

**An Exploration of Educator Engagement with the Contemplative
Practices of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, Deep Talk and Balint**

Paul King

BA, BD, Dip.PC., H.Dip.Ed., MA., MSc.

Thesis presented for the award of
PhD

Dublin City University
School of Human Development

Supervisors:

Dr Catherine Maunsell
Professor Charlotte Holland

January 2025

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Paul King

Student ID No: 16210688

Date: 7th January 2025

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to all the participants in this study who engaged with openness, generosity and insight.

My colleagues in the School of Human Development - Professor Maeve O'Brien, Associate Professor Sandra Cullen, Dr. Majella McSharry, Aisling Fleming, Marie Therese O'Gorman - were constant in their encouragement and tangible support during this journey. My deep appreciation to each of you.

I am deeply grateful to friends, extended family and to my beloved parents who were so understanding of my temporary disconnect with their lives. I look forward to reconnecting.

My deep appreciation to my supervisors, Associate Professor Catherine Maunsell and Professor Charlotte Holland. Your unwavering, steadfast, patient, and wise mentoring as well as being people of extraordinary integrity, kindness and humility have left an indelible mark on me and inspiration for my own approach to contemplative education.

Finally, to our children Joshua, Lucy and Ben and to my beloved wife Frances – your loving presence in my life is an inestimable blessing for which I am eternally grateful. I can never repay you for all your support during these past few years - only honour you. Míle buíochas le grá ó mo chroí.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Abbreviations	vi
List of Figures	vii
Abstract	viii
Chapter One: Introduction	9
1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 Rationale for the Research	10
1.3 Intellectual Foundations	13
1.4 Overview of the Research	17
1.5 Researcher Context and Genesis of Thesis	18
1.5.1 <i>The Personal</i>	18
1.5.2 <i>The Professional</i>	19
1.5.3 <i>Researcher Positionality</i>	21
1.6 Thesis Structure	23
Chapter Two: Literature Review	25
2.1 Introduction	25
2.2 Literature Review Approach	26
2.3 Educator Well-being	27
2.3.1 <i>A Space for well-being</i>	31
2.3.2 <i>Putting Educators on the Map of well-being</i>	33
2.4 Educator Reflexivity	36
2.4.1 <i>Reflexivity and the Place of Emotion</i>	38
2.4.2 <i>Radical Reflexivity</i>	39
2.5 Contemplative Education	41
2.6 Contemplative Practices	42
2.6.1 <i>The Contemplative Practice of Mindfulness</i>	43
2.6.2 <i>The Contemplative Practice of Deep Talk</i>	75
2.6.3 <i>The Contemplative Practice of Balint</i>	77
2.7 Conclusion	83
Chapter Three: Research Methodology	85
3.1 Introduction	85

3.2 Study Focus	85
3.3 Overview of Research Framework	87
3.4 Philosophical Underpinning – Choosing an Interpretivist-Constructivist Lens	88
3.4.1 <i>Ontology</i>	91
3.4.2 <i>Epistemology</i>	92
3.4.3 <i>Axiology</i>	93
3.5 An Inductive Dominant Approach to Theory Development	95
3.6 Qualitative Research Methodology	98
3.7 Research Strategy - A Case Study Approach	101
3.8 Time Horizon	105
3.9 Data Collection Process	106
3.9.1 <i>Reflective Tools</i>	107
3.9.2 <i>Semi Structured interviews</i>	110
3.9.3 <i>Naturalistic Observations and Field Study Notes</i>	112
3.10 Data Analysis	115
3.11 Ethical Considerations	117
3.12 Research Rigour	119
3.12.1 <i>Trustworthiness</i>	120
3.12.2 <i>Auditability</i>	121
3.12.3 <i>Credibility</i>	122
3.12.4 <i>Transferability</i>	122
3.13 Limitations	123
3.14 Conclusion	125
Chapter Four: Findings	126
4.1 Introduction	126
4.2 Dimensions of Contemplative Thinking-Practices	126
4.2.1 <i>Intentionality</i>	126
4.2.2 <i>Intentions</i>	130
4.2.3 <i>Attention</i>	134
4.2.4 <i>Attitude</i>	138
4.2.5 <i>Awareness</i>	143
4.2.6 <i>Self-Regulation</i>	147
4.2.7 <i>Process</i>	151
4.3 Interplay Across Dimensions of Contemplative Thinking-Practice	157

4.3.1 <i>Interplay of Intentionality</i>	157
4.3.2 <i>Interplay of Intention</i>	159
4.3.3. <i>Interplay of Attention</i>	160
4.3.4 <i>Interplay of Awareness</i>	161
4.3.5 <i>Interplay of Attitude</i>	164
4.3.6 <i>Interplay of Self-Regulation</i>	165
4.3.7 <i>Interplay of Process</i>	166
4.4 Reflexivity in MBSR	172
4.4.1 <i>Base Reflection</i>	172
4.4.2 <i>Critical Reflection</i>	173
4.4.3 <i>Radical Reflexivity</i>	175
4.5 Conclusion	176
Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations	177
5.1 Introduction	177
5.2 Responding to the Research Questions	177
5.2.1 <i>Response Question 1</i>	178
5.2.2 <i>Response Question 2</i>	181
5.2.3 <i>Response Question 3</i>	183
5.3 Discussion	185
5.4 Contributions to Knowledge and Research	187
5.5 Future Research & Dissemination	188
5.6 Researcher Reflections	190
5.7 Conclusion	193
References	194
Appendices	230
Appendix A: DCU Ethical Approval Confirmation	230
Appendix B: Frame of Interview Questions	231
Appendix C: Emergent themes within MBSR	237

List of Abbreviations

CE	Contemplative Education
CPs	Contemplative Practices
MBSR	Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction
DT	Deep Talk
MBI	Mindfulness Based Interventions

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Relationship between Contemplative Education, Contemplative Pedagogy, Contemplative Practices

Figure 2.1 Factors that Impact on Teacher well-being

Figure 2.2 Four Modalities of Reflexivity and Reflection

Figure 2.3 Contemplative Practices

Figure 3.1 Research Onion Framework

Figure 3.2 A single exploratory case study, using three contemplative practices

Figure 3.3 Sample Reflective Diary Entry

Figure 3.4 Sample Reflective Sheet Balint

Figure 3.5 Sample Observation Template

Figure 3.6: Adapted TACT model for assessing qualitative research outcomes

Figure 3.7 Sample Researcher Notes within Analysis Process

Figure 4.1 Intentionality across MBSR (M), Deep Talk (DT), Balint (B)

Figure 4.2 Intentions across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

Figure 4.3 Attention across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

Figure 4.4 Attitude across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

Figure 4.5 Awareness across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

Figure 4.6 Self-Regulation across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

Figure 4.7 Process across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

Figure 5.1 Contemplative Dimensions of MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint

Abstract

An Exploration of Educator Engagement with the Contemplative Practices of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction, Deep Talk and Balint

Paul King

The aim of this study was to explore educators' experiences of engagement with contemplative practices. A qualitative methodology was employed, using semi-structured interviews, observations, and reflective diaries with participants from primary, secondary and tertiary education. The data was analysed using a Thematic Analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2013; 2022). The contemplative practices included Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Deep Talk and Balint. MBSR is a mindfulness programme combining breath meditations, body awareness, and reflective exercises on thinking, feelings, and embodied experiences (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Deep Talk is a method using mythical stories and with auditive, visual and kinaesthetic representations which are intended to create dialogue, evoke emotional and embodied responses, and facilitate reflection on participants' contexts (Valkonen, 2015). Balint is an experiential, small group educational activity originally used with medics (Otten, 2018) and now applied in education as a dialogical space where educators can think and reflect on the emotional content of their work to obtain insight, meaning and understanding. These experiential contemplative practices offered educators the possibility of 'learning from within' and coupled with inquiry, reflection, and dialogue, created a contemplative pedagogical context which had potential to deepen personal and professional insights and cultivate a variety of contemplative dimensions. This study provides evidence of self-exploration by educators of inner subjective worlds, as well as identifying dimensions of contemplative processes and practices that act as a source of personal and professional support. The findings have the potential to inform future directions for the development of emerging contemplative practices in education.

Chapter One: Introduction

Is

*The important thing is not
To imagine one ought
Have something to say,
A raison d'être, a plot for the play.
The only true teaching
Subsists in watching
Things moving or just colour
Without comment from the scholar ...*

Patrick Kavanagh (Kavanagh, 1984, p.287)

1.1 Introduction

Contemplation, from the Latin 'contemplatio' means the "act of looking at," or "to gaze attentively, observe," originally "to mark out a space for observation" (Pasierbek, 2016, p. 11). For the contemplative educator it is awareness of moment-to-moment experience imbued with attitudes of trust, patience, non-striving, acceptance, letting go and even vulnerability. As the poet Kavanagh (1984, p.287) observes, "true teaching subsists in watching" and resisting, at least sometimes, the compulsion to always "comment." As a contemplative educator the invitation and encouragement are firstly to turn up to all of one's own life as it unfolds in the 'here and now' and to 'look at' and become more aware of one's internal world both as person and educator. And in the quest for more sustainable futures, contemplative practice offers possibilities of transformative learning spaces through "critical response-ability" and connection with one's own values and sense of meaning which in turn enables the forming of richer and deeper relationships with students, peers, one's community and the world around (Kayumova and Tippins, 2021, p.821).

This research is framed under the broad discipline of *Contemplative Studies*, "an emerging interdisciplinary field dedicated to research and education on contemplative practice and contemplative experience" (Komjathy, 2024, p. 361). The advent of contemplative education (CE) as an evolving and developing field, and as a subject worthy of research, is evidenced by the publication of the first *Handbook of Research Methods in Spirituality and Contemplative Studies* by Flanagan and Clough in 2024. This

handbook contains an entire chapter articulating how contemplative science “can expand the domain of empiricism to include the faculty of mental perception, a distinct faculty by which we perceive mental phenomena such as thoughts, mental images, subjective mental processes, and dreams, as well as sensory appearances” (Matiasz and Wallace, 2024, p. 73). Contemplative activity as an ancient and human endeavour has long preceded the scientific study of its practice, and in a long trajectory has unsurprisingly migrated into many other disciplines and settings including that of education. There is accumulating evidence of its contribution to the lives of students’ and teachers’ leading to the unfolding of a curricular-pedagogical phenomenon and a “contemplative turn in education” (Ergas, 2019, p. 251). The mindfulness movement in secular contexts, mainly popularised by the work of Jon Kabat Zinn (1990), has dominated the unfolding of this contemplative narrative both as a practice and as a subject of research and has now expanded to include other dimensions of contemplative activity (Dahl and Davidson, 2019). In the discourse on contemplative education, mindfulness and the student context have largely dominated the focus of researcher activity (Hadar and Ergas, 2022). As a counter to this pattern, this thesis explored how educators engaged with particular contemplative practices - *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)*, *Deep Talk (DT)* and *Balint*.

This chapter presents the rationale for the research, a summary of the intellectual foundations which framed the investigation and the methodological framing of the study, including the main research questions, along with an account of the researcher’s personal and professional interest in the area. The chapter also includes an outline of the overall thesis structure.

1.2 Rationale for the Research

Over the past decade, concern for student well-being has moved steadily to the centre of education policy in Ireland and internationally. In this domain teacher professional learning and development has predominantly focussed on the benefits of well-being for student learning. However, within some academic literature a reductionist understanding of well-being reflecting a narrow and limited perspective and constituted

mainly as content and pedagogy delivery, to the neglect of the complex process dimension of well-being, is a cause of justifiable concern (Barry, Clarke and Dowling, 2017; Thorburn, 2017). The policy and practice approach to well-being in education raises fundamental issues around assumed understandings of the concept given its ubiquitous presence currently in educational discourse. Problems of definition are framed by injunctions around “*learning about well-being*” rather than “*learning to be well and to live well,*” or “*learning for well-being*” (O’Brien and O’Shea, 2017, p. 5).

One of the notable absences in this recent attention to the rightful place of well-being as a central platform in policy and practice is the lack of parallel consideration of educator well-being. The deficit of practical responses to support educator well-being is itself a significant deprivation for educators, but equally disquieting given that the teacher is centrally tasked with responsibility as a key facilitator (or teacher) of well-being for students. This paucity of meaningful, purposeful and continued support signifies a lack of worthy attention to care for the educator as an individual in their own right in the challenge to mediate a personal and professional pathway or map for self-care and well-being in the context of the stressful demands of the teaching profession (Daly, Halbert, and Ó Cadhain, 2017; Department of Education, 2020). Student well-being is to some degree correlated with educator well-being and “the more challenging the circumstances in which educators are working, the more at risk they are for their own well-being (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2018, p. 12). It is not surprising therefore that the well-being agenda in policy and curricula development is likely to create a tension between educators seeking greater pedagogical guidance on well-being, and national curriculum organisations and Ministries of Education expecting educators to take on greater responsibility for well-being more immediately (Porciani, 2017). The current discourse on well-being, often with uncritical adoption of curricular initiatives and practices in many schools, is burdening educators with a mandate to implement yet another externally imposed well-meaning policy and its associated practices, and which ironically has positioned well-being as another outcome to be achieved by *doing* well rather than *being* well. This dilemma is further compounded by the “complexity at the heart of the discourses of self-improvement, self-work and self-government” (McCaw

and Gerrard, 2023, p. 135) whereby any movement towards care of self as an educator, and in particular through avenues such as contemplative practice, can reinforce a neoliberal agenda of individualisation. Sellman and Buttarazzi argue that this propensity is “adding lemon juice to the poison” (2020, p. 61) and places ultimate responsibility for change upon the individual whilst absolving institutions and structural systems from ethical obligations of care (Hyland, 2016).

Ott *et al.* (2017) argue for a holistic approach to well-being which includes multiple stakeholders within a given school community, including educators. They suggest that “schools cannot be settings that promote mental fitness for students if they are not psychologically healthy settings for educators” (2017, p. 13). Similarly, a number of international studies have explored the use of contemplative practices with teachers (Ergas, 2017a; McCaw, 2019; Weare, 2019; Powietrzynska *et al.*, 2021) but a dearth of research exists in the Irish context apart from a number of conference proceedings on the topic which relate to contemplative practice with students (Glanville, Iwashima and Becker, 2014; Glanville and Becker, 2015) and a theoretical paper on contemplative pedagogy and mindfulness (O Donnell, 2015).

It is intended for this empirical study to contribute to an understanding of educator’s experience and engagement with contemplative practices, its influence on the shaping of teacher reflexivity and to explore the dimensions of the selected practices for this study, two of which – *Deep Talk* and *Balint* – have not been researched to date in the field of contemplative inquiry. Recognising this lack of research within the Irish context, it is also an aspiration for this author’s research to contribute to debates concerning different forms of contemplative practice and to establish more formally professional opportunities for educators to engage in contemplative practice. The overarching research rationale was to articulate how and in what way a selection of contemplative practices could respond to the emerging and urgent need for a well-being space for educators and to contribute to some “understanding of the inner landscape of a teacher’s life” (Palmer, 1997, p. 15).

This exploratory study is significant in two senses: first, it considers the contribution of MBSR to the concept of teacher reflexivity or more specifically “radical reflexivity”

(McCaw, 2023, p. 1) which resonates with a contemplative framework for educators and secondly it seeks to bring clarity, theoretical depth and empirical evidence to an exploration of educator's engagement with three selected contemplative practices - *MBSR*, *Deep Talk*, and *Balint*, the latter two having not been the subject of contemplative research to date.

1.3 Intellectual Foundations

Within the contemplative field there are a "conglomerate of interpretations" (Ergas, 2019, p. 253), related but distinct terms, defining the parameters of the sub discipline - *contemplative education* - a philosophical approach to educational theory and practice. As an approach CE aims to support academic development, enhance self-understanding, foster analytical, critical, and reflective capacities, forge connections with others and engage with life to harness purpose and meaning (Weare, 2019, p. 323). Contemplative education is not unique in its contribution to "a rich tradition of integrative and experiential education that has developed over time in many ways" (Barbezat and Pingree, 2012, p. 178). CE shares common ground with many other educational philosophies of, and approaches to, education - experiential, inquiry-based, holistic, transformative. Scholars have remarked that CE cannot even be conceived as an entirely original field but is much more "a current reemergence of a contemplative orientation in education" (Morgan, 2015, p. 197). The beginning and evolution of CE stems from the ancient wisdom found in philosophy and religion, incorporating introspection and subjective experience into teaching and learning. Its origins are rooted in traditions that emphasise shared concepts of interiority, reflection, purpose and meaning, ethics. Latterly, there are other developmental influences, for example, transpersonal psychology, medicine, psychology, ethical education, and sustainable education positioning contemplative education as a developing rather than as a new field within education (Repetti, 2010; Barbezat and Pingree, 2012; Holland *et al.*, 2013; Morgan, 2015; Di Fabio, 2017; Komjathy, 2018; Holland, 2020).

Contemplative education has been defined as a "way of knowing that complements the rational and the sensory" (Hart, 2004, p. 29) and "a set of pedagogical practices designed

to cultivate the potentials of mindful awareness and volition in an ethical-relational context in which the values of personal growth, learning, moral living, and caring for others are nurtured” (Roeser and Peck, 2009, p. 127). Other goals include the development of empathetic connection, compassion, creativity, and altruistic behaviour (Zajonc, 2013). The recent emergence of contemplation in education may appear to be sudden and rapid; however, it is more accurately a re-emergence of an educational philosophy and practice which has been suppressed by an historically prevailing rationalist approach (Gunnlaugson *et al.*, 2014; Morgan, 2015). This development then, represents an impulse to return to ‘a care of the self’ as a pivotal purpose in mainstream education. However, pedagogies of contemplation oriented toward care can foster benefits beyond the participant. For example, in a study of marginalised environmental education learners, researchers concluded that an ethos of care led to “widening spheres” of care for self, others, and nonhumans (Schindel and Tolbert, 2017, p. 31).

The distinctive contribution of a contemplative education to new imaginings in educational approaches is expressed in contemplative *pedagogies* which are the processes and strategies reflecting many aspects of human experience – body, heart, mind, spirit, situational context. This pedagogical approach is intended to facilitate and promote harmony and dialogue between the inner dynamic of the educator/learner world and the outer expression of an “ethical-values presence” (Holland *et al.*, 2013, p. 47) as a transformation of self, others, and society. Contemplative pedagogy is “designed to quiet and shift the habitual chatter of the mind to a capacity for deepened awareness, concentration, and insight” (Hart, 2004, p. 29). The pedagogy acts as an antidote to the hyper-accelerated, fragmented, and multi-tasking world in which teachers operate.

To this definition, and as part of the conceptual framework for this thesis, is added a significant and crucial clarity with Kaufman’s notion of a “Critical Contemplative Pedagogy” (Kaufman, 2017, p. 1). His fusion here of the “*contemplative*” and the “*critical*” establishes a “transformative, liberatory, and subversive” (Wilson, 2021, p. 53) pedagogy which is founded on (1) the principle of nonduality – attentive to our own needs but also to others; (2) promoting an awareness of interdependence between

others; (3) embracing impermanence – the inevitability of change and thus a need to be present centred; (4) fostering intentionality – wilful deliberation on the process of teaching and learning; (5) grounding the political with the personal – contemplation is not merely for personal transformation, it is also for the well-being of others (Kaufman, 2017).

The final term in this conglomeration under CE is the integration of *contemplative practices (CPs)* for the purposes of fostering intuitive, non-conceptual and experiential forms of knowing along paths of learning, characterised by wholeness, unity, and integration (Gunnlaugson, 2009). Contemplative practice is an overarching term for a variety of methods to cultivate awareness, attention and embodiment including for example, mindfulness, meditation, yoga, and reflective journaling exercises, largely originating from religious traditions, but increasingly adapted to secular settings across diverse domains of life. These metacognitive type exercises are intended to focus attention on any element of conscious experience (Repetti, 2010) and can be further divided into a series of categories for example, relational type practices, which focus on cultivating a contemplative presence in interaction with others and the world. When teachers and students engage with these contemplative practices such as guided meditation, journaling, silent sittings, deep listening, exercises with the body, and freewriting, the body is quieted, the mind becomes more focused, and a greater sense of the *here and now* develops in the person. Deeper learning ensues, since what we know of effective learning is that the predominant factor is not merely time on task; it is the quality of attention brought to that task. If our attention is somewhere else, we may have little capacity to be present.

Irrespective of the practice, collective purposes include an inquiry into the nature of the whole person - body, thoughts, feelings, context, a reframing of subjective experience to deepen understanding, the cultivation of attention and awareness, the inducement of a spirit of curiosity and openness, and the generation of compassion to self and others. Ergas posits that contemplative practices are a way of “stepping outside education,” “reclaiming self,” and “returning with a difference” (Ergas, 2017a, p. 219) and elsewhere comments that three elements characterise the pedagogical movement

of contemplative practices - turning of one's attention inward toward one's first-person experience, a different intentional relationship with time, and finally the deliberate intention to be present to one's experience (Ergas, 2019). To these purposes can be added the cultivation of particular attitudes, such as non-judgement, discernment, kindness, curiosity, compassion, and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

The fields of contemplative education, contemplative pedagogy and contemplative practices are inter-related, as illustrated in Figure 1.1.

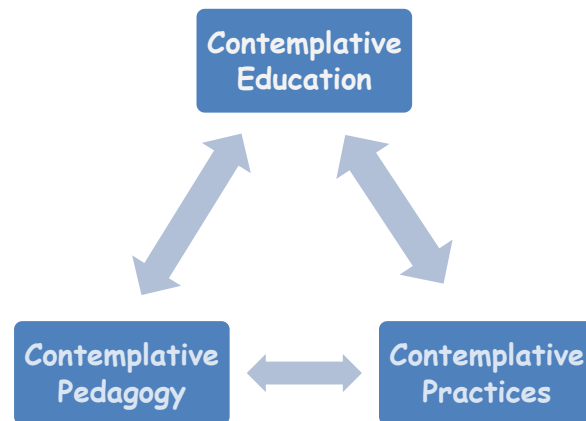


Figure 1.1 Relationship between Contemplative Education, Contemplative Pedagogy, Contemplative Practices

Three practices were selected for the conduct of this study with educators. Firstly, the mindfulness intervention - *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)* - was selected. An eight-week evidence-based programme developed by Professor Jon Kabat Zinn offering a secular, intensive mindfulness training to assist people to explore and manage patterns of behaviour, thinking, feeling and action (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). The second practice selected was *Deep Talk*, an emerging practice created by Tulla Valkonen (2015) as a storytelling method using short wisdom stories and originally developed for adults in workplace settings. It is designed to create a physical space where individuals can process issues which touch their lives or their community and to connect with their inner worlds and experience empowerment. And finally, the third selected practice – *Balint* – was originally created by Hungarian GPs and psychoanalysts Michael and Enid Balint (Otten, 2018). They developed Balint groups to enhance the general practitioner's understanding and management of the doctor-patient relationship and to support their ability to recognise and promote intra and interpersonal skills. The Balint group method

has extended as a reflective tool to other helper–client relationships across various settings to promote the mental well-being of professional helpers (Otten, 2018; Milberg and Knowlton, 2019). It is now used within education settings and in Ireland, for example, is adopted as a peer-support groups for school principals. Moreover, the Balint method is used as a means of exploring group dynamics and processes in a postgraduate programme at Dublin City University.

1.4 Overview of the Research

Wondering is a structured feature of one of the contemplative practices, Deep Talk included as part of this research. This same spirit of wondering has infused the exploratory nature of this study to *wonder* about what happens when educators engage in contemplative practice. The research sought to give voice to educator’s experience of contemplative practice and to explore what emerges as a result of this exposure to practice. The intention was to ascertain if educators valued opportunities to experience these practices and if so, what were the contributory elements to understanding their inner world. The research also sought to describe some of the characteristics of contemplative practices and to investigate how these related to other dimensions of contemplative education as identified in international literature.

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore educators’ engagement with and experiences of MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk practices. These experiential practices offer educators the possibility of *learning from within* and coupled with inquiry, reflection, and dialogue, each practice has potential to deepen insights and self-discovery. A qualitative methodology was employed, using semi-structured interviews, observations, and reflective diaries with participants from secondary and tertiary education, with the data analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2013; Braun and Clarke, 2022). The three research questions framing the study were as follows:

- Does engagement in a MBSR intervention contribute to teacher reflexivity? If yes, in what way(s)?
- What dimensions of contemplative thinking-practice are activated within the MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions?

- What interplay across dimensions of contemplative thinking-practice, if any, is stimulated in MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions?

1.5 Researcher Context and Genesis of Thesis

Staden (2024) remarks that “contemplative researchers tend to gravitate towards research topics that hold personal significance and often catalyse inner transformation.” (p. 222). This study became an intrinsic marker on a personal and professional journey offering the opportunity for intellectual curiosity, creative exploration and the development and refinement of research capacity in an area which also features as a foundational theoretical framework in my professional role and practice as an educator. As a study connected to this educational and professional background, I began with the anticipation of being challenged and supported in the integration of personal and professional experiences and with an openness to come to the task with what Kabat-Zinn describes as “the beginner’s mind” - receptive to new possibilities and a desire to unravel the rut of own expertise (2012, p. 8).

1.5.1 The Personal

I have a long-standing interest and habitual practice with a variety of contemplative practices. I have been an active member of a Balint Working Group for Educators for over the past decade and have completed extensive training in mindfulness as a graduate of the MBSR programme from the University of Massachusetts Medical School, USA (UMASS). I have also participated in foundational training as a Deep Talk facilitator. All of these practices are instrumental in supporting my own personal and professional life. My stance in life as a ‘participant/observer’ spurs a continuous curiosity and intrigue to *observe* multiple dimensions of life and is rooted in a desire to *participate* – to move in close and to *feel and embody* the unfolding actuality of life with all of its richness, complexity, and turbulence. Contemplative living is the habit of being fully present—in heart, mind, and body— allowing one to attend to all of life experience with conscious awareness. It is a disposition which offers an alternative way to live and learn and not to skim over or eliminate anything that threatens the ego. It holds possibilities to embrace everything—both the attractive and the unpleasant—together with attitudes

of curiosity, non-judgement, patience, trust, acceptance, letting go and all with a beginner's mind (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

1.5.2 *The Professional*

Professionally, this interest in contemplative education first emerged when working as a teacher at second level in the late 1990s. I began to introduce students to mindfulness practice mainly as an antidote to the mandatory nature of the curriculum, where the course 'needs to get done' and little space was given to students to explore their own inner subjective and personal world. There is a welcome and vibrant energy present in school life but sometimes the cascade of relentless activity and the frantic nature of schooling squeezes out possibilities and freedom just *to be*. To support students to step out of the frenzied nature of school life and to create some space for the awareness and cultivation of an *inner life*. I designed and delivered an introductory mindfulness-based programme as part of the school's Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme. For the most part students actively engaged, and it was a beginning insight to the inherent dilemma in much of contemporary education, the perpetual conflict between the *doing* and *being* mode of living and learning.

Discovering the work of Orgen Ergas in his seminal text, "Reconstructing 'Education' through Mindful Attention" (Ergas, 2017b), and explored further in the Literature Review chapter of this thesis, I discovered both a comprehensive rationale and practical guidance for a different way of thinking, practising, and researching as a *contemplative educator* which correlated with my personal and professional vision. As a teacher educator in a Higher Education Institute, I have continued to adopt and use a variety of contemplative practices with students, and which were the interventions for this study - MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint. This teaching approach represents a thrust against the "learnification" of education (Biesta, 2015, p.76) which for educators working with students with overwhelming needs and vulnerabilities exacts a heavy emotional toll. In turn, educators themselves often experience failure, frustration, distress, and feelings of worthlessness (Razer and Friedman, 2019). As a teacher educator, I take seriously the responsibility to support teachers, not just with knowledge and skills development

which directly supports their teaching role, but also to support their own “mind making process” since as Ergas notes,

‘Education’ is a mind-making process. But the mind is an ‘education’-making process just as much. Our task is to awaken from our stuck-ness in the former, to position ourselves in the latter and balance between the two. Practically that means to turn to the mind from which all this is perceived and to which it is addressed (Ergas, 2017b, p. 10).

In my own teaching praxis, I offer students a range of contemplative practices including short mindfulness breathing and body awareness exercises, and reflective writing tasks to expand metacognition and to encourage an embodied way of being in a spirit of curiosity, openness, and creativity. These exercises are presented to foster present moment awareness and to avert a preoccupation with the past or an anxiety about the future in the process of teaching and learning. Taking this contemplative educational approach, I am seeking to encourage deep learning, shifting to ‘first person’ approaches which connects students to their lived, embodied experience of their own learning, but also to honour ‘second person’ paths which can mediate between the subjective and the ‘other’ culminating in creativity and recognition of a “felt relational presence” (Gunnlaugson, 2009, p. 35). As well as a focus on what happens *out there* a contemplative education offers the possibility to become more aware of one’s *inner world* developing a practical intelligence through cultivating “*attention*” (learning to be absorbed and to absorb), “*attunement*” (awareness of external and internal stimuli), and “*insight*” (awareness about one’s own learning processes) (Williams, 2018, p.60). The purpose is to facilitate an intentional caring and learning climate where cooperation, collaboration, and inclusiveness are evident. It also seeks to develop a capacity for insightful educational leadership by practising the skills required to work collaboratively with students, colleagues, and other partners in education. A contemplative practice approach to education can be a way of grounding oneself amidst the demands and stresses of contemporary living as a human being and as a teacher.

1.5.3 Researcher Positionality

Researcher 'positionality' describes an individual's world view and the adopted stance in approaching a research task in its social and political context (Darwin Holmes, 2020). The perspective or world view as to 'where the researcher is coming from' hinges on *ontological* assumptions (beliefs about the nature of social reality and what can be constructed as knowable in the world), *epistemological* assumptions (beliefs about the nature of knowledge) and axiological assumptions (the way we interact with and to our environment). Collectively, the interactive and dynamic relationship among these key components is integral to shaping the philosophical framework or research paradigm which shapes both the research process and outcome. A statement on one's positionality as a researcher acknowledges that all research contributions are conducted by subjective humans whose personal and professional history offers a particular lens through which the world is perceived. A declaration of positionality also recognises the limits and opportunities within any study and informs the reader of those factors which may have influenced observations and interpretations reported in a study (Savolainen *et al.*, 2023).

The personal influences in this study resonate with the researcher's evolutionary practice as a contemplative practitioner which over the course of time has personally sustained and enabled the researcher to navigate the ordinary everyday challenges of living. Engagement with a range of contemplative practices has helped with the taming of the striving mind, to cultivate awareness, develop conscious capacity for attention, and to support a more sentient presence to life as well as connecting to something larger than one's own life. In deepening and expanding awareness through practice, discernment has contributed to cultivating a greater capacity to be present to lived subjective experience and in the desire to be in authentic relationship with others. Furthermore, the strengthening of awareness and discernment through contemplative practice makes possible the expansion of healthy engagement with greater complexity in my own individual life and the lives of others. In addition, the personal fostering of contemplative practice has contributed to a desire to live with a spirit of equanimity,

altruism, compassion, and from an ethical disposition in relationship to others and the world.

As an extension to my professional role, contemplative education has provided a philosophical and theoretical framework to inform my work as an educator. In working with trainee second level teachers, I am endeavouring to provide students with an opportunity to focus on developing their own philosophical orientations: understanding themselves, their students or others and how they consider their purpose as educators and their relationship to the education context in an integrated fashion on the path to 'becoming a teacher'. Absorption with the necessary extrinsic demands of teacher training can obfuscate a lack of focus on both subjectivity and intersubjectivity and the relational dimension of teaching. This can lead to a further sense of alienation arising from the threefold disconnect: the somatic, the perceptual, and the intersubjective (Bai, Scott and Donald, 2009). Teaching with the vision of a contemplative education framework, and in particular with the praxis dimension of contemplative practice as I do, can encourage teachers to fully inhabit their bodies, senses, and feelings – their inner world - and to dwell in a consciousness that experiences the self and the world that surrounds the self in terms of intersubjectivity. In this way, the subject (the self) and object (not self) duality is disrupted as the normalised mode of consciousness or way of being as a teacher. Traditional modes of teacher education have tended not to encourage educators to inhabit deeply in their bodies, senses, feelings, and for that matter, even in their inner mind (Ergas, 2017b). Teacher attention is continually drawn out of and away from their embodied and inhabited experience and is overly attached to abstract and discursive knowledge (information, fact, theories, ideas). The primary purpose of contemplative education, and reflected in this research, is how access to other frames of reference mediated through contemplative practice can be containers for other kinds of knowing. To do this, educators need new pedagogical tools such as contemplative methodologies that can inspire discovery of hidden dimensions of reality and other forms of knowledge beyond the abstract and conceptual.

Engaging in a reflexive approach to research can mitigate, to some degree, researcher bias and partisanship. However, it must be acknowledged that no matter how reflexive

one is, some form of bias or subjectivity is inevitable particularly in the context of a qualitative study. As Darwin Holmes observes (p.5), the insider-outsider dialectic more usually pertaining to ethnographic studies, has relevance to all qualitative researchers. For this researcher there is a warrant in claiming to hold an 'insider' perspective as an approach to this study. As identified above there are both personal and professional influences which provided the catalyst for this study as situated within the "cultural relativist perspective" (Darwin Holmes, p.5) of the researcher from a strong practitioner base. This was reflected in the use of terminology that was meaningful to and from the perspective of the teachers whose experience of contemplative practices were being studied. So, for example, interview transcriptions included verbatim colloquial language, spelling, and grammar used by participants. As well as referencing ontological positions, the term 'insider' or 'outsider' can also refer to whether the researcher is an actual insider or outsider to the culture under investigation. In this regard, the researcher positions himself as an 'insider' in the sense that he is a former second level teacher and remains working in education. This provided ease of access to participants for the study as professionals in the shared world of education and enabled an understanding of the language, including the colloquial language, used by participants in interviews.

1.6 Thesis Structure

Chapter One, as presented here, introduces the thesis, the rationale for the research, the intellectual foundations for the framing of the study including the main research questions, followed by an account of the researcher's personal and professional interest in the area and finally concludes with an overview of the overall structure of the thesis. In Chapter Two the review of the extant literature begins with a positioning of the topic in conceptualisations of teacher well-being. Following this review is a discussion on teacher reflexivity as it relates to one of the research questions in the study. Subsequently, a detailed discussion on understandings of contemplative education and practices including a treatment of each of the three practices adopted for this study. Chapter Three presents the research design and methodology utilised for the study, including the rationale for selection of the paradigm which framed the work. The research methodology of qualitative research adopted for the study is outlined with

subsequent reference to the selected research design – a case study approach. The chapter leads from here to a description of the data collection and data analysis processes and concludes with the limitations of the study.

Chapter Four is a discussion on the findings emanating from the empirical research conducted as part of the study with attention given to each of the three practices under review. This presentation includes an outline of the key findings which emerged from the study.

In Chapter Five the conclusions from the overall study emerging from the exploration of educator's engagement with the three contemplative practices are presented coupled with recommendations and identification of the contribution emanating from the study to knowledge in the sphere of contemplative education. The chapter concludes with the researcher's reflections on the study process itself, including the implications for personal and professional development.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In my view all teachers should be required to stop teaching at age thirty-two and not allowed to resume until they're sixty-five, so that they can live their lives, not teach them away – live lives full of ambiguity and transience and regret and wonder, be asked to explain nothing in public until very near the end when they can't do anything else.

Ford (1986, p. 128) *The Sportswriter*.

2.1 Introduction

This study on Contemplative Education explores the implementation of three contemplative practices – *Mindfulness (MBSR)*, *Deep Talk (DT)* and *Balint* – with educators working across the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. Contemplative Education is a subset of the broader framework of Contemplative Studies, Science or Psychology. These related disciplines consider “the contemplative experience and its various historical manifestations, often with a focus on its application in the contemporary world” (Cárcer, 2019, p. 1). They have, as their purpose, the concentration, broadening and deepening of awareness by human beings across cultures and time (Komjathy, 2018, p. 17). The rationale for contemplative approaches challenges an over reliance on the paradigm of logical thinking and knowing (third person knowing) to the exclusion of inner dimensions of being and doing in the world (first person knowing). The educator’s inner life embraces, as the author Richard Ford eloquently describes, a capacity to “live lives full of ambiguity and transience and regret and wonder” (1986, p.128).

More recently, others have argued for an intersubjective theory (second person knowing) of contemplative studies as a more substantial and meaningful theoretical lens to better articulate the inner world of individuals and their experiences, relationality to self and others (Gunnlaugson, 2009; Ferrer and Sohmer, 2017; Gunnlaugson *et al.*, 2023). The theoretical framework of contemplative studies is applied in contemplative practices which cultivate awareness of and attention to the present moment and continuous flow of thoughts and emotions and their embodied reality.

This chapter begins with a focus on teacher well-being and the concept of teacher reflexivity. A discussion then follows on the elements of Contemplative Education as a particular domain application within the field of Contemplative Studies. The focus then shifts to exploring the elements comprising the three contemplative practices adopted for this study with a conclusion critiquing CE as an approach to Education.

2.2 Literature Review Approach

The literature search for this chapter was conducted using the DCU Library (SUMMONS) database, PsycINFO, PubMed, Web of Science, EBSCOhost, ScienceDirect, ProQuest and the Scopus electronic databases in addition to Google Scholar. The following keywords/phrases guided the search:

Teacher well-being AND/OR Education; Teacher Reflexivity AND Education; Contemplative Education OR Contemplative Pedagogy OR Contemplative Practice; Mindfulness AND Education; MBSR AND Education; Balint OR Balint Groups; Deep Talk.

In terms of refinement of studies resultant from these searches, the participants, interventions, comparisons, outcomes, and study design, the key criteria were (1) participants – teachers or educators; (2) for the purposes of this review, Mindfulness Based Interventions in education were defined where mindfulness meditation was the central component (as indicated by mindfulness either featuring in the title of the intervention or being given prominence in the abstract); and with particular focus on Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction; (3) outcomes – mindfulness, well-being, and contemplative education/practices; (4) study design – both empirical and non-empirical studies featuring data collection. Studies were required to be published (or in press) in a peer-reviewed academic journal, and to be in English.

The inclusion criteria were: (1) research undertaken in an educational setting (except for Balint which is offered more generally in medical education context); (2) qualitative and quantitative analysis; (3) published (or in press) in a peer-reviewed academic journal; and (4) the broader terrain of grey literature, for example international and national reports on well-being. Regarding point (4), exclusion criteria were theoretical articles or commentaries outside the domain of mindfulness in education, for example,

mindfulness in clinical settings, and interventions where mindfulness practice is not the central component (even if incorporating elements of mindfulness practice or theory), such as acceptance and commitment therapy. However, to manage the review, the focus here was on interventions in education contexts that self-identify as having mindfulness as their central component. Additional sources were acquired through reference sections of relevant articles and a 'cited by' list search (snowballing).

The literature review presented here seeks to orientate the reader by examining the relevant key areas and the current debates in the academic discourse on teacher well-being and reflexivity, contemplative education approaches and the contemplative practices adopted for this study.

2.3 Educator Well-being

Over the past decade, concern for student well-being across all sectors within education has moved steadily to the centre of education policy in Ireland (Byrne, Carthy and McGilloway, 2020; Hill *et al.*, 2020; Higgins and Booker, 2022) and internationally (Govorova, Benítez and Muñiz, 2020; Jones *et al.*, 2021). Personal, social and emotional support for students in post primary education is now strengthened by recent policy and practice developments in the area of well-being (Maunsell and Bourke, 2018) and received considerable endorsement during the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequently in the return to normal schooling (Nohilly and Tynan, 2022; O'Flaherty and McCormack, 2023).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on learning highlighted the inseparable link between children's wellbeing and their educational experience, the shifting emphasis on the concept of wellbeing as a critical influence on the rounded development of young people had already gained momentum in Ireland and internationally. Within the Irish context wellbeing is now considered as fundamental in enabling young people from early years through second level to fulfil their potential (DE, 2019). As others have commented, the wellbeing agenda is not only a concern at the level of education influence but is a theme which features in the policy and decision making of other Government Departments, for example, in Health and in the

Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Nohilly and Tynan, 2022). The 2023 Primary Curriculum Framework (Department of Education, 2023) has an explicit focus on wellbeing where 'Being well' is a key competency, and Wellbeing (which includes the subjects of PE and SPHE) is one of five broad curriculum areas. Up to now the place of wellbeing within the current Irish primary school curriculum was more discrete but the publication in March 2024 of the Draft Wellbeing Specification for all primary and special schools marks a more formal designation of the concept. At second level, wellbeing was introduced as a subject area in the Junior Cycle in 2017 (NCCA, 2017) and the Junior Cycle SPHE curriculum was most recently updated in 2023 (NCCA, 2023) as well as the Department of Education Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023.

In the thrust towards placing wellbeing at the heart of education at all levels and in creating a whole school/institutional approach for this ambition, it is imperative to attend to the wellbeing of teachers (Nohilly and Tynan, 2022). More precisely, as Turner and Thielking, (2019) observe attention has indeed been given to teacher wellbeing but many of these studies have focused on ameliorating negative states of teacher wellbeing, teachers' increased stress levels or teachers' increasingly demanding workload and teacher burnout. The creation of a meaningful whole school/institutional approach to wellbeing entails creating opportunities for staff to consider their own wellbeing (NCCA 2017). Although support for the wellbeing of staff is acknowledged in the DES Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice this is only in respect of "raising awareness regarding supports for teacher wellbeing" (p.25) and has only a single mention within the entire statement.

Currently, at primary level, as part of the redevelopment of the Primary School Curriculum, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has completed consultation on the Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications for well-being (2024). In the Further Education Sector (FET) the Learner Mental Health Framework developed by Education and Training Boards Ireland (2023) provides a structure for the provision of mental health and well-being support for learners in a variety of FET locations. The Higher Education Authority (2022) has framed a well-being agenda outlined in their

Healthy Campus Charter and Framework. This framework, premised on the concept of a *Healthy Campus*, is more expansive comprising all elements of campus life – students, academic and administrative staff, leadership, and governance. The charter offers guidelines to third-level institutions to build on existing well-being actions and assists with the integration of health and well-being across the whole campus including teaching and learning, student supports and services, staff development, policies. In 2024 Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) launched a workplace *Well-being Strategy* ETBI with the particular purpose to support staff across their 16 member ETBs (2024).

A capacity to maintain wellbeing and respond proactively to professional challenges is recognised as a valuable capacity for teachers. Ensuring the wellbeing of educators is an essential element of building whole-school wellbeing. However, the research on educator wellbeing, which has mainly focused on teachers, shows high rates of stress and depression in the profession (Greenberg, 2016; Steiner & Woo, 2021). Poor teacher wellbeing negatively impacts teachers and schools, as it is associated with low teacher self-efficacy (Collie et al., 2012), poor relationships with students (Hoglund et al., 2015), and also leads to attrition (Greenberg, 2016).

Extensive research documents high stress levels and depression, emotional exhaustion, and low levels of mental health in educators to be common factors leading to high attrition rates. Attrition has found to be a significant concern amongst male educators and additionally, alienation and stereotyping by their students were factors that led to increased negative emotions on the job for secondary school educators (Patrick *et al.*, 2024).

In a tertiary context Turner and Garvis (2023) reveal that factors which are particularly hazardous to academic staff wellbeing include: job insecurity, a performance-based culture with increasing pressure to generate research income and publish in prestigious journals; excessive workload; work intensification; and work-family conflict. They identify that increased stress and decreased wellbeing in academic staff can result in poorer performance at work, reduce job satisfaction, and negatively impact student wellbeing.

In contrast, very little, if any guidance, is provided in policy documents for either the primary or post primary sectors on the concept of educator well-being. In these two levels the emphasis on approaches to well-being in education is placed on “*learning about well-being*” for students rather than “*learning to be well and to live well*”, the latter described by O’Brien and O’Shea (2017), as “*learning for well-being*” (p.5). Students rightfully ought to be the focus of the teacher’s care (O’Flaherty and McCormack, 2019; 2023) but this capacity, as Hargreaves et. al (2018, p.31) remark, is to some degree, correlated with educator well-being and the circumstances of their own work as educators. Teacher professional learning and development in the realm of well-being has predominantly focussed on the benefits for students. Even within this domain some of the academic literature reveals a bias towards understandings of well-being constituted mainly as content and pedagogy delivery as opposed to a process or well-being as an intersubjective dimension. There is an emerging focus now on teacher well-being (Viac and Fraser, 2020; Dreer and Gouasé, 2022; Ozturk, Wigelsworth and Squires, 2024). However, similar to the challenges in understanding and accepting consensual definitions of general well-being there is too in teacher well-being a lack of convergence on conceptual frameworks (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; McCallum, 2020; Hascher and Waber, 2021; Hascher, Beltman and Mansfield, 2021). Broadly speaking, research has generally focused on identifying influential individual and organisational drivers (Chen *et al.*, 2023).

In this wider context of education provision, Ball (2016) argues that the “slouching beast” (2016, p.1046) of the neo-liberal agenda creeps by stealth. Characterising the global neo-liberal agenda he highlights three defining “technologies” - *Market, Management and Performance* which are interrelated and interdependent bearing impact on education policy and practice (Ball, 2016, p.1049). There are other elements, less framed by socio-political contexts and more subjective, which also shape how educator’s experience their well-being (or ill-being). These include, for example, the personality of the educator, identity, professional experience and context, professional development, the perceived status of the profession. Returning to Ball (2016), he makes

a plea for resistance which is “vested in a pedagogy of context and experience, intelligible within a set of collegial relations” (p.1056). Ball’s (2016) position, as one stemming from a critical pedagogical approach, can be further enriched by a “critical contemplative pedagogy” (Kaufman, 2017) which combines both the inner and outer dimensions of life in the fostering of radical change.

2.3.1 A Space for well-being

In their study into the nature of the lived experience of well-being, Healey-Ogden and Wright (2011) describe the well-being experience as “a deeply woven masterpiece, where self and world become one” (p. 91). Palmer (1997, p.11) writes of “soulful connecting”, the ability of teachers to “dance” with their students; a critical component in co-creating a context in which teacher and students learn together. This same notion of connection with others and signifying well-being as interdependent is highlighted in two studies relating to teacher well-being. Klassen, Perry and Frenzel (2012) found that strong teacher-student relationships were not only important for student well-being, but also teacher well-being, to the extent that teachers’ need for relatedness with their colleagues may be overshadowed by their need for relatedness with their students. Further highlighting the significance of connectedness in teacher well-being, Grenville-Cleave and Boniwell, (2012) explored perceived control and well-being in teachers and other professionals identifying four themes related to control - *autonomy, authenticity, resilience and connection to others*. Although there were similarities between professions in the need for control over one’s work, for teachers, the values appeared different to other professions. Connections and being able to put pupils first were what really mattered to teachers and provided a source of well-being.

Intrator and Kunzman (2007) argue that professional development for teachers largely ignores the importance of vocational vitality, instead focussing on innovations in self-contained, one stop workshops which “embody a view of the teacher as deficient and needing to be fixed through the transmission of a new technique or skill” (p. 19). Thus, many initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher well-being paradoxically subject teachers to the *doing* of well-being and are much less about offering a *space* where teachers can

experience the unfolding reality of their life *as it is* rather than how it ought to be. However, teacher development programmes and professional workshops which speak to the inner self, the heart and soul of the teacher may be seen as one way of oxygenating' educators towards enhancing their personal and professional well-being, described by Palmer (2007, p.51) as the power of inwardness to transform work and lives. To be worthwhile, these programmes need to speak to the whole teacher being, not merely the identification with a professional role. Put simply, a programme merely designed to teach strategies and principles to alleviate professional stress is limiting if these principles cannot be applied to one's entire life – personal and professional.

Communities of practice as a concept have been formalised in research over several decades increasing in focus since its beginnings as a mechanism in, for example, Lave and Wenger's notion of situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation. DuFour, Eaker and DuFour (2005) identify three conditions requiring to continually be met by groups to qualify as professional learning communities. Primarily, the group needs to demonstrate the ability to generate collaborative knowledge and put it to use in institutions, which, as they describe, have been a component missing from many organisations claiming to be learning communities (p.9). A secondary purpose is the maintenance of learning communities to ensure that change and reflection are continual and do not cease, which can easily falter in the face of change and challenge. Finally, learning communities are not mandated meetings or groups and they cannot be forced or contrived. The voluntary and free nature of participation resides internally and acts a stimulus to committed engagement.

The concept of professional learning communities has gained considerable attention over the past three decades (De Neve and Nevos, 2017). Haiyan and Allan (2021) propose five characteristics of professional communities - having a shared vision or shared values, a focus on learning, encouragement of reflection or reflective dialogue, the de-privatisation of practice and collaborative activities.

Patton and Parker (2017) make the case that being part of a community, network, or team offers one of the most powerful modes of professional development, suggesting that learning between members is even more powerful than individual learning. In

connecting the notion of space with communities of practice they state, “participation within a community provides a space for authentic conversations, where members find reinforcement in and challenge each other's experiences and stories” (p.352). Their research unearthed the possibility for Communities of Practice to be “a place where new opportunities could be explored in an emotionally safe but challenging space” (p.357).

2.3.2 Putting Educators on the Map of well-being

Part of the challenge in determining the place of well-being in education stems from a persistent lack of clarity on how the concept is defined. Is it taught in the same way as a curriculum object is taught; a method; a way of doing and being? Is it both a pedagogical and curricular concern and are there wellness *truths* to be imparted? If so, how might approaches to well-being be shaped holistically including conceptions of sitting in a good relationship with self, community, and the natural world? Well-being understood as knowledge, practice, habit, being, and doing, (Zhou, Slemp and Vella-Brodrick, 2024) is restrictive and narrow if positioning well-being as a discrete curricular intervention. Similarly, teachers cannot teach well-being in the same way they may approach the teaching of Mathematics or Science since the very subject itself addresses core aspects of the individual, for example, identity, meaning, relationships and of course, happiness and suffering. Neither can teachers be expected to do the work of trained clinicians and other health practitioners and professionals. Such a requirement, explicitly or implicitly, can be harmful to both student and teacher well-being. Furthermore, it may lead to teachers becoming ultimately responsible for the success or failure of well-being initiatives and interventions which is problematic since in many cases, the outcomes of well-being or living with illbeing may be beyond their control. As teaching becomes more complex, intense, and multifaceted, teacher responsibility for their students' and their own well-being must be commensurate with teacher training, teacher support, and teacher resources. And while substantial literature testifies to the emotionally challenging nature of teaching as a profession (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Von der Embse *et al.*, 2019; Lindqvist *et al.*, 2021) relatively little research exists on teacher well-being

as an overarching concept (Foreman-Peck, 2015; Hascher and Waber, 2021; Hascher, Beltman and Mansfield, 2021).

While it is understandable to suggest the well-being of students should necessarily and always precede that of teachers and other educators, it may be irresponsible—if not ineffective—to ignore the ways in which well-being is fundamentally relational, as well as the ways that service to one group is dependent upon service to the other. Teachers can only support students if they first have access to the wellness resources, they need and recourse to a meaningful framework to understanding their own well-being experience as well as having opportunities and space to attend to their own well-being. A relational approach to promoting well-being understands that teachers and students co-experience and co-create the conditions for their mutual well-being.

Literature in the field of school well-being has articulated the merits of individual and collegial well-being in terms of student social, emotional, and academic learning, yet - surprisingly targeted and structured approaches to teacher well-being are minimal. Studies which do attend to teacher well-being are often instrumental either attending to positive or negative dimensions which impact teaching practice and student learning (Turner and Thielking, 2019). McCallum *et al.*, (2017, p. 2) in an extensive literature review on teacher well-being conclude that “teacher well-being is a complex issue, and in order to maximise the well-being of teachers, the adoption of a holistic approach which includes the implementation of initiatives that complement teachers’ personal strategies” is required. Their application of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as shown in Figure 2.1, illustrates the complex interplay of how teachers operate and interact in numerous microsystems including the school environment, home, community groups, friendships.

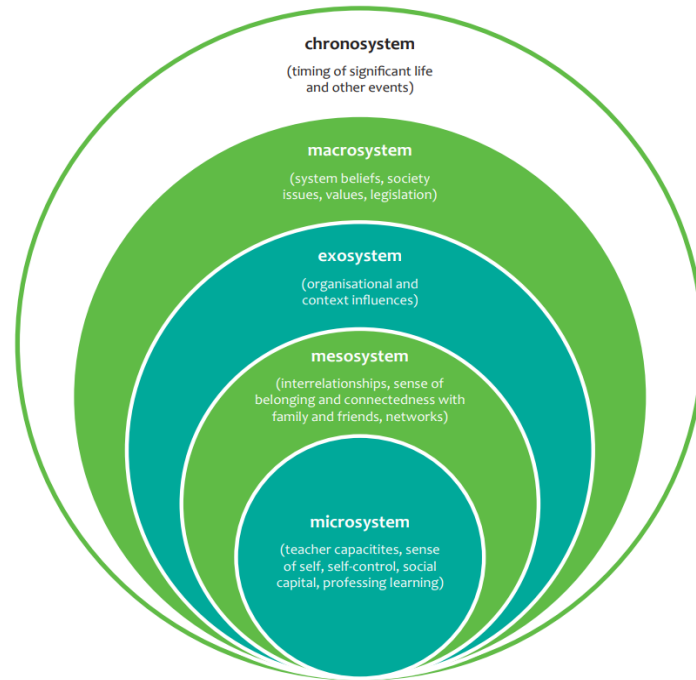


Figure 2.1 Factors that Impact on Teacher well-being (McCallum et al., 2017, p.24)

The complexity of this model and the subsequent analysis by McCallum *et al.* (2017) is a reminder that research on teacher well-being also needs to avoid falling victim to reductionist and technocratic purposes found in student well-being studies which negate attention to “issues around identity, being, and meaning that can help us to develop a fuller account of well-being in the context of human development” (O’Brien and O’Shea, 2017, p.9).

Considerable attention in Ireland is now being given to equipping schools with frameworks to support student well-being (Department of Education, 2020). Until very recently, a critical element often overlooked is support for educators themselves who are tasked with responsibility to deliver a school-based well-being curriculum as well as contributing to whole school structures and approaches to well-being. Accordingly, the Department of Education’s announcement in late Spring 2024 seeking proposals from service providers for the development and delivery of support for students, parents and school staff in the post primary sector is recognition of the interdependent nature of well-being provision in schools (Department of Education, 2024).

Ott *et al.* (2017) argue for a holistic approach to teacher well-being which includes multiple stakeholders within a given school community, including teachers. They suggest that “schools cannot be settings that promote mental fitness for students if they are not psychologically healthy settings for educators” (Ott *et al.*, 2017, p. 13). The exponential rise of interest in conceptualising educator well-being has led now to a logical parallel development. Emerging studies are now exploring how the well-being of educators, often tasked with the onerous responsibility of facilitating well-being for their learners as well as managing their own professional challenges and stressors, can be practically supported in a meaningful and sustainable manner (Rae, Cowell and Field, 2017; Dreer and Gouasé, 2022; Vo and Allen, 2022).

2.4 Educator Reflexivity

This section explores the related concept of teacher-educator reflexivity. Firstly, and more generally, the notion of reflexivity warrants attention grounded in the argument that teaching, schooling and indeed the purpose of education cannot be a mere technical-rational activity but is a multidimensional question functioning in relation to a number of domains (Biesta, 2015). It also has a shaping influence on educator practice characterised:

by an internal dialogue that takes place in order to understand and evaluate multiple perspectives (the individual’s and those situated in the broader social context, e.g., those based on school policies, curriculum expectations, social justice agendas) and maintain or change courses of action based on this dialogue (Lunn Brownlee, Ferguson and Ryan, 2017, p. 247).

Though reflexivity has a rich and ancient evolution (Hofer, 2017), Archer (2007) contends that the “reflexivity imperative” is now “categorical” for the first time in history proposing that

... the emergence of a new conjuncture between the cultural order (ideationally based) and the structural order (materially based) is shaping new situational contexts in which more and more social subjects find themselves and whose variety they have to confront – in a novel manner. (Archer, 2007, p. 1).

Similar to discussions and debates around well-being, reflexivity also occupies contested territory giving rise to confusion and conflation with *reflection* and *reflective practice*, notwithstanding their interconnection since, as Archer notes, “undoubtedly, reflection and reflexivity have fuzzy borders and can shift from one to the other” (Archer, 2009, p. 2). In order to navigate this muddy terrain, scholars over this past decade are committed to thrashing out the debate to arrive at some point of convergence in order to integrate reflection, reflexivity, and another related term - epistemic cognition (Ryan and Bourke, 2013; Alexander, 2017; Hofer, 2017; Weinstock *et al.*, 2017; Kuzmynska, 2024).

Returning to the challenge of definition, Archer defines reflexivity as “the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their social contexts and vice versa” (2007, p. 4). Although discussed in relation to reflexivity as an epistemic virtue Weinstock *et al.*, (2017) add a useful dimension to the concept which they describe as “informed reflexivity” which they posit adds to the process by accounting for one’s particular context and the purposes of knowing and action thereby rejecting the notion of reflexivity as a general trait or ability and which they argue can also be learned (2017, p.286). In addition, they emphasise that informed reflexivity has an intentional and deliberate application and is “reflex” (p.286) in the sense that it acknowledges the need to engage in self-reasoning and,

As such, informed reflexivity requires metacognitive knowledge and awareness (in the sense of judgments about one's own learning and actions as well as knowledge about which reasoning strategies are at one's disposal to choose appropriate actions) (Weinstock *et al.*, 2017, p.286).

Hibbert *et al.* (2019) remark that individuals do not, however, experience a blissful state of critical questioning but instead have moments of “being struck” (p.188) whereby ways of making sense of everyday experience are called into question. With the dawning of new insights and the challenging of perhaps long-standing assumptions “arresting moments,” in which affected individuals notice new possibilities for future practice and initiate a change of the context arise and can lead

to what they describe as the possibility for “emotional entanglement” (Hibbert *et al.*, 2019, p. 188).

2.4.1 Reflexivity and the Place of Emotion

The discerning place of in the lives of educators themselves is to be welcomed after a time when its positioning both in education and in understandings of reflexivity was absent. Internationally, the work of Zembylas and Schutz (2016) has enriched this conversation and in an Irish context Redmond (2016) has conducted research on affective attunement, emotion and collaboration with Voluntary Secondary School Principals finding that

There exists a demand for an emotionally engaged ‘leaderliness’ which is underpinned by values and which can comprehend the politics and power dynamics of school life while linking the emotional dimensions of practice with teacher performance and student outcomes (Redmond, 2016, p. 27).

Hibbert *et al.*, (2019) offer three reasons for the inclusion of emotion as a component of reflexive practice. Firstly, it is an unavoidable facet of daily living therefore and warrants consideration. Secondly, it involves the self in the social context with the latter offering a better understanding of the insights provided by one’s own emotions; and finally, motivation towards reflexive action always has an “emotional tone” (Hibbert *et al.*, p.189). They illustrate how engagement with reflexive practices generally yield one of two responses. Firstly, individuals can be motivated to “engage” with the call for transformative action both rationally understood and emotionally experienced or secondly default to “stasis in the face of transformative pressures” (Hibbert *et al.*, 2019, p.190) with an inclination to “avoid” because of lack of hope or because of self-interest. There is no possibility for inaction since even avoidance of itself is the taking of a stance as “emotionally entangled engagement-avoidance” (Hibbert *et al.*, 2019, p.190). Both of these actions can either be internally oriented (reflexive practices focused on the self) or externally oriented (reflexive practices focused on the context).

2.4.2 Radical Reflexivity

In the context of this research attention to reflexivity is critical since it is a gateway to both the antecedents and the consequences of engagement with contemplative practices. Reflexivity as a process is supported by contemplative practices and is directed to outward (critical reflexivity) and inward orientations (self-reflexivity) where the former has a focus on one's external environment and the latter concerned directly with self-awareness and self-transformation. McCaw's (2023) article, '*Beyond deliberation—radical reflexivity, contemplative practices and teacher change*' maps out and clarifies important distinctions between the related practices of *reflection-on-action*, *reflection-in-action*, *critical reflection* (my emphasis). Adding to this lineage he proposes the notion of "radical reflexivity" (p.1) which is characterised by both temporal synchronicity and the bending back of the reflective arc to form a *subject-object-subject* structure. Subsequently, he proposes that contemplative practices (mindfulness, meditation, etc.) are sources for teachers to mobilise radical reflexivity through the cultivation of present-moment, non-judgemental, embodied awareness. His findings from a qualitative study of seven beginning teachers, focuses on participants' experiences of putting the ego aside and responding to strong, embodied emotions in classroom contexts revealing the distinctive implications of radical, contemplative reflexivity as an avenue for the professional transformation of teachers.

Taking Schön's (1983) work and the scholarship on critical reflection McCaw captures schematically a shifting emphasis from a reflective structure towards a reflexivity model which he classifies as "radical reflexivity" marked by "the transition from subject-object structure to a subject-object-subject structure" (McCaw. 2023, p.5). This movement is represented graphically by McCaw as per Figure 2.2.

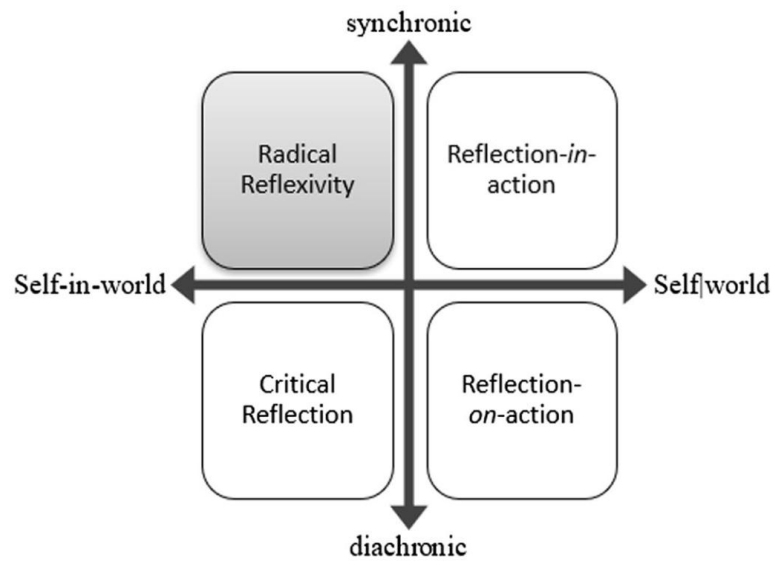


Figure 2.2 Four Modalities of Reflexivity and Reflection (McCaw, 2023, p. 5).

Resonating with and acknowledging the work of Ergas (2017), McCaw (2023, p.6) cites this movement “outward” (towards the world), to attending “inward” (toward the self). However, Ergas’ conceptualisation is somewhat binary, perhaps even dualistic, and thus McCaw’s use of the term “Self-in-world” (left side of Fig. 2.2) more richly captures the synergy of the inner and outer world of the educator in harmony as opposed to a dichotomy which may appear to privilege one disposition over the other. In this representation, McCaw’s work on defining *Radical reflexivity*

follows through on this impulse to disrupt the presumed unity, coherence and naturalness of the (teacher) self. It moves reflexivity from the diachronic to the synchronic mode and, I argue, provides a new window to transforming teacher practice via an immediate, embodied and embedded encounter with the relationally constituted teaching self (McCaw, 2023, p.7).

This opens a space for an encounter with the “teacher self as it is constituted, moment-to-moment in relation to the world” (top-left quadrant of Fig. 2.2) and challenges “the taken-for-granted status of the teacher self” bringing “awareness into the ongoing, embodied experience of being a teacher, right now, in the midst of teaching practice” (McCaw, 2023, p.7).

2.5 Contemplative Education

Despite the threat of the neo-liberal agenda in education, Zembylas argues that “there are methodological, theoretical, and political reasons to avoid invoking a monolithic notion of “neoliberal subjects” in academia” (Zembylas, 2024, p. 172). In another paper he argues how critical pedagogy, with its consideration of affect and resistance, might help teachers and students develop counter-conduct actions resisting neoliberal affects, policies and practices (Zembylas, 2021). The extent to which contemplative pedagogy builds upon critical pedagogy will be the subject of a later discussion in this chapter.

Contemplative education is a set of pedagogical practices designed to cultivate conscious awareness in an ethical-relational context (Holland *et al.*, 2013) in which the values of personal growth, learning, moral living, and caring for others are nurtured. The emerging field of contemplative pedagogy and its practices may provide a framework for intellectual transformation, improved learning, concentration, self-knowledge along with social activism. It rages against an education system that only fills students' heads with definitions, facts, figures, set principles and logic rather than imparting real knowledge to bring in radical social change based on an outer directed education system. As Freire (1970) in ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ argues, there is a need to abolish the teacher-student contradiction whereby the teacher is the only one who teaches, and the students are the only one who learns. Through the amalgamation of contemplative practices into critical education systems we can achieve more compassionate social action.

Ergas (2019) argues that the contemplative shift in education is highly complex. It involves several voices, traditions, orientations, interpretations, and implementations and is based on the “pedagogical movement of contemplative practices” (Ergas, 2019, p.255) – turning inwards, engaging differently with time and with a deliberate intention to attend differently to experience. He argues that since the turn of the millennium there has been an exponential rise in publications, which point to a shift from a predominantly theoretical to a practice-oriented discourse. Ergas notes this shift as reflected in three domains: mindfulness-based interventions, contemplative pedagogies, and contemplative inquiry (Ergas, 2019, p. 258).

As Morgan (2015) observes, the resurging interest in contemplation and contemplative practices in education, needs referencing to its historical presence in education. The contemplative tradition has asserted the value in human beings laying claim to inner wisdom and intuitive knowing that comes with first-person inquiry in order to obtain significant discoveries about the mind and human nature. Nonetheless, as Matiasz and Wallace (2024) argue, this first person perspective can be augmented through the integration of that other tradition, the sciences and its methods, leading to a convergence and an epistemology of contemplative science illustrated by the links between empiricism, objectivity, subjectivity, and normativity (2024, p.86).

2.6 Contemplative Practices

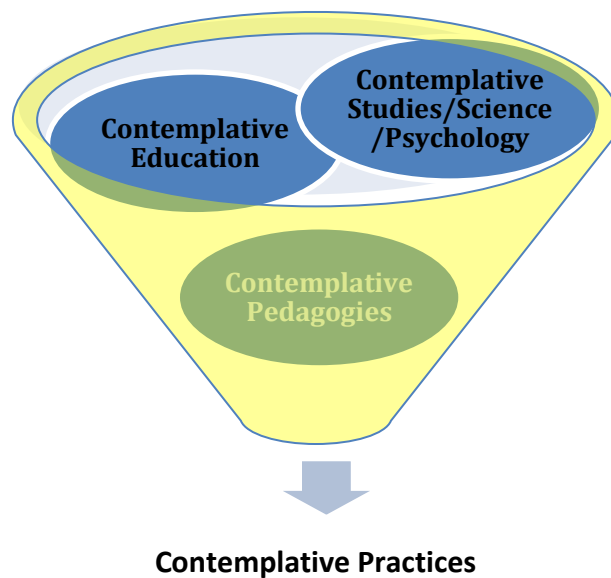


Figure 2.3 Contemplative Practices

Contemplative practices (CPs), illustrated in Figure 2.3, have been defined broadly as: "the many ways human beings have found, across cultures and across time, to concentrate, broaden and deepen conscious awareness" (Roth, 2008, p. 19). As previously discussed, focussing primarily on inner and interpersonal dimensions of experience, the various practices are intended to cultivate attentiveness, awareness, compassion, concentration, and presence, usually rooted in interiority, seclusion, and a sense of place (Komjathy 2017). Examples include diverse forms of meditation (e.g.,

mindfulness practice, compassion meditation), body-based contemplative practice (e.g., postural yoga, tai chi, walking/standing meditation), ecological practices (e.g., nature walk), reflective practices, journaling, and many others.

In the past decade, a surge of interest to incorporate diverse contemplative practices in the curriculum has become apparent in primary, secondary, and higher education supported by various institutions (for example, Mind and Life, Garrison Institute, Contemplative Mind in Society, the Collaboration of Academic and Social Emotional Learning), a host of networks (for example, Mindfulness in Education, Mindfulness and Contemplative Education) and is manifest in diverse curricular interventions (for example, MINDUP, CARE, 'i.b' curriculum). As Ergas (2019) observes contemplative practices stem from wisdom-traditions that seem to be offering a counter-movement to the narrative of economic-rational-secular agendas pointing towards performativity, accountability, and standardisation by introducing some measure of *non-productive-affective-spiritual* flavour into the curriculum. Lundh (2022) proposes that contemplative practices be viewed through the lens of experimental phenomenology and can be regarded as an informal phenomenological practice mediated by variations of experience and its observation. In this regard, they can be extended to more targeted development of experiential manipulation toward specific objectives. The boundary that defines the categorisation of contemplative practices is ill defined, but in general CPs emphasise self-awareness, self-regulation, first person inquiry to first bring insight to self. Practices involve some form of mental agility and can also involve physical movement or dialogue-centred exercises. Contemplative practices are typically viewed as practical methods to bring about a state of enduring well-being or inner flourishing. In this research the three contemplative practices selected for this investigation - MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint. Each is reviewed below with consideration also given to empirical studies as applied to educators and contemplative practice.

2.6.1 The Contemplative Practice of Mindfulness

Mindfulness involves learning to direct our attention to our experience as it is unfolding, moment by moment, non-judgmentally and with open-minded curiosity and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). It is a skill that can be learned by practice with a focus on immediate

felt experience in the breath, body, and mind. Interest in mindfulness within mainstream society and its institutions is rapidly becoming a global phenomenon, supported by increasingly rigorous scientific research, and driven in part by a longing for new models and practices that might help us individually and collectively to respond to the challenges of living and optimising the preconditions for happiness and well-being. Since the introduction of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction in a clinical setting at the end of the 1970s (Kabat-Zinn 1990), an increasing number of Mindfulness Based Interventions, aimed at helping practitioners cultivate mindfulness in their daily lives, has developed appropriate for particular populations. The overall evidence base for the effectiveness of these interventions for adults is well established across many areas (Carroll *et al.*, 2022).

In a policy context, the use of Mindfulness is criticised as exemplifying the drift to targeting individual behaviors, rather than addressing structural deficits (Nehring and Frawley 2020). The most comprehensive and strident critique has coalesced around 'McMindfulness.' As Hyland remarks, "what often happens with popular innovations, the burgeoning interest in and appeal of mindfulness practice has led to a reductionism and commodification – popularly labelled 'McMindfulness' – of the underpinning principles and ethical foundations of such practice" (2016b, p. 97). He further argues that this tendency to commodify or usurp mindfulness as a practice solely for commercial gain "threatens to subvert and militate against the achievement of the original aims of MBIs in general and their educational function in particular" (*ibid*). Other critiques of mindfulness, and by extension to the other contemplative practices in this study, are that while potentially liberating, mindfulness they deplete a person's critical capacities. Leggett (2022) argues that mental states are elevated but what is missing is the possibility that bodily discomfort, emotional upset or intellectual confusion are not interior realities but are rooted in objective social or physical circumstances and a blindness to this negates the ambition of social and political critique to better understand the origins of the present reality. In its extreme manifestation, presentism is also not just atemporal, but asocial whereby experience is abstracted from the

institutions, ideologies, social norms, and relations that constitute an agent's 'present,' and are the basis of critique (Leggett, 2022, p.267).

While the concept of mindfulness and other contemplative practices have an ancient tradition, research in the field is still considered by many to be in its infancy, particularly in education. Even within the education domain much of the existing research focuses on the benefits of MBI's for students themselves and mostly students in the primary or secondary education sectors (Lee, McCaw and Van Dam, 2024). While the initial focus of mindfulness in education in the earlier research was on children and young people, accounts of work with teachers have been included in general reviews of mindfulness in education (Ergas and Hadar, 2019).

Even more fundamental is to consider how we can assist educators to teach mindfully. As a discipline, mindfulness can be integrated into education contexts using one of three basic approaches: indirect (the educator develops a personal mindfulness practice and embodies mindfulness attitudes and behaviours through their work); direct (programmes which teach students mindfulness exercises and skills); or a combination of direct and indirect approaches.

Research suggests that building teachers' social-emotional competence, including via mindfulness training, can improve teachers' overall effectiveness and help equip them with the tools needed to respond to the unique stressors of the teaching profession (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013; Rechtschaffen, 2014; Roeser *et. al*, 2022). The heavy demands placed on the educator result in many becoming alienated or burning out. Therefore, it is imperative to identify ways to support the educator's internal capacities for managing their stress and promoting well-being since as evidenced above while there is a growing foundation of empirical support for mindfulness in education settings most programmes are targeted at students with a paucity of programmes geared toward promoting the well-being of educators.

Following the exponential rise in publications on mindfulness in education and the emergence of some critical perspectives on this field, Ergas (2019b) articulates three roles of mindfulness practice in education: Mindfulness *in, as* and *of* education. These perspectives are developed based on an examination of the practice as it is shaped by

two different socio-historical narratives, which in turn manifest in different modalities of implementation and aims in the contemporary educational field. He states that while much of the field is governed by “mindfulness *in* education” (2019b, p.346) within economic-therapeutic interventions, equal attention is given to “mindfulness *as* education” (2019b, p.348) as reflected in a whole school approach and to “mindfulness *of* education” (2019b, p.351) in which the practice radicalises the ethos of critical pedagogy. Describing these three roles, he introduces readers to the practice itself, offers a framework for understanding its associations with a variety of educational aims, and critically discusses these associations as well as the diverse pedagogical possibilities that this practice brings to contemporary and future education.

Mindfulness *in* education reflects the most common form of contemporary implementations of the practice in educational settings (Ergas and Hadar, 2019; Roeser *et. al*, 2022). When analysing the role of the practice here, both an external perspective (focusing on the facets of the practice) and the internal perspectives (focusing on the social-historical narrative) are required because each sheds a different light on this phenomenon. The former clearly reveals mindfulness as a tool in this case, whereas the latter raises questions on whether something more profound is occurring here. The external perspective shows mindfulness in education as conforming with *the system*, supporting its functioning and improving performance and well-being within it. One can detect these processes in the ways in which the practice is framed throughout publications in this domain. As Ergas and Hadar (2019) demonstrate, these will generally ground understandings of mindfulness in Kabat-Zinn’s work and either refrain from mentioning the first narrative (Bakosh *et al.*, 2016) or mention it in passing yet shift to scientific-secular language. Ergas further critiques publications on mindfulness as either the implementation of MBIs in education as therapeutic interventions or as attempts to improve cognitive functioning and that “the very term ‘intervention’ embodies the seed of alienating the practice from education.” (Ergas, 2019b, p.10). This is reflected too in Sellman and Buttarazzi’s critique of MBIs as normalising a sick system by in fact, “adding lemon juice to poison” (2019, p.61).

Mindfulness *as* education is grounded in educational aims and is connected to more “ancient and contemporary conceptions of education as a path and as a holistic endeavour that concerns character, virtue, self-knowledge and social engagement” (Ergas, 2019b, p.14). Ergas argues, however, that just as many of the scientists and leaders within mindfulness in education are versed in the first narrative i.e. mindfulness *in* education, those teaching mindfulness in or as education need to be grounded in the practice. The case for mindfulness *as* education is taken up by Hyland (2016, p.177) in his call to challenge the “crude commodification” of mindfulness which divorces the practice from the ethical and genuinely educational aspects of its foundations. Finally, as a third possibility conceptualised by Ergas as “mindfulness *of* education” (2019b, p.19) this can be conceived as engaging in mindfulness for the purpose of critiquing education. This framing holds significant potential for introducing the radical dimensions of mindfulness as a way to inform education and critical pedagogy. In doing so it places mindfulness beyond the personal to include the political. In doing so it provides an integral framework for a critical, social, moral mindfulness that challenges the insular nature of practice, remaining solely at the level of seeking to obtain only a benefit for self (Forbes, 2019)

2.6.1.1 Conceptualising Mindfulness – definitions, approaches, and pedagogies

Current frameworks or protocols for MBI’s do already exist, for example the MBSR and Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) programme in the USA and the. b foundations programme in the UK but have a particular relevance for the educational settings of their origin countries.

Accompanying the rise of mindfulness across all settings, debate exists as to its proper meaning and interpretation, and the issues involved in its transfer into new scientific, social, and therapeutic contexts (Monteiro, Musten and Compson, 2015). In response to the question, ‘What is mindfulness?’ McCaw, (2020, p263) posits that we might well ask: “Will the *real* mindfulness please stand up?”. His way of negotiating this terrain and to offer clarity in discussions of mindfulness in education, is the distinction he makes between “thin mindfulness” and “thick mindfulness” which he argues is a “heuristic device for helping to understand variations in uses of the term, and for mapping their

implications for education” (McCaw, 2020, p.263). Thin mindfulness, he conceives as primarily in psychological, ethically neutral terms, configured around the purpose of individual self-improvement and thick mindfulness is rooted primarily in ontological terms and around an ethically grounded purpose of transformation (McCaw, 2020, p.265). Although mindfulness as a practice is a focus of research in many studies with a wide range of cohorts for different purposes this study considers the practice in the space of contemplative thinking or practice with teachers and with agreement to McCaw’s clarity is positioned in this “thick” context (2020, p265).

Various attempts have been made to describe mindfulness, the most frequently cited from Jon Kabat-Zinn, a pioneer of contemporary adaptations of mindfulness who defined mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In the following decades, this definition has evolved to include an expanded dimension of the concept. Shapiro *et al.* proposed a three-component model which separates *attention* from *intention* (“on purpose”), and also includes *attitude* (“in a particular way”) as a third component (2006, p.375).

Brown *et al.* (2007) define mindfulness as comprising two components “a receptive attention to and awareness of present events and experience” (p. 212). In their definition, *awareness* is of the senses and also activities of the mind and *attention* is deliberately noticing experience with consciousness Brown *et al.*, 2007, p.214.) Baer *et al.* (2008) developed a five-facet model of mindfulness with five component skills: *observing, describing (attending), acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience (attitude), and non-reactivity to inner experience (self-regulation)*. In response to the lack of comprehensive theoretical frameworks Hölzel *et al.*, (2011) explored several components through which mindfulness meditation exerts its effects: (a) *attention regulation*, (b) *body awareness*, (c) *emotion regulation* (including reappraisal and exposure, extinction, and reconsolidation), and (d) *change in perspective on the self*. They identify these distinct but interacting mechanisms at play in the benefits of mindfulness meditation practice and propose they combine to describe the mechanism of action through which mindfulness works. An added

dimension to their formulation is that while previous models have described the process of mindfulness almost exclusively from a conceptual, psychological perspective, their review integrated a neuroscientific perspective.

Kang, Gruber and Gray, (2013) propose that four core elements of mindfulness - *awareness, attention, focus on the present moment, and acceptance* - dampen *automaticity* (in the mindfulness parlance also known as *being on automatic pilot*.) With this term they signify that “automatized cognitive or emotional reactivity can lead to a wide range of detrimental consequences” (p.193) and hence mindfulness has a de-automatization capacity to cultivate adaptive self-regulation strategies and amplify potential for self-regulation.

The proposed S-ART framework from Vago and David’s work (2012) for understanding mindfulness focuses on *self-processing, self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence*. With the interesting title, “Mind Your Expectations: Exploring the Roles of Suggestion and Intention in Mindfulness Training,” Farb (2012) asserts that *intention* and *expectation* are under-investigated but potentially important contributors to the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions. Farb makes a distinction between an expectation which has a success or failure attached to it depending upon whether that expectation is realised while an intention, on the other hand, is either held or not, but is “not contingent upon external outcomes.” (Farb, 2012, p.36).

Perhaps one of the greatest misconceptions around mindfulness is that its purpose is to empty the mind of thoughts and feelings, particularly if negative. Teper, Segal and Inzlicht, (2013) show that emotion regulation does not equate to *not feeling* and that some of the most positive outcomes of mindfulness, such as improved executive control and emotion regulation, rely on an ability to attend to and accept one’s emotional states. Again, what is significant here is that although this article is principally concerned with emotional regulation in mindfulness, as the authors remark, present-moment awareness and nonjudgmental acceptance and attitude are pre-conditions for this capacity.

Hanley and Garland, (2014) found that mindfulness practice led to an increase in the positive reappraisal of thoughts and that mindfulness practice facilitates positive

reappraisal which functions as an adaptive process through which stressful events are reconstructed as beneficial, meaningful, or benign.

Dorjee (2016) includes mindfulness under the category of contemplative science stating it to be an interdisciplinary study of the metacognitive self-regulatory capacity (MSRC) of the mind and associated modes of existential awareness (MEA) modulated by motivational/intentional and contextual factors of contemplative practices. Since the MSRC is a natural propensity of the mind, introspective awareness of mental processes and behaviour is enabled and is a necessary prerequisite for effective self-regulation supporting well-being. The influence of motivational/intentional and contextual factors of meditation practice, can lead to changes in the metacognitive self-regulatory processes with shifts in MEA which determine our sense of self and reality.

As a step toward determining the central components of contemplative practice including mindfulness, Grossenbacher and Quaglia, (2017) begin with what was by then the accepted and validated processes in research and practice of three dimensions - attention, intention, and awareness - to which they added an original perspective. Their framework is among the first to integrate these components - intended attention (IA), attention to intention (A→I), and awareness of transient information (ATI). The integrated functioning of IA, A→I, and ATI is defined by the authors as "contemplative cognition" (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017, p.1587).

McIntyre explored how integrating mindfulness-based practices into the student teaching experience affected the abilities of elementary education preservice teachers to cope with negative feelings emerging from experience alleviated or reduced anxiety, and support participants to be proactive and open-minded with attitudes toward teaching and challenging situations and improve their sense of confidence in their teaching practice (McIntyre, 2018).

The findings in the study by Park, Riley, and Branch (2020) using a short mindfulness practice with preservice teachers suggest that self-awareness is not only a mechanism of mindfulness but also a corollary of the practice. The participants identified their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement through mindfulness meditation and reported that their awareness resulted in increasing their sense of self-confidence to

achieve personal and professional goals and transform weaknesses into pedagogical resources.

With a focus on the role of attention or the lack of leading to mind wandering, Delorme and Brandmeyer (2019) identify that one goal of meditation is to identify the arousal of emotions and thoughts, and remain equanimous with them and that over time, meditation may help dampen the attention-grabbing power of these thoughts both during practice and in daily life, which may consequently help deepen meditation practice.

Literature and research on the process or pedagogy of mindfulness has received relatively little attention except in regard to programme content (Santorelli *et al.*, 2017). In MBSR teachers of mindfulness are *guided* by a curriculum with a stronger emphasis on intensive personal and professional training in mindfulness meditation and with discouragement to copy a single standard though core elements are required for MBSR to be authentic. McCown, Reibel and Micozzi, (2010) identify that there is a meta-structure with regard to what and when material is taught that constitutes the original MBSR programme. Dobkin *et al.* propose a number of elements to ensure programme fidelity and standards of teaching with the ultimate purpose to ensure participants have an experience worthy of quality and grounded in ethical principles. Some of these include explicating the link between science and practice while maintaining a balance between the two, meeting participant's needs, teaching from one's own experience and personal meditation practice, the provision of quality resources and fostering the very attitudes which mindfulness seeks to cultivate - open-mindedness, curiosity, and acceptance. With the development of their *Inside Out Group* (IOG) model Griffith, Bartley, and Crane (2019) consider what has been given little attention, namely the potential of the group to enhance participant learning in mindfulness programmes. Their model considers three aspects -(a) reading the group, (b) holding the group, and (c) befriending the group. Brandsma (2017) has a chapter on "creating a fertile learning setting" with a section on "the power of the circle" (p. 57), which explores how, when a group of people come together, there is resonance between members,

wisdom shared, insights gained, and a sense of togetherness that would not be possible if studying mindfulness alone.

2.6.1.2 Review of Empirical Studies of Mindfulness Based Interventions in Education

For the sake of clarity and as a working definition, an MBI signifies any intervention which has mindfulness as a core component. Interventions take various forms and emphasis. In the early days of research on Mindfulness Based Interventions the focus remained almost exclusively on the student population (Roeser, Galla and Baelen, 2022). This population remains the dominant target for research on MBIs. However, over the past decade more attention has centered on the delivery and research of MBIs for teachers as one effective and early intervention approach to support teachers in developing positive coping skills and to reduce the experience and impact of stress (Emerson *et al.*, 2017; Almaguer-Botero *et al.*, 2023). Although some studies focus explicitly on the impact of mindfulness for teachers in reducing psychological distress for example, Franco *et al.*, (2010), the focus in this section is the impact of mindfulness for the promotion of attention, awareness, attitude, emotional regulation and the influence of intention and process (including the group process) in contemplative practice. This section reviews the published empirical literature accounting for findings in MBIs used by teachers but with a particular focus on MBSR. The review is generally chronological, beginning with the earliest studies.

One of the earliest empirical studies in the literature using a sample of classroom teachers employed a five-week standardised meditation training that included weekly classes and a recommended practice of two daily twenty-minute home and school practice sessions (Anderson *et al.*, 1999). The training included use of a mantra, observing breath, and group practice. The sample consisted of elementary, middle, and high school teachers randomly assigned to an intervention (n=45) or control group (n=46). Effects of training were assessed at pre-, post-, and one-month follow-up on measures of anxiety, burnout, and stress. Results showed improvements in state and trait anxiety, less emotional exhaustion (a facet of burnout), and reduced stress at post-test, and less depersonalisation (another facet of burnout) at one-month follow-up.

Strengths of this study were the inclusion of a control group and one-month follow-up assessment, and a limitation was no use of a direct mindfulness measurement.

A small scale qualitative study using semi structured interviews (Napoli, 2004) with three teachers reported findings to indicate there was an improved quality of personal life for the teachers citing increased awareness in the body and in their surrounding environment, supporting capacity to respond to stress and greater task focus in their role as teachers (p.38).

Poulin *et al.*, (2008) implemented and researched a mindfulness-based intervention among two groups of human services professionals – nurses and teachers. The study included 28 teacher trainees (primary and secondary) participating in a Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE) programme, an experiential 8-week programme focusing primarily on the development of mindfulness skills that serves as a foundation to exploring seven dimensions of well-being: physical, social, emotional, ecological, mental, vocational and spiritual and which closely mirrors the MBSR programme. A recognised and validated measure Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS) was used to measure four aspects of mindfulness: observing, describing, acting with awareness, and accepting without judgments. Interviews with 5 participants were also conducted. The results revealed that the course had positive personal and professional outcomes, as it helped them to stay in the moment and to let go of the past with a follow effect of improving relationships and practices for self-care and significantly greater increases than controls in mindfulness application.

The 2010 study by Gold *et al.* using the MBSR for primary school teachers included 10 intervention participants and no control group (Gold *et al.*, 2010). One purpose of the study was to train teachers to be more mindful. Pre and post-test measures included a measure of depression, anxiety, and stress and a mindfulness scale. Teachers reported improvement in depression and stress and an attitude of accepting without judgement (a component of the mindfulness scale used in the study). A strength of this study was using a widely studied model of mindfulness for training. Limitations were the lack of control group and reliance on self-report measures.

Franco *et al.* (2010) conducted a quasi-experimental study, implemented to examine the efficacy of a mindfulness training programme to reduce psychological distress in a group of teachers. The sample comprised 68 teachers of Secondary School Education, from various public schools; half of them formed the experimental group, and the other half the control group. The intervention programme for teachers in the experimental group comprised 10 sessions distributed over 10 weeks mainly with the use of meditative practice with each session one and a half hours long. Participants completed pre and post-test measures. The use of a mindfulness technique was found to decrease cognitive fusion and develop cognitive flexibility, reducing the innate desire to control internal aspects (e.g., thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, etc.), and instead promoting acceptance of whatever emerged.

Jennings *et al.*, (2011, 2017, 2019) have for almost a decade conducted research into their Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) programme. Their first study (Jennings *et al.*, 2011) features two pilot studies of the programme offered in two different socioeconomic settings, one urban and one suburban, each with a control group. Study 1 involved educators from a high-poverty urban setting (n = 31). Study 2 involved student teachers and 10 of their mentors working in a suburban/semi-rural setting (n =43). The methods used were completion of questionnaires prior and post programme to assess changes in well-being, motivational orientation/efficacy, and mindfulness. Post programme participants also engaged in a focus group to assess programme satisfaction, feasibility, and effectiveness. The CARE programme has three primary content areas – emotional skills instruction, mindfulness/stress reduction practices and care and listening practices offered as a series of four day-long sessions presented over four to five weeks. In each case, participants attended two weekend sessions with follow-up support. In the urban setting, positive results showed increased self-regulation, attention and nonjudgmental awareness, key mindfulness skills. Teachers reported that CARE improved their self-awareness (97%, n = 28) and well-being (93%, n = 27) with 83% reporting improvement in their ability to manage their classroom. In the suburban study, student teachers accompanied their mentor teacher, which may have affected the results, and these teachers did not note reduced stress.

Focus group findings reported that CARE was helpful in increasing emotional awareness and acceptance of their emotional states, lessening their distress levels in general and that the skills learned in the programme helped them to recognise and regulate emotions related to managing student behaviours. Many reported improvements in the relationships with their students, co-workers, and families because of applying CARE techniques. Additionally, participants also reported new awareness of their emotional triggers both in school and in their personal lives with many reporting being more mindful of slowing down and better able to respond appropriately to challenging situations rather than automatically reacting out of strong emotions (Jennings *et al.*, 2011, p.42). In a follow up study on CARE (Jennings *et al.*, 2017) the efficacy of the CARE programme was assessed using a cluster randomised trial design involving 36 urban elementary schools and 224 teachers. The programme involved 30 hours of in-person training in addition to between-session phone coaching. At both pre- and post-intervention, teachers completed self-report measures and assessments of their participating students. At the time this was the largest sample of teachers in an MBI impact study and was a major contribution to the literature in terms of the size, diversity, and scope of the population studied. In the study, in comparison to a control group teachers showed higher levels of adaptive emotion regulation defined as “the ability to closely examine situations in which teachers experience difficult emotions and to be able to engage in cognitive reappraisal as well as to less often suppress their emotional expression” (Jennings *et al.*, 2017, p.13). In respect of emotional regulation intervention teachers reported a 14% improvement in their ability and a 11% increase in their overall mindfulness. The authors cite this as significant since CARE has, as one of its principal intentions, the desire to help teachers recognise the physical correlates with emotion reactivity and to use mindful awareness practices and cognitive reappraisal to improve emotional self-regulation in the context of classroom (Jennings *et al.*, 2017, p.13). The study also revealed the intervention effects on the capacity for mindfulness indicated by significant improvements in the observing and nonjudging subscales of the mindfulness factor. Participants reported a substantial 16% improvement on the capacity for observing and an 8% improvement on the nonjudging subscale. These

findings may be significant since if a teacher can observe internal and external experiences with a nonjudgmental attitude, he or she may be better prepared to respond to classroom situations without recourse to maladaptive reasoning supporting teachers' ability to reappraise emotional situations and reduce or prevent dysregulation. Finally, as part of the above same intervention of CARE Jennings *et al.*, (2019) examined teachers' self-reported data collected at three time points over two consecutive school years as part of a randomised controlled trial. The study reported on longitudinal findings of the effects of the CARE program on teacher self-reported experiences of stress, well-being, social-emotional competencies, and physical health between the fall of one school year and the fall of the following year. Results indicate that at the third assessment point (9.5 months after participating in the programme), participants continued to show significant increases in emotion regulation and some dimensions of mindfulness. A range of measures were used to assess well-being, efficacy, burnout, time pressure, mindfulness, and physical health. Five subscales came from the 39-item Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer *et al.*, 2008) *observing, describing, acting with awareness, nonjudgmental (attitude) and nonreactive (emotional regulation)* and two scales from the 10-item Emotion Regulation Questionnaire to assess teachers' emotion regulation. For mindfulness, two of the subscales showed significant intervention effects: non-judging ($b = 0.15, p < 0.001, ES = 0.21$) and observing ($b = 0.14, p < 0.01, ES = 0.20$) although the effect sizes were small, with improvement indices of 8.32% and 7.93% for non-judging and observing, respectively. A significant impact on linear change in adaptive emotion regulation was found ($b = 0.18, p < 0.01, ES = 0.26$) revealing that CARE teachers' emotion regulation skills increased, on average, at a per time unit rate of 0.18 points higher than those of their control counterparts. The findings showed that being assigned to the CARE programme would have led to improvements of 10.3 percentile points on the emotion regulation growth rates. Consistent with findings from their 2017 study (Jennings *et al.*, 2017), significant linear increases over time in adaptive emotion regulation were observed for the CARE group compared to control teachers. Concluding this review of research on the CARE programme, Schussler *et al.*, (2016) adopted an explanatory design to analyse data

from four focus groups each with three to eight teachers who participated in CARE to explore the mechanisms underlying the intervention effects. For this study, the researchers were specifically interested in what, if anything, teachers became more aware of because of participating in CARE, and how awareness operated as a mechanism. Some participants in the study explicitly made the connection between awareness of their physical stress and awareness of their mental state. Participants identified that the CARE program helped them become more aware of both their physical and emotional health. They developed bodily awareness, identifying when their bodies were displaying signs of stress, and they felt equipped with strategies—like simple breathing or a body scan—to help ameliorate that stress (p.138). Teachers also developed more sophisticated emotion awareness and described becoming less emotionally reactive because of strategies learned, breathing and emotion awareness exercises among the most used. The authors also conclude that data from this study also suggests that teachers' increased self-awareness and emotion regulation improved their ability to interact with students in more positive ways, possibly because of greater efficacy.

Kemeny *et al.* (2012) study focused on meditation combined with emotion regulation training for 82 female teachers. Across all three assessment points (baseline, post-test, five-month follow-up) self-reports were collected and experimental tasks were administered at baseline and/or post-test (final n=76). The training involving didactic presentations, discussion, and practice related to both meditation and emotional skills occurred over an 8-week period, clustered in 4 all-day sessions/4 evening sessions to a total of 42 hrs. Teachers in the intervention group as compared to the control group reported more positive trait affect and increased mindfulness, showed improved awareness of others' emotions, as well as greater sensitivity to compassion-related words in a behavioural task. The study findings demonstrated that mindfulness-based interventions can directly impact emotional behaviour, including in the context of emotional provocation. In particular, the training appears capable of inducing emotional regulation, reducing destructive emotions and emotional behaviours, and the cognitive

processes that provoke such responses, as well as increasing positive states of mind, such as positive affect, and prosocial responses, such as compassion.

Flook *et al.*, (2013) report results from a randomised controlled pilot trial of a modified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course (mMBSR) adapted specifically for teachers with 18 public elementary school teachers from a medium sized Midwestern city in the USA. Pre-test data collection occurred over the course of approximately four weeks. Teacher classroom behaviour coding was completed on a sub-sample of 13 participants using a standardised coding system during observation visits to the classroom. Post-test data collection occurred over the course of approximately three weeks. The results suggested that a mindfulness intervention adapted for educators boosts aspects of teachers' mindfulness and self-compassion, reduces psychological symptoms and burnout, increases effective teaching behaviour, and reduces attentional biases. Change in mindfulness from pre- to post-intervention was correlated with improvements in burnout, psychological symptoms, and attention in the intervention group. From the self-report measures non-reactivity was associated with increases in an objective measure of sustained attention. Increased acting with awareness was also associated with reduced psychological symptoms and emotional exhaustion in addition to greater sustained attention on an objective measure (p.10).

In Abenavoli *et al.* (2013) study, 64 educators completed self-report measures of mindfulness, burnout, affect, sleep-related impairment, daily physical symptoms, stress, and ambition. Addressing a gap in the literature by examining mediators of associations between mindfulness and outcomes results of cross-sectional analyses indicated that educators' mindfulness had strong, consistent negative associations with three widely studied components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and low personal accomplishment (p.66). The evidence revealed that hard-working, ambitious educators who exhibit greater resilience and self-regulatory skills experience less burnout than hard-working, ambitious educators who do not possess these skills.

The implementation of mindfulness training (MT) programme of 36 hours duration and adopting a RCT research method on psychological and physiological indicators of teachers' occupational stress and burnout was examined in 2 field trials (Roeser *et al.*,

2013). The study engaged 113 elementary and secondary school teachers (89% female) from Canada and the United States. In both studies, data collection included a take-home survey to assess teachers' self-reported occupational stress, burnout, health, and well-being at all time points, the use of physiological measures and an evaluation survey of daily mindfulness practice journals collected at the end of the programme. Measures were collected at baseline, post-programme, and 3-month follow up; teachers were randomly assigned to condition after baseline assessment. One research question addressed in the study was to find if teachers randomised to MT show greater mindfulness, focused attention and working memory capacity, and self-compassion at post-programme, and if such group differences at post-programme mediate the impact of MT on reductions in teacher stress and burnout later at 3-month follow-up. Survey questions were used to assess the programme process in terms of teachers' perceptions of (a) whether what they learned matched the stated goals of the programme; (b) the programme facilitator in terms of her domain-specific expertise, genuineness, effectiveness at presenting material, and trustworthiness. Results showed that 87% of teachers completed the program and found it beneficial. Teachers randomised to MT showed greater mindfulness, focused attention and working memory capacity, and occupational self-compassion, as well as lower levels of occupational stress and burnout at post-program and follow-up, than did those in the control condition. Regarding the programme process, participants indicated strong acceptance in terms of programme goals; the quality of the facilitator, curriculum, and home practices; and, ultimately, programme benefits. Mediation analyses showed that group differences in mindfulness awareness and the attitude of self-compassion at post-programme mediated reductions in stress and burnout as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression at follow-up.

Assessing the effectiveness of an adapted mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programme on educator stress and well-being, a study of 36 high school educators using a variety of self-report measures and with a waitlist control group was conducted by Frank *et al.* in 2015. A quasi-experimental pretest–post-test comparison group design was adopted for the study. Findings here suggested that educators who participated in

the programme reported significant gains in self-regulation, self-compassion, in addition to the mindfulness related skills of awareness/observation, attitude/non-judgment, and regulation/non-reacting. Participants showed significant improvements in their efficacy to self-regulate several dimensions of affect with those in the treatment group reporting significantly greater gains in their efficacy to engage in key mindfulness-related practices such as acknowledgement, remaining calm, and adopting a present moment focus. However, there was no report of higher levels of perceived efficacy in ability to engage in acceptance of challenging thoughts, sensations, and emotions. For this to happen the researchers posit that greater time or more practice is needed. Levels of self-judging and over-identification showed significantly greater declines for treatment group participants compared to controls (p.214).

The 2015 study by Hue and Lau (Hue and Lau, 2015) investigated the effects of a six-week mindfulness-based programme on pre-service teachers in Hong Kong ($N = 70$). Intervention and control groups were part of the study and assessed at baseline and post-intervention. Qualitative data from focus groups was also used in the study. Participants also completed a short feedback evaluation at exit. The study had two purposes - to evaluate such a programme's ability to improve the well-being and manage the stress, anxiety, and depression of pre-service teachers in Hong Kong and the second was to evaluate the feasibility of offering the programme in a local setting. It is noted that this study is not with in-service teachers but with participants who were recruited from the Hong Kong Institute of Education, the largest teachers' training tertiary institute in Hong Kong. The training group attended a six-week programme (15 hours) and a one-day retreat (7 hours). Consistent with previous research, the general pattern of correlation indicates that mindfulness was positively correlated with well-being and negatively correlated with depression, anxiety, and stress. The qualitative findings consistently showed that all the participants had a positive experience in the programme reporting that the programme's activities improved stress reduction, aroused a sense of compassion, and helped them cultivate more awareness of the internal changes occurring in their minds and bodies.

Taylor *et al.*, (2016) mixed-method study, conducted within the context of a randomised-control trial of an MBI for teachers, sought to examine four potential ways by which the MBI reduced teacher stress, including by (1) increasing their efficacy for regulating emotion on the job; (2) improving their ways of coping with stress at work; (3) increasing their efficacy for forgiving colleagues and students at work following conflict, as well as the tendency to do so; and (4) increasing teachers' tendency to feel compassion for people generally, and for challenging students in particular. The study was with 59 public school teachers who were randomised to an MBI or a waitlist control condition. Methods used were surveys at pre/post/follow-up and interviews at post-programme. In general, results of the study supported the hypothesis that mindfulness training cultivated social-emotional skills in teachers (based on teacher interview and survey measures). Evidence also identified that various aspects of (1) emotion regulation and (2) prosocial tendencies like compassion and forgiveness changed as a function of the mindfulness training and helped to reduce stress. The study verified that programme participation increased teacher felt efficacy for regulating emotions on the job compared to the control group imparting both the skill of emotion regulation, and the confidence to deploy emotion regulation skills as well (Taylor *et al.*, 2016, p.125). In interviews, teachers in the treatment group reported slightly greater use of self-regulatory and problem solving (i.e., problem focused) strategies rather than reactive ones at post-programme. In respect of attitude formation teachers receiving the training felt more efficacious regarding being able to forgive students and showed increases in their general tendency to forgive others. In contrast teachers' disposition for the attitude of compassion was only partially supported by the data but with no significant differences reported.

Beshai *et al.*, (2016) conducted a non-randomised feasibility trial assessing the efficacy of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention with 89 teachers to reduce stress and improve well-being researchers. Participants were asked to complete self-reports which measured stress, well-being, mindfulness, and self-compassion at baseline and after the completion of the intervention. Results revealed that individuals in the intervention condition reported significant reductions in stress, and significant increases in well-being

post-intervention in comparison to their counterparts in the comparison group. Participants cited learning mindfulness and self-compassion as ways of recognising thoughts, emotions, and bodily states, allowing these to be held in awareness with interest and equanimity and responding adaptively at times of stress. Over time, they reported that habitual patterns of thinking and behaviour that exacerbate stress were replaced with more adaptive and resilient responses. These findings indicated that a customised mindfulness-based programme for teachers is a promising approach to reducing stress and increasing well-being, mindfulness, and self-compassion among secondary school teachers.

Gouda *et al.* (2016) pilot study investigated whether students and teachers who participate in separate Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) courses showed improvements across a variety of psychological variables including areas of mental health and creativity. The study applied a controlled waitlist design with three measurement points. The number of teachers involved was 29 teachers ($n = 14$ in the intervention and $n = 15$ in the waitlist group) All completed questionnaires before and after the MBSR course. The intervention group was also assessed after a 4-month follow-up period. The level of self-reported mindfulness was measured by means of the 14-item short form of the *Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory* (FMI; (Walach *et al.*, 2006) which covers a two-dimensional structure with the factors mindful presence and non-judgmental acceptance. The *Self-Regulation Scale* (SRS) was used to assess participants' attention control, and the study adopted the *Emotion Regulation Skills Questionnaire* (ERSQ) which has 27 items, primarily exploring coping with negative emotions and includes 9 subscales: awareness, sensations, clarity, understanding, modification, acceptance, resilience, self-support, and readiness to confront distressing situations. With the teacher arm of the study, results pointed to significant improvements among participants of the intervention group in self-reported mindfulness after participation in an MBSR-course, relative to the waitlist control group. The effect sizes for emotion regulation ($d = 0.55$) also indicated a benefit. The increase in self-reported mindfulness as measured by the FMI indicated that the implemented

intervention did indeed foster central mindful attitudes, namely acceptance and presence, among participating teachers consistent with the other studies cited above.

A mindfulness programme - Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM) - for educators was the subject of a 2016 study by Harris *et al.*, 2016. CALM is a brief daily school-based intervention to promote educator social-emotional competencies, stress management, and well-being. Participants included 64 educators from middle school. Intervention sessions included gentle yoga and mindfulness practices and were offered 4 days per week for 16 weeks. Pre- and post-test measurements included self-report surveys of social-emotional functioning and well-being, as well as physiological measures. As hypothesised, CALM participants showed significant improvement in mindfulness and emotional functioning. Compared to controls, they increased on the mindfulness dimension, *degree of observation* which the authors posit to be especially indicative of body awareness. Although the effect size estimates indicate the CALM group showed improvement in other dimensions of mindfulness, although not to a statistically significant degree at post-test. The study findings also suggested that CALM did not alter the frequency of negative affect but instead helped participants to cope more effectively with negative emotions and distress. However, no differential changes were observed in suppression or reappraisal of emotion.

As an interlude here to the chronology of research four systematic reviews on MBIs with teachers were conducted around the period between 2017 and 2018 and ironically three were almost published at the same time, one in January 2017 (Lomas *et al.*, 2017) another in February 2017 (Emerson *et al.*, 2017) and the third in May 2017 (Hwang *et al.*, 2017). However, none of these three reference each other perhaps due to the timing of the respective publications. The fourth review (Klingbeil and Renshaw, 2018) cites these first three reviews since this was published later. Lomas *et al.* (2017) conducted their systematic review of empirical studies featuring analyses of mindfulness in teaching contexts (including pre-service) sourcing databases from the start of records to January 2016 with their eligibility criteria including empirical analyses of mindfulness and well-being outcomes acquired in relation to practice. A total of 19 papers were included in the systematic review, consisting of a total of 1,981 participants. However,

their review also included intervention studies on mindfulness in the workplace (those relevant to teachers are included in this author's review). The primary summary measures used were mindfulness, mental health, and well-being outcomes. With respect to well-being outcomes more broadly, the findings included positive results for mindfulness (12 out of 14 studies), compassion and empathy (three out of four), emotional regulation (three out of three), well-being and satisfaction (five out of six), health (five out of eight), and job performance (three out of four). Emerson *et al.*, (2017) conducted their systematic review and narrative synthesis for 13 quantitative and qualitative studies (all 13 are featured above) and reported the effects of MBIs for teachers (again including pre-service teachers) of children aged 5-18 years on symptoms of stress and emotion regulation and self-efficacy. From their analysis they conclude that MBIs for teachers show most promise for the proposed intermediary effect of emotion regulation. They note that effect sizes for emotion regulation tended to be larger with more of them showing statistical significance, although effects varied according to the measures used (Emerson *et al.*, 2017, p.1145). In addition, they cite that the qualitative data from teachers also demonstrated that the aspect of MBIs most rated as helpful related to emotion awareness, recognition and understanding.

Hwang et al (2017) from their systematic review of mindfulness interventions for in-service teachers reported on sixteen studies published up to 2015 from an initial search of 1788 records in PsychINFO, EBSCOhost, Education Source, Scopus, Google Scholar and Mindfulness, a major publication outlet for research in mindfulness. The review outcomes were presented according to the four categories of (1) research methods, (2) mindfulness-based interventions, (2) effects of mindfulness-based interventions, and (4) experiences of learning and practising mindfulness. The review of the qualitative studies illustrated how practising mindfulness helped in-service teachers to cope strategically with stress and difficult emotions, and to manage conflict. The authors found evidence that over time, teachers developed better awareness of their mental and physical experiences, including cognisance of any habitual reactions to stressful situations, clarity of mind, relaxation, and calm. These improvements were associated with regulation capacity to reduce feelings of stress and opened greater possibilities of not reacting

automatically in stressful situations but rather to respond in skilful, reflective ways. Finally, the meta-analytic review by Klingbeil and Rensh (2018) of 29 studies was a review of studies only with in-service teachers and found that mindfulness-based interventions with teachers was promising for promoting mindfulness, increasing psychological well-being, and decreasing psychological distress. From their review one interesting finding was the authors claim that “there may also be a point of diminishing returns for MBI dosage, as there was a slight negative effect of increasing the formal intervention time beyond 24 hrs” (p.507).

As observed above some MBIs tend to be a derivative of the MBSR, the most well-known and researched of all MBIs. The stress prevention and mindfulness (SPAM) programme, a 6-week psychoeducational and support group for teachers incorporating psychoeducation about stress and elements of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was the focus of a research study based on the adaptation of MBSR (Reiser, Murphy and McCarthy, 2016). The programme was delivered to 23 teachers from a public charter school in Southwest USA, but research was from only 7 group members, considered as *completers* since they attended more than half of the 6 meetings. Two aspects are of interest here in this study. Firstly, SPAM was conceived as much shorter than other MBIs including MBSR and of only 6 hours duration on the basis that “shorter programs may be more practical for teachers, and some research suggests that they are no less effective” (Reiser, Murphy and McCarthy, 2016, p.121) and cite the evidence of Carmody and Baer, (2009) which examined 23 MBI studies and found no significant correlation between effect size of outcomes and number of intervention hours, providing further evidence in support of briefer interventions. Secondly, their study is also centered on the group aspect of programme delivery i.e. the process of delivery on the basis that “concurrence of mindfulness approaches utilizing a group structure, it is possible that some of the positive outcomes associated with MBIs are in part due to the group format. Group work has demonstrated several advantages for members, including formation of a safe communal environment and helping members realise they are not alone” (Reiser, Murphy and McCarthy, 2016, p.121). Evaluation of the group included analysis of pre- and post-intervention quantitative measures and exit survey data.

Feedback at the point of exit suggested the group positively impacted members' sense of community with colleagues, their interactions with students, and their ability to manage stress. Participants had positive reactions to both the content and the brief format of the group. The evaluation of the group suggested that leader facilitation, the integration of psychoeducation and support in the group format, and communication with school-based staff were important to the members (Reiser, Murphy and McCarthy, 2016, p.131). Group leaders acknowledged the expertise of members and incorporated their feedback into the planning and execution of the group. The support function of the group also allowed members to share their mutual frustrations and successes in learning new material and practising at home. Several group members mentioned receiving encouragement from each other to use mindfulness strategies during stressful experiences at school that occurred between sessions. These supportive interactions allowed for more practice of the stress reduction techniques and for the support component of the group to be transferred to teachers' workdays outside of group meeting time. The authors remarked on the challenges inherent to bringing such a group to a teacher's place of work since attendance fluctuated due to conflicts with other on-site work demands which presented as more urgent, for example, grading, after school duties, team meetings and while members reported finding the group beneficial, they were also tempted to spend more time on work or leave a bit early.

A German based study conducted a pilot nonrandomized, waitlist-controlled study investigating the impact of a mindfulness intervention (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) on teachers' well-being, self-regulation ability and classroom performance applying a mixed-method design (Rupprecht, Paulus and Walach, 2017). The sample consisted of 32 German school teachers (93% female) and were distributed to a control and intervention group. Compared to the control condition, the intervention showed medium to high effect sizes on most outcome variables at post-test and results were sustained at follow-up. Using t-Tests the authors noted that teachers in the intervention group reported greater mindful presence and mindful acceptance at post-test and 3-month follow-up than controls. At post-test, intervention group participants reported statistically significant reductions in cognitive and emotional strain. Again, using t-tests

authors found that self-regulation competences improved in the intervention group. Teachers of that group reported an increased, but not statistically significant, ability to switch off from work problems at home, while teachers of the control group reported decreases at the same time. Teachers of the intervention group reported statistically significant improvements in the tendency to resign and the ability to find inner calm and balance while non-significant changes were observed in the control group. Between-group effect sizes were large for the reduced resignation and small for increased inner calm. Qualitative interviews highlighted the way mindfulness may influence teacher engagement and improve performance which following thematic analysis they labelled as wise discernment, greater self-efficacy and resilience and finally enhanced emotional regulation.

A 2019 study examined whether middle school teachers' mindfulness skills were related to their concurrent occupational health and well-being (job stress, occupational burnout, and depressive and anxiety symptoms), and quality of their interactions with students in their class during the school day (Braun *et al.*, 2019). Multivariate regression analyses of 58 middle school teachers indicated that teacher mindfulness was significantly associated with lower levels of job stress, occupational burnout, and depressive and anxiety symptoms; and higher levels of observers' ratings of teachers' emotionally supportive interactions with students in their most stressful classroom. Results suggest individual differences in middle school teachers' mindfulness may affect their interactions with students in the middle school classroom directly and through reductions in burnout, though longitudinal studies of these relations are needed. The results also suggested that teachers who are more mindful may be able to identify, regulate, and manage their cognitive and emotional experiences such that they feel less stressed, depressed, and anxious.

Berkovich-Ohana, Lavy and Shanboor, (2020) is interesting as a study conducted in Arab schools since most MBI are adopted in western countries. Their pilot study aimed to fill this gap by examining the effects of an MBI among Arab teachers in Israel. This examination was conducted within the framework of the mindful self in school relationships (MSSR) model, which suggests that the positive effects of MBI on teachers'

emotion regulation are mediated by decentering. The participants (N = 39) were teachers from two Arab elementary schools in Israel, who underwent an MBI course (the MBI condition, N = 20) and another cognitive intervention (the control condition, N = 19). In a pre–post design, participants completed mindfulness, decentering, emotion regulation, and stress questionnaires. They hypothesised that (1) only in the MBI group, teachers’ mindfulness, decentering, and emotional regulation will increase and stress will decrease, and (2) changes in teachers’ decentering would mediate the associations of changes in teachers’ mindfulness with changes in their emotion regulation. ANOVA analyses show that, only in the MBI condition, teachers showed an increase in three mindfulness subscales (acting with awareness, non-reactivity, and observance), in decentering, and in adaptive emotion regulation (reappraisal) and a decrease in stress. Furthermore, changes from pre-intervention to post-intervention in teachers’ decentering mediated the associations of their pre–post changes in mindfulness with changes in emotion regulation.

A study from Israel (Tarrasch, Berger and Grossman, 2020) implemented the “Call to Care – Israel for Teachers” (C2CIT) programme which employs mindfulness, compassion, and social-emotional skill training, with a unique emphasis on the construct of care. This pilot study explored the effects of the C2CIT program among schoolteachers by comparing self-report measures of teachers trained in the C2CIT program with those of teachers serving as controls. Forty-four teachers were allocated into either the C2CIT program throughout a full academic year, including 20 weekly meetings, or passive control. Before the intervention and immediately after its end, teachers filled self-report questionnaires consisting of mindfulness in teaching, sense of efficacy, trait anxiety, mindfulness, self-compassion, burnout, stress, rumination, reflection, and interpersonal reactivity. Repeated measures ANOVAs, followed by Tukey honest significant difference post hoc tests revealed that only teachers in the C2CIT group improved in the interpersonal faculties of teachers’ sense of efficacy, interpersonal mindfulness in teaching, and the regulation of interpersonal reactivity through perspective taking. In addition, they also improved in the intrapersonal faculties of mindfulness related to self-

awareness and adopting a non-judgmental, nonreactive, or regulatory stance toward emotions and thoughts.

The study by de Carvalho *et al.*, (2021) sought to evaluate the proximal and distal effects of a mindfulness-based programme, specially developed to promote teachers' social-emotional competencies (SEC), across teachers, classroom climates, and students' outcomes. The study followed a randomised trial design with two data collection points (pretest and post-test). Participants in the experimental group (EG) included 123 elementary school teachers, as well as students and parents and the control group (CG) comprised 105 elementary school teachers. A mixed data collection strategy was used that included teachers' and students' (self-) report, Results after the intervention, with the EG teachers, compared to CG teachers, reported a significant increase in mindfulness and emotional regulation competencies, self-efficacy, and well-being and a decrease in burnout symptoms. The findings further the knowledge on the role played by mindfulness-based SEC interventions in reducing teachers' burnout symptoms and cultivating their SEC and well-being.

In a study from Australia (Carroll *et al.*, 2022) researchers assessed the effectiveness of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program (MBSR) compared to an active control intervention, the Health Enhancement Program (HEP) in reducing stress and burnout, and enhancing emotion regulation, well-being, and cognitive function with teachers experiencing work-related stress. Both programmes were evaluated across subjective and objective testing modalities including (1) teachers' self-reported stress, burnout, psychological distress, emotion regulation, well-being, and mindfulness; (2) behavioural performance on cognitive tasks assessing attention, memory, emotion recognition, and cognitive control; and (3) the neural correlates of emotion regulation as identified using an emotion Stroop task administered during fMRI. Methods were the use of independent groups, matched sample longitudinal design, a sample of 75 teachers completed questionnaires and cognitive tasks at pre-intervention, post-intervention, and 5-month follow-up. A subsample of 47 teachers also completed fMRI scans pre- and post-intervention. Both programs resulted in equivalent significant, and sustained improvements for teachers on self-report measures of well-being, mindfulness,

perceived stress, and intention to leave the profession, and in the cognitive domains of cognitive control and memory. Between group differences were found on the sustained attention task, with MBSR showing greater improvements than HEP. Although important subtle differences were found between the programmes, results overwhelmingly suggest that both the MBSR and HEP programs are similarly and highly beneficial to teachers experiencing work-related stress.

A pilot study (Cheng *et al.*, 2022) used a mixed-methods design to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of an adapted mindfulness-based program for kindergarten teachers. The participants in the quantitative component were 70 kindergarten teachers (mindfulness training group = 35, comparison group = 35, Mage = 30.96) from China and again a variation from western implementations. Participants were rated on the Mindfulness in Teaching Scale; the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale; the Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey; and the Emotional Intelligence Scale, before and after intervention. In the qualitative part, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants (n = 24). Compared with the comparison group, the mindfulness training group showed a significant improvement in emotional intelligence and mindfulness in teaching, and a reduction in burnout and depression. The qualitative findings further supported the effectiveness of mindfulness-based programs to help kindergarten teachers improve their present moment awareness; enhance their emotion regulation; and show more compassion and acceptance.

A mindfulness intervention adapted from MBSR was the subject of a study conducted during the critical and formative phase of teacher training in Germany (Beuchel *et al.*, 2022). This study aimed to investigate whether early career teachers benefit from this by better coping with occupational stress and improving their practical teaching skills. In a quasi-experimental design, 42 participants' stress, mindfulness, and occupational coping were assessed via self-reports at three time points. Linear mixed-effects model analyses revealed that mindfulness-trained teachers were less stressed, more satisfied with work and, eventually, developed better classroom management than the control group. The results were partly consistent with their hypotheses: on the teacher level, the mindfulness intervention showed medium-sized between-group effects

on *Perceived Stress* and *Mindfulness* (hypothesis 1). The achieved levels were maintained five months after the intervention, such that no significant changes in these variables appeared in the Intervention Group from post (t_2) to follow-up (t_3).

Another 2022 study (Roeser, Galla and Baelen) utilised a randomised-controlled trial to examine the near- and longer-term impacts of the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB) program with regard to improving middle school teachers' mindfulness, self-compassion, occupational health and well-being, and quality of interactions with students in their self-nominated most stressful classroom. The sample included 58 sixth through eighth grade teachers randomised to condition ($n = 29$ MBEB and $n = 29$ Waitlist Control) who were assessed at baseline, post programme, and follow-up (4 months later). Results showed that compared with controls, MBEB teachers reported greater occupational self-compassion and less job stress and anxiety at post programme and follow-up, as well as less emotional exhaustion and depression at follow-up. Exploratory analyses showed that longer-term impacts of MBEB were moderated by teaching experience and school type, with newer teachers (#5 years) and teachers in Grades 6–8 schools showing more beneficial personal and classroom outcomes at follow-up compared with more experienced teachers or those working in Grades K–8 schools, respectively.

The purpose of the Almaguer-Botero *et al.*, (2023) study was to determine whether a mindfulness-based intervention would be effective for reducing stress and increasing mindfulness, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and well-being among teachers in low-income schools. The study utilised both experimental and control groups in each educational level, and when the experimental group completed their 8-week intervention sessions, both groups were provided with post package surveys. The experimental group post intervention received an additional page with three post-intervention reflection questions to assess the application of mindfulness techniques and skills in the teacher's life (e.g., whether they would use mindfulness in the future). Well-being was the closest construct to reach a significant level in the experimental (SPAM intervention) teacher group reflecting a substantial (albeit non-significant) increase from pre-post-test, suggesting teachers who participated in the SPAM

intervention had an increase in their mental well-being. Mindfulness levels at pre- and post- tests for this study remained constant for both the experimental and control groups. Acknowledging that these results are contradictory to previous results which suggest mindfulness interventions will increase mindfulness among participants, the authors cite that more than half the teachers in the experimental SPAM intervention group reported they had many other school-related responsibilities outside their regular classroom duties. As such, teachers were required to teach while engaging in numerous extracurricular activities.

In 2023 another systematic review of Mindfulness-based interventions for stress and burnout in teachers was published (Hidajat *et al.*, 2023). This provided an updated synthesis of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) for stress and burnout in teachers (K-12) and assessed implementation fidelity. The authors conducted electronic searches in five databases and included studies through to February 2022. Thirty-nine studies met the inclusion criteria for their paper. The review was guided by the research question: *Are mindfulness-based interventions effective for improving teacher well-being (i.e., reducing stress and burnout, and improving other psychological outcomes)?* Evidence of MBIs for reducing stress and burnout, and improving other psychological outcomes showed great promise. However, a lack of standardisation in intervention components, facilitators, duration, and outcome measures was observed. In addition the reviewers observe from the meta-analysis that conceptual elements for effective MBIs for teachers are: (i) facilitators can be trained personnel or external providers, professional experts, or app-based self-administered programs; (ii) duration of 3.5 weeks and 18.5 contact hours (based on median); (iii) inclusion of 4–5 intervention components such as self-regulation, breathing, body scans, meditation, and psychoeducation; and (iv) evaluation of implementation fidelity is essential for results to have validity and integrity. Of particular interest is their observation that future tests of the efficacy of MBIs with teachers should report quality of delivery, acceptability, and responsiveness of participants towards the interventions, to enable a rigorous assessment of implementation fidelity which addresses the issue of process with the delivery of MBIs.

The authors of a 2024 study (Lensen *et al.*, 2024) acknowledge that although Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing stress among the general populace, its implementation among educators, especially in non-United States settings, has received limited exploration. Thus, their pre-registered randomised-controlled trial investigated the effectiveness of the standard MBSR in reducing perceived stress among Dutch elementary school teachers. It examined the impact of MBSR on mindfulness skills, emotion regulation, and self-compassion as secondary proximal outcomes, along with exploring its influence on teacher self-efficacy, perceived pupil-teacher relationships, and classroom climate quality as secondary distal outcomes. Involving 146 teachers randomly assigned to either the intervention ($n = 72$) or waitlist-control condition ($n = 74$), assessments were conducted pre- and post-intervention or control period, with a 3-month follow-up. Participants in the intervention reported significantly lower perceived stress compared to the control group, demonstrating a substantial effect size at post-treatment ($d = -0.84$) and a moderate effect at follow-up ($d = -0.69$). Exploratory analyses revealed no moderation effects based on past or present psychological problems, school weight/pupil population, years of experience, or age on perceived stress at post-measurement. Furthermore, the study examined the potential influence of COVID-19 on the results, concluding that the pandemic had no discernible impact. These authors advocate for the findings to support the widespread adoption of the standard MBSR programme as a means of enhancing the well-being of elementary school teachers.

A study by Palomata (2024) which employed a qualitative design, investigated the lived experiences of 12 teachers who explored mindfulness-based practices to reduce stress and anxiety. The study had three primary objectives; firstly to understand how teachers experienced exploring mindfulness-based practices for stress and anxiety reduction with a focus on mindfulness-based interventions, teacher well-being, and their impact on educational outcomes; secondly the study examined how teachers coped with the challenges associated with mindfulness-based practices and identified themes related to past experiences of stress and anxiety management, the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions utilised, and the promotion of teacher well-being and thirdly, the study

sought the educational insights and practices derived from exploring mindfulness honing to educational settings, professional development opportunities, and potential improvements in student engagement. Methods used were in-depth interviews with the participants. Teachers' narratives revealed the mindfulness techniques they employed to manage stress and anxiety, highlighting their effectiveness in enhancing overall well-being. Participants described how mindfulness practices heightened their awareness of the present moment, reducing uncertainty-related anxiety. This heightened presence fostered a sense of fulfilment and well-being. Mindfulness interventions also encouraged participants to cultivate self-compassion, enabling them to manage self-criticism and negative self-talk and thus this self-acceptance positively impacts their well-being. The importance of community support was identified for practice, indicating that practising mindfulness with fellow teachers creates a sense of belonging and helps sustain the practice suggesting that a supportive environment and community engagement play a vital role in coping with stress and anxiety.

In their study Wagner *et al.*, (2024) investigated whether teachers' years of working experience and their initial level of mindfulness, self-care, stress, and emotional exhaustion moderated the effects of a self-care- and mindfulness-based seminar on their stress and emotional exhaustion using a repeated measures design. The analyses of the data from 122 primary, secondary, vocational, and special schoolteachers (83% female) revealed comparably larger positive effects for teachers with lower initial self-care and mindfulness and higher initial stress and exhaustion levels. However, positive effects were detected across all groups of teachers, indicating mindfulness and self-care to be resources for promoting teachers' mental health.

In summary, the review of mindfulness-based studies with teachers identified a majority which were mainly quantitative. This perhaps can be explained by the more general population studies on the use of mindfulness conducted mainly from within the scientific and psychological community. However, of note are the publication of two studies in 2024 which adopted a qualitative design. Again, this may reflect the broader debate within the mindfulness community on the necessity to explore more deeply the

lived experiences of participants captured with the possibility of using qualitative approaches to reflect this depth of engagement.

2.6.2 The Contemplative Practice of Deep Talk

Deep Talk can be situated in the 'relational category' of contemplative practices incorporating story as an approach to building community (Valkonen, 2015). Its development has been influenced by the work of foreign language learning Italian educator Maria Montessori (1870-1952) and her emphasis on child centred education and the work of religious educator Jerome Berryman (Berryman, 1990). Another influence is the concept of *Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity* (VUCA), a term first introduced by the American Military in 1987, and used to describe the characteristics of many institutions, workplaces and communities including education (LeBlanc, 2018). Valkonen (2015) suggests that those best placed to negotiate the complexity of the VUCA world are flexible, have a strong inner language of values, learn quickly from experience, and can move forward with agility. Workplace mentoring as a personal and professional tool has also shaped the rationale for Deep Talk with its emphasis on supporting employees in their work and requiring a capacity for reflective practice to offer insight into work roles, interpreting and managing different experiences and feelings, as well as how to solve work-based problems. Dialogue and participation are also core features of Deep Talk shaped by the work of Spanish linguist Joseph Artigal's work on conceptual spaces for learning language (Valkonen, 2015). This method applied to Deep Talk leads to the creation of a physical space where individuals can process issues that touch their lives, or their community and are able to connect with their inner worlds and experience empowerment. Deep Talk is also an active participative process where everyone is invited to engage with the session at a level which is comfortable and meets their needs but crucially silence is also considered as a positive and active tool in the dialogue which takes place.

Within education settings, and as a contemplative practice, Deep Talk offers a means of developing reflective capabilities. It can be a springboard for discussion of complex issues, used as a method to address Well-Being and can support community

development as well as a possible methodology in education for addressing philosophical questions of meaning and purpose.

2.6.2.1 Deep Talk Process

The length of a Deep Talk session is determined by the number of stories used in a single session and typically is of 1-2 hours duration. A Deep Talk session, in short, is structured generally as follows:

1. A circle of participants is formed and an invitation to listen to a story is offered.
2. A story is told in a very particular fashion (no eye contact on the part of the leader and using a Desert Bag and minimal props).
3. Wondering questions are engaged with (normal eye contact from this point onwards).
4. The wondering is concluded, and the Desert Bag is closed.
5. An exchange of places occurs. The leader also changes his/her place.
6. The Desert Bag is opened again, and the leader and participants bring the story which has just been heard, into dialogue with participants' current contexts. This is a period of community questions and play. It is the role of the leader to follow the direction of the answers of the community engaged in the playing of the interactive community story.
7. The leader asks the participants to take a figure from a basket and to place it on the landscape of the Desert Bag.
8. The discussion of the figures' locations takes place.
9. The leader closes the session by asking: "Is this good enough?" and putting their hands over the landscape as a mark of closing, says: "This is good!"
10. Finally, the session ends with a simple celebration.

2.6.2.2 Research Evidence for Deep Talk

Only one empirical study was found with respect to Deep Talk (Aerila *et al.*, 2022). Conducted in Finland this qualitative study set out to determine the significant elements of the Deep Talk method in creating dialogical spaces for children and teachers in early

year's education based on the teachers' experience. The research questions were framed in asking; 1) What elements of Deep Talk are significant to educators? 2) Are there differences in the narratives of Deep Talk between novice and experienced educators? The data was obtained from twenty-five educators who participated in Deep Talk training through an online questionnaire, which consisted of four background questions (multiple choice or Likert scale) and five open ended questions on the participants' experiences with the Deep Talk method centred on meaningful observations during the Deep Talk sessions. The data was analysed using thematic content analysis. The results showed that Deep Talk consisted of several elements which had a positive effect on the sense of belonging, increasing dialogue between children, supporting children's voices to be heard and reducing inner speech. Differences in the narrative accounts were found when comparing the results between novice and experienced teachers with the former indicating their personal growth, noticing the children's individuality, and their relationship with the children as individuals strengthened outside of the Deep Talk sessions.

2.6.3 The Contemplative Practice of Balint

Balint was conceived by Hungarian couple and psychoanalysts, Michael and Enid Balint who established the concept of the *Balint Group*, in the 1950s as a training and research method for General Practitioners (Balint, 1955). Initially, the groups were intended to enable doctors practice the skills of deep listening but developed as a supportive type of structure, what might be termed today as a peer supervision group as a means of enabling GPs to better understand the emotional aspect of the doctor/patient relationship. Michael Balint believed that in the ordinary discourse of general practice "by far the most frequently used drug in general practice was the doctor himself" (Balint, 1955, p. 6866).

Balint Groups meet regularly to discuss cases regarding doctor-patient relationships and are facilitated by two trained leaders, with the purpose of encouraging reflection and discussion on the emotional aspects of patient care. The model has been adapted for other healthcare settings, for example with nurses, social workers, and mental health

professionals. The general aims of a Balint session in medical settings are to therapeutically understand the doctor/patient relationship, to explore and discover the therapeutic possibilities of communicating skillfully with patients, to understand the patient as a person and their problem through the nature of the doctor patient interaction, to examine the individual approaches of doctors to patients, to consider alternate ways of responding to difficult situations and finally to explore the doctor's use of self-pharmacology (*Reference Library - The American Balint Society, 2024*).

Given these aims of Balint as a reflective group in medical/clinical settings it is conceivable how this model could be applied in an educational context. In November 2015, a Working Group based on the Balint structure was founded to support a network of educators working in both the UK and Ireland (Fogel and Moller, 2019). Balint Groups can provide an opportunity to develop insight into the interpersonal aspects of professional practice as an educator and to become more empathetic with others. For educators, Balint also provides a contemplative space, “somewhere to stop and think” (Fogel and Moller, 2019, p. 25), to explore and understand the dimension of the student/teacher relationship and the internal world of thoughts and feelings supporting the development of the educator as one committed to a process of “radical reflexivity” (McCaw, 2023, p. 1) and hence its selection as a practice for research in this study. The Balint method is not about what we *can do* about the problem but more about how we *can be* with the problem and in this way bears its mark as a contemplative practice.

2.6.3.1 Balint Process

Balint Groups normally comprise six to twelve members with one or two trained Balint leaders and meet for between ninety and one hundred and twenty minutes. All members sit in a circle with the leaders whose function is to safeguard the group process with an orientation to trust and cohesion and which is characterised by qualities of honesty, responsibility, respect for members, confidentiality, boundaries, safety, tolerance for divergent opinions, etc. If two leaders are present one tends to mainly function as a gatekeeper for the group, managing the time and supporting the main leader and may interject with a comment if deemed helped. The role of group leaders is not to teach ‘content’ or offer advice but rather to hold the group and stimulate

participants to gain a greater understanding of the presented case and by association relationships/interactions in their own work setting. The leader's role is also to honour the reflective nature of the process and to remind participants of the task which includes resisting the urge to offer advice to the case presenter or become absorbed in the sharing of their own personal 'story.'

Balint Groups are a case discussion forum where the presented case is a cause for reflection, worry, surprise, difficulty, puzzlement, or uncertainty. The session begins with the leader inviting the presentation of a case by asking, *'who has a case they would like to bring today?'* This invite is often greeted with silence by members before a case eventually emerges. In response to the invitation a member verbally presents on a patient who has been on their mind. The issue may be, for example, that a patient is emotionally disturbed or just difficult to understand or treatment resistant though it can also entail presentation on other relational aspects of work, for example, an issue with a colleague. Again, the rationale for presenting is not to 'solve the case' or to either seek or offer directives for proposed action. The case presenter is not searching for answers but with the support of the group may hope to find an enhanced ability to connect with and care for the person at the heart of the case. The group listens to the story without interrupting with the aim of supporting the presenter to better understand the emotional processes at play.

Following the initial presentation of the case, the leader offers some time to other group members, generally a few minutes, to ask questions of the presenter of direct relevance to the case on matters of relevant facts and to provide sufficient clarity to proceed, for example, how long have you known the patient or has this happened before? After this period, the presenter is invited to sit out of the group by physically moving back their chair and to remain silent for approximately the next thirty minutes while other group members reflect on the case.

Group members are encouraged to speculate freely and to respond to what they have heard. Often initial contributions are silent, the inner articulations, where space is given for the presenter's case to percolate as members internally mull over the case. Responses take various forms. For example, there may be questions articulated out loud

but not directed to the presenter in expectation of a response. Other responses include emotional reactions induced by the patient's story and speculations about what else might be going on. After a period (approximately thirty minutes) the presenter is invited back into the circle and may or may not choose to respond or add to the discussion. The case closes by checking in again with everyone.

This structure from Balint Groups for medics as described above is replicated in an educational context except obviously the presented cases are from the professional settings of educators.

2.6.3.2 Research Evidence for Balint

Teaching medical students about the role of emotions in illness and relationships with patients can be challenging but necessary in a context where the nature of this human interaction occurs in moments of crisis and of vulnerability. (Gajree, 2021; Nalan and Manning, 2022; Ryding and Birr, 2022). For medics a different perspective arising from participation in a Balint group can provide insight for doctors about themselves and their patient, in a context which is non-judgmental, supportive and has the "added benefit of decreasing the debilitating isolation felt by so many practicing modern medicine" (Johnson and Milberg, 2020, p. 162).

Given that Balint has its origins in medical and clinical contexts it is hardly surprising that most of the studies on a search of the Web of Science database from 1969 (when the first study was published) to currently, are located in clinical or medical settings. Almost 40% (n=209) of overall publications on Balint (empirical and non-empirical n=525) for this period are from the field of psychiatry. The database search indicated a marked increase in citations and publications over the last decade reflecting the growing awareness that emotions play a fundamental role in the professional development of doctors. From 2013 to date, there have been 205 studies conducted, of which 102 are empirical in scope.

Almost all quantitative studies used self-report questionnaires, measures of work satisfaction, burnout, attitudes, empathy, personality, psychosocial self-efficacy and BG evaluation. In the qualitative studies, semi-structured interviews, field notes, video-taped sessions, audio-taped sessions and open questionnaires were the methods

employed. Although BG were initially set up for GPs, some studies addressed the use of BGs with other health professionals, for example with nurses, specialists, physiotherapists, community health medical residents and medical students.

These studies can be divided into 4 main categories – outcome effects of Balint participation, the characteristics of those who had participated in Balint, consideration of the themes addressed in Balint and the experience of the Balint Group process itself – the latter two which directly concern this study. The outcome effects of Balint group participation are mainly quantitative studies measuring variables including self-efficacy, effect on burnout/satisfaction, participation attitude, cultivation of expertise and knowledge. A very recent qualitative study (Schweiger, Hofbaur and Rabady, 2024) investigated the impact of regular participation in Balint groups on job satisfaction and self-care among general practitioners in Austria using semi-structured interviews with seven general practitioners and employed a thematical analysis of data and narrative summary. The results revealed from eight themes identified that interviewees emphasised changes in self-care and job satisfaction because of Balint participation and presented Balint as a protector for themselves as well as contributing to improved communication skills. Another outcome study reported changes in professional self-efficacy associated with reduced burnout in a group of thirteen nurses working in community based primary care clinics in Israel. Measures used in the study were the Psychological Medical Inventory (PMI) to account for psychosocial professional efficacy and Shirom's eight item questionnaire to measure burnout. Results showed significant increases in awareness and ability cognitions after the Balint group and reduced emotional exhaustion and cognitive weariness (Rabinowitz, Kushnir and Ribak, 1996). Conducted by Abeni *et al.* (2014) a study with thirty-four participants (10 caregivers, 11 physicians, and 13 nurses) from Pavia, Italy sought to evaluate the effect of Balint as a support to face stressful situations. Three assessment tools were administered to the participants at baseline, during, and after completion of the study: the Response Evaluation Measure (REM-71), the Satisfaction Profile (SAT-P), and the Group Climate Questionnaire (GCQ). Findings reported a general maturation in participants' defence mechanisms following the Balint method in comparison to baseline levels. Group

climate, assessed through the GCQ, showed an increase in the “Engagement” factor and a decline in the “Conflict” factor in all groups (p. 101). In a descriptive, qualitative study with nine GPs who had participated in Balint groups for 3 to 15 years a phenomenological analysis was carried out to describe the phenomenon of Balint group participation (Kjeldmand and Holmstrom, 2008). Balint group participation was considered a positive influence on work life and analyses revealed several interrelating themes: competence, professional identity, and a sense of security which created a platform of endurance and satisfaction enabling the GPs to rediscover the joy of being a physician.

Kjeldmand *et al* (2004) found that in a Swedish study with experienced BG participants they (n=26) had significantly higher scores on self-reported control (using a 49 question survey) on work satisfaction, quality of work, co-operation, training, health and attitudes towards patients than the 26 GPs used as a reference group but with no BG experience. In a recent study conducted in China by Zhang, Samsudin, and Sun (2024) the purpose was to examine the influence of Balint group training on the empathy ability of first-year medical students. This study was a randomised controlled trial with eighty students majoring in clinical medicine in our school were randomly divided into Balint and non-Balint groups, with 40 students in each group. The JSE-HP scale before and after the intervention for both groups was used to measure empathy. After the intervention, the total score of empathic and all dimensions were higher in the Balint group than before training ($p < 0.05$), but there was no significant difference in the total score of empathic before and after the non-Balint group intervention (Zhang, Samsudin and Sun, 2024). In another recent study which was conducted with healthcare professionals from Israel (n=142) who had participated in Balint, a purposefully designed questionnaire sought to evaluate their perceptions and to determine the impact of BGs on their personal and professional well-being, and identify the factors related to these positive outcomes. Respondents reported a reduction in burnout, increased empathy, and enhanced professional identity and relationships with patients and colleagues (Kannai *et al.*, 2024). Finally, only one empirical study prevailed from the literature research on Balint with educators. This pilot study from the USA (Williams, Munjuluri and Lichtenstein, 2022)

was conducted using a mixed methods approach with eight teachers working in an urban middle school. It sought to examine the influence of participation in a Balint group experience on a novice teacher's self-efficacy, experience with burnout, and intentions to persist in the classroom. The quantitative data was gathered using the Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale and the Maslach Burnout Inventory. Qualitative data included (a) a semi-structured focus group; (b) field notes shared from the co-facilitator and Balint group leader; (c) open-ended questions on the pre and post-test reflection forms, and (d) semi-structured interviews with 3 participants. The quantitative data revealed that the participants' self-efficacy decreased overtime in two of the domains: class management and student engagement but increased in respect of teaching strategies. In the focus group, participants stated that their relationships with students and their understanding of their locus of control also improved because of the Balint intervention. Regarding burnout, this increased across class management, student engagement and teaching strategies. The focus group revealed that teachers felt more stressed throughout the school year because of, for example, administrative pressures, systematic pressures, social perceptions of education, a desire for recognition, limited time restraints, and lack of work-life balance.

In Balint, among the studies reviewed the preponderance for mainly quantitative methods may reflect the original foundations of Balint as a process initially used in medical settings and also the cite for publication which are mainly in scientific or medical journals. However, also in Balint as with MBSR, a 2024 study with Austrian GPs reflects a clear qualitative approach. The single sourced study from an educational context reflects a mixed methods approach.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature review has identified some dimensions of contemplative practice, with theoretical musings and empirical findings indicating interrelatedness across some of these dimensions of contemplative practice. For example, it has been argued that attention is a precursor for the capacity to be consciously aware. Awareness itself may bring one to the realisation of emotional dysregulation of internal (emotional,

physiological) and external (behavioural) systems that prevent making consistent and healthy choices or the presence of inner judgement (attitude). Depending on the focus of the particular study a different emphasis is applied in considering these elements, how they interact with each other and their relationship to mindfulness as a contemplative practice.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.

From Rudyard Kipling (1902) *Just So Stories*

3.1 Introduction

The rationale for this qualitative study was to explore teachers' engagement with and experience of three contemplative practices – *MBSR*, *Deep Talk* and *Balint*. The theoretical positioning and the conceptual framework of the thesis is grounded in contemplative education. In this chapter, consideration is given to the empirical elements and the process for conducting this research. A statement on the study's focus is followed by an overview of the adopted research framework. Thereafter an account of the philosophic assumptions underlying the research process, the rationale for the choice of a qualitative methodology, a discussion of the adopted case study strategy, and the research design methods employed for data collection and analysis is presented. The chapter also deliberates on the ethical implications in conducting the research and the limitations inherent in the applied research design framework chosen for this study.

3.2 Study Focus

The overarching purpose of this qualitative study was to explore educators' interactions with a range of contemplative practices and the emerging insights from consideration of their inner subjective worlds. The three selected practices – *MBSR*, *Deep Talk* and *Balint* – are examples of "the pedagogical movement of contemplative practices" (Ergas, 2019, p. 264) and are different in design, structure, and methodology of delivery. As practices they share a commonality of purpose each characterised by a deliberate intention for participants to become aware and attend in a different way, orientate

towards an embodied inner subjective reality or “life from the inside” (Zajonc, 2009, p. 46) and foster a temporal quality of present moment relatedness to time (Ergas, 2019). The application of contemplative practices in educational contexts has expanded in the past decade with a concomitant attention to research. However, there is almost exclusive reliance on MBIs as virtually the sole mediator of contemplative practice in education to the exclusion of other emerging and creative contemplative practices. It is not always apparent either in theoretical or empirical studies if authors sufficiently denote MBIs as a subset of contemplative practices since almost habitually there is a uniform equivalence of MBIs as *the* contemplative practice as opposed to one among many (Imoto, 2022; Larson *et al.*, 2024).

MBSR, as one of several mindfulness programmes, is the subject of multiple studies in different population contexts but generally as a prescriptive intervention (Querstret *et al.*, 2020) to ameliorate psychological distress in contrast as a contemplative practice for the cultivation of the inner life. However, more recently there is recognition of mindfulness as a practice which sits comfortably in the field of contemplative inquiry contributing to the facilitation of *attention* while strengthening a heightened awareness of present-moment experience, the *construction* of healthy, or virtuous psychological qualities and the positive *deconstruction* of self in eliciting self-knowledge and insight through reflection and self-inquiry (Dahl and Davidson, 2019). The other practices utilised in this study, *Deep Talk* and *Balint*, share these purposes though there is a dearth of research on as an application of contemplative practice. In *Deep Talk* a single study investigated how the method supported teachers and children in early years education to create a dialogical space and a sense of belonging (Aerila *et al.*, 2022). Research on the *Balint* process, though more prolific, unsurprisingly centres on participants who are General Practitioners GPs and/or other (para)medical professionals since *Balint* as a reflective process was first conceived in that professional context (Otten, 2018). These studies explored a variety of themes - difficult interactions with patients through case presentations and discussions, the outcome effect of *Balint* participation, characteristics of *Balint* group participants, themes addressed in *Balint* groups, the *Balint* process, leadership of *Balint* groups, and evaluative studies of participant experience (Van Roy,

Vanheule and Inslegers, 2015). Although Balint is relatively well established as a reflective practice model in medical education there remains to date only a single published study on Balint within mainstream education and with a small group of US public high school teachers (Williams, Munjuluri and Lichtenstein, 2023).

Related to the overall aim of this study the following three questions frame the research objectives:

- Does engagement in an MBSR intervention contribute to *teacher reflexivity*? If yes, in what ways?
- What *dimensions* of contemplative thinking/practice are activated within MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions?
- What *interplay* across the dimensions of contemplative thinking/practice, if any, is stimulated in MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions?

3.3 Overview of Research Framework

The 'Research Onion Framework' (Figure 3.1) metaphor from Saunders and Lewis (2017) provides an overview of this research under the following six elements: research philosophy underpinning the study (*Interpretivist-Constructivist*), approach taken to theory development (*Inductive*), adopted research methodology (*Qualitative*), chosen research strategy (*Case Study*), and methods of data collection and analysis (*Thematic Analysis*) of interviews, reflective diaries and observations. Utilising different descriptive labels and four elements, Crotty (1998) argues that setting out a research frame or process in this manner ensures the "soundness of our research" and "constitutes a penetrating analysis of the process and points up the theoretical assumptions that underpin it and determine the status of its findings" (Crotty, 1998, p. 6).

Figure 3.1 Research Onion Framework (Saunders and Lewis, 2017, p. 105)



3.4 Philosophical Underpinning – Choosing an Interpretivist-Constructivist Lens

The philosophical underpinning of any research requires interrogation and a clear statement of intentionality. Mason (2002) asserts “that how we think the social world is constituted, or what we think it is (our ontology), shapes how we think we can know about it, but conversely how we look (the epistemology and methods we use) shapes what we can see” (p.59). This declaration underscores how the beliefs system and values-base of the researcher influences *what* and *how* data is gathered, and indeed how the data is interpreted. Various assumptions govern a research worldview or paradigm defined as “a basic set of beliefs that guides action” (Guba, 1990, p.17) and determining an adopted philosophy or philosophies helps to clarify a researcher’s beliefs and acts as a boundary to guide the study (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

For this study, which has the exploration of various contemplative practices as the research focus in the broader horizon of contemplative education, it is arguable that a pragmatic philosophy is well suited as a posited paradigm since it “requires our beliefs, theories and concepts to be directly and reflexively linked to experience, and practice” (Greenhalgh and Engebretsen, 2022, p.348). It is therefore conceivable that given the contemplative turn in education with its own epistemology and axiology worthy of “scientific endeavour” (Ergas, 2019, p. 265) this inquiry could be situated comfortably within the “pragmatic turn” (Norwich, 2020, p. 20) which directs the researcher “not simply to know more, but to apply, problem solve and enhance awareness of one’s *interaction[sic]* with the world” (King, 2022, p. 3159). In returning to the debate centred on the ‘paradigm wars’ of the 1980s Denzin wisely remarks,

In the social sciences today, there is no longer a God’s eye view that guarantees absolute methodological certainty. All inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer. All observation is theory-laden. There is no possibility of theory- or value-free knowledge. The days of naive realism and naive positivism are over. The criteria for evaluating research are now relative (Denzin, 2017, p. 12).

From this researcher’s standpoint it is the relativity of this study, namely, an exploration of teacher engagement with a variety of contemplative practices from a sample population of teachers at a point in time which provides the rationale for the choice of paradigm. This study has a focus on human beings who happen to be teachers working in an educational context within specific “*domains of educational purpose*” (Biesta, 2015, p. 77, original emphasis). Consequently, the transformative potential of contemplative practices to support teachers to transcend and overcome the challenges in the teaching profession undergirded the rationale for the choice of paradigm. In choosing a philosophical standpoint for this study, a critical element was that while the practices themselves were indeed under scrutiny, the research centred on participant’s encounter with these practices. Central to the study was illustrating to what extent this engagement led to identifying the dimensions and interplay of these contemplative practices and in what way MBSR contributed to teacher reflexivity.

Accordingly, an *interpretivist-constructivist* framework was chosen to inform the horizon of this qualitative study as it sought to make sense of how participants engaged with CP and to understand how they considered the complexities and multiplicity arising from participation. This research approach valued the context in which social interactions occur by giving attention to the cultural, historical, and social factors that influence individuals' interpretations and beliefs. Philosophically, there were obvious connections between an interpretivist meta-theoretical outlook and constructivism which focuses on how the mind constructs meaning through forms of active learning and exposure to experience and the emphasises on the situated and social nature of contexts including language, pedagogy, and other cultural artefacts in shaping experience.

Some research scholars argue for a differentiation between interpretivism and constructivism (Crotty, 1998; Stelmach, 2016; Fodouop Kouam, 2024) while others hold or imply that essentially the differences are so discrete or even non-existent to warrant equivalence (Adom, 2016; Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022; Denzin *et al.*, 2024). Other researchers, for example, Schwandt, recognise the "common intellectual heritage" shared by interpretivist and constructivist paradigms since they both share related concerns (Schwandt, 1998, p. 22). The main difference between radical constructivism and interpretivism lies in their ontological assumptions since the interpretivist paradigm rejects the idea of an objective reality independent of the observer while in contrast constructivism is open to embracing the existence of an external reality beyond the perception and attention of the researcher. As a point of confluence both these philosophies accentuate the importance of understanding human behaviour and social phenomena through subjective interpretation and the creation of new theoretical and social constructs. Researchers generate understanding in context yielding findings which illuminate local settings and knowledge and therefore cannot be generalised, and this study shared a similar rationale.

Constructivism privileges the individual in the acquisition and discovery of knowledge through meaning rather than the hierarchical elevation of knowledge itself and prioritises the unique experience of individuals in their sense-making in and of the world. It is closely aligned to the interpretative paradigm reflecting a primary purpose to

understand social phenomena in their natural environment and the configuring of research participants as “social actors” (Saunders and Lewis, 2017, p.109) who, for example in this study, interpret their interaction with CP with the “situated meaning” (Treagust and Won, 2023, p. 9) they give to their experience. In addition to seeking to understand, constructivist approaches highlight the social construction of reality, leading to studies that explore how individuals' interactions and social contexts shape their beliefs and understandings.

Interpretivism is sometimes conflated with constructivism and applied as a paradigm (Stelmach, 2016). Under this framing of research there is no ‘out there’ objective reality which concords with the truth but as a central principle deliberate primacy is given to the participants themselves and how they construct subjective “*localized meanings of human experience*” (Treagust and Won, 2023, p.9, original emphasis). But this positioning is not to entirely locate meaning in the subjective. As Stelmach remarks, “Objects themselves exist (objectivism). We come to understand them through collective negotiation and interaction (subjectivism)” (2016, p.22) and consequently meaning is both objective (things exist in the world) but it is also subjective rendered by how we make sense of this objective reality. Interpretivism often employs qualitative research methods such as interviews, observations, and focus groups to capture in-depth data on subjective experiences and meanings. Further attention will be given to the choice of methods for this study later in this chapter.

Three interrelated components - *ontology, epistemology, and axiology* - constitute the shaping of one’s theoretical foundation/paradigm/worldview and are embedded in underlying assumptions on the nature of research. Having aligned with an interpretivist -constructivist paradigm the suppositions of each component as they relate directly to this research will be delineated giving substance to the paradigm positioning in this study.

3.4.1 Ontology

At its simplest ontology can be described as the study of being and reflects one's underlying belief system as the researcher, about the nature of being and existence. It

is a declaration of the assumptions we make in order to believe that something makes sense or is real, or the very nature or essence of the social phenomenon we are investigating. Considered questions here include - is there reality out there in the social world or is it a construction created by one's own mind? And if so, what is the nature of that reality and what is the nature of the situation being studied? Relativist assumptions emphasise the "multiple constructed realities" (Denzin *et al.*, 2024, p. 22) that can be applied to a world, which clearly has an important influence on the interpretivist-constructivist approach to research and by association to this study. From a *relativist* position this research was not seeking objective truth but rather sought to ascertain participant's interpretation of experience with CPs. However, the criticisms emanating from the critical realist perspective that within the interpretivist approach "there is a reluctance to privilege the ontological domain and to acknowledge a reality 'out there' beyond how different versions of reality are constructed in language and in discourse" (Tikly, 2015, p. 243) have merit. An additional caveat for this selected paradigm is the reductionist bias which elevates individual and group interpretations of reality over a consideration of the nature of reality itself and the failure to adequately account for the individual, cognitive and biological structures and mechanisms that also shape experience.

3.4.2 Epistemology

In research, epistemology is used to describe how we come to know something; how we know the truth or reality. Maxwell (2011) asserts, "Epistemological views are not simply theoretical abstractions; they are real properties of researchers, with real consequences for their actions" (p.23). In considering issues of epistemology the question of whether knowledge is something which can be acquired on the one hand as an objective pursuit, or something which is personally experienced is pertinent. Other related questions include what is the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the attainment of knowledge itself? A particular epistemology also foregrounds the nature of relationship between the researcher and the intention of the researcher's rationale. The assumption of a dominant subjectivist epistemology adopted in this study

is congruent with the interpretivist element of the overarching paradigm and entailed that this researcher set about to make meaning of participant data through his own thinking and cognitive processing of data informed by his interactions with participants (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). The researcher constructed knowledge socially as a result of his personal experiences of real-life engagement with contemplative practice within educational settings akin to the natural settings investigated (Punch, 2013). This was an iterative and interactive process which also characterised the approach to the research and as a “subjectivist epistemology based on local and specific realities [it] required embracing a greater degree of ambiguity and unpredictability” (Ilisko, 2013, p. 64). Denzin et al. (2024) assert this subjective dimension of the researcher’s epistemological stance, stating that “we are shaped by our lived experiences, and that these will always come out in the knowledge we generate as researchers and the data generated by our subjects” (p.83). However, there is an important proviso to this stance since this researcher, returning to the constructivist component of the study’s paradigm, accounts for the possibility that “Meaning is both objective and subjective. It is objective because things do exist in the world, but it is subjective because things in themselves are meaningless until we make sense of them” (Stelmach, 2016, p. 23).

3.4.3 Axiology

Axiology is “the branch of philosophy dealing with ethics, aesthetics, and religion” (Denzin *et al.*, 2024, p. 98). Axiological assumptions in qualitative research refer to the researcher's values, biases, and assumptions that influence the research process. In agreement with Denzin’s (2017) critique as cited above it is arguable that all research, even that situated in a strict positivist paradigm, is value laden such that the researcher’s own values, beliefs, and experiences can influence the research process, from the selection of research topics to research questions to the interpretation of findings. Researchers situate themselves and indeed from a qualitative methodology approach are obliged to take a ‘position’ in relation to the context and setting of the research (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 18). Considerations here include identifying the values which guide the conduct of research, adhering to respect for all participants’ rights,

awareness of possible cultural, intercultural and moral issues which may arise and how to address these, conducting the research in a socially just, respectful and peaceful manner and significantly, avoiding or minimising risk or harm, whether it be physical, psychological, legal, social, economic or other (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017, p. 17).

Staden remarks that, “Researchers tend to gravitate towards research topics that hold personal significance and often catalyse inner transformation. Such researchers view their research as an intrinsic facet of their personal growth journey, approaching it with an inquisitive and exploratory mindset” (Staden, 2024, p. 222). Consistent with the paradigm for this study this statement reflects the axiological position of the researcher. Researcher reflexivity is one mechanism for ensuring a systematic inquiry supporting thoughtful analysis and disciplined self-reflection in an exploratory research context. It involves continuous evaluation by researchers of what they are assuming, and a continuous checking that assumptions are aligned with and appropriate for the research situation, the research question, and the methodologies and methods adopted (Berger, 2015). The reflexivity tool and its practical application are given more detailed attention in the concluding chapter of this study but for now suffice to acknowledge that it anchored the researcher to ensure that his personal and professional interest in contemplative practices was not projected to participants in a manner which might be considered a means of proselytising or evangelical in conducting the research. The researcher was explicit with participants about the purpose of the study as exploratory and not experimental in the sense of attempting to prove/ disprove a hypothesis. In the interviews with participants the distinctive qualities of contemplative practices to be aware, attentive, and present centred informed the approach to the research task. Staden (2024) also identifies another “hallmark characteristic of contemplative researchers” whereby as an holistic engagement one’s entire being is brought into the research project “recognising the interconnectedness between their research and personal lives, these researchers acknowledge that their own growth and development are inextricably intertwined with their research pursuits” (Staden, 2024, p. 222). In this research an encompassing approach led to incorporation of one’s professional context as a Teacher Educator (and as one who also teaches a module framed by the philosophy

and practice of Contemplative Education) and as well as the integration of personal experiences, beliefs, and values. This professional context is influenced as follows: the research findings of this study are yielded from multiple interpretations made from the raw data by the researcher who coded the data. Inevitably, the findings were shaped by the assumptions and experiences of the researcher in conducting the research and in the data analysis. In order for the findings to be of substance, the researcher made decisions about what was more important and less important in the data.

3.5 An Inductive Dominant Approach to Theory Development

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore teachers' engagement with a range of contemplative practices and to ascertain if and how teacher reflexivity was generated through mindfulness practice and to what extent dimensions of contemplative practice and the interplay between these practices are illuminated. The study was intended to contribute to an expanded understanding as to the influence of contemplative practice in the personal and professional lives of a sample from the teacher population. The discussion above has underlined the significance of ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions in configuring this research study design. In this section, attention turns to how theory contributed to the knowledge generation required to undertake the study.

The interpretative quality of qualitative research entails that "Qualitative researchers rely on complex reasoning processes" (Rossman and Rallis, 2017, p. 10). Deductive research relies on theory to inform study design and analysis, and the framing of the research question and other elements of the study design could be considered as a deductive action/ process. The concepts identified in this approach are also referential for the analysis of data and are tested for applicability. However, from the position of using inductive logic in research the reasoning method involves drawing conclusions by going from the specific to the general. This can be described as a "bottom up" exploratory approach (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 43). Rossman and Rallis argue that the dichotomy between inductive and deductive approaches is over simplistic since it "trivializes the complexity of any research, especially qualitative research" (Rossman

and Rallis, 2017, p. 10) and they instead point to the flexible nature of qualitative frameworks. This study reflects their position, “that all inquiry proceeds through a complex, nonlinear process of induction, deduction, reflection, inspiration, and just plain old hard thinking” and a “feature of qualitative research, then, is a reliance on sophisticated reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative, moving back-and-forth between the parts and the whole” (Rossman and Rallis, 2017, p. 10). However, the primary mode of inductive reasoning was adopted in this study since it adhered to a number of purposes which gave credence to the underlying development of a general inductive approach. These purposes are commensurate with Thomas’ general inductive approach for analysing qualitative data where he states that “inductive analysis refers to approaches that primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher” (2003, p. 238). They include the condensing of extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format, the establishment of clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure these links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research as outlined above) and finally a development theory about the underlying structure of experiences of participants and processes which were evident in the raw data.

Some of the underlying assumptions of a general inductive approach outlined by Thomas (2003) were adopted in this study. Firstly, data analysis was shaped by deductive research objectives and by an inductive approach with recurring readings and interpretations of the raw data. Thus, the findings were derived from both the research objectives and the findings arising directly from the analysis of the raw data. Secondly, the primary mode of analysis was the development of categories from the raw data into a model or framework that captured key themes and processes judged to be important by the researcher and aligned with the research questions for the study. Finally, in the approach to development of theory and commensurate with a case study design the inductive nature of this research was bounded and context specific.

Combining deductive and inductive methods in the generation of knowledge offers a holistic approach, allowing researchers to understand phenomena more comprehensively. A flexible research design, allowing for changes between deductive and inductive approaches as the research develops can facilitate a less dualistic and limiting structure for data analysis. As a qualitative approach this study was exploratory in seeking to understand the encounter by educators with contemplative practice through an emic perspective. This chosen approach better provides contextualisation of meaning and clarity to the rationale for the study, the research questions which frame the study, and the concepts related to contemplative practice in the educator context than using hypotheses and tests of variables. Accordingly, commensurate with the nature and purpose of the study an “inductive-dominant” (Armat *et al.*, 2018) process in respect of knowledge generation and the approach to data was deployed. For two of the practices which formed part of the study focus - Deep Talk and Balint – this method was appropriate since little extant literature or other research exists on these practices in a contemplative education context. Focusing on an inductive approach here provided opportunities to explore new aspects of contemplative practices and in respect of Deep Talk and Balint for the identification of emerging dimensions and the interplay between these practices.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the adoption of a mainly inductive dominant approach for this research as Yuwono and Rachmawati (2023, p.19) observe, developing questions that stimulate deductive thinking while providing space for inductive discovery can enrich data analysis. In this study the deductive analysis process began with the review of the relevant literature, forming research questions, and formulating interview questions. By starting the research process with a deductive approach, it was possible to establish a framework and a working hypothesis that provided a foundation for the research. This method was especially applicable to understanding, exploring, and mapping the dimensions of contemplative practice as evident in MBSR which as an illustration of mindfulness practice is more well established in the contemplative tradition. The combination of deductive and inductive approaches provided the advantages of structure and rigor of the deductive approach while maintaining the

freedom of exploration and creativity of the inductive approach. Integrating deductive and inductive research can achieve a more holistic whole and meet demands for a more comprehensive and contextual research approach and thus, “the combined deductive and inductive method is not just an alternative but a dynamic and creative strategy for producing quality knowledge” (Yuwono and Rachmawati, 2023, p. 18).

3.6 Qualitative Research Methodology

The complexity of qualitative research is given attention by Denzin et al. which they describe as a “complex historical field” and where the “blurred genres” of the methodology are increasingly subject to “internal tensions” and which is a current feature of the field in the face of “an uncertain, utopian future-present”(Denzin *et al.*, 2024, pp. 12–14). As they remark, qualitative research means different things to different researchers and this is an observation shared by other scholars in the field (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Atkins and Wallace, 2012; Rossman and Rallis, 2017; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Notwithstanding this ever-shifting multiplicity of views and complexities in articulating the methodology it is imperative that a definition, however limiting be offered. Denzin *et al.* posit the following:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible...At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. What this means is that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, which are socially constructed, attempting to make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them (Denzin *et al.*, 2024, p. 14)

This definition from Denzin *et al.* (2024) indicates interest in understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena (actions, cognition, feelings, decisions, beliefs, values etc.) within their social worlds. Aspers and Corte (2019) define qualitative research “as an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied” with qualifying two criteria, namely the “how to do things” in qualitative research and secondly, yielding an “outcome” which offers a new and improved understanding to the scholarly community (p.155).

Qualitative research according to Rossman and Rallis has two unique features the first which draws attention to the significant role of the researcher: “(1) *the researcher is the means through which the study is conducted* and (2) *the purpose is to learn about some facet of the social world*” (2017, p. 4, original emphasis). This position facilitates the accumulation of data which critically is “not reality itself but rather representations of reality” (Rossman and Rallis, 2017, p. 4). and in a qualitative process is transformed through analysis and interpretation, into information. In addition, the final outcome of qualitative research “includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description, and interpretation of the problem and its contribution to the literature or a call for change” (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 24). Precedence is given to the lived experience, event, or phenomenon in detail via non-numerical data collection with the purpose to obtain the views, perspectives, and perceptions of those being studied and accurately portray and communicate these findings in a systematic fashion. In contrast to methodologies located in the positivist tradition, the researcher as identified very clearly in Denzin *et al.*'s and Rossman and Rallis' definitions above, is in the qualitative tradition often an instrument of the research as they are part of the data gathering process as the interviewer, observer of behaviour, or purveyor of documents. From the participant perspective their data is likely to yield a variety of perceptions leading to diverse views of reality or ‘multiple truths’ —none of which are contingent upon an objective truth but instead represent the spectrum of the phenomenon under investigation. As Denzin *et al.* (2024) note “there is no clear window into the inner life of the individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity and observations are “socially situated in the worlds of- and -between -the observer and the observed” (p. 12). As the third part of this triangulation alongside participants and the researcher the resulting outcomes are context-dependent, and this context is included as part of the final outcome of the study.

A qualitative methodology is inherently flexible since as the study develops the researcher may have some idea of the phenomenon but may shift and adapt practices as they learn more from the participants and the nature of the study. This became

apparent early in this study when the frame for exploration was expanded to include other dimensions of contemplative practice which allowed for the possibility of richer interpretations and meaning to emerge in seeking to explore the dimensions and interplay between practices. Finally, when reporting findings, the researcher should declare their motivation to study this topic as this may inform how the researcher interpreted the data and as Bordia and Crossman (2021) comment this type of “reflexivity forces qualitative researchers to engage with the issues of culture, language, socio-economic status, education and almost every aspect of human experience that shapes the interpretation of data and creates narrative” (2021, p. 2).

The general, philosophical assumptions underlying this research are based on an interpretivist-constructivist ontology that posits there is no single objective reality (Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022) rather meaning or knowledge for each individual is socially constructed, being built on their lived experiences in situation-specific interactions with others (Schwandt, 1998; Soini, Kronqvist and Huber, 2011; Haverland and Yanow, 2012). Consequently, this study is positioned under a qualitative framework utilising an exploratory case study approach to guide the qualitative analysis.

Over the past 25 years, research on mindfulness interventions across most populations commonly use a randomised control experimental design under a positivist paradigm and more laterally too in interventions in education settings (Klingbeil and Renshaw, 2018). Positivism seeks to create causal relationships that can be generalised to wider populations. To maintain levels of objectivity, quantitative studies separate researchers from the research, and control the context that the research takes place in. These efforts are taken in an attempt to isolate specific parts to be able to make more accurate causal claims about what we know to be true. In comparison, qualitative research seeks to better understand phenomena within naturalistic settings, which reduces the degree of objectivity because numerous factors may be having an impact and in lieu of the weighting given to date in mainly quantitative studies of mindfulness this study has opted to contribute qualitatively to other understandings of mindfulness as a practice. The qualitative research methodology for this study is interested in gaining a more descriptive analysis of the phenomena that includes how teachers make meaning of

their experience with contemplative practice and is in keeping with the chosen paradigm for this study and thus consistent in purpose. Meaning making, a characteristic of the interpretive-constructivist worldview, is more focused on process rather than an orientation to objective outcomes such as in a quantitative approach. Focusing on process and meaning making is inherently a subjective experience because it requires an interpretation of events and in turn data is represented in words, not numbers. Since the purpose of this interpretivist-constructivist research was to study how a particular group of teachers experienced engagement with contemplative practices, the meaning individuals formulated in representing their different realities was of significance to the study's purpose. A qualitative research methodology under the chosen philosophical approach and the use of a case study design strategy offered the opportunity to explore more deeply teacher experiences as a way of discovering new insight into their engagement with contemplative practices and was adopted to reflect this researcher's stance that 'reality' is multiple, contradictory, and changing, and that the researcher is inevitably part of the study.

3.7 Research Strategy - A Case Study Approach

Perhaps because the concept of a 'case' or 'case study' is such a widely used term in the vernacular with disparate meanings, case study research (CSR) does not have a generally agreed definition for application in research and can lead to confusion. For example, as Tight (2017) comments, that although all research in essence is the study of cases or instances or examples of particular things "This does not mean, however, that all research projects are case studies" (p. 5) and hence according to Tight (2017) the term 'case study' should be "reserved for a particular design of research, where the focus is on an in-depth study of one or a limited number of cases" (p. 6). In addition, another misrepresentation of CSR is that sometimes it is mistakenly equated with research methods as opposed to a *strategy for* research. This is illustrated by Stake (1995) remarking that, "Case study is not a methodological choice, but an object to be studied" (p. 14). It is the choice of methods adopted by the case study researcher which enables

the 'object' to be studied or investigated hence methods are secondary to the primacy of the case. Creswell's (2014) definition captures many of the essential elements of CSR.

Case Studies are a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. (Creswell, 2014, p. 241)

Across these varied definitions and others there exists commonalities which can help to locate a precise understanding of the term case study research. Firstly, it requires consideration of selected data which has according to Stake an element of the particular and a characteristic of complexity (Stake, 1995). As Merriam (1989) notes, the "single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case... If the phenomenon you are interested in studying is not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case" (p. 27). Miles & Huberman (1994) also draw attention to this notion of boundary or boundaries in case study research defining a case as, "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 25). Another significant marker of CSR is that the case is researched in its 'natural' or 'real life' context and cannot be artificially removed, as with a laboratory experiment for example, from immersion in reality. In an early definition in his work Yin (2009) marks out this attribute of case study research defining a case study as an "in-depth exploration of multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project policy, institution program or system in a *real-life context*" (researcher's emphasis) (p. 18). He subsequently identifies key elements of case study research as "An empirical enquiry that investigates 'a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Finally, Thomas (2019) cites the holistic nature of case study research in terms of strategy and by this he means the case is not dissected for the purpose of analysis but is considered as a unified entity over a given period of time. In summary, CSR has at least four defining attributes – it is the study of a particular case, (or a number of cases), cases are complex and bounded, have a real-life context and their analysis is holistic in method.

Stake (2009) suggests the strength of a case study research method is in its effectiveness to unravel the complexity of a demarcated entity. Case study research constitutes the “science of the singular” (Simons, 1980) and concentrates its focus on the particularities of the target case (Abma and Stake, 2014). The primary focus of CSR is to explore the characteristics and uniqueness of the particular case rather than using the case “instrumentally” to understand an issue or theory (Stake, 2009, p. 3). Drawing from its constructivist philosophical underpinnings and consequently in the context of this study’s positioning as interpretivist-constructivist, case study research attempts to focus on the subjective creation of meaning while also simultaneously recognising both the requirement for researcher objectivity and an acknowledgement of the researchers subjectively. The “particularization” (Abma and Stake, 2014, p. 1135) of case study research aims to capture a genuine and complete understanding of the case being researched while attempting to avoid imposing reductive emic preconceptions on the emerging understanding of the case. Case study research aims to understand the participant in a social context by interpreting their actions as a single group, community, or a single event: *a case*. In other words, it seeks to identify what is *common* or *particular* across individuals within the case being investigated (Stake, 2005). This “multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context” is the primary defining feature of this single case study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p.14).

With this understanding of case study, attention is now given to specific types of qualitative case study design which do always hold clear demarcated boundaries. Two are considered here. Firstly, Stake (2005) situates case studies under three categories: *intrinsic*, *instrumental*, and *collective*. The intrinsic case study is primarily descriptive and one where the focus lies solely in one particular case itself and no attempt to generalise from the studied case to other cases. An instrumental case study is one where the case is of secondary importance but it ‘facilitates our understanding of something else;’ and finally, a collective case study refers to instances where a number of cases are studied ‘in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition.’ Stake asserts that a collective case study ‘is an instrumental study extended to several cases’ (Stake, 2005, p.445). Yin (2009, pp.46ff) offers a different labelling of case studies according to

purpose: *exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory*. An exploratory case study is used in the absence of knowledge for the case being examined but can foreground subsequent work. A descriptive case study is a detailed, contextualised picture of a particular phenomenon akin to Stake’s definition of an intrinsic case study, where the emphasis is on obtaining a deep understanding of the case itself. An explanatory case study is used to explain cause–effect relationships related to a phenomenon and is frequently a long-term, or longitudinal endeavour.

From these two models, among others, this study adopted a single exploratory design with the intention to investigate the phenomenon of teacher experiences of engagement with three contemplative practices – MBSR, Deep Talk, and Balint, as illustrated in Figure 3.2.

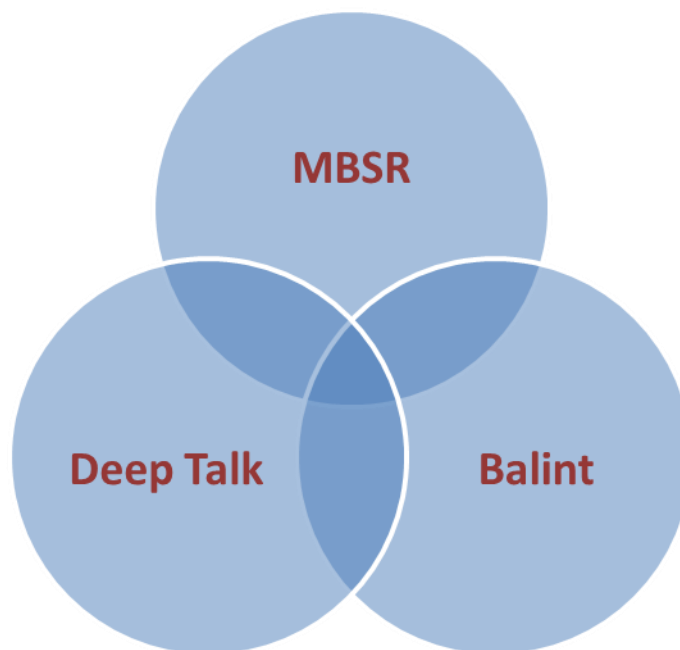


Figure 3.2 A single exploratory case study, using three contemplative practices

Each of the above three practices are defined as contemplative practices and constitute the content for the analysis of the case. The MBSR was offered as an eight-week programme to primary school educators, and a prescribed curriculum with the

intentionality to enable participants receive training in formal meditative practice which include mainly breath and body movement exercises. Originally designed for stress management it was used to promote enhanced awareness of self and the cultivation of present moment attention. Part of the MBSR requirement is for participants to engage in home practice based on each session. In addition, small exercises were included weekly, for example, mindfully eating a meal or noticing occasions when one reacted as opposed to responding to a strong emotional experience. In particular, Deep Talk and Balint were chosen as novel representations of CP given the dominance of mindfulness as the normative practice considered in most contemplative studies. They took the form of once off interventions with target groups of educators, employing a pre-defined process for each approach, and a participant-inspired scenario or case.

3.8 Time Horizon

Saunders *et al.* (2017) remark that “An important question to be asked in designing your research is, ‘Do I want my research to be a “snapshot” taken at a particular time or do I want it to be more akin to a diary or a series of snapshots and be a representation of events over a given period?’” (p. 212). What they describe as a “snapshot” (ibid, p.212) i.e. at a point in time is ascribed the term ‘cross-sectional’ and in this timeframe data collected mostly refers to the period of time at or approximate to the time of collection. Adopting a cross-sectional time frame, as this study did, implies that the researcher or reader cannot make causal inferences.

This was an exploratory research study and as Spector illustrates the first step is to collect sets of data in order to search for meaningful patterns since

Almost by definition, exploratory research concerns situations where you do not yet know what patterns of relationships to expect and what the time frame might be. Often, the goal is to investigate whether a large set of potential causes might relate to some outcome variable/s of interest. (Spector, 2019, p. 133)

One of the challenges faced by the researcher in respect of timeline was the pandemic which resulted in a disruption to the intended time period for intervention and data

collection. The data collection and analysis phases of this study took-place from 2021-2024.

3.9 Data Collection Process

The flexibility of research design and sampling strategies in qualitative research allows the focus of research to adapt as a study progresses. This flexibility may increase the influence of ontological and epistemological assumptions, but also allow for the analysis and reporting of participant perspectives (Whitley and Crawford, 2005). The selection of methods for this exploratory study reflects the paradigmatic frame adopted as interpretivist-constructivist and the qualitative research methodology employed using a case study design strategy. Several forms of data gathering were utilised for this study – reflective diary/ sheets, semi-structured interviews, direct observation and accompanying field notes for the Deep Talk intervention.

Intervention	No. of Participants	Data Collection	Frequency of Collection
MBSR	3	Interviews	Pre & Post Intervention
		Reflective Diary	Pre, Mid-point, Post
Deep Talk	9	Interviews	Pre & Post Intervention
		Observation	During session
		Reflective Sheet	Reflective sheet x 3 entry points
Balint	7	Interviews	Pre & Post Intervention
		Observation	During session
		Reflective Sheet	Reflective Sheet x 4 entry points

The MBSR intervention was facilitated by an external leader, offered consecutively over eight weeks with each session of two hours duration. Balint was three hrs in duration

with 2 presentation activities occurring in this period. Deep Talk was three hrs in duration with 2 presentation activities occurring in this period.

3.9.1 Reflective Tools

Reflective tools were used by both the researcher and the participants in MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk, as described below.

3.9.1.1 Researcher Reflective Diary

On the use of diaries for research purposes, Browne argues that “they become useful repositories for critical reflection on the research process as it is unfolding, cathartic tools to air grievances, and important resources to rationalise decision making processes at times of great uncertainty” (Browne, 2013, p. 432). From the very outset of this study a research diary was utilised for a diversity of purposes. This diary took the form of various modes either as handwritten notes, recording to audio, or in a typed format. In order to explore positionality as a researcher, reflections were further recorded immediately after each participant interview. The researcher’s contemplative practices were a source of grounding and reference point responding to the encouragement that researchers should be “unafraid to draw on their own experiences when analysing materials because they realise that these become the foundations for making comparisons and discovering properties and dimensions” (Corbin & Strauss 1998: p. 5). The benefit of this approach was to observe emotions as the research progressed, and the knowledge obtained from closely observing feelings in relation to others (Flam & Kleres ed. 2015), as well as assumptions held early in the study regarding understandings of well-being and the core intentionality of contemplative practices (Ergas, 2019).

The extract shown in Figure 3.3 is a commentary following a meeting with supervisors which invited a careful consideration of the convergences between researcher and practitioner but also the divergence required to retain the integrity of the research process.

Wed May 6 2020 - 3pm

I have just finished a supervising meeting - my first since the outbreak of Covid. The wheels have come off lots of things over the past few months. At home it is a challenge to keep existing as 'normal'. The kids are really missing the social interaction of school and I get that. I am finding it increasingly challenging to have to do all of my teaching work from a screen! The logical part of me is saying this is an ideal time to get stuck into the PhD but the inertia is difficult to surmount. It is the perfect excuse for avoidance! Not knowing how long this will last I am anxious too about how I will get into the field to gather data. The meeting was very helpful to encourage me to consider looking now perhaps at a more blended approach to obtain the data for DeepTalk and Ballast. So I need to give that some thought before my June meeting.

Today's meeting (31/01/22) with my supervisors returned (once again!) to an ever-grappling issue for me in pursuit of this study. I want to stay in my comfort zone as the teacher practitioner since this is the space which I know intimately and am most at ease. But then I have to remember that I am not engaging in programme design. My study's purpose is to **explore** ie RESEARCH what teacher's experiences are of CPs. My task is not to offer CPs. Reflecting on this it seems very obvious, but I think it is connected to anxiety around shifting to learning a new set of skills. It isn't that my practitioner base is irrelevant (since after all this is what inspired and motivated my pursuit of this study) but it is, and I like this idea, what my supervisors talked about today as 'playing' with the idea of moving into the researcher space....

Figure 3.3 Sample Reflective Diary Entry

The diary had two main structural components. The first was paradoxically unstructured, more personal and designed to capture spontaneous thoughts, feelings, and responses which could emerge at any time, sometimes, for example, in the middle of preparation or teaching itself since working in an Educational Institute, and teaching content on a module – *Restorative Justice for a Contemplative Education* – to second level trainee teachers on the postgraduate master's in education. In parallel to conducting the research there was also engagement in ongoing professional training in all three practices used in the study as a development of personal practice and as an enrichment as a professional educator working in the field. This presented a challenge too in maintaining the ethical boundary between being a researcher and practitioner. As a cathartic tool an early diary entry for this study illustrated some of the uncertainty and organisational difficulties around waiting for ethical clearance, submitting amendments and the struggle to meet submission deadlines. As a PhD student working during the Covid pandemic the diary became a meaningful way to capture the turmoil of this period, and its impact personally and professionally as illustrated below. As a tool to crystallise the process and decisions made during the research the typed entry below captures the significance of the diary as a tool to enable deep level thinking about research practices and assumptions. By recording these thoughts in a systematic way

this contributed to an effort to be as transparent as possible in acknowledging the subjectivities inherent the researcher role and the research process which influences the interpretations generated (Nadin and Cassell, 2006).

3.9.1.2 Reflective tools MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint

In the MBSR, participants completed reflections at three points in the 8-week intervention, before the first session, mid-way and after the final session. These reflections captured participants' thoughts and feelings about their expectations and experiences of the MBSR practice. For the Balint session (as shown in Figure 3.4), participants recorded their thoughts and feelings at three points, just before the session commenced, at the end of the first case presentation, and at the end of the session. For the Deep Talk session, the same process was followed, with participants completing the reflective sheets at the outset, at the end of the first story-share, and at the end of the session.

Reflective Diary Entries - Balint Session

Thank you for completing these reflective entries on your experience of today's session.

Name: _____

(Please note, your identity is for the purpose of following up on the 2nd interview. Your anonymity will be preserved and you will not be identifiable in any material used for the purpose of research)

Entry 1

Please record your **initial thoughts, feelings, body awareness** at the outset of this 1st session.

Entry 2

At the end of this first case, are you aware of **any thoughts, feelings, body awareness** that come to you in this very moment and Why? **F**

Entry 3

Please record your **initial thoughts, feelings, body awareness** at the outset of this 2nd session.

Entry 4

At the end of this second case, are you aware of **any thoughts, feelings, body awareness** that come to you in this very moment and Why?

Figure 3.4 Sample Reflective Sheet Balint

3.9.2 Semi Structured interviews

Qualitative semi structured interviews facilitate an open and flexible discourse and provide the researcher with an opportunity to support the emergence of novel insight in pursuance of data (Punch, 2005). Brown and Danaher (2019) offer a guiding framework for maximising the ethical and methodological advantages of semi-structured interview research practices constituted in values which they classify under three “CHE principles of Connectivity, Humanness and Empathy” (p.76). For this researcher, these principles resonate with intentions related to contemplative practices and acted as a theoretical and ethical thread between the exploratory purpose of the interviews and the topic under investigation. Similarly, in this vein and in light of the topic under research, (Qu and Dumay, 2011) discuss the interview method as positioned between a research ‘tool’ and as a ‘human encounter’ with the participant. The complexity of interviews as a method is compounded by a potential for bias, a capacity (or not) to connect and the interplay between power and powerlessness in the differing roles of both the researcher and participant. The incorporation of these three CHE principles, according to Brown and Danaher (2019), therefore, help to ensure that authentic and dialogical semi-structured interviews can be designed, conducted, and evaluated. The semi structured element allows for the ebb and flow of the dialogue where mediation can be maintained between fidelity to the research question(s) and autonomy for the interview to take a more natural course of direction. “Connectivity” is the initial expression of respect for the participant conveyed through attentiveness and acknowledgment of others, using first names when appropriate to do so, and creating a friendly approach that includes techniques like maintaining eye contact, tone of voice and smiling. The “humanness” of interviewing reflects the value of reciprocity and the embodiment of humility and honesty strategies to maximize the interview process as a dialogical exchange and “where possible a co-construction of meaning, rather than as a monological extraction of information” is the intention (Brown and Danaher, 2019, p. 83). Finally, “empathy” in the interview research context is defined by the authors as moving “the interview process away from being one of interrogation to one that is much more in tune with developing enduring relationships with participants” (ibid, p.85).

The epistemological stance for this study articulated earlier led to consideration of the validity of qualitative semi-structured interviews as a data collection method for the study. The validity of the interview as a research tool is supported by the argument that all participant narratives are important in contributing to the understanding of their experience (Nunokoosing 2005).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted pre and post intervention with participants across all three interventions. The MBSR intervention further included a mid-point interview (after four weeks) reflecting the time horizon for this practice which was delivered over eight weeks. There was a total of 9 interviews for MBSR, with all interview participants working as primary school teachers. For the other two practices – Deep Talk and Balint - the participants included educators working from second and third level settings. In Deep Talk a total of 16 interviews were held, and 14 in Balint. Across all three settings the range of experience as educators was of between two and thirty plus years. All interviewees signed the informed consent form. At the beginning of the interview's gratitude was expressed for prior consent and confirming receipt of the consent form. Participants were also reminded they could terminate the interview at any time and could withdraw consent for the interview. Interviews were conducted via ZOOM with auto-transcription functionality. The researcher reviewed each transcript in detail to ensure accuracy of the transcription. Post intervention interviews were conducted in close proximity to the conclusion of the interventions to ensure participants had an accurate recall of their experience.

A list of interview questions (as shown in samples from MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint in Appendix B) was used to probe participants' experiences of the particular interventions, with the flexible format allowing for additional questions to permit expansion by participants on their differing contextual background and experiences. The first part of the interview schedule adopted an open-ended approach, allowing the participant to talk about their experience of programme participation. This took the form of: *'Can you tell me about your initial response to the intervention?'* and *'What motivated you to join the programme/intervention?'* Utilising open-ended questions avoided directive trajectories or the assumption of any additional prior knowledge on the part of the

participant. The second part of the interview facilitated further exploration of the participants' experiences of each intervention, and their consideration of future practice. The concluding part returned to participants' views on the perceived value of the programme both personally and professionally. After each interview, a researcher memo captured initial responses and for the earlier interviews supported minor adjustments to ensure clarity of expression in asking the questions of subsequent interviewees.

3.9.3 Naturalistic Observations and Field Study Notes

Naturalistic observation is a nonexperimental, primarily qualitative research method in which participants are studied in their natural settings. Various phenomena of interest, for example, interactions are observed and recorded by the researcher, whose presence might be either known or unknown to the subjects. This kind of researcher presence falls within the broader category of field study, or research conducted outside the laboratory or institution of learning. No manipulation of the environment is involved in naturalistic observation, as the activities of interest are those manifested as normal occurrences (in this case participation in the practices). The method is frequently employed during the initial stage of a research project, both for its wealth of descriptive value and as a foundation for hypotheses that might later be tested experimentally.

The reactivity to the researcher as an observer can compromise internal validity. The Hawthorne effect, in which behavioural and performance-related changes (usually positive) occur as a result of the researcher's attention, is one form of reactivity. Other problems might ensue if participants change their behaviours after learning the purpose of the research or 'reluctant participants' in anticipation of researcher presence might take measures to avoid being observed. One of the ways to practically contend with being the 'researcher on site' is to maintain appropriate distance. Hence, a decision was made to deliberately arrive quite close to the starting time for both interventions to avoid an over conscious awareness of researcher presence in the room and secondly during the actual practices location in the room close was enough to observe but distant enough so as to 'contaminate' the circle.

Field notes are widely recommended in qualitative research as a means of documenting relevant contextual information and can ensure a richer context to supplement the research process (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2018) and have been a central component of qualitative research since the early 1900s, originating in the field of ethnographic anthropology (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). They are encouraged for use in many qualitative research methods to enhance data and provide a rich context for analysis (Creswell, 2013; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2005; Patton, 2002). Their value lies in prompting researchers to closely observe the environment and interactions, as a supplement to language-focused data, and as a useful means to document sensory data, for example, sights, sounds etc and can help to expand researcher impressions shortly after they occur. They encourage researcher reflection and identification of bias increasing rigour and trustworthiness and crucially provide essential context to inform data analysis (Phillippi and Lauderdale, 2018). For example, in this study the researcher was struck by the unusual lack of silence in the Balint method as generally, from practitioner experience, this is a very frequent occurrence. Field notes can contain a lot of contextual information that may frame a study in a time, place, or population. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) divide the collection of field notes into two categories – those relating to study context, for example, basic information, geographical setting, demographics. Secondly, field notes can also apply to the research itself. This includes the location for interviews or focus groups. Other elements are participants themselves, and, in this study, it was observed how those who knew each other sat together.

In this study design, participants were aware of researcher observation in advance for both the Deep Talk and Balint elements of the study and were apprised of the research purpose prior to data collection. As MBSR was delivered online, it was not possible for the researcher to engage in observation of participant interactions. In terms of observation, the researcher recorded detailed notes on the 2-hour session Deep Talk and 2-hour Balint sessions. The sample Balint template has been illustrated in Figure 3.5. The Deep Talk session was further video recorded, in order to capture movement, engagement, presence or absence of silences, and utterances by participants. The video

content was transcribed and used primarily to further inform interview questions posed at the end of the session.

Balint Naturalistic Observation/ Field notes template document

Observation #	
Observer:	
Location:	
Number of participants:	
Time:	
Duration:	
Session Focus:	<input type="text"/>
Facilitator/ Practices:	
Involvement/ engagement of participants:	
Climate/ Environment	
Other notes:	
Date:	Observers signature:

Figure 3.5 Sample Observation Template

3.10 Data Analysis

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe data analysis as a spiral, where entry into the analysis stage is with textual data but the exit is with a story. Patton (2015) states that using software to analyse the data can enhance the process of analysis but warns that software packages do not conduct the analysis for the researcher because “the real analytical work takes place in your head” (p. 530). The transcripts from each of the semi-structured interviews in this study were analysed using a thematic analysis approach informed by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis guide. They define thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (ibid, p. 79). In terms of what constitutes a theme, they clarify that a theme “captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (ibid, p. 82).

The initial layer of thematic analysis, which supported the response to the first research question, followed the step-by-step guide outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): Familiarisation with the data, i.e., transcription of the data and multiple rounds of reading the data, making a note of any initial ideas, generation of initial codes, i.e., coding interesting features across the dataset, searching for themes, i.e., collation of codes into potential themes, review of themes, i.e., checking whether the proposed themes work, first in relation to the relevant extracts, and secondly in relation to the entire dataset, a definition and naming of themes, i.e., refining each theme and finally production of the report, including highlight appropriate extracts as examples. More recently, Braun and Clarke (2019) have emphasised that their thematic analysis framework is a reflexive process, and that themes do not simply emerge from the data but are conceptualised based on the data.

Familiarisation with the textual data is achieved by reading the transcripts several times, by reading field notes and by listening to the recordings. This process provides the space to gain an understanding of the methods that are applied to the data collection. Some small initial sidenotes are made as thoughts occur to this researcher during this process.

In generating initial codes Braun and Clarke (2013) cite that the first analytical steps are taken in order to bring life to the data. The textual data in this study is enlivened by highlighting points of interest and by making annotations on emerging items of significance. While involved in this individual physical exercise, this researcher adopted a personal style of coding, which is “a process of identifying aspects of the data that relate to your research question” (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 206). Initially, the NVivo 12 software package was rejected and instead working with highlighting pens as the preferred method of coding.

According to Hammond & Wellington (2013), there is no single agreed approach to coding and “even the terminology to describe the process so that terms such as ‘codes’, ‘themes’, ‘categories’ and ‘labels’ may be used interchangeably” (p. 22). Codes are words, or brief phrases, representing bits of data. Initial codes such as ‘relationships,’ ‘respect’ and ‘time’ begin to emerge, but they are difficult to pattern in the initial stages as there are so many variations to the codes. Braun and Clarke (2013) advise that the researcher concentrates on one or two transcripts at first. This researcher proceeded to code two of the initial transcripts in this complete manner attempting to “identify anything and everything of interest” (p. 206).

As the coding process develops, broader patterns of coded data are collated into provisional themes. A theme captures something significant about the data in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The codes are collected into those themes as it is more easily managed in this way. Sometimes the codes become themes in themselves (Charmaz, 2014). Sometimes themes emerge that have not been expected, so flexibility was required at every step.

Braun and Clarke (2013) advise the researcher to critique and make refinements when reviewing the themes. Sometimes, the coding is changed and, towards the end, this researcher had to “let go of coded material” as the material became too unwieldy (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 230). While this is difficult, it is important to be selective in order to “create an overall patchwork pattern for the quilt” (ibid, p. 231), and tell the story that answers the research question. It was also critical to know when to stop reviewing because the coding can become interminable

The penultimate step in Braun and Clarke's (2013) phases for thematic analysis is when the shape of the thematic map starts to come into focus. At this stage, this researcher tried to define and conceptualise each theme by categorising the participants' contributions under key themes as shown in Appendix C. This involved defining themes and naming themes, such as: Intentionality, as the thematic area hosting - meeting personal needs, learning new skills, exploring work/ family contexts. The observations and reflective sheets for MBSR were thematically analysed and informed the (re-)framing of questions posed to participants in post session interviews with the analysis tailored individually for each participant. With both the Balint and Deep Talk sessions these were thematically analysed with the information informing the (re-)framing of questions posed to participants in post session interviews with the analysis tailored individually for each participant. The final phase involved the collation of themes and findings, as presented in Chapter 4.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical frameworks and codes based on rules and sets of principles are helpful to minimise and safeguard against harm and avoid risk and as a governance gatekeeping structure are necessary for oversight and regulation. A researcher has a higher obligation in the pursuit of learning, formation and becoming an "an ethically rigorous educational researcher" (Head, 2020, p. 75). As Head (2020) remarks further, "Ethical issues in educational research go beyond a matter of compliance with rules, codes and principles to the complex matter of ethical dilemmas that are organic, dynamic and dependent on context and relationships, and which are often contestable" (p.75). It is a reasonable assumption that researchers in the educational space are nobly intent on engaging in quality research in the hope of furthering insight or leading to possible transformation for either the context of education or for research participants or indeed for the researcher. Yet it is difficult to avoid the claim that "empirical research involves intruding on people's lives and in education settings and this is normally at a time when they would otherwise be engaged in teaching or learning" (Head, 2020, p. 76). While the administrative process of ethical research may have implicit notions of care it is also,

perhaps too often, preoccupied with a reductionist interpretation of what it means to do no harm and the promotion and support of research for the good. Thus, ethical educational research is ultimately a moral imperative and much less the adherence to administrative process. Succinctly, Head in the conclusion of his article makes what could be considered a profound statement on ethics in education remarking that “becoming an ethical educational researcher, then, is a matter of pedagogy” (Head, 2020, p. 83).

Adhering to the DCU Code of Practice on research ethics, an application was submitted to the DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC) to obtain ethical approval for the conduct of the study. The submission included plans for seeking permission to commence the study and addressed the issues of informed consent, maintaining anonymity, confidentiality, and consideration of the well-being of participants and explicitly outlined the research aims and a clear plan for how the research was to be ethically managed. The initial application was submitted in November 2017 and following a request for the inclusion of some minor clarifications notification of approval was received in January 2018 (see Appendix A). The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the original plans for engage in face-to-face research with participants and subsequently an addendum was submitted to REC to account for the need to shift to online delivery of MBSR intervention and hosting of online interviews. Full approval was granted in March 2021.

All participants in the study were teachers working in either the primary, secondary or tertiary sectors in education. Informed consent is a critical part of any research process and is contingent upon participants having a full understanding of the researcher’s request and is characterised by transparency and honesty. All of the study participants were provided with a Plain Language Statement which explicated the purpose of the research and the voluntary nature of the study. A consent form was also included requiring signed completion before commencement which included clear direction on the right of any participant to withdraw from the study at any point.

In respect of confidentiality and anonymity pseudonyms were used in the study and the locations of the participants were anonymised. When collecting and storing data, the

necessary precautions were implemented to protect the data and access was only possible using the university's Multifactor Authentication system. The pseudonyms for participants were securely stored and only accessible by the researcher. For any future publication of any part of the study, participant anonymity has been assured. Any identifying data held on the DCU managed Google Drive will be securely disposed of two years post-completion of the project. Although qualified as a teacher of all three practices - *MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk* – the researcher did not personally deliver any of the interventions to ensure the maintenance of boundaries between the role of researcher and practitioner. All facilitators who delivered each of the interventions are accredited and qualified in their respective practices.

3.12 Research Rigour

The demonstration of rigour, described by Corbin and Strauss (2008) as “quality qualitative study” (p.304) is essential so that the research findings have the integrity to make valid claims on the quality and efficacy of any research purpose. Criticisms of qualitative research methodology include the lack of rigour, ambiguity, mediocre data collection and the process of analysis used, and hence the integrity of findings. These criticisms are succinctly captured by Denzin with his “litany” of twenty-three criticisms levelled against qualitative research, many of which are targeted at the alleged lack of rigour in the methodological inquiry (Denzin, 2017, p. 11). Despite such criticisms there is understandable rejection of the potential applicability of positivist reliability and validity criteria because of differences in the theoretical and philosophical paradigms underpinning quantitative and qualitative research. Corbin and Strauss (2008) illustrate the complexity of what is meant by rigour in qualitative studies reflected in the divergence of language across the literature to express what might be considered to be similar terminology - “validity”, “rigor”, “truthfulness,” “goodness” or “integrity” (p. 304). Irrespective of whatever term is employed there is little consensus on what constitutes a good and trustworthy qualitative study (Morse *et al.*, 2002).

As a tool, Daniel's generic framework of rigour with four critical dimensions— *Trustworthiness, Auditability, Credibility and Transferability* (TACT) is useful, as shown in

Figure 3.6, and was adopted for attending to this aspect of the research methodology for this study (Daniel, 2019).

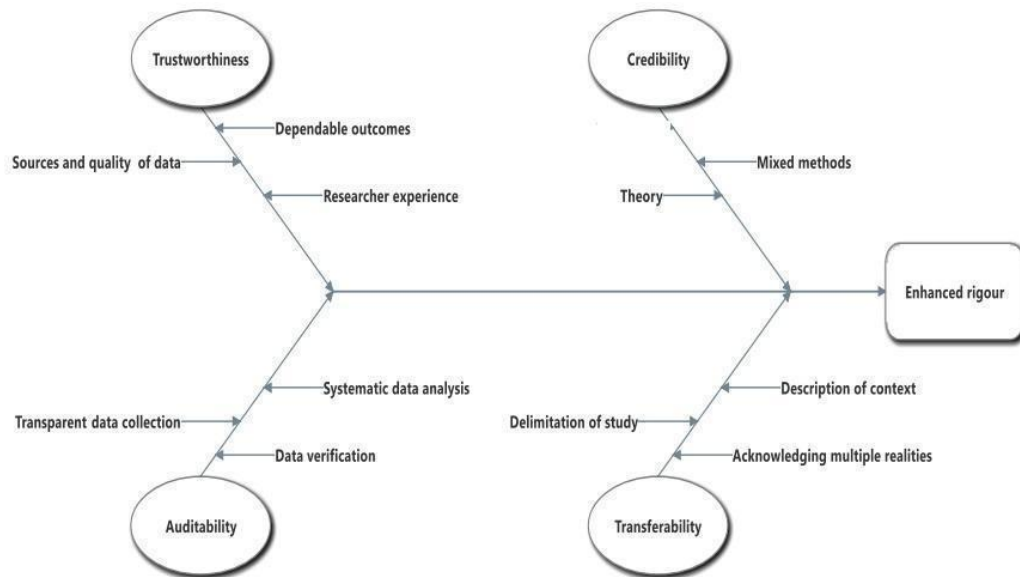


Figure 3.6: Adapted TACT model for assessing qualitative research outcomes (Daniel, 2019, p.119)

3.12.1 Trustworthiness

As a proxy for establishing the authenticity of the research outcome, and truthfulness of findings, trustworthiness in qualitative research reveals the degree of trust or confidence readers have in research findings and is viewed as a vital element necessary for enhancing the understanding and interpretation of research findings (Daniel 2019, p.119). For this researcher one mediator for trustworthiness of data analysis was the explicit statement of assumptions about the phenomenon being studied (as evidenced in section 3.5 above) and stating the experiences the researcher brought as practitioner-researcher to guide the understanding of the data through the tools of reflexivity (evidenced in section 3.10 above). Another indicator of trustworthiness in this study was the employment of a systematic process in organising and thematically analysing the data using Braun and Clarke’s framework (2022) for example, coding, identifying shared themes, categorising themes, and demonstrating a clear theoretical or logical rationale for eliminating overlapping themes as outlined in section 3.10.

3.12.2 Auditability

Auditability as a critical dimension for establishing rigour in qualitative research requires the demonstration of transference in the research process and the application of a systematic procedure for collecting, analysing and interpretation of data (Daniel, 2019, p. 120). It also entails a detailed step-by-step description of the processes and decision-making throughout the study (Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin, 2020). As a measure of internal auditability this researcher addressed methodological issues including stating clarity in the research question, and how questions were aligned with the particular research design, analysis of data, and conclusions drawn. Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 243) termed this as an “audit trail”. Using field notes, diaries, memos (as illustrated in Figure 3.7), and pictures, during data collection, analysis, coding decision making and reporting. To achieve auditability within the TACT framework required the researcher to describe who was involved in the study, how data was collected, where and when data was collected, and how the analysis was undertaken (which has been outlined above in section 3.10).

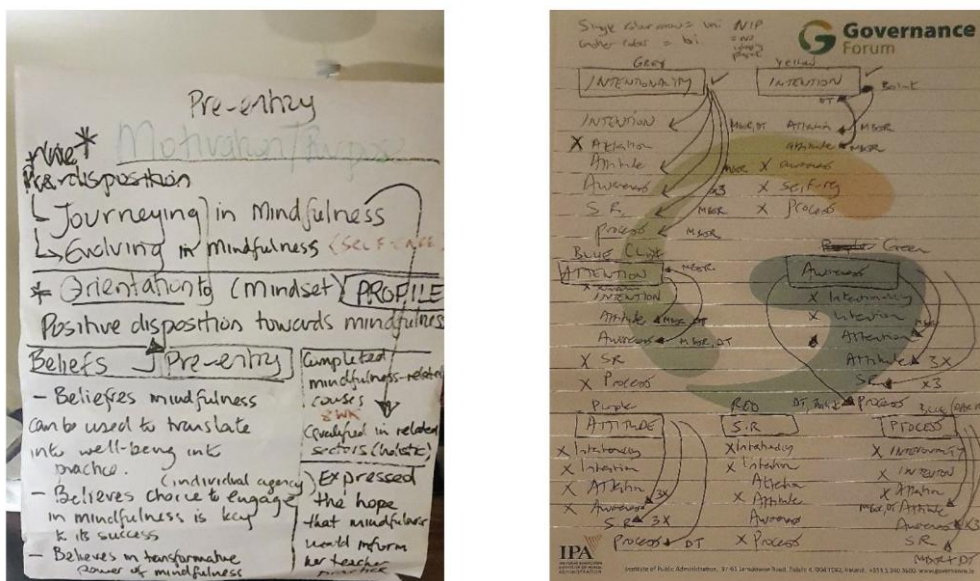


Figure 3.7 Sample Researcher Notes within Analysis Process

3.12.3 Credibility

In the context of qualitative research, validity is equitable to ensuring “appropriateness” (Daniel, 2019, p. 121) of the tools, processes, and data used in the study. This entailed that the researcher demonstrated (as above in section 3.8) that the choice of the case study research design research was appropriate to the questions, the application of data collection methods, and analysis, and the reporting of the outcome (chapter four). Similar to auditability, credibility was achieved through a careful description of the data analysis. It also required the researcher to anchor the topic of research (teachers’ engagement with contemplative practice) in the central phenomenon being investigated – the impact of MBSR on teacher reflexivity and the dimensions of and interplay between contemplative practices. Peer debriefing with supervisors, attention to negative cases, and the use of verbatim quotes in chapter four were other ways of establishing the degree of credibility in the research findings. Credibility was also achieved by the researcher describing his experiences as a researcher, which is captured in the final chapter.

3.12.4 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research suggests that findings from one study can be applied to other settings or groups of people and although congruent to the concept of reliability in a quantitative methodology it does not advocate for generalisability but instead, it suggests that findings gained in a particular context can offer valuable lessons to other similar settings (Daniel, 2019, p. 122). Transferability was used to provide evidence to the reader of the integrity of the research outcomes and required a detailed description of the context of the study, sample characteristics, participants (e.g. demographic information, their experiences and the methods used to recruit the sample, and the types of data obtained. To demonstrate transferability, the researcher ensured that the recruitment and selection of the research sample were based on expert knowledge of participants (as practising teachers) and participants were accurately informed about the phenomenon under study. The researcher used thick descriptions of real-life settings and understandings of participants’ worldviews not only to achieve transferability but to help bridge any perceivable gap between practitioners and the

researcher. In the context of TACT, to attain transferability, it was crucial for the researcher to clearly articulate the delimitation of the research and the context in which it was undertaken, including the choices researchers made during the process of data collection and analysis, and the challenges faced during the research, a particular one in the context of this study being the Covid pandemic.

3.13 Limitations

All research is subject to limitations contingent on the boundaries for the chosen study topic and in particular in respect of research design. An obvious limitation is the lack of generalisability from the study as the sample population did not extend to a large enough cohort. In addition, all participants were professional teachers' and representative across the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors which was purposeful to explore teachers' experience in general. This facilitated multiple perspectives from a range of teachers in different sectors but may have mitigated against an understanding of how participants' experience of contemplative practice might be shaped by their own specific local and sectoral context. However, the portrayal of participants' accounts selected from a general teacher cohort in this study of engagement with contemplative practice may assist others to investigate the experience of contemplative practice more deeply with more defined professional teacher profiles.

In this study all of the participants' experience with the three interventions was explored respectively i.e. post intervention with the exception of MBSR which tracked participant experience at three points – the beginning, middle and end of the eight-week MBSR programme. The nature and structure of MBSR as an eight-week intervention provided the rationale for these three research points of investigation. Both Deep Talk and Balint have validity as an intervention at a single point in time which offers an advantage for implementation as a flexible and mobile practice in terms of an 'in the moment experience' with contemplative practice reflecting the concept of temporality as reflected in McCaws' "radical reflexivity" (2023, p.1). However, these practices can be delivered in a cycle period with consecutive, though not necessarily related, sessions. As the study was exploratory the primary intention was to garner participants initial

experience of the practices however, further research would benefit from accessing participants who engage with these practices on a more regular basis and perhaps yield data which might be more longitudinal in contrast to a cross-sectional study and facilitate, for example, consideration of how the group dimension of practice impacts on the experience of contemplative practice. This brings its own challenges too. The researcher as an embedded presence amidst an existing cohesive group with a strong and deep personal bond and created over period and given the nature of discussions and sharing which tend to arise in both Balint and Deep Talk might be perceived as a form of intrusion and disrupt the spontaneity of their practice. However, it could also lead to the creative possibility of an ethnographic study in such a context.

Finally, in discussions on the role of the researcher in relation to the topic under investigation or the relationship with participants the framing of this qualitative study accounts for the legitimacy of subjectivity as an emic reality for the researcher. This will be accorded further attention in the concluding chapter but for now addressed here as a possible limitation of the study. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) observe,

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others—to indwell—and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand (p. 124)

Having “insider epistemology” (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 55) raises issues concerning impartiality, honesty, and authenticity since understandably the argument is strong that one may know too much or be so personally and professionally vested in a research area to legitimise any degree of scientific rigour. Ademolu (2024) issues a “clarion call to qualitative researchers and methodologists to acknowledge their positionality on both substantive and practical aspects of the field” (p. 347). For this researcher, the insider knowledge was reflected in his existing practitioner base for all of the three practices utilised for the study. Among the complex debate on the insider/outsider researcher it is acknowledged that the knowledge created here by this insider researcher may have had a quite different outcome if created by an outsider researcher.

3.14 Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodological framing of this qualitative research study exploring educators' experience of contemplative practice, with its underpinning interpretivist-constructivist philosophical paradigm. The following chapter presents the findings from the study.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the contemplative practice themes which emerged from the data collection processes. The initial section presents an analysis of the data sets generated from interviews with and observation of participants engaged in the MBSR practice. Following this, the data generated from the Balint and Deep Talk practices is explored, presenting the emergent themes and a discussion in the context of participant engagement with these contemplative practices. The final section presents themes emerging from MBSR specifically in relation to teacher reflexivity.

4.2 Dimensions of Contemplative Thinking-Practices

Six dimensions of contemplative thinking-practice were activated within MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions, namely, intentionality, intentions, attitude, awareness, self-regulation, as presented below.

4.2.1 *Intentionality*

Intention and intentionality are related components of evolving and dynamic contemplative practice which may change over time with exposure both to practice and to living contemplatively. *Intentionality* answers the question, “Why am I doing what I am doing?” Contemplation both as a practice and approach to life fosters intentionality by encouraging one to think and reflect carefully about the things one is doing (Kaufman, 2017). Living contemplatively and/or participating in contemplative practices is purposeful to facilitate insight, meaning, growth (for example, personal, psychological, or spiritual), and for one’s well-being in the connection between the objective and subjective dimensions of one’s life (Van Gordon et al., 2022). Intentional/motivational and contextual factors for practice are often linked to self-regulation, for example, engagement in contemplative practice to learn how to cope with stress or better regulate chronic pain, or as a way to find existential meaning and purpose (Dorjee, 2016). Contemplative practice also marks a different “intentional relationship” with time captured by the distinction between doing and being and in a radical embrace of

the sense of *being* in the here and now (Ergas, 2019, 2020). Intentionality expresses the participant's purpose for choosing to engage in one of the three practices and is indicated by the questions of *why* and *what* I am doing.

4.2.1.1 Intentionality in *MBSR*

Intentionality in MBSR was *linked mainly to addressing emotional stressors, managing work or family responsibilities, and in one case furthering self-development and well-being*. For example, Sara articulated a well-considered and reflective position regarding her intentionality for exploring mindfulness practice. This was aligned to personal needs, her struggle to regulate her emotions, and on occasions feeling overwhelmed from the general demands of life. This personal intentionality was also captured by Tara who described herself as “an anxious person” often feeling overwhelmed due to work stress. This impacted her mental health to the extent that she recognises the need “to take a step back and do what is best for myself.” She did not wish as a teacher to be “missing out on what’s going on because of absorption with the past or future” and was interested in “developing the tools to deal with those situations better.” She identified mindfulness as a practice tool to potentially manage her stress. Lucy had prior experience of mindfulness practice, but the passage of time had eroded the benefits, and she wished to return to practice as a gift to herself. This time she brought her greater life experience to the mindfulness programme noting she was “in a different frame of mind and coming at it from a new angle.”

4.2.1.2 Intentionality in *Deep Talk*

Intentionality in Deep Talk was *linked mainly for potential to sustain self as an educator both in furthering professional development and enhancing personal and teacher well-being*. Several participants cited their intentionality for participation motivated by a desire to improve their professional practice. For example, Clara was encouraged to join since as a teacher she believes that in the well-being space, teachers and their needs are often overlooked in deference to student well-being. With the demands of her teacher role, she hoped that DT could be a contemplative practice with potential to nourish herself as an educator.

Other participants framed their intrigue and interest in DT as grounded in a natural curiosity. The notion of story as a method in the DT was of interest to both Alice and Natalie, both of whom were English teachers. Natalie appreciated the value and power of story, considering stories as guides for living and offering insight into people and the world. And because she had other heavy professional obligations she felt “closeted away” and had a desire for a story as an antidote to her seclusion.

Unsurprisingly for educators, a natural interest and enthusiasm for learning was fuelled by the apparent novelty of DT and the element of intrigue with the method. Several participants cited their interest as possibly providing a “tool” in their skillset as teachers. Alice was coming to Deep Talk as an expansion of her interest in creative methodologies and hoped that DT would benefit her work as a teacher. Des expected that DT could be applied to his teacher role offering a new set of skills and contributing to his professional development. And while he did find the DT experience to be positive characterised by qualities of openness, kindness, and honesty he lamented the lack of apparent logic and direction in the process and which itself was devoid of a stated intentionality.


4.2.1.3 Intentionality in *Balint*

Intentionality in Balint was linked mainly to the *seeking of peer support for professional challenges, addressing emotional stressors, regulating self, managing work responsibilities, and in general to further self-development and well-being*. Some participants expressed the hope that Balint could provide support for personal stresses and challenges. Emer described her habitual tendency as “a fixer or rescuer” when working as a teacher or living with others. Reflecting on her membership of previous reflective practice groups she noticed her past reactions to group dynamics and hoped Balint could provide more insight to this pattern. As a teacher for over twenty years, Cait experienced the role as a lonely place where “it all comes crashing in on you” because of mental health issues and stress. Anna too was conscious of the impact of work on her health leading to stress and was seeking what she described as “whole space” in Balint to manage her work and emotions. Balint, she believed, might enable her to “sit with the issue or sit with the student or just respond kind of quietly and be with the person and the problem rather than resolving it.” Coming to Balint as a long-experienced

teacher and with a senior position in her new school Elsa expressed both a personal and professional aspirations for her intentionality. She hoped that personally Balint might be a useful way “to be able to let go of the ego and let others help you” and also as a potential tool for members of the senior and middle management teams in her school. Others expressed the desire to present a case from their work, for example, Jenny who in her new role in tertiary education as a learning support person and tutor is encountering several challenges in her work. In doing so she was hoping to get some perspective on how she is functioning in her new role.

4.2.1.4 Intentionality across *MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint*

As illustrated in Figure 4.1 intentionality across *MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint*, was broadly linked to personal and professional factors. In all three practices, intentionality was linked to furthering self-development and well-being. In both MBSR and Balint, intentionality was further linked to addressing emotional stressors and managing work responsibilities. There were unique aspects to intentionality in the Deep Talk and Balint interventions, with intentionality motivated by a desire to enhance and improve professional practice as educators for both and only in the latter to seek peer support for professional challenges and regulating of self. Coming to Deep Talk from a place of curiosity was a unique element here which stimulated intentionality for participants.

 Intentionality Dimension	
Elements	Practice
Personal	
<i>Furthering of self-development and well-being</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>
<i>Addressing emotional stressors</i>	<i>M/B</i>
<i>Regulating self</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Responding to curiosity</i>	<i>DT</i>

Professional	
<i>Managing work responsibilities</i>	<i>M/B</i>
<i>Enhancing and improving educator professional practice</i>	<i>DT/B</i>
<i>Seeking peer support for professional challenges</i>	<i>B</i>

Figure 4.1 Intentionality across MBSR (M), Deep Talk (DT), Balint (B)

4.2.2 Intentions

Intentions have a direct immediacy for the explicit intention one deliberately brings in advance to a contemplative practice (Van Gordon et al. 2022). Intentions can represent a purposeful *'spatial' turning inward* of attention toward one's first-person experience so that one can turn to one's subjectivity and make it into the object of one's attention (Ergas 2019). It also includes *attention to intention (A→I)* as attentional modulation and/or monitoring of an intention whether through facilitation of a selected intention, inhibition of competing intentions, sustaining an already operative intention, and/or re-engaging one that has waned (Grossenbacher and Quaglia 2017).

4.2.2.1 Intentions in MBSR

As the MBSR programme was offered over an 8-week cycle there was a noticeable shift in participant's intentions. Intentions were expressed *as a deepening of mindfulness practice for self-development* which was developed with programme progression, *extending practice beyond self into other areas of life including family and work and ensuring practice becomes a regular habit*.

Sara at halfway point remarked that participation helped "rejuvenate" her practice for own immediate benefit. Her initial intentions were primarily focused on herself, but she deepened and extended her intentions for practice to other areas of her life in relation to family and her teaching role. At the end of the programme, she acknowledged that her original intentions shifted to being more open and less attached to outcomes (which were originally just for herself) and allowing whatever to emerge as part of her practice. As she moved through the programme the benefits for Tara become apparent as she identified practice having a "big impact" again not just directly for herself but also in her

work as a teacher. This development encouraged her to deepen her practice. As participants moved through the MBSR programme the accrued benefits were a stimulus and encouragement to continue with practice. Lucy remarked on the encouragement she experienced to build her practice as a habit into her daily routine. The intention to practice was bolstered by the habit of her short daily practice which she said, “brings me back to earth and the basics.”

4.2.2.2 Intentions in Deep Talk

In coming to Deep Talk while the intentionality for some in advance was the possibility of application of the practice to work, others brought no defined expectations at the start of the session. They were coming with “a clean slate, a blank canvas” and *an open mind and with curiosity* to see what might emerge as insightful and helpful to life and work. From early on in the practice, many participants came to see the potential for *extension of the practice to their teaching role*. This reflected the position of *attention to intention (A→I)* and the capacity to re-orientate intention in the moment (Grossenbacher and Quaglia 2017).

Curiosity stems from a desire to “get a flavour of what it is about.” Prior to engaging, Martha was attracted by the notion of DT as an “inside out” approach to reflective conversation and dialogue which goes beyond the surface and had an element of depth. At the outset of the session, she confirmed her wish to be present to what would unfold because “overall I’m curious. I’m hopeful. I’m really interested.” Lisa was coming to DT as she was attracted to the session title inviting participants to go deep as “in under the surface.” She was also refreshingly honest in stating that at the same time she was not sure what precisely was involved and yet was curious and “interested in deep conversations.” Later when she reflected on her DT experience Alice recounted that her prior intentionality was radically altered almost immediately in the session in how she experienced the use of story within DT as a contemplative tool. Originally, as an English teacher she had merely considered a story in the traditional manner as one with a plot, characters, and themes but the use of story in DT moved participants into “an unconscious kind of space.”

As the session progressed a number of participants began to ponder on how the practice could be applied to their work, for example Bob early on began to imagine how the practice could be applied to his work with students or with staff although in contrast, Des struggled with the “lack of logic” in DT and how it could be applied practically to his teaching role as the process was very fluid with no unified outcome.

4.2.2.3 Intentions in Balint

For Balint there was a shift at the start of the session as participants *attending to their original intentions* came to realise that its purpose was not to find solutions or problem solve. Others came *with a sense of curiosity* and not really sure what to expect. A number of participants were very keen to use the opportunity as a method *of offering insight to work challenges* through the presentation of a case.

Elsa, reflecting her immediate intention at the start of the Balint session, was conscious of her intention firstly to wait for others to commence and then to automatically analyse the case with a desire to find a solution since this is her default position. However, she recognised this was not the intention of Balint since it was intended to be a ‘non-fixing’ process. Participants were informed by the facilitator at the beginning of the purpose of Balint and they welcomed the clarity on the function and structure of Balint as helpful to refine their intentions for the session. For example, Tracey came to appreciate the opportunity to “sit” with the issues presented by two members from their practice as educators rather than moving to problem solving or fixing. Others remarked that early in the session they realised it is an “efficient” process with a focus on the task at hand, namely attending to the presenter and their case and the avoidance of irrelevance or small talk. This again reflected the position of *attention to intention (A→I)* as also evident for participants in Deep Talk.


Despite the information provided in advance to participants many acknowledged that they were not sure what to expect but still came with a curiosity. Ellen best captured this sentiment when she noted – “I’m just not a very visual person. But I try to do these things as much as I can out of curiosity.”

At the start of the session four participants were keen to use the opportunity to present a case from their work practice and to use the process as a way of offering insight into

their practice. Two of the participants, Jenny, and Rosa, carried this intention very strongly and in the end presented their respective cases with the agreement and support of the group.

4.2.2.4 Intentions across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

Figure 4.2 illustrates that for this dimension there was greater emphasis on the personal in contrast to professional. Because of the nature of the MBSR programme participants had a sense of deepening their practice over time and this perhaps explains the notion of a ‘habit intention’ over time. Being present and bringing curiosity was a particular feature of both MBSR and Deep Talk. In Balint the immediate intention of many participants became quickly focused on the task of the session itself which was to actively engage with the presenters in the presenting of their case. In contrast to MBSR which has an 8-week timeframe, during which period participants could observe their *attention to intention* (A-> I) the other two practices were singular interventions and so intention can only be assessed at the time of the practice. Although featuring in all three practices, the professional dimension was particularly present and strong for Balint as participants were tasked with responding to the cases presented from the professional context of two members.

 <i>Intention Dimension</i>	
Elements	Practice
Personal	
<i>Deepening of practice for self-development</i>	M/B
<i>Deepening practice commitment – practice as habit</i>	M
<i>Becoming more open minded and curious</i>	M/DT

<i>Attending to and shifting Intentions</i>	DT/B
Professional	
<i>Extending practice/insight beyond self – general life, family, teaching</i>	M/DT/B

Figure 4.2 Intentions across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

4.2.3 Attention

Attentional capacity (Crosswell et al. 2024) namely, attending to experience in a particular way involves observing one’s moment-to-moment, internal (first-person experience) and external experience with focus but without judgement, described by Ergas as a ‘spatial’ turning inward (2019, 2020). Attention is directed towards thoughts, behaviour and body sensations and is complex and dynamic, for example, engaging, disengaging, shifting, sustaining, monitoring, or the widening or narrowing of focused attention (Grossenbacher and Quaglia 2017). Attention may also be focused externally on a single object of contemplation, or towards a range of discrete phenomena, experiences, concepts, or situations selected as objects to be contemplated (Van Gordon et al. 2022). This external focus also means that engaging in contemplative practices is also an important mechanism to recognise that we are not separate from others, and in addition to our own needs we are also attentive to the needs of others (Kaufman 2017).

4.2.3.1 Attention in Mindfulness

In MBSR participants observed more *readily attending to whatever arose in thoughts, feelings, and body*. This attentional dimension also *extended directly both in the moment of the practice itself and beyond to normal daily living* and has *application for capacity to attend more appropriately to the demands and challenges of work*.

Sara, for example, described attending to practice with deliberation as she regularly gave her attention to observing what was happening for and to her which she describes

as a “tuning in.” She learned to be less fixated on outcomes or reaching a goal in her practice which believes would diminish the value of the practice itself. Tara was more willing to attend even to negative feelings and thoughts but without judgement. Having this capacity to attend to both the positive and negative moments in one’s experience was the full embodiment of attending.

Both in practice and in her life generally Sara shifted her attentional capacity to become more open, trusting that benefits would emerge for her in life if she remained practising even if she didn't know why or how. At the end of MBSR Tara observed herself “to be more present, to be more in the now and to be kind of experiencing my life, rather than rushing through it and missing the important things.” Lucy echoed a similar theme stating that as she became more comfortable with practice, she was learning to attend to what appeared to be chores or to the ordinary with more deliberation and presence and as a result derived enjoyment from these aspects of her life. Tara, in learning to have a different relationship with her work, was less inclined to become consumed by its demands as she learned to have less fear even in challenging situations. Mindfulness practice helped Lucy to be conscious of minding the boundaries between home and work and ensuring that she was not swamped with the demands of her work and credited her practice and programme participation for helping her to attend and prioritise what mattered in her life.

4.2.3.2 Attention in Deep Talk

Attending to thoughts, feelings and body sensations is also a feature in Deep Talk. Because of the elements of the process in DT, participants were conscious of *attending to the various stages of the process*.

Reflecting on his DT experience Des noted that initially he was very much the outside observer remaining in logical thinking mode as he questioned the purpose and value of DT. When invited to become involved as an active agent in the stories this passivity shifted, and he entered with a spirit of curiosity and enquiry. Natalie described two different responses here to the DT experience, one where she attends to her experience by moving away to sit with her feelings and be alone. In contrast, on another occasion she remarks attending to moments of joy and the positivity she felt which brought a

sense of “abandon” or a “carefree feeling.” During the moments of silence in DT, several remarked on their ease with this aspect of the experience, welcoming it as an opportunity to be fully present to the experience.

Many participants described becoming absorbed and being drawn into the process of Deep Talk and in particular with how the story and process unfolded. For example, Bob’s engagement with DT was attention to the movement of sand describing the facilitator’s use of this prop as taking him out of himself and enabling him to focus on the unfolding of the story. In DT when members were invited to place themselves in the story through the metaphor of placing small representative figures of self, several were intrigued to note where others place themselves in the story.

4.2.3.3 Attention in Balint

In Balint participants noted *attending to what is happening in their internal experience through participation – thoughts, feelings, body sensations*. The notion of attention also centred on how participants *were attending to the process itself* i.e. the presentation of cases by members. Attending to the case presentation also brought direct and *focused attention to work challenges and demands* and in particular for the presenters.

Cait remarked on her initial Balint experience as “waiting my turn or trying to wait my turn” as she was “bursting to kind of say something because I thought it would be valuable to the presenter...to support the presenter.” Later, she remarked, “I felt eager to reassure or comfort, not necessarily fix the problem, but just reassure the presenters that this is very normal. Rosa, as a case presenter, became aware in Balint of her desire to “jump in” in response to comments made by others to her case and had to hold back and attend to her own role at this stage which was to observe and listen.

Attending to a Balint case presentation had three aspects – how one responds oneself to the story, secondly how one responds to the presenter and thirdly how one responds to elements of the case either the people involved or the case context itself. These first three elements can be framed as an internal dialogue with self. A fourth element was attending to others in the group in response to the presented case. This was the external dialogue which occurred in Balint although silence or not responding was equally considered to be part of this external dialogue. Anna, for example, remarked that she

was cautionary with her interjections, careful of being too critical or to risk interpreting incorrectly.

Several participants, although not presenting, resonated deeply with both cases presented and described being transposed to their own particular work stimulated by comparisons with the presenter's cases. Rosa, as a case presenter, described with insight and clarity her experience of listening to others give feedback on her case presentation which was of support to her in attending to a challenging case from her work. Though some of the feedback was difficult to hear she was able also to attend with compassion and understanding to group members' responses and their desire to reach out with support for her.

4.2.3.4 Attention across *MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint*

Attention to the inner world of thoughts, feelings and body sensations was present across all three practices, as illustrated in Figure 4.3. This perhaps can be explained by an active engagement with the respective practices although in the case of MBSR participants were intentionally invited to consider thoughts, feelings and body sensations and unsurprisingly features strongly. The various practices have their respective and distinctive elements, for example in mindfulness the invitation to attend to the breath, in Deep Talk attending to the story and in particular to the element of playing with the story, and in Balint the case is the hook for attention. Thus, the process itself in all three became an object of attention. Unique to mindfulness was participants' expansion of the practice to their wider lives and again this may be explained by the duration of course delivery over time. Both Balint and MBSR worked as an attending focus and in the former, this was explained by the nature of Balint processes which invited participants to engage with cases presented from professional practice.


	
Attention Dimension	
Elements	Practice
<i>Attending to feelings, thoughts, body</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>
<i>Attending to other aspects of life</i>	<i>M</i>
<i>Attending to the process (and its elements)</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>
<i>Attending to work</i>	<i>M/B</i>

Figure 4.3 Attention across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

4.2.4 Attitude

Attention and attitude are closely related with the latter describing the cultivation of qualities one brings to attention - being non-judgemental, discerning, kind, curious, compassionate, and accepting (Ergas 2019, 2020). An attitude of non-striving is important indicating an openness to allow thoughts, feelings emerge and to accept the impermanence of living where change is both inevitable and constant. With recognition of impermanence experientially from our contemplative practice, we are better equipped to both deal with it and bring it about when we engage with the world. In coming to acknowledge and appreciate the personal benefits of contemplative practice there is recognition too of the collective well-being that our practices engender – the grounding of the political with the personal (Kaufman 2017).

4.2.4.1 Attitude in MBSR

The practice of MBSR was a way of responding to *the demands and circumstances of life without judgement*. There was an element too of *learning to choose to respond* rather

than react to arising circumstances. *Bringing kindness and compassion to practice and to one's general life* was a consistent theme for all participants.

Commitment to contemplative practice can naturally falter, requiring self-compassion and nonjudgement. It is a natural and likely occurrence, and the antidote is beginning practice again with commitment and without judgement. Irrespective of whatever arises during her practice, Sara accepted all without labelling or judgement so that, as she said bluntly, "if you're feeling crap, or if you're feeling good, or, you know, whatever, whatever is there!" However, for Tara it was a challenge to step back and be less demanding and critical of self, but she could see the benefits of accepting reality as it was without a sense of guilt or blame replacing these feelings with expression of kindness and compassion to herself. At the end of the programme Tara had learned to be kinder to herself and chose to be less attached as to how she feels in the moment which could bring critical self-judgement. Lucy, in feeling being pulled apart and conflicted by various life demands echoed this same capacity to be self-judging and was learning to remain faithful to her practice as a way of responding to this tendency since it built capacity for compassion toward self.

One of the skills Sara learned was to bring a responsive rather than a reactionary state to whatever she observed happening in her life. When she did manage to adopt this approach, she was less inclined to "to beat myself up as much about it, when it happens as it's human, it's okay."

4.2.4.2 Attitude in Deep Talk

Attitude can be viewed as the natural follow up to attention so that if one can remain attentive to the fullness of experience then there is *potential to choose one's attitude to what emerges* as evident in DT. *Bringing an attitude of open mindedness and curiosity* enables participants to enter into the spirit of the practice with freedom. *Suspending judgement* is a part of this openness and permits participants to be themselves and authentic in the process.

Many DT participants used the language of choice or deliberation to illustrate the positioning of their attitude. This capacity seemed to stem from life experience where participants learned how to respond to events in their lives following particular events

and moments. Bob remarked that in moments of attending to his sense of wondering in DT he noted an opportunity for being either “overly critical or overly nice to myself and see where and what that's bringing me.” For Lisa, this element of choice was painfully manifested through the loss of a family member and through the experience of DT she was reminded of the power of choice and how this framed her disposition to life and grief.

A number of participants came to DT with “a clean slate, a blank canvas” and an open mind to see what might emerge as insightful and helpful to life and work. Des entered DT with a spirit of openness remarking that with the other group members he was willing “to try and contribute to make it a success” and by being open and honest he had a positive experience of DT. In the pre-DT interview Bob remarked that he was open to learning and seeing what emerged from the DT experience and these attitudinal qualities permeated Bob’s responses both before and after DT. This curiosity stemmed from his desire to “get a flavour of what it is about.” In Martha’s words she came to DT, as she says, because “overall I'm curious. I'm hopeful. I'm really interested.” Lisa was coming to DT to delve deeper into her thinking and practice. She expressed particular “interest in deep conversations.”

Participants in DT could also communicate through story figures without being labelled or identified. This cultivation of a non-striving and non-judgemental spirit was convened by the facilitator’s attitude whose skill encouraged participants to “let your mind go.” For a number of participants DT was itself an opportunity to directly explore and reflect on their own attitude to self and their experience. Through the DT process Natalie recognised that she had been giving herself “a bit of a hard time” and being self-critical. She remarked how participation in DT helped her to redress the imbalance between her professional and personal life and to actively be more kind to herself and in attending to her own needs. Clara returned to this sense of being kind towards herself and having confidence to be her “best self” without judgement from herself or others as again it the safety of the group and the DT process itself gave her permission to articulate her thoughts and feelings. DT was, for Martha, a place to be open, honest, and crucially in an atmosphere which was non-judgemental. She described being in a non-judgmental

context where participants “could just sit around and talk so openly with vulnerability and not fear judgement.”

4.2.4.3 Attitude in Balint

As with Deep Talk, interest in Balint brought *an attitude of curiosity and interest* for participants. It also provoked *the fear of being judged by others or holding judgement towards self*. But this was counteracted by participants' experiences of *feeling and conveying compassion towards others*.

Elsa had a general awareness of Balint, and its purpose and she came to the session hoping to learn more about Balint and she brings a general sense of curiosity.

Emer stated being part of the Balint group induced feelings of nervousness and anxiety at the beginning stemming from the perception others may have of her in a new group. This she ascribed to a sense of inferiority towards herself and that others in her view hold a higher social status. In choosing to present her case to the group Rosa recalled feeling a similar sense of inferiority with a range of emotions and frustrations with the strongest emotion being shame towards herself. In her diary entry after reflecting on her own presentation Jenny noted that she felt both “relief and reassurance” but also, since the group picked up on her lack of boundaries she noted too “feeling tension and frustration and “angry with myself for giving too much to a student.” Upon hearing the group’s response to her case Jenny recognised the breach of boundaries in her work and the need to be more kind towards herself, learning to be less demanding and for the need to mind herself. Listening to the first case Elsa remarked on noticing emerging judgement in her attitude to the presenter and to other players in the case presented, namely the role of management in the presenter case school. In the days after Elsa also found herself deeply reflecting on the first case and in particular the students who featured in the first presenter’s case. She felt she neglected to give the presenter adequate attention and so she was self-critical of her attitude here.

These feelings of inferiority or negativity toward self were in stark contrast with the cultivation of more positive qualities of self-compassion and kindness towards others. Rosa, for example, was quick to bring this compassion to the second presenter in the Balint session despite not being able to cultivate this response towards herself. Anna

conveyed a sense of understanding and compassion to the presenter acknowledging that it was not always possible to “solve” cases but in fact the real work involves attention to self. Elsa in her diary entry noted feeling empathy towards the presenter and feeling upset for them to the extent she found the case draining.

4.2.4.4 Attitude across *MBSR*, *Deep Talk*, *Balint*

A constant and salient element across all three practices was the attitude of judgement and non-judgement. In MBSR participants, while initially aware of a judging disposition, learned the practice of mindfulness as a way of countering self-criticality and judgement. This non-judging attitude was also present in DT where participants experienced the freedom to engage and participate in the practice without fear of judgement. This can also be framed as learning a capacity for kindness and compassion towards self. In contrast, the element of judgement featured strongly in DT and Balint participants towards self. However, regarding attitude towards others and in particular for the two presenters of cases in Balint, some participants remarked on their feelings of empathy and compassion. This was an attitudinal disposition and as Kaufman noted that in coming to acknowledge and appreciate the personal benefits of contemplative practice there is recognition too of the collective well-being that contemplative practices engender (Kaufman 2017). In MBSR and Deep Talk there was the emergence of a responsive choosing attitude where participants felt they could choose rather than be coerced to react to their experience in practice. Deep Talk and Balint also engendered an attitude of openness and curiosity towards the practices which may be explained by the novelty of both these practices for most participants, as illustrated in Figure 4.4.


 <p>Attitude Dimension</p>	
Elements	Practice
<i>Judging and non-judging</i>	M/DT/B
<i>Responding with choice versus reactive attitude</i>	M/DT
<i>Remaining open minded and curious towards process</i>	DT/B
<i>Developing compassion and kindness</i>	M/B

Figure 4.4 Attitude across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

4.2.5 Awareness

Related to intentionality is choosing to be aware and attend to one’s present experience in a different way (Ergas, 2019, 2020). This awareness has an ‘in the moment’ quality - *awareness of transient information (ATI)* - whereby “awareness engages information in mind about present-moment experience as it happens” (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017, p.1586). This level of awareness extends also to conscious awareness of engagement in contemplation and is retained throughout the period of contemplation (Van Gordon et al. 2022). Awareness of one’s bodily sensations-*interoception*- including becoming aware of previously unconscious internal bodily sensations (Crosswell *et al.* 2024), mental processes and behaviour is a necessary pre-requisite for effective self-regulation supporting well-being. Awareness outside of oneself to include one’s relationships and interdependence with others is essential since we are inherently tied up with others (Kaufman 2017).

4.2.5.1 Awareness in MBSR

Perhaps of all the dimensions, awareness is the one element which one would expect to find in contemplative practice since at its core this dimension is endemic to the nature of contemplation. Awareness in MBSR practice *extended to other aspects of life and in particular to work*. It also shaped how participants considered their *emerging feelings and their well-being* which became more evident in their lives.

Sara's awareness of self through her mindful practice was embodied in everyday living and formed a natural part of the beginning rhythm of her day. This capacity for awareness was an embedded feature of Sara's approach to the world and the practice enabled her to slow down and become more aware of the present moment in her life as a teacher. Work remained a challenge for Lucy, where she struggled to find space for MBSR practice but the opportunity for long practice brought balance and its own reward in helping to regulate the busyness of her role and "just kind of brings me back to earth then kind of you know, really helps, I suppose, just to touch base really with life."

At the end of the programme Tara felt a lot more confident and a lot lighter than pre programme completion so "now things just feel easier" in her work. Lucy engaged with MBSR as she acknowledged that for much of her life her own well-being was sacrificed in deference to care and concern for others and "that it comes at the bottom of a long list of other people's wellbeing." She became more aware of the importance of attending to her own well-being perceiving this not to be "treat" for self but rather as "sort of essential" and she attributed this awareness to her mindfulness practice which also brought her a "feeling of calmness" and a sense of "everything slowing down."

4.2.5.2 Awareness in Deep Talk

Awareness of one's bodily sensations, mental processes and behaviour is a necessary pre-requisite for effective self-regulation, supporting well-being and arguably the first movement in a contemplative practice since without this 'in the moment' quality of each moment as it happens, there can be no context for attending or the cultivation of attitude.

Upon reflecting on DT Alice remarked that initially she had a sense of being cautious, feeling tense at the prospect of being vulnerable with others in the DT setting but later as she engaged with the process of DT, she was aware of being “more comfortable and engaged.” Many times, during the DT experience, Des remarked that he struggled with the lack of apparent logic to the DT method. He displayed a candid honesty in recognising and acknowledging his frustrations when the practical and logical seem to be minimised. His immediate response to the stimulation of the story was nearly always at the intellectual or cognitive level. His honesty was a reminder that having awareness was being able to be open to all of one’s experience. DT gave Martha an insight into the difference between processes of reflecting and wondering, the latter described as much less tied to outcomes and is more open ended. In DT, Lisa came to awareness that there was a vulnerability as to how she allowed herself to remain on the periphery and she saw the need to push herself beyond her comfort zone.

Awareness of her relationship and interdependence with others which is awareness beyond the self, was identified strongly by Alice towards the end of her post DT interview and she recounted that at the very end of the DT experience, reflecting on her active involvement in the story through the placing of her metaphorical figure into the story enabled her to more deeply reflect. During DT, Ellen saw the use of both stories as pointing to the centrality of relationship in her own work. It connected her to the purpose and motivation of her own work - the way of doing what she does.

4.2.5.3 Awareness in Balint

In Balint a *heightened awareness of self both in feeling and thinking* arises from exposure to Balint. The group aspect also compelled participants to *be mindful of their connection with others* and to take care with any interjections or comment so as not to offend. And from Balint some had cause to *reflect on dimensions of their own work practice* particularly in light of the presented cases.

At the outset of the Balint session Cait acknowledged feeling “very uneasy at the beginning” remarking “I just wanted to get it over and done with to see to experience it and see what it was like.” She also had a sense of being nervous and feeling the emotion of the process.

For the second case, Rosa's natural instinct was to comfort the presenter amidst her experience of strong emotions. This revealed Rosa's natural empathetic disposition. But also, her attention to the second presenter and her response to their case was also a cause for reflection on her own dispositions and attitudes. After the emotion of presenting her own case Rosa felt strong emotions which she recorded in her diary when she noted "various emotions, rage, hope, but I understood it felt good to share my dilemma and find that others have been in the same situation." Rosa was able to connect the experience of these strong emotions to insights about her own personality and her upbringing.

Emer's participation in Balint introduced her to the possibility of staying with the other person's story without the urgency to "fix it" and so she recognised a greater appreciation and sensitivity to what others may be asking of her in either her professional or personal contexts. As the first presenter relayed their story Anna was aware of feeling uncomfortable which in turn led to fear and which Anna understands to be "an over-the-top empathy" for the other person because she feels overwhelmed. From Balint Elsa recognised that "it's a different way of sharing and helping each other to what you would be used to." Despite this experience Elsa was also conscious of how she presented in the group. She found herself moving into "solution mode" as she was familiar with the particular school in the case presented.

By the end of the first case presentation Cait eased into the process and the cases deeply resonated and connected with her own experience as a teacher. After the Balint and the next day Elsa noticed the physical effect of participation and the emerging insights she had upon reflection on her own work, and which impacted how she subsequently considered her role.

4.2.5.4 Awareness across *MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint*

Awareness is the most prominent dimension evident across all three practices, as shown in Figure 4.5. This element applies across all three practices with reference to participant's work and to a heightened awareness of their feelings. In mindfulness all participants become increasingly aware of the impact of practice on their daily work and one which is positive allowing self to "slow down." As expected, all three practices bring

acute awareness of arising feelings in practice and beyond to other aspects of life. Sometimes these feelings are negative – anxiety, tension, frustration, impatience, and others are positive – calm, comfortable, empathetic. In Deep Talk and Balint the sense of connection with others was prevalent which may reflect the interactive nature of the practice, and the pedagogy adopted which invites engagement with each other. While it would be expected that MBSR would also feature in this element of connection with others, none of the participants mentioned this aspect except in the general sense of the practice influencing their lives.


 Awareness Dimension	
Elements	Practice
<i>Extending awareness to work</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>
<i>Enhancing awareness of self and emerging well-being</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>
<i>Connecting to and with others</i>	<i>DT/B</i>

Figure 4.5 Awareness across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

4.2.6 Self-Regulation

The processes of orienting, shifting, and sustaining attention combined with metacognitive awareness to effectively manage thoughts, emotional responses, and behaviour is a “metacognitive self-regulatory capacity (MSRC) of the mind” (Dorjee, p.1) and this awareness is a necessary pre-requisite for effective self-regulation (SR) supporting well-being. A specific aspect of SR is the introspective metacognition attention (awareness and knowledge of bodily sensations, mental phenomena, and behaviour). A secondary related element of SR is the capacity for emotion regulation, effectively navigating distressing situations (Crosswell et al. 2024). It includes cultivation

of qualities and unique emotion regulation strategies to name emotions, visualization, reflective contemplations, and transformation of negative emotions into their positive emotion 'antidotes,' (Dorjee, 2016, p.4).

4.2.6.1 Self-Regulation in MBSR

As a practice MBSR has as one of its intentions the purpose of self-regulation and the managing of emotions. In bringing a meta-awareness and attention to self, Sara was capable through her practice of not becoming swamped by recognising what was happening to her in the moment and as she said, "whatever is there, is there." Tara's mode of grounding herself was literally to connect with her feet as a mechanism for breaking the cycle of her rumination and taking her out of her unhelpful mind. It was by giving attention to her body and to her feet that Tara came to find herself being more grounded which helped break any sense of being panicked or unstable and supported her to slow down and notice her experience. As she progressed through the programme, she was also aware that the practices were enabling her to pause and "get back on track," became less reactionary and obtained greater control over her thinking patterns which in the past led her to "spiral out of control." Lucy after completing the programme was less perturbed by her self-critical mind and was more readily able to remain present with her thinking mind and be less anxious and as she said to handle these thoughts much better. When noticing her racing mind Lucy was using her breath to anchor and stabilise her emotions when anxious but also attending to her breath as a way of maintaining her positive sense of well-being.

Sara identified her capacity to make choices in response to her state of being. As she moved through practice and the MBSR programme it brought awareness to the propensity for being consumed by thinking and the capacity to regulate but this was not without a challenge. This had the potential to develop capacity for greater space for choice and a recognition that "there's a different way, there's a better way sometimes" to respond to whatever arises. She acknowledged that habitual patterns were hard to break but she also held that the possibility of choice coupled with courage to face this reality could lead to change - "I notice that I can choose to respond, I can choose to

notice it.” Sara viewed the bringing of mindfulness to her own personal and professional life to be a “valuable tool for me to be able to share with kids in the classroom but just even for my own emotional regulation, for my own presence in the classroom.” She later remarked that her awareness of being more present was enhanced by her practice of mindfulness leading her to be more “tuned in” to the “emotional *leads or emotional climate in the classroom*” and responsiveness to activity therein. Lucy noticed that on becoming aware of her feelings she had better control or more regulation over negative feelings. Lucy was learning to step back from the habits of compulsive doing and learning to make more acceptable choices about what she really wished to do.

4.2.6.2 Self-Regulation in Deep Talk

Several participants remarked on the heightened level of emotions experienced in DT and found participation as a “trigger” for other dimensions of their lives including relationships. For example, Natalie was in the middle of a stressful and demanding place in her life moving jobs and was experiencing a sense of rejection. She found the DT workshop helpful as a way of supporting her to face her emotions without feeling swamped since as she described “the flood of feelings was probably there beforehand, and that [DT] really helped to process that in a way for me.” The element of silence was a feature remarked upon by some as a way of giving space to face emerging emotions in response to DT. Alice remarked on being easy with the periods of silence throughout as it offered her space to reflect after a demanding year for her personally and professionally. During DT Des recognised his ease with the periods of silence, recording that “the silence during the session was just silence. I didn't feel any need to try and fill it.” and he was content to allow the silence to give him space to think and reflect.

For Ellen, DT provided an opportunity to reflect on her own life and to wonder in respect of the quality of care towards herself helping her to “look within and really make you think. Am I taking care of myself? Is there a well-being aspect in my life, or not?” Several participants commented on the process of DT itself as a way of connecting with a range of inner emotions and thoughts. Bob remarked that the use of the sand totally took him out of himself and “focused me very much on what was happening.” And Clara remarked

that in the days after the practice she felt “a great calmness within me” a real sense of being her “best self, as much as you can” and appreciating the need to bring more of herself to work in a way that nurtures her confidence.

4.2.6.3 Self-Regulation in Balint

As a method Emer saw Balint allowing one to remain with the reality of one’s experience without desiring to change this reality – “it permits things to be as they are.”

In advance of presenting her case, Rosa observed in her diary that she was curious, excited and a little anxious as to what might come up. After the conclusion of the second case in Balint, Rosa remarked feeling “more relaxed physically, and I’m enthusiastic about the possibility of attending more support groups.” What she recognised to be of particular help was the sense of connection which she received from the group as a means of helping her process all of the feedback from presenting her case. Jenny, also a case presenter, acknowledged that the Balint group helped her to gain perspective and to step back “knowing there was no right, there was no wrong. There was just a wholeness.”

Tracey was very aware of deliberately slowing down in her thinking and active responses during moments of processing the cases. She was also keen to be fully present to the presenters and felt a sense of responsibility towards them as the process was not to “be taken flippantly” and she remarks on how Balint was a “kind of processing externally and internally.” She gave an honest assessment of how she first felt towards the case of the first presenter with a dual response, feeling frustrated and annoyed but also in her own work recognising that sometimes one has to “hold back.” Elsa felt Balint offered an outlet to manage the stress of complex situations and also provided supportive affirmation as a protective and “holding” space.

4.2.6.4 Self-Regulation across *MBSR*, *Deep Talk*, *Balint*

As shown in Figure 4.6, across all three interventions the practices enabled participants to remain grounded in the reality of their experience however difficult or challenging. This grounding gave participants a present moment feel to their experience and encouraged them to stay with reality rather than avoid. Another commonality was the

potential for these practices to help participants choose how to respond to problems and presenting challenges particularly in work which has the added benefit of helping participants to be more emotionally attuned. A final commonality was the actual use of the process elements themselves in supporting regulation of self – in mindfulness the breath, in DT the elements in particular the props and the use of silence and in Balint the opportunity to present a case as a window in professional practice. Unique to Balint was the strong emphasis identified by participant’s in how the group member aspect of the process gave each other a different perspective and helped to modulate one’s immediate response which could be “flippant.”


 Self-Regulation Dimension	
Elements	Practice
<i>Remaining grounded through practice</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>
<i>Choosing how to respond personally and professionally</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>
<i>Regulating capacity of group members</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Regulating capacity of the process elements</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>

Figure 4.6 Self-Regulation across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

4.2.7 Process

The purpose of contemplation for each person is unique. It ordinarily involves an open process of investigation, exploration, observation, and/or reflection directed toward the object of contemplation and recognises that one’s emerging experience has a value in and of itself even if no end outcome is obtained (Van Gordon et al. 2022). This process dimension includes elements of *physical safety* since the physical environment is a predominate source of safety (and threat) signals, and traditional contemplative practices are often undertaken in intentionally safe spaces. The activation of secure

attachment and social belonging via relationships with trusted teachers and fellow practitioners in contemplative practice creates a *social safety* (Crosswell et al. 2024).

4.2.7.1 Process in MBSR

Sara believed that the constancy of MBSR practice in small measures collectively leads to an improvement in overall well-being. She described MBSR as a process of “navigating” with the tools which were a personal support and, in her teaching, helped her to recognise patterns of being and how to respond to what emerged. Later she described this process as learning to trust her practice in the belief that with this *“kind of trusting that the answer will come and trusting that you know it will work its way out once I keep practicing.”* With MBSR practice, Lucy recognised its efficacy and learned to directly respond to moments of stress through the process of grounding and focusing on her feet.

Tara’s wish at the outset to relate to others and in her case particularly Irish people (as she was abroad for the course), expressed the process dimension of practice through the safety of social connection as part of practice. The presence of other people in the class was also a support to Lucy as she enjoyed sharing and listening to others on their experience of practice and doubted whether the MBSR programme could be completed on her own, without the support of others.

From the practice of meditation Tara noticed that MBSR brought a stillness, reduced her tendency to panic and mitigated against her ruminating mind which can cripple her confidence. She acknowledged that as she learned more about herself - “the more I’m realising it it's a never-ending process, and I think it will be kind of a life practice.” She identified a number of elements of the mindfulness process which she carried into her daily life – continuing with practice, being present or coming into the present as often as possible, and bringing mindfulness into every aspect of her day so “when I’m working or when I’m just going for a walk or something just being there and doing what I’m doing. I think that's really, what I want to continue doing.” Lucy found the taking of time to practice her breathing “kind of helps me through the day.” This habit was not only for when her mind wanders but had also become a natural part of her daily living.

4.2.7.2 Process in Deep Talk

Several participants had some prior experience of group reflective practice though most came without prior knowledge of Deep Talk. In DT several reported that learning from others and being with others in a 'safe space' was instrumental in shaping participant response and the attention to thoughts, feelings, and experience. When asked to consider her response to being invited to place herself in the story Alice believed that engaging the whole group made it a shared and enjoyable experience. Martha noted that in the process everybody was generous and open and that one's viewpoint was not judged, nor did it really matter as she experienced the atmosphere as inclusive where nobody was seeking to impress. Ellen remarked on the warmth and acceptance of the group whom she felt were on the "same brainwave with each other."

The use of props, the vehicle of the story itself and the creation of the conceptual space within DT were all aspects of the process which Alice perceived as contributory to her engagement and exploration of the DT process. Reflecting on DT, Natalie remarked on the elements of the process too- the sand, the story, the use of objects as a metaphor - all which drew her into reflection at the time of the experience but also afterwards so that she remained in a further stage of contemplating. In DT Clara remarked on the process of exploration using the figures which assisted her to look at herself in a different way and providing an alternative perspective on her life. Clara mentioned too the use of movement which gave her a new perspective and as a process opened up a different way of seeing and understanding, paradoxically by making her feel uncomfortable. In contrast, in his post DT interview, Des was direct and forthright in his immediate response to DT citing the lack of and direction and his struggle with the lack of purpose and the use of the DT methodology. The open-ended nature of DT as a process and the collective understanding of the experience shared by the group was initially too non-directional for Des though he shifted in his understanding of the DT process acknowledging that logic "doesn't always have to be the chief driver. Commenting on the use of silence in DT, several participants considered it to be helpful and a contributor to creating a reflective space without being awkward creating the pressure to speak. Natalie described the use of silence by the facilitator as a "thinking

silence” and as *comfortable* since it offered support to the group to collectively reflect and interpret what was happening for each during the DT experience.

A number mentioned that the facilitator was central to creating a safe process in “holding” the group. For example, Martha cited the role of the facilitator as significant in generating respect via the use of people's names and her skills to facilitate the session. She described the methodology as “hypnotic” citing how the figures were put back so gently with a tangible respect for everything. She used the word hypnotic to describe other elements in the telling of the story by the facilitator - the hands, detachment from the face of the storyteller, her voice and pace - and in conclusion, the hands over the story which she found soothing and comforting. Bob too referenced the capacity of the facilitator to create an atmosphere where all were “encouraged but with the element of choice” to engage as they wished.

4.2.7.3 Process in Balint

In Balint several participants alluded to the clarity, purpose, and the structure of Balint facilitated by the leader as helpful to clarify intentions for the session. For example, Tracey found the session helpful because of what she described as an “efficient” process where there was a real focus to the task at hand and the avoidance of irrelevancy or small talk. Cait, familiar with other group reflective processes reflecting on her Balint experience “liked the formality of it and the kind of structure to it.” She liked the formality of the process – the structure and the boundaries of the Balint as something which helped ground her for what was about to happen. Anna comparing Balint with other group processes of which she said can “descend into offloading and fixing,” valued the invitation by the facilitator not to move into fix mode but to stay with the feeling component of the presenter’s case. For Elsa, the structured space supported self-reflection and in a group process this enriched the potential for learning since reflection as an individual can be isolating and unfocused. As a contribution to her own personal and professional well-being Tracey felt Balint offered “structured, constructive support” and an opportunity to present a case from work. She recognised and valued the structure of the Balint process and the presentation of clear cases which allowed the group to process and to listen purposefully and with care and respect.

Emer was a member of similar type groups before and when she was invited to comment on the overall lack of silence or quiet time in the group, she believed participants wanted to “perform” in the group, to be seen to be active. As a case presenter Rosa was exposed to silence more than the rest of the group as she sat out on her case. This was not an easy position for her to hold but she recognises its value and the space for insight which it offers. Commenting on the absence of silence in the group for the most part, Elsa feels this arose from feelings of discomfort from participants, the need to talk and be active. The presence and impact of others in the group experience features prominently in the feedback on Balint. On her experience of Balint, Emer remarked being in a new group induces anxiety. She also noted a sense of feeling inferior at the outset while at the same time she acknowledged frustration that people in this new Balint group were keen to preserve the “niceties” and to be less direct and honest which in turn restricts her own capacity to be forthright. Remarking on these elements of social safety she expressed frustration that everyone initially played it safe. In contrast Cait found it helpful to be with a group of strangers as it gave more freedom to express oneself. At the end of the case presentations, Cait remarked in her diary entry of having “a sense of well-being, completion, feelings of shared experiences, comforting, grateful for the honesty.” She experienced an honesty from the group and the presenters which lead to her sense of the Balint with this group as occurring in a “very safe space.” Jenny, as a case presenter, captured the recognised the contribution of members to help her safely “reflect on your own process and your own bias and your own, you know, the way of thinking when you're hearing other people asking questions.”

Anna was also comforted by the guidance of the facilitator for the session whom she described as holding the group but “didn't let it run on and also give people plenty of time to speak. Tracey also remarked on the manner of the facilitator in setting the tone for the group and allowing space for time to think.

4.2.7.4 Process across *MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint*

Unsurprisingly, the process element of all three practices generates the most vibrant discussion from participants, as illustrated in Figure 4.7. The group element of practice featured across all three practices. In summary, being in practice with others is considered a supportive mechanism reducing isolation and offering direct support to each other.

In MBSR all participants allude to the learning of tools which are a support to their practice. Similarly, in DT the adopted tools e.g. use of props, and the dialogical space created support participants to be present in a contemplative manner. In DT there was also frequent allusion to the use of silence in the process as a facilitator for a “thinking space.” For DT, the use of story and the process, described by one participant as “hypnotic” drew all into a place of natural and active engagement with the process. And in Balint the structure of the process itself was considered an influence to enable participants remain focused and present to the experience. Balint, perhaps because the presented cases resonated with the professional lives of the teacher participants, created a context for desire to engage and contribute.

The role of facilitator features in DT and Balint and in the former was considered instrumental in creating a contemplative space with their “hypnotic” capacity through the use of voice, hands, and pacing. In Balint the clear guidance offered by the facilitator ensures that participants are aware of the Balint purpose and be of support to each other and to the case presenters.

In mindfulness the practices “tools” of mindfulness were a support to participants in contributing to enhanced well-being as managing levels of stress. And furthermore, these tools were used by participants in other aspects of their lives both personally and professionally.


 Process Dimension	
Elements	Practice
<i>Supporting influence of others in group</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>
<i>Trusting the practice tools even when challenging</i>	<i>M/DT/B</i>
<i>Enabling role of Facilitator</i>	<i>DT/B</i>
<i>Extending practice to all of life</i>	<i>M</i>

Figure 4.7 Process across MBSR, Deep Talk, Balint

4.3 Interplay Across Dimensions of Contemplative Thinking-Practice

This section presents the findings from the review of interplay between the aforementioned dimensions of contemplative thinking.

4.3.1 Interplay of Intentionality

This study revealed interplays in a unidirectional flow from the dimension of intentionality to the dimensions of *intention, attitude, awareness, self-regulation, and process*. There was no evidence of an interplay from intentionality to *attention* across any of the three practices. There is no direct reference in the literature to the interplay between intentionality and these dimensions.

The unidirectional flow from *intentionality to intention* was present within two practices - MBSR and Deep Talk (DT). This interplay was perhaps expected as original intentionality for joining a contemplative programme might change or shift in emphasis throughout

the practice. An example came from Lucy, whose *intentionality* for joining MBSR was to enhance her overall well-being and to feel calmer and more positive about her life. Her *intention* shifted to deliberately make practice a more regular habit in her life outside of the programme and also to “live life more in the moment.” As she comes to the end of the programme her *intention* has also shifted again so that she is considering taking regular mindfulness courses to ensure she maintains her “mindful habit.” A further example of the interplay from intentionality to intention is drawn from Deep Talk. Lisa reflecting on her *intentionality*, expressed her desire to use DT in her work but soon realised “I was there for myself, and I was there also to learn in terms of learning for my own personal development,” a connection to *intention*.

There was no evidence of an intentionality to attitude interplay among participants in either Deep Talk or Balint. However, this interplay was present in MBSR as illustrated by two participants. Sara hoped that her *intentionality* for participation in MBSR would not only have a benefit for herself but that it would cultivate a positive *attitude* towards her teaching role enabling the development of compassion for self and others. And Tara’s *intentionality* for joining, originally to contain her anxiety, modified and broadened as she identified an *attitude* of “curiosity to learn more about myself” and “what else I can work on in my life.”

An interplay from *intentionality to awareness* is present across all three practices – MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint. In MBSR, Lucy, as an example, and who had some prior informal experience of mindfulness, expressed her *intentionality* to build on this initial exposure as she became *aware* now of being a different person and to MBSR is “coming at it from a new angle... a little bit older, and as a mother, and still as a teacher.” From Deep Talk Martha remarked that her *intentionality* was to “come and leave there with a tool that I will use in my work. But I soon became *aware* of how it impacted me personally in so many ways which came as a surprise.” In Balint, Emer cited that her *intentionality* “was to go and listen to other people's perspectives in a way that I don't normally do and to layer on top of that for myself.” Reflecting afterwards she did feel she adhered to this but as time evolved and the group became more cohesive, she

became *aware* of the “normal process where we were more free with each other and our comments” which in turn encouraged a “more real engagement.”

The unidirectionally from *intentionality to self-regulation* was seen in MBSR but not present in DT or Balint. Tara came to MBSR with an *intentionality* to manage her considerable anxiety and stress. She then recognised that while this is part of who she is, from MBSR she is learning to cope better and *self-regulate*, observing, “I’ll always get panicked or get anxious. I don’t have to continue to get stuck in that.” Furthermore, the unidirectional interplay from *intentionality to process* was not present in DT or Balint but seen in MBSR. Here Sara identified and linked her *intentionality* for joining the MBSR programme specifically because it is a recognised model of formal mindfulness training and one which is characterised by ‘high ethical standards’ in terms of programme *process*, content, and delivery.

4.3.2 Interplay of Intention

This study revealed interplays between the dimension of intention in a bidirectional flow with the dimensions of *attention and attitude*. There was no presence of an interplay of intention with *awareness, self-regulation, and process*. The literature cites the interplay of intention to attention and attention to intention. (Grossenbacher and Quaglia 2017) but has no account of the interplay of intention with attitude.

Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) have uniquely defined *intended attention* (IA) as “attending that has been specified by an intention primarily about attention” and comprises “all attending that has been made more likely by virtue of intentions that specifically invoke attention” (p.1584). Although not present in DT or Balint there was an illustration of the interplay from *intention to attention* taken from MBSR participant Sara. Reflecting on her original *intentions* in joining the MBSR and how these had changed over the programme she found that by *attending* to these in writing they were, “always there to remind me why I’m doing this, even if, if I don’t feel like doing it.” Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) in their framework for mindfulness as a contemplative practice define *attention to intention* (A→I) “as attentional modulation and/or monitoring of an intention” (p.1585). As attention and intention, are closely

interrelated, and subject to confusion the arrow here “indicates the present-moment operation of attention on intention in (A→I) and here it regulates the efficiency of current intending, whether through facilitation of a selected intention, inhibition of competing intentions, sustaining an already operative intention, and/or re-engaging one that has waned” (ibid.1585). In MBSR and Deep Talk there was no evidence of an interplay from attention to intention, however, this interplay was present as a unidirectional movement in Balint. As an example, Rosa was purposefully *attending* to the group mood, and remarked, “I was taking my time at the start and seeing how others were in the group, I didn't want to be the first to offer a case.” Following this stance Rosa was also equally mindful of her *intention* in that very moment as “I had this topic, this dilemma, this case to address and maybe to ask for support.”

The interplay from *intention to attitude* is not found in DT or Balint but is present in MBSR. Sara, at the end of the programme linked her *intention* for practice as less outcome driven but instead orientated to a trusting *attitude* so that the practice would support her as long as she maintained her commitment. She remarked, “practising is not about a goal. I don't think there's anything to be achieved. I think it's about practising and knowing, trusting that the practice will support me in my own life because I know it does. So that kind of takes away the goal orientation.” The interplay from *attitude to intention* is not present in MBSR and Balint but is evident in DT. At the beginning of the DT session Alice remarks on her *attitude* of curiosity as the process began and this remained with her throughout. While in advance she had expectations of what might be involved, in the actual session she spoke about remaining open in respect of her **intentions** to whatever was going to happen as “I had no agenda.”

4.3.3. Interplay of Attention

There was an interplay from the dimension of *attention to attitude* which was unidirectional in movement and from *attention to awareness* which had a bidirectional flow. There was no presence of an interplay from attention to *intentionality, self-regulation, or process*. There is no direct reference in the literature to the interplay between attention to these dimensions.

Although not present in Balint as an interplay, attention to attitude was evidenced in MBSR and Deep Talk as a unidirectional flow. From MBSR, Lucy, acknowledged that in practice she continued to struggle to *attend* to negative emotions or feelings, but realised that there was nothing to be gained by denying this reality and so changed her *attitude* accepting that “it is healthier to acknowledge even my negative feelings.” In Deep Talk Bob remarked that from the outset in *attending* to the unfolding of the process he was absorbed with how the leader weaved the story through playing with the sand which he said, “totally took me out of myself and focused me very much on what was happening. And he quickly became reassured and calm which gave him an *attitude* of confidence to share his thoughts and respond with openness and honesty. The interplay between attention and awareness is bidirectional. It is present in MBSR and in Deep Talk in a unidirectional flow from attention to awareness but no evidence in Balint. From MBSR Sara has identified a pattern of *attending* to her thoughts at the start of the day even before rising so that, as she says, “I am tuning or checking in with self” and “*being aware* of the here and now” by tuning into thoughts and sensations in her body. In Deep Talk, Des, along with the other participants was invited to *attend* to his positioning in the Deep Talk story and he remarked, “Okay, I have a role in this now and now that I'm in the story, what am I doing there? Would I do things differently? And so, I got more involved.” This brought a shift for Des where he “felt that I *noticed* I was more involved than just merely observing.” Only in MBSR is the interplay between awareness and attention present and in a unidirectional thrust *from awareness to attention*. Here, Tara was much more *aware* of the need to experience her life and has realised that the “more I focus on that and the more I kind of come back to the present” by giving her life and practice *attention* then the greater capacity she has to live with purpose and enjoyment.

4.3.4 Interplay of Awareness

Brandmeyer and Delorme's (2021) study on the influence of awareness and attention on mindfulness practice, highlighted the role of awareness of spontaneous thought and the cyclical observation of involuntary shifts of attention as being at the core of focused-attention meditation practice. This study revealed an interplay from the awareness

dimension to *attention, attitude, self-regulation, and process* which were all in a unidirectional flow but found no presence of an interplay from awareness to *intentionality, or intention*.

The interplay from *awareness to attention* was present in MBSR and not in DT or Balint. An example from Lucy illustrated how more aware she had become of her everyday reality and connecting to her experience through her practice when she said, “I think it's so easy and I'm *aware* that I am doing it [connecting to her experience] more but I'm also aware that a lot of the time I am just rushing around or doing things and not actually kind of experiencing things.” Her shift in attention was expressed when she remarked, “Though I think the more I focus on that, the more I kind of come back to the present and then the more it [connecting to her experience] happens naturally.”

The study revealed the interplay in a unidirectional flow from *awareness to attitude* across all three practices, MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint. In MBSR Lucy became *aware of* what was happening in the moments of her everyday life and even when she exhibited less than the desired skill, she was non-judgemental in *attitude* and was “not going to beat myself up as much about it, when it happens. With what he describes as his “logical side” Des noticed in the Deep Talk intervention that he was *aware* of bringing this rationality to the DT story element and asked questions about what was unfolding. He observed that group members approached the story in different ways which was of interest to him, and this spiked his *attitude* of curiosity. Emer in Balint was *aware* that she might appear too direct and “name things as she sees them” which would damage the climate of trust in the group and found herself at times saying to herself - “Don't say this now.” However, this “holding back” at times in the group led to an *attitude* of feeling a “little bit frustrated by the immediate reassurance everyone wanted to give in the group to the presenters.

The interplay from *awareness to self-regulation* featured among several participants from across all three practices of MBSR, DT and Balint and all in a unidirectional movement. An increased capacity for awareness and self-regulation from her MBSR programme led to Lucy's *awareness* for her the ability to “observe and say, “okay I'm very stressed and rushing around” but this was tempered with her insight that *by self-*

regulating, “I can then also take a step back and say, “Okay, I can also change this, and it doesn't have to be this way.” Remarking on his *awareness* of silence in the Deep Talk and its capacity to facilitate *self-regulation*, Des commented it was “just silence. I didn't feel any need to try and fill it. But I was more conscious of allowing the silence than I had been before.” And so that's a huge learning from me, the power of silence.” Cait remarked that in Balint she became *aware* of feeling “anxious, jittery, uneasy” at the start of the process and hoping somebody would speak first “to show the way.” But as the session progressed, she grew in confidence and became more *self-regulated* as she “tapped into” her feelings and what helped was the “scanning of the environment, seeing who's here, weighing the process up, and trying to get a handle and control how I was feeling.” In another Balint example, Anna was very *aware* of the strength of feelings both in herself, in the presenter and the group. For her, it was firstly a feeling of empathy to the presenter and understanding for the pressure she was under. But in recognising the depth and range of feelings she noted in terms of her own *self-regulation*, “It's a really good, taking a step back, especially when it's busy, especially when there's lots of issues going on that, you know, if you if you can just step back and see, right, you know, what's mine, and what's not mine, and to see what's really happening here.”

Awareness to process features as an interplay in Deep Talk and Balint, occurring several times in both practices and was unidirectional in flow. It was not present in MBSR. Being part of a new group in Deep Talk, Alice became *aware* at a point of feeling “a bit uncomfortable about the whole kind of group thing because you're just thinking about yourself in the group *process* and wondering “where are we going to go with this whole group thing and your place in the group”. From another example in Deep Talk, Natalie, in comparison to another reflective group experience, was *aware* of feeling safer in the DT group as the boundaries were held very well by the facilitator creating a *process* she describes as a “therapeutic effect” on her mood at the time. In Balint, reflecting on her capacity to be *aware*, Emer remarked there were times she was one dimensional in her focus “because you can get fixated on the presenter and forget the case story” and she welcomed the redirection from the facilitator's *process* which helped her to consider

the case with new perspective as she “was blocked by the other aspects of the story initially based off the anxiety I was feeling.”

4.3.5 Interplay of Attitude

This study found interplay from the dimension of *attitude to self-regulation* which was also cited in a previous study by Baer et al. (2008). An interplay also existed from *attitude to process* and from *attitude to awareness* that has not been previously recorded in the literature. The flow was unidirectional from attitude to both of these dimensions. There was no presence of an interplay from attitude to *intentionality, intention, and attention*. In respect of attitude and self-regulation, Baer *et al.*, (2008) captured this interplay as “nonreactivity to inner experience and is the tendency to allow thoughts and feelings to come and go” (p.30). There were examples from MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint of a unidirectional flow from *attitude to self-regulation*. From MBSR Tara learned to change her *attitude* to the overwhelming demands of work and by seeking to *self-regulate*. She stated, “I see now that I have to find a way, it's okay, these things come up and they happen to everybody, and you just have to deal with them.” While elements of the DT process were appealing to Des – use of sand, movement, imagery - he acknowledged his *attitude* of frustration – “What was getting to me was, where is this going in terms of a use of logic and the tools to a decision or what is it actually and so I got a bit frustrated in that bit.” However, he found that “staying with what was happening” helped him to *self-regulate* and “consider possibilities for the use of the process” for himself and his work. In Balint Jenny who presented a case felt frustrated in her *attitude* because her student was not progressing and wondered whether she had failed the student but then was relieved to hear from the group that she had done her best. She remarked of her capacity to *self-regulate* that “something that resonated with me was no matter what I could have done, whether you've done less, whether you've done more, it would never have been enough and so I learned about managing my boundaries.”

In Deep Talk there were occurrences in the interplay from *attitude to process*, but this is not present in MBSR and Balint. All examples from DT were unidirectional from *attitude to process*. To illustrate Alice noted, when invited to move as part of the DT exercise, her *attitude* was “open and easy” to moving places since she considered herself

an active learner and besides, as she noted, everybody was moving which “made you less conscious” and was enjoyable. Her ease was expressed when she remarked on the DT *process* that “I didn’t think twice about getting up and moving and taking up a different perspective.” From another example, Martha found the atmosphere in DT devoid of judgemental *attitude* where it was so “openly and honestly and non-judgmentally with others sharing and leading to deep engagement.” She felt that the *process* brought you back to “being playful like a child” using the elements of sand and toys” and helped to bring all into a deeper and more meaningful experience in exploring themselves.

There was evidence of a unidirectional flow from *attitude to awareness* in all three practices. In MBSR, Lucy remarked on her prior judgemental *attitude* towards her commitment to practice considering herself almost self-indulgent, “because up until now, I probably would have felt ‘oh I’m going to lie down and meditate that’s like an absolute treat or I’m going for a walk by myself but then I’m leaving the children behind”. She then became aware that the practice was “just part of my well-being and it should be part of my day, and it might not happen every day, but as many days as I can.” In DT, Lisa reflected on the general context of her life, some it marked by pain and realised “I think it is sometimes *attitude*, and how you look at it? Like do you look at life and say oh, that was unfair! Why did that happen to me?” And in DT she became *aware* of how one of the stories resonated with her “because it’s kind of like I came to see I had a choice.” Anna, from Balint, in response to one of the cases had a deep *attitude* of empathy towards one of the presenters, reflecting, “I think I felt a lot of just like, hopeless, is maybe not the right word, but just that feeling of ‘where does she go from here? Like, this is too hard. It’s too much. How do we help her?” And yet she shifted in her *awareness* to realise, “I was conscious of, like, we’re not getting into fixing this here. I was trying to feel my feelings on it, trying to just reflect how I felt on it rather than wanting to fix it”

4.3.6 Interplay of Self-Regulation

The flow was unidirectional in the interplay from *self-regulation to attention* and from *self-regulation to awareness*. There was no evidence of a flow from self-regulation to

the other dimensions *such as: intentionality, intention, attitude, process*. There was an account in the literature of the influence of a number of mechanisms, which work as a unity to establish a process of enhanced self-regulation in mindfulness practice (Hölzel *et al.*, 2011).

Self-regulation to attention as an interplay featured in MBSR but was not present in Deep Talk and Balint. Sara, from MBSR noticed that “bringing mindfulness to my own life and bringing mindfulness to my own work is so valuable even for my own *emotional regulation* and for my own presence in the classroom.” She linked this consequence to a capacity for *attention* by being “more tuned into the emotional needs or emotional climate in the classroom.”

The interplay from *self-regulation to awareness* in a unidirectional flow was not present in MBSR but existed in Deep Talk and Balint. In Deep Talk, Natalie, commented on her current experience of personal and work stress, noting her *self-regulatory* capacity, “I think the workshop helped me to go with it, not to shut it down. I think I had been shutting it down at home and doing the work and putting it away. But I think the workshop really helped to bring that up, and to look at it from the perspective, almost like stepping outside it.” And as a result, she became *aware of* “the flood of feelings” she was experiencing before the DT session. In Balint, Tracey felt the session helped her to *self-regulate*, to “slow you down maybe a little bit and what you’re processing externally and internally” and she became more *aware* in Balint as she commented on her response to the first presenter, “Am I saying the right thing? I don't want to make this worse for the person. I want to try and help them.”

4.3.7 Interplay of Process

The flow was unidirectional in the interplay from *process to awareness*, from *process to attitude and from process to self-regulation*. There was no evidence of a flow from process to the other dimensions of *intentionality, intention, attention*. Brandmeyer and Delorme (2021) considered the influence of mindfulness practice or process on the propensity for mind wandering which they defined “as the disruption of focused attention or task focus” (p.46). In this study of MBSR, DT and Balint, an interplay existed from *process to awareness*. Part of the MBSR programme involved the practice of yoga

type movement and from her experience with this practice *process* Lucy commented, “God, this feels great, this feels lovely to be doing and being *aware* of my body and ...I just find it very good for me.” Clara, in Deep Talk, found that the *process* was both interesting and enjoyable and enabled her to look at herself from another perspective bringing a “kind of rationality to my thoughts and emotions” which heightened her *awareness* of self. Commenting further, the elements of DT with the story itself and the use of the figures in the *process* made Clara “wonder how I can bring more of my own self to my work, a more satisfied version of myself as well.” Deep Talk helped her to become more *aware* of herself since she felt uncomfortable with the division between her personal and professional self. As an example in Balint, Anna remarked that Balint was distinct because it was not directed to offering advice but was a *process* of “wondering” – about the presenter, the case itself, other people in the case story and was “a controlled way to only think and be *aware* about how you're feeling and not around what the other people think we should do.

Present in MBSR and Deep Talk but not in Balint, the interplay from *process to attitude* was unidirectional in movement. As Lucy developed and grew into the *process* of her MBSR practice she was more non-judgemental in *attitude* of her wandering mind recognising that this happens in life and in mindfulness practice. Considering DT to be a gentle invitation to engagement Natalie commented on the openness and flexibility of this process and identified it as a space “where you know things don't have to be a certain way” which in turn cultivated an *attitude* of openness and trust for herself and among the group.

Featuring in MBSR and DT and not in Balint an interplay occurred unidirectionally from *process to self-regulation*. From MBSR, one of the outcomes in Sara's teaching role was the emergence of an interplay now between the *process* of mindfulness, and her capacity to counter the future-oriented and task dimension of teaching so that in “mindfully teaching” she was “less caught up, and running ahead of myself, and slowing down” and *self-regulating* since “the intensity of our teaching is very much future focused a lot of the time as opposed to more of a now focus”. In practicing her breathing processes through MBSR this became automatic for Lucy which helped her to *self-*

regulate even “when my mind is wondering” or “feeling bad or panicky” or even when she had no negative feelings. In Balint, Ellen commented that for her in the DT *process* both of the stories used in the session “were very much about connection” which she believed was particularly important. Ellen acknowledged struggling at times in her teaching role and the session helped her to self-regulate and reappraise her position as it “brought me back, I suppose as to why I'm doing this work in the first place and why I wanted to get into this field of work.”

A number of three-way interplays emerged across the practices which are discussed below. Though a number of studies have considered various three-way connections on some of the dimensions alluded to here below (Shapiro *et al.*, 2006; Baer *et al.*, 2008; Vago and David, 2012) there was no direct identification in the literature in the manner in which they appear here.

This interplay from *Attention to Attitude to Self-Regulation* occurred in MBSR and not in DT and Balint. In a unidirectional flow, an example is Tara's whose initial starting point in participating was to avoid negative feelings or to distract herself by placing *attention* elsewhere. She developed a more trusting instinct and *attitude* towards herself to do more things and was “not so insecure about doing things. Okay, I'll try them if they don't work, and that's okay” As a *self-regulating* strategy if she experienced something negative or felt negative, she commented that: “I can just let it be and feel it instead of trying to always push it away, which causes me probably more stress for anxiety.

In a three-way interplay from *attitude to awareness to self-regulation* there was evidence in MBSR and Balint but not in DT. In MBSR, Lucy exhibited a self-judgement *attitude* when she remarked after the halfway point in the programme that “maybe if I was a bit more *aware* of the present, then I will be able to switch off (*self-regulate*) a bit more from work to home to school.” In Balint Rosa remarked in her diary about bringing an *attitude* of “curiosity, excitement and a little anxiety,” as to what might come up. She also had *awareness* in her body, trying to breathe deeply. But just before she offered to present a case she says, “I settled myself and her capacity to *self-regulate* is expressed when she commented “if it happens, it happens and if not, I can still enjoy” This three-way interplay is unidirectional from *attitude to awareness to self-regulation*.

This interplay from *awareness to process to self-regulation* was present in MBSR and Balint but absent in DT. The occurrences were all unidirectional. In MBSR Tara learned to be more *aware* when she was physically stressed or tensed up. She found that using the *process* of pausing by “focusing just on my feet on the ground,” she could *self-regulate*. From Balint, an example is Elsa, who despite her teaching and life experience was surprised by what she learned about herself and was *aware* of the need “to be a little bit more flexible in my thinking because although I have all this experience...there's still a lot I can learn from all sorts of people in all sorts of situations. She found the *process* of Balint opened her to a different perspective on her role as a teacher and her tendency to “jump in” and solve even if it is from what she perceives to be well intentioned.

The interplay from *Awareness to Attitude to Process* was absent from MBSR but occurred in DT and in Balint in a unidirectional flow. In the Deep Talk intervention, Alice was *aware* of feeling initially uncomfortable and vulnerable after the first episode of DT and expressed a cautious *attitude* with the invitation to engage, wondering about her place in the group *process*: she remarked, “where do you see yourself in the group because that's very personal.” In Balint Emer was *aware* of being incredibly nervous at the start and feeling intimidated, sensing that others in the room were more experienced than her as a young teacher. She remarked in terms of *attitude*, that she thought she was in “a lower place than everyone else and was very worried about how I'm going to be perceived.” She remarked on “many niceties at the start of the group, where everyone was afraid to be more direct or more honest” but acknowledged this is normal for a new *group process*.

The interplay from *Awareness to Process to Attitude* was observed in DT but not in MBSR and Balint. Clara remarked Deep Talk “brought me to a deeper sense and *awareness* of self which I really liked, but in a very, in a very rational way.” She enjoyed the “kinesthetic methodology” *process* touching the pieces, walking around, having the dialogue through active listening to others. She noted her *attitude*, “I was getting comfortable in my chair, and next thing I was out of it again, and I liked feeling that kind

of sense of being uncomfortable, but also changing perspective. This interplay had a unidirectional movement from *awareness to process to attitude*.

The interplay from *Self-regulation to Awareness to Attention* occurred in MBSR and was not present in DT and Balint. In a unidirectional flow from *self-regulation to awareness to attention* Lucy learned to slow down and *self-regulate* and in doing so, believed she enhanced her awareness “taking much more note of what are you doing” which she remarked was not her normal habit but as a result of giving greater *attention* to her racing mind and seeing where it took her.

There was unidirectional interplay from *Process to Awareness and Intention* in MBSR but not in DT and Balint. At the halfway point Sara observed that her commitment to her personal practice of the mindfulness *process* was bringing benefits, stating “My own personal practice was probably the motivation to keep going because I knew, I felt it was making a difference” enhancing her *awareness* and as she had a lot of commitments – family, work, study – “It was really personal for me to keep up my own practice so as not to miss everything else that I was doing” and in this way illustrating the impact on her *intentions*.

The interplay from *Process to Awareness to Attitude* was seen in DT in a unidirectional thrust but was evident in DT or Balint. Natalie, in DT, remarked that from the *process* “when other people were speaking as well, it stimulated ideas” and was *aware* there was no feeling of being judged since there was an “*attitude* of trust” among others. Martha remarked that from the very beginning the *process* had a “the deep level of engagement”, was created by the facilitator “from the minute we stepped into the room” and further the props used to facilitate this engagement, the use of hands, the voice in the background, and the barrenness of the scene, “cleared your mind of everything else and allowed the participants “to wonder” noting here her awareness. Martha remarked on her positive *attitude* “I thought I was going there to learn about something new that I might use, and I did certainly do that, but I did not expect that one session could have sparked so much positive inward looking for me.

Only in DT was there evidence of an interplay from *Process to Awareness to Self-regulation*. Natalie, when asked to move as part of the DT *process*, was *aware* of feeling

kind of comfortable in the seat as she was “kind of tired. I didn't really want to move.” But she came to see the benefit since staying in the same place meant “we don't look at things from different perspectives. And it is really important to do that...going to the other side of the room shifted me in another direction to think differently,” thus illustrating the capacity to *self-regulate*. Martha commenting on the *process*, noted the vulnerability and openness among members of the group who were generous enough to “be of themselves and honest.” She remarked on “the methodology, which I found to be quite hypnotic” and the use of props – the sand and figures and the voice and pacing by the facilitator as “really soothing and comforting” and all of which created a context for “deep listening” where Martha felt “the power that comes from listening in such a deep way” and *aware* of being at ease and having the capacity to “be myself as a person and as a teacher.” When invited to change her seat Martha “found that really resonated with me, that we are where we are only for now, but we can change things, and even though I had negative thoughts, I know I have the capacity to see things differently” and thus helping her to *self-regulate*.

The unidirectional interplay from *Process to Self-regulation to Awareness* was observed in DT but not in MBSR and Balint. For Clara, the openness of the questions from the group *process* helped her to reflect a lot more and “listening to the different opinions from the group members, just made me challenge my own thoughts on a deeper level and my own perspectives on a deeper level too.” She remarked that she was ready with her response to one of the stories, and “ready to shoot in there”, but from *awareness* of herself she *self-regulated* by holding back saying “no, no, just stop for a second Clara now and give yourself a few minutes, and it was in the giving myself a few minutes and listening to other people, I thought no, actually, my perspective is changing here.”

Finally, only one four-dimension interplay was evident - from *Process to Attention to Self-regulation to Awareness*. It was unidirectional in flow. Through the *process* of mindfulness Sara was *attending* to “being more tuned into what's happening.” In stressful situations Sara found in “those pockets of moments” the capacity to “*control* how you're reacting to the situation and how you're responding,” and this has given her

capacity for greater *self-awareness* which in turn has enabled her to live with balance in her life.

4.4 Reflexivity in MBSR

In what follows, three tiers of reflexivity underpin the discussion of the analysis of teacher reflexivity in the MBSR context, namely, Base Reflection, Critical Reflection, and Radical Reflexivity. Each of these were further sub-categorised in respect of the movement from Subject to Object (S-O) or Object to Subject (O-S). Temporality was a significant element for the consideration of all tiers and are discussed in further detail below. For the Critical Reflection tier, the temporal dimension of *past or future* was also delineated. In Radical Reflexivity the *present* was the marker of time.

4.4.1 Base Reflection

Participants demonstrated evidence of *Base Reflection* defined as a reflective movement beginning from themselves as *subjects* to consideration of their external experience of mindfulness and/or their role as teacher i.e. the *object* of their reflection (coded as: BR/S-O). In other instances, the movement was reversed with participants beginning with their *objective* experience and reflecting on how this impacted them as the *subject* (coded as: BR/O-S). These reflective movements also tended to encompass one of two elements from Schön's reflective model (1983). Some participants illustrated *reflection-on-action* (coded as: RoA) capturing observations on their professional practice enhanced through an analysis of experiences, situations, successes, and failures *after* the fact. In other examples, participants demonstrated *reflection-in-action* (coded as: RiA) more akin to an 'on-the-spot' or 'thinking on your feet' framing of their mindfulness practice with the dynamic capability of evaluating and adapting their decisions and actions whilst fully engaged in an activity leading to effective professional practice (Schön, 1983).

As an illustration of Base Reflection Subject to Object (coded as: BS/S-O), Sara identified her "reactionary patterns" in both her personal and working life as a teacher and remarked,

I [subject] think, even though there probably was an awareness there, I didn't know how I could work with it. I could notice that I was reacting [past]... It was always easier to keep going with the habitual pattern as opposed to actually look at it [RoA]. And it's hard to look at it. And it's difficult to question it. And it's difficult to look at those reactionary patterns ...[object].

As an example of Base Reflection Object to Subject (coded as: BS/O-S) Sara, in response to a question as to how she considered the influence of MBSR on her well-being, commented,

The programme is just so supportive, like everything in the programme supports,[object] how you're looking after yourself and supports how you're relating to yourself, or seeing yourself, how you are listening to your body's wisdom, or how practices are supporting you in recognising, you know, what your body needs, recognising all my thoughts, recognising my emotions, recognising sensations.[subject] Each practice in itself is a lesson in well-being [RiA]

Reflecting on her teacher role and how MBSR has helped her to re-perceive her thinking Tara illustrates another example of Base Reflection Object to Subject (coded as: BS/O-S) when she commented,

For example, sometimes if I had a lot of work on I would be panicking in case something else happened [object]. And I'd have to deal with that thing. And how would I possibly do that because I have so much work? [RoA]. And now I see, 'okay, I have to find a way...I just have to deal with it' [subject] Whereas before I couldn't entertain that thought.

4.4.2 Critical Reflection

In *Critical Reflection* the teacher might bring to bear their reflexive capacities to other meta elements of influence on self, for example, their experience of teacher education, being a teacher itself, their own intellectual, cultural, and moral dispositions and other facets which have shaped their personal and professional teacher identity. Critical reflection moved also in two directions either from Subject to Object (coded as: S-O) or Object to Subject (coded as: O-S) and included critical reflection of past events (meta-past) and/ or of future action (meta-future).

4.4.2.1 Critical Reflection – Meta Past: Subject to Object

Tara, in response to a question at interview if she had noticed any change in herself as a teacher through participation in the programme, remarked,

*I am thinking back to the beginning of the year, I wasn't doing so well, and I actually took a week of work, ...and I was kind of pushing myself **[subject]** ..and I sent an email to the head of the university. I just explained the situation and I said, you know I'm not feeling well, and I think I'm not doing the work to the best of my ability **[object]**. I need this time. And that was something that I would have never done before, you know, approaching my boss. I would have just worked through it **[meta past]**.*

Here Tara acknowledged the shift in her identity as a teacher where she recognised that she didn't have to sacrifice her personal well-being for her work and that she could maintain her strong commitment to her role as a teacher and care for herself as a person.

4.4.2.2 Critical Reflection – Meta Past: Object to Subject

Lucy, in responding to a question as to how she sees herself as a teacher and as a person, commented that one of the impacts of working as a teacher during the COVID-19 lockdown was how it altered her pattern of working and that of her colleagues. She had noticed how her work would often encroach late into her evening as she was preparing for the next day of school and on the return to school post lockdown, she had observed that this pattern remained. From her MBSR programme she became aware of this pattern and remarked,

*We used to be good for switching off and then since lockdown we all started working at 11 o'clock at night, you know when the kids were settled down and then you'd start doing your schoolwork making your crazy videos or whatever you were doing. **[object]** And we were saying in school we need to get back to doing our work and then stopping our work **[meta past]**. ..I suppose that's what a disciplined teacher needs to do for herself, because you could work all the hours under the sun, but you could do a good job in less time you know. And so, for me, that's something I am conscious of now since doing the programme **[subject]***

4.4.2.3 Critical Reflection – Meta Future: Subject to Object

When asked if there were any elements of the MBSR programme that might influence her future role as a teacher Tara commented,

*I remember we did a really useful listening activity, and I found it very effective. **[subject]** Maybe in the context of teaching it could teach you how to be more present when teaching**[object]** ...We are not always fully listening as teachers because we're probably thinking of a response or thinking of the next thing. So, it really taught me to kind of go with it and I don't need to plan the next thing to say. That will come. **[meta future]**.*

Here we see the future element of focus in Tara's critical reflection on MBSR and its application to teaching. However, it was evident too that her response centred on her cognitive thinking faculties, and it was not apparent that she considered this type of typical teacher experience of work pressure as requiring an embodied response in future interactions.

4.4.2.4 Critical Reflection – Meta Future: Object to Subject

Sara engaged in critical reflection in addressing one of the misconceptions of mindfulness as a tool which was merely attention to the breath, the cultivation of relaxation and the avoidance of difficulty.

*...people can see mindfulness as just like, "I just focus on my breath and then that I'm being mindful." **[object]** But like they say it is very muddy - "no mud, no lotus" I love that phrase and I think that's what we need to understand. **[subject]**. It's not all about relaxation because life isn't going to be like that. It's about me working with distractions and working with the uncomfortable and about that being okay **[meta future]**.*

4.4.3 Radical Reflexivity

Radical reflexivity was distinguished from base and critical reflection in its foundations in a specific *subject-object-subject* structure. Across all participants evidence was present indicating patterns of radical reflexivity. In some cases, the arc from *subject to object to subject* was identified as emerging in the work context of individuals. Sara, in reflecting on her life and on her work as a teacher, described a clear trajectory, moving

from herself, outward towards her work and then returning to herself as a person and/or teacher. She commented,

I think, you know, for me, bringing mindfulness to my own life and bringing mindfulness to my own work is such a valuable tool for me to be able to share not just with the kids in the classroom but just even for my own emotional regulation, for my own presence in the classroom [subject]. I think I'm more aware of when I am present in the classroom ...you could be teaching the curriculum and you might not even notice what's going on with the kids in your class a lot of the time [object], so I think for me, I am a lot more tuned in to what's going on for the children and in my class at the time. I am more tuned into maybe the emotional leads or emotional climate in the classroom [subject].

Tara commented on how recourse to her practice grounds her and releases her from feeling stuck and offers an opportunity to still her busy mind.

I think the most important thing is just taking five minutes or 10 minutes even during work. When I'm in class, I can find 10 minutes just to sit and breathe. [subject]. Maybe I'm stuck for ideas, or I'm trying to force myself to think of some lesson plan, [object], where sometimes just taking 10 minutes, it just comes to me then because I'm not trying to force it into my brain. ...I think in that way the course has shown me 'okay, I just need five minutes just to kind of still the mind' [subject].

In both these examples the temporal shift to *present moment awareness* was evident, as was the emergence of insight which supports transformative modes of *being* a teacher as opposed to *doing* teaching which accounts too for the possibility of embodied presence.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the data collected within the MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions, in the context of contemplative thinking and teacher reflexivity. The final chapter considers these findings in the context of the overarching research questions.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This research involved exploration of educators' inner subjective worlds through contemplative processes and practices. This chapter opens by responding to the research questions, and in doing so, discusses teacher reflexivity and dimensions of contemplative thinking that emerged within the contemplative practices. The contribution to knowledge and research and recommendations for further studies are also detailed, with the latter part of the chapter presenting the researcher's critical reflections on the research journey.

5.2 Responding to the Research Questions

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore educators' engagement with and experiences of MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk contemplative practices. These experiential practices offer educators the possibility of learning from within and are, as Wilson describes, a "practice of presence when the present is overwhelming" (2021, p. 52). Through inquiry, reflection, and dialogue, each practice had potential to deepen insights and self-discovery. MBSR as a practice in its "thick manifestation" (McCaw, 2020, p. 265) is a collective one which unites people towards acting for the common good and provides the basis for human flourishing and social transformation (Purser, 2015). Deep Talk is a practice which creatively uses physical space for the telling of mythical stories in various stages with multi-sensory representations (for example, sand, figures, movement) to cultivate a conceptual space group where individuals have the ability to process matters that touch their lives or the community and are invited to connect with their inner worlds to experience empowerment and insight (Valkonen, 2015; Aerila *et al.*, 2022). And lastly, Balint which originated in clinical and medical settings as a reflective practice mode, uses case presentations not to problem solve but as a way to cultivate empathic understanding of others along with a deeper understanding of one's own responses (Johnson and Milberg, 2020).

In this study, a qualitative methodology was employed using semi-structured interviews, observations, and reflective diaries with participants from secondary and tertiary

education, with data analysed using the thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021). The three research questions below which framed this empirical study are responded to in the subsequent subsections:

- Does engagement in a MBSR intervention contribute to teacher reflexivity? If yes, in what ways?
- What dimensions of contemplative thinking-practice are activated within MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions?
- What interplay across dimensions of contemplative thinking-practice, if any, is stimulated in MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions?

5.2.1 Response Question 1

Does engagement in a MBSR intervention contribute to teacher reflexivity? If yes, in what ways?

This study provided evidence that engagement in a MBSR intervention does contribute to teacher reflexivity at a number of levels. In chapter two, the critical review of the literature in contemplative education considered *Teacher Reflexivity* based on the premise that attention to reflexivity is fundamental since it is a gateway to both the antecedents and the consequences of engagement with contemplative practices. For discussion on this first research question, McCaw's clarification, and extension of teacher reflexivity as "*radical reflexivity*," (McCaw, 2023, p. 1) has been adopted. This depiction of reflexivity as radical in nature builds on the work of others and is an evolutionary concept constructed by McCaw (Archer, 2012; Keck, 2015, 2020; Ergas, 2017; Hofer, 2017). In Archer's (2012) articulation of reflexivity there is a bending of the reflective arc back on to oneself, a perspective which is shared by Ergas in the movement from the outer world to the inner world (Ergas, 2017). McCaw maps the concept of radical reflexivity in the context of contemplative practices (including mindfulness and meditation) which he demonstrates can "provide avenues by which teachers can access

radical reflexivity, through the cultivation of present-moment, non-judgmental, embodied awareness” (McCaw, 2023, p. 1).

Three tiers of reflexivity were evidenced in the MBSR intervention - *Base Reflection, Critical Reflection, and Radical Reflexivity*. Participants demonstrated evidence of Base Reflection defined as a reflective movement beginning from themselves as subjects to consideration of their external experience of mindfulness and/or their role as teacher i.e. the object of their reflection. These reflective movements encompass one of two elements from Schön’s reflective model (1983). Some participants illustrated *reflection-on-action* capturing observations on their professional practice enhanced through an analysis of experiences, situations, successes, and failures *after* the MBSR intervention. In other examples, participants demonstrated *reflection-in-action* more akin to an ‘on-the-spot’ or ‘thinking on your feet’ framing of mindfulness practice with the dynamic capability of evaluating and adapting their decisions and actions whilst fully engaged in an activity leading to effective professional practice (Schön, 1983). Both reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action are part of the first of two dimensions which map McCaw’s radical reflexivity. Reflection-on-action is, as he describes, “inherently diachronic,” meaning that it separates the time of actual reflection (in the present) from the situation reflected on (which is in the past). In contrast, reflection-in-action is “synchronic,” bringing the focus of reflection into the present moment (McCaw, 2023, p.4-5). Crucially, in both cases the reflective self is considered as a movement of subject to object structure or object to subject in terms of reflection which McCaw indicates by the label, “Self|world” (McCaw, p.5). In critical reflection the teacher brings to their reflexive capacities other meta elements of influence on self, for example, their experience of teacher education, being a teacher itself, their own intellectual, cultural, and moral dispositions and other facets which have shaped their personal and professional teacher identity. In this tier the self as person and teacher is understood as being in relationship with the world – *self in the world* (McCaw, 2023, p.6). Self-identity, and in particular teacher identity, have direct implications for how the teacher interacts in their professional context. However, two limitations reside with this concept. Firstly, it is restricted by the functioning of these meta influences over time as applied to either

past (meta past) or future meta events or experiences (meta future) ignoring the present. Secondly, as a mode of reflexivity, it is bounded by “the philosophical assumptions about the nature of the teachers as autonomous, largely disembodied, rational and self-transparent subjects” (McCaw, 2023, p.6). This study of MBSR found critical reflection to be bi-directional.

As a response to the limitations of Schon’s model and the construct of critical reflection, radical reflexivity, according to Keck (2019), is radical in the sense of an “intense” and “total dedication to the personal-intimate dimension of the teacher” (p.416) and is presented as the medium for the transformation of identity and practice. McCaw refines this notion of radical reflexivity further identifying what he calls “the arc of reflection” towards the self, but, also through engagement with the present moment so that the teacher self is in an embodied moment-to-moment relationship to the world “and seeks to bring that awareness into the ongoing, embodied experience of being a teacher, right now, in the midst of teaching practice” (p.7).

Radical reflexivity is distinguished from base and critical reflection insofar as it is founded on a specific *subject-object-subject* structure. Within this structure, the strict duality of self and world, which dominates reflective thinking, becomes temporarily suspended. It is, furthermore, distinguished from practices of critical reflection insofar as the self-inquiry is drawn into the lived, embodied, experiential present, leaving behind the diachronic, deliberative activity of historical, political, or ideological analysis (temporal dimension).

Across all participants in MBSR evidence was present indicating patterns of radical reflexivity. In some cases, the arc from *subject to object to subject* was identified as emerging in the work context of individuals. There was further evidence of a temporal shift to present moment awareness and the emergence of insight which supports transformative modes of *being* a teacher as opposed to *doing* teaching and which accounts too for the possibility of embodied presence: this aligns with what has been theorised by Dunne (2011) and Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017).

5.2.2 Response Question 2

What **dimensions** of contemplative thinking-practice are activated within MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions?

The six **dimensions** of contemplative thinking-practice activated across MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions were: *Intentionality, Intention, Attention, Attitude, Awareness, Self-Regulation*, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

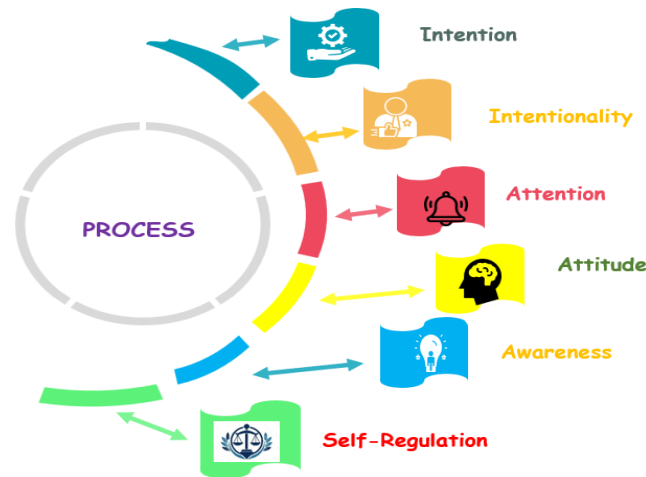


Figure 5.1 Contemplative Dimensions of MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint

Intentionality causes one to think and reflect carefully about the things one is doing. This study expands on the theorisation of intentionality by Dorjee (2016) and Van Gordon, Sapthiang and Shonin (2022) in its articulation of personal and professional aspects of intentionality as an element of contemplative practice. In this regard, the study found evidence of four personal aspects of intentionality - *furthering of self-development and well-being, addressing emotional stressors, regulating self, and responding to curiosity*, and three professional aspects of intentionality - *managing work responsibilities, enhancing, and improving educator professional practice, seeking peer support for professional challenges*.

Intentions have a direct immediacy for the explicit intention one deliberately brings in advance to a contemplative practice (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017; Van Gordon, Sapthiang and Shonin, 2022). It represents a purposeful “*spatial turning inward*” of attention toward one’s first-person experience so that we can turn to our subjectivity

and make it into the object of our attention (Ergas, 2019, p. 255). This study expands on the theorisation of intention by its identification of personal and professional aspects of intentionality as an element of contemplative practice. In the context of intentions, this study found four personal aspects (*personal deepening of practice for self-development, deepening of practice commitment – practice as habit, becoming more open minded and curious, and attending to and shifting Intentions*) and one professional aspect (*extending practice/insight beyond self – general life, family, teaching*). All of these with the exception of the element of '*becoming more open minded and curious*' which was identified by Frank et al. (2015), are new contributions to the literature.

Attentional capacity (Crosswell et al., 2024) involves observing one's moment-to-moment, internal (first-person experience) and external experience with focus but without judgement, described by Ergas as a "spatial" turning inward (Ergas, 2019, p. 255). This study identified four aspects of attention - *attending to feelings, thoughts, body; attending to other aspects of life; attending to the process and its elements*; and *attending to work*. All of these, with the exception of the element of '*attending to feelings, thoughts, body*' outlined by Carroll et al. (2022), are new contributions to the literature.

Attention and attitude are closely related with the latter describing the cultivation of qualities one brings to attention - being non-judgemental, discerning, kind, curious, compassionate, and accepting (Ergas 2019, 2020). This study identified four aspects of attitude that align with those theorised by Kabat-Zinn (1990), namely, *judging, and non-judging; responding with choice versus reactive attitude; remaining open minded and curious towards process and developing compassion and kindness*.

Related to intentionality, is choosing to be aware and attend to one's present experience in a different way (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017; Kaufman, 2017; Van Gordon, Sapthiang and Shonin, 2022). This study identified three aspects of awareness connected contemplative practice not previously articulated in the literature - *extending awareness to work, enhancing awareness of self and emerging well-being, and connecting to and with others*.

The processes of orienting, shifting, and sustaining attention combined with metacognitive awareness to effectively manage thoughts, emotional responses, and behaviour is a “metacognitive self-regulatory capacity (MSRC) of the mind” (Dorjee, 2016, p.1) and this awareness is a necessary prerequisite for effective self-regulation (SR) supporting well-being. This study identified four aspects of self-regulation that resonate with elements identified by Dorjee (2016), including *remaining grounded through practice, choosing how to respond personally and professionally, regulating capacity of group members, and regulating capacity of the process elements*).

5.2.3 Response Question 3

What **interplay** across dimensions of contemplative thinking-practice, if any, is stimulated in MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions?

This study provides empirical evidence of interplay of six dimensions of contemplative thinking-practice, namely, *Intentionality, Intention, Attention, Attitude, Awareness, Self-Regulation* within the MBSR, Balint and/or Deep Talk interventions, and revealed unidirectional, bidirectional, and multi-dimensional interactions. While the interplay of some of these have been theorised (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017; Dorjee, 2016; Van Gordan, et al., 2022), this study is original in contributing to the empirical evidence of the interplay within and across the six dimensions, in the context of contemplative thinking-practice.

This study revealed interplays in a unidirectional flow from the dimension of intentionality to the dimensions of *intention, attitude, awareness, and self-regulation*. Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) theorised about the interplay of intentionality, and *intention, attitude, awareness*. The identification of interplay between intentionality and self-regulation is a new contribution, as it has not been directly referenced by theorists or empirical studies. A further contribution of this study is evidencing the interplay between the processes of MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint and intentionality, whereby the framing of the intervention influenced the dimension of intentionality. There was no evidence of an interplay from intentionality to *attention* across any of the three practices.

This study revealed interplays between the dimension of intention in a bidirectional flow with the dimensions of *attention and attitude*. These interactions were theorised by Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) and evidenced by one empirical study within the context of contemplative practice by Godlaski (2018). There was no presence of an interplay of intention with *awareness, self-regulation, and process*.

A unidirectional interplay from the dimension of *attention to attitude* and a bidirectional interplay from *attention to awareness* were found in this study. These interactions were theorised by Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017). There was no presence of an interplay from attention to *intentionality, self-regulation, or process*.

Unidirectional interplays from the awareness dimension to *attention, attitude, and self-regulation* were identified but there was no presence of an interplay from awareness to *intentionality or intention*. Grossenbacher and Quaglia (2017) had theorised an interplay from awareness to attention, so this study provides evidence of that. The other identified interplays are new contributions to empirical evidence.

The interplay from the dimension of *attitude to self-regulation* was identified in processes of MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint. A previous study by Baer *et al.* (2008) has identified this interplay within an MBSR context. This study further found a unidirectional interplay from *attitude to process* and from *attitude to awareness*, which had not previously been referenced in the literature. There is no presence of an interplay from attitude to *intentionality, intention, and attention*.

Unidirectional interplay from *self-regulation to attention* and from *self-regulation to awareness* was found in the study, with no evidence of interplay from self-regulation to the other dimensions of *intentionality, intention, attitude*. Many studies in mindfulness refer to self-regulation and awareness, but this study provides empirical evidence of these interplays within the context of contemplative thinking-practice.

The unidirectional interplay of attitude to self-regulation reported by Baer *et al.* (2008) in a mindfulness study, was found across the three contemplative practices. Likewise, Grossenbacher and Quaglia, (2017) cite the interplay of intention to attention and attention to intention, the former evidenced in relation to MBSR in this study, while the reverse interplay was found in Balint.

The unidirectional interplay from awareness to intention reported by Brandmeyer and Delorme, (2021) was also found in this study in relation to MBSR. All other interplays, unidirectional or bidirectional, found in this study had not previously been reported in the published literature and thus contribute to new knowledge in the field.

5.3 Discussion

The positioning of this research was to explore engagement by educators with three contemplative practices, MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint. Although MBSR, and other mindfulness applications, have received considerable attention in contemplative practice research (Dahl and Davidson, 2019) there has been no research conducted on either Deep Talk or Balint as contemplative practices. The purpose of using a case study was to understand how participants experienced and described the role of these contemplative practices for reflection on their professional and personal lives. The rationale for conducting the research was twofold; firstly, to address the absence of research in this area in the Irish educational context and secondly to consider what emerged for participants through engagement with these reflective opportunities of contemplative practices as possible transformative learning experiences for self and professional practice.

Discourses on the purposes of education are historically contentious, subject to vibrant debate (Biesta, 2015) and framed in the wider context of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity - the VUCA world which permeates many aspects of modern day living (Laukkonen, Biddell and Gallagher, 2019). Education across all sectors faces persistent challenges in the face of limiting resources and exponential change currently exemplified for example, by the revolution in artificial intelligence and the urgency of education for sustainable development (Holland *et al.*, 2020; Alshamsi *et al.*, 2024). It is plausible, therefore, that educators are somewhat frazzled by the constraints imposed by these external elements and perhaps too by the limitations of the educational institutes where they work.

In this local and global context for the 'doing *and* being' of education, this research has proposed that the "pedagogical movement of contemplative practices" (Ergas, 2019, p.

255, original emphasis) has potential to nurture educator's capacity for skills to foster a 'whole person approach' in the cultivation of cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal aspects in the role. The practice of MBSR explored in this research demonstrated contributions to the development of a "radical reflexivity" (McCaw, 2023, p. 1) paramount in transformative learning. The six dimensions of contemplative thinking-practice and their interplay - *Intentionality, Intention, Attention, Attitude, Awareness, Self-Regulation* - activated across the MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk interventions can also nourish growth, creativity, and stability for educators.

A truly liberating contemplative education can only be transformational when acknowledging and addressing the personal and professional elements of the role and the socio-political complexities in which educators' function (Wilson, 2021). Any other interpretation renders engagement with contemplative practices as potentially a reproduction in self-indulgence and an inflation of the ego merely for the purposes of serving the self. As an example of this diminishment, critics have argued that the promotion of mindfulness or "McMindfulness" (Safran, 2014, p. 1) as a commodity like any other commodity in corporate workplaces is essentially an *undercover* and instrumental device to bolster productivity and to place upon staff sole responsibility for their own emotional stability (Hyland, 2016). By extension, as Cárcer observes (2019, p. 6), "it is nearly impossible not to see contemplative practice embedded in a brutal capitalist framework, promoting and supporting values such as individualism, success, and career advancement at any cost". In this researcher's opinion, these criticisms are entirely legitimate since failure to acknowledge and respond to these systemic forces along with the absence of an ethical framework in the promotion of contemplative practices can reaffirm the neoliberal ideology and instrumentalism of contemporary education.

As a rejoinder to these valid criticisms and to avoid the contamination that has prevailed not only in mindfulness in education (Lee, McCaw and Van Dam, 2024) but also within the broader domain of well-being the "hybrid approach"(Kaufman, 2017, p. 2) represents a unification of critical pedagogy and contemplative pedagogy in what Forbes (2016) characterises in his "Critical Integral Contemplative Education" model (p. 362).

Here the critically turning inward through contemplative practices and the cultivation of interiority, awareness and presence coupled with the facing outwards of a critical pedagogical stance to engage in action for social justice can more fully harness the potential for human growth and development in service of self, others, and the world.

5.4 Contributions to Knowledge and Research

This study utilised McCaw's (2023) framing of radical reflexivity to identify a particular understanding of educator reflexivity specifically within MBSR as a mindfulness-based intervention. In doing so, the study found the presence of three levels of reflection represented by an arc toward exploration of self, including base reflection, critical reflection, and radical reflexivity. Within these processes of reflection/reflexivity, there was evidence of a deeper awareness of self, including reactionary patterns, and moments of insight that supported transformative modes of *being* a teacher as opposed to *doing* teaching. Therefore, the study has provided an evidence base for deep levels of teacher reflexivity fostered within MBSR.

In the context of the recent "contemplative turn in education" (Ergas, 2019, p. 251), this research also sought to explore educators' experiences of contemplative practices of MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint. The study found evidence for the presence of six dimensions of contemplative thinking/practice - *Intentionality, Intention, Attention, Attitude, Awareness, Self-Regulation*.

Furthermore, the study traced this interplay across the six dimensions which aligned with and provided an evidence base as confirmation of existing contemplative practice theories and research findings articulated in the literature, while significantly mapping new interplays between these dimensions of contemplative thinking and practice. The interplay across the dimensions within MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk revealed unidirectional, bidirectional, and multi-dimensional patterns of interaction. With the articulation of these six dimensions of contemplative thinking-practice and their interplay, the study confirmed elements of existing knowledge and theories of contemplative practice and expanded on broader understandings of educators' engagement with contemplative processes and practices.

The study further addressed a dearth of empirical research on Balint and Deep Talk as contemplative practices for educators. In the case of Balint, as discussed in the literature review chapter, many of the empirical Balint studies presented findings on its application in the medical and healthcare professions, explained by its original purpose as a practice devised to support the emotional content of medical practice. These studies are mostly outcome related exploring the effect of Balint as an influence on the outcomes of patient doctor relationship. Some studies include, for example, the effect of Balint on resident professionalism (Adams *et al.*, 2006), the triggers and reasons for case presentations in a Balint group for medics (Torppa *et al.*, 2008), and the efficacy of Balint to support the process of mentalization for therapists i.e. the capacity to understand and interpret one's own and others' actions in terms of assumed internal mental states, leading to an understanding of intentions, thoughts and feelings (Farkas, Csukly and Fonagy, 2024). As an application to education only two articles were discovered, only one of which is an empirical study, and again with an outcome focus, examining the influence of Balint group participation experience on a novice teacher's self-efficacy, experience with burnout, and intentions to persist in the classroom (Williams, Munjuluri and Lichtenstein, 2022) which interestingly, although related to teachers, was published in a psychiatry journal. In Deep Talk there exists only one published empirical study which sought to determine the significant elements of the method for the individual child and the children in a group experiencing DT as method (Aerila *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, this study contributes to a narrow body of research and literature, by providing an evidence base for the integration of Balint and Deep Talk in a professional development model that seeks to promote a contemplative disposition and as a contemplative practice for educators.

5.5 Future Research & Dissemination

This research study clearly shows the potential of contemplative practices to enable teachers to explore the *self* and reveals the interconnectedness of *self* and *practice*. However, there are multiple opportunities to deepen and expand on these findings. In this regard, future research in the post-doctoral space will seek to deepen understanding of the interplay between dimensions of contemplative thinking and

investigate to what extent and how differing contemplative practices contribute to this interplay, and the implications for initial and continuing teacher professional development thereof. Future research will also explore the translational impacts for teachers engaged in forms of contemplative practice, in terms of classroom practice and their own well-being.

While the voices of educators are given precedence in this research a more expansive study exploring the experiences of students in tandem with educators would broaden the breadth and depth of the research in the tracing and mapping of contemplative practice located within institutions in contrast to a focus on individual stakeholders. This wider frame could also potentially offer insight on the significance of institutional contexts in the support or otherwise of a model for contemplative education.

The findings of this research will be disseminated in a number of ways. Firstly, two academic papers will be submitted to scholarly journals, such as *Teacher and Teacher Education* (Q1) and the *Irish Educational Studies* (Q2) in Spring 2025. The first of these will present the dimensions of contemplative practice, and the interplay within these dimensions as presented in this thesis. The second article will foreground approaches to the fostering of radical reflexivity in Teacher Professional Development, with a critique of MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk as contemplative practices in this regard. Furthermore, the findings will be presented at the education research conferences, such as the European Conference on Educational Research, and the Education Studies Association of Ireland in the coming academic year.

A Practitioner Toolkit will be developed with resources (lesson plan, story sacks) to guide the integration of MBSR, Balint and Deep Talk for teacher professional development in contemplative practice. This resource, and the broad research findings, will also be shared with colleagues engaged in teacher professional learning within undergraduate teacher education programmes and postgraduate education programmes at DCU, such as the Masters in Guidance Counselling and the Masters in Education.

It is acknowledged that this thesis explored the agency of a group of educators as individuals engaging with various contemplative practices. This reflects the disparate experience and educational context for participants in the research. A further expansion

of this work to consider the role of structural agency would lead to what Gunnlaugson describes as a “*polymorphous sense of agency*” (2009, p. 32, original emphasis) and a richer exploration of contemplative experience “from an intersubjective position that is represented spatially as between us, in contrast to inside us (subjective position) or outside us (objective position)” (Gunnlaugson, 2009, p. 27).

5.6 Researcher Reflections

There is an interesting parallel with the role of the researcher and the therapist where the latter are ethically and professionally endowed with responsibility to attend to the impact of their own personal history and ‘baggage’ as a gateway to their understanding of and reactions to the client. In therapy, this is couched in the psychodynamic language of ‘counter transference.’ By analogy, “reflexivity is the self-appraisal in research” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). In many respects the entire process of conducting a PhD study is a referential act of continuous self-appraisal. Capturing this merely as an abstract process pertaining to high levels of cognitive activity, analysis and meta-reflection that comes with the “situational logic of opportunity” (Archer, 2012, p. 249) of pursuing doctoral studies and as an academic working in university is reductionist and even unreal. Archer describes a more earthier notion of reflexivity mirrored for this PhD researcher, and one which “rests on the fact that all normal people talk to themselves within their own heads, usually in silence...” (Archer, 2007, p. 2). In a refinement of Archer’s description that the mental activity of reflexivity is often “an unacknowledged condition of social life,” as a PhD student, I had anticipated that the process would indeed require an acknowledgement to be reflexive particularly for a qualitative study. What I underestimated was the extent of the “... ‘internal conversation,’ ‘self-talk,’ ‘intra-communication,’ ‘musement,’ ‘inner dialogue’ and ‘rumination’...” (Archer, 2007, p.2) which characterised my own journey as a PhD researcher. Archer further remarks that at certain times in life and under circumstances it is probable that we engage in more internal dialogue than external conversation. For most PhD students, and certainly for this one, this observation has a significant and deep resonance. Both activities – the internal monologues with self and the external exchanges with PhD supervisors - along

with the actual task of researching and writing can perhaps be concisely summarised as an act of reflexive deliberation and one which bears the mark of a “relationally reflexive research process”(Hibbert *et al.*, 2019, p. 187). The process of this PhD study has a strong emotional charge, and it is the scrutiny, dialogue and relationship with self which gave cause for most absorption and even rumination during this process.

In another parallel with therapy the American existential psychiatrist, Irvin Yalom, emeritus professor of psychiatry at Stanford University writes that in the therapeutic encounter between client and therapist, “Everything—especially episodes containing heightened emotion—is grist for the mill” (Yalom, 2002, p. 71). This insight represents a point of departure for this section on my journey as a researcher where I came to experience variations on the theme of "analyzing everything" to "everything is analyzable" (Inderbitzin and Levy, 1994, p. 763). Therapeutic and research activity share a common purpose – an attempt to articulate and understand the experience of others in a space which is often muddled by a multiplicity of meanings and reflecting the complexity of what is, at least until fully explored, undefined interpretations of reality. Both encounters have a preoccupation with, to borrow from Yalom above, “episodes containing heightened emotion.” For the therapist, the necessity to understand a client’s emotions is a prerequisite for a successful outcome in the therapeutic process. Embarking on a PhD study is deeply intertwined too with emotional affect and everything – the personal and the professional - becomes “grist for the mill.” For a qualitative research study, as this was, emotional content was intrinsic. In a spirit of contemplative inquiry, it first required a reflexive disposition to be present and then to the naming of this presence however jagged or uneasy. As Hibbert *et al.* observe “reflexivity is not just a rational process, but also intrinsically involves emotion” (2019, p. 187). The unravelling of and careful attention to clusters of emotions – anxiety, doubt, fear, joy, excitement, surprise, ensured fidelity to the general purpose and methodological approach of the study. More significantly as an ethical obligation, a sensitivity to emotional contagion had implications for how I as researcher sought to respectfully engage with participants and in efforts to make claims for the authenticity and integrity of the work.

Staden's remark that "contemplative researchers tend to gravitate towards research topics that hold personal significance and often catalyse inner transformation" (2024, p. 222) boded an early first warning. The first negotiated hurdle for this researcher was the potential for bias and the potential shadow side of bringing a strong practitioner base to the project. I both recognised and valued the inherent strength of coming to the study with some foundational knowledge and a solid practice base as a teacher educator and contemplative practitioner. But while the mantra "to write about what you know" is probably sound advice for works of fiction it warrants caution when the task involves the conducting of empirical research. Early in the process I faced the challenge of recurring slippage into the secure knowledge base I had as a practitioner where the comfort of the known was an antidote to the messy and uncertain world of research. While acknowledging that this did not have to be framed as an 'either or' approach during the early phase of the work I was disposed to an 'underdeveloped reflexivity' (Archer, 2012, p. 250, original emphasis) struggling to decipher the related but distinctly different connections between my personal and professional interest in contemplative practice and the task at hand to engage as a researcher. I appreciated the guiding wisdom of my supervisors to 'mind the gap' and their urges "to play" with the potentiality of moving into the researcher space. This I learned was not a letting go of professional identity but instead an invitation and challenge to *integrate* the foundational platform of my knowledge base as a practitioner into the study and the avoidance of the "unintended acts of under-reflexive self-harming" (Archer, 2012, p. 250). In the encouragement to deploy differing theoretical and conceptual lens, as a researcher, I developed a reflexive maturity as a qualitative researcher which did not entail an abandonment of my subjective personal and professional experience but represented a recasting of purpose for this study at this time. The process of my own internal dialogue and the external dialogue with supervisors enabled an integrative disposition where the source of my practice base became a liminal space for movement into the person as researcher. This reorientation was often a place of discomfort, a type of disruptive pedagogy reflecting a 'dis-ease' of not knowing but learning instead to enter the process with openness, flexibility, creativity, and excitement too.

Finally, it is not without irony that in a study on contemplative practices that this reflection captures the researcher's persistent questioning of the perceptions, judgements and inferences made in the conduct of the study where the interplays and dimensions of contemplative practice for example, intention, attention, awareness, attitude, self-regulation are not only the subject of findings but represent too markers of engagement for the researcher "that is concerned, not with producing the thesis as object, but with producing the thesis as movement" (Bowstead, 2022, p.177).

5.7 Conclusion

This research set out to explore the experience of educators with contemplative practices firstly in terms of understanding teacher reflexivity and secondly to consider the dimensions, and interplay therein, across the three practices of MBSR, Deep Talk and Balint. The findings suggest that engagement with contemplative practice can offer educators a creative space to explore aspects of interiority both personally and professionally, and provides a foundational platform, from which to extend and expand scholarly work in the field of contemplative education.

References

Abenavoli, R., Harris, A., Katz, D., Gildea, S., Jennings, P., Greenberg, M., (2013) 'Teachers' Stress and Social-Emotional Competence: Identifying Risk and Protective Factors in Relation to Classroom Efficacy and Burnout', *The Psychology of Education Review*, 37(2), pp. 57–69.

Abeni, M.S., Magni, M., Conte, M., Mangiacavalli, S., Pochintesta, L., Vicenzi, G., Ferretti, V.V., Pompa, A., Cocito, F., Klersy, C., Corso, A., (2014) 'Psychological care of caregivers, nurses and physicians: a study of a new approach', *Cancer Medicine*, 3(1), pp. 101–110. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/cam4.163>.

Abma, T.A. and Stake, R.E. (2014) 'Science of the Particular: An Advocacy of Naturalistic Case Study in Health Research', *Qualitative Health Research*, 24(8), pp. 1150–1161. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732314543196>.

Acton, R. and Glasgow, P. (2015) 'Teacher Wellbeing in Neoliberal Contexts: A Review of the Literature', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(40). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n8.6>.

Adams, K.E., O'Reilly, M., Romm, J., James, K., (2006) 'Effect of Balint training on resident professionalism', *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 195(5), pp. 1431–1437. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajog.2006.07.042>.

Ademolu, E. (2024) 'Birds of a feather (don't always) flock together: Critical reflexivity of "Outsiderness" as an "Insider" doing qualitative research with one's "Own People"', *Qualitative Research*, 24(2), pp. 344–366. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941221149596>.

Adom, D. (2016) 'Constructivism philosophical paradigm: implication for research, teaching and learning', *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4, pp. 1–9.

Aerila, J.-A., Kinossalo, M., Siipola, M., Laaksonen, P., Lamminen, A., Valkonen, T., (2022) 'Deep Talk: A Dialogic Instruction Method for Enhancing the Sense of Belonging', *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 3, pp. 89–96. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2022.3.6.490>.

Alexander, P.A. (2017) 'Reflection and Reflexivity in Practice Versus in Theory: Challenges of Conceptualization, Complexity, and Competence', *Educational Psychologist*, 52(4), pp. 307–314. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2017.1350181>.

Almaguer-Botero, A.P., Miller, E.L., Chen, R.K., Carlson, R., (2023) 'Effects of a Mindfulness Intervention to Improve Teachers' Well-being', *Trends in Psychology* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-023-00318-3>.

Alshamsi, I., Sadriwala, K.F., Ibrahim Alazzawi, F.J., Shannaq, B. (2024) 'Exploring the impact of generative AI technologies on education: Academic expert perspectives, trends, and implications for sustainable development goals', *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, 8(11), p. 8532. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i11.8532>.

Anderson, V.L., Levinson, E.M., Barker, W., Kiewra, K.R., (1999) 'The effects of meditation on teacher perceived occupational stress, state and Trait Anxiety, and Burnout', *School Psychology Quarterly*, 14(1), pp. 3–25.

Archer, M.S. (ed.) (2007a) 'Introduction: reflexivity as the unacknowledged condition of social life', in *Making our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511618932.001>.

Archer, M.S. (2007b) *Making our Way through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511618932>.

Archer, M.S. (ed.) (2009) *Conversations About Reflexivity*. London: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203867556>.

Archer, M.S. (ed.) (2012) 'Fractured reflexives: casualties of the reflexive imperative', in *The Reflexive Imperative in Late Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 249–291. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139108058.008>.

Armat, M.R., Abdolghader, A., Mostafa, R., Hassan, S., Abbas, H. (2018) 'Inductive and Deductive: Ambiguous Labels in Qualitative Content Analysis', *Qualitative Report*, 23, pp. 219–221. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.2872>.

Aspers, P. and Corte, U. (2019) 'What is Qualitative in Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Sociology*, 42(2), pp. 139–160. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-019-9413-7>.

Atkins, L. and Wallace, S. (2012) *Qualitative Research in Education*. SAGE Publications Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473957602>.

Baer, R.A., Smith, G.T., Lykins, E., Button, D., Krietemeyer, J., Sauer, S., Walsh, E., Duggan, D., Williams, J.M.G., (2008) 'Construct Validity of the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire in Meditating and Nonmeditating Samples', *Assessment*, 15(3), pp. 329–342. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191107313003>.

Bakosh, L.S., Snow, R.M., Tobias, J.M., Houlihan, J.L., Barbosa-Leiker, C., (2016) 'Maximizing Mindful Learning: Mindful Awareness Intervention Improves Elementary School Students' Quarterly Grades', *Mindfulness*, 7(1), pp. 59–67. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0387-6>.

Bai, H., Scott, C. and Donald, B. (2009) 'Contemplative Pedagogy and Revitalization of Teacher Education', *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 55(3), pp. 319–334.

Balint, M. (1955) 'The doctor, his patient, and the illness', *The Lancet*, 265(6866), pp. 683–688.

Ball, S.J. (2016) 'Neoliberal education? Confronting the slouching beast', *Policy Futures in Education*, 14(8), pp. 1046–1059. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316664259>.

Barbezat, D. and Pingree, A. (2012) 'Contemplative Pedagogy: The Special Role of Teaching and Learning Centers', *To Improve the Academy*, 31(1), pp. 177–191. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2334-4822.2012.tb00681.x>.

Barry, M., Clarke, A. and Dowling, K. (2017) 'Promoting social and emotional well-being in schools', *Health Education*, 117, pp. 434–451. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/HE-11-2016-0057>.

Berger, R. (2015) 'Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research', *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), pp. 219–234. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>.

Berkovich-Ohana, A., Lavy, S. and Shanboor, K. (2020) 'Effects of a Mindfulness Intervention Among Arab Teachers Are Mediated by Decentering: A Pilot Study', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.542986>.

Berryman, J.W. (1990) 'Teaching As Presence And The Existential Curriculum', *Religious Education* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0034408900850402> (Accessed: 1 October 2023).

Beshai, S., McAlpine, L., Weare, K., Kuyken, W., (2016) 'A Non-Randomised Feasibility Trial Assessing the Efficacy of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention for Teachers to Reduce Stress and Improve Well-Being', *Mindfulness*, 7(1), pp. 198–208. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0436-1>.

Beuchel, P., Groß Ophoff, J., Cramer, C., Hautzinger, M., (2022) 'Promoting occupational health and teaching quality: The impact of a mindfulness intervention in teacher training', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 114, p. 103703. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103703>.

Biesta, G. (2015) 'What is Education For? On Good Education, Teacher Judgement, and Educational Professionalism,' *European Journal of Education*, 50(1), pp. 75–87. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12109>.

Bordia, S. and Crossman, J. (2021) 'Chapter 1: Introduction to the Handbook of Qualitative Research Methodologies in Workplace Contexts', in. Available at: <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap/edcoll/9781789904338/9781789904338.00005.xml> (Accessed: 30 May 2024).

Brandsma, R. (2017) *The Mindfulness Teaching Guide: Essential Skills and Competencies for Teaching Mindfulness-Based Interventions*. New Harbinger Publications.

Braun, S.S., Roeser, R.W., Mashburn, A.J., Skinner, E., (2019) 'Middle School Teachers' Mindfulness, Occupational Health and Well-Being, and the Quality of Teacher-Student Interactions', *Mindfulness*, 10(2), pp. 245–255. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-018-0968-2>.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful qualitative research: a practical guide for beginners*. London: SAGE Publications.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic analysis : a practical guide*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Harvard University Press.

Brown, A. and Danaher, P.A. (2019) 'CHE Principles: facilitating authentic and dialogical semi-structured interviews in educational research', *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 42(1), pp. 76–90. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2017.1379987>.

Brown, K.W., Ryan, R.M. and Creswell, J.D. (2007) 'Mindfulness: Theoretical Foundations and Evidence for its Salutary Effects', *Psychological Inquiry*, 18(4), pp. 211–237. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10478400701598298>.

Browne, B.C. (2013) 'Recording the Personal: The Benefits in Maintaining Research Diaries for Documenting the Emotional and Practical Challenges of Fieldwork in Unfamiliar Settings', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 12(1), pp. 420–435. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691301200121>.

Byrne, D., Carthy, A. and McGilloway, S. (2020) 'A review of the role of school-related factors in the promotion of student social and emotional wellbeing at post-primary

level', *Irish Educational Studies*, 39(4), pp. 439–455. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2019.1697949>.

Cárcer, de N.A. (2019) 'A Decolonial Perspective on Contemplative Studies', *The International Journal of Humanities Education*, 17(2), pp. 1–15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-0063/CGP/v17i02/1-15>.

Carmody, J. and Baer, R.A. (2008) 'Relationships between mindfulness practice and levels of mindfulness, medical and psychological symptoms and well-being in a mindfulness-based stress reduction program', *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 31(1), pp. 23–33. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10865-007-9130-7>.

Carroll, A., Sanders-O'Connor, E., Forrest, K., Fynes-Clinton, S., York, A., Ziaei, M., Flynn, L., Bower, J.M., Reutens, D., (2022) 'Improving Emotion Regulation, Well-being, and Neuro-cognitive Functioning in Teachers: a Matched Controlled Study Comparing the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Health Enhancement Programs', *Mindfulness*, 13(1), pp. 123–144. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-021-01777-4>.

Chen, J., Zhang, L., Li, X., Li, Y., Xu, W., Yan, Z., (2023) 'The multidimensional teacher well-being: a mixed-methods approach', *Teachers and Teaching*, 30(6), pp. 1–21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2023.2282483>.

Cheng, X., Zhang, H., Cao, J., Ma, Y., (2022) 'The Effect of Mindfulness-Based Programs on Psychological Distress and Burnout in Kindergarten Teachers: A Pilot Study', *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 50(7), pp. 1197–1207. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01254-6>.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2011) *Research Methods in Education*. 7th ed. London: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720967>.

Collie, R. J., Shapka, J. D., & Perry, N. E. (2012). School climate and social–emotional learning: Predicting teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), 1189–1204. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029356>

Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 3rd ed. SAGE Publications, Inc. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230153>.

Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2018) *Qualitative inquiry & research design : choosing among five approaches*. Fourth edition, International student edition / John W. Creswell, Cheryl N. Poth. Los Angeles: SAGE

Crosswell, A.D., Mayer, S.E., Whitehurst, L.N., Picard, M., Zebarjadian, S., Epel, E.S., (2024) 'Deep Rest: An Integrative Model of How Contemplative Practices Combat Stress and Enhance the Body's Restorative Capacity: Psychological Review', *Psychological Review*, 131(1), pp. 247–270. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000453>.

Crotty, M.J. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. 1st edn. London: SAGE Publications, Limited. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003115700>.

Dahl, C.J. and Davidson, R.J. (2019) 'Mindfulness and the contemplative life: pathways to connection, insight, and purpose', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, pp. 60–64. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2018.11.007>.

Daly, M., Halbert, G. and Ó Cadhain, C. (2017) 'Wellbeing in Irish Education: Towards a Common Understanding', in O'Neill, H. (ed.) *Wellbeing in Our Schools: International Perspectives*. CIDREE Yearbook 2017. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, pp. 88–107.

Daniel, K. (2019) 'Using the TACT Framework to Learn the Principles of Rigour in Qualitative Research', *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods: EJBRM*, 17(3), pp. 118–129. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.34190/JBRM.17.3.002>.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2017) 'Teacher education around the world: What can we learn from international practice?', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(3), pp. 291–309. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2017.1315399>.

Darwin Holmes, A.G. (2020) 'Researcher Positionality - A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research - A New Researcher Guide', *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 8(4), pp. 1–10.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232>.

De Carvalho, J.S., Oliveira, S., Roberto, M.S., Gonçalves, C., Bárbara, J.M., de Castro, A.F., Pereira, R., Franco, M., Cadima, J., Leal, T., Lemos, M.S., Marques-Pinto, A., (2021) 'Effects of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention for Teachers: a Study on Teacher and Student Outcomes', *Mindfulness*, 12(7), pp. 1719–1732. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-021-01635-3>.

Delorme, A. and Brandmeyer, T. (2019) 'When the meditating mind wanders', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, pp. 133–137. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2018.12.006>.

Denzin, N.K. (2017) 'Critical Qualitative Inquiry', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(1), pp. 8–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800416681864>.

Denzin, N.K. *et al.* (2024) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Sixth edition / edited by Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, Michael D. Giardina, Gaile S. Cannella. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Department of Education & Skills. (2019) Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023. Accessed December 18, 2024. <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/wellbeing-policystatement-and-framework-for-practice-2018%E2%80%932023.pdf>

Department of Education (2020a) *Wellbeing in education*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/851a8e-wellbeing-in-education/> (Accessed: 29 June 2024).

Department of Education (2020b) *Wellbeing in education*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/851a8e-wellbeing-in-education/> (Accessed: 12 April 2024).

Department of Education (2024) *Funding announcement for wellbeing and mental health supports in post-primary schools*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/45178-minister-foley-announces-funding-for-wellbeing-and-mental-health-supports-in-post-primary-schools/> (Accessed: 29 June 2024).

Di Fabio, A. (2017) 'The Psychology of Sustainability and Sustainable Development for Well-Being in Organizations', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01534>.

De Neve, D. and Devos, G., (2017) How do professional learning communities aid and hamper professional learning of beginning teachers related to differentiated instruction? *Teachers and Teaching*, 23 (3), 262–283.

Dincel, B.K. and Savur, H. (2018) 'Diary Keeping in Writing Education', *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 7(1), p. 48. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v7i1.3758>.

Dobkin, P.L., Hickman, S. and Monshat, K. (2014) 'Holding the Heart of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: Balancing Fidelity and Imagination When Adapting MBSR', *Mindfulness*, 5(6), pp. 710–718. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0225-7>.

Dorjee, D. (2016) 'Defining Contemplative Science: The Metacognitive Self-Regulatory Capacity of the Mind, Context of Meditation Practice and Modes of Existential Awareness', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01788>.

Dreer, B. and Gouasé, N. (2022) 'Interventions fostering well-being of schoolteachers: a review of research', *Oxford Review of Education*, 48(5), pp. 587–605. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2021.2002290>.

Dreer-Goethe, B. (2023) 'Observing teacher well-being in the classroom: a feasibility study', *PRACTICE*, pp. 1–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/25783858.2023.2256644>.

Dufour, R.; Eaker, R.; Dufour, R. (Eds.) Closing the knowing-doing gap. In *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*; National Educational Service: Bloomington, IN, USA, 2005; pp. 225-254.

Dunne, J. (2011) 'Toward an understanding of non-dual mindfulness', *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12(1), pp. 71–88. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2011.564820>.

Dwyer, S.C. and Buckle, J.L. (2009) 'The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), pp. 54–63. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>.

Education and Training Boards Ireland (2023) *FET Learner Mental Health Framework*. Available at: <https://library.etbi.ie/library/framework> (Accessed: 24 May 2024).

Education and Training Boards Ireland (2024) *ETBI Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2026*. Available at: <https://www.etbi.ie/etbi-celebrates-national-wellbeing-day-at-hq/> (Accessed: 24 May 2024).

Emerson, L.-M., Leyland, A., Hudson, K., Rowse, G., Hanley, P., Hugh-Jones, S. (2017) 'Teaching Mindfulness to Teachers: a Systematic Review and Narrative Synthesis', *Mindfulness*, 8(5), pp. 1136–1149. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0691-4>.

Ergas, O. (2017a) 'Reclaiming "self" in teachers' images of "education" through mindfulness as contemplative inquiry', *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*, 14(3), pp. 218–235. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2017.1398698>.

Ergas, Oren. (2017b) *Reconstructing 'Education' through Mindful Attention: Positioning the Mind at the Center of Curriculum and Pedagogy*. 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58782-4>.

Ergas, O. (2019a) 'A contemplative turn in education: charting a curricular-pedagogical countermovement', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 27(2), pp. 251–270. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1465111>.

Ergas, O. (2019b) 'Mindfulness In, As and Of Education: Three Roles of Mindfulness in Education', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 53(2), pp. 340–358. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12349>.

Ergas, O. (2020) 'Reclaiming the Educational Through Embodied Narratives of "Know Thyself"', in N. Hodgson, J. Vlieghe, and P. Zamojski (eds) *Post-critical Perspectives on Higher Education: Reclaiming the Educational in the University*. Cham: Springer International Publishing (Debating Higher Education: Philosophical Perspectives), pp. 97–109. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45019-9_8.

Ergas, O. and Hadar, L.L. (2019) 'Mindfulness in and as education: A map of a developing academic discourse from 2002 to 2017: Review of Education', *Review of Education*, 7(3), pp. 757–797. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3169>.

Farb, N.A.S. (2012) 'Mind Your Expectations: Exploring the Roles of Suggestion and Intention in Mindfulness Training', *The Journal of Mind-Body Regulation*, 2(1), pp. 27–42.

Farkas, K., Csukly, G. and Fonagy, P. (2024) 'Is the Balint Group an Opportunity to Mentalize?', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 40(1), pp. 55–75. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjp.12880>.

Ferrer, J.N. and Sohmer, O.R. (2017) 'A Radical Approach to Second-Person Contemplative Education', in *A Radical Approach to Second-Person Contemplative Education*. SUNY Press, pp. 15–35. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781438467689-003>

Flanagan, B. and Clough, K. (eds) (2024) *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Spirituality and Contemplative Studies*. London: Routledge.

Flook, L., Goldberg, S.B., Pinger, L., Bonus, K., Davidson, R.J., (2013) 'Mindfulness for Teachers: A Pilot Study to Assess Effects on Stress, Burnout, and Teaching Efficacy', *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 7(3), pp. 182–195. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/mbe.12026>.

Fodouop Kouam, A.W. (2024) 'Interpretivism or Constructivism: Navigating Research Paradigms in Social Science Research', *International Journal of Research Publications*, 143. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47119/IJRP1001431220246122>.

Fogel, J. and Moller, B. (2019) 'Running a group for educators', *Psychotherapy Section Review*, 64 (Winter).

Forbes, D. (2016) 'Critical Integral Contemplative Education', in R.E. Purser, D. Forbes, and A. Burke (eds) *Handbook of Mindfulness*. Cham: Springer International Publishing (Mindfulness in Behavioral Health), pp. 355–367. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44019-4_23.

Forbes, D. (2019) *Mindfulness and its discontents: Education, self, and social transformation*. Fernwood Publishing.

Ford, R. (1986) *The Sportswriter*. Reprint. Camden, London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC. 2006.

Foreman-Peck, L. (2015) 'Towards a Theory of Well-Being for Teachers', in *Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, pp. 152–166. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118977859.ch9>.

Franco, C., Mañas, I., Cangas, A.J., Moreno, E., Gallego, J., (2010) 'Reducing Teachers' Psychological Distress through a Mindfulness Training Program', *The Spanish journal of psychology*, 13(2), pp. 655–666. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1138741600002328>.

Frank, J.L., Reibel, D., Broderick, P., Cantrell, T., Metz, S., (2015) 'The Effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on Educator Stress and Well-Being: Results from a Pilot Study', *Mindfulness*, 6(2), pp. 208–216. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0246-2>.

Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Gajree, N. (2021) 'Can Balint groups fill a gap in medical curricula?', *The Clinical Teacher*, 18(2), pp. 158–162. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/tct.13298>.

Glanville, G. and Becker, B.A. (2015) 'Mindfulness and contemplative practices: The voice of the student', in *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Engaging Pedagogy (ICEP 2015)*. ICEP. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10197/8272> (Accessed: 21 September 2023).

Glanville, G., Iwashima, R. and Becker, B.A. (2014) 'Introducing Contemplative Pedagogy to the Classroom: Implementation, Experience and Effects on Concentration', in.

International Conference on Engaging Pedagogy (ICEP), Athlone Institute of Technology, Co. Westmeath, Ireland

Gold, E., Smith, A., Hopper, I., Herne, D., Tansey, G., Hurland, C. (2010) 'Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) for Primary School Teachers', *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 19(2), pp. 184–189. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-009-9344-0>.

Gouda, S., Luong, M.T., Schmidt, S., Bauer, J. (2016) 'Students and Teachers Benefit from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in a School-Embedded Pilot Study', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00590>.

Govorova, E., Benítez, I. and Muñoz, J. (2020) 'How Schools Affect Student Well-Being: A Cross-Cultural Approach in 35 OECD Countries', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00431>.

Greenberg, M. T. (2016). *Teacher Stress and Health: Effects on Teachers, Students and Schools*. Pennsylvania State University. Available at: <https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2016/07/teacherstress-and-health.html>.

Greenhalgh, T. and Engebretsen, E. (2022) 'The science-policy relationship in times of crisis: An urgent call for a pragmatist turn', *Social Science & Medicine*, 306, p. 115140. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2022.115140>.

Grenville-Cleave, B. and Boniwell, I. (2012) 'Surviving or thriving? Do teachers have lower perceived control and well-being than other professions?' *Management in Education*, 26(1), pp. 3–5. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020611429252>.

Griffith, G.M., Bartley, T., and Crane, R.S. (2019) 'The Inside Out Group Model: Teaching Groups in Mindfulness-Based Programs', *Mindfulness*, 10(7), pp. 1315–1327. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-019-1093-6>.

Grossenbacher, P.G. and Quaglia, J.T. (2017) 'Contemplative Cognition: A More Integrative Framework for Advancing Mindfulness and Meditation Research', *Mindfulness*, 8(6), pp. 1580–1593. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0730-1>.

Guba, E.G. (1990) *The paradigm dialog*. Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.

Guba, E.G. and Lincoln, Y.S. (1989) *Fourth generation evaluation*. Sage Publications Inc.

Gunnlaugson, O. (2009) 'Establishing Second-Person Forms of Contemplative Education: An Inquiry into Four Conceptions of Intersubjectivity', *Integral Review*, 5(1), pp. 25–49.

Gunnlaugson, O., Sarath, E.W., Scott, C., Bai, H. (2014) 'An Introduction to Contemplative Learning and Inquiry Across Disciplines', in *Contemplative Learning and Inquiry across Disciplines*. State University of New York Press, pp. 1–12. Available at: https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/163/edited_volume/chapter/1288266 (Accessed: 3 November 2023).

Gunnlaugson, O., Cueto de Souza, R., Zhao, S., Yee, A., Scott, C., Bai, H., (2023) 'Revisiting the Nature of Transformative Learning Experiences in Contemplative Higher Education', *Journal of Transformative Education*, 21(1), pp. 84–101. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/15413446211067285>.

Hadar, L.L. and Ergas, O. (2022) 'Mindfulness for in-service and preservice teachers: an empirical map of the discourse from 2000 to 2020', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, pp. 1–20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2022.2153669>.

Haiyan, Q. and Allan, W. (2021) 'Creating conditions for professional learning communities (PLCs) in schools in China: the role of school principals', *Professional Development in Education*, 47(4), pp. 586–598. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1770839>.

Hanley, A.W. and Garland, E.L. (2014) 'Dispositional mindfulness co-varies with self-reported positive reappraisal', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 66, pp. 146–152. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.03.014>.

Hargreaves, A., Shirley, D., Wangia, S., Bacon, C., D'Angelo, M., (2018) *Leading From the Middle Summary*. Toronto: Council of Ontario Directors of Education, pp. 1–44. Available at: <http://ccsli.ca/downloads/2018-Leading-From-the-Middle-Summary-Final-EN.pdf> (Accessed: 24 April 2022).

Harris, A.R., Jennings, P.A., Katz, D.A., Abenavoli, R.M., Greenberg, M.T., (2016) 'Promoting Stress Management and Wellbeing in Educators: Feasibility and Efficacy of a

School-Based Yoga and Mindfulness Intervention', *Mindfulness*, 7(1), pp. 143–154. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0451-2>.

Hart, T. (2004) 'Opening the Contemplative Mind in the Classroom', *Journal of Transformative Education*, 2(1), pp. 28–46. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344603259311>.

Hascher, T. and Waber, J. (2021) 'Teacher well-being: A systematic review of the research literature from the year 2000–2019', *Educational Research Review*, 34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100411>.

Hascher, T., Beltman, S. and Mansfield, C. (2021) 'Teacher wellbeing and resilience: towards an integrative model', *Educational Research*, 63(4), pp. 416–439. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2021.1980416>.

Haverland, M. and Yanow, D. (2012) 'A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Public Administration Research Universe: Surviving Conversations on Methodologies and Methods', *Public Administration Review*, 72(3), pp. 401–408. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02524.x>.

Head, G. (2020) 'Ethics in educational research: Review boards, ethical issues and researcher development', *European Educational Research Journal*, 19(1), pp. 72–83. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904118796315>.

Healey-Ogden, M., and Austin W. (2011) 'Uncovering the Lived Experience of Well-Being', *Qualitative Health Research*, 21(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732310379113>.

Hibbert, P., Callagher, L., Siedlok, F., Windahl, C., Kim, H.S., (2019) '(Engaging or Avoiding) Change Through Reflexive Practices', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 28(2), pp. 187–203. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492617718089>.

Hidajat, T.J., Edwards, E.J., Wood, R., Campbell, M., (2023) 'Mindfulness-based interventions for stress and burnout in teachers: A systematic review', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 134, p. 104303. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104303>.

Higgins, E. and Booker, R. (2022) 'The implementation of a whole school approach to mental health and well-being promotion in the Irish primary school context', *Health Education Journal*, 81(6), pp. 649–666. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00178969221105319>.

Higher Education Authority (2022) *Higher Education Healthy Campus Charter and Framework Ireland*. Available at: <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2023/03/Healthy-Campus-Charter-and-Framework.pdf> (Accessed: 21 March 2022).

Hill, M., Farrelly, N., Clarke, C., Cannon, M., (2020) 'Student mental health and well-being: Overview and Future Directions', *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, pp. 1–8. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/ipm.2020.110>.

Hofer, B.K. (2017) 'Shaping the Epistemology of Teacher Practice Through Reflection and Reflexivity', *Educational Psychologist*, 52(4), pp. 299–306. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2017.1355247>.

Hoglund, W. L. G., Klinge, K. E., & Hosan, N. E. (2015). Classroom risks and resources: Teacher burnout, classroom quality and children's adjustment in high needs elementary schools. *Journal of School Psychology*, 53(5), 337–357. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2015.06.002>.

Holland, C. (2020) 'Exploring Heuristics and Testimony in Education for Sustainable Development: Using the Visual Cues Approach to Disrupt, Discuss, and Deepen Introspection.', *Constructivist Foundations*, 16(1), pp. 16–19. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10099-012-0008-6>.

Holland, C., Mulcahy, C., Besong, F., Judge, M., (2013) 'Ethical-Values Pedagogical Model', *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 14(2), pp. 41–53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10099-012-0008-6>.

Holland, C., Bennett, D., Mughal, A.G., Ni, H., (2020) *G20 Collaborative Strategy for SGGs 4 Target 4.7: Monitoring Progress In Education For Sustainable Development And Global Citizenship Education*. Saudi Arabia.

Hölzel, B.K., Lazar, S.W., Gard, T., Schuman-Olivier, Z., Vago, D.R., Ott, U. (2011) 'How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work? Proposing Mechanisms of Action From a Conceptual and Neural Perspective,' *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 6(6), pp. 537–559.

Hue, M. and Lau, N. (2015) 'Promoting well-being and preventing burnout in teacher education: a pilot study of a mindfulness-based programme for pre-service teachers in Hong Kong', *Teacher Development*, 19(3), pp. 381–401. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2015.1049748>.

Hwang, Y.-S., Bartlett, B., Greben, M., Hand, K. (2017) 'A systematic review of mindfulness interventions for in-service teachers: A tool to enhance teacher wellbeing and performance', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 64, pp. 26–42. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.01.015>.

Hyland, T. (2015) 'On the Contemporary Applications of Mindfulness: Some Implications for Education: Journal of Philosophy of Education', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 49(2), pp. 170–186. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12135>.

Hyland, T. (2016a) 'The erosion of right livelihood: counter-educational aspects of the commodification of mindfulness practice', *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies*, 15(3), pp. 177–189. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2016.1179666>.

Hyland, T. (2016b) 'The Limits of Mindfulness: Emerging Issues for Education', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64(1), pp. 97–117. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1051946>.

Ilisko, D. (2013) 'Changing Landscape of Research Traditions: Paradigmatic and Narrative Orientations', *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 51. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.33225/pec/13.51.63>.

Imoto, Y. (2022) 'Towards a contemplative approach to ethnography and education: an ethnography of a contemplative classroom at a North American university', *Ethnography and Education*, 17(2), pp. 122–141. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2022.2036215>.

Inderbitzin, L.B. and Levy, S.T. (1994) 'On Grist for the Mill: External Reality as Defense', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 42(3), pp. 763–788. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/000306519404200305>.

Intrator, S.M. and Kunzman, R. (2007) 'The Person in the Profession: Renewing Teacher Vitality through Professional Development', *The Educational Forum*, 71(1), pp. 16–32. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131720608984564>.

Jennings, P.A., Snowberg, K.E., Coccia, M.A., Greenberg, M.T. (2011) 'Improving Classroom Learning Environments by Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE): Results of Two Pilot Studies', *The Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 46(1), pp. 37–48.

Jennings, P.A., Brown, J.L., Frank, J.L., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Davis, R., Rasheed, D., DeWeese, A., DeMauro, A.A., Cham, H., Greenberg, M.T., (2017) 'Impacts of the CARE for Teachers program on teachers' social and emotional competence and classroom interactions.', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(7), pp. 1010–1028. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000187>.

Jennings, P.A., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Rasheed, D., Frank, J.L., Brown, J.L., (2019) 'Long-term impacts of the CARE program on teachers' self-reported social and emotional competence and well-being', *Journal of School Psychology*, 76, pp. 186–202. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2019.07.009>.

Johnson, A.H. and Milberg, L.C. (2020) 'A narrative history of the American Balint Society 1990–2020', *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 55(3), pp. 153–166. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091217420919000>.

Johnson, J.L., Adkins, D. and Chauvin, S. (2020) 'A Review of the Quality Indicators of Rigor in Qualitative Research', *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 84(1), p. 7120. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe7120>.

Jones, E., Priestley, M., Brewster, L., Wilbraham, S.J., Hughes, G., Spanner, L. (2021) 'Student wellbeing and assessment in higher education: the balancing act', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 46(3), pp. 438–450. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2020.1782344>.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990) *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. New York: Delacorte Press.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2012) *Mindfulness for beginners: reclaiming the present moment--and your life*. Boulder, CO, USA: Sounds True.

Kang, Y., Gruber, J., and Gray, J.R. (2013) 'Mindfulness and De-Automatization', *Emotion Review*, 5(2), pp. 192–201. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073912451629>.

Kannai, R., Krontal, S., Freud, T., Biderman, A. (2024) 'Balint groups: an effective tool for improving health professionals' perceived well-being', *Israel Journal Of Health Policy Research*, 13(1), p. 31. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13584-024-00618-8>.

Kaufman, P. (2017) 'Critical Contemplative Pedagogy', *Radical Pedagogy*, 14(1), pp. 1–20.

Kavanagh, P. (ed.) (1984) *Patrick Kavanagh: The Complete Poems*. Reprint. New York / Newbridge, Co. Kildare Ireland: The Peter Kavanagh Hand Press / The Goldsmith Press.

Kayumova, S. and Tippins, D.J. (2021) 'The quest for sustainable futures: designing transformative learning spaces with multilingual Black, Brown, and Latinx young people through critical response-ability', *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 16(3), pp. 821–839.

Keck, C.S. (2015) "'Here there is order, full stop!' – radical reflexivity and teachers' migrations from the orders of education toward the (dis)orders of (self-)relations', *Teacher Development*, 19(1), pp. 22–39. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2014.973529>.

Keck, C.S. (2020) 'The Question Teacher and the Case for a Therapeutic Turn Within Teacher Education', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 71(4), pp. 409–419. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487119858982>.

Kemeny, M.E., Foltz, C., Cavanagh, J.F., Cullen, M., Giese-Davis, J., Jennings, P., Rosenberg, E.L., Gillath, O., Shaver, P.R., Wallace, B.A., Ekman, P. (2012) 'Contemplative/emotion training reduces negative emotional behavior and promotes

prosocial responses.', *Emotion*, 12(2), pp. 338–350. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026118>.

King, R. (2022) 'The Utility of Pragmatism in Educational Research', *Creative Education*, 13(10), pp. 3153–3161. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2022.1310199>.

Kivunja, C. and Kuyini, A.B. (2017) 'Understanding and Applying Research Paradigms in Educational Contexts', *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(5), p. 26. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n5p26>.

Kjeldmand, D. and Holmstrom, I. (2008) 'Balint Groups as a Means to Increase Job Satisfaction and Prevent Burnout Among General Practitioners', *The Annals of Family Medicine*, 6(2), pp. 138–145. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.813>.

Kjeldmand, D., Holmström, I. and Rosenqvist, U. (2004) 'Balint training makes GPs thrive better in their job', *Patient Education and Counseling*, 55(2), pp. 230–235. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2003.09.009>.

Klassen, R.M., Perry, N.E. and Frenzel, A.C. (2012) 'Teachers' relatedness with students: An underemphasized component of teachers' basic psychological needs', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(1), pp. 150–165. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026253>.

Klingbeil, D.A. and Renshaw, T.L. (2018) 'Mindfulness-based interventions for teachers: A meta-analysis of the emerging evidence base', *School Psychology Quarterly*, 33(4), pp. 501–511. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000291>.

Komjathy, L. (2018) 'Contemplative Studies', in *Introducing Contemplative Studies*. Hoboken: Wiley, pp. 13–49.

Komjathy, L. (2024) 'The Impact of Contemplative Studies on Research Paradigms', in B. Flanagan and K. Clough (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Spirituality and Contemplative Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 361–371.

Kuzmynska, D. (2024) 'The idea of creative reflexivity and its psychological substantiation', *Psychology & society*, 89(1), pp. 159–170. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.35774/pis2024.01.159>.

Larson, K.E., Chaturvedi, A., Dunn, M., Chavers, N. (2024) 'Using a contemplative practice intervention in teacher education courses to neutralize implicit racial bias: a feasibility study', *Teaching Education*, 35(2), pp. 162–183. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2023.2252353>.

Lave, J.; Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK

Laukkonen, R.E., Biddell, H. and Gallagher, R. (2019) 'Preparing humanity for change and artificial intelligence'. OSF. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/g5qwc>.

LeBlanc, P.J. (2018) 'Higher Education in a VUCA World', *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 50(3–4), pp. 23–26. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2018.1507370>.

Lee, W., McCaw, C.T. and Van Dam, N.T. (2024) 'Mindfulness in education: Critical debates and pragmatic considerations', *British Educational Research Journal*, p. berj.3998. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3998>.

Leggett, W. (2022) 'Can Mindfulness really change the world? The political character of meditative practices,' *Critical Policy Studies*, 16(3), pp. 261–278. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2021.1932541>.

Lensen, J.H., Stoltz, S.E.M.J., Kleinjan, M., Kraiss, J.T., Scholte, R.H.J., Speckens, A.E.M., (2024) 'Mindfulness-based stress reduction for elementary school teachers: a randomized controlled trial', *Frontiers in Education*, 9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1385375>.

Lindqvist, H., Weurlander, M., Wernerson, A., Thornberg, R. (2021) 'Talk of Teacher Burnout among Student Teachers', *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 65(7), pp. 1266–1278. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1816576>.

Lomas, T., Medina, J.C., Ivtzan, I., Rupprecht, S., Eiroa-Orosa, F.J., (2017) 'The impact of mindfulness on the wellbeing and performance of educators: A systematic review of the empirical literature', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 61, pp. 132–141. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.10.008>.

Lundh, L.G. (2022) 'Experimental Phenomenology as an Approach to the Study of Contemplative Practices', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.751298>.

Lunn Brownlee, J., Ferguson, L.E. and Ryan, M. (2017) 'Changing Teachers' Epistemic Cognition: A New Conceptual Framework for Epistemic Reflexivity', *Educational Psychologist*, 52(4), pp. 242–252. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2017.1333430>.

Mason, J. (2002) *Qualitative researching*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE.

Massumi, B. (2002) *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Duke University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822383574>.

Matiasz, N.J. and Wallace, B.A. (2024) 'Contemplative Science: Expanding the Scope of Empiricism to Increase the Convergence of Evidence', in B. Flanagan and K. Clough (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Spirituality and Contemplative Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 73–88.

Maunsell, C. and Bourke, A. (2018) 'SPHE and Intimate Citizenship Education in 21st Century Irish Post-Primary Schools: Meeting Opportunities and Challenges of Proposed Junior Cycle Reform through Teacher Professional Development', in *SPHE and Citizenship Education 100 Years On*. Ireland: SPHE Network.

Maxwell, J. (2011) 'Epistemological Heuristics for Qualitative Research', in H. Soini, E.-L. Kronqvist, and G.L. Huber (eds) *Epistemologies for Qualitative Research*. Tübingen, Germany: Center for Qualitative Psychology (Qualitative Psychology Nexus).

Maykut, P. and Morehouse, R. (1994) *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide*. Oxford, England: Falmer Press/Taylor & Francis, Inc, pp. xii, 194.

McCallum, F., Price, D., Graham, A., Morrison, A., (2017) 'Teacher wellbeing: a review of the literature'. Available at: <https://apo.org.au/node/201816> (Accessed: 29 July 2024).

McCaw, C.T. (2019) *Contemplative practitioners, becoming teachers: a study of the implications of contemplative practices for teacher professional becoming*. PhD Thesis.

Melbourne Graduate School of Education. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11343/227795> (Accessed: 8 March 2022).

McCaw, C.T. (2020) 'Mindfulness "thick" and "thin"— a critical review of the uses of mindfulness in education', *Oxford Review of Education*, 46(2), pp. 257–278. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1667759>.

McCaw, C.T. (2023) 'Beyond deliberation—radical reflexivity, contemplative practices and teacher change', *Journal of Educational Change*, 24(1), pp. 1–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-021-09432-4>.

McCaw, C.T. and Gerrard, J. (2023) 'Post-secular affective labours of teaching: contemplative practices and the "belaboured self"', *Critical Studies in Education*, 64(2), pp. 134–150. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2022.2043404>.

McCown, D., Reibel, D. and Micozzi, M.S. (2010) *Teaching mindfulness: a practical guide for clinicians and educators*. New York London: Springer.

McIntyre, A. (2018) 'Purposeful Pausing: Integrating a Mindfulness Practice into the Student Teaching Experience', *Teacher Education and Practice*, 31(1), pp. 30–44.

Merriam, S.B. (1998) *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA, US: Jossey-Bass (Case study research in education: A qualitative approach), pp. xx, 226.

Milberg, L. and Knowlton, K. (2019) *Restoring the Core of Clinical Practice: What is a Balint group and how does it help*. Independently Published.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook, 2nd ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc

Monteiro, L.M., Musten, R.F. and Compson, J. (2015) 'Traditional and Contemporary Mindfulness: Finding the Middle Path in the Tangle of Concerns', *Mindfulness*, 6(1), pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0301-7>.

Morgan, P.F. (2015) 'A Brief History of the Current Reemergence of Contemplative Education', *Journal of Transformative Education*, 13(3), pp. 197–218. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344614564875>.

Morse, J.M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., Spiers, J. (2002) 'Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research', *International journal of qualitative methods*, 1(2), pp. 13–22.

Nadin, S. and Cassell, C. (2006) 'The use of a research diary as a tool for reflexive practice', *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 3(3), pp. 208–217. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/11766090610705407>.

Nalan, P. and Manning, A. (2022) 'The Juice is Worth the Squeeze: Psychiatry Residents' Experience of Balint Group', *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 57(6), pp. 508–520. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00912174221127084>.

Napoli, M. (2004) 'Mindfulness Training for Teachers: A Pilot Program', *Complementary health practice review*, 9(1), pp. 31–42. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1076167503253435>.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2017) *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines*, Dublin: NCCA.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2023) *Updated Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum*, Dublin: NCCA.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2024) *Updated Junior Cycle SPHE Curriculum*, Dublin: NCCA

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2024) *Consultation on Draft Wellbeing Specification - Primary Curriculum*. Available at: https://ncca.ie/media/csmh55u0/draft_primary_wellbeing_specification_2024.pdf (Accessed: 24 June 2024).

Nehring, D., and F. Frawley. 2020. "Mindfulness and the 'Psychological Imagination'." *Sociology of Health and Illness* 42 (5): 1184–1201. doi:10.1111/1467-9566.13093.

Nohilly, M. and Tynan, F. (2022) 'The Evolution of wellbeing in educational policy in Ireland: Towards an interdisciplinary approach', *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 12(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v12i1.1663>.

Norwich, B. (2020) 'Thinking about the nature of educational research: Going beyond superficial theoretical scripts', *Review of Education*, 8(1), pp. 242–262. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3182>.

O'Brien, M. and O'Shea, A. (2017) *A Human Development (PSP) Framework*. Dublin: National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

O' Donnell, A. (2015) 'Contemplative Pedagogy and Mindfulness: Developing Creative Attention in an Age of Distraction', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 49(2), pp. 187–202.

O'Flaherty, J. and McCormack, O. (2019) 'Student holistic development and the "goodwill" of the teacher', *Educational Research*, 61(2), pp. 123–141. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2019.1591167>.

O'Flaherty, J. and McCormack, O. (2023) 'Conceptualisations of care: the understanding of "care" across Irish educational legislation, policies, circulars and curriculum', *Pastoral Care in Education*, 41(4), pp. 409–429. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2023.2214902>.

Ott, M., Hibbert, K., Rodger, S., Leschied, A. (2017) 'A Well Place to Be: The Intersection of Canadian School-Based Mental Health Policy with Student and Teacher Resiliency', *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 40(2), pp. 1–30.

Otten, H. (2018) *The theory and practice of Balint group work: analyzing professional relationships*. Heide Otten. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Ozturk, M., Wigelsworth, M. and Squires, G. (2024) 'A systematic review of primary school teachers' wellbeing: room for a holistic approach', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1358424>.

Palmer, P.J. (1997) 'The Heart of a Teacher Identity and Integrity in Teaching', *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 29(6), pp. 14–21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00091389709602343>.

Palmer, P.J. (2007) *The courage to teach: exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. 10th anniversary ed. San Francisco, Calif: Jossey-Bass.

Palomata, G. (2024) 'Exploring the Role of Mindfulness-Based Practices in Reducing Teachers' Stress and Anxiety', *Nexus International Journal of Science and Education*, 1(1). Available at: <https://niise.org/index.php/home/article/view/49> (Accessed: 21 October 2024).

Park, M.-H., Riley, J.G. and Branch, J.M. (2020) 'Developing self-awareness using mindfulness meditation with preservice teachers: reflections on practice', *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 41(2), pp. 183–196. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2019.1695692>.

Pasierbek, W. (2016) 'Jesuit philosophy of contemplative education', *Horyzonty Wychowania*, (33), pp. 9–22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17399/HW.2016.153301>.

Patrick, P., Reupert, A., Berger, E., Morris, Z., Diamond, Z., Hammer, M., Hine, R., Fathers, C. (2024) 'Initiatives for promoting educator wellbeing: a Delphi study', *BMC Psychology*, 12, pp. 1–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-01724-7>.

Patton, K. and Parker, M. (2017) 'Teacher education communities of practice: More than a culture of collaboration', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 67, pp. 351–360. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.06.013>.

Pervin, N. and Mokhtar, M. (2022) 'The Interpretivist Research Paradigm: A Subjective Notion of a Social Context', *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v11-i2/12938>.

Phillippi, J. and Lauderdale, J. (2018) 'A Guide to Field Notes for Qualitative Research: Context and Conversation', *Qualitative Health Research*, 28(3), pp. 381–388. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317697102>.

Porciani, M. (2017) 'The teacher-in-training perspective: Preparing teachers to incorporate wellbeing into learning and teaching', in *Wellbeing, Education and Contemporary Schooling*. London: Routledge, pp. 110–122.

Poulin, P.A., Mackenzie, C.S., Soloway, G., Karayolas, E. (2008) 'Mindfulness training as an evidenced-based approach to reducing stress and promoting well-being among human services professionals', *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education*, 46(2), pp. 72–80. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14635240.2008.10708132>.

Powietrzynska, M., Noble, L., O'Loughlin-Boncamper, S., Azeez, A., (2021) 'Holding space for uncertainty and vulnerability: reclaiming humanity in teacher education through contemplative | equity pedagogy', *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 16(3), pp. 951–964. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-021-10035-x>.

Priya, A. (2021) 'Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in Its Application', *Sociological Bulletin*, 70(1), pp. 94–110. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>.

Punch, K. (2013) *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Purser, R.E. (2015) 'Clearing the Muddled Path of Traditional and Contemporary Mindfulness: a Response to Monteiro, Musten, and Compson', *Mindfulness*, 6(1), pp. 23–45. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0373-4>.

Qu, S.Q. and Dumay, J. (2011) 'The qualitative research interview', *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8(3), pp. 238–264. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/11766091111162070>.

Querstret, D., Morison, L., Dickinson, S., Cropley, M., John, M. (2020) 'Mindfulness-based stress reduction and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for psychological health and well-being in nonclinical samples: A systematic review and meta-analysis', *International Journal of Stress Management*, 27(4), pp. 394–411. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/str0000165>.

Rabinowitz, S., Kushnir, T. and Ribak, J. (1996) 'Preventing Burnout: Increasing Professional Self Efficacy in Primary Care Nurses in a Balint Group', *AAOHN Journal*, 44(1), pp. 28–32. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/216507999604400108>.

Rae, T., Cowell, N. and Field, L. (2017) 'Supporting teachers' well-being in the context of schools for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties', *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 22(3), pp. 200–218. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2017.1331969>.

Razer, M. and Friedman, V.J. (2019) 'Building 'Restorative Relationships': An Actionable, Practice-Based Model of Inclusive School Practice', in Schuelka, M., Johnstone, C., Thomas, G., Artiles, A. (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Inclusion and Diversity in Education*. London: SAGE Publications, pp. 208–221. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526470430.n19>.

Rechtschaffen, D. (2014) *The way of mindful education: Cultivating well-being in teachers and students*. WW Norton & Company.

Redmond, M. (2016) *Affective Attunement: Emotion and Collaboration: A Study of Ireland's Voluntary Secondary School Principals*. Dublin: Joint Managerial Body. Available at: <http://www.jmb.ie/images/pdf/publications/Affective-Attunement---A-Study-of-Irelands-Voluntary-Secondary-Principals.pdf> (Accessed: 1 February 2023).

Reference Library - The American Balint Society (2024). Available at: https://americanbalintsociety.org/reference_library.php (Accessed: 8 June 2024).

Reiser, J.E., Murphy, S.L., and McCarthy, C.J. (2016) 'Stress prevention and mindfulness: A psychoeducational and support group for teachers', *Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 41(2), pp. 117–139. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01933922.2016.1151470>.

Repetti, R. (2010) 'The case for a contemplative philosophy of education', *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2010(151), pp. 5–15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.411>.

Riebe, L., Girardi, A. and Whitsed, C. (2016) 'A Systematic Literature Review of Teamwork Pedagogy in Higher Education', *Small Group Research*, 47(6), pp. 619–664. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496416665221>.

Roeser, R.W. and Peck, S.C. (2009) 'An Education in Awareness: Self, Motivation, and Self-Regulated Learning in Contemplative Perspective', *Educational Psychologist*, 44(2), pp. 119–136. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520902832376>.

Roeser, R.W., Schonert-Reichl, K.A., Jha, A., Cullen, M., Wallace, L., Wilensky, R., Oberle, E., Thomson, K., Taylor, C., Harrison, J., (2013) 'Mindfulness training and reductions in teacher stress and burnout: Results from two randomized, waitlist-control field trials', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 105(3), pp. 787–804. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032093>.

Roeser, R.W., Mashburn, A.J., Skinner, E.A., Choles, J.R., Taylor, C., Rickert, N.P., Pinela, C., Robbeloth, J., Saxton, E., Weiss, E., Cullen, M., Sorenson, J., (2022) 'Mindfulness training improves middle school teachers' occupational health, well-being, and interactions with students in their most stressful classrooms', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 114(2), pp. 408–425. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000675>.

Roeser, R.W., Galla, B. and Baelen, R.N. (2022) 'Mindfulness in Schools: Evidence on the Impacts of School-Based Mindfulness Programs on Student Outcomes in P–12 Educational Settings'. OSF. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/ascpv>.

Rossmann, G.B. and Rallis, S.F. (2017) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research: Learning in the Field*. SAGE Publications, Inc. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802694>.

Roth, H.D. (2008) 'Against cognitive imperialism', *Religion East and West*, 8, pp. 1–23.

Rupprecht, S., Paulus, P. and Walach, H. (2017) 'Mind the Teachers! The Impact of Mindfulness Training on Self-Regulation and Classroom Performance in a Sample of German School Teachers,' *European Journal of Educational Research*, volume–6–2017(volume6-issue4.html), pp. 565–581. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-er.6.4.565>.

Ryan, M. and Bourke, T. (2013) 'The teacher as reflexive professional: making visible the excluded discourse in teacher standards', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(3), pp. 411–423. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2012.717193>.

Ryding, E.L. and Birr, A. (2022) 'Becoming the kind of doctor that you want to be. A qualitative study about participation in Balint group work,' *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 57(4), pp. 283–292. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00912174211042972>.

Safran, J.D. (2014) 'McMindfulness: The marketing of well-being', *Psychology Today*, pp. 1–2.

Sancar, R., Atal, D. and Deryakulu, D. (2021) 'A new framework for teachers' professional development', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 101, p. 103305. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103305>.

Santorelli, S.F., Meleo-Meyer, F., Koerbel, L., Kabat-Zinn, J., (2017) 'Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Authorized Curriculum Guide.' University of Massachusetts Medical School, Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society.

Saunders, M. and Lewis, P. (2017) *Doing Research in Business and Management*. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, Limited. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dcu/detail.action?docID=5175031> (Accessed: 24 August 2023).

Savolainen, J., Casey, P., McBrayer, J., Schwerdtle, P. (2023) 'Positionality and Its Problems: Questioning the Value of Reflexivity Statements in Research', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 18(6), pp. 1331–1338. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916221144988>.

Schindel, A. and Tolbert, S. (2017) 'Critical caring for people and place', *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 48(1), pp. 26–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2016.1249326>.

Schön, D.A. (1983) *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315237473>.

Schussler, D.L., Jennings, P.A., Sharp, J.E., Frank, J.L. (2016) 'Improving Teacher Awareness and Well-Being Through CARE: a Qualitative Analysis of the Underlying Mechanisms', *Mindfulness*, 7(1), pp. 130–142. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0422-7>.

Schwandt, T.A. (1998) 'The Interpretive Review of Educational Matters: Is There Any Other Kind?', *Review of Educational Research*, 68(4), pp. 409–412. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543068004409>.

Schweiger, K., Hofbaur, B. and Rabady, S. (2024) 'Balint groups' possible role in self-care and job satisfaction of general practitioners—A qualitative study', *Wiener klinische Wochenschrift* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00508-024-02404-7>.

Sellman, E.M. and Buttarazzi, G.F. (2020) 'Adding Lemon Juice to Poison – Raising Critical Questions About the Oxymoronic Nature of Mindfulness in Education and Its Future Direction', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 68(1), pp. 61–78. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2019.1581128>.

Shapiro, S.L., Carlson, L.E., Astin, J.A., Freedman, B. (2006) 'Mechanisms of mindfulness', *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62(3), pp. 373–386. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20237>.

Simons, H. (1980) *Towards a science of the singular: Essays about case study in educational research and evaluation*. Norwich, United Kingdom: University of East Anglia.

Soini, H., Kronqvist, E.-L. and Huber, G.L. (eds) (2011) *Epistemologies for Qualitative Research*. Tübingen, Germany: Center for Qualitative Psychology (Qualitative Psychology Nexus: Vol 8).

Spector, P.E. (2019) 'Do Not Cross Me: Optimizing the Use of Cross-Sectional Designs', *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 34(2), pp. 125–137. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-018-09613-8>.

Staden, E.V. (2024) 'Turning Within: The Spirit of Contemplative Research', in B. Flanagan and K. Clough (eds) *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Spirituality and Contemplative Studies*. Routledge, pp. 218–226.

Stake, R.E. (1994) 'Case studies', in *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc, pp. 236–247.

Stake, R.E. (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc

Stake, R.E. (2005) 'Qualitative Case Studies', in *The Sage handbook of qualitative research, 3rd ed.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd, pp. 443–466.

Steiner, E. D., & Woo, A. (2021). Job-related stress threatens the teacher supply. Rand Corporation.

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA1100/RRA1108-1/RAND_RRA1108-1.pdf

Stelmach, B. (2016) 'Issues with Evidence in Constructivist/Interpretivist Educational Research', in Brill. Available at: <https://brill.com/display/book/edcoll/9789463004381/BP000003.xml> (Accessed: 16 May 2024).

Tarrasch, R., Berger, R. and Grossman, D. (2020) 'Mindfulness and Compassion as Key Factors in Improving teacher's Well Being', *Mindfulness*, 11(4), pp. 1049–1061. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-020-01304-x>.

Taylor, C., Harrison, J., Haimovitz, K., Oberle, E., Thomson, K., Schonert-Reichl, K., Roeser, R.W., (2016) 'Examining Ways That a Mindfulness-Based Intervention Reduces Stress in Public School Teachers: a Mixed-Methods Study', *Mindfulness*, 7(1), pp. 115–129. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-015-0425-4>.

Teper, R., Segal, Z.V. and Inzlicht, M. (2013) 'Inside the Mindful Mind: How Mindfulness Enhances Emotion Regulation Through Improvements in Executive Control', *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22(6), pp. 449–454. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413495869>.

Thomas, D. (2003) 'A General Inductive Approach for Qualitative Data Analysis', *The American Journal of Evaluation*, 27.

Thomas, G. (2019) *Case Study*. SAGE Publications Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036812890>.

Thorburn, M. (2017) 'Contrasting conceptions of wellbeing and their implications for educational planning and practice', in *Wellbeing, Education and Contemporary Schooling*. London: Routledge, pp. 27–43.

Tight, M. (2017) *Understanding Case Study Research: Small-scale Research with Meaning*. SAGE Publications Ltd. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473920118>.

Tikly, L. (2015) 'What works, for whom, and in what circumstances? Towards a critical realist understanding of learning in international and comparative education,' *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, pp. 237–249. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.008>.

Tineke A. Abma, and Robert E. Stake (2014) 'Science of the Particular: An Advocacy of Naturalistic Case Study in Health Research'. Available at: <https://journals-sagepub-com.dcu.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1177/1049732314543196?journalCode=qhra> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).

Torppa, M.A., Makkonen, E., Mårtenson, C., Pitkälä, K.H. (2008) 'A qualitative analysis of student Balint groups in medical education: Contexts and triggers of case presentations and discussion themes', *Patient Education and Counseling*, 72(1), pp. 5–11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2008.01.012>.

Treagust, D.F. and Won, M. (2023) 'Paradigms in Science Education Research', in *Handbook of Research on Science Education*. Routledge.

Turner, K. and Thielking, M. (2019) 'Teacher wellbeing: Its effects on teaching practice and student learning', *Issues in Educational Research*, 29(3), pp. 938–960.

Turner, K. and Garvis, S. (2023) 'Teacher Educator Wellbeing, Stress and Burnout: A Scoping Review', *Education Sciences*, 13(4), p. 351. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13040351>.

Vago, D.R. and David, S.A. (2012) 'Self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-transcendence (S-ART): a framework for understanding the neurobiological mechanisms

of mindfulness', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 6. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2012.00296>.

Valkonen, T. (2015) *Deep Talk. Tunnista yhteisön voima. [Deep Talk. Recognize the power of the community.]*. Helsinki: Kirjapaja.

Van Gordon, W., Saphiang, S. and Shonin, E. (2022) 'Contemplative Psychology: History, Key Assumptions, and Future Directions', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 17(1), pp. 99–107. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620984479>.

Van Roy, K., Vanheule, S. and Inslegers, R. (2015) 'Research on Balint groups: A literature review', *Patient Education and Counseling*, 98(6), pp. 685–694. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2015.01.014>.

Verschuren, P.J.M. (2003) 'Case study as a research strategy: Some ambiguities and opportunities', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory & Practice*, 6(2), pp. 121–139. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570110106154>.

Viac, C. and Fraser, P. (2020) 'Teachers' well-being: A framework for data collection and analysis'. OECD. Available at: <https://www-oecd-ilibrary-org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/content/paper/c36fc9d3-en> (Accessed: 29 July 2023).

Vo, D.T. and Allen, K.A. (2022) 'A systematic review of school-based positive psychology interventions to foster teacher wellbeing', *Teachers and Teaching*, 28(8), pp. 964–999. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2022.2137138>.

Von der Embse, N., Ryan, S.V., Gibbs, T., Mankin, A., (2019) 'Teacher stress interventions: A systematic review', *Psychology in the Schools*, 56(8), pp. 1328–1343. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22279>.

Wagner, I., Noichl, T., Cramer, M., Dlugosch, G.E., Hosenfeld, I. (2024) 'Moderating personal factors for the effectiveness of a self-care- and mindfulness-based intervention for teachers', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 144, p. 104576. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104576>.

Walach, H., Buchheld, N., Buttenmüller, V., Kleinknecht, N., Schmidt, S. (2006) 'Measuring mindfulness—the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI)', *Personality and*

Individual Differences, 40(8), pp. 1543–1555. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2005.11.025>.

Weare, K. (2019) 'Mindfulness and contemplative approaches in education', *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, pp. 321–326. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsy.2019.06.001>.

Weinstock, M., Kienhues, D., Feucht, F.C., Ryan, M. (2017) 'Informed Reflexivity: Enacting Epistemic Virtue', *Educational Psychologist*, 52(4), pp. 284–298. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2017.1349662>.

Whitley, R. and Crawford, M. (2005) 'Qualitative Research in Psychiatry', *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 50(2), pp. 108–114. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/070674370505000206>.

Williams, R. (2018) *Being human: bodies, minds, persons* / Rowan Williams. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

Williams, T., Munjuluri, S. and Lichtenstein, A. (2022) 'Experiences from a Balint Group Intervention with Urban Public School Teachers', *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine*, 57(6), pp. 527–533. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00912174221120774>.

Wilson, C.N. (2021) 'A Contemplative Pedagogy: A Practice of Presence When the Present is Overwhelming', *Journal of Transformative Learning*, 8(1), pp. 52–62.

Woodside, A.G. (2016) 'Building Theory from Case Study Research' in *Case Study Research*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp. 1–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78560-461-420152014>.

Yalom, I.D. (2002) *The gift of therapy: An open letter to a new generation of therapists and their patients*. New York, NY, US: HarperCollins Publishers (The gift of therapy: An open letter to a new generation of therapists and their patients.), pp. xxi, 263.

Yin, R.K. (2009) *Case study research: design and methods*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications (Applied social research methods series).

Yin, R.K. (2014) *Case study research: design and methods / Robert K. Yin*. Fifth edition. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Yuwono, M.A. and Rachmawati, D. (2023) 'Combined Methods. Can This Solve The Differences Between Deductive and Inductive Methods in Qualitative Research?,' *Moroccan Journal of Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 5(3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.48379/IMIST.PRSM/mjqr-v5i3.45541>.

Zajonc, A. (2009) *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry*. Great Barrington: Lindisfarne Books.

Zajonc, A. (2013) *Contemplative Pedagogy: A Quiet Revolution in Higher Education: New Directions for Teaching and Learning*. 02710633, pp. 83–94. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.20057>.

Zembylas, M. (2021) 'The affective dimension of everyday resistance: implications for critical pedagogy in engaging with neoliberalism's educational impact', *Critical Studies in Education*, 62(2), pp. 211–226. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2019.1617180>.

Zembylas, M. (2024) "'Neoliberal subjects" and "Neoliberal affects" in academia: Methodological, theoretical, and political implications', *Policy Futures in Education*, 22(2), pp. 172–186. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103221135618>.

Zembylas, M. and Schutz, P.A. (eds) (2016) *Methodological Advances in Research on Emotion and Education*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-29049-2>.

Zhang, X., Samsudin, N. and Sun, H. (2024) 'Fostering empathy in Chinese medical students: the role of Balint groups facilitation', *COGENT EDUCATION*, 11(1), p. 2344371. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2344371>.

Zhou, S., Slemph, G.R. and Vella-Brodrick, D.A. (2024) 'Factors Associated with Teacher Wellbeing: A Meta-Analysis', *Educational Psychology Review*, 36(2), p. 63. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-024-09886-x>.

Appendices

Appendix A: DCU Ethical Approval Confirmation

Dear Paul,

Thank you for submitting the amendment for your research project DCUREC/2017/215 and for your patience whilst we got back to you. I can confirm that the REC Chair has completed their review and issued approval for the amendment and all associated documentation. Please accept this email as formal approval.

Wishing you the very best for your research.

Kind regards

Adam Platt (on behalf of REC)

Riarthóir Coiste Eitice um Thaighde | DCU Research Ethics Committee Administrator

Tacaíocht Taighde & Núálaíochta | Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath

Research and Innovation Support | Dublin City University

Email: rec@dcu.ie

Appendix B: Frame of Interview Questions

MBSR Sample Interview Questions

My Starter Questions:	Broader Questions (for the field)	Higher Order Consideration
<p>1. What is your <u>Motivation/Purpose</u> (trigger) for signing up at this time? What has brought you here today ie to the course? – (the antecedent)</p> <p>2. What is your <u>Intention</u> for this particular week? - more future orientated and can be immediate or long term</p> <p>3. What are your <u>aspirations</u> for completing the Programme – your hopes or expectations when programme is completed?</p> <p>Note to self to alter for schedule</p>	<p>Set 1:</p> <p>1. Do you ever find yourself (wondering about yourself), for example, noticing the thoughts that go through your mind, or the feelings that come up for you, , (what you are doing)</p> <p>2. Can you give me some examples please?</p> <p>3.? (When this “wondering happens, what is this like for you?</p> <p>4. And how do you respond to these thoughts/feelings/actions (whatever they are) when they emerge? (watch if negative and redirect)</p> <p>5. What I mean by this is... what do you do when this happens?</p> <p>6. Why do you respond in this way? What influences your response?</p> <p>7. Is this a common response pattern for you?</p> <p>Set 2:</p> <p>1. Are there ever times when your response is different ie in different parts of your life? (personal v professional) I am interested here in areas outside your work too</p> <p>2. If you were to ask close colleague to describe you as a teacher what would they say and why do you think they would say that?</p> <p>3. Do you see yourself differently as “Paul the person” versus “Paul the teacher” and why?</p> <p>4. How do you feel about that? ie does this “conflict” bother you?</p>	<p>Set 1:</p> <p>-In thinking of the concept of self- reflection what comes to mind for you?</p> <p>-What helps you or tell me the ways that help you to come to know yourself/understand yourself/engage in thinking (contemplate) about your own life?</p> <p>Set 2:</p> <p>-How do you understand your identity as a teacher?</p> <p>-What shapes your understanding now of yourself as a teacher?</p> <p>-In what way does your personal life experience shape or influence how you see yourself as a teacher and how you teach?</p> <p>-What have been the significant professional experiences you have had which have shaped your professional identity as a teacher?</p>

	<p>Set 3:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When you think of your wellbeing what comes to mind? 2. What are your feelings around that awareness? 3. Tell me what you do or could do to further your wellbeing? 4. Do you experience your wellbeing differently depending on your personal context or your work context? Can you give me examples please? 5. Is this experience different for you as you move between contexts, for example, between home and work? 6. Are there ever tensions in maintaining a balance between wellbeing in your home and wellbeing in work? 7. Have you ever put your prof obligations/work demands ahead of your wellbeing? 8. Tell me please about what gets you back on track ie to shift the imbalance so as to mind yourself *And are these the same for you regardless of the context? 9. Are you aware of “organised/structured” supports that you can access too? 	<p>Set 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In thinking of the general concept of wellbeing what comes to mind for you? -In thinking of the concept of <u>teacher</u> wellbeing what comes to mind for you? -What are the sources or elements which support your own wellbeing as a person/individual? -Are these sources different from what supports your wellbeing as a teacher? -What is that you need to support your own wellbeing as a teacher?
--	--	---

Deep Talk Sample Interview Questions

	<p>Pre Interview: Starter Questions What is your Motivation/Purpose (trigger) for participating at this time in the Deep Talk session? What brings you to the session? – (the antecedent) What is your intention for participating in the session? What are your aspirations for participating in the session ie your hopes or expectations when the session is completed?</p> <p><i>Frame 1:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you ever find yourself (wondering about yourself), for example, noticing the thoughts that go through your mind, or the feelings that come up for you, what you are doing? 2. Can you give me some examples please? 3. When this “wondering” happens, what is this like for you? 4. And how do you respond to these thoughts/feelings/actions (whatever they are) when they emerge? (watch if negative and redirect) 5. What I mean by this is... what do you do when this happens? 6. Why do you respond in this way? What influences your response? 7. Is this a common response pattern for you? <p><i>Frame 2:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there ever times when your response is different ie in different parts of your life? (personal v professional). I am interested here in areas outside your work too. 2. If you were to ask close colleague to describe you as a teacher what would they say and why do you think they would say that? 3. Do you see yourself differently as “Paul the person” versus “Paul the teacher” and why? 4. If so, how do you feel about this difference ie does it bother you? <p><i>Frame 3: You have just recently come through a DT exp- has this, in any way, contributed to your personal or prof context -</i> <i>How meaningful was exp overall in terms of per or prof self</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When you think of your own wellbeing what comes to mind? 2. What are your feelings around that awareness? 3. Tell me what you do or could do to further your wellbeing? 4. Do you experience your well-being differently depending on your personal context or your work context? Can you give me examples please? 5. Is this experience different for you as you move between contexts, for example, between home and work? 6. Are there ever tensions in maintaining a balance between wellbeing in your home and wellbeing in work? 7. Have you ever put your professional obligations/work demands ahead of your wellbeing? 8. Tell me please about what gets you back on track ie to shift the imbalance so as to mind yourself. And are these the same for you regardless of the context? 9. Are you aware of any “organised/structured” supports that you can access?
	<p>Post session Starter Questions at post interview: Post deep talk completion is your intention for participating in the session any different? Post deep talk completion are your aspirations for participating in the session ie your hopes or expectations any different now that the session is completed?</p>

1. Do you ever find yourself (wondering about yourself), for example, noticing the **thoughts** that go through your mind, or the **feelings** that come up for you, what you are **doing**?
2. Can you give me some examples please?
3. When this “wondering” happens, what is this like for you?
4. And how do you respond to these thoughts/feelings/actions (whatever they are) when they emerge? (watch if negative and redirect)
5. What I mean by this is... what do you do when this happens?
6. Why do you respond in this way? What influences your response?
7. Is this a common response pattern for you?

Post session

1. Are there ever times when your response is different ie in different parts of your life? (personal v professional). I am interested here in areas outside your work too.
2. If you were to ask close colleague to describe you as a teacher what would they say and why do you think they would say that?
3. Do you see yourself differently as “Paul the person” versus “Paul the teacher” and why?
4. If so, how do you feel about this difference ie does it bother you?

Balint Sample Interview Questions

Pre Intervention:

Starter Questions What is your Motivation/Purpose (trigger) for participating at this time in the Balint session? What brings you to the session? – (the antecedent)

What is your intention for participating in the session?

What are your aspirations for participating in the session ie your hopes or expectations when the session is completed?

SET 1:

1. Do you ever find yourself (wondering about yourself), for example, noticing the **thoughts** that go through your mind, or the **feelings** that come up for you, what you are **doing**?
2. Can you give me some examples please?
3. When this “wondering” happens, what is this like for you?
4. And how do you respond to these thoughts/feelings/actions (whatever they are) when they emerge? (watch if negative and redirect) What I mean by this is... what do you do when this happens?
5. Why do you respond in this way? What influences your response?
6. Is this a common response pattern for you?

SET 2:

1. Are there ever times when your response is different, i.e. in different parts of your life? (personal v professional). I am interested here in areas outside your work too.
2. If you were to ask a close colleague to describe you as a teacher what would they say and why do you think they would say that?
3. Do you see yourself differently as “Paul the person” versus “Paul the teacher” and why?
4. If so, how do you feel about this difference, i.e. does it bother you?

SET 3:

1. When you think of your own wellbeing what comes to mind?
2. What are your feelings around that awareness?
3. Tell me what you do or could do to further your wellbeing?
4. Do you experience your well-being differently depending on your personal context or your work context? Can you give me examples please?
5. Is this experience different for you as you move between contexts, for example, between home and work?
6. Are there ever tensions in maintaining a balance between wellbeing in your home and wellbeing in work?
7. Have you ever put your professional obligations/work demands ahead of your wellbeing?
8. Tell me please about what gets you back on track ie to shift the imbalance so as to mind yourself. And are these the same for you regardless of the context?
9. Are you aware of any “organised/structured” support that you can access?

Starter Questions at post interview

-Tell me your response in general to the Balint experience

-Post Balint completion is your intention for participating in the session any different?

	<p>-Post Balint completion are your aspirations for participating in the session ie your hopes or expectations any different now that the session is completed?</p>
	<p>Personal DIARY entries explored When invited to share a case, how did you feel about this invitation? What did you notice about yourself as the presenter was telling their story in the first part of the session? And then in the second presentation? How did you respond to being invited to actively participate in the case presentations How did you feel at the end of the presentation 1? and feelings at the end of case 2</p>
	<p>Post Session SET 1: 1. During Balint did you find yourself (wondering about yourself), for example, noticing the thoughts going through your mind, or the feelings that came up for you, what you were doing? 2. Can you give me some examples please? 3. If this “wondering” happened what was this like for you? 4. And how did you respond to these thoughts/feelings/actions (whatever they were) when they emerged? (watch if negative and redirect) What I mean by this is... what did you do when this happened? 5. What influenced your response in the context of the Balint? 6. Is this a common response pattern for you or is it different in the context of the Balint experience?</p> <p>SET 2: 1. Were there ever times when your response to Balint experience was different ie in the different parts of your life? (personal v professional). 2. What insights, if any, did Balint offer you in seeing yourself as “Paul the person” versus “Paul the teacher” and why? 3. If so, how do you feel about this difference ie does it bother you?</p> <p>SET 3: . <i>What impact did engagement in this contemplative practice experience – Balint - have on you as a teacher’s sense of their personal and professional wellbeing/illbeing? more heightened awareness of self?</i> ? <i>You have just recently come through a Balint exp. - has this, in any way, contributed to your sense of personal wellbeing or prof context - How meaningful was the exp overall in terms of insight into your sense of per or prof wellbeing?</i> ? <i>In the moments of silence throughout the session what were your thoughts, feelings, awareness of body sensations?</i></p> <p>Closing summary general question - what stays with you as a learning for yourself now at the end of the session?</p>

Appendix C: Emergent themes within MBSR

Six themes emerged in the analysis of participant engagement within MBSR, namely, *Intentionality and Intention, Attention, Attitude, Awareness, Process and Self-Regulation*, all of which are discussed in the following subsections.

Intentionality and Intention

At the outset, prior to programme commencement, participant *intentionality* captures how participants in the practices intend to proceed by identifying and naming their precise *intentions* in advance of coming to the practice. Intentionality is what lies behind one's intentions – it is the capacity to set out one's future intentions. On the other hand, the articulation of *intentions* represents a '*spatial turning inward*' in the moment of practice and reflects a turning of attention inward toward one's first-person experience so that one can orientate to subjectivity and make this the object of attention (Ergas 2019).

In this theme participant's **personal needs** are a dominant intentionality for engagement with mindfulness practice. Sara articulates a well-considered and reflective position regarding her intentionality for exploring mindfulness practice. This interest is aligned to her personal needs pertaining directly to her personal life.

I suppose the main thing was, you know that, to have a level of calm and competence in my own life....the first motivation to do mindfulness is for my own personal life.... to support myself and to live life, you know, in a way that really matters to me.

This personal intentionality is also captured by Tara who describes herself as "an anxious person" often feeling overwhelmed due to stress arising from her demanding work. This has impacted her mental health to the extent that she recognised the need "to take a step back and do what is best for myself." Hence, Tara's intentionality for practice is linked to her desire for self-regulation and to learn how better to cope with stress in her life. Lucy has had prior experience of mindfulness practice, but the passage of time has eroded its main benefits, and she wishes to return to the possibility of learning to practice again as a gift to herself. This time she brings her greater life experience to the programme, and she notes that she is "in a different frame of mind and coming at it from a new angle" as well as "coming from it, a little bit older, and as a mother, and still as a teacher."

Another expressed intentionality by **participants is the desire to learn a new skill** for self. In Sara's case, the deepening of her mindfulness practice through programme participation is to become a mindfulness teacher. She wishes to create a mindfulness practice community within her school for her colleagues and for her students with the hope that her mindful practice would also "trickle into my teaching." For Lucy, this skill intentionality is the desire to practice with more awareness and attention. She expresses "high hopes of learning a few little things to keep me well, in the moment and to be

mindful of things” and the joy which comes from making a commitment for herself to the programme. By the end of the programme, she expresses a hope to have a “little toolkit that might work for me at this moment in my life, and I want to just learn how to put it into my day a little toolkit and to be able to be more mindful.” Tara remarks how she does not wish to be “missing out on what’s going on because of absorption with the past or future.” While accepting that stress is part of living Tara sometimes feels trapped in a cycle of continuous stress which can lead her to becoming stuck and thus, she is interested in “developing the tools to deal with those situations better.” As she moves through the course the benefits for Tara become apparent as she identifies her participation as having a “big impact.” As she comes to the end of the mindfulness programme Lucy is “feeling some positive effects, which are a motivation of their own” and also feels a little bit calmer as she builds the practice as a habit into her daily routine. The intention to practice is bolstered by her short daily practice which she says, “brings me back to earth and to the basics.”

As participants move through the programme the accrued benefits are a stimuli and encouragement to continue with practice. Sara acknowledges her original intentionality for practice was for self but as she completes the halfway mark in the programme, she sees extensions to **other dimensions of her life** – her family and her work as a teacher. She notes that as the commitment to practice intensifies, she is more deeply questioning her motivation for continuing, stating,

When I first started out, my intentions, were probably very much around you know, using my practice to really support me in my life. But then, as time went on, I suppose I really noticed that even though I was doing this, for me that there really was, it was really kind of affecting, like other areas of my life too, in relation to family and work, in relation to teaching ...I suppose my intentions were deeper, they were more focusing on "What do I really want to get out of doing the programme and why am I doing this? Why am I keeping going?"

Over time, participants acknowledge that their **intentionality for practice has changed** and developed, for example Sara remarks,

My practice probably has grown, and I've practiced more.. my intentions have changed. And in that sense, because you know, the more you practice, the more your intentions grow and the stronger you feel yourself... you grow yourself in your own practice.

At the end, reflecting on her engagement with the full programme, Sara is realistic about the challenges to maintain her interest. However, the evidential benefit to her personal life has propelled the sustaining of this commitment. She is shifting to a more open and less attached seeking of an outcome in deference to allowing whatever to emerge as part of her practice and as she describes is more “willing to work with whatever is there, you know, not obviously having a low level of expectations but not expecting too much to happen, but just to practice for the sake of practicing.”

Attention

Staying with or attending to whatever emerges in the unfolding of daily living and in the practice of mindfulness can understandably induce feelings of resistance particularly if these feelings are negative. Participants observed attending to whatever arises in thoughts, feelings, and body with more ease. Sara describes attending to practice with deliberation as she regularly gives her attention to observing what is happening for and to her and which she describes as a “*tuning in*” to what is going on for her. Over time she realises that writing down her intentions can support her practice and sustain her commitment by giving direct attention and focus to her original and ongoing intentions.

I actually wrote them down. I have all my intentions written down. Yeah. So, they're always there to kind of remind me why I'm doing this. Even if I don't feel like doing it are usually the days that I really need to practice more.

Attending to one's reality whatever it is brings a different relationship to one's experience. For example, Tara, in learning to have a different relationship to her work is less inclined to become consumed by its demands as she learns to have less fear even when she faces the reality of her situation. She is more willing to face the negative but without judgement.

But I can see that sometimes things just go wrong, or events come up in life that sometimes can't be avoided. And that's okay. I don't have to completely avoid all negative events or try to avoid them anyway. So, I think in that sense, it's really helped.

Lucy echoes a similar theme stating that as she becomes more comfortable with practice, she is more naturally able to attend and notice more with deliberation, noting

this morning, I went for a quick little walk when I dropped the children off. And like even just taking a little breath and saying, “oh, here are the birds, there they are” and maybe I did that before, but I'm just conscious that I'm doing it now.. I suppose more than anything.

Lucy credits her practice and programme participation for helping her to attend and prioritise what matters in her life. She is learning the value of

taking time to be in the moment and which I am...and if I am developing these nice habits of being present then nearly without even realizing I'm kind of giving myself to whatever - personal life - family life and work life, you know, I supposed it comes automatically.

Attitude

The practice of mindfulness as a way of helping one to respond to the demands and circumstances of life without judgement and with kindness is a consistent theme for all participants. Sara remarks,

Self-compassion in mindfulness was my first interest because at the time, it was something I needed in my own life. I was dealing with a lot of grief, and it just really supported me so many other ways. At that same time, my kids were small, there was a lot going on.

Commitment to practice falters which when it wavers requires one to acknowledge being human. This is a natural and likely occurrence, and the antidote is beginning practice again with commitment and without judgement. Sara observes,

when you are practicing mindfulness, you know, you can fall off the wagon and life takes over and we are human, you know, the pitfalls that people are going to fall into, and it's about getting out of those because you can be dragged so easily to not doing the practice and then you lose interest in it.

Irrespective of whatever arises within Sara's awareness she accepts without labelling or judgement so that, as she says bluntly, "if you're feeling crap, or if you're feeling good, or, you know, whatever, whatever is there!" This capacity for awareness from her mindful practice is neither blind nor passive. It is awareness which comes with a freedom or non-attachment and an ability to choose a response and to make choices so that one does not remain stuck in one's experience. Tara holds extremely high expectations for herself which although as a result she excels it can also be problematic leading to an attitude of striving since as she notes,

I'm very conscientious as well, when it comes to working that I always want to do things as well as possible. So sometimes that involves pushing myself more than I should, I think it's not always a positive thing for myself. And ...but if I can see a way of doing something better, I think I always want to go that extra mile. And I think that's sometimes where I fall into problems.

As Tara moves through her practice experience, she becomes more at ease with herself and is less inclined to avoid negative feelings choosing to stay with whatever emerges.

Or maybe I've noticed that I trust myself more to do things I don't know..I think, "Okay, I'll try them if they don't work, and that's okay." Or if something's negative, if I feel negative about something, that's okay. I can just let it be. And feel it instead of trying to always push it away, which causes me probably more stress for anxiety.

However, for Tara it is a challenge to step back and be less demanding of self. Her natural tendency is to strive and to make things better but as she learns to be more accepting, she can see the benefits of accepting reality as it sometimes is without a sense of guilt

or blame. Following on from the mid-point stage of the programme Tara has retained the capacity to become less attached, particularly to her negative emotions and has become more comfortable with accepting whatever is her emotional experience. She recognises the cyclical nature of her emotions and moods but recognises “it won't last” and so, as she says, “maybe just take it as it comes and know that it will pass well, which is good for me.” She has learned to make her own well-being a priority since “in the past, I think I found that very selfish, whereas now, I can see, I can't actually help anybody or else I'm not any benefit to anybody else if I'm not doing well, myself and so I think, just taking that time for me really helps and just helps everything.” At the end of the programme Tara, arising from her mindfulness programme experience, has kept her curiosity and interest to learn more. She has also learned to kinder to herself and less bonded to how she feels in the moment which can bring a critical aspect to how she considers herself.

I can just observe it [her experiences] and say, “Okay, this is what's going on inside, but I don't have to be kind of attached to it.” I can observe it and say “okay I'm very stressed and rushing around, but I can then also take a step back and say “Okay, I can also change this, it doesn't have to be this way.”

Lucy often feels too this sense of being pulled apart and conflicted by the various demands she experiences in her life between her teaching role, her family, and the desire to attend to her own well-being and echoes this same capacity to be self-critical.

I suppose in an ideal world, you would do that [school] work during the day, but if I'm at home with the children, and there's dinner and things to be done or homework, you know, so then I go back to that work at night. That's just the way that works for me.

She has learned to respond more gently to her wondering mind and to be less judgemental or burdensome with expectation.

So I'm still wondering about my life probably, maybe not as much, but I'm calmly wondering about my life, you know, um, I'm not thinking I should be doing this or should I do that or, you know, as much, um, I suppose more so, um, I'm okay with the wondering....

And when it comes to her daily practice Lucy is recognising the tendency of “bringing work home in my head and obviously physically as well” but rather than harshly judge herself she is learning to remain faithful to her practice as a way of switching off even when her practice is minimal by doing “a little breath here and there, but that's not everyday, it just doesn't work for me, you know...but you can live with the kind of ‘not every day is the same’ and some days there is more practice than others.

Awareness

Sara's hope is that mindfulness would also trickle into her teaching for the purpose of becoming more self-aware. She considers the commitment to practice as essentially a different way of being a person and a teacher when she says,

it's like your training an awareness. It's a habit. You're creating new patterns, new habits, but you have to be committed to it. And I think that, you know if you're not committed to those, it doesn't happen.

Her awareness of self through her mindful practice is embodied in everyday living and forms a natural part of the beginning rhythm of her day, and as she remarks "being aware of what's going on right here right now, as opposed to finding myself already going through the day." This capacity for awareness is an embedded feature of Sara's approach to the world and to what's going on around her, within her vision and the space she occupies. For Sara, the practice has enabled her to slow down and become more aware of the present moment in her life as a teacher.

... and the intensity of our teaching is very much future focused a lot of the time, I think, as opposed to more thana now focus. So, I think that's something that you're kind of going against the grain when you're mindfully teaching. It's not the done thing really all the time.

Returning to relationships with students Sara expresses a wish to be real and authentic in her connection with students since the duality between her real self and being a teacher "doesn't sit well with me." Tara's starting point is solid as she is already a reflective person using a daily reflective diary as an aide de memoire for her daily living experience and emotions and as a record of the positive and challenging moments she encounters. She remarks that within her personal life the meeting of new people can induce feelings of anxiety when she tends to be less assertive but perceives herself to be "more assertive or more self-confident when I'm working or when I'm teaching."

Work for Tara dominates the demands on her time and this imbalance is something she seeks to redress in pursuing her interest in mindfulness. She illustrates her growth in more deliberate awareness as she learns that she can make choices about what and when she enjoys doing for herself without being forced to do something in the moment.

I've realized, actually, maybe this isn't the right time if it does not feel right but maybe tomorrow, I'll be completely in the mood to do that thing. And then I'll do it and it'll be great. Whereas if I force myself to do it today, it's an effort, and I'm not enjoying it.

At the end of the programme, she identifies as being in a very good place and feeling a lot more confident and a lot lighter than pre programme completion so "now things just feel easier." Lucy has an appreciation for her life and recognises the preciousness of the life she leads. However, she is aware too of the ambivalence towards her fast-moving

life which although not inducing direct anxiety gives her cause for thinking and wondering. She recognises the similarities between herself as a teacher and person but recognises differences too principally because of the demands and nature of her role. She is coming mindfulness as she acknowledges that for much of her life her own well-being is sacrificed in deference to care and concern for others and “that it comes at the bottom of a long list of other people's well being.” She is also becoming more aware , through MBSR of the importance of attending to her own well-being, perceiving this not to be a “treat” for self but rather as “sort of essential” and she attributes this awareness to her mindfulness practice which is also bringing her a “feeling of calmness” and a sense of “everything slowing down.” Work remains a challenge for Lucy to find space for practice but the opportunity for long practice brings balance and its own reward and helps to regulate the busyness of her role and “it just kind of brings me back to earth then kind of you know, really helps, I suppose, just to touch base really with life.” Participating in the programme has connected Lucy with a sense of her own humanity and her sense as a teacher. It has enabled her to be more relaxed and to be more acutely aware of others needs and circumstances.

Process

Sara laments the absence of supports for teachers in managing their own well-being. She describes the practice of her mindfulness as “making space for whatever is there.” She believes it is the constancy of practice in small measures which collectively leads to an improvement in overall well-being. She describes mindfulness as a process of “navigating” with the tools which are a personal support and in her teaching help her to recognise patterns of being and how to respond to what emerges as she states,

Everything in the programme supports how you're looking after yourself and supports how you're relating to yourself, or, you know, seeing yourself, how are you listening to your body's wisdom, or practices are supporting you in recognizing, you know, what your body needs, recognising all the thoughts, recognising their emotions, recognising sensations. Each practice is a lesson in well-being.

Later describes this process as learning to trust her practice in the belief that with this “kind of trusting that the answer will come and trusting that you know it will work its way out once I keep practicing.” Tara’s wish at the outset to relate to others and in her case particularly with Irish people as she is abroad, expresses the process dimension of practice through the safety of social connection as part of her intention too for practice. Through practice she begins to recognise its efficacy and learns to directly respond to moments of stress through the process of grounding and focusing on her feet.

For me, it was just always focusing just on my feet on the ground. I'm just taking those two seconds, and it just breaks the cycle. And then I think, “okay, then I can start again.” And, so I think just seeing that it actually works. And it does help just makes me remember to do it more often.

From the practice of meditation Tara is noticing that it brings a stillness, reduces her tendency to panic and mitigates against her ruminating mind which can cripple her confidence.

I have also noticed, especially over the last few weeks, that when I'm actually just still or I try to now, just meditate even if it's just for a few minutes before I start class, I find it really helps just bring that stillness. ... And I think that really helps. And then things do flow. I'm not so in my head and thinking so much. And then I can be more present...

This insight has remained with Tara at the end of the programme when she states that “I think now it's a lot more realistic for me to pause each day and to meditate each day and it might not be an hour, but I can stop at any time of the day, and just take three minutes if that's all I have or take 20 minutes if that's what I have.” And later Tara acknowledges that as she learned more about herself “the more I’m realizing it it's a never-ending process, and I think it will be kind of a life practice.” The presence of other people in the class is a support to Lucy and she enjoys sharing and listening to others and their experience of practice and she doubts it is a programme she could complete on her own without the support of others. And even when she had to complete an all day retreat online she enjoyed the sense of “being able to give that time to myself” which she found to be very peaceful. On a description of her online mode experience of MBSR Lucy describes it to be better than she expected, and she feels the shared conversations had a slower pace because of the nature of ZOOM. However, she did consider it somewhat “formal” in contrast to in person meeting. Lucy finds the taking of time to practice her breathing “kind of helps me through the day.” This habit is not only for when her mind wanders but has also become a natural part of her daily living. She identifies the depth, length, and continuity of her practice as crucial to bringing noticeable and substantial change to her life and in particular to assisting her to manage her thinking mind and what she describes as the patterns of her brain.

I suppose the continuity of the practice seems to be helping me, you know, seems to be, I suppose, getting me a little, just changing me a little, my thoughts. I suppose, you know, changing my little brain patterns, just, um, to be a bit more present.

The focus on her breath is for Lucy a positive and accessible way of grounding herself which says brings a calmness, allows her to step back and have clarity to “see a bigger picture” and which helps curtail her anxiety.

Self-Regulation

Sara is not naïve to the challenge of her mindfulness practice acknowledging that sometimes one can be dragged away from the need for practice through distraction and which leads to a loss of interest. In bringing a meta-awareness and attention to self she is capable through her practice of not becoming swamped by recognising what is happening to her in the moment as she says, “whatever is there, is there.” Arising from

this awareness and through her practice Sara identifies her capacity to make choices in response to her state of being.

If I'm thinking this, it doesn't mean this. Not being attached to it, or it doesn't mean that this is how it's going to be, you know, like, there's always choices and being very aware of yourself, there's always something you can do to kind of move forward, move up, move on from how you're feeling by bringing awareness, which is kind of like, okay, I can step out now and, and do whatever I need to do.

As Sara moved through practice and the mindfulness programme it brought awareness to the propensity for being consumed by thinking and the capacity to regulate but this is not without a challenge. Over time enhanced awareness for Sara leads to being more responsive and less reactionary particularly as role a model for her own children and those whom she teaches. This can lead to a capacity for greater space for choice and a recognition that “there's a different way, there's a better way sometimes” to respond to whatever arises. She acknowledges and is wise that habitual patterns are hard to break but she also holds that the possibility of choice coupled with courage to face this reality can lead to change. On several occasions Sara speaks of the habits acquired which do not serve her well and one of the outcomes of her practice is that while these habits of a lifetime, are still present she has a relationship with them whereby she notices when they happen and “I notice that I can choose to respond, I can choose to the notice it.” Sara views the bringing of mindfulness to her own personal and professional life to be a “valuable tool for me to be able to share with kids in the classroom but just even for my own emotional regulation, for my own presence in the classroom.” She later remarks that her awareness of being more present is enhanced by her practice of mindfulness leading her to be more “tuned in” to the

emotional leads or emotional climate in the classroom and how I can adapt my teaching to suit what's going on for the kids in the class, because a lot of the time you know they may have their own stuff going on and we need to adapt with that so to be more tuned into what's going on in the classroom environment.

Tara's mode of grounding herself is literally to connect with her feet as a mechanism for breaking the cycle of her rumination and taking her out of her unhelpful mind. It is by giving attention to her body and to her feet that Tara comes to find herself being more grounded which help breaks any sense of being panicked or unstable and supports her to slow down and notice her experience.

Yeah, and I think, now, I've really just started to connect. just really focusing on my feet on the ground, for some reason this helps me a lot more than focusing on my breath...., yeah, I don't know why. And it does help me to breathe, especially if I'm kind of panicking but I think when I notice if I'm rushing, or in a hurry, or starting to panic, and then I say, “okay, just feel your feet on the ground”, it just automatically breaks the cycle. And

suddenly, I'm kind of in touch with everything that's around me I can hear what's going on around me. I can just take myself out of my mind.

As she progresses through the programme Tara is aware that the practices she is learning are enabling her to pause and “get back on track,” become less reactionary and obtain greater control over her thinking patterns which to date have led her to “spiral out of control.” She is less panicked by the unexpected which may arise and can approach emerging circumstances with a greater sense of calm and acceptance in the confidence that she will find a solution.

For example, sometimes if I had a lot of work on I would be panicking in case something else happened and I have to deal with that thing. And how would I possibly do that because I have so much work? And now I see, “okay, I have to find a way, it's okay, these things come up. And they happen to everybody. Everybody expects them and probably, accepts if they do happen. And it's okay. You just have to deal with them.” Whereas before I couldn't entertain that thought.

Tara has learned to recognise what she describes as the “barrier or limits” to herself and to be less demanding of herself beyond reasonable expectation. This is because of deliberate choices she is making in her life, but this change comes with work and effort. Through her induction into mindfulness Tara feels she is redressing the imbalance between attention to work life in deference to her personal well-being. She is learning to activate choices which results in work not consuming all of her time.

And I think there may be balancing out a bit more. I think before, work probably took all of who I am. ...So then I would maybe take away from my own private time or my own personal time to work, whereas now, I'm thinking, “Okay, this time is also important. And I can do that work next week.” I have time. So yes. I think in that aspect, they're balancing out a bit more.

Lucy is cognisant too that her work as a primary teacher is often so busy that she is working on “autopilot,” and she is aware of the need to mentally adjust before she leaves work for home. She has come to notice that on occasions when she has more time to become aware of her feelings and she expresses a desire to have better control or more regulation over these negative feelings.

But when you have a little bit of extra time, then you have time to notice what you're feeling, you know, so maybe that's another way to address your well-being because you say, “oh possibly, those feelings are there for years, and I just haven't noticed, you know” ... Really, you can have negative feelings, but like, you know, if there's something you could do to kind of manage this a little bit better,

Lucy is learning to step back from the habits of compulsive doing and learning to make more acceptable choices about what she really wishes to do.

Yeah. And I'm kind of stepping back a tiny bit and I'd love to be all hands on deck, but, you know, I'm just starting to step back a tiny bit, you know, as well and say, well, do I really need to do that now? You know? Um, yeah which is probably helping, it's not helping the house, but it's helping me <laugh>

After completing the programme, she is less perturbed by her self-critical mind and is more readily able to remain present with her thinking mind and to be less anxious and as she says to handle these thoughts much better.

I'm kind not getting anxious over things I'm kind of more.. more being with the thoughts, you know and yeah, so I would say I'm handling those kinds of things much better, much better. And probably not having as many kinds of those thoughts more just enjoying life...

When noticing her racing mind Lucy is using her breath to anchor and stabilise her emotions when anxious but also attending to her breath as a way of maintaining her positive sense of well-being.

I'm practicing my breathing and that's working for me. ..but I definitely find just taking the time, and I'm nearly doing that automatically now. I'm starting to, just take a little breath, you know, here and there and that's not even when my mind is wondering, not even when I'm feeling like bad or panicky or anything, like just, just all the time, even when I'm feeling good.

Emergent themes within Balint

The same six themes emerged in the analysis of participant engagement within Balint, namely, Intentionality and Intention, Attention, Attitude, Awareness, Process and Self-Regulation.

Intentionality and Intention

Intention and Intentionality are evolving and dynamic components since they may change over time with exposure both to practice and to living contemplatively. *Intentionality* answers the question, “Why am I doing what I am doing?” Contemplation both as a practice and approach to life *fosters intentionality* by encouraging one to think carefully about the things one is doing (Kaufman 2017). Living contemplatively and/or participating in contemplative practices is purposeful to facilitate insight, meaning, growth (e.g., personal, psychological, or spiritual), and/or well-being and the connection between the objective and subjective dimensions of one’s life (Van Gordon, Sapthiang and Shonin, 2022). Intentional/motivational and contextual factors for practice may also be linked to self-regulation, for example, engagement in contemplative practice to learn how to cope with stress or better regulate chronic pain, or for others it may be a way to

find existential meaning and purpose (Dorjee, 2016). It also marks a different “intentional relationship” (Ergas, 2019, p. 255) with time captured by the distinction between doing and being and in a radical embrace of the sense of being in the here and now. *Intentions* have a direct immediacy for the explicit intention one deliberately brings in advance to a contemplative practice (Van Gordon et al. 2022). It represents a ‘*spatial turning inward*’ (Ergas, 2019, p. 255, original emphasis) and concerns a turning of one’s attention inward toward one’s first-person experience so that we can turn to our subjectivity and make it into our object of attention. It also includes *attention to intention (A→I)* as attentional modulation and/or monitoring of an intention whether through facilitation of a selected intention, inhibition of competing intentions, sustaining an already operative intention, and/or re-engaging one that has waned (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017, p. 1585).

Several participants had some prior experience of group reflective practice though most came without prior knowledge of Balint. The attraction of being part of the Balint group session was the **potential of group as a method** for possible learning obtained through participation and the insights offered by others in a group setting. There are various types of support for professional educators at all levels though the majority is centred on the external aspects of teaching itself, for example, approaches to curriculum development and its implementation. Groupwork is attractive as a means of personal and professional self-development for educators as it facilitates an openness to one’s biases allowing for the safe challenge of one’s preconceived perceptions as well as providing differing perspectives on one’s personal and professional life. (Riebe, Girardi and Whitsed, 2016; Sancar, Atal and Deryakulu, 2021).

Working in a group for example, Emer, who has some prior experience of Balint and is positively disposed to the process, remarks that it “opens me up to different perspectives, but it also helps me make links. It helps me join the dots in a different way.” While being part of a group offers support this is not in the absence of potential challenge and at times may even be, as Cait notes, “unpalatable.” This is less so if one can hear other’s comments without identifying personally with the remarks. She comments,

It's nice to kind of have people who are in the same kind of... they've got the same workload or they can some way empathize with what you're going through. And I suppose I wouldn't be somebody ...I don't take criticism well and I don't... I find it very uncomfortable. But in that small group, I found that, you know, it could something could be said in a way that is okay for me to receive or it's palatable, you know. It's not just about comforting you and saying you're great. It's about going, oh, I wonder, could you do this? Or, well, hang on a second now.

Jenny captures the potential of groups for personal development as in the past it supported her to “reflect on your own process and your own bias and your own, you know, the way of thinking when you're hearing other people asking questions.”

Crucially, she identifies that feeling safe is a key element in the efficacy of the group and in her post interview she commented,

I was really excited coming back in and doing it [groupwork] again. So, I felt this time, I was a little bit more, I was aware of how the process worked. I was comfortable, more comfortable than before in sharing and knowing that this was a safe space even though there were new people in the group that I hadn't engaged with before.

The invitation to the Balint stimulates an already latent **curiosity** held by many participants about what precisely Balint might be and how it operates. Rosa, captures this sentiment of curiosity citing that she would “love to learn more in relation to the Balint group to see what the approach is there and possibly have an opportunity to apply it in the workplace.” Tracey’s participation in Balint arises out of curiosity and interest too, and as a possible application to her work. Using group processes in her work Tracey is keen to build on this experience and to manage the challenges that arise for her in group work. Elsa had a general awareness of Balint and its purpose. She came to the session hoping to learn more about Balint and although not intending to present a case her intentionality stems from a general sense of curiosity. As a long-experienced teacher and former Principal and now with a senior position in her new school she hoped that Balint could be a useful way “to be able to let go of the ego and let others help you” and in the future a possible tool for members of the Senior and Middle management teams in her school.

I would like to have the confidence to be able to bring this into my own school setting to work with students, that I'd be able to use it as a tool with students in sessions.

Another incentive for joining is the desire expressed by many participants to better understand their own **internal dynamics** of being and working. Some are coming as a way of seeking support for personal stresses and challenges endured. The group process offers a mirror into self through the evocation of internal personal dynamics which become triggered when interacting with others, many of which are unconscious. Emer describes her habitual tendency is to be a “a fixer or rescuer” when working or living with others and reflecting on her membership of previous reflective practice groups she noticed her own reactions to the dynamics within these groups. As a teacher for over twenty years Cait has experienced teaching as a lonely place where “it all comes crashing in on you” because of mental health issues and stress.

I have struggled for 20 years in education, and I have struggled, with my mental health and stress and, not being able to sleep, ruminating, you know, when you have 1 or 2 things on your plate, it's manageable but then when it all comes crashing in on you, it's a very lonely place to be, in teaching.

Anna too is conscious of the impact of work on her health and her history of unhelpful stress reminds her of the ever constant need to mind herself. She is seeking what she describes as “whole space” to manage her work and her own emotions. She sees Balint as a possible way to meet this need.

We can't tolerate, like, just sitting in the problem. We do jump to fix a lot of the time. We struggle to, you know, give whole space, I suppose, and just with the whole space for the kind of, that awkward, really, like, deep kind of processing of our own emotions towards the problem.

Anna recognises the increasing burden of expectation on educators and yet the inability to find space to sit with the emotional aspect of her work.

I think it could offer for teachers, everybody, you know, we're all handling an awful lot of people's... there's a lot of emotional work that needs to be done in our environments that isn't going to get done. ...So, it's just that idea that, you know, we're sitting in the kind of, you know, not trying to fix it, not trying to work it out. I know we sometimes get into, like, trying to solve the problems and, so I suppose tomorrow I just would like to experience it.

Balint, she feels may enable her to “sit with the issue or sit with the student or just respond kind of quietly and, from, you know, I suppose, empathetically, like, just sitting with the person and with the problem rather than, resolving it.”

Elsa is very honest on reflecting her immediate intention at the start of the session. She is conscious of her immediate move firstly to wait for others to commence and then to automatically analyse the case with a desire to find a solution since this is her default position. However, she recognises this is not the intention of Balint.

And, again, my usual default is to wait for somebody else to get started. Because, again, because it's really my first session, I'm still asking what is the purpose of it so that I don't overstep? I know I can go into the analytical very quickly. And that's not what the intention is. I need to pull back from that, and I need to be aware to pull back from that. And that we're looking at it. It's a different angle of our thinking that needs to be coming, being brought to the session. Now I don't know. That's just something I gleaned from yesterday. Is this because my default is, let's see can we find a solution? How can we make this better? And that is the end goal, but how we get to that end goal is not necessarily by analyzing. I'll come with the reasons why solution.

Intentionality for participation in Balint also has a **professional purpose** for members. Jenny in her new role in tertiary education as a learning support person is encountering several challenges in her work and wishes to present a case from her work practice. In doing so she is hoping to get some perspective on how she functions in her new role.

That by putting my perspective out there that I'm getting different perspectives from other people that help me to broaden out, make me see outside the box and see if there's another solution. Is it me being pushy? Is it my, my long-term goal, my, you know, limitations on it is preventing the moving forward with these folks.

Elsa, feels strongly about the absence of support for educators and the struggles which arise and thus she remarks,

I could see a benefit to it, for whether it's, you know, as I say, it could be a group of Yearheads, it could be principals or deputy principals or what your peers, obviously, who would be maybe experiencing similar situations that you're struggling with. Because I really, you know, it really comes back to a problem shared is a problem halved. But I think there's a lot of people feeling they have to kind of hold it all together and be seen to not have all the answers.

After Balint Tracey states that the clarity, purpose, and the structure of Balint was helpful to clarify her intentions for the session. She also appreciated the atmosphere of respect within the group and the opportunity to “sit” with the issues presented by two members from their practice as educators.

I think I see that now it's very it's about bringing one clear cut case. It has to be done very carefully, very respectfully. And, you know, it's not a talking shop. Okay. There is something specific that somebody has brought and is having issues with. And you kind of, I think it's good the way everybody had that space to sit with this for a moment.

She found the session helpful and because of what she described as an “efficient” process there was a real focus to the task at hand and the avoidance of irrelevancy or small talk.

I suppose it would ... I found it very, very helpful. That is ...that it can tend to become.. we can go off in tangents. Okay. And sometimes it might be the most helpful thing. ..This was very efficient. And we had a job to do, and that was to support the presenter and to try and give them the space to talk through their issue. But, you know, I think having that really efficient, structure is really, really good.

Post session Elsa remarks that participation by members supports the presenter by way of triggering some insight to their practice.

I suppose you want to bring whatever thoughts you have that can maybe help. You might trigger some thought process in somebody else that might help them.

Attention

Attentional capacity (Crosswell et al. 2024) - attending to experience in a particular way - involves observing one's moment-to-moment, internal (first-person experience) and external experience with focus but without judgement, described by Ergas as a '*spatial turning inward*' (2019, 2020). Attention is directed towards thoughts, behaviour and body sensations and is complex and dynamic, for example, engaging, disengaging, shifting, sustaining, monitoring, or the widening or narrowing of focused attention (Grossenbacher and Quaglia 2017). Attention may also be focused externally on a single object of contemplation, or towards a range of discrete phenomena, experiences, concepts, or situations selected as objects to be contemplated (Van Gordon et al. 2022). This external focus also means that engaging in contemplative practices is also an important mechanism to recognise that we are not separate from others, and in addition to our own needs we are also attentive to the needs of others (Kaufman 2017).

Emer notes attending to her **thoughts and feelings** during the presentation of the second Balint case, adopting a more reserved stance since she remarks,

I think that's because I was conscious, very conscious, about how I wanted to respond to the situation. I think some of that was, just being sensitive to the fact that part of me was curious as to whether or not some of that real desire to present opportunities to someone, that the presenter was, working with some of the, struggles that they had in themselves growing up, and yet I don't know her situation.

In broader terms Emer sees Balint as a way of attending to the reality of one's own experience with more precision and self-acceptance of her feelings rather than trying to suppress what emerges.

And, I think that I noticed that sometimes even when I was in the in the classroom setting, sometimes that, like, sense of losing control brings up such an anxiety and fear that I think even just to have that awareness that you're not trying to be in control, you're just trying to influence. And once you kind of let go of that sense, I think then you could have quite a different approach to everything you do, but the Balint would be great for that.... Sometimes, it's really good for the recognition of particular things that we actually are experiencing. Because sometimes we're not that good at that.

Cait remarks on "**waiting my turn** or trying to wait my turn" as she was "bursting to kind of say something because I thought it would be valuable to the presenter, you know, to support the presenter." Later, she remarks, "I felt eager to reassure or comfort, not necessarily fix the problem, but just reassure the presenters that this is very normal. This is human."

Rosa, as a case presenter, became aware too of this desire to "jump in" and understandably so as a presenter. She describes with insight and clarity her experience of listening to others give feedback on her case presentation. She was aware of holding

the dual role of being observed and being herself an observer. She acknowledges that her most immediate urge in the moment was to jump in and defend her stance yet recognising that she was invited to observe and listen. However, she was able also to attend to the sense of compassion and understanding she felt from group members and their desire to reach out with support to her in their feedback.

Well, the first reaction was to jump in when something was said that wasn't really reflecting what happened. Yeah. So, there was a bit of that. So, I really had to be very conscious and, you know, "I'm just outside of the circle now." I only need to observe and listen. I had to bring myself there into that space of the observer even though I was being observed as well. You know, it's a double, I suppose, role, that you have there. There was a lot of that. But at the same time, also relaxing into what was being said and getting the feeling that everybody else in the group really came from a place of understanding and compassion.

In contrast to jumping in, Anna remarks that she was cautionary with her interjections careful of being too critical or to risk interpreting things wrong.

I felt, I suppose, that I wanted to be aware of how I'm feeling. And I suppose the other thing, I did have a feeling of, like, I didn't want to go hard on the person. I didn't want to have the person insulted or feel bad. So there was a little bit of that where I was like, I want to be kind in what I'm going to say. I suppose it was a bit of not having the courage to trust that we're all professionals, we're all big girls and boys, and we can take it. There was, I suppose, choosing your words maybe a little bit so that somebody wouldn't interpret things wrong or think I'm a terrible person for saying something.

Others found Balint to be an "intriguing and interesting" experience which was enjoyable. One participant felt the time passed quickly as she became absorbed in the experience.

I enjoyed I didn't feel the time go past. I was in the flow or whatever. You know, I was very much, enjoying it that I did not like when it was over, I was like, "oh, is it over? You know, like, it was very, very quick. And, like, I will let you know that things need to hook me in, you know, to keep me at that level. I found it was very real.

Attitude

Attitude describes the cultivation of qualities one brings to attention - being non-judgemental, discerning, kind, curious, compassionate, and accepting (Ergas 2019, 2020). An attitude of non-striving is important indicating an openness to allow thoughts, feelings emerge and to accept the impermanence of living where change is both inevitable and constant. With recognition of impermanence experientially from our contemplative practice, we are better equipped to both deal with it and bring it about

when we engage with the world. In coming to acknowledge and appreciate the personal benefits of contemplative practice there is recognition too of the collective well-being that our practices engender – the grounding of the political with the personal (Kaufman 2017).

Emer states being part of the new Balint group induced feelings of nervousness and anxiety at the beginning. This she ascribes to a **sense of inferiority** towards herself and that others hold a higher social status.

I was incredibly nervous at the start because whenever everyone seems like they're much more established or are more long standing now the positions they hold, So I find that quite intimidating. And I've always felt like I'm always coming from, and this is... I don't know why I think this ...but like a lower place than everyone else if that makes sense. So, I always kind of go in being like, very nervous, very anxious, very worried about how I'm going to be perceived.

Tracey recognised herself in the first case and it reminded her of own work the attitude of “dread” she brought to working with a particular group.

Yes. Absolutely. I remember going into this class every Thursday morning and thinking about how am I gonna get these lads on-side here? The school isn't for them, and I knew I to go with it and it took a while. And at the end, we had a great relationship, but I had a sense of dread going into them. They didn't know that, but I had a sense of dread. People, oh god. Come on now. They just ...and there was nothing on the level that the presenter was speaking about at all. But I was still aware that I needed to get these lads in and get them to come along with me.

In choosing to present her case to the group Rosa recalls feeling a similar sense of inferiority with a range of emotions and frustrations with the strongest emotion being shame towards herself.

But shame in a way because in a way I felt that I hadn't been able to manage the students, and it was down to me and my inability, if you like, so I was trying to contain that as well. And not to maybe, put it too obviously out there because, you know, this sense of shame and guilt, there's always something that goes with them, and it's, you know, always having to try to hide it and not to show it because it's not appropriate and it's not good.

Cait acknowledges a level of striving in her desire to be actively engaged in the task of the Balint group. She recognizes this as a desire to be competitive and to appear “wise or have something valid.”

Well, I was kind of watching others. You're watching others. I was watching others just to see how urgent their coming was well because we were kind of making a physical gesture so that, one of the presenters knew that we were going to speak. And, yeah, I know sometimes I didn't ..I was like, “oh,

no. I just want to say it." And it gushed out. I was watching what others were saying. And I suppose maybe there probably was a bit of competition in me "oh, jeez. I want to get this in first now before somebody else says it. There's kind of maybe a want to be wise or have something valid. There probably was.

In her diary entry after reflecting on her own presentation Jenny notes that she felt both "relief and reassurance" but also, since the group picked up on her lack of boundaries she notes too "feeling tension and frustration that I wasn't as productive as I liked and angry with myself for giving too much to a student, that didn't or couldn't progress." Upon hearing the group's response to her case Jenny recognised the breach of boundaries in her work and the need to be more kind towards herself as she was very stressed by the case and it began to impact on her personal life so she learned to be less demanding and for the need to mind herself.

I'm not minding myself, but I had to be mindful of boundary. That really hit me. I was like, alright. I overdid it. I probably ...and no matter I'm one person that's something that resonated with me was no matter what you have done, whether you've done less, whether you've done more, it would never have been enough. And that is something I took away from the group. ...And yet sitting there and listening to the group, kind of discussing the case made me more realize I wasn't minding myself in this situation. I was above and beyond what I would expect what was expected of me. And I think it was important for me to realize that.

Following the Balint another group member remarks on the judgement of herself in the process.

Now there's a bit in there this with me about what I say. Am I saying too much? Am I going down the wrong? I'm always conscious of is what I'm saying stupid or is it but that's just, you know, impostor syndrome or whatever you wanna call it. I've always been like that. And then I get nervous about or hope they don't ask me to bring a case. I have to think long and hard about the case I bring, and I can't just off the top of my head

This person is always initially fearful and anxious in such settings but knows too that this is a habitual pattern for her that is a type of cognitive dissonance and is embodied in how she feels. It takes time for her to move into the process.

My immediate thing is, "oh, Jesus, I hope they don't ask me." I like I need to kind of be eased into it, and then once I'm comfortable, I can then maybe bring something. But there is a bit of the "whatever I have to bring isn't worth. There's a little element of whatever I have to bring isn't worth what there's something more important that need you know, needs to be discussed. And yet, I know that's... I know that's not true. . I know whatever I have is as

relevant as it is to the next, you know. But just that's my immediacy. And my I know that's what's going on for me. So, I'm sitting there and I'm nervous, and my stomach's going, and I'm saying, "please don't look at me and please don't ask me." But that's always been my way. And then I'll eventually then you can't shut me up, of course, once I get going.

Listening to the first case Elsa remarks on noticing emerging judgment in her attitude to the presenter.

and it sounds terrible. There's a little bit of judgment maybe that I was conscious of and I had to kind of roll back. I was straight away thinking of the children and what's going on for them. But that's maybe something I need to reflect on. I well, I don't... I know I need to reflect on. I automatically think the child is the one that needs to be cared for more because their children and you're the adult, and you can find ways to solutions the children can't. So my default is always to kind of think about the child and have well, that doesn't mean I don't care about the adult who's getting that receiving that kind of behavior.

Elsa reflects that she also shifted her judgment to other players in the case first presented, namely the role of management in the presenter case school. This she describes as a "trigger" influenced by the fact that she knew the school context.

But, again, I think that was the trigger of knowing. Of knowing the context. Also, it is the trigger of being in the management role for so long that I kinda go into my head space and go into the problem solving. How do I make this person feel better? How do I get these kids to behave?. And then I was wondering about, you know, about the role of management and would that have affected your thinking either, like, blaming because some people blame management and say, well, listen. "That's why those kids are bold is because of management." But she did herself say, oh, the discipline is very good. Our management are very supportive. Because I was questioning how supportive really. Where were the supports within the school for that?

These feelings of inferiority or negativity toward self are in stark contrast with the cultivation of more positive qualities **of self compassion and kindness** towards self. Rosa, for example, was quick to bring this compassion to the second presenter in the Balint session despite not being able to cultivate this response towards herself.

...the first thing that came to mind was really, well, it's not because of you. It's not because of how you do things, because it's not a reflection of who you are or how you do things. Because in my case, that would be very much my first, reaction as "oh, I have failed."

Anna surmises that her openness to the process and her comfortability may have had its roots in the timing of the session since due to her holidays she had more space and time to engage without feeling compelled to be present. Anna also feels the burden of the first presenter and the limitations of time and intervention to support the presenter. She conveys a sense of understanding and compassion to the presenter acknowledging that it is not always possible to “solve” cases but in fact the real work involves attention to self.

From the second case Tracey recalls how this stayed with her in the days after as she recognised herself in the case presented and so it “played on my mind” as she felt the presenter was enduring an injustice in the level of expectations thrust upon the presenter by her student.

But I was in the space. But I've actually been thinking about that over the days. Yeah. And that has it has played on my mind a couple of because I've been thinking of the presenter and everything that was being put on her and how overwhelmed she must have been feeling and the person who kept putting stuff on her. Yes. That that was really, really inappropriate. And I suppose I was thinking after for her I was thinking in the days after, I was thinking, “oh my god. That was that's just awful for her to Yeah. I've gone through that. Yeah. Well, at the time, I thought about it, you know, in the initial stages, I was like, “oh, yeah. That's terrible.” But actually, she had played in my mind. Yeah. Because it I just think it is a job at the end of the day. Yeah. Yeah. And to be trying to manage ranting emails at nighttime and like, when she's done everything that she could do. I mean, I just felt this is really unfair...

Elsa in her diary entry notes feeling empathy towards the presenter and feeling upset for them to the extent she found the case draining.

“I felt empathy with the presenter, felt their hurt and disappointment. I felt upset for them.” Somewhat emotionally drained by the presenter case, possibly an element of transference.”

In the days after Elsa finds herself deeply reflecting on the first case and in particular the students who featured in the first presenter’s case. And she feels she neglected to give the presenter adequate attention and so she is critical of her attitude here.

There was a bit of me pulling back Yeah. Because I was conscious to some extent that I, unconsciously or conscious that I was, that I wasn't concerned about the presenter, but I was kind of, first and foremost, wanting to know what was going on with the children that they were behaving that way. That's where my process was and I thought that's not what this is about. So I was trying to I want and I did give a few thoughts, but I was conscious of now, “Elsa, are you coming from the right angle here?” Because you're straightaway going thinking about the girls in the class who are misbehaving,

what's going on for them, and you're not necessarily putting as much emphasis on the adult, the presenter.

Awareness

Related to intentionality is choosing to be aware and attend to one's present experience in a different way (Ergas, 2019, 2020). This awareness has an 'in the moment' quality - *awareness of transient information (ATI)* - whereby "awareness engages information in mind about present-moment experience as it happens" (Grossenbacher and Quaglia, 2017, p.1586). This level of awareness extends also to conscious awareness of engagement in contemplation and is retained throughout the period of contemplation (Van Gordon et al. 2022). Awareness of one's bodily sensations-*interoception*- including becoming aware of previously unconscious internal bodily sensations (Crosswell *et al.* 2024), mental processes and behaviour is a necessary pre-requisite for effective self-regulation supporting well-being. Awareness outside of oneself to include one's relationships and interdependence with others is essential since we are inherently tied up with others (Kaufman 2017).

Emer is aware that the desire **to be a fixer** in the group can lead to her feeling frustrated and annoyed. Reflecting on the Balint process she remarks,

But I do find I do get a little bit frustrated by the by the immediate reassurance everyone wants to give. I don't know why it frustrates me.... I don't know.

This frustration is further enhanced by the Balint group members, as Emer observed, falling into this tendency to fix or problem solve the presented issues rather than staying with the emotional experiences of the presenter.

So trying to solution focus. And last night, I find participants wanted to do that a lot. And maybe it comes from the nature of the roles they've all been in before where it's like, "I'm going to give you a solution to this problem." And some part of me is like, when you're detailing what's happening, it's coming up from a place of "these are the emotions I've experienced, not I'm incapable of coming up with a solution myself."

Balint, for Emer, has introduced her to the possibility of staying with the other person's story without the urgency to "fix it" and so she recognises a greater appreciation and sensitivity to what others may be asking of her in either her professional or personal contexts.

I was going to just say that I do think though having been through the Balint group, it probably has made me more, aware that when I am talking to certain, even people even in my professional, capacity, but then also personally. Sometimes I am, like, this person doesn't want me to fix it. They are not asking me to fix this right now. They are asking me to, for a moment, try and experience potentially the feelings they are and, like, where that's coming

from or whatever it may be. So it's definitely opened up another side of my responses to, it's different when someone asks you for it. It's completely different.

For the second case, Rosa's natural instinct was to comfort the presenter amidst her experience of strong emotions. This revealed Rosa's natural empathetic disposition. But also her attention to the presenter and her awareness of the case was also a cause for her to reflect on her own dispositions and attitudes.

Well, the first reaction, of course, is to, as I assume everybody else is, was to comfort the presenter because I could feel that she was, but I wouldn't say distressed, but she, you know, she was feeling strong emotions. That was my perception that she was, going through a lot even just by telling the story. So the first reaction was for me to try and comfort her. And again, say, well, this is not about you. It's about the client. It's about your client. It's not about you. So you're doing amazing work, and it's about drawing the line. And again, it was bouncing back and forth, you know, reflecting on the presenter, but also reflecting on myself, you know, and trying to separate the 2, the 2 things in a way - The case and the person.

As the first presenter relays their story Anna is aware of feeling uncomfortable which in turn leads to fear and which Anna understands to be "an over the top empathy" for the other person because she feels overwhelmed.

So I wanted to kind of move through the hard bit and just go with, we can you know what I mean? So it's kind of like I was like, this is terrible, But, look, you can do it. You know, that sort of way. So I had that feeling where I when I spoke, I said, like, it's really stressful. It's this, it's that, it's the other. However, look... we've got this really positive thing. So move it from the kind of uncomfortableness, try it. Like, that would be me.

The possibility of having **insight into one's own story** is supported with Balint even when another person is presenting a case which is not related to one's own circumstances. Emer recognises that the Balint space can offer opportunities for insights into one's own dynamics and feelings.

A big thing for me, and it's something that I'm always trying to do, I find it really difficult. I do it a lot in my own personal counseling. It is to separate what I'm feeling versus what the other person is feeling. So as in sometimes, I will, kind of go, oh, "I'm mad about that thing too." And I can never tell whether that's common for me or the other person. And I do find that quite difficult, so I think it's good for that really, it really identifies potentially where things are coming from. So, I think it can be good for, drawing up your own kind of, "oh, actually, I have had a similar experience to this." Well, "how did I feel about that? Maybe, actually, this is my moment to process that other thing that happened to me through the process and for this person."

At the outset of the Balint session Cait acknowledged feeling “very uneasy at the beginning.” She says, “I was like, oh, I hope somebody speaks and has a problem to bring. And I just wanted to get it over and done with to see to experience it and see what it was like.” She also had a sense of being nervous and feeling the emotion of the process. But by the end of the first case presentation Cait had eased into the process and the cases deeply resonated and connected with her own experience as a teacher.

I feel like it's almost like resolution even though there wasn't a solution. It felt it came full circle. And then I was quite keen to get on to the next one, you know. And I didn't find it tiring. I didn't, you know, and very interesting input from lots of different people make you look at it in a different way. And both issues would have resonated with me to the core, and, it's like I would have could have given you 20 examples of times I felt like that,

This sense of unease or anxiety is internalised for Cáit such that she also experiences it in her tummy as “butterflies.”

After the emotion of presenting her case Rosa feels strong emotions which she records in her diary when she writes I note “various emotions, rage, hope, but I understood it felt good to share my dilemma and find that others have been in the same situation.” Rosa is able to connect the experience of these strong emotions to insights about her own personality and her upbringing.

So a lot of self doubt as well. But at the same time, the strong emotions. And because it brought me back to my upbringing and being type 1, the perfectionist, and this has clashed a lot, you know, with the way of managing the class, that specific class.

During the first case presentation Jenny notes feeling both “relief and trepidation.” She proceeds to remark,

Trepidation because I've felt triggers that I've been in that situation myself. And I only did one class with this particular group and had very, very, disruptive student in my class. So I can get this, except she had a whole class of disruptive student. Oh my god. What could I do in that situation? I was jumping ahead thinking, how would I react to that situation? Not about what she was doing. I felt I have to stop myself and pull myself back and say, no. I'm supposed to be listening to Rosa. Learn from Rosa. How did she deal with this situation? What can I learn from this situation? But I still felt triggered. I did.

Jenny is aware of being triggered by the first case and noting a shift in here response from the presenter towards her students.

I felt triggered as I had a similar experience as the presenter. I empathize, I empathized and understood her predicament. However, the more she talked,

the more we talked, I felt her, insistence of the rules very restrictive. And I started to sympathize for her pupils that they had such a rocky experience.

However, Jenny notes that she held back until the end before giving her honest response to the first case as she recognised the subjects of the case with empathy and understanding and as she says coming from a mentor perspective

I believe in having a relationship with my with my cohort because that's the only way I know I can get through to them. If I don't have that relationship with them, I'm not gonna get through to them. I'm gonna get resentment. .. that's my beliefs, anyway.

Jenny speaks of mirroring the presenter by gripping her own chair and moving between empathy and frustration as she felt triggered to feeling critical of the case and then shifting too in her understanding which came when she started to relax and reflect more deeply. And in her own presentation she notes the shift from judging of herself to being able to tell her story as it was for her in that experience.

I could feel the tension that she was feeling that she was on the edge of her feet, that she she was gripping the chair, and I was mirroring that kind of tension. But then when I stopped to think about what she was doing, I thought, relax, and sit back. So, well, hold on a second here. There's 2 people in this scenario. You know? So it's a give and take situation here, and I'd started to reflect more around what would I do in that situation?

I'm telling my story, and I was getting all passionate and, you know, frustrated. And all these emotions were coming up because I was trying to share as much as I can in the short frame at the time. And, I felt that, you know, sitting back and relaxing. Now I'm going to I'm not going to talk. I'm just going to listen here. I'm listening to people's perspective and see them going I'm on the edge of my seat. Oh my goodness. I can feel that.

Overall, during the process Tracey was aware of feeling comfortable but also self conscious so as to ensure she would respond appropriately but also recognising her own projections in feeling triggered by the first presenter's case as it mirrored somewhat her own experience in school.

I think I said I felt very comfortable, and I did. And probably, I was a little bit conscious. Am I going to say the wrong thing? I didn't want to say something that might, make a situation worse for the presenters. And because I was aware that for both of them, they're very, very exposed when they ..when you present a case. So I suppose I I was coming from a place of trying to, you know, not not make them feel worse. Okay. And to try but I suppose I felt I was feeling annoyed about what the 1st presenter was going through that I felt she needed a lot more support in the school. Yeah. I was feeling triggered myself

because I could see the lads that I had last year that were really similar with that.

Her response to the second presenter was one of empathy and compassion and she resonated with the pressure to “fix” things for others in her role as a yearhead.

... I really felt for the presenter. I just felt, “oh my god. Everything has been thrown at her. She has to fix all of this.” And sometimes I got not so much now, but I know on occasion in school, you might get people who just say, somebody's kind of ..can you deal with that? Or can you fix that? Okay. Is that kind of, and she was mentioning the organization thinking that they could ...that she was going to fix all this. Occasionally, not from management, but occasionally, staff here might feel that too. This isn't for me to do it. Can you, it's urgent. I need you to do it now. And you go, well, “No!”

Tracey was aware that in responding to the Balint she was coming from the authenticity of who she is and how she normally functions in work. However, the Balint offered a formal space to process and consider dilemmas such as those presented.

I don't think it was a professional me. I think it was just me, but I was probably just a little bit more, cautious Okay. If that makes sense. I just I just think I took I took an extra moment. Okay. I think I was the same person. But maybe just a little bit more formalized, maybe, and maybe a little bit more considered or careful.

Having some prior experience of reflective groups Elsa did have some anxiety in approaching the group but this experience also gave her some advance security and she wasn't “disappointed or thrown off by it.” From this she recognises that “it's a different way of sharing and helping each other to what you would be I'd be used to. So, I find this engaging in that way that I want to explore it more.” Despite this experience Elsa is also conscious of how she presents in the group, noting

Now there's a bit in there this with me about what I say. Am I saying too much? Am I going down the wrong? I'm always conscious of is what I'm saying stupid or is it but that's just, you know, impostor syndrome or whatever you want to call it. I've always been like that. And then I get nervous about or hope they don't ask me to bring a case. I have to think long and hard about the case I bring, and I can't just off the top of my head

From the first case Elsa happened to know the school of which the presenter spoke and this, she says this did affect her thought processes in response as she was distracted by this prior knowledge she had. She found herself moving into “solution mode” and

I was thrown off a little bit by the fact that I knew the school and I knew. I think ... I don't think I know I was. Because my focus went somewhere else than

where it would be would've gone if it was just anonymous. I didn't know who it was, where it was, if you know what I mean.

Further, Elsa states that her awareness was more cognitive than bodily.

I was kinda listening as a story. I was reacting more in my head Okay. Than bodily. I was kind of trying to get a handle on the story. Not the story as in what you're saying, what's going on behind the story. And because, as I say, I know the cohort of students and I know the area and, you know, I grew up in right next door as well. So it's very close to home. I could see why students would react to a certain type of teacher knowing the type of students they are

In the second case Elsa notes that

well, I did, in the second case, get more into the feel how the other person being in the other person's shoes, I didn't so much in the first case. Whereas others did get into where they were feeling is bodily. I felt the second bodily more so than the first. But I think because the first one, I was thrown off a little bit by the fact that I knew the school..

In response to the second case Elsa has more of an embodied experience in her response and awareness too of the presenter's disposition.

In body, at one point, I could because in her telling of the story, I could hear the emotion in her voice. And I could hear and I was sitting right beside her, so I could actually physically see her face and her eyes. So I could feel I really felt the emotion as the story went down. And it was quite intense in her telling of it. Not that the other story wasn't, but her way of telling this. Like, she was so invested in it.. I was ..I actually felt it more bodily. And then I was thinking what was going on for the other person and, you know, you know, like, this person has obviously been through the system a long time and saw them you know, I was thinking transference and all that stuff when I was looking at the point. I could see the tears in their eyes, and I could feel it myself. So I felt a lot of the emotion I felt the second story more bodily than I did the first. But then, clearly, I was in my head about thinking, well, how she needs to mind herself in that situation. And, also, though I wouldn't say it, that person has gone through the system, and I start going down psychoanalysis. My head went down psychoanalysis in terms of the mature student she was dealing with.

Elsa is aware of having found the process challenging, requiring her to move out of her "normal zone."

It was challenging... it was challenging to try and get my brain to work differently. Now a challenge I welcome. But it would be a challenge going forward. You have to maybe come out of your normal zone and try and think, but I'm thinker outside the box a bit. But I mean, as I say, I'm new to it, so I

don't know if I have a fully clear understanding of it's. I know it's end goal, but how does the process works.

Elsa offers a very reflective analysis of what she observed in the second case which she frames as a pattern of transference between presenter and student and also towards herself. She is also deeply aware of the reminder of her own professional experience as an educator. And all of this is felt in truly embodied way by Elsa that she borders on becoming upset.

But I was wondering what was being transferred to me. Because I felt that case so much more bodily. And I could nearly feel the tears coming to my eyes. You know what I mean? But I'd be I'd be aware of having invested a lot in others in in the past, you know, in students. You know, you but I've got understand it now, and it doesn't upset me. I know if I give up myself, they'll do what they do with it. And as somebody else said last night, we never know the impact in 5 years' time or 10 years' time. It would have been the past I would have been upset as upset as the presenter when you give your all and it doesn't be appreciated or you just you know, it's dismissed. But I've worked through that. But maybe that was being that memory was a bit resurfacing for me or something. I don't know.

Coming away after the Balint and the next day Elsa noticed the physical effect of participation and the emerging insights she had upon reflection after the experience and which impacted how she was as she reflected on her contribution.

it's quite tiring and draining. And I'm aware of that. I was aware when I was coming home last night that it's quite intense and exhausting because you are present. And when you're present for an hour and a half like that, you're present to everybody else and you're present to yourself. So that's a lot of an awful lot of stuff going on that like, even a half an hour before I came on the Zoom. And I know this is going to trigger on for the next few days. Half an hour before, I came on to you, I still process for days afterwards, and things will come into my head. That's how I like things to sit. And, eventually, I'll, you know, I'll get the moment or I'll get, "oh, that's what that is." I was only brushing my teeth, and I said to myself "Elsa, you were triggered by the fact that school and your thought process has changed." If you were just listening to a person telling a story, it affected you, the fact that you knew the school and you knew some of the individuals in the school. And you knew the kind of children and the difficulties that because you've lived that for 30 years. So it dawned on me this morning. That was what triggered your thinking. That triggered your thought process in a different ...down a different path, I think, than it would have if I was listening to the story. It was literally this morning. Even though I wasn't aware at the time I became aware this morning and that actually impacted how I was. Thinking of my contribution.

Process

The purpose of contemplation for each person is unique. It ordinarily involves an open process of investigation, exploration, observation, and/or reflection directed toward the object of contemplation and recognises that one's emerging experience has a value in and of itself even if no end outcome is obtained (Van Gordon et al. 2022). This process dimension includes elements of *physical safety* since the physical environment is a predominate source of safety (and threat) signals, and traditional contemplative practices are often undertaken in intentionally safe spaces. The activation of secure attachment and social belonging via relationships with trusted teachers and fellow practitioners in contemplative practice creates a *social safety* (Crosswell et al. 2024).

On her experience of Balint Emer remarks being in a new group induces anxiety. She also noted a sense of feeling inferior while at the same time she acknowledges frustration that people in this new Balint group are keen to preserve the "niceties" and to be less direct and honest which in turn restricts her own capacity to be forthright. Here Emer is remarking on the **elements of social safety** which she perceives to be lacking in the immediate creation of a new group – everyone plays it safe.

I was incredibly nervous at the start because you know, whenever everyone seems like they're much more established or are more long standing now in, like, positions they hold, So I find that quite intimidating. And I've always felt like I'm always coming from, and this is... I don't know why I think this but like, a lower place than everyone else, if that makes sense. So, I always kind of go in being like, very nervous, very anxious, very worried about how I'm going to be perceived. ... and I find it all really so many niceties happen at the start of the group, and everyone's so afraid to be more direct or more honest or more.... And you sense that in a group, and so then you withhold. But I do find that we're always so afraid to be like, well, I've actually had this maybe thought that isn't, super nice about this situation or... and it's not that I enjoy being super direct all the time because I'm not. I'm a coward in moments also, and it's that's when you're like, no. "Don't say this now." But I do find I do get a little bit frustrated by the by the immediate reassurance everyone wants to give. I don't know why it frustrates me. Yeah. I don't know.

Cait found it helpful to be a with a group of strangers as it gave more freedom to express oneself. At the end of the case presentations Cait remarks in her diary entry of having "a sense of well-being, completion, feelings of shared experiences, comforting, grateful for the honesty." She experienced an honesty from the group and the presenters which lead to her sense of the Balint with this group as occurring in a "very safe space." Later Cait expands on this safety dimension of being in Balint when she remarks on a suitable composition for the group, stating,

I suppose, a mixture of personalities and experience and no power. You know, it couldn't be people in your own staff, because I think there'd be a power thing going on. I think I'm just trying to imagine myself at 20

something when I was really struggling with discipline, and certain people were very kind and very helpful and very useful, and, then other people were not. You know, they were very blamey

Tracey, commenting on feeling safe in the group, remarks

I felt it was really worthwhile being there as a participant. But if I was a presenter, I'm sure I would feel even more fulfilled, I suppose, at the end of the session. I think I would feel "right, okay, I've been heard. I think people have listened. People are going through the same thing." It's that community that removal of isolation ..it's all very safe to speak about, and people are just there to help you. I think that's so important.

Emer has been a member of similar type groups before and when she was invited to comment on the overall **lack of silence** or quiet time in the group, she believed participants wanted to "perform" in the group, to be seen to be active.

And there were there were no pauses. But I think that's some of that has to do with... It's kind of performative, though, when you're in a group for the first time. So I'm an active participant. I'm a relevant participant to be here. I am performing.

Cait noticed the relative lack of silence, but it was of interest and not for desire as she admits that "I've become more comfortable with silence as years have gone on. So, I was just kind of like, oh, I wonder what will happen here now." As a case presenter Rosa was exposed to silence more than the rest of the group as she sat out on her case. This was not an easy position for her to hold but she recognises its value and the insight it offers.

As I said before, it can be challenging, you know, to really you know... you need to stop yourself from jumping in and replying or commenting. And so, but at the same time, the value of silence, maybe it's me, and I don't I don't... there's so much in silence that I should, you know, appreciate more and that it gives.. it gives a lot of insights. So even if you're, in a way, forced to, you know, stand back and just listen and you can't.... But it's an opportunity for things to sink in and for comments to sit with you without having to, go straight into, explanation mode. Or response mode...

Tracey was aware of the heightened activity and interaction in the group and the lack of space and silence to process more deeply.

I did think that. And like that because I know there's a couple of times I was going to say something and somebody else got in beforehand or whatever. So there was, there was plenty of of interaction and people contributing, which was good. And, yes, I suppose, you know, maybe if people are more familiar with each other and, you know, you're in the process and, there's lots of

contextual factors, time of the day, time of the year there might be more silence

Commenting on the absence of silence in the group for the most part, Elsa feels this arose from feelings of discomfort from participants, the need to talk and be active.

Cait, familiar with other group reflective processes in reflecting back on her Balint experience “liked the formality of it and the kind of, the **structure** to it.” She liked the formality of the process – the structure and the boundaries of the Balint as something which helped ground her for what was about to happen.

I think the formality of the circle, the start time, the finish time, not letting kind of jovial banter bleed into the circle. Like, I think it was for me, I thought, like, the sitting down in the chair, and, actually, I went back and put my tea back at the table because I was like, no. This is, you know, this is quite a formal Even though somebody else had their tea, but I was like, no. Actually, I think this feeling of this and I think that's important. If I if I was running groups again, I think I would have that, like, the division is important.

Rosa too appreciates that Balint gives a structure for processing experience in groups.

But I suppose the Balint method puts structure to it, which means that even the fact that you you're sitting back for a little bit, the physicality of doing it is creating space for you physical and mental space for you to really sit with what's being said and with the listening and with the observing and the emotions in in the circle. So I wouldn't jump straight, to conclusion in any group, I would say, but the way it's done in a Balint group really is respectful and or creates more boundaries if you like. I'd say it's more effective.

She liked the structured group element of Balint which yielded a balance between contributing and receiving contributions from members.

So there's people who are constantly there jumping in and saying what they need to say and some others who just listen or they might want to say something. And maybe yesterday, it was very well balanced, and everybody got a chance to have a say. And I thought this was really great, you know, because, you can do a little bit of both of listening and integrating what's been said. You get the support. You get your peers' support and point of view. So when it comes to the well-being of educators in a balint group, I would say that it is extremely an extremely powerful tool. And I wouldn't think twice to go back and use it. Because, again, there's a balance. It's well structured, and in a way, you have to trust the people who are there even though you don't know them. You have to trust them and you're putting yourself out there in a way, and you don't know what's coming next.

Related to structure Rosa cites her positive experience of Balint arising from the possibility that the process of Balint was strengthened by the voluntary nature of attendance and therefore contributed to everyone being on “much on the same wavelength” Later she describes the aspect of safety as one which conveyed a sense of being understood. Anna too remarked on the formality and the structure used in Balint. She compares this with other group processes of which she is part and which she says can “descend into, like, offloading and fixing, offloading and fixing.” In the Balint she valued the invitation not to move into fix mode but to stay with the feeling component of the presenter’s case. For Elsa the Balint offers a structured space which can support one’s own self reflection and it has the advantage of support offered by others in a group process which can enrich the potential for learning since reflection as an individual can be isolating and unfocused and also may not happen as it is self dependent and also may lack in quality or purpose.

I need to reflect more in a bit more structured way instead of ruminating in my head. And by structured, I mean, like, set aside a time to actually.. I do a lot of self reflecting on my own. The balint session gave you an opportunity to reflect in a different way that others can reflect back to you that can aid you in your self reflection. Instead of it being self talk in your head and you reflecting back and having the 1 on 1 with yourself, you're putting yourself ..you're getting back 7 or 8 other reflections that can help you then. You're not having a 1 on 1, you're having a 7 on 1. Because when we're kind of on our own reflecting on things, we can get sidetracked off. So, we never quite finish. we don't set aside because who says I'm gonna set aside an hour today and I'm going to self reflect? But set aside an hour and a half, a month, or every 6 weeks or something where you know that's your focus and you're going to really look at something. That I think is far more that's beneficial. So I know I said to you yesterday, “oh, yeah, I self reflect well, in hindsight, how good is my self reflection after being at the session yesterday? Without having the input of others' reflections on what's going on for you.

Tracey recognised the value of Balint in offering the opportunity for shared experiences as there is little if no space to do so in a reflective manner. New teachers have a process which is not available to established members of the profession and she is envious of that.

I think hearing other people's experiences, I think it is so important. And it's one thing I find that we don't have that space to do. We don't get to sit with others and have that time that we had that evening. OAnd I think that's really, really important. You know, even when I see the new teachers coming in and doing the droichead process and, you know, all of that support that they are getting. We don't get that.

As a contribution to her own personal and professional well-being she feels Balint offers “structured, constructive support” and an opportunity to present a case from work.

I think having that space and knowing that, you know, there was 2 cases that could be brought. So, you know, even if you had the chance to bring a case, but equally, if you didn't have a chance to bring a case, then you could do it the next time. I could say this is what I want to discuss. I could bring this to the group. And you're getting very structured, constructive support. I think there's a time that we all all need proper, structured, the presenter speaking, listen, and then people come in, you know. Because sometimes it can go up, well, this happened to me, and then your story's forgotten. And your case is forgotten. Well, that doesn't happen in balint. The presenter is given the space.

Tracey values the opportunity to have space to be heard as a professional educator but also she feels Balint could also be of value to students especially as it has a structure.

I just I think I think it's so important that everybody has a space to be heard. Okay. And I was thinking afterwards, you know, from a professional point of view, but I was also thinking of, was this something that could be done with students? Would you know, I just thought it was such a lovely way it's just such a lovely way to give people space to be heard. Okay. And you know, I sat in here with students, a couple weeks ago.. And they were going hell for leather at each other and shouting over, like, typical teenagers. I was thinking that's having that formal safe space of now. You speak and the ground rules are there. You're speaking. Then we all get our turn, you know. So I thought I thought the structure was really, really good.

Anna was also comforted by the **guidance of the facilitator** for the session whom she describes as holding the group but “didn't let it run on and also give people plenty of time to speak.” And Anna perceived her role as facilitator to be crucial to the success of the session. Tracey also remarked on the manner of the facilitator in setting the tone for the group and allowing space for time to think. She recognised and valued the structure of the Balint process and the presentation of clear cases which allowed the group to process and to listen purposefully and with care and respect.

I think I see that now it's very it's about bringing one clear cut case. It has to be done very carefully, very respectfully. And, you know, it's not it's not a talking shop. Okay. There is something specific that somebody has brought and is having issues with. And you think it's good the way everybody had that space to sit with this for a moment.

Elsa considers that the Balint process offers a particular type of **insight** into herself and her own thought process. Being in a group process “feeds her knowledge and understanding” and is a different reflective experience than if she was responding to a case as an individual teacher.

if I wasn't in that balint session, I wouldn't have been in a situation to respond to those situations, and I wouldn't be in the situation where I'd find out a little

bit more about myself and how my thought process is working, how I need to reflect and increase my self awareness. So, I might not have responded in fully the same way if I met a teacher on the corridor and she told me these cases, you know, there'd be smaller. whereas that situation that brings us all together feeds it better. So it feeds the knowledge and feeds the understanding and maybe the solution better than if it was just a one on one and somebody came our door.

In response to the process she noted how her own process was emerging in the moment,

I was aware that I was thinking., feeling some of the too. But thinking a lot and working out the machinations in my head about what's going on in this story. Wondering what I call Wondering. And kind of going from that and then the input from others then would get my thought processes kind of going in another way too or added to. I mean, it added to it and got me to think a different way or think about it with an angle I haven't thought of.

From participation she learned that although she has a rich and varied experience of life, she still needs to be challenged in her thinking which can be enhanced by her interaction with people and other situation and in especially around her tendency to want to fix things and make things right for everyone.

Did I have any insights? Well, you know, I still will always think I have a lot to learn. I don't know it all even though I'd like to think I know a lot. I suppose because I've learned or I've been around a while, I may have not set notions, but I still think I need to be challenged in my thinking about things. So if I learned that about myself, particularly case 1 as sometimes I need to be a little bit more flexible in my thinking because although I have all this experience and I, you know, I've learned a lot and I do know a lot about it and I know how to deal with lots of situations. There's still a lot I can learn from all sorts of people in all sorts of situations. Because I could be a bit you know,..in the first case, very much down the managerial head or the running school type scenario and I wanted to solve this. I make everything right for everybody or make everybody a bit happier in their ...in that school environment to be in the school environment. So, yeah, I learned there's still a lot of self reflection to do.

Elsa feels the Balint process could help her move out of her head with a case and seek other perspectives.

Although I didn't bring a case yesterday, I could see if I needed. if I had something going on that I really needed to discuss Yeah. Instead of being in my head with it. Putting out there for me to listen to others' views would be hugely beneficial.

Self-Regulation

The processes of orienting, shifting, and sustaining attention combined with metacognitive awareness to effectively manage thoughts, emotional responses, and behaviour is a “metacognitive self-regulatory capacity (MSRC) of the mind” (Dorjee, p.1) and this awareness is a necessary pre-requisite for effective self-regulation (SR) supporting well-being. A specific aspect of SR is the introspective *metacognition attention* (awareness and knowledge of bodily sensations, mental phenomena, and behaviour). A secondary related element of SR is the capacity for *emotion regulation*, effectively navigating distressing situations (Crosswell *et al.* 2024). It includes cultivation of qualities and unique emotion regulation strategies to name emotions, visualization, reflective contemplations, and transformation of negative emotions into their positive emotion ‘antidotes,’ (Dorjee, 2016, p.4)

As a method Emer sees the Balint as way of allowing one to remain with the reality of one’s experience without desiring to change this reality – it permits things to be as they are.

That's why I love the Balint because it's a controlled way to only think about how you're feeling the feelings it's bringing up, and not around what the other people think we should do.

In advance of presenting Rosa observes in her diary that she was curious, excited and a little anxious as to what might come up. And this awareness was manifest in her body, which she tried to manage through deep breathing. After the conclusion of the second case Rosa said “I’m grateful to be part of this group and have had experiences, in this Balint session. I feel more relaxed physically, and I’m enthusiastic about the possibility of attending more support groups.” What she recognises to be of particular help is the sense of connection which she received from the group.

Jenny acknowledges that the Balint group helped her to gain perspective and to step back.

..it was the environment that I was presenting it and knowing there was no right. There was no wrong. There was just a a wholeness. I'm listening and that kind of, you know, openness. And I just felt that the group that was the right group for it is not like in go to ... this is not something that's normally done in a supervision, for example. This is something that it seems to me that I'm able to offload it and step back and see how people see it

She elaborates further on this notion of perspective gaining when asked about her Balint experience by saying,

I think it's a balint experience. I've never experienced that in any other way, shape, or form, to be honest. maybe because I work in 3rd level, so I'm not

entitled to, you know, the supervision that my peers may get in other I don't have the same level of, supervision that they do. So I don't get the benefit of having that support.

She feels that access to a Balint type process “would be absolutely totally, beneficial for me, for my well-being. Just helping me to come away feeling like I've done the best I could.” She recognises its value in helping her to reflect on a deep level, beyond the superficial and to help her have boundaries in her work.

Yeah. I probably give too much of my time. I could curtail it better. I could put better boundaries in place for me, but I did everything as well. The other thing that I came away with from the balint session was the need for this type session to help us to, you know, reflect. Sometimes you can reflect to a level that it doesn't go beyond that. Though I might reflect, my reflection might not be the step back reflection that I would have got at the balint level.

Tracey was very aware of deliberately slowing down in her thinking and active responses during moments of processing the cases. She was also keen to be fully present to the presenters and felt a sense of responsibility towards them as the process was not to “be taken flippantly.”

I suppose it kind of slows you down maybe a little bit that you're kind of processing externally and internally. That's like I said earlier, that not wanting to rush to give to say something Okay. That might cause further distress or upset or that you want to you want to give inform or you want to provide support and comfort to the person. And so maybe a little bit of pressure that “I am I saying the right thing? I don't wanna make this worse for the person. I want to try and help them.” So maybe there's a a little, maybe you could say it's a sense of responsibility of sitting within that. Yeah. That is not something to be taken flippantly. It is really important.

She gives an honest assessment of how she first felt towards the case of the first presenter with a dual response, feeling frustrated and annoyed but also in her own work recognising that sometimes one has to “hold back.”

I suppose there was parts of the first case I remember feeling .. I remember feeling very frustrated for the presenter that she was in this situation. And I thought, my god. What are people doing here to support her? I thought she was very much on her own. And I know I was holding myself back a little bit from I didn't want to just say, “Jesus, what is going on there?” Is there nobody giving me any help? So you have to keep it kind of, I suppose, professional as well, and not just dive in with your immediate frustration or annoyance or whatever that you have to say, “no. Hang on. Let this settle for a moment.” And I think I think a lot of other people spoke, and then I said something. But I waited, I waited till I kind of, you know, had let it I suppose just let it settle.

Yes. Because I wasn't I.. because I felt annoyed on her behalf. Yes. She was in this situation.

To care for herself and her own well-being Elsa has a range of interests – mindfulness practice, music, friendships, sport and actually getting out is good to help her maintain a balanced life and manage her emotions.

I do a certain amount of mindfulness, and through my friendships. I love my gigs. I love going to gigs and that's what makes puts a smile on my face. I love going to sporting occasions so I do all of that but I do it with friends and that's what yeah even just being out with friends and being able to talk about things that are on your mind. I'm not sitting dwelling in the same, you know, seven days a week in the same four walls. I try and get out as much as possible and engage with sport and music and friendships all of the above.

Elsa feels it would be very helpful to have access to a balint group to meet with and a nonjudgemental space to help gain perspective on matters arising in work or offer insights to support her capacity to learn.

I would feel beneficial for me to have a group like that that I would meet with. And we don't well, we know each other now, but we don't know each other. We're just bringing ourselves and our, what we can to the session. It's kind of a neutral a neutral, nonjudgmental place. And I'm not saying my, you know, my colleagues, but they're too close to us. It's good to be with people who are distant from it. They're not in your ...I think you get a more, nonjudgmental, clearer view of what's going on from others for you from other people's perspective. if I have to continue for a few years in education, I think I would need it. It's not about me needing therapy. It's about me needing the support of peers. But we don't work and live you know, work together every day. It is like a group session. It is like a kind of a group session where, somebody has something they need help with or not advice on, but give you other ways to think about what the situation is or because we'll all look at it from our own angle, and it's always good to get other people's view or vantage point on what they think is possibly going on. Because there's always learning in that and there's always...

She feels Balint would offer an outlet to manage the stress of complex situations and also provide supportive affirmation as a protective and “holding” space.

it would help also in the in dealing with the stress of it. Because you have the affirmation .. if nothing else I don't mean if nothing else, but, another thing that happened yesterday was affirmation. That there's the support there. That even though we may not be in your situation, we can imagine what it's like. And you have that kind of a little bit of, not cocoon... What's the word I'm

looking for? A lot of holding. I think of the mother holding the child..I don't know if I'm going off too much on a tangent, but that's just exactly what is coming into my head.

Discussion of Emergent Themes within Deep Talk

The same six themes emerged in the analysis of participant engagement within Deep Talk, namely, Intentionality and Intention, Attention, Attitude, Awareness, Process and Self-Regulation.

Intentionality and Intention

Contemplation both as a practice and approach to life *fosters intentionality* by encouraging one to think carefully about the things one is doing (Kaufman 2017). Living contemplatively and/or participating in contemplative practices is purposeful to facilitate insight, meaning, growth (e.g., personal, psychological, or spiritual), and/or well-being and the connection between the objective and subjective dimensions of one's life (Van Gordon et al. 2022). Many of the interviewees reflect this duality of purpose in their intentionality for coming to DT. Alice's intention for coming to Deep Talk (DT stems from recognising herself as a person who is "a fairly deep thinker and reflective person." She exhibits a natural enthusiasm in learning for self development and expects that DT will offer the opportunity to expand this interest and may even offer possibility of extended benefits to her work as a teacher. For Alice, the personal and professional are connected. Many of the participants in the DT experience are attracted by the opportunity and possibility to enhance their personal and professional development particularly as learners. Unsurprisingly as educators, this natural attraction and enthusiasm for learning is fuelled by the apparent novelty of DT and the element of the unknown and mystique surrounding the concept.

Alice expresses her intentionality to connect the objective and external parts of her life as a teacher with the inner and subjective dimensions of herself as person and considers that the DT experience will be the bridge between these two dimensions.

I mean, at least at the very least, I think it would be a personal learning experience.but for me every personal learning experience can inform your work so you know... at the very least, it's a personal learning experience, but I'm pretty sure it will, it will...find its way into my work as well....and I think I'll enjoy it.... I think I'll be stimulated by it... enjoy it.

Later when she reflects on the DT experience Alice recounts that her prior expectations on the use of story were radically altered in the way she experienced the story dimension within DT as a contemplative tool.

Des has expectations that DT can be readily applied to his work context and will offer him a new set of skills as an educator. DT holds the hope that it may contribute to his professional development.

..it mentioned something about group discussion and how you can use it to maybe make group decisions or consensus, or whatever it might be. So, seeing how I could use it. So that's one thing as well to see how it works. The second one is to maybe learn new skills that I could try myself.

For some this learning intention is very personal, for example, Clara expresses interest in DT since as a teacher she believes that in the well-being space, teachers and their needs are often overlooked in deference to student well-being. In the busyness of teaching, she holds the hope that DT could be a contemplative exercise with potential to be a source of nourishment for herself as an educator noting,

I think there is very little time to stop and reflect. It's all busy, busy. Go, go, go! And I just think to gather as a group in a contemplative space, I just think it's different. It's needed. It's necessary. I would see a much deeper level of well being there. In my case, I would probably call it a spiritual well being. I feel, it would need to be nourished, and particularly as educators.

Another participant, Martha came to DT with an openness and curiosity and also for personal gain, yet she acknowledges that it was

quite different to what I expected. I suppose I thought I would leave there thinking that would be a tool that I will use. And yeah, I'd be interested in training up, and, that was my expectation. but then it..... so I still think that. But I wasn't expecting it to be as impactful personally for me in so many ways, you know, I... that came as a surprise.

Others are perhaps more instrumental in their motivation or intention for attendance viewing DT as a possible additional “tool” to their educator toolbox and hoping for the possibility of transference of the method to their teaching. For example, Des’ expectations are that DT can be readily applied to his work context and will offer him a new set of skills as an educator and is hopeful that it may contribute to his professional development.

..it mentioned something about group discussion and how you can use it to maybe make group decisions or consensus, or whatever it might be. So, seeing how I could use it. So that's one thing as well to see how it works. The second one is to maybe learn new skills that I could try myself.

And while Des did find the group dimension of DT to be positive characterised by qualities of openness, kindness, and honesty he does lament the lack of apparent logic

and direction to the DT process. For Des it did not seem to have any defined single purpose and lacked a direct and stated intentionality.

And I liked the patterns, the actual construct of the sand. It was pretty. What was getting to me was where is this going in terms of a use of logic and the tools for a decision or what it was? So I got a bit frustrated in that bit.

Many participants frame their intrigue and interest in DT as grounded in a natural curiosity. Regarding the use of storytelling as a method they are allured by the notion that DT developed in Finland suggesting perhaps it's origins may bring a mythical dimension to the stories. The notion of story is of interest to both Alice and Natalie both of whom are English teachers. Natalie appreciates the value and power of story, considering stories as guides for living and a teacher about people and the world. And because she is currently studying, she feels "closeted away" and has a desire for a story as an antidote to her seclusion. Alice indicates her passion, commenting:

I've always liked anything to do with a story, and that's me! I suppose in life and in work as an educator everything's a story... everything is a story. Everything comes through a story, and then everybody has a story. So, this... the idea of story, I think, was the big appeal for me.

Later when she reflects on her DT experience Alice recounts that her prior expectations were radically altered in how she experienced the use of story within DT as a contemplative tool.

While the expectation and hope that DT could be transferable to work is strong for some, others bring no defined expectations for the session. They are coming to DT with "a clean slate, a blank canvas" and an open mind to see what might emerge as insightful and helpful to life and work. This curiosity stems from a desire to "get a flavour of what it is about." Prior to engaging Martha is attracted by the notion of DT as an "inside out" approach to reflective conversation and dialogue which goes beyond the surface and has an element of depth. She is also attracted to the idea that DT has an element of play and giving adults permission to engage with play she finds both interesting and a source of curiosity. This curiosity is accompanied by a sense of openness and hopefulness. Although DT may have a benefit to Martha for her professional development, providing another tool for her professional toolbox, she also sees the possibility of enrichment for her personal life. In her words she comes, as she says, because "overall I'm curious. I'm hopeful. I'm really interested." Lisa is coming to DT as she was attracted to the session title inviting participants to go deep as "in under the surface." She is also refreshingly honest in stating that at the same time she is not sure what she what precisely is involved and yet she is "interested in deep conversations." For Ellen it is this curiosity which mostly attracted her to the session,

I'm a very curious person, especially about the self, you know, and I do wonder about those things, especially, you know, if I was in a teaching space. I always kind of come away with more questions after that as well, even if we had a very deep conversation. It's very I suppose, important in my life. I'm always in that kind of head space.

Attention

Giving moment by moment attention to the unfolding of one's experience without judgement is a challenge for most and especially for the educator in a fully engaged classroom. The self-critical voice often impedes the capacity to stand back, notice and be fully present to one's experience. And being in the attending reflective space can, as Clara remarks, be a place of both excitement and apprehension. For Clara, the practice of mindfulness has helped her to respond to thoughts and feelings so that she is not overwhelmed, can remain detached, see things rationally and with a sense of calm and non-judgement.

But if I got a thought of the future I can say, "Okay, well, what are the facts here and what's going on, and let's, you know, keep it nice and calm and kind of be in the moment, and see you know weigh it up rationally, and likewise, if I'm excited for it, I kind of think, okay, well, you know, how will I follow this in a rational manner as well? It's definitely probably because I have done the mindfulness, of course I respond with a sense of calm, because of that, if that makes sense.

Lisa considers herself to be a wondering, thinking type of person who remains alert to her own internal dynamics and to what is going on for her. She is more attuned to her thinking patterns and less attached to a fixed and rigid way of living or insisting that life has to be a certain way.

I was someone who was very black and white, very kind of rigid. And I think the counselling helped me to see that there's a bit of, you know, you can.... you know, you can live in the space between the black and white. It doesn't have to be this way. Things change. And it was kind of around like the gym and eating if that makes sense. Now I'm trying to....I'm kind of more catching what I'm like, it's actually okay if you can't go to the gym?

Many of the participants described this attending to present experience as a struggle and a challenge. For Alice, she observes that often the lines between rumination, reflecting and daydreaming become so embedded in her life that she needs "to pull myself up." In attending to tasks, she realises that on occasion she can be absorbed and lose herself to the extent that she sometimes skips meals and yet she can recognise this tendency:

...And I have to tell myself, look, even if you don't feel like taking a break, take the bloody break. You need it.

She has a developed capacity for paying attention to what is happening to her before she becomes swamped and so can shift her attention when she feels potential pressure arising from being hyper busy.

I suppose my sense of well being a lot of it would be around knowing my limits and knowing like I used to beat myself up about. I used to be like, how come all the teachers can be a teacher and a year head, and they teach hockey or direct a play, and I just managed to do my job, you know, just the job. I don't do all that extra stuff but I've just learned for some people they thrive on being hyper busy. Some people need it....and I don't.

Here Alice reveals not only her capacity to observe what is happening to her but an ability to observe her moment-to-moment, internal and external experience with precision and focus but without judgement.

Perhaps it is the transition in later life from a previous career that enables Des to bring clarity to his thoughts on noticing and paying attention to his life. He recognises the value of self-reflection as an antidote to criticism of self especially as a teacher where fear and self-criticism can dominate. Swimming is now his way of being mindful in the world where he says

...I get my mindfulness, or "in moment bit" and you're just there swimming. Like some of the other guys do the front crawl where you're facing the water doing it, whereas I'm always up having a chat, having a look around, but appreciating it and taking it in, taking nature, taking the sun, taking the movement of the water. So that kind of being in the moment bit is becoming more natural for me to do.

Reflecting on his DT experience Des notes that initially he was very much the outside observer remaining in logical mode as he questioned the purpose and value of DT. When invited to become involved as an active agent in the stories this passivity shifted, and he entered with a spirit of curiosity and enquiry. Similarly, Bob's engagement in response to DT was being attentive to the movement of sand describing the facilitators use of the sand as taking him out of himself and enabling him to focus on what was happening in the unfolding of the story.

During the moments of silence in DT Bob remarked on his comfort with this aspect of the experience welcoming the silence as an opportunity to be fully present to himself.

Again, I was comfortable in it. And yeah, I felt no pressure to speak up, and I wasn't sitting back thinking should I say something or anything like that? I felt if any time I wanted to speak, I was comfortable in speaking. So the silence, I kind of enjoyed the silence part because it was kind of giving time for it to settle and let us absorb what was going on.

And later, he remarks that he felt no compulsion to fill the silence but merely an urge to enjoy it and to notice the response of others to its presence.

Having the capacity to attend to both the positive and negative moments in one's experience is the full embodiment of attending so that in other words attention to self is not just to what is comfortable but also to the possibly disturbing. Natalie describes two different responses here, one where attends to her experience by moving to action and away from people to sit with her feelings and be alone. In contrast, when attending to moments of joy and positive experiences she has a sense of "abandon" or a "carefree feeling" which is accompanied by an urge to dance with joy. When asked to move places in DT, Natalie initially feels resistant but then notices a shift in her sense of awareness so that she comes to have a different awareness of herself in the experience.

I didn't really want to move, but I think I can see I can definitely see why you do that, and that's probably, people do get lazy, and they don't look at things from different perspectives. And it is really important to do that. So yeah, it did. It did like..... going to the other side of the room it did actually shift it, like this is in another direction.

Likewise, Martha demonstrates her capacity to attend to both the negative and positive. When she finds herself in a positive teaching place and there is a sense of flow and a feeling that it is going somewhere Martha notices that her attention is actually shifted to a focus on the student and from whom she notices there flows an energy.

You know, what I find, you know when you're teaching and you know it's really going somewhere, you, you know. I'm kind of reflecting on that as I go, because I'm just the simple thing of gosh, this is, you know, this is really working, you, you know, and I can..... I know it's really working, like that's a really lovely feeling. And with me I find it gives me energy and it you know..... And the really interesting thing is that when it's going like that, and when I'm kind of reflecting on it, it's.... you would, you might think, oh, well, then, is it becoming about me? But it's I find it's actually the opposite, it becomes more about the student..

When asked to reflect on the moment of her DT experience Martha jots down in her diary that she had an imminent sense of danger as she felt the need to protect herself and the pending consequences of entering the desert which was identified as a dangerous place. She acknowledges that this language of the desert being described as a place of danger and demanding protection sparked an internal response for her.

Attitude

Attitude can be viewed as the natural follow up to attention so that if I can remain attentive to the fullness of my experience then I have potential to choose my attitude to what subsequently emerges. In this sub theme many participants used the language of choice or deliberation to illustrate the positioning of their attitude. This capacity seems to stem from life experience where participants learn how to respond to events in their lives following particular events and moments.

Alice illustrates the choices she has made to protect her well-being by deliberately cultivating an attitude of non-striving which facilitates remaining open to her thoughts, and feelings without conditionality or judgement. This attitude supports her to make decisions which recognise the limitations of her potential and to respond creatively to the sometimes-present negativity within her professional context.

I mean there was the odd time, say, like the odd time when I would have felt, you know, especially when you work full time as a teacher, and there are certain times like ...there was one time, just all busy, busy, busy, and there was a lot of negativity and hostility in the staff room, and one day I was exhausted, and I rang in sick the next day for a day. Now you kind of like feel, you know normally well, I don't have a broken leg, and I don't have a cold, and I'm not coughing my guts up. But mentally, I just I needed that day, and I needed it. And I've done that once or twice over the last few years. And so it just was like, Okay, I need to step back. And just, and it's not a lazy day. It's not yeah irresponsible. I actually just needed it, and then got back in and was grand so...

Des describes a shift in his attitude to life and living which stemmed from a break down in his mental health. He shared that a tendency to be overly judgemental and critical of himself led to a situation where he became paralysed for fear of making a mistake. This up tightness is in sharp contrast to other insights into himself where Des remarks, for example, when entering a room of new people for the first time and finds somebody on their own, he says that

I tend to go to that person and say, "hi I am Des. Blah, blah, blah." And then they may be interested or not in talking to me, and if they're not well, I like to move on but if they are interesting I might stay with them. Yeah, I kind of like to see what's going on around and with different people.

He enters DT with a spirit of openness remarking that with the other group members he was willing "to try and contribute to make it a success" and by being open and honest he had a positive experience of DT.

In the pre-DT interview Bob remarks that he is open to learning and seeing what emerges from the DT experience. It is perhaps these attitudinal qualities that most permeates Bob's responses both before and after DT. In moments of attending to his

sense of wondering he notes it can be an opportunity for being either “overly critical or overly nice to myself and see where and what that's bringing me.” In his very first response to DT Bob remarks that the actual process itself eliminated the tendency to have an attitude of judgement as both the story and the process decoupled the meaning from a direct link to any member of the group. Participants could speak through the figures of the story without being labelled or identified. This cultivation of a non-striving and non-judgemental spirit was convened by the facilitator’s attitude whose skill encouraged you to “let your mind go” as

It wasn't restrictive, you know, a lot of the time you're asked for your opinion on a certain aspect of a story or a situation. This was just pure whatever came into your head, and it was again welcomed and encouraged which was refreshing.

Lisa has learned not to become totally consumed by her thoughts and she can choose to stay with her experience but then equally redirect by engaging in external activity. Again, counselling has enabled her to live less in the extremes and to have perspective on her life. She allows herself to enter the moment of her experience and feelings but does not become overwhelmed by the intensity of her feelings.

I no longer live in the extremes. It's [counselling] made me come back into the balance; I suppose.

For Lisa, this element of choice is painfully manifested through the tragic loss of her brother in an accident and through the experience of DT she is reminded of the power of choice and how this has framed her disposition to life and grief.

So, it's kind of like the whole Victor Frankl, what do you do with the the suffering? And I think it is sometimes attitude, and how you look at it? Like do you look at it as oh, that was unfair! Why did that happen to me? No one says it shouldn't have happened; you know. It just happened. So, what do you do with that? So, I don't know. So, in that story, then it kind of resonated with me because it's kind of like.... that choice.

For a number of participants engaging with DT was itself and an opportunity to directly explore and reflect on their own attitude to self and their experience. For example, when invited to share in DT Natalie has an initial sense of the risk of being judged but then was encouraged by others in the group who proceeded to share. Later, she declares that the entire process was an invitation without pressure and that “There's no fixed way of looking at this, so that is very nice to have that place where you know things don't have to be.” Through the DT process Natalie recognised that she had been giving herself “a bit of a hard time” and had come to judging herself and being self critical. She remarks how participation in DT helped her to redress the imbalance between her professional and personal life and to actively be more kind to herself and in attending to her own needs,

And I think I made a decision there, I think - that I just needed to to look at that space, that I needed to make a bit of space for myself a bit more, you know, in the weeks after that, to be able to take a step back a bit. So, I did put a few things in place after that to look after the personal.

Clara enjoyed sharing with others as DT was a safe space and seeing herself through the figures gave her insights into herself from a third person position which was safe and protective. She describes how the story became her own story and the telling of it twice gave her confidence to participate without judgement

But I think it was that safe space that was created. And I think it was this as I've mentioned a few times, using these different figures, and I felt I was revealing something about myself. It was like in third person, and that's very safe and that felt very good. It was just a very..... There was no right or wrong answer. It was a really safe space to be in, and that felt really good.

Clara returns to this sense of being kind towards herself and having confidence to be her “best self” without judgement from herself or others as again it the safety of the group and the DT process itself gave her permission to articulate her thoughts and feelings.

I suppose my thought for, the week there's been a great calmness within me Paul. There's been a real sense of being yourself, Clara. Bring your best self, you know, to as much as you can. Don't be leaving Clara behind, or you know there was definitely a sense of..... I was able to explore my thoughts and myself as a person, my professional self, and in the stories, education, and you know what it felt great to offer my perspective, and even though my perspective wasn't maybe the same as everybody else's, it felt good for me to vocalize, this is who I am as a person.

For Martha, although she welcomes moments of reflection and an openness to her thoughts and feelings as they emerge, she does acknowledge that the associated feelings can be difficult to process and so is a little hard on herself leading to self-judgement and blame which can be difficult to deal with

And sometimes those feelings that come with that, you know, can be difficult to process. It can be particularly with me, because I'm a little hard on myself, as you know, you know sometimes there isn't a space for that. You know what I mean because it's, you know, sometimes..... like. If you reflect and you, blame yourself for things, that can be a difficult place to be in sometimes, if you know what I mean, you know, if I had done, you know, if you're reflecting and thinking oh, maybe if I had done this, or maybe if I done that, you know, or you, you know sometimes that can be hard to deal with...

and so, DT was for Martha a place to be open honest and crucially in an atmosphere which was non judgemental. Martha comes back later to this creation of a nonjudgmental context where participants “could just sit around and talk so openly with vulnerability and not fear judgement.”

Awareness

Awareness of one’s bodily sensations, mental processes and behaviour is a necessary pre-requisite for effective self-regulation supporting well-being and arguably could be stated to be the first movement in a contemplative practice since without this ‘in the moment’ quality of each moment as it happens there can be no context for attending or the cultivation of attitude.

For many both the personal and the professional aspects of self are strongly connected to each other. Educating the whole person for Alice is one’s purpose as an educator and she considers this to be a personal and relational activity as a teacher. She is comfortable with her capacity to be a reflective person describing this quality as something that has served her well and yet her propensity to “overthink” and “overanalyse” can sometimes lead her “into a kind of a rabbit hole.” Because of this Alice resorts to the practice of OLGA – observe, let go, attend – to enable her to stay in the present moment.

I need to be more mindful to the present moment. As I said, it's that kind of wondering, the thinking, reflecting, and getting ideas. It's great, but you have to also kind of be in present in the moment. So, there are times when I'd be like you know, observe it, let it go and be mindful and it's just about awareness, you know.

Upon reflecting on DT, she remarks that initially she had a sense of being cautious, feeling tense at the prospect of being vulnerable with others in the DT setting but later as she engages with the process of DT, she is aware of being “more comfortable and engaged.” Awareness of her relationship and interdependence with others which is awareness beyond the self, is identified strongly by Alice towards the end of her post DT interview. She recounts that at the very end of the DT experience, when actively involving herself in the story through the placing of her metaphorical self in the story she stood back and realised that

... over the last year or so that in school, like my colleague, has been really really crucial right like, really kind of held my hands through the work, and I felt like looking at it, I thought, “oh, I'm not ready to branch out on my own do you know, I'm still kind of very not dependent.” But I suppose you know I still need the kind of mentoring in, you know, in my new role, and, Yeah, I'm not ready to strike out on my own, you know. And I felt that was an

insight that I felt came to me looking at the way I kind of put myself in it [the story].

Many times, during the DT experience, Des remarks that he struggled with the lack of apparent logic to the DT method. He displays a candid honesty in recognising and acknowledging his frustrations when the practical and logical seem to be minimised. His immediate response to the stimulation of the story is nearly always at the intellectual or cognitive level. His honesty is a reminder that having awareness is being able to be open to all of one's experience.

Natalie observes that she has a heightened awareness to her emotional responses particularly in moments of stress. She indicates having a sense of curiosity when she observes within herself negative emotions noting,

I like to think I'm curious if I have reactions and maybe why I react in a certain way at certain times, or you know, picking apart what is that about? If it is a strong reaction or something I find that interesting and what's motivating that?

As she has developed in her teaching career Natalie perceives herself as an adult role model and is more comfortable with being herself in the classroom which she integrates into her professional role as a teacher. This growth and development are also reflected in how she manages anger in the classroom and how she has become more empathetic and understanding. Later she describes how she is allowing this aspect of herself "to come out more." She has become more conscious of meeting her needs through activity and connection.

Natalie found that DT helped her to accept and acknowledge her current circumstances and not to deny the reality of her current circumstances by giving her a different perspective and to process her reality.

I think the workshop helped to go with it, not to shut it down. I think I had been shutting it down at home and doing the work and putting it away. But I think the workshop really helped to bring that up, and to look at it from the perspective, from the almost like stepping outside it, "Oh, I know that's me. That's where I am. Okay, right?" I see that. And you know, that's where I am now, and then looking at the whole community as well of people, that we're in, populating the space, and that's a nice place to to come into, that it's not a lonely space. So, I think that the flood of feelings was probably there, you know, beforehand, and this really helped to process that in a way for me.

Clara considers herself to be a habitual reflector both in her personal life and her professional role as a teacher. Her upbringing and home life through the calming influence of her dad in contrast to the anxious disposition of her mother she now sees transferring to herself, remarking, "it did transfer unbeknownst to myself, and definitely in some circumstances I would have

seen that.” She articulates very clearly what she believes to be lacking in her professional life which she describes as a quest for nourishment and depth which she labels further as a desire for ‘spiritual nourishment.’

I don't know where to go for that nourishment, and you know where once it would have been the church, and it still is So don't get me wrong. The church is quite a contemplative space, but it's like I'm crying out for spiritual nourishment, and I don't know where to turn. So, for me personally. this is why I'm really looking forward to Deep Talk.

The desire for depth or what Clara describes as a need for “something more meaningful” is expressed in her view that connection on a deeper level needs to happen beyond the superficial. She recognises when her own well-being is slipping and can identify supports which enable her to live more purposefully and manage the stresses of her personal and professional life including attention to her physical health, her mental health and ensuring she has a focus which gives her external perspective on her life.

And so, I'm very conscious. Of my thoughts and you know what you fire you wire, and you know, keeping my thoughts very positive, keeping them in perspective. And then, physically, I look after myself in terms of going for a walk, or I get my vitamins but probably the area I'm always passionate about is that spiritual side, and that's definitely one that I feel I can't really nourish. So, I do everything else right and well, and I keep myself very well.

Martha cites the absence of reflection in the early stages of her teaching career and has a sense of regret of this being a reality so now she appreciates the opportunity for reflection seeing it as a valuable skill. She recognises her propensity to overwork and despite having a support system in her school she does acknowledge bringing too much schoolwork home and being over engaged in her role as a teacher.

there was always something going on, and there probably.... I probably.... well, not probably, I definitely didn't need to do all those things, if you know what I mean, looking back on it. But I did, and, you know, got great satisfaction and the kids did, and all those staff members. So, I suppose I probably did bring too much home with me to do.

DT has given Martha an insight into the difference for her between reflecting and wondering stating that

I now realize wondering and reflecting are quite different. There's more of a safety around wondering somehow, more of an innocence if that makes sense. Less of a feeling that you're wondering must lead to something.

Later she returns to this difference stating that the word reflect is more onerous while there is an innocence about wonder which can't be right or wrong. And in wondering you can change your mind, and this brings for Martha a sense of uplift whereas reflecting means possible hardness or self critique and thus be counterproductive.

There's always what now element for me in an academic reflecting sense, I suppose. Whereas wondering is Hmm ...more blissful. I don't know. Maybe that sound a bit crazy!

Awareness doesn't always imply harmony or is to be bestowed as a virtue. It is sometimes a cost for Lisa or is almost an irritant interfering with her ordinary daily living and she says that

Sometimes I feel like too much reflection is bad. Sometimes it would annoy me that.... you know, because sometimes I find myself thinking of the bigger things, what's this all about what is what is actually like.

She recognises an existential angst within herself, and counselling helps to help her to be more free and to make choices for herself. But she is also a driven person who "swings into action with a plan" when the need arises. Working in a private educational setting Lisa finds it easier to relate to students which comes to her automatically and she instantly feels a connection. In DT she came to awareness that there is a vulnerability as to how she allows herself to remain on the periphery and she sees the need to push herself beyond her comfort zone.

Similarly, Ellen enjoys and is drawn to the reflective space but feels it can lead her to be overly reflective and to what she describes as "a little bit much sometimes." As a way of finding calm, she resorts to reading or playing video games to escape from the sense of feeling overpowered. In contrast, a positive sense of self discovery can be uplifting for her and leads to clarity and an unlocking of a new part of herself. She recognises a divide between her personal and professional self which she attributes to past trauma. During DT, Ellen could see the use of both stories as pointing to the centrality of relationship in her own work. It connected her to the purpose and motivation of her own work - the why of doing what she does.

and a really important aspect for me is the importance of relationships, and building those relationships with your students, is the most important aspect for me. And so, it just, it made me feel lovely. Like, it just it brought a lovely feeling to me, and brought me back, I suppose as to why I'm doing this in the first place, you know? Why, why I wanted to get into this field of work.

Process

Learning from others and with others has been instrumental in shaping participant response and the attention to thoughts, feelings, and experience. Bob recognises a

number of elements in the process which in his opinion were key to his engagement. These include feeling respected, the creation of a safe space, a spirit of non-judgement and the use of the group which were a community in the moment rather than a collection of disconnected individuals.

The use of props, the vehicle of the story itself and the creation of the conceptual space within DT are all aspects of the process which Alice sees as contributory to her engagement and exploration of the DT process.

When asked to consider her response to being invited to place herself in the story Alice believes that engaging the whole group made it a shared and enjoyable experience.

I was fine [placing myself in the story] because everyone was too... We were all doing it. I mean, it might be if I was the only person you know. that would be totally different. But we were all.. It was a shared experience. So I actually again thought, and you know I really loved that all the little people had different postures. So, they had a mood or a vibe, you know each little person. There was something going on with each little person. So, I actually... I actually liked that. Yeah, I enjoyed it. And I was very comfortable because we're all doing it at the same time. You know, we're all we're all in it together...

In terms of process Des clearly sets out his stall in respect of his expectations. He has a curiosity which is essentially directed towards the hope that DT can teach new skills for application to his work as an educator and that the group dimension via the use of discussion will be purposeful and instrumental. In his post DT interview Des is direct and forthright in his immediate response to DT citing the lack of and direction and his struggle with the lack of purpose and the use of the DT methodology. This open-ended nature of DT as a process and the collective understanding of the experience shared by the group was too non directional for Des.

...was I really that pent up that I needed to know where they were going, where they're coming from? And I obviously was, because it was bugging me like, the logic of what they were doing, where they're going. The desert. How long were they going to be there and if there was water? Are they in a bad state? All these kinds of questions were asking me very practical kind of things, and even down to the sand. And sand being left on the table and saying that kind of upsets me just that untidiness or whatever. And that made me ask what was the reason?

However, this logical and cognitive response contrasts to Des final summation when he appears to reveal a shift in his understanding of DT and its impact when he says that the need for logic “doesn’t always have to be the chief driver and “It's okay to let things kind of go without a certainty as to where they might end up.”

Reflecting on DT, Natalie remarked on a number of elements - the sand, the story, the use of objects as a metaphor - all which drew her into reflection at the time of the experience but also afterwards so that she remained in a further stage of contemplating as she says,

Yeah, I liked watching her and what she was doing with the sand and the way she was sort of like running her hands through, it almost felt like that really settled everybody, or that settled me, anyway. And I could almost feel the sand myself. And then I..... what struck me in the story, that line about giving away your most precious gift, and that's been going around my head for the last couple of weeks. I've been because we didn't really talk about what that was, we just kinda..... and I guess that's the idea as well, that it's not black and white, but I did think about that in various ways. And wondering what is it? How do we do that? And what does that mean? and it's not..... I haven't answered that either fully. But it's actually opened up some kind of thought process, I think. Yeah, so yeah, that story. That story wasn't..... We didn't..... I don't think we delved into that as much as the other stories. So that the story, I suppose, was an opening. An opening story, if you like. So that bit stayed with me.

Later Natalie describes the use of silence by the facilitator as a “thinking silence” and as comfortable since it offered support to the group to collectively reflect and interpret what was happening for each during the DT experience.

Clara recognises the value of reflection and stepping back before exhaustion takes root and identifying what truly matters. Staying close to her experience and recognising patterns of response helps Clara to readjust and restore balance for herself.

.... it's being reflective, really, Paul, I mean... I sit back and I say, “Well, what's important here? And what are the facts? And who do I really need to care for?” And it's kind of creating that boundary. But it's definitely that space of reflection, because I think if I don't stop and kind of look at it for what it is, I'm on the hamster wheel, and I'm "go, go, next, next, next" that I just need to just really stop myself when I'm you know, under a lot of pressure and say, “Well, I know I need to readjust our prioritize and say, “You know, this is or isn't, what's important”.

In DT Clara remarks on the process of exploration adopted which she assisted her to look at herself in a different way and providing an alternative perspective on her life.

But one thing that I did enjoy was using the little characters, Paul. It was like looking at myself from another perspective. And I really liked that. Do you know, when Cora would say, you know you placed yourself there - why did you do it? When you were thinking about why you made a decision it was like looking at yourself in a story. It just offered way, more perspective.

Being part of a group for the DT also offered a meaningful experience and the seamless forming of the group led to a situation where a “very caring, safe space [was] created.” and “everyone was heard.” Clara mentions often that DT gave her a new perspective and as a process this opened up a different way of seeing and understanding, paradoxically by making her feel uncomfortable.

I liked moving around the classroom, even though I think we just moved maybe twice or three times. But I liked kind of the I was getting comfortable in my chair, and next thing I was out of it again, and I liked feeling that kind of sense of being uncomfortable, or once again changing perspective. It's hard to put into words.

Responding to DT Martha notes that in the process everybody was generous and open and that one’s viewpoint was not judged, nor did it really matter as she experienced the atmosphere as a place of vulnerability and openness where a spirit of generosity meant that nobody was seeking to impress.

She describes DT as very hopeful and although called Deep Talk it was a place of deep listening which Martha found to be enormously powerful characterised by acceptance and recognition of all within the group.

I found that extraordinarily hopeful I suppose you could say, you know, and I suppose it made me, you know, realize the need for that in general. Okay? And I also like, I suppose, that thing of you know, it's called Deep Talk. But for me it was the deep listening, if you know what I mean. Like I did not miss one word. I didn't wander at any point, you know. I heard everything. I could probably repeat everything that everyone said. So, there was just, and the power that comes from listening in such a deep way like it's one thing to deep talk..., we don't get enough opportunity, but to get the opportunity to deep listen like that. And the fact that people would feed back, which was actually showing that they were listening deeply as well. You know, I found that it was almost like an acceptance or a recognition that everybody's viewpoint is absolutely fine, you know...

For Martha, the role of the facilitator was significant in generating respect via the use of people's names and her skills to facilitate the session. She describes the methodology as “hypnotic” citing how the figures were put back so gently with a tangible respect for everything. Again Martha uses the word hypnotic to describe other elements in the telling of the story - the hands, detachment from the face of the story teller, her voice and pace - and in conclusion the hands over the story which she found soothing and comforting and a respectful way of working and engaging the group.

Commenting on the use of silence in DT does not recall it being awkward or feeling the pressure to speak.

As far... I'm just trying to remember now. I don't remember like the silence being feeling like awkward. I I didn't remember feeling the need to speak, or anything. As I said, like it was.... I felt pretty relaxed. It was a safe kind of space. ... So, it was kind of giving.... It was kind of making me think of how other people.... what other people's perspective might be on what we've just heard or seen. That's what I was probably doing in the silence.

A number of elements contributed to the process for Ellen. Firstly, her silent agreement to the wonderings aloud of others. She also felt the warmth and acceptance of the group whom she felt were on the “same brainwave with each other.” The value of the group members with their differing opinions and views enriched the experience for Ellen making it a “powerful and effective” experience. For Ellen, the facilitator was central to a safe process but using DT in her own workspace would depend on the cohesion of the gathered group. Also, the use of silence was a mediator of reflection and supported the work of the group in giving space to reflect.

Self-Regulation

The processes of orienting, shifting, and sustaining attention combined with metacognitive awareness to effectively manage thoughts, emotional responses, and behaviour is a “metacognitive self-regulatory capacity (MSRC) of the mind” (Dorjee, p.1) and this awareness is a necessary pre-requisite for effective self-regulation (SR) supporting well-being. A specific aspect of SR is the introspective *metacognition attention* (awareness and knowledge of bodily sensations, mental phenomena, and behaviour). A secondary related element of SR is the capacity for *emotion regulation*, effectively navigating distressing situations (Crosswell *et al.* 2024). It includes cultivation of qualities and unique emotion regulation strategies to name emotions, visualization, reflective contemplations, and transformation of negative emotions into their positive emotion ‘antidotes,’ (Dorjee, 2016, p.4)

As a means of managing what Alice calls that “space in her head” she resorts to the practice of OLGA – *observe, let go, attend* – to enable her to stay in the present moment.

I need to be more mindful to the present moment. As I said, it's that kind of wondering, the thinking, reflecting, and getting ideas. It's great, but you have to also kind of be in present in the moment. So, there are times when I'd be like you know, observe it, let it go and be mindful and it's just about awareness, you know.

Yoga and nature are also avenues to mind her head space and in school she often eats alone to help regulate the volatility of school life and also because she enjoys the silence when alone. This element of silence is also appealing to Alice throughout the DT session where she remarks on being easy with the periods of silence throughout. Alice also has availed of counselling in the past and sees this resource as a safeguard when issues become overbearing for her.

Bob's practice of daily meditation, his love of nature and his passion for woodwork are all anchors which stabilise him in life. In work he describes how if a class has been draining, he will try to get outside as he feels "that's very good for quick grounding for me just to let go of all the energy of whatever has been happening." Another method used by Bob is consciously becoming aware of his trigger points and thus he can engage in positive self talk when facing challenging situations. In DT Bob remarks that the facilitator's method of story telling and "playing with the sand totally took me out of myself like the fingers going through the sand, I kind of..... it focused me very much on what was happening."

Swimming is cited by Des as his way of being mindful in the world where he says,

...I get my mindfulness, or "in moment bit" and you're just there swimming. Like some of the other guys do the front crawl where you're facing the water doing it, whereas I'm always up having a chat, having a look around, but appreciating it and taking it in, taking nature, taking the sun, taking the movement of the water. So that kind of being in the moment bit is becoming more natural for me to do.

And he feels too that his sea swimming has given him the capacity to feel alive and engaged with his life in a new way so that he now feels more in touch with nature and the joy of being part of a swimming community. Later Des identifies this connection with nature and with people along with his swimming as enablers of his self-care as providers of self-protection,

my sea swimming is definitely there like for the head space, the actual, the community...the connection and connectivity with nature and with other people around this. That's huge. And if I wasn't swimming for 3 days, I'd start to get antsy and exercise in general is good for my well being.

Moving from doubt to contentment and framing the positive has given Des a sense of feeling truly fortunate and appreciating the current circumstances of his life. He does not take for granted what he describes as his "social capital" and for most of the time feels "intense joy and happiness." His experience of ill health has "made me appreciate what I have now and how important it is just to, as you say, be in the moment." He has come to recognise his own limitations and those created by his context and circumstances, noting

But it is about being able to say, "Okay, it's only so much that I can actually do." And it's right. Now, what can I do right now? What happens out of school time or next week, or whatever you know, it might not happen, but things happen outside my control. It's only a small little bit that I can control

During DT Des recognises his ease with the periods of silence, and he records “the silence during the session was just silence. I didn't feel any need to try and fill it. But I would be more conscious of allowing silence than I had been before.”

As a teacher and as a person Natalie ascribes to her training in Drama Therapy as “gamechanger” in her development as a person and professional. In her early days as a teacher, she acknowledges that she became angry quite easily and lose her temper but now she notices she has “become more the kind of teacher I really was.” Other supports to her regulation of self include reminding herself of the “small things” which help make a difference including reading and music. In school Natalie makes a concerted effort to get outside during the school day which she finds helps regulate her moods and stress levels. As Natalie is in the middle of a stressful and demanding place in her life as she attempts to move jobs, she was experiencing a sense of rejection. She found the DT workshop helpful as a way of supporting her to face her emotions without feeling swamped.

I think the workshop helped to go with it, not to shut it down. I think I had been shutting it down at home and doing the work and putting it away. But I think the workshop really helped to bring that up, and to look at it from the perspective, from the almost like stepping outside it. "Oh, I know that's me. That's where I am. Okay, right?" I see that. And you know, that's where I am now, and then looking at the whole community as well of people, that we're in, populating the space, and that's a nice place to to come into, that it's not a lonely space. So, I think that the flood of feelings was probably there, you know, beforehand, and this really helped to process that in a way for me.

Clara acknowledges that being in the reflective space can sometimes bring mixed feelings, on the one hand excitement but also apprehension too about the future. The practice of mindfulness has helped Clara to respond to her thoughts and feelings so that she is not overwhelmed, can remain detached, see things rationally and with a sense of calm.

But if I got a thought of the future I can say, "Okay, well, what are the facts here and what's going on, and let's, you know, keep it nice and calm and kind of be in the moment, and see you know weigh it up rationally, and likewise, if I'm excited for it, I kind of think, okay, well. you know, how will I follow this in a rational manner as well? It's definitely probably because I have done the mindfulness, of course I respond with a sense of calm, because of that, if that makes sense.

Later Clara returns to mentioning her mindfulness practice as a way of helping regulate her thoughts apply rationality where required.

I participated in mindfulness courses, and because of that I suppose I kind of detach a bit from my thoughts, and kind of you know look at them. kind of from...what would I say... I don't get too sucked into the emotions of them if

that makes sense, and it's probably only true you know since my experience of mindfulness, and maybe it's kind of being detached from my thoughts a little bit. But if I got a thought of the future I can say, "Okay, well, what are the facts here and what's going on, and let's, you know, keep it nice and calm and kind of be in the moment, and see you know weigh it up rationally, and likewise, if I'm excited for it, I kind of think, okay, well. you know, how will I follow this in a rational manner as well

As a way of regulating Martha identifies two elements which are supportive. Firstly, the support from her staff was very enabling to cope with stresses of work and secondly her attachment to her hobbies of reading, cooking, music, and the arts in addition to her close friends. From a cognitive perspective Martha claims she never "took the notion of being a teacher very seriously" and after a heavy day she is always conscious of the need to "decompress" while in school the element of keeping fun as part of the learning experience for the children was central to keeping a balance. Martha has come to learn to accept illbeing as part of well-being rather than try to push difficult feelings away. This strategy she describes as learning to park rather than bury things

If you have a feeling then of overwhelmness, you know, if something isn't going right, if you can't find the solution, you know, especially parents knocking on your door, you know that it's okay to kind of say, you know what? I don't have the answers, and I'm afraid I don't have the answers. But if you like it's about parking, and also, I think like, just from hearing other people that thing of you know, I don't have to..... I don't have to be the fixer.

One of the key strategies to have supported Lisa to manage her sometimes rigid thinking and anxiety has been her engagement with therapy.

And I think the counselling helped me to see that there's a bit of, you know, you can.... you can live in the in the space between the black and white. It doesn't have to be this way. Things change...

Lisa has learned to see her experience of feelings as non-threatening so positive and negative feelings are not polarised but are part of a normal functional reality and as she says, "counselling has helped me not to live in the extremes" and "to come back into balance." She also reads a lot of existential and other counselling material which gives her insight and support.

To support her own regulation of thoughts and emotions Ellen either reads a book or plays video games to "quiet my mind down, while I'm in that constant head space, because there's the other part of me that will just want to research things that I'm thinking about, and then I will get into the research mode, and that will sometimes make it a bit more crazy".

The entire process of DT gave Ellen an opportunity to reflection her own life and to wonder to herself in respect of care towards herself.

it was very deep for me, like I got very deep, and I was really looking again and stuff like that and I do think that like that if you're looking within, it really can make you think. Am I taking care of myself? Is there a well being aspect in my life, is there not?