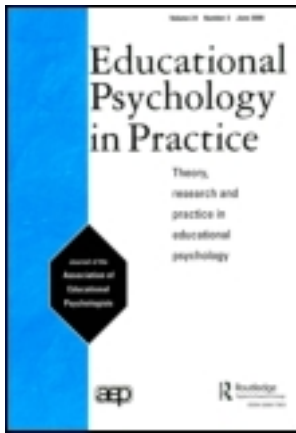


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Mindfulness-Based Approaches and their potential for educational psychology practice

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Research has been carried out on the application of “mindfulness” to a number of different populations in varying contexts, some of which traverse the field of educational psychology. This discussion paper explores what is understood as mindfulness and outlines the breadth of its application. As well as more extensive research into the use of mindfulness with adults in clinical settings, there has been initial research carried out in the use of Mindfulness-Based Approaches (MBA) with children and parents. MBA have also been used within therapy and coaching which has some similarity to educational psychology consultation with teachers and parents. This paper proposes that the future role of MBA within educational psychology might be one of cautious use by practitioners and the development of a greater body of evidence relating to efficacy in this field.

Keywords: mindfulness; education; psychology; school; parenting; consultation; children

Introduction

What is mindfulness?

The term “Mindfulness-Based Approaches” (MBA) refers to the range of programmes and strategies aimed at the development of mindfulness. In further defining the term, “mindfulness” can be understood as

the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment. (Kabat-Zinn 2003, p. 145)

One of the difficulties in attempting to define mindfulness is that it cannot be easily placed in any one distinct conceptual framework or category such as “method”, “perspective”, “experience” or “cognitive process”; mindfulness traverses all of these concepts. The term mindfulness has been transplanted from a different tradition, that of Buddhist psychology (Rosenberg, 1998). Therefore, the process of translating the term into modern Western psychology is not straightforward. Whilst Rothwell (2006) stresses the importance of MBA distancing themselves from any spiritual or religious associations, the ability to separate mindfulness fully from its culture of origin without changing or distorting it from its original meaning is a

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significant challenge. Kabat-Zinn suggests that the challenge is to ensure that mindfulness “honors the integrity of what may be different but complementary epistemologies” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 147).

It has been argued that a clear understanding of the term can only be appreciated through a full experiential involvement achieved through the practice of the techniques described in mindfulness literature (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). However, for the purposes of sharing knowledge through research, it is important to attempt a purely conceptual understanding of the term. Whilst there is general agreement amongst the main proponents of mindfulness (Hayes, Linehan, & Follette, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Linehan, 1993; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002) as to what they are alluding to when they refer to “mindfulness”, MBAs have not yet fully answered questions surrounding the construct specificity and operational definitions of mindfulness (Bishop et al., 2004). Bishop et al. (2004) argue that this may hinder the development of a coherent body of research into the area.

In describing the complexity and multiple dimensions of the concept this paper has conceptualised mindfulness as a method (Bishop et al., 2004), perspective (Hayes et al., 2004), subjective experience (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007) and cognitive process (Carson & Langer, 2006); each of these dimensions is explored separately.

Mindfulness as a method

Mindfulness as a method is described as a form of training or practice of repeating the specific mental activity of re-directing attention towards present experience (Bishop et al., 2004). This can be in the context of meditation (where meditation is defined as “focussing of the mind for a period of time”, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2002, p. 885) or in a person’s everyday occupations, such as washing up or in the midst of a busy classroom. Broadly there are two types of mindfulness practice, one with an emphasis on a narrow focus of attention and one with a broad focus of attention.

In the first approach the person is asked to focus their attention on a particular object of experience; this can range from eating a raisin (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) to the feelings or the sensations involved with breathing (Fletcher & Hayes, 2005). This has been described by Wells (2006) as “effortful attention” (p. 337). During this activity attention has a tendency to drift into conceptual thinking or move to other objects of experience such as auditory stimuli. When there is conscious awareness of this, individuals are encouraged to bring their attention back to the desired object. It is thought that through this mental activity the individual’s ability to sustain attention on a desired object of experience at the expense of distraction and conceptual thinking will increase over time (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Research has supported the suggestion that a reduction in such rumination contemporaneously increases cognitive resources to perform tasks more effectively (Leary, Adams, & Tate, 2006).

The second form of mindfulness practice differs in the sense that there is no single object of attention. In this practice the individual is asked to pay attention to whatever is in their experience (Bishop et al., 2004). Whilst in the first approach there is a narrowing of attention and a desire to control the focus of that attention, in this method the attention is broad and there is a letting go of wilful direction. If thoughts dominate people’s experience, they are asked to be aware of the thoughts without trying to control or suppress them. Thus the individual is aware of the “ebb

and flow of internal events” (Wells, 2006, p. 340). A traditional metaphor used to describe this approach is that of imagining thoughts and feelings as clouds drifting across a sky without the interference of the observer (Hayes et al., 2004).

These techniques resonate with the relaxation techniques and meditations used by some educational psychologists and teachers in the classroom (Baer, 2003). However mindfulness is distinct from other forms of relaxation exercises in that MBA do not encourage the conscious effort to let go of tension.

Mindfulness as a perspective

The purpose of these practices is to cultivate a particular perspective to experience. This is clearly explained by Hayes et al. (2004) through the concepts of “fusion” and “defusion” (p. 131). Broadly, the perspective can be described as witnessing internal events, including feelings and thoughts, as objects experienced by the subjective self or awareness. This is as opposed to the internal events incorporated in the experience of the subjective self (Bishop et al., 2004). For example, from the mindfulness or defused perspective a teacher might describe their experience of anxiety as “there is an experience of anxiety in my awareness”. This is as opposed to a fused position in which the teacher might describe their experience as “I am anxious”. Therefore, the sense of self is identified as the witness of the experience as opposed to the experience itself.

The mindful perspective is orientated towards direct experience as opposed to conceptualisation or abstract thinking (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). For example, from a perspective of mindfulness there would be a greater emphasis on paying attention to the physical experience of anxiety as opposed to ruminating on the factors surrounding the anxiety. This may manifest as an increased awareness of tension in the shoulders and tingling in the chest as opposed to imagining possible futures.

An important aspect of the conceptual process which is renounced is the judgement of the experience as good, bad, right or wrong. Mindfulness discourages the viewing of emotional discomfort as bad. Whilst encouraging pleasurable feelings and avoiding uncomfortable feelings might generally be seen to be an adaptive process, according to Kabat-Zinn (2003) it is often the cause of psychological pathologies. Hayes et al. (2004) explain that rumination arises out of attempts at avoiding present experience. The effort to avoid the present is seen to be based on the irrational premise that it can be avoided when it has already manifested itself.

Mindfulness as a perspective of not judging but accepting internal experiences carries with it some controversy. The positive process of change inevitably involves judgement of unwanted experiences as something to move away from and desired experience as something to move towards. This can be seen through goal setting in behaviour plans or in Solution Focused Brief Therapy. The issues surrounding the debate of acceptance and change, whilst relevant to understanding the subtleties of mindfulness, are beyond the scope of this paper. However, approaches which address this issue directly are Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (Linehan, 1993) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (Segal et al., 2002).

Mindfulness as a subjective experience

The subjective experience of this perspective is not related to the specific feelings in awareness as these change independently of mindfulness. Therefore someone

could be very mindful as well as feeling sad or anxious. MBA writers (Brown et al., 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 1990) suggest that mindfulness encourages some of the subjective states of well-being referred to in positive psychology, such as calmness, vitality, spaciousness and freedom (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991; Seligman, 2002). One description of mindfulness is that of being more awake (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000; Lynch, Chapman, Rosenthal, Kuo, & Linehan, 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2003), referring to a sense of greater consciousness and mental vitality.

Mindfulness as a cognitive process

The most common references to mindfulness as a cognitive process are meta-cognition (Bishop et al., 2004) and cognitive flexibility (Carson & Langer, 2006).

Mindfulness is seen to relate to meta-cognition through the act of observing internal and external processes. This cognitive process entails consciously knowing what experience is happening, as it is happening, in the present moment. For example, with mindfulness an educational psychologist might have greater conscious awareness that they feel undermined by a head teacher's reaction to them, as opposed to mindlessly reacting to the unconscious experience of feeling undermined. This then is seen to enable the person to process a broader range of information and have greater conscious choice in how to respond to their experience (Bishop et al., 2004).

Carson and Langer (2006) describe mindfulness as "a flexible cognitive state" (p. 20) referring to an ability to view situations through many perspectives, and to change perspective depending on the context. Cognitive flexibility is the ability to reduce rule-governing behaviour (Coyne & Wilson, 2004) and have a greater capacity to consider a broader range of possibilities when making decisions. In *The Power of Mindful Learning*, Langer (1997) suggests that the cognitive skills implicit in mindfulness involve taking a more flexible approach to tasks which can lead to improved memory and greater enjoyment of tasks. It is also thought that boredom is a result of mindlessness and through the cultivation of mindfulness children develop a greater potential for interest in their work (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000).

Whilst it has been acknowledged that a clear understanding of the term can only be appreciated through an experiential encounter with mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), for the purposes of sharing knowledge through research, mindfulness will be understood in this paper as

the practice of paying attention towards the present moment free from identification with thoughts and feelings, which is associated with the experience of feeling free and more awake, resulting in a meta-cognitive approach to experience and a flexible cognitive state.

Whilst this is a rather cumbersome definition it acknowledges the complexity of the term encompassing its main facets.

Breadth of application

The dominant application of mindfulness is through the delivery of therapeutic programmes to groups (Dryden & Still, 2006). In a typical programme, participants would be in a group of up to 30 people, meeting once a week for two hours, for

between eight and 10 weeks. Through the use of tools including metaphor, meditative exercises, discussion and homework the ability to cultivate mindfulness would be increased (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). One of the most common of these is the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programme (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). In the United Kingdom these programmes are typically led by health professionals within the National Health Service focusing on a range of issues including stress and pain management for individuals who have been referred to specialist services via their general practitioner (Moore, 2008).

MBA are currently included in the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2004) guidelines for the treatment of depression relapse. There has been research in the application of mindfulness as an approach to an extensively wide range of areas. These have included: parenting (Singh et al., 2007); depression (Segal et al., 2002); obsessive compulsive disorder (Patel, Carmody, & Simpson, 2007); chronic pain (Wicksell, Dahl, Magnusson, & Olsson, 2005); romantic relationship satisfaction (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007); organ transplant (Gross et al., 2004); psoriasis (Kabat-Zinn et al., 2003); insomnia (Yook et al., 2008); anxiety (Evans et al., 2008); eating disorders (Proulx, 2008); compulsive gambling (Lahey, Campbell, Brown, & Goodie, 2007); trauma (Berceli & Napoli 2006); substance and alcohol abuse (Witkiewitz, Marlatt, & Walker, 2005); psychosis (Chadwick, Taylor, & Abba, 2005); and obsessive compulsive disorders (Singh, Wahler, Winton, & Adkins, 2004). Therefore MBA appear to be versatile and have some evidence base across a number of fields which have yet to include educational psychology.

There is, however, some diversity in the quality of the research. Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, and Walach (2004) in their meta-analysis of research into the MBSR programme reviewed 64 studies out of which 20 were deemed as acceptable in quality. Grossman et al. (2004) used 11 criteria to identify relevant studies which included identifying those that had integrity to the MBSR programme, as well as having quantitative outcomes, being group programmes, and having data to allow effect size to be calculated. Five criteria were used to identify those that were deemed not to be of "acceptable quality" (p. 35): insufficient information with regard to the interventions used, weak quantitative health evaluations, inadequate statistical analysis, mindfulness not being central to the intervention and deviation from the MBSR programme. From the acceptable studies identified Grossman et al. (2004) conclude that there are some indications that there may be substantial benefits within the areas of chronic pain, fibromyalgia, cancer, anxiety disorders, depression and stress.

Much of the research into MBA has been carried out to investigate their effect on various pathologies. With regards to the potential for the application of mindfulness to educational psychology, this research does suggest that mindfulness can be usefully introduced to different populations with no previous experience of mindfulness, resulting in a diverse range of potential benefits.

Brown et al. (2007) have placed the benefits of mindfulness into three categories: emotional well-being, behavioural regulation, and relationships and social interaction. Each of these is a domain in which educational psychologists work (Farrell, Woods, Rooney, Squires, & O'Connor, 2006).

With regards to emotional well-being Brown et al. (2007) found significant correlations of emotional well-being trait measures across a number of studies. According to Baer (2003) the ability of MBA to increase well-being and reduce suffering accounts for their broad applicability across many areas of psychological pathology.

The use of MBA with obsessive compulsive disorder (Patel et al., 2007), compulsive gambling (Lakey et al., 2007) and substance and alcohol abuse (Witkiewitz et al., 2005) highlights the MBA role in behavioural regulation. Carson and Langer (2006) propose that mindfulness allows the individual to make more informed choices over their behaviour as opposed to being driven by habits, strong emotions and intrusive thoughts. A worthy area of investigation would be the exploration of its application to children who are displaying challenging behaviours.

Finally, it is thought that through developing mindfulness social interactions are positively enhanced (Knowles, 2008). Using a number of quantitative measures and diary analysis Crason, Carson, Gil, and Baucom (2004) found that participants practising mindfulness had a greater sense of autonomy and increased feeling of closeness to and acceptance of their partner. These benefits were maintained after a three-month follow-up. It is therefore not surprising that mindfulness has been applied to parenting programmes (Singh et al., 2007) and could potentially be applied to teacher–pupil interaction.

It is argued that mindfulness is a well-researched field; this paper has cited a small portion of the research to convey the breadth of its application, including emotional well-being, behavioural regulation, relationship and social interaction. Further, it is argued that since educational psychologists predominantly work with children, parents and teachers (Farrell et al., 2006), these are all areas to which mindfulness might successfully be applied.

The application of MBA to working with children

Due to the differences between adults and children in cognitive ability, life experience and culture, there is a necessity to give some consideration to the application of MBA to children and adolescents as distinct from that of adults with whom the majority of the research has been carried out (Grossman et al., 2004).

Whilst there are differences between adults and children, Hooker and Fodor (2008) concluded in their research that children would benefit in ways similar to adults. In a recent study by Flook et al. (2010), mindfulness was found to increase the executive functions of children between the ages of seven to nine, as well as resulting in increasing behavioural regulation and meta-cognition. Semple, Lee, Rosa, and Miller (2010) found in a study with nine to 13 year olds a decrease in anxiety for children using MBA. This has been supported in a randomised control trial by Biegel, Brown, Shapiro, and Schubert (2009), who used MBA with adolescents, resulting in a significant reduction in anxiety, depression, and somatic distress, and with a significant increase in self-esteem and sleep quality.

Whilst Zylowska et al. (2008) made no adaptations in their successful trial application of MBA for adolescents with an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) diagnosis, both Semple, Reid, and Miller (2005) and Hooker and Fodor (2008) advocate that age-appropriate modifications be made.

Exercises within MBA can have a high level of abstraction (Wicksell et al., 2005). In their study using MBA with a 14 year old, more concrete language was used as well as the use of repetition for more difficult concepts (Wicksell et al., 2005). This was also advocated by Heffner, Sperry, Eifert, and Detweiler (2002), Wicksell et al. (2005) and Semple et al. (2005), who propose a change in the use of metaphors when working with younger people. It is suggested that metaphors are presented in more physically tangible ways (Heffner et al., 2002). In their work

with adolescents with Asperger Syndrome, Singh et al. (2011) found that mindfulness was best taught through training the participants to focus on the concrete experience of sensations in the soles of their feet as opposed to the more subtle sensation of the breath. Whilst this variation in approach may be in part due to the traits associated with Asperger Syndrome, it may be that such changes are also important when working with younger populations.

Hooker and Fodor (2008) and Semple et al. (2005) advise that for children, mindfulness meditations are initially brief, between five and 15 minutes. This is in contrast to traditional MBA where adults are expected to do mindfulness meditation for up to 40 minutes.

The use of MBA has been found to be successful with adults, and preliminary research suggests that adaptations need to be made in its application to children. Whilst there is some evidence for the effective use of MBA, research at this stage is limited. In a review of the current research Burke (2010) concluded that whilst there is support for the use of MBA with children and adolescents there is no generalised evidence base for its efficacy. Burke (2010) calls for more methodologically robust studies to be carried out on the application of MBA to children and adolescents.

The application of MBA to working with parents

Aspects of mindfulness that have particular relevance to parenting are through the mitigation of certain barriers to positive parenting (Singh et al., 2007) and through the cultivation of positive parenting traits (Cohen & Semple, 2010). There has been some small scale research supporting the effectiveness of the use of mindfulness in parenting programmes (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007; Blackledge & Hayes, 2006; Bogels, Hoogstad, van Dun, de Schutter, & Restifo, 2008; Minor, Carlson, Mackenzie, & Zemicke, 2006; Singh et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2007).

Specific areas relevant to parenting on which mindfulness has been found to have an impact are the mitigation of stress (Singh et al., 2007), the cultivation of empathy (Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan, & Orsillo, 2007), objectivity (Bogels et al., 2008), presence (Thomas & Wuyek, 2007), cognitive flexibility (Coyne & Wilson, 2004), and the enhancement of relationships (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007) each of which will be briefly explored.

The evidence to support the relationship between parental stress and the stress of their children is inconclusive (Mannuzza et al., 2002). However, through the use of MBA, Singh et al. (2007) proposed that parental stress can be reduced and result in a better ability to respond effectively to children's difficult behaviour.

Highlighting the importance of empathy in parenting, Luis, Varela, and Moore (2008) found that qualities displayed in parenting that were related with lack of empathy, such as lack of warmth and acceptance, were associated with increased childhood anxiety. It is suggested by Greason and Cashwell (2009) that MBA is an important tool in the development of empathy. Through the greater awareness of one's emotions that MBA can cultivate (Bishop et al., 2004), there is seen to be a greater capacity for "empathetic responding" (Block-Lerner et al., 2007, p. 506).

The importance of objectivity in the role of parenting has two facets: the objectivity that a parent might bring to their understanding of their child, and objectivity with regard to their own experience. The term "objectivity" in this paper is used on the contentious premise in which the cited research is based, that subjective relationship to phenomena can be influenced, to a lesser or greater

degree, by previous conditioning. Bearing this in mind, Bogels et al. (2008) found that by teaching parents non-judgemental observations of children, they were better able to respond more appropriately to their children. Mindfulness within the context of parenting has been seen as a valid approach to developing objectivity (Bogels et al., 2008; Hayes & Greco, 2008; Wahler, Singh, & Singh, 2009). Also by developing objectivity towards themselves through MBA, Dumas (2005) suggests that parents become less entangled in negative thoughts and feelings.

A feature of MBA mentioned previously is that of bringing attention to the present moment (presence). Thomas and Wuyek (2007) applied this aspect of mindfulness to parenting through encouraging this quality of attention to parents' interactions with their children. Hayes and Greco (2008) suggest that this quality of awareness facilitates greater sensitivity and responsiveness to the child. This is supported in Singh et al.'s (2010) study on caregivers which concluded that developing presence and acceptance towards the children's behaviour reduces the emotional and psychological resources used by the caregiver.

Another important component of mindfulness mentioned previously is that of cognitive flexibility. Within the context of parenting Coyne and Wilson (2004) found that rule governed behaviour was less responsive to the direct demands of the environment than responding with mindfulness. Dumas (2005) suggest that conflicts in families with children exhibiting difficult behaviour are a result of patterns of "mindless" (p. 779) behaviour that are learnt through constant repetition and can be changed through the use of mindfulness. Bogels et al. (2008) attempted to increase cognitive flexibility through encouraging parents to become aware of their habitual responses to their children.

With regard to relationships, Altmaier and Maloney (2007) suggest that the application of MBA to parenting results in the development of the emotional aspect of the parent-child relationship. Using a number of quantitative measures and diary analysis, Crason et al. (2004) found that participants practising mindfulness found a greater "connectedness" in their relationships (p. 472). Singh et al. (2007) have emphasised the role of unconditional acceptance in mindfulness training of parents in developing relationships with their children. Using these approaches Singh et al. (2010) found that mothers of children with ADHD reported increased satisfaction with their interactions with their children.

With MBA's reported impact on stress, empathy, objectivity, presence, cognitive flexibility and the enhancement of relationships, mindfulness can be seen as an approach that has particular relevance to parenting. This has been supported by a small number of research studies exploring its effectiveness (Altmaier & Maloney 2007; Blackledge & Hayes, 2006; Bogels et al., 2008; Coatsworth, Larissa, Greenberg, & Nix, 2010; Larissa & Bardacke, 2010; Minor et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2007). In their review of studies, Cohen and Semple (2010) concluded that initial research on the application of MBA to parenting may reduce stress, increase parenting satisfaction, and reduce children's aggressive behaviour.

The application of MBA to consultation with teachers

Much of the work an educational psychologist carries out with teachers is through consultation. Consultation is increasingly becoming a central aspect to an educational psychologist's activities (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Bramlett & Murphy, 1998; Farrell & Woods, 2006; Kennedy, Frederickson, & Monsen, 2008).

Mindfulness and consultation skills

Consultation is a complex activity that requires the educational psychologist to be able to navigate through a number of constructed realities (Wagner, 2000). The level of complexity of the consultation situation requires a range of skills that cannot be assumed to be readily available and fully developed in the consultant (Brown, 1993). MBA potentially offer a range of methods to develop skills that are important for consultation. These skills could be broadly separated into cognitive, social and attitudinal.

Cognitively, MBA have been found to develop integrative decision-making skills, greater capacity to reflect during complex situations (Martin, 1997), increased meta-cognition (Bishop et al., 2004) and flexibility in thought (Varra, Hayes, Roget, & Fisher, 2008).

The MBA effect on social aspects of the consultation is thought possible due to reported benefits in the ability to see things from different perspectives (Carson & Langer, 2006); have a less judgemental stance towards others (Follette & Batten, 2000); and a greater capacity for empathy (Knowles, 2008).

With regards to the potential attitudinal effects on the consultation, MBA have been found to lead to a heightened awareness of, and a greater ability to enact, one's values (Hayes & Wilson, 2003). Attitudinal effects also include a reduction in self-interested agenda, in focusing on the demands of the objective situation (Carson & Lager, 2006) and the development of a greater genuine curiosity in the present situation (Bishop et al., 2004).

The specific contexts in which MBA has been successfully applied that most closely resemble consultation are coaching (Gardner & Moor, 2007; Silsbee, 2004), therapy (Childs, 2007; Grepmaier, Mitterlehner, Loew, & Bachler, 2007; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009), and supervision (Follette & Batten, 2000). Each of these is explored in turn.

Mindfulness and contexts similar to consultation

Coaching

Silsbee (2004) has developed a coaching model called "The Mindful Coach" in which the importance of knowledge of one's own internal state and its effect on the social dynamics of the coaching session is seen as crucial. This is achieved through questioning techniques to help coaches bring a greater awareness and sensitivity to their own internal states. The coach is thus seen to be more able to set aside their own agenda and focus on the client's needs. Coaches are also encouraged during the session to develop a greater awareness of their bodies and the experience of breathing, to recollect the experience of mindfulness.

Mindfulness Acceptance Commitment (MAC) is a coaching model primarily developed for use with athletes and in the work environment where optimal performance is required. There is some evidence base for the effectiveness of this model (Gardner & Moor, 2007). The aim of MAC is to help individuals act in accordance with their desired overall aims and values, instead of being driven by the immediate flow of emotions and thoughts. The protocol for MAC as outlined by Gardner and Moor (2007) involves acceptance of internal processes and focused attention.

It is possible that where these approaches have been found useful within the context of coaching they could equally be applied to the context of educational psychology consultation.

Therapy

The use of MBA in therapy has largely been with regard to the encouragement of mindfulness in clients but there is some research on the practice of MBA for therapists themselves. Grepmaier et al. (2007) suggests that through mindfulness practice during therapy sessions, therapists are able to understand their own experience better and are better able to assess their client's progress.

Childs (2007) describes the cultivation of mindfulness during therapy sessions as "crucial" (p. 374). Through the clinician's mindfulness the client is understood "directly" (Childs, 2007, p. 373). By this Childs is referring to an ability to perceive without being fettered by the filters of one's own thoughts and responses, alluding to what has previously in this paper been termed as objectivity. Shapiro and Carlson (2009) believe that through the development of mindfulness the skills of attention, presence and empathy can more readily be manifested, thereby giving the client a direct experience of the therapist's mindfulness.

It is argued that mindfulness may develop qualities such as greater understanding or empathy in the therapeutic situation which is also an important quality for effective consultation (Tingstrom & Little, 1990).

Supervision

The application of mindfulness to supervision has been explored by Follette and Batten (2000) and Edwards and Chen (1999). Follette and Batten (2000) particularly refer to the supervision of therapists. Through mindfulness practice during supervision, supervisors are seen to be able to develop a greater awareness of both their own emotional experience and that of the supervisee.

Edwards and Chen (1999) have developed a strengths-based supervision that incorporates the practice of mindfulness. Through an adoption of mindfulness the supervisee is thought to be more receptive during the session (Edwards & Chen, 1999). Edwards and Chen (1999) also place a strong emphasis on the experience of the supervisee, in the present moment, as a source of the most pertinent information that is available for the supervision session.

With regard to the consultation situation, conversation is seen by Macready (1997) as "a medium through which the identities and relationships of the communicators are fashioned and through which the process of change emerges" (p. 130). Therefore it could be argued that the presence that is emphasised by Edwards and Chen's (1999) supervision might help educational psychologists pay close attention to their conversations with consultees.

Research suggests that MBA provide a method for developing problem solving and interpersonal skills that are important when consulting with teachers. Through considering the application of MBA to the contexts of coaching, therapy and supervision, it is argued that there might be a strong potential for the application of MBA to consultation. As there is a lack of an evidence base for these approaches individually, it would be difficult to rely on their findings; however, collectively they do offer some confidence in the application of MBA to consultation with teachers.

The future role of mindfulness in the field of educational psychology

In the last 10 years MBA have become an established field within many areas of applied psychology (Christopher & Maris, 2010). Despite their growing use in

similar contexts, MBA have yet to make an impact on the work of educational psychologists (Burke, 2010). The applications of MBA have gradually widened to encompass the mitigation of a broad range of psychological difficulties (Grossman et al., 2004) and the enhancement of a broad range of strengths (Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). The range of contexts and populations in which MBA has been applied have widened from adult groups in the clinical setting to working with children and parents in a variety of settings including schools (Flook et al., 2010).

With regard to working with teachers, whilst there has been some research carried out on the application of mindfulness to teacher stress (Gold et al., 2010) there has been little published work on the application of mindfulness to educational psychology consultation *per se*. However, some of the skills used in consultation have been seen to be developed through MBA, and have been used in a number of settings similar to consultation.

MBA are no longer a new or emergent field in applied psychology; they have a strong evidence base in limited areas and a developing evidence base in a broader range of applications (Grossman et al., 2004). For the educational psychologist there is some supporting evidence for MBA application in work with parents (Singh et al., 2006) and children (Burke, 2010). However, compared to the research with adult populations there is significantly less research with children. With regard to quantitative studies, whilst there has been a limited number of randomised control trials with children and adolescents (Semple et al., 2010, Biegel et al., 2009) sample sizes in these studies have been small; there have been, as yet, no large scale randomised control studies examining the effects of mindfulness with children.

In their analysis of studies Grossman et al. (2004) refers to “objective disease markers” (p. 40) and randomised controlled trials. Whilst this may have some validity where physical manifestations of difficulties are clear, such as in the progression of cancer, the effect of mindfulness in areas within educational psychology are manifested through cultural, social and psychological systems which make measurement a complex process.

Whilst Grossman et al.’s (2004) observations are useful, especially when communicating within a community that values “objectivity”, they do reveal a specific paradigm of positivism from which their understanding is framed. However, an important criticism they offer is the lack of information given with regard to the specific methods employed in MBA. Together with the lack of an operationalised definition of mindfulness, it is difficult to clarify what aspects of mindfulness are effective, and which technologies are best utilised to facilitate change.

MBA comprise a diverse range of components and exercises that are seen to increase mindfulness in participants. Further research is required to ascertain which of these increase participants’ mindfulness. There are a broad range of measures designed specifically for mindfulness including the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (Hayes et al., 2003), Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (Buchheld, Grossman, & Walach, 2001), Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004); future research could adapt these measures to evaluate components from MBA in isolation and thus develop a knowledge base to develop an informed mindfulness programme.

Qualitative research has helped to develop and refine mindfulness programmes for children (Semple et al., 2005; Wicksell et al., 2005), however there needs to be ongoing research on how mindfulness can best be presented to a young population.

In the light of their own promising initial evidence, Cohen and Semple (2010) suggest further research into the use of mindfulness with parents.

There is currently sufficient evidence for educational psychologists to incorporate MBA within their work or with appropriate training to facilitate established mindfulness programmes with adults, such as teaching staff or parents. It is suggested that, when incorporating MBA into their existing work, educational psychologists are cautious with its application. Practitioners should identify exercises that are not likely to cause discomfort or reveal previously avoided discomfort as is the intention of some components of MBA (Hayes et al., 2004). Also, mindfulness work with children should be closely monitored and evaluated.

MBA are a fast expanding field and are ready for more extensive research into their application within the area of educational psychology. This is particularly the case with regards to consultation. Educational psychologists who wish to explore this field further would be advised to begin with the seminal texts from the main approaches which are based on mindfulness: MBSR (Kabat-Zinn, 1990); Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (Segal et al., 2002); Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (Linehan, 1993); Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes et al., 2004).

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