

What happens when guided meditation is used in the classroom after break times?

Alana Lochrie

Rationale

Within the school education system, Health and Wellbeing is a core part of the Curriculum for Excellence and is the responsibility of all staff within the school environment. It is expected that children and young people are included, engaged and involved within their own learning as this is essential in enabling the child to achieve and raise their attainment at school. (Healthier Scotland: The Scottish Government, 2017). There are many barriers that prevent a child from achieving. Cremin and Arthur (2014) explain that barriers to learning can occur from social, emotional, learning difficulties and the socio-economic state of the child's family. This can affect children's wellbeing within and out with school. Furthermore, Healthier Scotland (2017), state that poverty is the single biggest driver in poor mental health. As a probationer teacher within a school where the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile is 4, (Scottish Government, 2016) it is vital that I plan appropriately to support the needs of individual children. This also enables a prime opportunity to research further into the impact that this has on the learning environment. In order to do this it was decided to look at the underlying factors relating to mental health within the education system. Through tackling mental health and the health and well-being within our children, it is thought that this will contribute to the improvements in literacy and numeracy. (Smarter Scotland: The Scottish Government, 2018). Nurture and health and wellbeing is a focus point of the school improvement plan, and so it is anticipated that this enquiry will encourage children to use relaxation strategies to support mental health and wellbeing. It is hoped that this will result in a positive impact on children's learning across the curriculum, thus contributing towards closing the attainment gap.

Aims

This practitioner enquiry aims to investigate the impact of guided meditation on focus within the classroom. Within the subject class, there are varying dynamics within the class, such as children who struggle to settle and focus, that have a negative impact on the learning of the children. I anticipate that the use of guided meditation will have a positive impact on focus within the classroom.

Methodology

The research was conducted over four weeks with a class of 29 primary 3 children. In line with the school improvement plan, Health and Wellbeing was chosen as the main curricular area, with guided meditation being implemented after lunch times. To introduce this new concept, the meditation was led by the teacher, using music through ICT.

Before commencing the enquiry, children were asked to complete a survey. This asked the children to give their opinion on mindfulness using a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Over the 4 weeks, pupils engaged in different lessons with regards to meditation and mindfulness. They participated in guided meditation at least 3 times a week, where the focus would be on their breathing and clearing their mind. To support this learning, children also participated in mindfulness colouring, yoga sessions and breathing exercises. Whenever it was noted that pupils lacked focus, the teacher implemented a guided meditation session for no longer than 10 minutes.

For the purpose of this enquiry, three different children were used as the main focus, although all pupil's learning was evaluated. The teacher recorded observations through visual assessment of pupil's focus before and after the sessions had been implemented. This approach enabled the teacher to determine if guided meditation had any impact to the children's focus. In addition, the teacher used the work within jotters, and observed if children were successful within their work. This enabled the class teacher to measure the level of focus before and after the session has been delivered.

Over the course of the study, children engaged with learning about mindfulness, what this is, and how this can impact wellbeing. A survey was carried out at the start of the enquiry where the children could state whether they enjoyed mindfulness and assess whether they thought it increased their focus. The same survey was carried out at the end of the enquiry, enabling the teacher to measure the impact it had on each individual child.

Findings

This enquiry was investigated over 4 weeks and carried out 3 times a week, after lunch times. When examining the data from the survey, it was evident that the investigation did not have a major impact on the children. After analysing the data more closely, it is apparent that in this classroom environment, this enquiry was not as successful in supporting some of the children's learning.

From figure one, it is clear to see that although most of the children had said that they enjoy mindfulness prior to learning guided meditation, 21 of the children did think it aided them to focus. Furthermore, 16 children stated that mindfulness did help them learn. It was also noted that the children that did say they felt focused prior to them enquiry, were children that are seen to be settled and achieving within their learning already. Figure ones results were completed on the first week of the enquiry, to ensure a clear comparison could be given at the end.

Figure 1

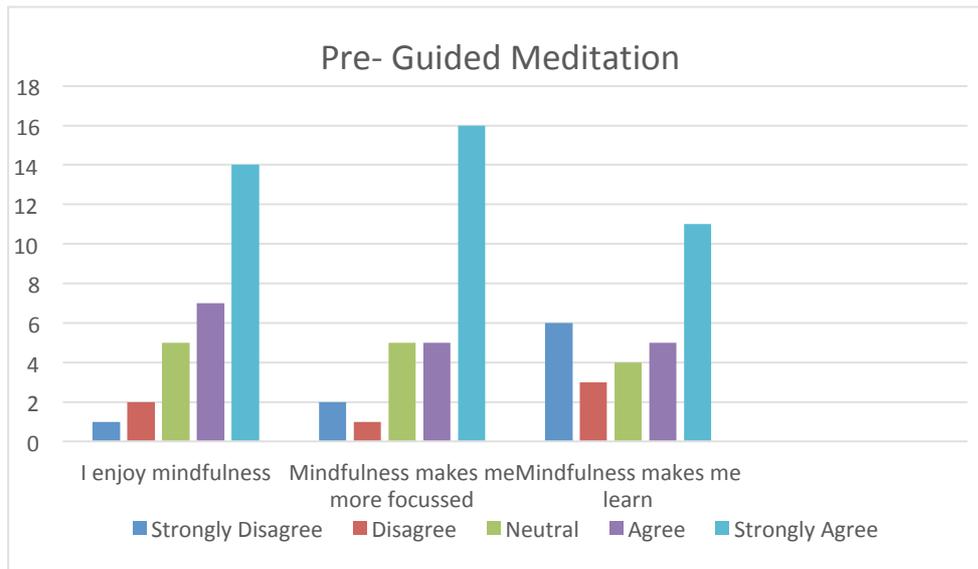
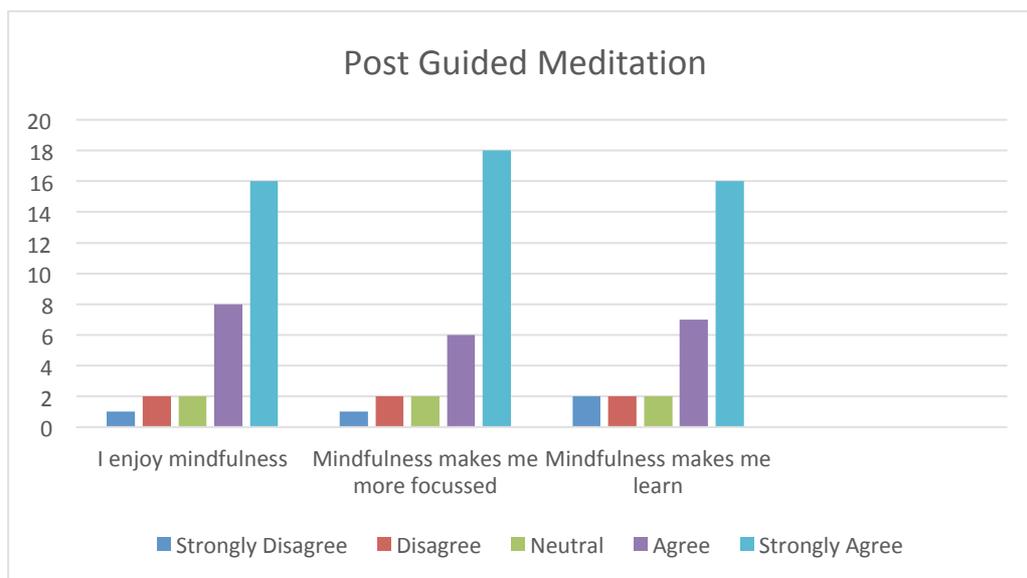


Figure 2 shows the results from the same survey completed within the final week of the investigation. As shown below, 24 children stated that they enjoyed mindfulness more by the end of the investigation, compared to figure 1 where 21 children stated they enjoyed mindfulness. This was an increase on 3 children. It can also be seen that after completing the investigation, that most of the children did feel more focussed and ready to learn. However, for some children, guided meditation made them less focussed and less likely to learn. Although this was only a minority of the class, the children that were the main subjects of this investigation were included in this outcome. Two of the main subjects had also stated at the beginning of the investigation they did not feel mindfulness enabled them to learn or focus. Therefore, it can be concluded that for those two children, the enquiry did not have a significant impact.

Figure 2



Jotter work

In the week prior to commencing the investigation, jotter work was observed to gather a baseline expectation of what was already being produced. Throughout the four weeks, various jotter work tasks were completed and observed. Within the class, pupils who were not completing tasks on time, or not starting the task within an appropriate time frame, had showed no improvement. Furthermore, some children who were generally completing tasks and focussed before the investigation, had produced work that was untidy and rushed. Through verbal feedback from the children, many said they felt very tired and too relaxed after guided meditation. Therefore, feeling tired may have had an impact of the quality of work which was produced. Many tasks remained incomplete throughout the full investigation, suggesting that for the pupils within this class, guided meditation did not have a beneficial impact.

Observations

Within the first two weeks, no significant impact in focus was recorded following the introduction of guided meditation. For the majority of the class, pupils engaged well in the techniques and participated in a sensible manner. For three pupils, Pupil A, Pupil B and Pupil C there was a lack of engagement displayed towards the strategies being used in class. Pupil A and Pupil B, both of whom struggle to make good choices, continued to not engage for the full length of the investigation. Pupil C, who has social/emotional needs, began to engage and become more settled and focussed by week 3, particularly when concentrating on breathing. There was a noticeable increase of effort levels from the pupil, with most tasks being completed independently, and a more positive attitude towards the learning within the class.

Conclusions

For this enquiry, most pupils were able to engage in guided meditation to enhance focus within learning. Although there were no major impact for most of the class, it was observed that the children who were already settled and focussed within their learning continued to be focussed and settled. For a small number of children, it was found that actually the guided meditation was too relaxing, which therefore made them less likely to complete their written tasks afterwards. Pupil A and Pupil B showed no engagement, and due to other factors, this was not the best environment for them to participate within an investigation like this. Next time, I would try this in a smaller group situation for these pupils. The survey was effective in highlighting the children's thoughts on mindfulness, however next time I would include a section for the children to write their emotions down. This would give a clearer view of how the children felt during and after the sessions. The jotter monitoring and observations provided me with an interesting insight to the work produced. From the data collected from surveys, jotters and observation, it can be concluded that although children enjoyed the guided meditation, it had no significant impact on their focus or their learning.

Implications for Future Practice

Although for many children, they enjoyed participating in guided meditation, it has highlighted some areas of development if conducting an investigation like this again. I am interested in continuing an investigation on guided meditation, however, I would ensure I carried this out with a smaller group of children. This would hopefully ensure I could give the right support to those who needed it, in a less crowded environment. If carried out in such a way, it is possible that for the children who do struggle to make good choices, there would be an opportunity for learning to regulate their emotions in a safe environment and through guided meditation. In turn, this could aid them in becoming more focussed within their learning and raising attainment.

Bibliography

Cremin, T. and Arthur, J. (2014) Learning to Teach in the Primary School. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.

Healthier Scotland: The Scottish Government (2017). Mental Health Strategy: 2017-2027. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.

Scottish Government (2016) The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. [Online] Available: <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD> [Accessed: 18 February 2020].

Audit General for Scotland and The Accounts Commission (2018). [online]

Auditscotland.gov.uk. Available at:

http://www.auditscotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2018/nr_180913_mental_health.pdf
[Accessed 6 Mar. 2019]

Smarter Scotland: The Scottish Government (2018). Developing a positive whole-school ethos and culture – Relationships, Learning and Behaviour. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government.