hyper at home Needs to calm down more – a goal **Awareness of thought processes.** I've got to do that, what if I don't get it right (at home) Meditation makes me worry less.
	Meditation is Active Sleep is passive	Go to sleep without thinking about things – meditation you are thinking all the time. You think during meditation.
	Favourite Meditations	Walking Drawing Activity based meditation liked more – perhaps less requirement to control urges

	Dislike of missing class	Missing out on something good in class. Missing PE Feeling left out, falling behind class

Sharings:

Super Ordinate Themes	Sub-Ordinate Themes	Elements of Themes
	Perception	Raisin meditation was difficult Surprised Didn't like not seeing Annoying Hard to find things. Fun – more challenging Difficult and weird.
	New Discoveries	**New Discoveries** The second raisin was lighter, sweeter and had more juice. If you kept looking around it, it might have something you haven't seen before. The picture reflects the person. I didn't realises you could actually feel how heavy your body was. I felt more heavy I never knew it could be that comfy… Body felt really heavy, like something was pushing me down.
	Impact	**Impact** Totally relaxing Felt Calm when walking about When your feet touch the floor and it's really like you can't go any further down. You can't draw with the other hand, so you just do what you feel. It was really good. You don't feel silly. Humour – giggles. Just let go, because you are drawing how you feel. Calm It was a bit of a shock. Sleepy Felt unusual. Actually felt the breath going through my body. Odd. Weird. Made me feel different after.
	Observations of the mind	**Observations of the mind** Mind wandering to birthday Hard to concentrate rattling mind Mind goes automatically to thinking about what you think will happen in 10

		years time…what's gonna happen next. By slowing down, you think more about things. Got distracted, but kept bringing mind back to body. Thoughts about gravity. Concentration and focus on self, not on others. I didn't know what others were doing. **Judgemental Thinking** But it turned out not very well. …then it went all wrong. It turned out differently. Unable to reproduce what was in the mind. …but it didn't look very good. **Noticed Distractions** Heard people chatting and people walking. Kept fidgeting People kept disturbing me.

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Appendix 11: Extracts from Reflective Journal

22/02/10:

Data Analysis:

- Wondering about social desirability bias in children. Having just taken part in qualitative research myself, it occurred to me that the desire to please, be helpful to the researcher and make a valuable contribution also applies to adults. It seems to be a bigger deal in research with children. In addition to the power imbalance between adult researcher and child participant, another factor may be because children are more open, and therefore less able to hide this aspect of their motives.

- Finding it difficult to analyse to what the children are saying in their interviews. The participants are descriptive, and do not tend to use metaphors in their descriptions. Does this mean that children's narratives are in some way less 'rich?'. Some have found it difficult to describe their internal processes….

- Words: Alert, noticing, urges to… - are they reflective of my own experiences of meditation? They are certainly my own interpretations of what they are saying…

22/3/10

Wondering about children's ability to transfer the skills into daily life. Seems too good to be true – but it's what they said that is important. They at least have the perception about it….

24/03/10: Write up of discussion section:

- Many of the participant's accounts do not appear to be mentioned in present mindfulness research, eg. Bodily sensations. Is this because the accounts mentioned here are descriptive and more superficial than the accounts generated by adults? Does this mean it's any less valid? I believe not, and it is still important to report findings of this nature. At times, it takes the simplicity of a child's perception to state the obvious, but is often missed in search of profound and deeper meanings.