

The implementation of socioemotional learning (SEL) in primary school

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Sociology Bachelor’s thesis
Academic year: 2023-2024



Source: Own elaboration

INTRODUCTION

Socioemotional Learning (SEL) arises in the present period of “Late Modernity” and the emergence of a globalised world in a networked capitalist system. SEL encompasses a broad and evolving range of "non-cognitive" or "human-centric" skills, attributes, competencies, values, and traits considered essential for achieving "life-effectiveness" in the 21st century (Casel, 2016). It promotes skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and consciousness, which are highly valued in current times.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How did socioemotional learning (SEL) emerge with the popularisation of new spiritualities in Late Modernity and how is it being implemented in public schools?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

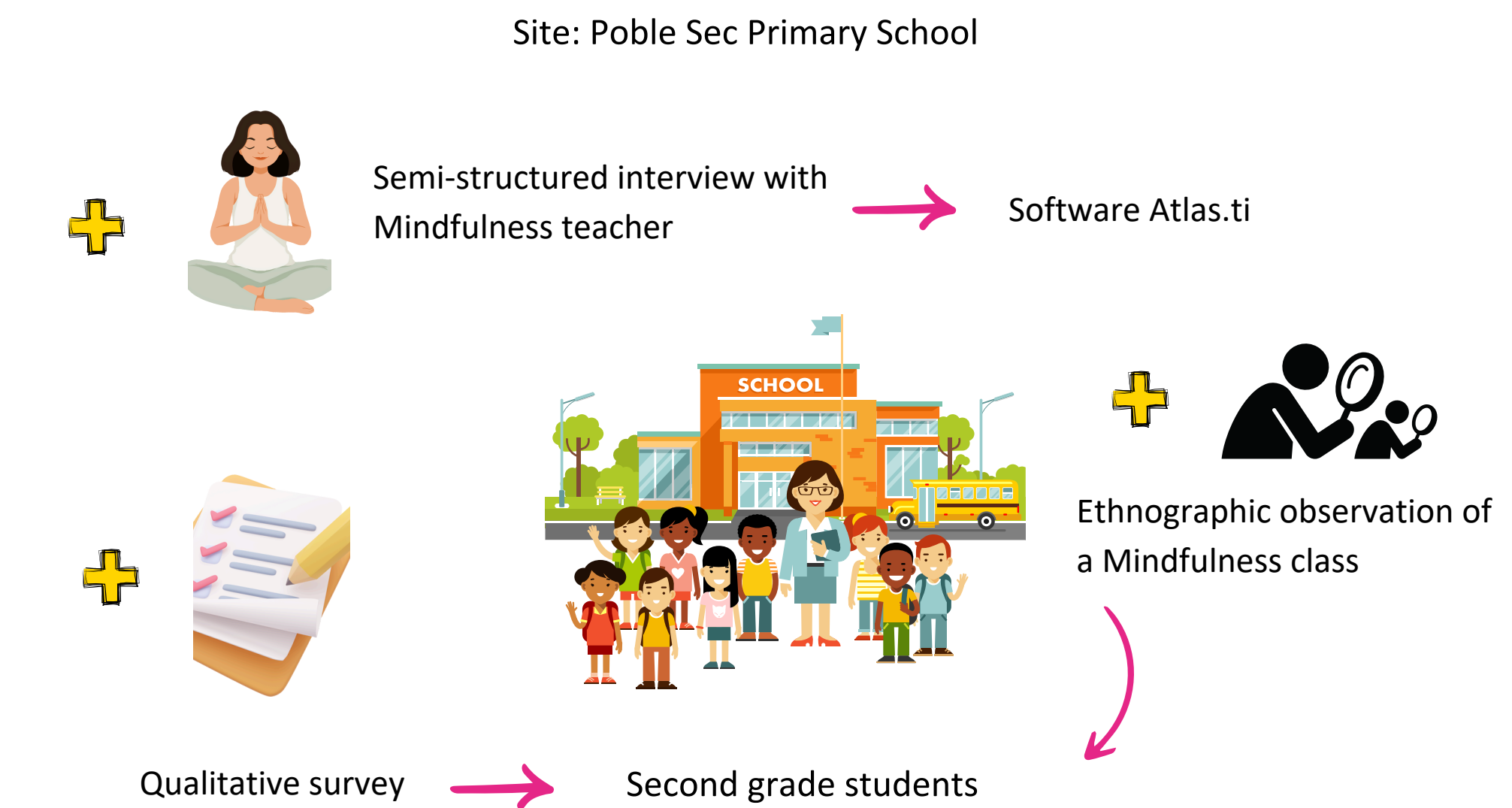
Socioemotional learning (SEL) was introduced in Western society as a new form of spirituality or religiosity that could be interpreted as an affirmation of contemporary societal values (Dawson, 2011). These values include new forms of autonomous reflexivity that recognise the importance of cultivating the “self”.

While initially targeted towards a new "counter-cultural" middle-class, SEL has expanded to encompass a broad spectrum of individuals. Indeed, SEL/Mindfulness skills, such as self awareness and social awareness, are particularly suited to culturally diverse contexts since they foster acceptance and creativity.

Interestingly, secular institutions such as public schools have advocated the secularisation of Mindfulness to make it appropriate for use in schools. However, the concept of somatic inversion, as described by Winchester and Pagis (2022), suggests that the experiential foregrounding of embodied dimensions in Mindfulness practice can lead to different interpretations based on practitioners' backgrounds and the practice environment.

Additionally, the experience of Mindfulness can vary depending on *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984), insofar as embodied cultural dispositions influence how individuals assimilate and interpret the mental and physical techniques that lie at the core of Mindfulness as a practice.

METHODOLOGY



Verd and Lozares (2016)

RESULTS

Table 1. Conceptual analysis on SEL/Mindfulness emergence and its implementation in Poble Sec’s public school.

| Issue / finding | Evidence |
|--|--|
| SEL in the context of Late Modernity | <i>If you observe a baby or a small child, small, they are mindful [...] But because we live a stressed life, because we adults take them out of their, of their being mindful, Mindfulness state, and even much more now than maybe 50 or 100 or 200 years ago, because our society changed, right? So, we are born mindful</i> |
| New spiritualities do not inherently carry religious connotations. The teacher herself was drawn to these practices for their transcendental significance. | <i>I was reading many people who were drawn into mysticism. [...] when I started the Meditation process, I did find a bit more clarity and I found a bit more peace in myself.</i> |
| Experiential dimension of the practice in Mindfulness lessons. | <i>They feel it in their bodies. That’s what I want.</i> |
| Mindfulness offers tools to navigate different situations. | <i>If someone comes to you and hits you, don't hit back. Observe your feelings. Talk to that person. Deep breathing techniques that will calm you down</i> |
| The significance of emotions in the practice of Mindfulness. | Many children mentioned feeling happiness and calmness, but also occasionally experiencing anger. |
| Limitations: constraint on timing, student-to-teacher ratio. | <i>Each lesson is limited to just 30 minutes. There are between 20 and 23 pupils.</i> |
| The teacher does not observe social class differences during the experimental phase of Mindfulness. She notes that children from upper classes may also face significant emotional challenges. | <i>They are not spending time with their parents. This is something quite typical for some families, not all of them.</i> |
| All people struggle from anxiety. | <i>One of the biggest health issues in our society.</i> |
| Social differences in conceptual learning. | The location of residence, whether in a marginalised area or not, as well as language, can impact children's learning processes. |

Source: Own elaboration.

Note: The phrases in cursive are from “Agata” (the Mindfulness teacher interviewed). The rest of phrases are mine, extracted from both the qualitative survey and the ethnographic observation.

CONCLUSIONS

- New spiritualities like Mindfulness are being incorporated in public institutions, enhancing access for individuals of diverse backgrounds.
- SEL/Mindfulness practice fosters a wide variety of interpretations.
- Mindfulness is still in its early stages and faces several limitations.
- Diversity, far from being a barrier, is an opportunity to learn from each other and enhance creativity.
- Overall, SEL and Mindfulness emerge as potential solutions to the widespread anxiety prevalent in contemporary society.

