Journaling: A More Mindful Approach to Researching a Mindfulness-Based Intervention in a Junior School

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Abstract

Mindfulness, often defined as present-moment awareness, has in recent years become a topic of multidisciplinary interest. This article addresses methodological issues for researching mindfulness and education. It is argued that there are advantages to coherence between ontological and epistemological positions when designing research studies. The limitations of positivistic methods for researching mindfulness are discussed. We then advocate the qualitative method of journaling as a more holistic means of providing in-depth access to the unique and often underexplored inner life of those experiencing a mindfulness intervention. Drawing upon pupils and teachers' views at a junior school receiving low-intensity mindfulness training, we show how journaling illuminates both its impact upon individuals alongside implementational issues for the school, in a manner more consistent with mindfulness' emphasis on such terms as "awareness" and "being."

Keywords

journaling, reflexivity, mindfulness, mindfulness-based interventions, schools, children, well-being.

Introduction

The popularity of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) has increased exponentially over the last two decades (Ergas, 2019; Feldman & Kuyken, 2019), so much so that the concept has entered common parlance. Yet it is enigmatic, and therefore it is useful to explore the precise meaning of mindfulness and how it has been instrumentalized in fields such as psychology, health, and education before we discuss approaches to researching the phenomenon. The literature on mindfulness is replete with challenges to defining and conceptualizing mindfulness due to the variety of practices associated with its cultivation. Consequently, definitions and applications of mindfulness are many and varied, often being subject to the author's understanding of the concept and their own introspective experience (Albrecht et al., 2012).

In its original Buddhist context, the Pali word for mindfulness "sati" refers to the process of remembrance, and acute observation of the unity of the self with the world, alongside an appreciation of the transitory nature of both (Bodhi, 2013). Since the 1970s however, and following a secularized introduction within a United States health care setting by Jon Kabat-Zinn in particular (Crane, 2017), mindfulness has focused on meditation practices and has been presented as a potential "panacea" to numerous types of issues ranging from addiction

to pain management, reactivity to coping with stress, a way of creating attentive learners, productive workers and, even somewhat antithetically, more efficient soldiers (Sun, 2014). Proponents of MBIs often paraphrase Kabat-Zinn, (2003, p. 45), who defines mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally." This kind of attention encourages greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of the here and now rather than the past or future.

In this way, the operationalisation of mindfulness and its associated practices have increasingly been used successfully with various adult clinical populations for treating a range of "disorders" such as depression, anxiety, stress, and pain-related health issues (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019). Consequently, and more recently, MBIs have become widespread, resulting in significant scientific efforts and financial resources to research

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their use. This is also the case for education, as illustrated by the fact that funding for a large randomized controlled trial was recently granted to the University of Oxford to research the impact of short courses in United Kingdom schools (Mindfulness and Resilience in Adolescence (MYRIAD) Project—Oxford Mindfulness Centre, 2017). However, according to Goldberg et al. (2017), in their systematic review of mindfulness research over the last 16 years, the literature in this field has not become more rigorous with time. As such, Bishop's (2002, p. 71) critique of this area as "rife with methodological problems" remains just as valid now as it was nearly 2 decades ago.

One of the less-discussed methodological issues concerning mindfulness research is the seemingly contradictory nature of researching something that concerns people's inner worlds using traditional positivistic techniques that focus on the external and observable. Within the field of education, writers such as Ergas (2019) and Sellman and Buttarazzi (2020) have shown two predominant approaches; mindfulness in education (as a psychologized intervention) and mindfulness as education (a more holistic, embodied approach). Aligning ourselves as advocates of the latter position, we suggest journaling as an approach that offers ontological-epistemological coherence. After defining journaling, we dedicate the larger part of this article to showing how journaling is a method that aligns well with social constructionist and interpretivist methodology in general. Following this, we will report on the use of a journaling approach we used ourselves within a small-scale study at an English junior school.

Social constructionism moves away from expertise-based, rational, hierarchical, and result-focused models toward participatory, collaborative, and process-centred approaches (Galbin, 2014), with the aim being to understand the world of lived experience from the perspective of those inhabiting it (Schwandt, 1998). A discussion on the broader context of mindfulness research and what we see as the problematic nature of much contemporary quantitative research is included within our review. This leads to the presentation of a substantive and robust case for journaling as a powerful and insightful real-world research method, one that is particularly synergistic with mindfulness.

Drawing on our own experience as mindfulness practitioners, pedagogues and researchers within the field of humanistic education, we contend that most approaches to researching mindfulness are contradictory and antithetical to its true meaning and origins. This is not to say mindfulness cannot be researched in positivistic ways—it clearly can be and is, like many other "ephemeral" qualities (kindness, compassion, altruism), yet, we contend, given the emphasis mindfulness places on inner experience and contemplation, it is amiss to neglect these sources of data from the research process. As our article shows, such inner experience is extremely rich with potentially more insightful information. Toward the end of the article, we include teachers' and pupils' perspectives about the process of using journals to reflect on an MBI at a state junior school in England. Ultimately, we advocate

research using journaling as both a more coherent and illuminating approach to investigate mindfulness. The results of our exploration using journaling with pupils and teachers and their implications for using this technique more widely are also discussed in later sections. First, we turn our attention to how mindfulness is commonly researched, particularly within education, and its limitations.

Limitations of a Positivistic Approach

Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010) note that mindfulness research within the school population is more complicated than clinical-based studies, which have clearly defined outcome variables related to reducing the severity of clinical symptoms as an objective. The influence of specific developmental periods within a child's or young person's life, the type and intensity of intervention used, issues around school delivery, e.g. teacher versus outside facilitator (Carsley et al., 2017), social background, and how a program is accepted within a particular school context all influence its effects (Zenner et al., 2014). Thus, research on mindfulness within education attempts to capture a broader range of positive and negative outcome variables, all impacting replicability.

Despite this, studies on MBIs within education invariably employ research methods where feedback is increasingly gained via psychometric by-proxy measures of mindfulness, e.g. Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM) (Greco et al., 2011); Five-Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer et al., 2006). These quantitative methods have been met with scepticism, although some of the criticism is equally applicable to all self-report instruments. Objections are wide-ranging; from questionnaires being subject to biases, where respondents measuring mindfulness misrepresent themselves either deliberately or unconsciously (Baer, 2011), to problematic issues concerning the scale construction of measures and interpretation (Van Dam et al., (2017). An earlier critique by Van Dam et al. (2010, p. 806) is that such measures lack "construct representationalism", i.e. they do not consider the psychological processes underlying individuals' responses to questions.

For Grossman (2011), the main weakness of these measures is how they de-contextualize mindfulness from its original ethical and attitudinal foundations. Grossman (2011) lists other flaws: the tendency to measure only particular aspects of mindfulness, such as staying present, attention span, or observing fleeting emotional states, and, more generally, presenting an incorrect and adulterated perspective on what mindfulness is. Grossman and Van Dam (2011) point out that although scores on concentration, present moment awareness, and emotional reactivity tests might correlate positively with enhancement of learning, all worthy and desirable traits, they are not necessarily measures of mindfulness.

From a different perspective, Feagans Gould et al. (2016) highlight the behavior and mental effects of mindfulness practices are subjective and personal; these are difficult to quantify alone and may occur with unpredictable timing. For example, a

participant may not realize they have become less reactive until such a stimulus arises to evidence this development. Furthermore, according to Trochim and Donnelly (2006), quantification only looks at one small portion of a reality that cannot be split or unitized without losing the whole phenomenon's importance. More recently, Hyland (2016) notes that positioning mindfulness as an intervention with instrumental ends and measurable outcomes for comparability and standardization between courses and training results in a reductionist approach to its meaning.

As such, Feagans Gould et al. (2016) suggest the importance of practitioners and researchers acknowledging the limitations of traditional, positivistic, scientific methods and espousing an approach that remains open to the full ramifications of mindfulness as an ongoing way of being and knowing. Having considered the problematic nature of measuring mindfulness, maybe, as Farran (2011) states, just because something can be measured, it does not mean it should be. Indeed, Ergas (2013) contends that compartmentalizing mindfulness to fit science's tendency and ability to measure, alongside educational policy-makers' requirement for standards and time-delineated achievements, undoubtedly affects the object measured. Hence this article presents the case for adopting a more mindful approach to the research process itself.

The Value of a More Mindful Approach to Research

A more mindful approach to research embraces reflective processes that also acknowledge the dialogical relationships between subject, object and researcher. It moves away from the quantitative methods of research that are, as Ochieng (2009) asserts, generally confirmatory and deductive methods. It recognizes research techniques themselves can impact the findings; that the subjects might not be aware of their feelings, interactions, and behaviors and, consequently, unable to articulate them to respond to something like a questionnaire (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Seminal sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) maintained all actions humans perform in the social world are acts, i.e. a projection of an image of ourselves we want others to see; however, while unable to control what others think of us, we can attempt to influence how we are seen through manipulation of aspects we can control, e.g., the setting of the interaction, our appearance, and how we behave. Another distinctive contribution comes from Freire (1970), who questioned the authenticity of voices when different groups and people are involved in an intervention. Powerless groups may echo the voices of those perceived as having the power as a conscious way to appear compliant with the more powerful parties' wishes or the dominant views and values internalized (Freire, 1970). Alternatively, they may become aware of what the researcher wants and try to please them (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For example, in the case of using approaches such as questionnaires to measure mindfulness, post-intervention, children are vulnerable to responding with social desirability and/or a desire to please the teacher and/or researcher associated with the intervention.

Instead of using a tool with a fixed set of questions that attempts to measure mindfulness, a more mindful approach enables the researcher and participant to let the questions arise and change as they become more familiar with what they are studying (Ochieng, 2009). The researcher moves away from assuming there is a single unitary reality apart from their perceptions since each of us experiences life from our own viewpoint (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). All our experiences are inescapably subjective; our descriptions of the world are limited, chosen, and filtered by the perceptions and assumptions we bring to our observations and the particular perspective from which we view the world (Letherby et al., 2013; Maxwell, 2018). Research carried out without considering this violates the fundamental view of the individual. Consequently, methods that attempt to aggregate across individuals are flawed because each individual is unique (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006).

Ochieng (2009) contends it is pointless trying to establish validity in any external or objective sense, particularly concerning inner phenomena such as mindfulness. As qualitative researchers, there is always a personal significance. The stories told to us, how they are relayed, and the narratives we form and share with others are influenced by our position and experiences as a researcher in relation to our participants (Greene, 2014); furthermore, just as the knowledge of participants reflects their social, cultural, and historical context, this is equally applicable to the researcher; as Burr (2015, p. 172) states: "No human can step outside their humanity and view the world from no position at all, and this is just as true of scientists as of everyone else." Through interaction with people, ideas, and activities in the world, who we are, what we think, and how we act is shaped and reshaped (Webster-Wright, 2013).

Therefore, the best way to understand what is going on is to bring awareness to the situation, to become immersed in it; to be flexible in the inquiry of people in context (Ochieng, 2009). In essence, the methods and procedures employed in the research process are ultimately and inextricably tied to the researcher's values and subjectivities (Bochner, 2000). The use of questionnaires to measure mindfulness, for example, communicates a reductive emphasis on the nature of mindfulness and attach status to personal competencies associated with its development. The facts and truths scientists find are linked inextricably to the vocabularies and paradigms the scientists use to represent them (Kuhn, 1996), and the observer and the observed are inextricably tied together in reflection (Ryan, 2007). One method that allows participants to be immersed in this way, enabling greater subjective exploration is journaling.

Journaling—A Brief History

The term "journal" comes from the French word "jour" meaning day and is often used to depict daily writing and reflection (Bender, 2000). Some writers use the terms diary and journal

interchangeably, others and ourselves would distinguish a diary as a report, often of facts related to external events, and a journal encompassing the thoughts and feelings from within. People have kept journals for different reasons throughout recorded history. Samuel Pepys, Anne Frank, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway and other famous authors kept journals that became great and influential works that have stood the test of time and ultimately served to be a catalyst for their self-actualisation and life purpose (Williamson, 2009).

In some quarters journaling became popular due to the human potential movement popular in the 1960s and 1970s. The movement emphasized an individual's development through encounter groups, sensitivity training, and primal therapy (Stone, 1978). This movement prompted Ira Progoff, a psychotherapist, to develop Intensive Journaling Workshops. Progoff (1992) began working with groups, requesting each participant keep a journal. He discovered that participants were more honest in their journals compared to what they articulated in therapy. Consequently, Progoff started to experiment, using the journal to probe the inner life and help his clients delve into personal insights (Martin, 1992).

Through such reflective writing, we have a way of expanding our inner horizons and relating more meaningfully to the world we live in. Journaling, therefore, is not just about recording objective facts about the day's events; it involves subjective contemplation (Baldwin, 2007). It is a reconstruction of experience with objective and subjective dimensions; events are chronicled as they happen, and we can have a dialog with facts and interpretations and learn from experience (Holly, 1989). This dialog allows more in-depth insight to form, enabling us to become more accepting, less judgmental, and better acquainted with our hidden patterns of thinking and feeling (Holly, 1989).

Although journaling is a key feature of the introduction and augmentation of contemplative practices in Higher Education (Barbezat & Bush, 2014), reflective journaling is perhaps best known hitherto in the field of education as a means for developing critical thinking skills (Miller, 2017) where dilemmas, contradictions, and evolving worldviews are questioned or challenged (Hiemstra, 2001). However, in the next section, we will outline how journaling, inner inquiry, and mindfulness are harmonious approaches for researching mindfulness and education specifically.

Journaling for Researching Mindfulness and Education

We begin by examining how journaling can help researchers incorporate reflexivity into their investigation, drawing upon synergistic links between mindfulness and inner contemplation. We then discuss how journaling was used in a study for researching mindfulness in a junior school.

Harmonious links. Dillon (2014) observes how reflecting through writing a journal provides an opportunity to understand the researcher's subjectivity rather than remove it. Seminal philosopher, Heidegger (1962), wrote of how there is a knowing only obtainable through active engagement; we can only learn the truth of balance, empathy, or charisma by embodying them and engaging with how they reveal themselves through our subjectivity. Cunliffe (2016) also considers this subjective dimension, emphasizing how journal writing is not just thinking about thinking; it is also thinking about self from a subjective perspective.

Thinking about thinking is a form of "pure awareness" according to Williams and Penman (2011); it enables us to experience the world directly, unclouded by our thoughts and feelings, and requires us to be attentive to our assumptions, ways of being and acting, and ways of relating. Thus, journaling as an approach resonates with both the secular definition of mindfulness as "paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to things as they are" (Williams et al., 2007, p. 47), and even more deeply with classical definitions emphasizing mindfulness as a form of remembrance or inquiry into the non-permanent, yet divine, nature of self and reality (Sellman & Buttarazzi, 2020). As such, harmonious links emerge between mindfulness, the subject of the research and journaling as the methodology. Thus, we can welcome an approach open to the full ramifications of mindfulness as a way of being and knowing (Fegans Gould et al., 2016); that acknowledges the limitations of positivistic science in this area.

For writers such as Janesick (2015) and Parnell (2005), a journal is a mirror of the self, our perceptions of, and responses to, life's events and, therefore, an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. The use of structured questions in conjunction with free-flowing journal writing is particularly useful (Progoff, 1992); it enables us to better explore and write about the dominating thoughts and emotions, to discover what they can reveal about where we are with "the now of life" (Parnell, 2005, p. 3). Journaling also provides us with ways to illuminate our automatic thinking and habits of mind; to move past an intuitive adoption of patterns of thinking, or unquestioned beliefs and progress from "*assimilative* learning to *transformative* learning" (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 64).

The "here and now" is a fundamental part of mindfulness. Williams and Penman (2011) distinguish between the "Doing" and "Being" modes of the mind. While good for solving problems and regulating our lives through habits, the Doing mode can result in too much control surrendered to automaticity where thinking, working, eating, and so forth happens without deep awareness of them taking place. Living our life this way means much can be missed. The Being mode is a different way of relating to the world. It allows us to see how our minds tend to filter and distort reality, over-think, over-analyze and over-judge. Mindfulness encourages us to enter this Being mode.

Similarly, just as journaling helps us develop and expand a more acute sense of self-awareness by examining our thoughts, communications, and behaviors over time (Solgot, 2005), so too can a mindful inquiry. Time for reflective thought is often limited in busy academic lives, with any available thinking time usually dedicated to pressing, analytic inquiry. Paradoxically, however, as Webster-Wright (2013) notes, time spent in contemplative mindfulness, stepping back from persistent

probing into a quiet, peaceful space, can provide us with a broader perspective, leading to increased clarity and focus.

For Sandelowski and Barroso (2002), reflexivity is a hallmark of excellent qualitative research; it entails the researcher's ability and willingness to acknowledge and consider the many ways they can influence research findings and, consequently, what is accepted as knowledge. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) emphasize the need for tolerance and integration of numerous perspectives in a more mindful inquiry; looking beyond assumptions to the often unaware, deep layers of consciousness and unconsciousness that underlie them. According to Kabat-Zinn (2004), paying attention in this way, with openness, not falling prey to our likes and dislikes, opinions, prejudices, projections, and expectations, allows new possibilities to open up.

Turning our attention to children and young people, as Barrack (2015) notes, mindfulness can empower pupils to become more self-confident and responsible for their well-being. Therefore, learning the practice of mindfulness presents the opportunity for personal insight and the development of a life-long tool or different way of being. Likewise, journal writing is a compelling medium for realizing transformative and healing properties in ourselves and the world (Myers, 2010). With freedom from the restrictions of "proper writing", journaling allows us to tap into our creative and authentic voice; a voice that perhaps sits just out of reach of our everyday conscious and critical minds. It enables us to write without thinking, with an openness and curiosity; also, a lauded trait of mindfulness (Langer, 2014) to see what unfolds as we write things down.

Journaling for researching mindfulness in a junior school. We now make greater reference to a small scale-study that sought to investigate the implementation of an MBI at a state junior school in England, emphasizing pupils' and teachers' perspectives. Journaling was considered most appropriately matched to this study's research objectives and valued for its harmonious link with mindfulness, as previously introduced. In this section, we offer further detail concerning the reasons underpinning this methodological decision. As a research method, journaling is an excellent aide-mémoire of what took place and when. It can highlight critical learning and facilitate the writer to glimpse directly into the research process.

As our next section will show, journaling allowed for greater exploration of how contextual factors and individual differences influenced the perceived impact of, and meanings attributed to, mindfulness practice and experience of an MBI. Such perceptions are vital for understanding the place of MBIs in schools and providing essential information on how the MBI was experienced first-hand by those at the receiving end. Hence, the strength of a more mindful approach through journaling lies in its ability to capture the nuances of diverse personal experiences gained from all involved in the same MBI. Providing pupils with a voice also diverts focus away from the usual narrow emphasis on feedback gained from the program implementer (Feagans Gould et al., 2016). While the implementer's perspective is essential as they are closely involved

with the program and, therefore, have greater program knowledge, which is a strength, this close association can also result in biased feedback; which is a weakness (Dariotis et al., 2017).

Hence, journaling provides program participants with a voice and includes them in informing the purposes of the data's research and meanings. Participants have a different vantage point, investment, and information sources. As key stakeholders, they provide unique perspectives; ones often under-explored using qualitative methods (Dariotis et al., 2017). Indeed, Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) emphasize, it is crucial to listen to and for different versions and voices; "truths" emerge when people come together to share their experiences through a dynamic process of action, reflection, and shared inquiry. However, these truths are still entrenched in the participants' conceptual worlds and their interactions (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008). Such voiced opinions about the acceptability of an MBI's content and delivery may help refine intervention procedures and optimize effectiveness (Dariotis et al., 2017). Similarly, McKeering and Hwang (2018) maintain that excluding qualitative data investigating pupils' learning experiences and practising mindfulness overlooks valuable information that could inform better implementation.

Wegner et al. (2017) note that adolescent programs are often criticized for focusing on implementation and providing little opportunity for reflection. Wegner et al. (2017) continue to describe using reflective writing to study a health-promoting schools project in South Africa. The participants reflected on connecting with complex, positive, and negative feelings. They perceived reflective writing had empowered them to express themselves with courage and honesty, connect with themselves, recognize weaknesses and let go of negative feelings. They also perceived writing to be non-judgmental, affording a sense of relief and release and inducing emotions; ultimately, it allowed them to recognize personal changes and development and provide insight into their feelings and experiences.

In the study we will now present, it was this creative and authentic voice of participants that was sought. Within a school community, the pupils are invariably those with a silenced voice or those not used to communicating their views freely or being taken seriously by adults in an adult dominated society (Punch, 2002). Thus, our concern was to provide pupils with ample opportunity to share their voice more prominently than the one characteristically heard via questionnaire data. Journaling gave them this voice, which can be heard alongside their teachers through the reflections contained within the extracts shared later in this article. Journaling, as we will show, also gave rise to a more democratic, participatory, and empowering experience.

The Study: Pupils and Teachers' Perceptions of Journaling

The study reported here aimed to ascertain pupils' perceptions of the potentiality and acceptability of mindfulness lessons at their school and journaling as a process that was integrated alongside these lessons.

Sample and approach. The lessons took place for one academic year in a mixed, ethnically diverse state-funded English junior school for pupils aged seven to eleven (years "three" to "six" in the English context). A qualified mindfulness teacher led a 6-week sequence of lessons to each of the 4-year groups. Twelve teachers and their classes, averaging 30 pupils per class, were involved. An accompanying activity was journaling; as reflection was a fundamental part of the study it was considered essential to provide the participants with an opportunity for reflection through journaling. Therefore, all pupils in years five and six received a "mindful moments" diary in which to practice. It was understood and agreed each pupil had full ownership of their diary; their entries would not be shared with the teacher, and they could write in them at a time agreed with their teacher, or at home. The diary comprised nineteen "tell me about moments" relating to the different themes taught by the MBI. For example, to reflect and write/draw about when they felt worried at school and needed to steady themselves. Alternatively, when they had felt grateful; to consider how it felt and what they had noticed. The diaries also contained mindful coloring sheets and blank pages for writing notes or doodling to allow for pupils' different preferences and abilities for expressing themselves.

Upon completing the six lessons, it was agreed that the teachers would select four pupils (two boys, two girls) from each class in each year group to form a focus group. Pupils were selected based on their perceived motivation toward the lessons; this included one highly motivated pupil, two neutral and one comparatively disinterested. It was considered more representative if the focus groups comprised a mixture of pupils in terms of enthusiasm for the MBI. Though perhaps a limitation, these factors were not analyzed as part of the process; rather their views were taken as likely to be representative of their age (7–11) and set against discussion of similar themes in the literature. The study followed the ethical guidelines and protocols of the University of Nottingham and BERA (2011); hence informed consent was obtained from the school and all participants for research activities (the lessons were part of the curriculum though and therefore mandatory), with pseudonyms used here to protect their anonymity.

Free discussion for 30 min was encouraged. A schedule of questions, influenced by hierarchical focusing (Tomlinson, 1989) and informed by a prior review of the literature on mindfulness and education, guided the group discussion. Prompts were used when long pauses in the discussion necessitated such interjection. The researchers did not have direct access to the pupils' journals; however, pupils were encouraged to reflect on both their use and content within the focus group's broader remit. Semistructured one to one interviews (30 min each) were conducted with nine class teachers and supplement the data reported here, where reference is made to the pupils' engagement with their journals.

The authors used thematic analysis to identify and analyze patterns of meaning in the resulting dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, emerging categories were used to determine the significance of experiences reported (Joffe, 2012) and then subsequently coded. Broader patterns of meaning were then sought by examining and comparing previously generated codes. This led to themes that explained larger data sections and involved combining similar codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), for example, mindfulness as calming and behavior management later merged into one theme.

The findings. The pupils' focus group reflections and occasional teacher interview extracts are integrated with a continuing literature review. While only a few examples of their experiences are shared, generally, they are indicative of the whole sample.

Some children referred to the calming and relaxing effects of journaling, others to the pure enjoyment of filling them in, or carefully coloring or doodling in them and thinking about "stuff."

> Mary—It's just really sort of relaxing, and you just think like it's a nice thing to do at school because you don't normally get that time to do coloring or write down your thoughts (year six pupil).
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> Noah—I think it's good because it's almost mindful classes but without the class. So, it's just kind of like you've got your own miniature private class to just do what you like really (year six pupil).
>
> Ravinder—It's nice to have something that you can put all your thoughts and feelings into, and your journal is almost like a person you're telling about all these questions you've got. And it's quite nice just writing down something you wouldn't really tell other people. Or maybe just like I'm quite nervous telling other people stuff, so it's been quite nice (year six pupil).

Other pupils perceived journaling as providing support for their mental well-being. For Parnell (2005), the ultimate goal of writing is to find our centre of emotional balance and identify ways to regain balance when confronted with emotional dilemmas. In committing ourselves to this "growth process," we begin to develop self-awareness to achieve and maintain emotional and spiritual balance in our lives. Journaling can help us develop self-awareness needed to recognize when we are not emotionally or spiritually centred or equanimous. It can pay witness to, and give a voice to, the often forgotten, overlooked, quieter, or silent parts of ourselves (Hubbs & Brand, 2005), as revealed by the extracts where some pupils alluded to the more therapeutic benefits gained by journaling.

> James—It certainly has allowed me to express my feelings as a kind of drawing really (year six pupil).
>
> Keiran—I think that it's good you can jot down all your worries down, and it will make you feel better, and it will make you feel like you can just leave them all behind and you don't have to think about them (year five pupil).
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> George—When I'm like sad, or like worried about something, I find it quite hard to say it. Because like you have to put like different . . . like ways of saying it when you're speaking. But when you're writing, I find it easier because you don't put emotion really on writing (year six pupil).

George spoke of how journaling had become a source of comfort and support, particularly as his mother had died recently. He found it difficult to speak to adults about his feelings, having noticed it shocked or upset them when he became emotional or angry. George spoke of how it seemed as though the adults did not want to listen to him, to hear of his pain and grief. He had decided it was because it was too distressing for them to cope with as they too were in pain. So, to protect their feelings, George felt it better to be careful about what he said and, more importantly, from his perspective, how he said it. Through journaling, he found a distinct, uncensored, voice, one that was not accompanied by even more pain than what he was already enduring. Similarly, the class teacher, when interviewed recognized the benefits of journaling for George.

One child particularly has started the writing of the questions when he's feeling quite emotional, quite strained because his mum died recently. He will take himself off with his journal and sits quietly and does a bit of writing and things like that. That's really helped him actually. He's been active with that (Mark, year six teacher).

From a more critical perspective, it prompts the question how ethical is it to give a child who is suffering in some way the space and time at school to allow for thoughts to drift through their mind and then on to paper? As Sellman and Buttarazzi (2020) contend in their discussion of MBIs, while processing such issues is valuable on an educational and therapeutic level, crucially it requires dedicated and qualified support as it could elicit disturbances in their emotional lives in unpredictable ways, which are difficult to handle and support (Ergas, 2017). Undeniably, according to Lynagh et al. (2010), many teachers express discomfort in dealing with sensitive issues such as mental health, grief, and loss. Undoubtedly, balancing teacher and carer roles can be problematic, particularly when the numerous pedagogical tasks filling a school day conflict with finding time to care for individual pupils (Alisic, 2011).

When writing in a journal, there is no expectation for it to conform to any style, category, representation, or to have any discernible meaning. It only needs to have substance and value for the writer; it records the dialog taking place in the writer's mind and makes sense of it. It takes an order of its own as the words are written down on paper, and is a way to be heard when it feels like no one else will listen (Williamson, 2009). Thus, journaling gives voice to our feelings, makes us pay attention to what is going on inside us and gives voice to your "self" in the sense that it can facilitate a person to speak with him/herself in a language of pure understanding. "The reflective journal provides a vehicle for inner dialogue that connects thoughts, feelings, and actions" (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 62).

The journal encompasses any and everything within the scope of our daily life experiences; it is "a collage" of our life; serving as a "storehouse" to document life experiences (Parnell, 2005). However, in a school, as Martin (1992) cautions, it is necessary to consider for children journaling maybe stifled when written as though someone is looking over their shoulder.

Undeniably, when we write knowing the thoughts presented will be viewed, there is the risk of self-censorship either consciously or unconsciously. There is exposure to the fear of being judged detracting from the "letting go" experience. Consequently, according to Martin (1992, p. 40), "a journal will probably be most useful if it is written not as something which will 1 day be published but with the abandon of one who knows that 1 day it will go up in smoke."

> Lily—It's really helpful when I can write things down, and I know no one will read it (year five pupil).
>
> William—If you want to get something out of your system, then it is helpful. And you know if somethings holding you down, it's your little private thing, yeah . . . and well no one else is going to read it so you can write whatever you want in there (year six pupil).

From a different perspective, it could be argued that although journaling can be challenging, it can also go on unchallenged, which could be a limitation of this solo act. The journal writer might repeatedly process and re-process the same concepts with little or no challenge to their accepted beliefs or ideas (Hubbs & Brand, 2005). Potentially this could provide a reason for including an 'audience' in the process; it may encourage the writer to reflect, re-evaluate, and criticize their perceptions at a deeper and more honest level, while providing others with a glimpse of what the writer is experiencing, or has experienced, at a given time (Hubbs & Brand, 2005).

Journaling can be an excellent tool to help children think about issues that have been addressed and worked on while revealing unresolved issues still in need of attention.

> Mary—when you write things down it sort of brings back memories and you can kind of think well, I think I did that well. Like you sort of understand more (year six pupil).
>
> Charlotte—I've found that I can just . . . just write it down but I've deliberately taken lots and lots of time erm . . . and I've had breaks where I've just thought about different things (year six pupil).

In terms of the teachers' perceptions of journaling, throughout the study, they maintained there was little time in their busy school day for "squeezing" anything else in, let alone what they viewed as another intervention. They considered they were already hard-pressed to complete everything they regarded as essential, therefore, unsurprisingly, lack of time remained an issue for them when trying to find time for the children to reflect and write in their journals. Yet, despite this, the teachers generally viewed journaling positively.

Helen (year five teacher) - Oh yes. I really like them. I think they really like them. Again, we haven't given them a lot of time in school I'm afraid, but I think it's a really good idea and it will get them used to writing down their feelings. I think it's very positive.

Stuart (year six teacher) - When everybody was doing it, it was nice and calm. It was nice and quiet. Yeah, it's lovely. I

think because they do like that whole idea of ownership of something like that. But they love it because it's theirs and they take real ownership of it; they take good care of it. They take better care of that than their reading books and their school diaries, stuff that don't necessarily give them that opportunity to do stuff for their benefit. I think that's the key, so that's definitely a good thing, a positive.

Journaling, however, is just one method of connecting with self and creating time to slow down and acknowledge all that takes place within our lives. Undeniably no one method will work for all people. If committed to self-care and well-being, it is an individual's responsibility to try out different methods and find the method or methods they consider best suited to their interests, forms of expression, and lifestyle.

Carrie (year six teacher) - They've loved it as well, whenever it's been like quiet reading "oh can we get our mindfulness journals out." And you know, you know, I think it's a good idea. They're like jotting a lot. Some children won't. I think you know they'll be mixed. There'll be the children that don't. And even just having time to reflect . . . I think they've all enjoyed some aspect of the journals, whether maybe not so much writing it down, whether it's like a drawing, or the quotes looking at those. I think I think there's been something for everybody they've enjoyed and like I said they've all used them in their own ways. But they've all certainly enjoyed getting them out and have asked me several times' oh can we get our journals out.

Conclusion

This article argues that there is a need for greater coherence between ontology and epistemology in research design in the field of mindfulness and education. To date, studies on MBIs within education have tended to employ quantitative research methods that emphasize the before and after, with little attention paid to the learning process itself. Such methods have often been met with skepticism by some (e.g., Hyland, 2016) for attempting to measure the "immeasurable." In doing so, they only research relatively narrow understandings and applications of mindfulness, and subsequently, reinforce an instrumental interpretation and agenda. In contrast, this review and study's findings acknowledge the limitations of the traditional, that is, positivistic, method and adopts journaling, a qualitative method with harmonious links to mindfulness, though the journals themselves were kept private and discussed in focus groups.

The rationale for employing journaling was the need to find a method both more synergistic with mindfulness as a way of being and knowing and more deeply illuminating of the type of learning that may take place during a mindfulness course; one that could be used as an appropriate tool to study the process of development and learning that takes place when learning the approach. As the practice of mindfulness is primarily learned experientially (Feldman & Kuyken, 2019), such an approach seems particularly pertinent.

Journaling, a more holistic, interpretive and contemplative type of self-report, provided this tool. In contrast to the more limited feedback typically gained from psychometric tests with their narrow emphasis on outcomes, journaling offered access to more eloquent, perceptive, and real-life feedback on the pupils' experiences of mindfulness and their experiences of the process of learning the practice and keeping a journal as an intricate part of the process itself.

The reflections reveal how the pupils valued the depth of insight afforded by journaling and how such an approach can support and go beyond processes of reflection encouraged by mindfulness. As Haertl and Ero-Phillips (2017, p. 1) highlight, "writing is a powerful means of expression. It allows the writer exploration of cognitive, emotional and spiritual areas otherwise not accessible." For some, like George, one of the pupils referred to in this article, journaling can provide the vehicle to help traverse a landscape clouded with pain and sorrow to a place where a measure of peace and acceptance can be found. For others, journaling can provide an element of calm in a typically busy school day, a time to think, reflect, or to be still.

Finally, this article argues the case for recognizing the value of journaling as a means of collecting data that encourages mindfulness and yields more authentic data. This more mindful approach to researching MBIs in schools provides a more nuanced opportunity for exploring the undeniably complex behavior and mental effects emerging from mindfulness practices.

Data Availability

The data sets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethical Statement

This article draws upon data collection in adherence with the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association and was cleared by the University of Nottingham's own ethical research reviewing protocols. All participants gave their informed consent and no subject was harmed or put at risk during the collecting of data. The article includes quotes from participants that have been safely anonymized. The literature has been cited accurately and representatively.

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