



Submitted: 14.07.2020

Accepted: 02.09.2020

Suggested citation: Kosz-Szumka J. (2020). *Building Child's Well-being through Developing Mindfulness. Mindful Eating*, „Elementary Education in Theory and Practice”, vol. 15, no. 4(58), pp. 65-83. DOI: 10.35765/eetp.2020.1558.05

Justyna Kosz-Szumka

ORCID: 0000-0002-9295-9184

Kazimierz Wielki University

## Building Child's Well-being through Developing Mindfulness. Mindful Eating

### KEYWORDS    ABSTRACT

mindfulness,  
mindful eating,  
action research,  
mindfulness  
practice, education,  
awareness, early  
school education

The paper addresses the issue of developing mindfulness among children at a younger school age, with particular attention to the category of mindful eating. It includes theoretical deliberations concerning, i.e. defining and understanding key concepts and the effectiveness of practicing mindfulness in the light of a review of the research results obtained so far. Also, the author considers the validity of implementing some elements of mindfulness into educational practice, and she outlines the empirical research conducted within the action research paradigm. By adopting the procedure of collecting data from various sources and associating them in their entirety (so-called network thinking), using various research methods and techniques (e.g. observation, self-observation, analysis of products, documents, free talks), an attempt was made to achieve the research objective, which was to assess the effects of innovative actions introduced into the education system, based on the implementation of mindfulness training elements. The author

of this paper was both a researcher cooperating with the teachers implementing the project, and a teacher-innovator. The analysis of the collected research material indicates the aspects that may constitute the basis for a wider discussion and for identifying some issues for further research, as well as for the improvement of mindfulness development in educational practice. In conclusion, the question was raised whether the mindfulness practice has a chance for a systemic or less formal inclusion in the Polish educational system.

## Introduction

The most urgent problems of contemporary children, parents and teachers include difficulties with making good relationships, hyperactivity and focusing attention. These issues are often analysed by pedagogues, psychologists and therapists. Carrying out scientific research in these areas makes it possible to understand the reasons and mechanisms of the above-mentioned problems, but it is also important to implement some practical solutions into the educational system. Such solutions do not always bring the expected results, especially if they are imposed by the system. If teachers fail to accept them as useful, and if they reject the introduced tools and programmes, it may turn out that their fulfilment is just another pointless obligation because no one believes they will be successful. Only rank and file actions may constitute an efficient alternative, because such actions are fully supported by teachers, parents, and – first of all – children.

This article presents an approach which, although it was discussed in many scientific works supported by empirical studies, is still unpopular in the Polish educational system. The term *mindfulness* usually denotes a state, feature, or a way of being, characterized by acceptance, authenticity and awareness (Albrecht 2018: 1). The word refers to *sati* which, in the Pali language, means consciousness, attention and memory. It may describe a theoretical construct (the idea of mindfulness), as well as practices aimed at developing mindfulness or psychological processes (mechanisms of acting in the mind and brain). The basic definition of mindfulness speaks about the “awareness of moments that occur one after another” (Germer 2015: 32). Jon Kabat-Zinn, who transferred the issue of mindfulness from the Buddhist tradition to the field of psychology, specifies mindfulness as a special kind of attention: conscious and oriented at the present moment and, at the same time, non-judging (quoted in: Dębska, Jacenik 2016: 196). The practice of *mindfulness* is based on the elements of the “present moment” on which we can focus, e. g.: what we see, feel, think, what impressions

accompany our breathing, or other feelings related to the body. In the “moments of mindfulness”, the quality of this attention is very important (Afzal 2020: 12). The research proves that transferring conscious attention to the current feelings, thoughts and activities, and keeping in mind only one activity (e. g. breathing, walking or eating) not only makes us calm, but also facilitates our sense of happiness and, in further perspective, leads to the restoration of inner balance and wellbeing.

The presented article familiarizes us with the idea of mindfulness in education. It aims at showing us different perspectives of understanding and practicing *mindfulness* in the context of the ability to use elements of mindfulness development in the educational practice. Special attention was drawn to the aspect of mindful eating as a category that may constitute the constant element of practicing *mindfulness*, which, at the same time, can be a part of nutrition prevention among children. The author presents the approach that refers both to the area of theory and practice. Such a connection is the result of the analysis that is carried out on the path: from school practice to pedagogy; through the influence of school practice on theoretical pedagogical knowledge, which enables creative pedagogical action (Palka 2006) performed through analysis in action.

## *Mindfulness* – defining and understanding

The researchers and practitioners of the issue define *mindfulness* in different manners. We can find both complex definitions, which treat this category in a broad and multifaceted manner, with the indication of the source, the way of understanding and the main elements of this conceptual category, and definitions that are simple, the authors of which use brief and essential terminology.

*Mindfulness* or *Mindfulness-Based Approaches* refer to the strategy that aims at consciousness development (Davis 2012: 31). One of the difficulties with defining consciousness is the fact that it cannot be easily placed within separate conceptual frames or categories such as a “method”, “perspective”, “experience” or a “cognitive process”. Mindfulness permeates all these notions (Davis 2012: 31-32). Mindfulness comes from the Buddhist tradition in which the practice of meditation is very important. Careful presence is one of the elements of such meditation. However, mindfulness can be practiced by everyone, not only by Buddhists (Stahl, Goldstein 2015; Dębska, Jacennik 2016: 197). In psychology, the construct of mindfulness has already been separated from religious aspects. Transferring the issue of mindfulness into psychology (which is connected with Jon Kabat-Zinn) resulted in an increased interest in the concept, especially in the USA, but also in Europe, including in Poland. In psychology, apart from J. Kabat-Zinn, the potential of mindfulness in education

has been discussed by Ellen Langer who specifies “mindfulness as a state of mind characterized by flexibility, openness to new experiences, and active differentiation of things that appear in the consciousness (...)” (Wegner, Wojciechowska 2016: 24). Stanisław Radoń (quoting: Górska 2019: 112) indicates that mindfulness is not only rooted in eastern, but also in western religions, mentioning not only Buddhism, but also Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The lay form of mindfulness appeared in the West in 1960s (Górska 2019: 112).

The term was derived from the Buddhist tradition, which is why translating it into the language of modern psychology is not easy (Davis 2012). Psychologists Bob Stahl and Elisha Goldstein (2015: 34) define mindfulness as a full awareness of what is happening at a given moment; cultivating the consciousness of mind and body, as well as living “here and now”. Also, they indicate that mindfulness can be used in any situation, which complements the practical aspect of such definition. In modern literature, mindfulness is sometimes defined as a therapeutic technique or method, but also as a quality of life (feature) that may result from individual predispositions of the subject or (which is significant from the educational perspective) from training (Radoń 2014: 712; Górska 2019: 113-115). Practitioners, in turn, use definitions that are characterized by imagery and emphasize the aspect of practicing. Uz Afzal believes that “mindfulness can be explained very easily”. This is an act of concentrating on our direct experience in the present moment, without judging it. This is really all you need to know about it.” However, he adds that this seemingly simple statement is not easy to put into practice (Afzal 2020: 12). Such an attempt was made by Anna Dębska and Barbara Jacennik (2016: 196) who defined mindfulness as “mental carefulness, careful presence, a set of techniques of supporting psychological health, based on universal elements of the worldview, which can be used in psycho-prevention and psychological therapy”. Today, the practice of mindfulness is applied in different therapeutic approaches, which are based on relatively distant assumptions. In psychotherapy, it is present in, e. g. the Gestalt approach in which the emphasis is placed on experiencing psychological states “here and now” to achieve balance. Also, we can find mindfulness in the cognitive-behaviorist approach of the so-called third wave, i. e. transactional analysis oriented at studying anatomy with the use of the practice of mindfulness in order to learn to be “here and now” and to recognize one’s own feelings (Dębska, Jacennik 2016: 197). The common denominator of all the above-mentioned assumptions of practicing mindfulness is achieving wellbeing with seemingly simple tools which we can access at any moment of our life. While defining the way we should understand mindfulness, Eline Snel uses simple terms: “(...) this is simply the fullness of presence. It is an open and friendly approach towards the attempt to understand what is happening now, without judging or negating it, and without allowing the external noise to overwhelm us. Being mindful is not thinking

about what is happening, but being in this moment, here and now” (2015: 13). Why should we be mindful? The answer to this question can be found in the words by Daniel J. Siegel who notes that “mindfulness enables us to receive the world with all our senses – to enjoy food, smell the air, listen carefully, and look at the world with fresh and analytic eyes” (Hawn, Holden 2013: 13).

## Efficiency of practicing *mindfulness* – review of the existing analyses

The introduction of various programmes and therapies based on mindfulness has already been described in many English language books. It has been supported by the results of empirical research. In Poland, the scale of practicing and analysing mindfulness is still small.

The research works carried out at Harvard University by Matthew A. Killingsworth and Daniel T. Gilbert checked how often people’s attention “drifts away” while carrying out everyday activities. The analysed people received devices similar to smartphones to write down what they do, how often they think about a given activity, and how often they start thinking about something else. According to the results, 47% of them were not thinking about what they were doing at a particular moment. Such a “drifting mind” usually made them feel unhappy. The connection was clear enough to lead to the conclusion that the “drifting mind” is connected with unhappiness in a predictable manner. “How often do our thoughts leave the present moment and go somewhere else? This predicts our level of happiness more accurately than the activities in which we are involved” (Afzal 2020: 34). The research carried out by A. Brewer (the University of Massachusetts), in turn, proved that experienced mindfulness practitioners show lower activeness in the default mode while practicing, but also in between the sessions. This suggests that regular application of mindfulness brings durable results and may direct our mind in such a way that, instead of “drifting automatically,” it is more focused on the present moment, which facilitates our sense of happiness (Afzal 2020: 39). The experimental research related to mindful eating, which was carried out in Pakistan in the group of 467 women and men aged 18-54, indicates that there is an important positive correlation between the general assessment of mindful eating and the assessment of psychological state (Khan, Zadeh 2014: 71).

Compared to the materials related to mindfulness courses for adults, scientists have not carried out many analyses based on mindfulness interventions at schools. However, what has already been discovered about the latter makes it possible for us to conclude that the development of mindfulness among children is beneficial. Good effects are especially noticeable in the area of behavior and anxiety reduction.

The analysis carried out by Willem Kuyken shows that children who practice mindfulness more frequently declare good mood and lower stress level, and the study by Hilary Marusak provided promising results related to concentration. The summary of the meta-analysis results indicated that: (1) the practice of mindfulness among children does not result in any undesired behaviours; (2) this intervention is liked by children; (3) it exerts a good influence on psychological health and mood; (4) it exerts a good influence on cognitive abilities (thinking); (5) it facilitates the development of social and affective skills; (6) it is good for physical health: it improves sleep and reduces cortisone, the stress hormone (Afzal 2020: 26).

In 2008-2010, E. Snel, the founder of the International Academy for Mindful Teaching (AMT), prepared a mindfulness course: "Attention, it works!" for schoolchildren. It is based on the adult training created by J. Kabat-Zinn. Both children and teachers who participated in the trial course, noticed the following results of the course: greater calmness, peace in the classroom, better concentration and greater openness of children. At the moment, the course is introduced in almost twenty countries and it includes more than a thousand teachers (Snel 2015: 14; Albrecht 2018: 3).

Due to the commitment of Goldie Hawn, an international activist fighting for children's rights, as well as a promoter of conscious living, who cooperates with many scientific organisations and centres, and who established the Hawn Foundation,<sup>1</sup> the project named MindUP (cf. <https://mindup.org>) has been prepared and implemented in public schools. The objective of this project is teaching mindfulness to youngest children, which supports the development of their social and emotional intelligence. The introduction of this innovative project was subject to a research procedure on the basis of which the scientists concluded that such an educational strategy is effective. The results clearly show that children who participate in the project not only focus their attention better, but they are also more resistant to stress, which is confirmed by the results of medical analyses. The MindUP project is currently fulfilled in the increasing number of schools in Canada, Great Britain and the USA (Hawn, Holden 2013: 11-12).

The projects based on developing mindfulness are also fulfilled in kindergartens. In the Center for Healthy Minds (the USA) conducted by Richard J. Davidson, the author of very important analyses on emotions and brain, the preschool project for teaching goodness was introduced. It was based on the basic mindfulness exercises. Four-year-olds practiced, i. a. proper breathing and attentive listening. In this way, they were taught how to focus attention on their own body, indicating how they can look at their own, current feelings (Goleman, Davidson 2018: 290-291).

---

<sup>1</sup> The foundation supports scientific research aiming at developing the ways of helping children be happy, achieve success at school and develop their own potential.

More and more analyses have confirmed the positive influence of the strategy of mindfulness on children's lives (Albertson-Wren, Roman 2020: X), so it is worth analysing the issue of mindfulness from the pedagogical point of view. It seems that mindfulness is underestimated in pedagogy. However, it touches important, yet rarely discussed issues such as coping with ignorance, hatred or the lack of knowledge. "Thus, reflection on mindfulness and its pedagogical potential is necessary, and it may prevent mindfulness from becoming just one of simple and trivial educational slogans" (Górska 2019: 111). That is why, another step towards this reflection includes therapeutic and educational actions based on the practice of mindfulness.

## Educational and therapeutic projects based on developing mindfulness

The most popular mindfulness-based intervention is a project started in 1970s by Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, named Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). The effectiveness of MBSR in treating many psychological and somatic disorders was confirmed by many analyses. The second rapidly developing trend in mindfulness is a project based on MBSR and extended by cognitive elements: Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), created by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale. The first teacher course of MBSR/MBCT in Poland was conducted in 2010 and 2011 (Dębska, Jacennik 2016: 197-198).

Until now, mindfulness projects have been mainly implemented in schools of English-speaking countries where numerous analyses concerning their efficiency was also carried out. It is difficult to precisely estimate the range of actions related to practicing mindfulness at schools, but the statistics show that, in some countries, e. g. Great Britain, almost 50% of schoolchildren are involved in the activities related to practicing mindfulness during school lessons. This tendency influences the way in which future teachers are educated. Scientists suggest that mindfulness development training should be included in the curriculum of pedagogical studies. Complex conscious education programmes have already been included into the curricula of studies in the USA. The introduction of mindfulness to schools is to be of preventive and therapeutic nature (Dębska, Jacennik 2016: 199; Albrecht 2018: 1-2).

Considerations on the introduction of mindfulness based projects into Polish schools require the analysis of some obstacles that may hinder the introduction of mindfulness based practices into our educational system. First of all, we have to take into account the characteristics of the Polish society, which include the dominant role

of the Catholic religion the elements of which create the educational environment of the vast majority of educational institutions. The problem whether mindfulness is connected with certain practices that are incompliant with the Catholic religion seems to be solved by the fact that mindfulness certifying courses are not connected with any religious groups or denominations, and they refer to universal resources of humankind. Another obstacle may include teacher's great load with obligations related to the fulfillment of the core curriculum, and those connected with everyday organizational, educational and bureaucratic issues. It does not seem practical to introduce mindfulness into the curricula and the regular agenda of lessons. Perhaps it is better to make teachers familiar with mindfulness, and train as many of them as possible in developing it. Those of them who start practicing mindfulness as an element of their own personal development will be able to cope with work overload better, but they will also become more open and willing to teach mindfulness to children (Dębska, Jacennik 2016: 202-203). We can already witness such a practice. The author of this article had the opportunity to participate in eight-week certified MBSR training for early education teachers. They were to learn mindfulness basics so that they could introduce some mindfulness elements during their classes and, in time, prepare and implement mindfulness development courses at the first educational stage. Are such actions correct in the Polish educational system? Perhaps introducing changes and innovations is more desirable in its other aspects? It is worth mentioning that Polish schools rank high in terms of requirements and discipline, but they present clear deficits in understanding and supporting a student. Also, numerous analyses indicate that the level of stress among students and teachers in Polish schools is high. Thus, we can suggest that the introduction of mindfulness training into Polish schools could improve social functioning and stress resistance of both students and teachers. According to the experience of other countries, mindfulness activities can be easily added to lessons both as separate classes and as a supplementary element that can be applied during any lessons (Dębska, Jacennik 2016: 203-205).

## Practicing mindfulness in education: needed or useless?

Mindfulness, a seemingly simple approach to experiences, "has, for a long time, been used to blunt the blade of everyday difficulties, especially the pain we owe ourselves" (Germer 2015: 29). This concise statement indicates both the way of practicing mindfulness, and the objective of undertaking this practice that may help us focus attention, experience the reality in an authentic manner, and cope with problems (Dębska, Jacennik 2016: 199).



There are two forms of practicing mindfulness: formal and informal one. The “formal practice” is specified as purposeful stopping. To apply it, we have to reserve a few moments of our day, which may be perceived as an act of kindness to oneself in the form of a moment of break. We can also practice in a more informal manner, while performing everyday activities, e. g. walking down the street and focusing on the way our feet touch the ground; or eating an apple and analyzing the impressions that accompany this experience. Experiencing something directly, through the senses, makes it possible for us to be here and now, and to become entirely involved in what we are doing (Afzal 2020: 13-14). Practicing mindfulness by adults is different than by children, but the basic assumptions are the same. However, the ways of practicing mindfulness must be different so that the needs and possibilities of particular age groups are taken into account. E. Snel claims that children are mindful by nature. However, they are sometimes stressed, nervous and absent-minded. Many children do too much, instead of just being. Sometimes it is hard for them to face social or emotional challenges. “Through the practice of mindfulness and conscious being, they learn how to stop, take a breath and feel what they need in a given moment. In this way, they turn off the «autopilot» and act less impulsively” (Snel 2015: 16). The practice of mindfulness cultivates curiosity and free spontaneity with which babies are born (Goodman 2015: 277).

Modern times seem to be particularly difficult for children. The age at which they first experience depressions or anxiety is decreasing, and the number of children with eating disorders is alarming. About 50% of psychological disorders are revealed before the age of 14. Perhaps mindfulness is a way of coping with stress, pressure and rivalry among children. Being kind to oneself and others helps young people “navigate” among everyday challenges, and developing kindness is the central element of mindfulness (Afzal 2020: 24-25).

## Mindful eating as one of the ways to practice mindfulness

A human being starts to be fed in a mother’s womb and eats until death. What we eat, when we eat and how we eat is important for the concept of healthy eating. It is known that healthy food is not only important for our sense of happiness, but also for maintaining health and preventing various diseases (Durukan, Gül 2019: 1). In order to satisfy his/her most urgent needs, a person starts to rely on easily and rapidly available solutions, such as unhealthy food or bad eating habits. In a long-term perspective, these strategies exert a bad influence on our health and mood. They may even increase our level of stress and anxiety (Stahl, Goldstein 2015: 210). What is alarming is the fact that eating is the activity that people perform in a very inattentive

way. We eat because we are restless or sad: due to emotional reasons. We eat because we are not hungry in a physical, but psychological manner. Through the introduction of mindfulness into eating, we are trying to develop a completely new way of perceiving this activity (Salzberg, Kabat-Zinn 1999: 144-145). If, while having a meal, our thoughts are somewhere else as we focus on a TV programme, a computer, a book, a conversation or memories, we almost ignore the food we are putting into our mouths. As a result, we lose the opportunity to enjoy the taste, or perhaps we eat too much. Thoughtless or hasty eating may become the cause of health problems. Mindful eating is listening to one's body to check if we are truly hungry. Careful eating also helps us be present when we are chewing, tasting and swallowing. It is also very important to consciously approach those moments when we feel like eating something but we are not hungry (Stahl, Goldstein 2015: 211). In its most basic form, mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to what we are doing (Khan, Zadeh 2014: 69). Mindful eating is understood as being conscious at the moment of eating, focusing on the senses, as well as physical and emotional feelings. Jan Chozen Bays writes: "Mindful eating involves all the senses. We plunge into colours, textures, smells and tastes, and even in the sounds of eating and drinking. We stimulate our curiosity and willingness to play when we check our reactions to different foods and inner signals of hunger or satisfaction" (Hawn, Holden 2013: 132-133). This is the first step to shaping mindful eating. The second step is conscious recognition of repeatable eating habits related to performing other activities at the same time – the so-called "eating on the autopilot." "Automatized" eating may lead to serious health consequences, such as overweight, obesity, or even type 2 diabetes (Afzal 2020: 58). The third step includes reaching the awareness of what causes the beginning and end of eating, i. e. noticing the moments of true hunger and satiety (Khan, Zadeh 2014: 70). Mindful eating can support digestion, so it may improve a person's health in many different ways. According to Susan Alberts, an expert in mindful eating, its advantages include the loss of weight, reduced tendency to overeating, and the ability to cope with eating disorders (Afzal 2020: 58-59).

Also, mindful eating can take the form of absolutely conscious consumption, based on thorough reflection on what we eat and why we choose particular products. The Buddhist monk and Zen master, Thích Nhất Hạnh, claims that if we know the nature and origin of our food, and if we eat it consciously, we can transform what is inside and even outside us (2004: 92-93). When a child focuses on experiencing a given moment, his/her mind becomes calm and open, creating the space for seeing what is happening more clearly. In this way, the child becomes aware of the process that take place in his/her mind and organism, and he/she learns how to use the senses as signals for reflection before an utterance or action. Thus, the child becomes less reactive and

more conscious of what is happening in him/her and outside (Greenland 2017 :2). Nowadays, when we are eating, we hardly ever think about the road our food travelled to get to our plate; about the role of sun/rain; or about the work of farmers whom we owe those products (Afzal 2020: 58). It is because our consumer society works the other way round: from our earliest age it encourages us to develop and satisfy various desires. Adults' personal interests and values determine different issues in the lives of children. Trying to live according to consciously selected, deep values, instead of adopting those "default" ones which are obligatory in a dysfunctional culture, we will give children a space for their own mindful analysis of true needs. When a child is able to name his/her feelings, he/she can somehow "stand next to them", think them over and evaluate what is happening in their mind. In today's world, parents and teachers have to rediscover the simple joy of life which they can give to children so that they can also discover it for themselves (Lozoff 2004: 131-134; Schaffer 2013: 156).

Mindful eating is connected with making conscious eating choices and being attentive while having meals. "It is believed that mindful eating is important for each generation due to the increasing obesity and other factors related to eating". That is why, we need to direct eating habits towards more correct behaviours. We all like the taste of food. The problem appears when the willingness to eat/taste becomes too high. The USA are threatened with the epidemic of obesity. The research (carried out by, e. g. the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) clearly shows that the number of obese or overweight people is still growing. Mindful eating may be defined as choosing food which is healthy and nutritious, but it may also refer to the very act of eating that should be slow, calm and attentive to many senses (Hawn, Holden 2013: 132-133; Durukan, Gül 2019: 1). "When we learn to eat attentively, we will enjoy each piece of food and we will eat less. A good side-effect will be understanding that mindful chewing of food facilitates digestion. Children are usually fascinated with the information that they should eat more slowly because their brain needs about ten minutes to experience the feeling of satiety. Delighting in food is also important for another reason: many scientists say that we can feel the taste better after the second bite" (Hawn, Holden 2013: 133). Moreover, mindful eating increases the pleasure of sitting at the table and eating together, which is a very important element of building relationships and bonds with people. Careful tasting is one of the ways to experience the optimum status of conscious relaxation through paying attention to what we are eating. When we teach children that it is not only important what we eat, but also how we eat, we help them understand what is good or bad for them. Also, we support them in taking responsibility for their own eating habits. The problem of eating together is an important issue which causes the anxiety of many parents. Afzal indicates that meals may become very stressful elements of the day. Parents' main fears are related to: (1) hasty eating,

(2) bad manners at the table, (3) the fact that children refuse to eat what parents give them, or they refuse to eat at all, (4) quarrelling during the meals, (5) overeating. What can we do to face these situations and change meals in nice experiences? We should teach a child that all things are interconnected in life. He/she needs to know that food does not appear in the supermarket in a magical manner. The child can participate in planning meals, choosing food products and deciding what he/she would like to eat (Hawn, Holden 2013: 133-134; Afzal 2020: 59-60). Mindfulness is a state based on voluntariness. It rejects any forms of forcing, commanding or controlling others. Everything we do should be done with full consciousness, but, first of all, with kindness to oneself. It seems that this is what contemporary children miss a lot. They watch adults who are always stressed and in a hurry, and they start imitating this inattentive and stressful way of living, i.e. walking, watching, listening, reading, or eating. An adult who is mindful and kind to himself/herself and others, may become a great teacher of mindful living for a child.

## Action research – method and objective

Combining theory and practice through using the influence of school practice on theoretical pedagogical knowledge on which action research is based (Palka 2006: 131), we implemented elements of developing mindfulness among children at the first educational level. The research was undertaken in the research paradigm called *action research*, within which we adopted the procedure of gathering data from various sources and combining them into a whole. The objective of the action research was evaluating the effects of introducing an innovative intervention based on developing mindfulness within the system of teaching early school education students.

The following research questions were specified:

P: How does the implementation of mindfulness training elements into the system of educating early education students determine their functioning at school and outside school? This general question generated the following detailed questions:

P1: How do mindfulness training elements determine early education students' ability to focus and direct their own attention?;

P2: How do mindfulness training elements determine early education students' ability to focus on their senses?;

P3: How do mindfulness training elements determine early education students' ability to focus on their own and other people's emotions?

The intervention was carried out through the teacher who took the role of a pedagogical innovator. Also, the possible and desirable common action of the teacher

and the researcher was adopted in the action research. Giving the researcher the right to get personally involved in the process, qualitative analyses enable the researcher to create and discover new qualities and synergies. For six months, from September 2019 to March 2020, seven early education teachers (who obtained the certificate of completing an eight-week MBSR course) fulfilled a rank and file pedagogical innovation by introducing mindfulness elements during their classes. The research project, which was carried out in the city of Bydgoszcz, included the group of 152 students of classes I-III of the primary school; class I: 25 students; class II: 84; class III: 43 children. According to the principle that action research is beneficial both in scientific and practical terms (improving the school practice) (Palka 2006; Szymańska, Ciecchowska, Pieróg, Gołąb 2018: 9), the author of this article played both the role of the researcher and the innovator. The applied procedure of the research action facilitated the integration of thinking and acting, as well as reflection on action and in action. When including mindfulness into the educational process, as the researcher and the innovator I asked myself about the efficiency of my own practice, I watched my actions trying to give them specific meanings, and I reached the conclusions that may become the source of further initiatives, or generate new questions and solution ideas. The action research has become a specific example of experience-based learning where, as Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak (2010: 320-321) shows, the organizational form of the research helps in changing the practice in which the practitioner (the teacher) is the researcher and the organizer of the change at the same time.

Since it is impossible to locate the action research in the linear order of cognitive strategies and paradigms (Czerepaniak-Walczak 2010: 331), the author did not select one research technique, but she adopted the procedure of collecting information from various sources, associating them in one whole, and designing further actions on this basis (so-called network thinking). Applying different research techniques and tools (techniques: analysis of the students, self-analysis, analysis of products and documents, free talks; tools: analysis sheets, analysis register) referred to the collection of data coming from: the people who participated in the mindfulness development project (students and teachers); from the products made with reference to the practice; and from audio-visual documentation that contained information gathered during the intervention. Also, an inseparable, or even basic, technique applied in the procedure of the action research was adopted: analysis and self-analysis. The researchers and the teachers-innovators registered facts, events, as well as their own comments and thoughts. Also, free talks and product analyses can be attached to the list of the techniques used.

## Discussion on the empirical material

While analysing the collected research material, we can assume that introducing mindfulness elements into the process of teaching early education students improves the functioning of children both in the individual and in the collective perspective. Systematic practicing of mindfulness facilitated the improvement of concentration and discipline of the students during the classes, and it made them more open to others and to their own needs, feelings and emotions. The analysis of the empirical material makes it possible to indicate the aspects that are the basis for a discussion in which we can separate some ideas being the foundation of further implementation, development and improvement of mindfulness training among the youngest school-children. The material is based on the analysis of particular stages of mindfulness training (cf.: Fig. 1):

Fig. 1 Stages of introducing mindfulness training at the first educational stage



Source: The author's own work on the basis of the *action research*.

Practicing mindfulness was based on: (1) conscious analysis of the surrounding reality with the senses; (2) developing the ability to focus attention on the feelings coming from the body; (3) practicing focusing on one's own breath; (4) practicing the way of *analysing* one's own and other people's thoughts and emotions; (5) watching one's own reactions in contacts with peers; (6) participating in games and exercises focused on experiencing the fullness of life "here and now." Once a month, the teachers who participated in the project systematically, met a certified MBSR trainer to exchange experiences, share reflections and plan further actions.

The following are selected research aspects focused on discovering the mechanisms that govern the practice of developing mindfulness and the change of such practice. On their basis, we will try to discuss the collected empirical material:

- conscious breath improves the child's ability to cope with emotions (pieces of utterances of the children who participated in the training: *When I got to know that my grandma would leave in a few days, I felt sad. They I took a few deep breaths and it helped me; (...) I was so happy that I had to breathe deeply to calm down*);
- children are able to focus on eating and they appreciate mindful eating in everyday life (pieces of utterances of the children who participated in the training: *I was trying to taste all the dishes carefully. I discovered that what I liked best were dumplings and borstch; When I was decorating the ginger house, I noticed that I felt like eating it*);
- children analyse others' emotions carefully and draw conclusions, which may facilitate the development of empathy (pieces of utterances of the children who participated in the training: *I noticed that during making wishes men and boys were laughing and happy, and women had tears in their eyes. My mum and grandma had them. But those were tears of joy and happiness; I noticed that children were smiling at one another. I felt happiness and curiosity*);
- being mindful makes a child happier (pieces of utterances of the children who participated in the training: *It was good to be mindful on the day of Santa Claus. It was one of the greatest Santa Claus days. I had very nice feelings; I felt happy, joyous and excited. It was great to be mindful because I noticed more things*);
- attentive being "here and now" makes children calm, relaxed and concentrated (pieces of utterances of the children who participated in the training: *I like this exercise because it makes me calm and all my thoughts go away; This exercise makes me stronger; I felt great, I was curious. I like this exercise because it helps me concentrate*) (cf. <https://www.facebook.com/mindfulnessdladzieci.gozdzicka/>).<sup>2</sup>

While trying to develop an early education student's mindfulness, a teacher has to be committed, kind and totally accepting to all the participants. Not all children are willing to practice mindfulness, and it is not always easy for everyone. In such a situation a teacher should not force the child to take part in the exercises. Instead, the teacher should encourage and invite the child to participate in the activities. During the first stage of the training, the children were curious, but they also showed their misunderstanding, disregard or even ignorance of mindfulness exercises. On the basis of the collected data, we can assume that careful, conscious breathing is a technique that can be used most frequently by the children. Children use it according to their own needs, e.g. in order to calm emotions such as anger or frustration. Careful watching and listening makes children happy, because it helps them notice

<sup>2</sup> The pieces of the children's utterances come from the website *Mindfulness&Compassion – mindfulness training in education*, conducted by the teacher-innovator participating in the project, Małgorzata Bulman-Goździcka, MA (cf. <https://www.facebook.com/mindfulnessdladzieci.gozdzicka/> [access: 6.07.2020]).

details they had not seen before. Mindful eating is not easy for children. It is difficult for them to eat slowly, patiently, paying attention to taste, smell and even the sounds of eating. This may confirm a relatively strongly rooted habit of eating in a hurry, without noticing the taste, smell and nutritive value of food. Practicing mindful eating was carried out in two ways: during shared mindful breakfasts when the children were encouraged to focus their attention on eating without talking or doing anything else; and through separate exercises. Products that can be eaten one at a time were selected for mindful eating training (e. g. raisins, small fruit or vegetables). The practice started with analyzing the look, smell, shape and texture. Then, the children were trying to name their emotions when they were holding the food items in their hands, just before eating. They ate slowly, as if in slow motion, with focusing attention to each stage of eating. Celebrating eating – in silence and consciously – aimed at concentrating on the current feelings and entering the state of mindfulness.

## Conclusion

Are the programs, projects or informal actions aiming at developing mindfulness needed in the contemporary school? There is no doubt that educational decision-makers and teachers have to decide which of the urgent problems of contemporary students are to be treated as the most important ones. There are many problems of this kind, and they refer to different, sometimes very distant areas of the student's functioning. Educational trends and slogans, to which some people add mindfulness, are worth testing through the analysis of theoretical knowledge, but also through implementing some of their elements into educational practice. There are many different ways to do this, because mindfulness refers to what we see, hear, smell, touch, and feel inside.

It seems strange that we pay so little attention to shaping children's ability to focus their attention, especially knowing that childhood is a long period during which neural connections in the brain are developing, and supporting it could improve these connections. Scientific knowledge of developing concentration skills is quite reliable, so it seems that researchers and practitioners should not have any problems with achieving this objective. The development of our ability to focus attention is necessary because, as a society, we have some deficits in this respect. Contemporary children grow up with electronic devices in their hands, so they are constantly distracted. In this perspective, increasing the ability to concentrate is a very urgent need (Goleman, Davidson 2018: 292-293). Will today's teachers, school principals and representatives of Polish educational authorities notice these increasing children's deficits related to



being mindful? This needs public debates, as well as innovative campaigns and projects being the basis for carrying out the research from school practice to theory.

## Bibliography

- Afzal U. (2020). *Mindfulness dla dzieci*, trans. M. Ryżewska, Łódź: Studio Koloru.
- Albrecht N.J. (2018). *Teachers Teaching Mindfulness with Children: Being a Mindful Role Model*, "Australian Journal of Teacher Education", no. 43(10), pp. 1-23 <<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol43/iss10/1/>> [access: 09.07.2020], DOI: 10.14221/ajte.v43.n10.1.
- Czerepaniak-Walczak M. (2010). *Badanie w działaniu*, [in:] S. Palka (ed.), *Podstawy metodologii badań w pedagogice*. Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Dębska A., Jacennik B. (2016). *Programy nauczania uważności dla dzieci i młodzieży – z perspektywy szkolnictwa polskiego*, "Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych", no. 23(2), pp. 195-210 <<https://apcz.umk.pl/czasopisma/index.php/PBE/article/view/PBE.2016.079/11287>> [access: 09.07.2020], DOI: 10.12775/PBE.2016.079.
- Davis T.S. (2012). *Mindfulness-Based Approaches and Their Potential for Educational Psychology Practice*, "Educational Psychology in Practice" Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 31-46 <[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Davis-Mindfulness\\_Potential\\_on\\_Education\\_Psych.pdf](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/Davis-Mindfulness_Potential_on_Education_Psych.pdf)> [access: 22.06.2020], DOI: 10.1080/02667363.2011.639348.
- Durukan A., Gül A. (2019). *Mindful Eating: Differences of Generations and Relationship of Mindful Eating with BMI*, "International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science", no. 18 (2019) 100172, s. 1-6 <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1878450X19300617>> [access: 21.06.2020], DOI: 10.1016/j.ijgfs.2019.100172.
- Germer Ch. K. (2015). *Czym jest uważność? Dlaczego ma znaczenie?*, [in:] Ch. K. Germer, R.D. Siegel, P.R. Fulton (ed.), *Uważność i psychoterapia*, trans. M. Cierpisz, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, pp. 29-63.
- Goleman D. (1999). *Inteligencja emocjonalna w praktyce*, trans. A. Jankowski, Poznań: Media Rodzina Sp. z o.o.
- Goleman D., Davidson R.J. (2018). *Trwała przemiana*, trans. P. Szymczak, Poznań: Media Rodzina Sp. z o.o.
- Goodman T.A. (2015). *Praca z dziećmi*, [in:] Ch. K. Germer, R.D. Siegel, P.R. Fulton (ed.), *Uważność i psychoterapia*, trans. M. Cierpisz, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, pp. 278-296.
- Górska R. (2019). *Uważność: technika uczenia się czy droga wspierania (samo)rozwoju?* "Rocznik Andragogiczny", vol. 26, pp. 109-124 <<https://apcz.umk.pl/czasopisma/index.php/RA/article/view/RA.2019.006/25175>> [access: 07.07.2020], DOI: 10.12775/RA.2019.006.
- Greenland S.K. (2017). *Zabawa w uważność. Mindfulness i medytacja dla dzieci, młodzieży i rodzin*, trans. J. Bokłazec, Łódź: Galaktyka sp. z o.o.
- Hạnh T.N. (2004). *Czym się żywimy*, [in:] A.H. Badiner (ed.), *Uważność na targowisku. Globalny rynek i masowa konsumpcja a świadome życie*, trans. J.P. Listwan, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Jacek Santorski & Co, pp. 91-98.

- Hawn G., Holden W. (2013). *10 minut uważności. Jak pomóc dzieciom radzić sobie ze stresem i strachem*, trans. M. Lipa, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Laurum.
- Khan Z., Zadeh Z.F. (2014). *Mindful Eating and Its Relationship with Mental Well-Being*, "Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences", no. 159, pp. 69-73 <<https://cyberleninka.org/article/n/589406/viewer>> [access: 28.06.2020].
- Lozoff B. (2004). *Uczta z zatrutego tortu*, [in:] A.H. Badiner (ed.), *Uważność na targowisku. Globalny rynek i masowa konsumpcja a świadome życie*, trans. J.P. Listwan, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Jacek Santorski & Co, pp. 130-141.
- Palka S. (2006). *Metodologia. Badania. Praktyka pedagogiczna*. Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Radoń S. (2014). *Pięciowymiarowy kwestionariusz uważności: polska adaptacja*, "Roczniki Psychologiczne", no. XVII(4), pp. 711-735 <[https://www.kul.pl/files/1024/Roczniki\\_Psychologiczne/2014/4/RadonPL\\_711-735.pdf](https://www.kul.pl/files/1024/Roczniki_Psychologiczne/2014/4/RadonPL_711-735.pdf)> [access: 07.07.2020].
- Roman C.P., Albertson-Wren J.R. (2020). *Mindfulness dla dzieci. Poczuj radość, spokój i kontrolę*, trans. J. Sugiero, Gliwice: Sensus.
- Salzberg S., Kabat-Zinn J. (1999). *Uważność jako lek*, [in:] D. Goleman (ed.), *Uzdrowiające emocje. Rozmowy z Dalajlamą o uważności, emocjach i zdrowiu*, trans. R. Bartoń, Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo s. c., pp. 120-160.
- Schaffer H.R. (2013). *Psychologia dziecka*, trans. A. Wojciechowski, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Snel E. (2015). *Uważność i spokój żabki*, trans. M. Falkiewicz, Warszawa: CoJaNaTo Blanka Łyszczowska.
- Stahl B., Goldstein E. (2015). *Uważność. Trening redukcji stresu metodą mindfulness*, trans. A. Sawicka-Chrapkowicz, Sopot: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne Sp. z o.o.
- Szymańska M., Ciecchowska M., Pieróg K., Gołąb S. (2018), *Badania w działaniu w praktyce pedagogicznej. Wybrane przykłady*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum <[https://wydawnictwo.ignatianum.edu.pl/sites/wydawnictwo/files/publikacje\\_pdf/badania\\_w\\_dzialaniu\\_w\\_praktyce\\_pedagogicznej\\_online.pdf](https://wydawnictwo.ignatianum.edu.pl/sites/wydawnictwo/files/publikacje_pdf/badania_w_dzialaniu_w_praktyce_pedagogicznej_online.pdf)> [access: 03.06.2020].
- Tabak I. (2014). *Zdrowie psychiczne dzieci i młodzieży. Wsparcie dzieci i młodzieży w pokonywaniu problemów*, "Studia BAS", no. 2(38), pp. 113-138 <[http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/wydbas.nsf/0/AE219B7023B6C528C1257D07003F5F95/%24File/Strony%20od-Studia\\_BAS\\_38-6.pdf](http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/wydbas.nsf/0/AE219B7023B6C528C1257D07003F5F95/%24File/Strony%20od-Studia_BAS_38-6.pdf)> [access: 09.07.2020].
- Wegner E., Wojciechowska L. (2016). *Uważność rodzicielska oraz jej aspekty teoretyczne i aplikacyjne*, "Polskie Forum Psychologiczne", no. 1(21), pp. 23-33 <[https://pfp.ukw.edu.pl/page/pl/archive/article-full/268/wegner\\_uwaznosc\\_rodzicielska/](https://pfp.ukw.edu.pl/page/pl/archive/article-full/268/wegner_uwaznosc_rodzicielska/)> [access: 08.07.2020].

## Internet sources

- Mindfulness&Compassion – treningi uważności w edukacji: <https://www.facebook.com/mindfulnessdla dzieci.gozdzicka/> [access: 06.07.2020].
- <https://mindup.org/> [access: 03.07.2020].

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

---

Justyna Kosz-Szumaska  
Kazimierz Wielki University  
e-mail: [jkosz@ukw.edu.pl](mailto:jkosz@ukw.edu.pl)