

## Using a personal reflective journal to impact positively on the classroom environment.

**Lara Hughes**

### ***Rationale:***

Health and Wellbeing, along with Literacy and Numeracy, is one of the core areas within the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) that is a responsibility for each member of staff within the school (Scottish Government, 2020). In Scotland, all adults who work within a school have a duty to support and develop the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of pupils, this is referred to as the 'Responsibility of All' (Mental Health Strategy 2017). If children are not able to listen, concentrate or participate in the classroom environment their emotional, social or physical well-being is not being met. Educating a child on how to reflect on their emotions, to unwind, and manage their mental health not only increases their concentration within the classroom but provides them with skills that they can use in later life.

In my probationary year I have been working in a school in which the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) (Scottish Government, 2020) decile score is low. I appreciate the importance of planning lessons that are accessible to each pupil individually whilst also benefitting the learning of the class as a whole. The Scottish Government (2013) states that children living in deprived areas are more likely to suffer from social and mental health inequalities- I feel a personal responsibility to minimise these inequalities as best I can. The importance of this underpins each lesson I plan and deliver. I aim to ensure that each child feels included, valued and nurtured and to develop a culture of respect that permeates beyond the bounds of the classroom. Education Scotland (2014) describes the aim of the Scottish Government to reduce social, economic and mental inequalities amongst children by narrowing the attainment gap in achievement, attainment and Health and Wellbeing. There is a known correlation between the Health and Wellbeing of a child and their attainment in other areas such as literacy and numeracy for example. This impact is the reason that the school I am currently in include Health and Wellbeing in their School Improvement Plan. It is predicted that this practitioner enquiry will see an improvement in the mental health and social wellbeing of the pupils, which will have a positive impact on children's learning in other curricular areas.

### ***Aims:***

The aim of this enquiry is to find how reflection strategies impact on learner focus and engagement within the classroom. In my class I have pupils with a wide range of abilities and behaviours which can often have a negative impact on the learning and development. It is anticipated that the reflective strategies that will be implemented throughout the 5 week period, will have a positive effect on pupils focus, behaviour and learning.

### ***Methodology:***

This enquiry was conducted with 33 Primary 7 pupils over a 4 week period, starting on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February and ending on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March.

At the beginning of this enquiry each child was given a questionnaire to complete (see appendix 1). The questionnaire asked three questions. These were:

- How well do you listen in the afternoon?
- How well do you concentrate in the afternoon?
- How well do you participate in the afternoon?

The children were asked whether they found each of the tasks impossible, found it hard, they sometimes took part in the task, they mostly took part in the task or if they always took part in the task. Each child circled the answer that related most to them for all questions.

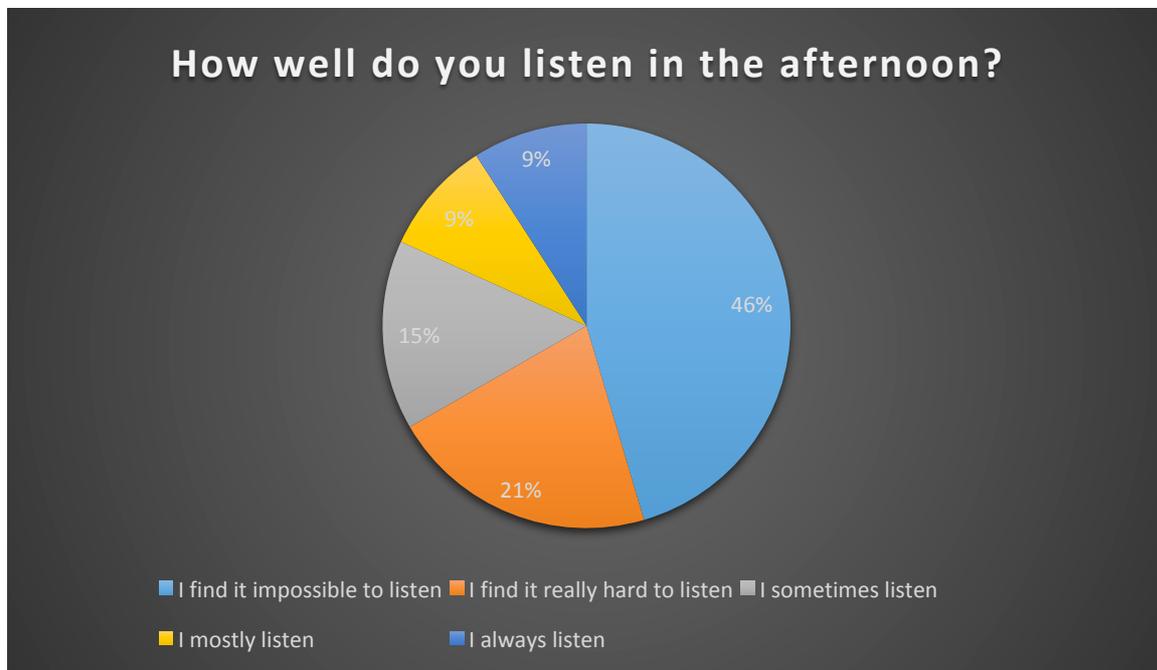
Following the questionnaire, the children were given 5 minutes to reflect in an emotional journal. To begin the children were asked to write down their reflection although this proved too difficult as the children didn't feel they were given enough time to think about their emotions and then also write down within the 5 minutes so we changed it to 5 minutes reflection and then 5 minutes writing about their reflection. Some children still struggled to think about their emotions so I used an emotion word bank (see appendix 2) to aid these children. I saw an increase in what the children were writing about in their journal when the word bank was used.

Observations of pupil's concentration and focus were recorded visually, both before, and after implementation of reflection strategies. Through this approach I was able to ascertain if the reflection strategies had the desired and expected effects. As well as these visual observations of participant's involvement in lessons I received feedback when marking their work. This feedback was also assessed and taken into account when collating the results of the study. If I could observe a marked increase in the children's' productivity after the reflection exercises it was determined that these exercises made an impact. The children also completed a further questionnaire which gave another opportunity for feedback in order to validate and embellish the results found.

**Findings:**

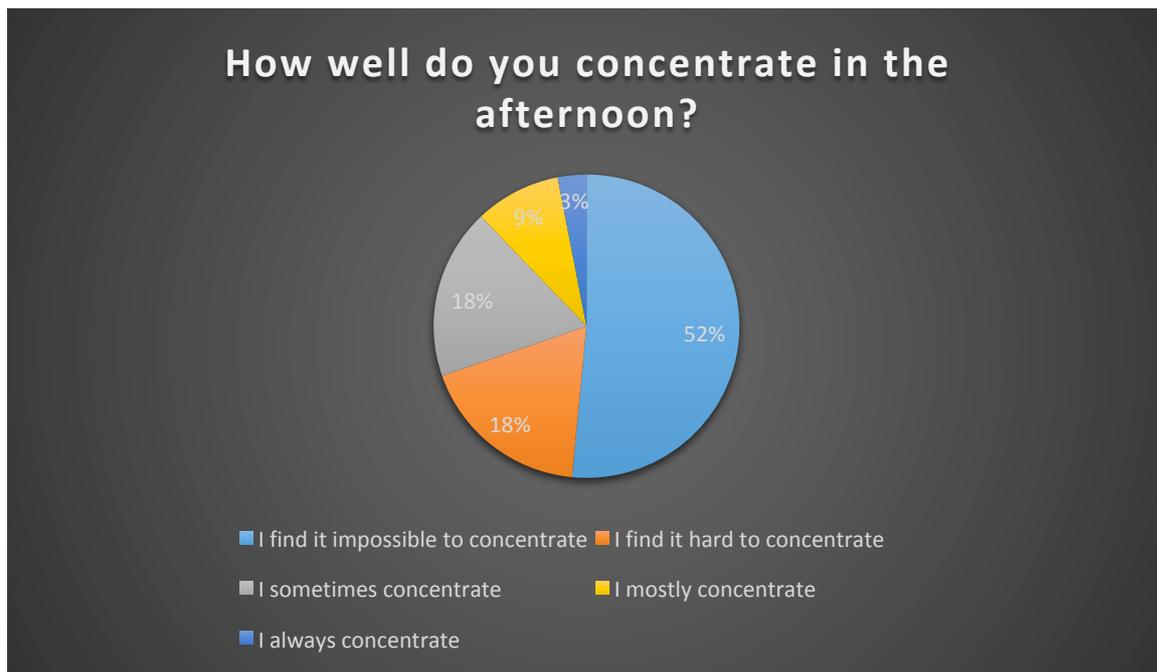
Pre relaxation:

**Figure 1:**



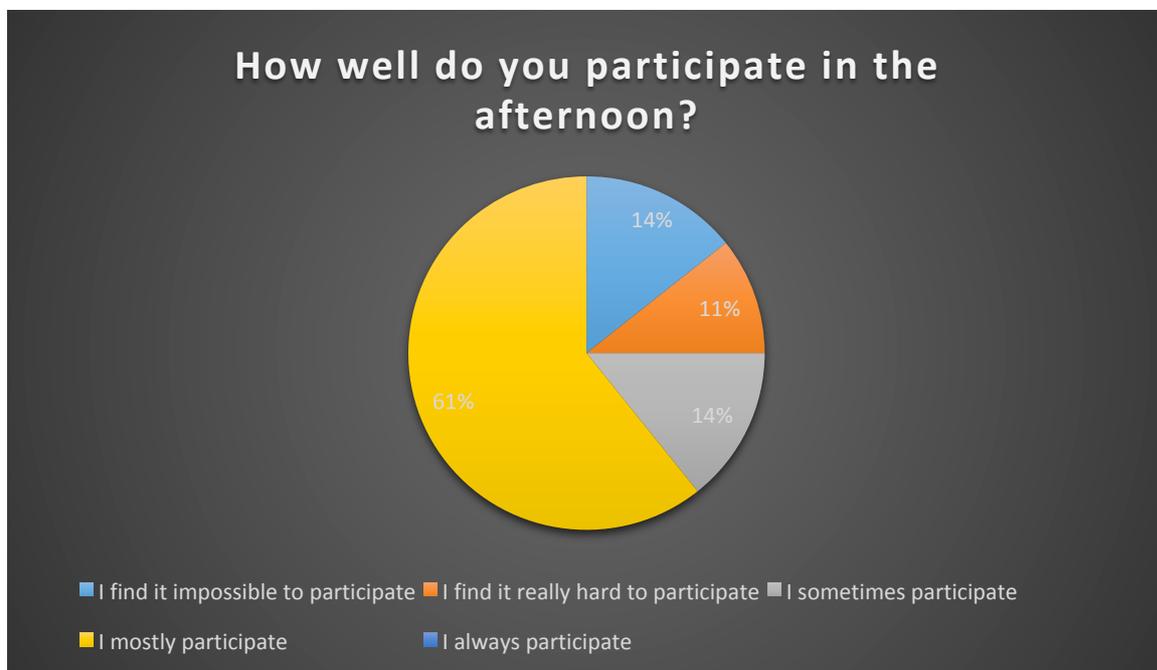
As we can see from Figure 1 above, the pre reflection questionnaire showed that 46% of children found it impossible to listen in the afternoon, 21% found it really hard to listen, 15% sometimes listen, 9% mostly listen and 9% always listen prior to any reflection strategies being used.

**Figure 2:**



As we can see from Figure 2 above, the pre reflection questionnaire showed that 52% of children found it impossible to concentrate in the afternoon, 18% found it really hard to concentrate, 18% sometimes concentrated, 9% mostly concentrated and 3% always concentrate prior to any reflection strategies being used.

**Figure 3:**

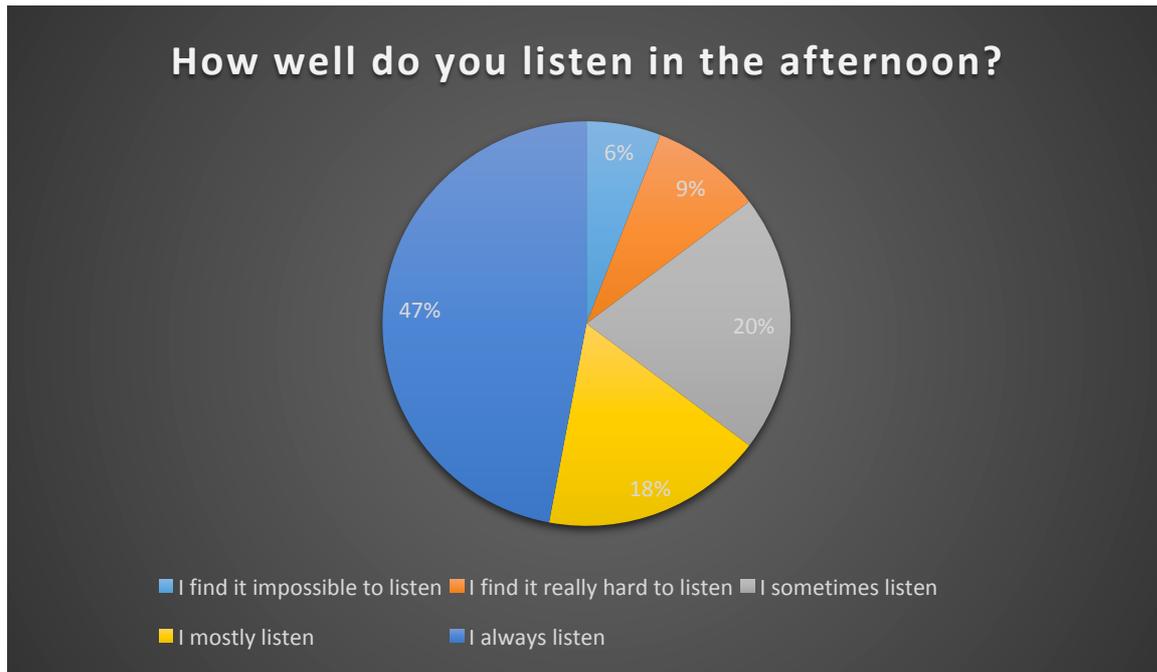


As we can see from Figure 3 above, the pre reflection questionnaire showed that 14% of children found it impossible to participate in the afternoon, 11% found it really hard to participate, 14% sometimes participate, 61% mostly participate and 14% always participate prior to any reflection strategies being used.

From the three figures it is clear that there is an issue with listening and concentration in the afternoon with the children in my classroom. 67% of the children in the classroom struggle with listening and 70% struggle with concentration in the afternoon. These results were completed on the pilot week (first week); therefore this result was in-line with the expectations of the enquiry.

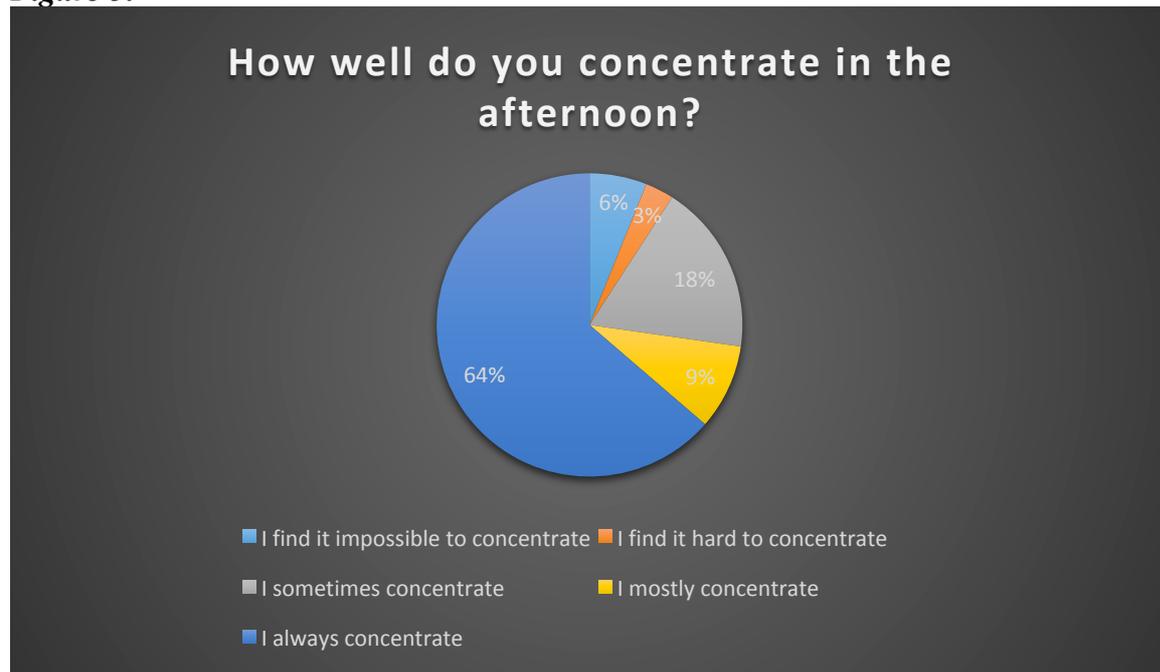
Post Reflection:

**Figure 4:**



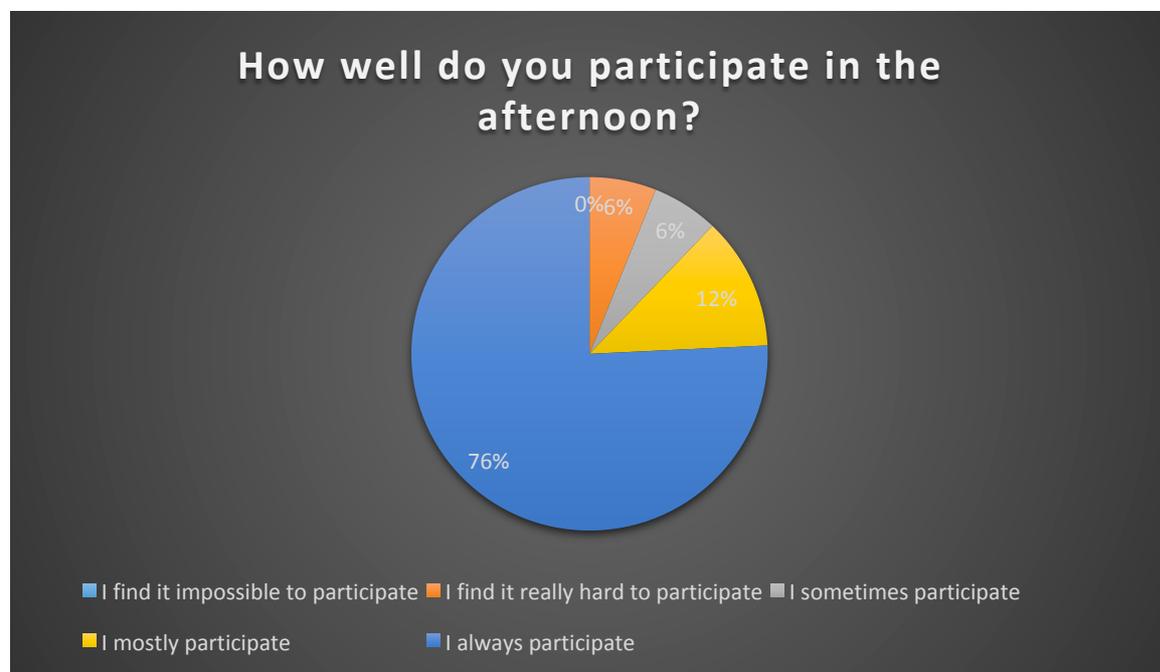
As we can see from Figure 4 above, the post reflection questionnaire showed that 6% of children found it impossible to listen in the afternoon, 9% found it really hard to listen, 20% sometimes listen, 18% mostly listen and 47% always listen prior to any reflection strategies being used.

**Figure 5:**



As we can see from Figure 5 above, the post reflection questionnaire showed that 6% of children found it impossible to concentrate in the afternoon, 3% found it really hard to concentrate, 18% sometimes concentrated, 9% mostly concentrated and 64% always concentrate prior to any reflection strategies being used.

**Figure 6:**



As we can see from Figure 6 above, the post reflection questionnaire showed that 0% of children found it impossible to participate in the afternoon, 6% found it really hard to participate, 6% sometimes participate, 12% mostly participate and 76% always participate prior to any reflection strategies being used.

As we can see from the Post-Reflection Questionnaire results in Figure 4 and 5, 65% of the pupils within the class felt they mostly or always listened in the afternoon and 73% of the pupils felt they mostly or always concentrated in the afternoon after the five week practitioner enquiry, compared to only 18% feeling that they listened and 12% concentrating more prior to undertaking reflection techniques as shown in Figures 1 and 2. It is clear, therefore, that from the findings shown in Figures 4 and 5 that that majority of the class felt in increase in their ability to listen and concentrate after the implementation of reflection strategies, with only a small minority (15%) feeling that they could not listen and 9% feeling that they were unable to concentrate.

### ***Conclusion:***

In conclusion, it can be seen that the implementation of reflection exercises has a positive impact on the level of focus and concentration of the children in my class. The result of this improvement being that the children become more active learners, more engaged in lessons and better learners overall. By teaching reflection strategies and their importance it allowed pupils to remain focussed on their work creating an equitable working environment where children were able to fulfil their emotional and social needs resulting in a more accessible learning environment. These strategies were adopted at times when the pupils seems disengaged or lacking in focus in order to increase productivity during lessons, this usually occurred after lunchtime. Different forms of assessment were used, including, data collection from visual observation, pupil feedback, jotter marking and pupil questionnaires. Results indicate that the reflection strategies improved pupil focus and concentration in the classroom, which is expected to have the knock on effect of improving their learning.

### ***Implications for Future Practice:***

Moving forward with the use of reflection strategies the children informed me that they felt the benefit of these exercises and would like them to continue. This class will continue to adopt the measures learned and used whenever it is felt that the pupils have disengaged and a boost in their concentration is needed. A study by Kuyken et al. (2013) on the effectiveness of mindfulness in schools showed that implementing a mindfulness exercise once a week can enhance the health and wellbeing of the pupils. As I have found the techniques involved in this enquiry to be beneficial to the learning environment as well as the health and wellbeing of my class I will continue to implement them on a weekly basis.

*Appendix:*

*Appendix 1*

P7 Questionnaire

**Week 1**

**Please circle your answer.**

1. How well do you listen in the afternoon?

I find it  
impossible  
to listen in  
the  
afternoon

I find it  
really  
hard to  
listen in  
the  
afternoon

I  
sometimes  
listen in  
the  
afternoon

I mostly  
listen in  
the  
afternoon

I always  
listen in  
the  
afternoon

2. How well do you concentrate in the afternoon?

I find it  
impossible  
to  
concentrate  
in the  
afternoon

I find it  
really hard  
to  
concentrate  
in the  
afternoon

I sometimes  
concentrate  
in the  
afternoon

I mostly  
concentrate  
in the  
afternoon

I always  
concentrate  
in the  
afternoon

3. How well do you participate in the afternoon

I find it  
impossible  
to  
participate  
in the  
afternoon

I find it  
really hard  
to  
participate  
in the  
afternoon

I sometimes  
participate  
in the  
afternoon

I mostly  
participate  
in the  
afternoon

I always  
participate  
in the  
afternoon

## Appendix 2

Use the words in the box to explain how you are feeling in the sentence below.  
Why do you think you are feeling this way? Why do you think you are feeling this way?

agitated	wound up	mad	angry	emotional
disinterested	fed up	giddy	overexcited	buzzing
afraid	astonished	amazed	guilty	ashamed
disgusted	disbelieving	enraged	fuming	bored
disappointed	anxious	apprehensive	disillusioned	distracted
shocked	distraught	miserable	obsessed	exhausted
thrilled	delighted	surprised	shocked	

Today, I am feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because

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