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Dear Peter

RE: MINDFULNESS, WELLBEING AND EDUCATION IN POST-CONFLICT NORTHERN IRELAND:
SUPPORTING MINDFUL SCHOOL COMMUNITIES AS A CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE BUILDING

A submission to the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education Inquiry into
Shared/Integrated Education

On behalf of my colleague, Niamh O'Reilly, and myself I am attaching a submission to your
Inquiry into Integrated Education and Shared Education. We'd be grateful if you could bring
this to the attention of your Chair, Deputy Chair and membership.

Our submission responds, in particular, to the following terms of reference:

- Identification of key barriers and enablers for Shared Education and Integrated Education;
- Identification and analysis of alternative approaches and models of good practice; and
- Consideration of priorities and actions needed to be taken to improve sharing and integration.

Thank you for your attention,

Dr Peter Doran

PP Niamh O'Reilly



MINDFULNESS, WELLBEING AND EDUCATION IN POST-
CONFLICT NORTHERN IRELAND:
SUPPORTING MINDFUL SCHOOL COMMUNITIES
AS A CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE BUILDING

A Submission

Mindfulness is the energy of being aware and awake to the present moment. It is the continuous practice of touching life deeply in every moment of daily life. To be mindful is to be truly alive, present and at one with those around you and with what you are doing.

(Wake Up Schools European Network)

<http://wakeupschools.org/>

Mindfulness training for doctors and teachers: Mental health problems cost the UK economy an estimated £70bn annually. Training new medical and teaching staff in mindfulness techniques would embed a culture of wellbeing in health and education, and reduce a later burden on the NHS by improving the availability of mindfulness-based therapies.

(All Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing, September, 2014)

<http://parliamentarywellbeinggroup.org.uk/>

Acknowledgements

We offer our thanks to the Community Foundation Northern Ireland and Kat Healy for the financial support for this research and enabling this submission.

We also thank all those who gave of their time for a series of interviews that form an important part of this submission. Clearly, mindfulness in the context of our education system and our journey towards united communities is an idea ripe for further exploration and support.

Interviewees:

Michael Mc Knight, Principal, Lough View Integrated Primary School

Anna Johnston, SENCO, Lough View Integrated Primary School

Monique Harte, Occupational Therapy Lecturer, University of Ulster

Mary McNulty, Amal Project, Mediation Northern Ireland

Clíodhna Scott-Wills, Senior Development Officer, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education

Lorraine Murray, Calm Kids, Connected Kids, Founder and Director of Feel Good Therapies

Phap Lai, Wake Up Schools European Network

Clare Kelly, Mindful Schools (UK)

Diarmuid Moran, Holy Child Primary School, Belfast

Caren McDonald, Mindfulness Educator and Secondary School Teacher, San Francisco

Dr Siobhan Hugh Jones, Faculty of Medicine and Health, Leeds University

Valerie York-Zimmerman, President of Mindful Kids Miami

Patricia McIlhone, Steiner School Hollywood

Witnesses who may be available to address the Inquiry:

Dr Peter Doran, School of Law, Queens University Belfast

Niamh O'Reilly BCL, LLM, PGCE, Lead Author of this Submission

Niamh Bruce, The Sanctuary, Dublin

Professor Katherine Weare, University of Exeter/Contributor, All Party
Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing & Economics (2014)

Phap Lai, Wake Up Schools European Network

Key Findings of research undertaken and collated for the Inquiry

1. Mindfulness as a secular practice – as endorsed by the NHS, the Mental Health Foundation, and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) - has been defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4). In addition it is seeing things in new ways and staying in the present. Mindfulness is associated with enhanced capacities for awareness and emotional regulation.
2. Mindfulness practices have already been the subject of a number of pilot projects in Northern Ireland schools. One school-based intervention has been the subject of a research project, which demonstrated a positive impact on teachers and pupils.¹
3. Emerging research demonstrates that mindfulness can be part of schools’ response to a pressing need around the stress and emotional difficulties reported by increasing numbers of children. The practice can therefore contribute to educational performance. This is best realised if mindfulness can be incorporated into a whole school culture.
4. One of the primary benefits of mindfulness in schools is the cultivation of enhanced capacity for attention as a support for qualities of mind and behaviour that can make a significant contribution to ‘Building a United Community’. These qualities of mind include:
 5. Compassion for self and other
 6. Non-judgement
 7. Open-minded curiosity
 8. A capacity for contemplative inquiry
 9. Tolerance and respect for otherness
 10. Self-awareness and a deeper understanding of one’s own limits
 11. Practices of gratitude and establishing a culture of gratefulness
 12. Acceptance alongside resilience and creativity

¹ See MSc in Applied Psychology (w/ Clinical Specialism) Dissertation Paper – “An evaluation of a mindfulness-based stress reduction programme for children in a whole-class primary school setting.” 2014

13. These qualities of mind can enhance individual and collective capacity for early identification of crises and challenges and encourage early intervention and a preventive approach. Mindfulness based work is associated with interrupting emerging patterns that might prove harmful to mental and physical wellbeing.
14. Mindfulness practices for students are best cultivated in school environments where teaching staff have already embraced the practice and begun to apply it to their roles in the school and integrated the practice into their own self-care and wellbeing.² Ideally the committed staff would include a Principal or other senior figure. It is advised that the best and most sustainable results for children and young people in our schools will be founded on initial support and training for school staff where staff have expressed an interest. In this way mindfulness can be embedded as a voluntary and bottom-up whole-school practice and contribution to good relations.
15. Mindfulness can re-awaken teaching staff's original animus for entering the profession and help them recover a passion for accompanying their pupils and students and make a difference in their lives.
16. Distinctive approaches to mindfulness should be encouraged for primary and secondary schools. Mindfulness practices differ and needs vary when it comes to supporting younger children and older students e.g. teenagers.
17. Mindfulness practices can complement school-based strategies to promote positive mental health and wellbeing.
18. Mindfulness based practices can complement school approaches to counter bullying and the cultivation of respectful relationships.

² Wellbeing of teachers is a concern with 50 per cent of teachers exiting the profession in the UK within the first five years of their employment.

Recommendations:

1. As a contribution to peace building and cultivating united communities, the Department of Education to work with education providers (all sectors) on identifying the support infrastructure and training required to introduce mindfulness to schools and identify resources. Specifically, this would involve:
 - a. A further study of international best practice in terms of the support and training resources required to embed mindfulness as an option for teachers and school administrators;
 - b. Steps to engage teacher training colleges on training and practice requirements, including measures to 'train the trainers';
 - c. Resources to establish a 'community of practice' for those engaged in mindfulness training, practice and research in our schools;
2. The Department to take steps to promote and become an advocate for a better understanding of mindfulness as a low cost intervention and its potential in a range of public services (e.g. mental and physical health, wellbeing, education outcomes).
3. Initiate a programme of support and training in mindfulness within the teacher training institutions at Stranmillis and St Mary's College, with an initial focus on extending support to trainee teachers in taking care of their own wellbeing and managing stress. This to be based on further pilot studies in our local education system.
4. Invite Katherine Weare, University of Exeter, to facilitate the extension of her 'Mindfulness in Education' work to Northern Ireland teacher training colleges and schools interested in taking mindfulness into local schools.³
5. Other sources of training and support available to Northern Ireland schools include:
 - a. The European Wake Up Schools network.⁴ This network offers year round support, including in-school workshops and immersive experience for school staff and is already active in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.
 - b. The Sanctuary Meditation and Mindfulness Centre, Dublin.

³ Other ongoing research work that would support capacity building in NI is currently being conducted by Mark Williams at Oxford and by Siobhan Hugh Jones at University of Leeds.

⁴ The Plum Village training may be accredited in the near future and would tap into a significant source of expertise and a significant level of commitment to Northern Ireland.

6. Adopt the recommendations of the All Party Group on Economics and Wellbeing set out in their report, *Wellbeing in Four Policy Areas* (September, 2014), including mindfulness in schools:
 - i. “Well-being must be seen as integral to core policy objectives in health and education, and not separate from them: mental health is inseparable from physical health, and children’s mental health and well-being is inseparable from their capacity to learn and achieve. A more holistic approach is needed.”
 - ii. In both health and education, a key challenge for scaling up mindfulness programmes is building the stock of trained mindfulness teachers whilst maintaining standards. It was suggested that mindfulness should be included in teacher training and in medical students’ training as a matter of course – bearing in mind that mindfulness can benefit doctors and teachers as much as it can patients and pupils.
7. To introduce mindfulness into a school community it will be important to work alongside school principals, administrators, teaching colleges and curriculum advisory bodies. This initiative should, at all times, be voluntary and based on outreach and engagement with a growing number of interested teachers and practitioners within and beyond the education profession.
8. Mindfulness and the accompanying practices can help staff and pupils deepen a sense of community and provide a model of good relations and wellbeing based on harmonious relationships for the wider community.
9. Identify “Beacons of Mindfulness” in local schools for the purposes of collecting evidence and providing local demonstrations of best practice and evident impacts.
10. Information to be made available to teachers on mindfulness and benefits of bringing it into the school. Highlighting benefits for: a. pupils; b. staff; c. parents and wider school community. This could take the form of information evenings and workshops.

MINDFULNESS, WELLBEING AND EDUCATION IN POST-CONFLICT NORTHERN IRELAND:
SUPPORTING MINDFUL SCHOOL COMMUNITIES AS A CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE BUILDING

1.0 Introduction

There is significant evidence that children and adolescents today are experiencing unprecedented levels of stress (Mendelson et al., 2010⁵ in mindfulness for children and youth articles). Reports and diagnosis of anxiety, depression, ADD, ADHD, to name but a few, among children and young people are increasing (Farrell & Barrett, 2007⁶) and it is believed that the number of cases reported represent a small fraction of those that go unreported. Today's world is fast, digitally focused, stress filled and disconnected.

The context of a post-conflict society brings additional challenges for our children and young people many of whom suffer the ills of trans-generational trauma and experience the impact of living within a deeply segregated and sectarian communities.

Violence, poverty, discrimination, underachievement and poor mental health are daily experiences for many within communities struggling to emerge from the legacy of the conflict. At the other end of the spectrum, we see "high achievers" emerging from 14 years of a highly segregated (religion, gender and often class based⁷), largely exam/assessment focused educational system. They have had very little exposure to, and thus lack, understanding of the views or experiences of children and young people from other communities. Academic achievement is given priority, with support for their short- or long-term mental

⁵Mendelson, T., Greenberg, M., Dariotis, J., Gould, L., Rhoades, B., & Leaf, P. (2010). Feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a school-based mindfulness intervention for urban youth. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 38(7), 985-994.

⁶ Farrell, L., & Barrett, P. (2007). Prevention of childhood emotional disorders: Reducing the burden of suffering associated with anxiety and depression. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 12(2), 58-65.

⁷ Smith A., *Education and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland*, Paper presented to the Annual Conference of the American Education Research Association, Montreal, April, 1999

health often limited. An education system which genuinely recognizes and nourishes the wellbeing of the whole child is something to strive for. Integral to this, should be the recognition and support for the wellbeing of teachers, educators and parents. Schools must be recognized as places where children, teachers and parents can flourish and grow together.

Positively, the role and importance of Social and Emotional learning has gained increasing acceptance within many schools, especially at primary level. Fostering and promoting mental wellbeing ought to feature prominently at every education level especially when we consider such that during the period 1999 to 2009, 2,258 deaths were registered as suicide in Northern Ireland⁸ In addition bullying and peer pressure continue to feature as major concerns within our schools⁹. It has been highlighted that the elements of health education that relate to mental health and wellbeing within many schools are underdeveloped¹⁰ (p.21).

Against this backdrop, this paper posits that the introduction of mindfulness based practices into schools across Northern Ireland in general – and within the context of integrated and shared campuses in particular - could potentially support teachers, pupils, staff and parents with regard to nourishing their mental health and wellbeing. Through so doing, we suggest that the introduction of mindfulness practices would foster a greater sense of connection to self and others. It would help to nurture a certain ‘quality of mind’ which would be more open to peace, compassion and acceptance of self and others in a sustainable and lasting way.¹¹ We suggest that the successful

⁸Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

⁹ Burns, S., (Dec 2006) School Bullying in Northern Ireland - It hasn't gone away you know. *ARK Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive*, 48 <http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update48.pdf>.

¹⁰ Education and Training Inspectorate, (Nov 2006), *Report of a Survey of Health Education in Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland*, <http://www.etini.gov.uk/survey-of-health-education-in-post-primary-schools-in-northern-ireland.pdf>

¹¹ Mindfulness practices have been used in other conflict zones, for example with bereaved mothers in Palestine. Pigni, A., A First-Person Account of Using Mindfulness as a Therapeutic Tool in the Palestinian Territories. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* (2010) 19: 152-156

introduction of mindfulness practices into schools could create a model of a mindful community based on respect, understanding, non-judgment and compassion which could act as a powerful example to the wider community in Northern Ireland of the transformational impact which mindfulness could bring to our relationship to ourselves, others and the wider community.

Our society is one which continues to struggle with our roots in the past. Our aim, while not belittling the pain of the past, should be one of focusing on the beauty and wonder of the present moment with an open and curious mind and heart with regard to the future from a place of healing, self-care and resilience.

It is the role of this paper to highlight the evidence to date supporting the introduction of mindfulness practices into schools and make suggestions regarding how the practices could most effectively be introduced in Northern Ireland. This is an area that is rapidly growing with regards to accessibility, receptivity and research.

2.0 Views and experiences within Northern Ireland and further afield

The focus of this research was to identify and understand the benefits that the introduction of mindfulness into schools could bring to children and young people in Northern Ireland. We considered the benefits as falling within two specific areas; that of enhancing the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people and that of contributing to the peace process in Northern Ireland. We thus considered how mindfulness could affect the present and future experience and context of our children and young people and indeed how it could offer them the opportunity to view the past from a different perspective. In order to facilitate the research and to receive guidance regarding the effective introduction a number of interviews were carried out with people in Northern Ireland who had direct experience of working with children, adolescents and adults in the context of mindfulness in various fields. A further set of interviews were carried out via telephone, email or Skype with experts in the field of mindfulness in England, Scotland, France and the United States. Nearly all interviews were recorded. For those which were not recorded, detailed notes were taken. To ensure clarity, the key points and guidance which were gained from the interviews has been recorded below divided under the headings of 'Mindfulness to support peace building', 'Mindfulness to promote

wellbeing/mental health’ and ‘Practical advice for the effective introduction of mindfulness into schools’.

2.1 Mindfulness (in schools) to support peace building

As referred to above, the education system in Northern Ireland is highly segregated. Schools have attempted to take account of the conflict/post conflict situation in a wider community sense through intervention in the process of education (curriculum reforms and increased contact between 2 communities) and the structure of education (equity issues and formation of integrated schools). The Northern Ireland Curriculum underwent intense revision in 2008 adding new segments on Local and Global Citizenship and Mutual Understanding (NIC 2008d). For younger children the curriculum focuses on approaches to conflict, understanding different people and cultures and being members of a community (2008a). For older children, the curriculum focuses more upon citizenship encapsulating four main areas; diversity and inclusion; human rights and social responsibility; equality and social justice; and democracy and active participation (2008c).

This report recommends that mindfulness would complement and allow greater access to this area of the curriculum. In so doing, it could contribute greatly to children and young people’s sense of peace within themselves and with other people. It would also nurture qualities such as positive acceptance, self-awareness and awareness of others, respect and tolerance which are necessary on our path of peace building.

Key points from interviews

- Schools could work to be exemplar models of a community within a community demonstrating how mindfulness can nurture and nourish respect, empathy, compassion, non-judgment, self-confidence and acceptance of oneself and others (for the past and the present). (Phap Lai, Wake Up Schools Network, Plum Village, France).
- Mindful listening and mindful speech must be cultivated within the school environment - between staff, staff and students, parents and the wider school community. This enables people to understand the needs of others and to celebrate and express appreciation for others (Phap Lai, Wake Up Schools

Network). In this way, teachers will also enjoy a greater sense of support which can contribute to building resilience. If teachers are in harmony with each other, they will provide a powerful model for their students. Linked into the concept of mindful listening and speech is the role of the 'mediative presence'. This allows for deep listening and can be aided by the practice mindfulness meditation and can be invaluable in the context of conflict resolution. (Mary McNulty, Coordinator for Amal, Mediation, N.I.).

- Elements of mindfulness including kindness practice (thinking about oneself and others with compassion) and gratitude practice (being grateful for what we have) can have a powerful effect on the classroom environment which can be brought into the wider community. (Valerie York-Zimmerman, President of Mindful Kids Miami)
- Mindfulness helps with identifying emotions and regulating emotions. It helps us to respond more skilfully to situations or stimuli that we may find displeasing or distressing (Clare Kelly, Mindful Schools). A possible point of research would be to investigate how people respond to a difficult situation (possibly conflict related) with mindfulness practice and without (Siobhan Hugh Jones).
- Mindfulness aids conflict resolution by helping us to regularly tune in to our emotions and pause before responding. Mindfulness can help to temper emotions and in this way acts as a preventative tool (Michael Mc Knight, Principal, Lough View Integrated Primary School).
- Mindfulness helps children to accept themselves, others and situations. (Anna Johnston, SENCO, Lough View Integrated Primary School).
- Coming into the present helps to nurture a sense of peace and relief for children in Northern Ireland many of whom will be carrying the burdens of the past and struggling with concerns about the future. (Michael Mc Knight, Principal, Lough View Integrated Primary School)
- Mindfulness plays an important role in aiding positive, peaceful relations within a school and helping to engender compassion and prevent bullying. (Monique Harte, Occupational Therapy Lecturer, University of Ulster)

- Mindfulness helps us to bring our attention to and notice our thoughts, opinions, mindsets. By so doing, we can bring awareness to our prejudices and concerns, realizing that that is what they are. They do not have to define us. This is more relevant for older children. (Lorraine Murray, Calm Kids, Connected Kids, Founder and Director of Feel Good Therapies)
- Mindfulness ties in with many social and emotional learning programmes. It helps children to understand, accept and appreciate who they are. (Clíodhna Scott-Wills, Senior Development Officer, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education)

2.2 Mindfulness to promote Mental Health

'The evidence that the mind and the nervous system are deeply connected is irrefutable...'¹²

As evidenced above, research suggests that mindfulness practice promotes positive mental health by, for example, reducing anxiety and recurrence of depression. With schools reporting increasing incidences of poor mental health, in addition to increasing number of diagnoses of conditions such as ADD and ADHD, there seems to be an increasingly significant need for support. Such support tends to take the form of interventions and preventative measures.

Mindfulness is a skill which children and young people can learn, with practice. It can be a relief to many teachers and parents to know that children and young people can learn skills that will promote their wellbeing and protect their mental health.

Below are the key points that emerged from the interviews with regard to mindfulness and mental health.

Key points

- Children are very responsive, in a ready place to practice mindfulness. (Diarmuid Moran, Holy Child Primary School, Belfast)

Zajonc, A., (2009). *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*. Lindisfarne Books. 99

- Developing good habits of mind early on in childhood in terms of building self-awareness and being able to recognize and identify emotions and how to deal with them is very important for future mental health. Mindfulness can help with these skills. The benefits of attention building, emotional regulation and executive function which it is reported are gained from mindfulness practice are linked to enjoying positive mental health. There is a gap in provision, at second level in particular, of education programmes that deal with mental health. Mindfulness could help to bridge that gap though more research is required. 75% of all mental health disorders are diagnosed before the age of 15. (Dr Siobhan Hugh-Jones, Associate Professor, School of Psychology, University of Leeds)
- While mindfulness can have a calming effect on the body and mind, the practice may have quite a different effect, initially, especially with regard to adolescents. While it raises awareness, it may bring to the fore some difficult emotions and experiences. (Lorraine Murray, Calm Kids, Connected Kids, Founder and Director of Feel Good Therapies, Caren McDonald, Mindfulness Educator and Secondary School Teacher, San Francisco)
- Mindfulness helps children to realize that thoughts create a feeling or response in the body. (Lorraine Murray, Calm Kids, Connected Kids, Founder and Director of Feel Good Therapies)
- Mindfulness can be beneficial for extreme anxiety. Mindfulness could be used to de-escalate strong emotions/responses (Dr Siobhan Hugh-Jones, Associate Professor, School of Psychology, University of Leeds)
- Mindfulness can help children in their interactions with others to be more mindful of others' feelings. In this way, it can help with relationship building. Strong peer support is important with regard to positive wellbeing and mental health. (Diarmuid Moran, Holy Child Primary School, Belfast)
- We are learning that the adolescent brain develops quite differently from the childhood brain (Dan Siegel's, Brainstorm), therefore teenagers who are learning mindfulness techniques need to be monitored closely and taught by an experienced teacher. If some are dealing with trauma or some hidden mental illness then there can be some negative side effects to mindfulness meditation. Additionally, teenagers are dealing with a different level of

stressors, socially, sexually, familial, (possibly) experimentation of drugs, which impacts their brain. Thus caution is required in this area. (Caren McDonald, Mindfulness Educator and secondary School teacher, San Francisco).

- Once a 'mindful community' has been established within a school, children can experience the place as somewhere where they are secure and safe. (Phap Lai, Wake Up Schools Network) Mindfulness helps children and young people to develop compassion for themselves. (Lorraine Murray, Calm Kids, Connected Kids, Founder and Director of Feel Good Therapies)
- The focus of non-judgment in mindfulness helps to relieve adolescents of the judging which they can feel and which they place on themselves (Lorraine Murray, Calm Kids, Connected Kids, Founder and Director of Feel Good Therapies)
- If children have experience of mindfulness at an early age, they are being offered a lifelong tool to help them to manage emotions and stress (Phap Lai, Wake Up Schools Network, Michael Mc Knight, Principal, Lough View Integrated Primary School)
- Mindfulness, by helping a child or young person to understand themselves, is helping them to understand their limits. (Michael McKnight, Principal, Lough View Integrated Primary School) Mindfulness helps children to accept themselves and accept difference.
- Mindfulness must be practiced regularly to effectively act as a preventative and protective measure regarding mental health (Anna Johnston, SENCO, Lough View Integrated Primary School)
- Children and young people are constantly exposed to many stimuli, partly due to advances in technology, social networking etc. with little time for quiet. Mindfulness provides a break from the endless 'doing' mode and allows time for simply 'being'. (Valerie York Zimmerman, Mindful Kids Miami, Anna Johnston, SENCO, Lough View Integrated Primary School) It can offer children and young people a mental break. This could help to engender a sense of connection with ourselves that is often felt to be lacking in the modern world.

A lack of connection with ourselves and others will inevitably impact upon our wellbeing.

- Mindfulness can be a powerful, stress reducing, tool for children and young people who have special needs and their families. (Monique Harte, University of Ulster)

2.3 Practical advice for the effective introduction of mindfulness into schools

Before mindfulness can be introduced effectively into schools, there is a number of important, practical steps which should be considered and encouraged. Below are the key points of advice that emerged from the interviews.

3.0 Evidence base supporting the introduction of mindfulness practice with children and adolescents

Mindfulness is increasingly recognized as an essential education tool. It develops attention, emotional and cognitive understanding, and bodily awareness and coordination, as well as interpersonal awareness and skills. Most importantly, by diminishing stress, anxiety and hostility, mindfulness enhances our total wellbeing, peace, confidence and joy...Mindfulness is a powerful tool to help children develop the skills to promote peace in themselves and in the world around them.”¹³

Documented research into the effects of mindfulness upon children and young people is still at a relatively infantile stage though the area is growing rapidly. There has been extensive research, however, into the effects of mindfulness practices upon adults and results have been overwhelmingly positive showing that mindfulness can prevent the recurrence of depression, reduce anxiety, help people to manage chronic pain, facilitate improved sleep and self-esteem and promote emotional regulation¹⁴ (Biegel, Brown, Shapiro and Schubert,

¹³ Dharmacharya Shantum Seth, Foreward, *Planting Seeds*. Berkley: Parallax Press, 2011. 11-12.

¹⁴ Biegel, G.M., Brown, K. W., Shapiro, S. L., & Schubert, C. (2009). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for the treatment of adolescent psychiatric outpatients: A randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Clinical and consulting Psychology*, 77, 855-866.

2009). Such results suggest that there is 'significant potential benefits for teachers and pupils'¹⁵ (Meikljohn J et al. 2012)

This section will highlight the evidence and research to date into the effects of mindfulness practice with young people.

Children, it is evidenced, are in a ready position to respond to mindfulness. They are more focused on the present moment¹⁶ (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). Their hearts and minds are more naturally open and have a natural capacity to approach matters with a 'beginners mind'¹⁷ (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Partly due to the challenges associated with their developmental stage, the structure of the learning environment and differing external and internal pressures which they experience, the approach to introducing mindfulness to children and adolescents and young people must differ.

Given the proportion of time which children and young people spend in school, it seems the logical place to introduce the practice. (This paper is also open to the potential to disseminate the practice to parents and carers of children. Positive evidence of the benefits can be found in Singh et al., 2009¹⁸.) The hope is that the practice will act as a lifelong tool to help children and young people manage stress, build resilience, regulate their emotions and enjoy positive relationships with others from their own and other communities.

¹⁵ Meikljohn J., Phillips, C., Freedman, L., Griffin, M.L., Biegel, G.M., Roach, A., (2012) Integrating mindfulness training into k-12 Education: Fostering the Resilience of Teachers and Students. *Mindfulness*, 3, 291-307

¹⁶ Hooker, K. E. & Fodor, I. E. (2008). Teaching mindfulness to children. *Gestalt Review*, 12(1), 75-91

¹⁷ Kabat-Zinn, J., (1990) *Full Catastrophe Living, Using the Wisdom of your Body and mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness*. Delta

¹⁸ Singh, N. N., Singh, A. N., Lancioni, G. E., Singh, J., Winton, A.S.w. & Adkins, A.d. (2009). Mindfulness training for parents and their children with ADHD increases children's compliance, *Journal of Child and Family Studies* (published online 26/03/09)

Central to this paper, akin to the approach of Kabat-Zinn with regard to his clients (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992¹⁹) is the belief that mindfulness practice will provide an empowering tool for children and adolescents to play an active role (as far as possible) in their present and future life.

The following research reports on the effects of mindfulness programmes that have been researched with primary and secondary children in both school and clinical settings. Generally, programmes draw largely on the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) approaches and refer to programmes delivered in an educational or clinical setting. The studies range from evaluations of universal programmes, for example .b to small scale interventions. Studies have been separated based on age and have been chosen based on relevance to introducing mindfulness to the education system.

3.1 Mindfulness defined

Mindfulness has been most commonly defined in literature as ‘paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally’²⁰ (Kabat-Zinn, 1994) Adding to this Langer and Moldoveanu (2000)²¹ proffer that by seeing things in new ways we stay in the present moment. Katherine Weare of Exeter University explains that learning to be mindful enables us to ‘be aware and pay close attention to inner states such as thoughts, emotions and physical sensations, as well as to what is happening to the outside’²². A common thread among all of these definitions is the focus upon attention. What is actually happening right now? By staying with the present moment, we reduce the amount of time that we spend ruminating

¹⁹ Kabat-Zinn, J., Massion, A. O., Kristeller, J., Peterson, L. G., Fletcher, K., Pbert, L., et al. (1992). Effectiveness of a meditation-based stress reduction programme in the treatment of anxiety disorders. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 149, 936-943

²⁰ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York: Hyperion. 4

²¹ Langer, E. J., & Moldoveanu, M. (2000). The construct of mindfulness. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56, 1-9

²² Weare, K., (2013) Developing mindfulness with children and young people: a review of the evidence and policy context. *Journal of Children's Services*, 8(2), 141-153

about the past or worrying about the future. Mindfulness encourages us to accept experiences as they unfold, viewing them with kindness and curiosity in a non-judgmental way. The practice of mindfulness, it is reported, lessens reactivity and impulsiveness and generally helps to foster a greater sense of 'mental stability, calm, acceptance and appreciation for what is.'²³ At root, mindfulness cultivates a healthy capacity to separate out thoughts and emotions from the construction of our identity, and enables a spirit of on-going life inquiry.

It must be emphasized that a focus on the present moment does not denigrate the importance of the past or the future but rather puts us in a different relationship to them. Zajonc elucidates this clearly through his definition of contemplative practice which draws greatly upon mindfulness. Contemplative practice, he suggests, means 'a special form of recollection of the past, mindfulness for the present, and envisioning of the future in a manner that is enlivening, clear and insightful'²⁴ (Zajonc, 2009). Within the context of post conflict Northern Ireland 2014, this definition seems particularly relevant.

Mindfulness, as examined and presented in this paper refers solely to the secular practice which has evolved in the West over the past four decades since Jon Kabat-Zinn first developed the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programme at the Medical Centre at the University of Massachusetts. While key features of mindfulness can be identified, for example, a focus on the breath, mindful movement, paying attention to our mind and body, becoming aware of one's experience, it must be recognized that mindfulness can ultimately be brought to all activities. Our goal indeed with introducing the practice would be to introduce people to the possibility of leading more mindful lives, to reach a mindful way of being (Kabat-Zinn). Through so doing, a person is better equipped to make decisions and respond more skilfully to the events of everyday living as they unfold.

3.2 Local Research and Experience

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Zajonc, A., (2009). *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*. Lindisfarne Books. 20

Local research into the effects of school based mindfulness practices is also growing and showing positive results. A Masters level study, (carried out by Emmet Kinsella and supervised by Queens University Belfast and the Children's Interdisciplinary Schools Team, BELB) was carried out in a year 3 class in Lough View Integrated Primary School, Belfast in 2014. The study evaluated an 8 week, MBSR based, child friendly programme. Reports from the children, class teacher, school SENCO and parents were considered. Results showed 'statistically significant improvements on ratings of psychological wellbeing and emotional regulatory ability' among the children who partook in the programme.

3.3 Post primary age interventions

Beauchemin et al. (2008)²⁵ reported on 32 adolescents with learning difficulties attending a private residential school. Students experienced led mindfulness meditation sessions for 5-10minutes at the start of each class, 5 days a week for 5 weeks. The students reported reduced anxiety and teachers reported improvements in students' social skills, problem behaviors and academics.

Zylowska et al. (2008)²⁶ researched the effects of mindfulness meditation on symptoms of ADHD with 30 participants (adults and adolescents). After the study, participants reported improvements in ADHD symptoms, anxiety, depressive symptoms and working memory. Bogels et al. (2008)²⁷ carried out a study involving 14 adolescents (aged 11-18) with ADHD, ADD or ASD partaking in an 8 week MBCT programme. The participants and their parents reported improvements in attention, behaviours, subjective happiness and mindful awareness.

²⁵ Beauchemin, J., Hutchins, t.I., & Patterson, F. (2008). Mindfulness meditation may lessen anxiety, promote social skills, and improve academic performance among adolescents with learning disabilities. *Complementary Health Practice Review*, 13, 34-45.

²⁶ Zylowska, L., Ackerman, D. L., Yang, M. H., Futrell, J. L., Horton, N. L., Hale, S. T., et al. (2008). Mindfulness meditation training with adults and adolescents with ADHD. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 11, 737-746.

²⁷ Bogels, S., Hoogstad, B., van Dun, L., De Shutter, S., & Restifo, K. (2008). Mindfulness training for adolescents with externalizing disorders and their parents. *Behavioral and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 36, 193-209.

Biegel et al. (2009)²⁸ studied the effects of a modified MBSR programme delivered to 102 4-18 year olds with various diagnoses. Those who participated in the programme reported significantly reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression and somatic distress, increased self-esteem and sleep functioning. A three month follow up assessment was carried out which showed that those who continued to practice showed improved clinicians' ratings of anxiety and depression.

Broderick and Metz (2009)²⁹ evaluated the universal 'Learning to Breathe' curriculum using a group of 137 girls aged 17-19 at an independent girls school who participated in the six session programme. Participants reported a reduction in negative affect, tiredness, aches and pains and an increase in emotional regulation, feelings of calmness, relaxation and self-acceptance.

Kuyken et al. (2014)³⁰ have carried out an evaluation of the nine-week UK based Mindfulness in Schools Project '.b'. The non-randomized control trial included over 500 students in 9 schools and was carried out by University of Exeter. After the programme, the participants reported fewer depressive symptoms, less stress and higher rates of wellbeing. A greater commitment to practice outside of the dedicated sessions was associated with higher rates of wellbeing.

Sibinga et al. (2011)³¹ evaluated an 8 week MBSR programme for 33 urban youth aged 13-21 with a range of medical and psychological issues. Those participating in the MBSR programme reported reduced levels of emotional

²⁸ Biegel, G., Brown, K., Shapiro, S., & Schubert, C. (2009). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for the treatment of adolescent psychiatric outpatients: A randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 77*(5), 855-866.

²⁹ Broderick, P. C., & Metz, S. (2009). Learning to BREATHE: A pilot trial of a mindfulness curriculum for adolescents, *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion, 2*, 35-46.

³⁰ Kuyken, W., Weare, K., Ukoumunne, O.C., Lewis, R., Motton, N., Burnett, R., Cullen, C., Hennesly, S., and Huppert, F. (2013). Effectiveness of the .b Mindfulness in Schools Programme: A Non-randomized Controlled feasibility Study. *British Journal of Psychiatry*

³¹ Sibinga, E., Kerrigan, D., Stewart, M., Johnson, K., Magyari, T., & Ellen, J. (2011). Mindfulness instruction for urban youth. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, 17*, 1-6.

discomfort and hostility, and perceived improvements in school achievement, health, relationship and levels of stress.

Twemlow, Sacco and Fonagy (2008)³² researched potential to use mind body techniques to reduce aggression - research suggests that physical movement is a vital element to reaching youth who are reluctant to engage with talk therapy.

Joyce et al (2010)³³ studied behavior problems and depression with a group of 10-13 year old children participating in a 10 week mindfulness programme which was delivered by teachers. The participants reported a significant reduction in behavior problems and depression after the programme particularly with pupils who had significantly high levels of behavioral problems and depression before the intervention.

The evidence above all supports the proposition that bringing mindfulness into schools is likely to bring significant benefits for the pupils especially with regard to key areas such as attention, depression, anxiety, stress, wellbeing, emotional regulation, behavioral regulation, self-esteem and executive function. A natural inference to draw from the evidence is that if stress, anxiety and depression decrease through mindfulness practice while wellbeing, attention and emotional regulation increase, it is likely that academic performance will also improve. Underdeveloped attention skills, Kaiser Greenland argues, can pose a considerable impediment to success in the school system³⁴. The research also underlines the importance of practice showing that the more consistent and regular the practice, the greater the benefits accrued.

3.4 Mindfulness and teacher training

³² Twemlow, S.W., Sacco, F.C., & Fonagy, P. (2008). Embodying the mind: Movement as a vehicle for destructive aggression. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 62(1), 1-33.

³³ Joyce, A., ETTY-Leal, J., Zazryn, T., Hamilton, A., and Hassed, C.. (2010). Exploring a mindfulness meditation program on the mental health of upper primary children: A pilot study. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*, 3, 17-17

³⁴ Kaiser-Greenland, S., (1990) *The Mindful Child*, New York: Free Press. 88.

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper posits that before children experience mindfulness, it is important that teachers develop their own practice. This proposition is based on two main tenets.

Firstly, teaching is a 'high stress', 'high burnout rate' profession. In the UK, 50% of teachers leave the profession before they have completed their first five years. Stress is cited as one of the main contributory factors. There is clearly a need, therefore, to provide a means to support teachers in the profession, to build resilience. Linda Laniteri who has been responsible for writing and delivering programmes for teachers and children who suffered severe trauma following 9/11 bombings in New York argues that Mindfulness can nurture the self and other and foster appreciation among staff³⁵. Improved peer support is therefore a factor that would help to support teachers' resilience.

A number of specific programmes have been established, for example, The Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education Programme (CARE) which aims to support teachers with regard to their own wellbeing, their ability to support the emotional wellbeing, behavior and learning of their students, improve their classroom environment and promote positive pro-social behavior with their students. The programme encourages teachers to participate in mindfulness practices to help them to recognize their own emotions and those of others, recognize and manage their own stress and nurture the skills of mindful listening to enable them to increase their understanding and empathy of their students and colleagues (Jennings and Greenberg, 2009³⁶). Following this programme, teachers have reported feeling less stressed, more able to manage their classrooms and more able to build positive relationships with their students.

Secondly, it has been shown that courses that have been delivered by teachers who are experienced mindfulness practitioners have been more effective. This

³⁵ Lantieri, L., (2012), *Cultivating the Social, Emotional and Inner Lives of Children and Teachers*, FAROS Sant Joan de Deu Foundation, Spain

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stems from the fact that teachers will be more able to embody and model the qualities of compassion, open mindedness, empathy, patience, skills of focus and attention which regular mindfulness encourages³⁷. They will also be more experienced with regard to the benefits and challenges which one can experience with mindfulness practice. In line with the most recent All-Party Parliamentary Group on Wellbeing Economics 2014³⁸, this report recommends that mindfulness practice and training opportunities should be made available to teachers both trained and those completing their initial teacher training programme.

3.5 Primary School age interventions

Napoli, Krech and Holley (2005)³⁹ reported on a 24 week programme (12 sessions of 45mins each) with 194 children aged 5-8 from nine classes in two schools. The programme included sitting, movement and body scan exercises and relaxation practices. The results showed reductions in self-rated test anxiety and improvements in teacher-rated attention, social skills and selective attention.

Wall (2005)⁴⁰ used a five-week modified MBSR programme in addition with Tai Chi with 11 school children aged 11-15. The children did not have any reported behavioral difficulties but reported feeling an increased sense of calm and wellbeing. They also reported feeling less reactive and experiencing improved sleep.

³⁷ Weare, K., (2013) Developing mindfulness with children and young people: a review of the evidence and policy context. *Journal of Children's Services*, 8(2), 141-153

³⁸ <http://parliamentarywellbeinggroup.org.uk>

³⁹ Napoli, M., Krech, P.R., & Holley, L. C. (2005). Mindfulness training for elementary school students: The attention academy. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 21, 99-125.

⁴⁰ Wall, R. B. (2005). Tai chi and mindfulness-based stress reduction in a Boston middle school. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 19, 230-237

Semple et al. (2009)⁴¹ carried out a 12-week programme using MBCT-C with 25 children aged 9-11 who had been assigned to a remedial unit for reading. When compared to the control group, participants experienced a significant reduction in attention difficulties. A reduction in anxiety was also observed in children who had clinically raised anxiety at the time of the programme.

Salzman and Goldin (2008)⁴² reported upon an 8 week 'child-friendly' MBSR programme for 31 children aged 9 to 11. The programme was written for children and parents and the teachers were trained mindfulness instructors. The participants reported improved attention, emotional reactivity and some areas of meta-cognition. Schonert-Reichl and Lawlor (2010)⁴³ undertook a study of 12 elementary classrooms in which six were randomized to receive the Mindfulness Education (ME)(now MindUP) programme and six to wait list control. Teachers delivered the programme of ten lessons with mindfulness sessions three times a day. Students participating in the programme reported increased optimism and teachers reported improvements in behavior and social and emotional competence and a decrease in aggression.

Singh et al. (2007)⁴⁴ used 'Meditation on the Soles of the Feet' programme with seventh grade boys who displayed aggressive behavior. The study suggested a reduction in aggressive behavior and participants reported feeling more relaxed, having increased impulse control, better focus and improved sleep. The effects were felt for over one year.

⁴¹ Semple, R. J., Rosa, D., & Miller, L. F. (2009). A randomized trial of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for children: Promoting mindful attention to enhance social-emotional resiliency in children. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*

⁴² Saltzman, A., & Goldin, P. (2008). Mindfulness based stress reduction for school-age children. In S.C. Hayes & L. A. Greco (Eds.), *Acceptance and mindfulness interventions for children, adolescents and families* (pp. 139-161). Oakland: Context Press/New Harbinger

⁴³ Schonert-Reichl, K. A., & Lawlor, M. S. (2010). The effects of a mindfulness-based education programme on pre- and early adolescents' wellbeing and social and emotional competence. *Mindfulness*, 1, 137-151

⁴⁴ Singh, N., Lancioni, G., Joy, S., Winton, A., Sabaawi, M. Wahler, R., & Singh, J. (2007). Adolescents with conduct disorders can be mindful of their aggressive behavior. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 15(1), 56-63.

Flook et al. (2010)⁴⁵ carried out an 8 week programme of mindful awareness practices (Susan Kaiser-greenland's 'Inner Kids' programme) with 7-9 year old children with 64 children divided between those experiencing the mindful practices and the control group. Those who participated in the programme who had lower pre course self-regulation exhibited significantly improved overall behavioral regulation, meta-cognition and executive function.

The MBSR programme for adults has been shown to reduce anxiety, manage and prevent recurrence of depression and facilitate improved sleep and self-esteem (Biegel, Brown, Shapiro and Schubert, 2009⁴⁶). The MBSR programme has been adapted for use with children (Saltzman & Goldin, 2008⁴⁷). Activities have been shortened and are presented in a more child friendly. Research on the programme suggests that children participating in the programme show improvements in attention, self-regulation, social competence and general wellbeing (Saltzman and Goldin, 2008).

3.6 Local Research and Experience

Local research into the effects of school based mindfulness practices is also growing and showing positive results. A Masters level study, (carried out by Emmet Kinsella and supervised by Queens University Belfast and the Children's Interdisciplinary Schools Team, BELB) was carried out in a year 3 class in Lough View Integrated Primary School, Belfast in 2014. The study evaluated an 8 week, MBSR based, child friendly programme. Reports from the children, class teacher, school SENCO and parents were considered. Results showed 'statistically significant improvements on ratings of psychological wellbeing and

⁴⁵ Flook, L., Smalley, S. L., Kitil, J., Galla, B.M., Kaiser-Greenland, S., Locke, J., et al. (2010) Effects of mindful awareness practices on executive functions in elementary school children. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 26(1), 70-95

⁴⁶ Biegel, G. M., Brown, K. W., Shapiro, S. L., & Schubert, C. (2009). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for the treatment of adolescent psychiatric outpatients: A randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Clinical and Consulting Psychiatry*, 77, 855-866

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⁵³ Kuyken, W., Weare, K., Ukoumunne, O.C., Lewis, R., Motton, N., Burnett,, R., Cullen, C., Hennelly, S., and Huppert, F. (2013). Effectiveness of the .b Mindfulness in Schools Programme: A Non-randomized Controlled feasibility Study. *British Journal of Psychiatry*

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⁶⁰ Weare, K., (2013) Developing mindfulness with children and young people: a review of the evidence and policy context. *Journal of Children's Services*, 8(2), 141-153

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