

Looking back on Online data Collection Through Mindful Reflection

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Abstract: Reflections emerging from what was learned from conducting online research by using an online survey administered to primary school pupils during the Covid-19 pandemic are presented in this paper. First, a brief review of relevant literature is outlined. Secondly, the advantages and limitations of conducting online research are addressed. An overview of the research process employed including the sample, measures used and procedures employed for ethics clearance are how online research was made possible during a pandemic was explored. The main challenges were: (a) parental engagement and the subsequent collection of consent forms; (b) the actual data acquisition itself. These issues and others are explored through a reflection process using the cycle outlined by Gibbs (1988). The paper also points out how the reflective process was applied throughout the project. The study is focused on how pupils aged between 9 – 11 years perceived their own creative self-concept and their wellbeing at school. In this quantitative study, five hundred and thirty pupils were recruited through their schools following the dissemination of information letters and consent forms. While various advantages emerged from conducting online research, this approach was not without problems. Finally, this study presented an opportunity for learning and growth for the author through a process of reflection and evaluation.

Keywords: researching school children, parental engagement, online data collection, employing reflection, researcher's learning

1. Introduction:

The pandemic induced by the spread of the COVID-19 virus left a mark on the development of empirical research on a global scale (Harper et al., 2020). The limited mobility due to various lockdowns restricted access to various sample populations. These new conditions led to a state of VUCA (Hadar et al., 2020) with many researchers requiring the redesign of research projects they were undertaking possibly including alternative means of data collection. Since many individuals have access to the world wide web (Granello and Wheaton, 2004), possibilities to conduct online data collection increased. (Ward et al., 2014).

Through a mindful reflective process, this paper presents what was learned from conducting online research by collecting data through an online survey administered to pupils aged 9 - 11 during the Covid-19 pandemic. There is scarcity of material in the available literature related to researchers' adoption of mindful approaches to the reflective process of researchers. This gap together with the opportunity to learn from this new experience led me to explore and develop a method to support the reflection process mindfully. Following a brief review of relevant literature, an outline the research process employed is presented in the sections below. A mindful reflection on the experience of collecting data online based on Gibbs (1988) followed by recommendations for further consideration ensues.

Being mindful entails being aware of the present situation by focusing on the moment as it is lived (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). This aspect of the researcher's ability to reflect is deemed essential when conducting collecting data from children for a variety of reasons. In this case, three points were kept in mind; (i) children's vulnerability, (ii) the need to quickly take note of potential unusual reactions and avoid normalisation during the data collection process, and (iii) to avoid forgetfulness until the journal entries were completed. Jasper and Rosser (2013) refer to a reflective process as a learning experience where evaluation on the acquired knowledge takes places while fine tuning procedures for future use. Outlining the advantages of reflexivity, Nadin and Cassell (2006) state that the researchers' awareness of their impact on the study may lead to increased trustworthiness of the data and integrity of the research process. These two practices, mindfulness and reflection, may arguably augment the learning experience emerging from online data collection.

2. Doing research online

Online research has increased considerably over the years especially since access to online media had become widespread (Hokke et al. 2018) in most developed countries. This presents an array of issues of an ethical nature. Using mindfulness to raise awareness of these matters could enhance the research process (Lemon, 2017).

2.1 Advantages when collecting data online

In person data collection can be time consuming and expensive (Granello and Weathon, 2004; Lefever, et al. 2007). There are various advantages in favour of online data collection over more traditional methods. Commutes to visit data collection sites for instance could be one of the most time-consuming aspects if multiple data collection locations are used. Online data collection presents researchers with the opportunity to collect data efficiently and in a timely manner (Lefever, et al. 2007) cost-effective for a variety of reasons (Mohanty et al. 2020). Firstly, paper and pencil methods are replaced by online forms thus eliminating the need for printing. Moreover, manhours spent on the field to collect the data could be expedited through access to online portals. Mertler (2002) noted these advantages in relation to data collection from students, teachers and parents. Other points in favour of data collection appear to support the researcher directly. Using online data collection methods enhances the safe storage of data and makes loss of data less likely. Moreover, the inputting of data is efficient since it is easily downloaded into user-friendly formats. Data can then be cleaned and analysed more easily (Ilieva, Baron and Healey, 2002).

2.2 Limitations when collecting data online

Notwithstanding the various advantages of online data collection, a number of short-comings are still present when using this method. One of the main bones of contention here remains the issue of sampling and data integrity. Hocevar and Flanagin (2017) raise this issue in their work and claim that sampling and data integrity raise critical concerns in the assessment of research results no matter which online data collection method is used. Further limitations are pointed out by, Granello and Weathon (2004) who claim that when conducting online data collection, there may be issues related to the representativeness of the sample. When the researcher does not have face to face access to respondents it may be difficult to tell who is actually completing a survey. Technical issues present other difficulties (Lefever, et al. 2007) that may vary in nature from issues to establish an online connection due to faults from the part of the internet service provider to difficulties emerging from the level of technological literacy experienced by respondents.

Response rates may still vary when collecting data online. Whereas Fricker Jr in Fielding et al (2017) claim that often the response rate for online data collection can be low, previously had indicated that there may be an argument for a better response rate when using this method. Granello and Weathon (2004) suggested the use of reminders to nudge respondents into participating. Others have anticipated these issues and identified means to make the process of online data collection more user friendly. Dillman et al., (1999) identified eleven principles that may encourage participation in online data collection. These include the following: include a welcome screen, formats that are similar to paper-and-pencil formats, limiting scrolling for respondents to view statements and clear instructions for different operating systems.

2.3 Ethical issues when conducting online research

The increase in use of the internet and smartphone technology made it easier for researchers to engage with family and child populations (Hokke et al., 2018). Online research and the ease with which respondents may be approached has created new challenges for ethics committees and institutions as well as researchers (Ackland, 2013 cited in Sugiura et al 2017). The increase in engagement with online environments calls for the establishment of ethical guidelines. The rise in online data collection may have created difficulties and opportunities for new thinking for ethics committees and researchers alike (Sugiura, 2017). Some of the newly introduced research ethics procedures have been said to be to 'restrictive' (Langer and Beckman, 2005). Shelley-Egan (2015) identified a number of issues related to ethics when conducting online research. Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity are amongst the most problematic. Another critical element is informed consent. These matters need to be given adequate consideration especially when conducting research with families and children (Hokke et al. 2018). Obtaining valid informed consent becomes critical especially since minors are considered as vulnerable and their capacity to conclude if they should participate in an online study may not be clear. It is therefore important to obtain consent from parents or legal guardians.

This section offered a brief overview of the issues surrounding online data collection. These issues were considered at research design stage. In the following section, contextual elements about the project are outlined for better appreciation of the reflection exercise.

3. Research context:

The study subject to this paper involved gathering of information from pupils about their own perceptions of their creativity and their wellbeing at school during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. The study took place in Malta (EU), and it adopted a quantitative approach with the aim to be able to generalise findings to the relevant age group. Statistical analysis can be used to indicate how a sample population could behave at a macro-level. This is typically done since quantitative measures address the 'what' elements (Kelle, 2006). In this quantitative study, a sample of 530 pupils coming from eight different schools were surveyed using an online platform. Participants were recruited through their respective schools following the dissemination of information letters and consent forms.

Ethics clearance was obtained from the stakeholders involved, namely the University, Department of Education, the Secretariat for Catholic Education and each Independent School. The Head of each school acted as an intermediary between the researcher and parents or legal guardians. The latter had to provide written consent to allow the participation of their children on the project. This was done keeping in mind, the claims by Hokke et al (2018) that it is important to establish the capacity of young pupils to consent to participate in the study.

Since handling of materials was kept to a minimum to mitigate the spread of the virus, information letters and consent forms were issued electronically by the school in the two official languages, Maltese and English. In Malta, approximately 90% of the population has access to the internet (NSO, 2020). This should have facilitated access to the information letters and consent forms as well as access to the online survey for pupils following school from home. Access to the survey was not anticipated to be a problem since all the pupils in the identified sample had access to a tablet provided by the Department of Education nationwide. Data for the project was to be collected using a one-time intervention on the part of each student using an anonymous self-rated survey. The researcher planned to access each class virtually to guide the pupils through the survey by giving the same instructions to all groups and by reading out each statement to each group. This was done at different times and according to slots previously agreed upon with the participating schools. This method ensured that data was collected simultaneously and that pupils had the same interpretation of the statements they were to use for the self-rating exercise. Data collection took place during school hours. In keeping with total anonymity of respondents, digital identifiers of any type were not considered for harvest.

4. Learning through reflection as a researcher

Taking place constantly (Tracey et al. 1995), learning can be tacit or explicit. The new normal induced by the pandemic required individuals to adapt and normalise the situation while carrying on with life in general. This was the case for academic research too. These changes provided the opportunity to capitalise on experiential learning, which often goes unnoticed due to its informal nature. The need to redesign the data collection method presented an unprecedented opportunity for learning at design stage and also in retrospect by way of reflection.

4.1 A guiding framework for the reflective process.

Reflection is an essential part of learning. Although this method has gained prominence over the years, a single definition of what is understood by 'reflective practice' is not available (Fook et al., 2006; Moon, 2013). This lack of a standardised definition causes various difficulties. Rodgers (2002) points out that there is lack of clarity about how reflection may differ from other thinking processes. For the purposes of this paper, reflective practice involved the review of an experience to actively and critically think about how the activity could be improved in future. At the origins of critical reflection, we find the need for sense making to add meaning and context to develop. This notion is grounded in the definition offered by Remenyi (2022) "Reflection occurs when an activity is paused in order to consider or reconsider any aspect of phenomenon such as its authenticity, justification, processes or potential outcomes etc. Reflection may be solitary, or it may be conducted by a group. It may be triggered as a result of an event, or it may be routinely conducted as part of a review process. Reflection may be understood as a means of testing whether a current train of thought and actions are valid and likely to produce the desired outcome."

Various reflective models were explored to mobilise this paper. It was noted that most models appear to be grounded in experiential learning. Jasper (2003) offered the simple ERA cycle where she addresses experience, reflection and action, while Kolb (1984) introduced the experiential learning cycle that addresses the concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. The cycle appears to

facilitate the application of a learning experience through experimentation. Given that the aim of the paper is to reflect on a procedure, Gibbs (1998) seemed most appropriate for the task. It provides a cycle that encourages reflective thinking focusing on different stages of the experience made (Fig. 1).

Gibbs identifies 6 key steps that encourage the user to think and process experiences. In itself the process may lead to recalibration of how procedures are executed thus resulting in a learning experience.

Below are the six stages involved in the reflection process by Gibbs (1988).

1. Description. In this first stage details about how the experience unfolds are shared.
2. Feelings. Feelings may be associated an emotional state or a frame of mind. It is important to recall and acknowledge the feelings that emerge as a result of an experience.
3. Evaluation. This stage requires an assessment of the experience itself. Details of what worked and what could be improved or what did not work at all need to be highlighted.
4. Analysis. At this point we would interpret and understand the experience. This supports our sense making of a series of events that make a whole experience.
5. Conclusion. This stage is particularly important if an experience is to be repeated. Using the previous stages as a scaffold, the opportunity for creative thinking emerges since deliberate effort needs to be made to generate alternatives. At this point one needs to capitalise on the learning and identify what could be done differently if there had to be a repeat of the experience.
6. Action plan. The alternatives identified in the previous stage can be developed and turned into an action plan that can support future experiences.

Journaling was used to collect reflections that would mobilise the reflective cycle by Gibbs (1988). It provided the conceptual foundations to pursue a mindful reflection on the experience of doing online research. Mindful reflections were noted throughout the entire research process from its inception; before, during and after the data collection process by keeping journal entries. Journals are convenient since they capture the experience as it is lived while thoughts and feelings are still fresh. This method is useful due to the critical and reflective stance in which one needs to be in order to revisit and process events as they unfold chronologically. This practice allows the possibility to look back on the experience and capitalise on opportunities for improvement thus fostering critical reflection.

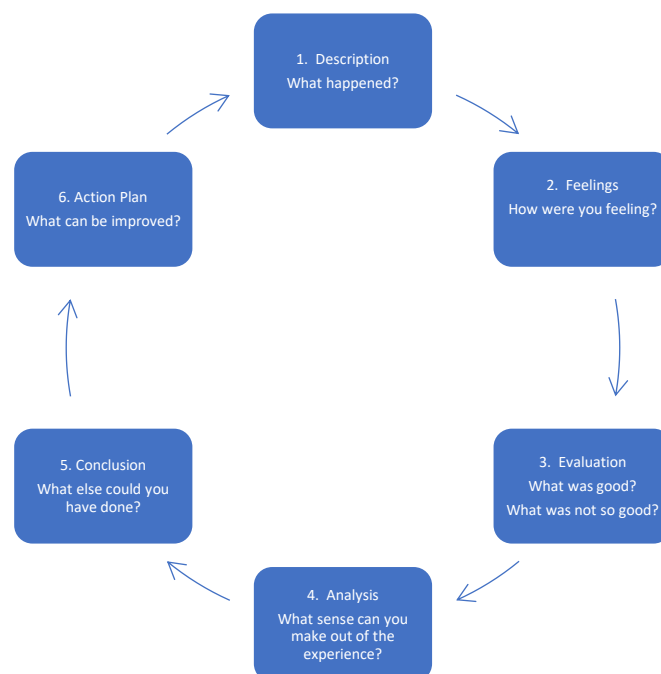


Figure 1: Reflective Cycle. (adapted from Gibbs,1988)

5. Reflections

The reflective process started during the planning of the research project itself. Assumptions about how meaning is typically made (Brookfield, 2000a) were questioned since the challenges imposed partly or completely due to the pandemic influenced how data was collected. A number of questions emerging from the different stages presented by the model by Gibbs (1988) were identified by the researcher and used as cues to guide the reflection process as found in Table 1.

Table 1: Cues guiding the reflective process

Stage	Cues
Description	Where and when did the activities unfold? What happened? What was the outcome of the activities? What worked as anticipated? What were the potential difficulties? What was the role of the different stakeholders?
Feelings	How did the processes of collecting data online make me feel? How was I feeling before and after data collection? How did the stakeholders feel?
Evaluation	What went well when collecting data online? What didn't work out well? How did the respondents contribute to make the experience a positive or negative one?
Analysis	Why did the process work out? What made the process stall?
Conclusion	What did I learn from this experience? What could have been done differently? What precautions can be taken for future studies?
Action Plan	How can the process be improved for next time?

Advantages and limitations emerged from conducting online research. This paper explores the issues that were encountered and how online research made data collection from schools possible during a pandemic are explored through reflection. The main stumbling blocks were related to: (a) parental engagement and the subsequent collection of consent forms; (b) issues that emerged during the actual data collection.

5.1 Description.

The planning phase and ethics clearance for the project took place between December 2020 and March 2021. Submission to different institutions made ethics clearance time consuming. This process ensured that the study adhered to all ethical principles both in its design and during the data collection phase. Following Recital 38 (<https://gdpr-info.eu/recitals/no-38/>) under the GDPR act, special attention was given since data was collected from minors. Once all approvals were in place, information letters and consent forms for parents and legal guardians and assent forms for the pupils were distributed by the Head of each school who acted as an intermediary. Consent forms were to reach the researcher directly from the parents or legal guardians of each participating child. This was a very long process.

Issues to ensure the integrity of data that was collected online (Hocevar and Flanagan, 2017) were overcome through the specific targeting of schools with populations of pupils aged between 9-11 years. Collecting data during the school day helped with the preservation of integrity. Issues pertaining to the authenticity of respondents were resolved easily since the schools confirmed the ages of the participants taking part in the project. Information letters and consent forms were sent out to the parents or legal guardians of approximately 1275 pupils.

While different schools were using different online platforms one commonality prevailed. Visitors were not allowed in schools during the time of data collection allowed in schools during the time of data collection. This presented two options. The first involved the dissemination of the surveys by class teachers who would have received training on how to present the instructions to their pupils prior to data collection. This method could compromise the data (Hocevar and Flanagan, 2017) due to multiple interpretations. The second option, was for the researcher to reach each school online and instruct each class on the aims of the project and how to complete the survey. The latter was the preferred option. Following a pilot study with a separate school, a

written script containing the instructions was written for consistency. The researcher accessed each school online and read out each statement to all respondents. A number of sessions were required since each class or year group within the participating schools was approached separately to allow time for clarifications by the respondents if requested. The respondents indicated how they perceived their own creativity using the 'Short Scale for the Creative Self' by Karwowski et al. 2013 and the 'How I Feel About Myself and School Questionnaire' by Stewart and McLellan (2015) on a Likert scale. Sample questions from these questionnaires may be found in Appendix 1.

At the outset of the project, it was anticipated that obtaining consent would not be a problem. This was an assumption that was soon discounted as will be outlined below.

5.2 Feelings

Online data collection brought with it feelings of excitement and anticipation coupled with a careful stance to ensure that all ethical procedures were adhered to especially because of the vulnerability of the sample. Guided by elements highlighted in the literature, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity (Shelley-Egan, 2015) were adhered to. Feelings of nervousness arose each time that data was being collected due to fears that there could be a technical breakdown. Due to the large number of people making use of the bandwidth locally, technical issues were not uncommon. A frozen screen or loss of connection were issues that we have learned to deal with during the pandemic. Apart from these isolated occasions that caused disruptions the overall experience was appreciated by the participating schools.

The interaction with respondents raised hopeful feelings in the researcher. This was a result of the interaction while collecting data since mutual visibility was possible. Access to the classroom using Zoom or MS Teams made the distance between the researcher and the respondents 'shorter'. The researcher could see the pupils and vice-versa through the interactive whiteboards used in local schools and on the personal laptop for the researcher. The scripted introduction and overview of the project along with each question that respondents had to answer were carefully read out to each class in the same manner to ensure consistency. This gave the researcher peace of mind by way of assuring that the young respondents clearly understood the procedure, why it was taking place, and how important their input was. The respondents were engaged, attentive and very cooperative. A sense of connection was also created when clarifications were required since the pupils had an instant visual/audio reply to their query.

Feelings related directly to the project were compounded by a degree of disappointment coming from the expectation that a higher number of parents or legal guardians would consent to their children to take part in the study. The assumption that widespread use of internet services is made by many induced the researcher to expect a higher response rate.

5.3 Evaluation

For most of the project online data collection proved to be a pleasant experience. The advantages referred to in the literature, were experienced in their entirety. The project ran efficiently both in terms of time and cost acknowledging findings by Lefever, et al. (2007), and Mohanty et al., (2020). The data collection exercise was welcomed by the participating schools since this activity provided space for pupils aged 9-11 years to experience personal reflection about their own creativity and wellbeing at school.

Data collection had to be postponed on one occasion due to lack of access to the school network. The IT technician was not informed of my online visit. In this school the network was set up to allow access to approved individuals only. Since I was not given rights to access, my attempts to use the provided link were futile. This led to frustration on both sides. The teachers and the pupils involved in this school were deeply disappointed.

From an ethical perspective, conducting the research during school hours with the school Head acting as an intermediary proved to be a successful strategy. Since the dissemination of information letters and consent forms was conducted by the school the reassurance of knowing who to expect to be interacting online was easily obtained. To minimise issues of validity of consent, consenting parents and guardians had to forward a signed consent form via email directly to the researcher. Addressing concerns raised by Shelley-Egan, (2015), anonymity and confidentiality were respected since no digital identifiers were collected and the respondents were explicitly asked not to write their names anywhere. Only the school year (Year 5 or Year 6) was made available to the researcher.

Hocevar and Flanagin, (2017) referred to the issues pertaining to data integrity when this was collected online. Sampling and sampling criteria were two main concerns outlined by the authors. In the present study, these issues were easily overcome by asking the school Head to act as an intermediary between the parents or guardians giving their consent and the researcher. The preservation of data integrity was achieved by collecting all data during school hours. No interventions by parents, guardians, or teachers were possible since all respondents were visible to the researcher on screen in their respective class or in their homes according to the mode of schooling adopted. These conditions also allowed the researcher to obtain representativeness of the sample, an issue deemed as problematic when conducting online studies by Granello and Weathon (2004). Notwithstanding this, a higher response rate was expected especially in State funded schools. One might speculate that at the time of data collection parents may have experienced an overload with letter circulars being sent electronically throughout the scholastic year.

Overall, adopting this strategy eased the process and ensured its success. This was made possible following an extensive search related to online data collection especially in relation to vulnerable participants, in this case young pupils. Although the process was laborious and lengthy, the outcome was positive and rewarding for the researcher.

5.4 Analysis

The overall satisfaction with how the online data collection project unfolded still leaves space for reflection about the different touchpoints of the process. The carefully laid out instructions along with appropriately scheduled data collection sessions made the process run smoothly most of the time. It was particularly pleasant to see how engaged the pupils were during the process.

As mentioned above, the research ethics committee of the university stipulated that the schools act as intermediaries between the researcher and the parents and their children. Signed consent forms had to be sent directly to the researcher via email. This process involved the assumption that parents were downloading the information sheet and the consent form that were sent by email. Initially, the response rate was low, however, a number of reminders (Granello and Weathon, 2004) encouraged more parents to give their consent on behalf of their children. After a few weeks of assessing why a number of parents were not giving their consent, potential reasons leading to a low response rate were generated as follows: (1) parents may not have had access to online devices where they could download a document, sign it and upload it again, (2) the email detailing the research project may have been interpreted as less important than other emails sent by the school and therefore it was not read, (3) parents were experiencing screen fatigue from getting all school communication sent via email, (4) parents viewing emails on a mobile phone may not have had the opportunity to download the documents. Following communication with the various schools about the response rate being lower than initially expected, one of the participating schools asked parents to simply send an email to the researching stating the name of the school, name of the child and a statement confirming their wish to participate in the project. This led to an instant increase in the number of parents or legal guardians consenting participation.

5.5 Conclusion and Action Plan

Similarly, to Warin (2011), I felt that the outcome of the study and the representativeness of the sample depended on positive relationships with the stakeholders. Although the sample size was satisfactory, unfortunately, this was not enough to achieve a higher turnout. Various lessons were learned with the most salient ones being to ensure that access is granted by gatekeepers on the ground, IT technicians in this case and to potentially make the information and consenting process more accessible to respondents. In future a recorded message or a video link could replace the information sheet since this may have been too long and detailed for parents to read through especially if the medium used is a smartphone.

The reflective process provided insight about the experience gained from the project through a mindful disposition that the researcher committed to adopt as a result of the opportunity to evaluate the research process. It enabled me to adopt a self-critical perspective over the processes I was implementing. Although objectivity was a guiding principle throughout the processes, subjective elements are difficult to obliterate completely (Bouzanis, 2022). Bouzanis claims that self-reflection is critical to develop an agential conduct. From this point of view, it must be noted that since the reflective cycle by Gibbs (1988) is primarily an exercise in experiential learning through reflection, it may be considered as parsimonious when looking at the method in which data is collected. In previous sections, the limitations of conducting online research and the ethical issues involved were discussed. These elements are not directly captured by the model since it does not capture the

issues that are directly related to the project unless the researcher specifically identifies technical cues or prompts to be used during the reflection process. In the current study they were given prominence primarily because a researcher needs to be accountable for the data collected and also because of the vulnerability of the sample. Accountability starts with the obligations that the researcher has towards the stakeholders involved (Given, 2008), in this case young pupils, their families and the schools concerned.

6. Embarking on mindful reflection and the uses of keeping a research journal.

Deciding to practice mindful reflection was primarily influenced by a six-week course in Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) that I had attended previously. Brief five-minute mindful meditations were incorporated in the reflection process prior to each 'debrief' session that I had to identify what went well and what could be improved. Each session took place immediately after the data collection activity. To concretise the reflection process a journal was kept throughout the project. Differentiating this process from other journaling activities was the explicit use of the reflective cycle identified by Gibbs (1988) while employing a mindful approach loosely following the procedure highlighted by Lemon (2017). Aiming to make future occurrences of online data collection smoother, journaling offered a space to record my thoughts as a researcher while they were still fresh during the data collection process was created. One downside of keeping a journal is the deliberate effort that needs to be made and the time that must be allocated in an already busy schedule. These slight hindrances were overcome by positive outcomes that emerged as a result of sorting out my thoughts and to avoid potential research blocks since the notes could be an efficient refresher of the experience.

Overall, the procedure entailed the preparation of templates with the six-step process detailed by Gibbs (1988) on MS Word. Prompting questions were used to avoid any mental blocks. The process in itself is not difficult, however, the diligence to pursue and adhere to the plan each time required effort. Each mindful reflection session lasted between 15-25 minutes following a brief moment to collect my thoughts and the disconnection from other media to avoid distraction. During data collection similarities in the entries were noticed apart from when different circumstances occurred. Initially the journals were not aimed to inform a study. The aim was to have the possibility to look back on the experience and assess the learning experience. Early entries express feelings of hope and frustration until ethics clearance was obtained, followed by the regular communication with intermediaries to enquire about the rate of signed consent forms obtained.

Below a sample entry from the journal can be found. Notes in the journal were typed in a Microsoft Word document for ease of reference and for practical reasons related to retrieval and legibility of the notes. The entries themselves were not intended to be long but simply to provide a reference point related to the journey of online data collection.

Table 2: Typical journal entry

<p>Phase: Data collection Date: 12/04/2021 School: Alpha, Year 5 Green Session Number: 10 Number of pupils taking the survey: 20</p>	
<p>Description What happened? How did things unfold? What was the outcome? What was the role of the stakeholders?</p>	<p>Logged in on Teams at 08.45 – Lesson to start at 08.50. I had the script ready on my desk. The teacher using her laptop logged in from school and she projected my image on the screen. The children from home also logged in on time. The pupils were eager to start. They were ready to go with their tablets already set up. I started off by introducing myself and by introducing the project. I asked the pupils if they ever think about creativity, if they knew what it is. I also asked them if they very thought about their wellbeing. I told the pupils that it is important for us grown-ups to understand how they feel about their creativity and their wellbeing so that we can improve on what we are doing. I went through the procedure of anonymity and that it was important for me that they did not write their names anywhere on the online form.</p>

	<p>We started off with the demographics and gradually worked our way down the survey. Each question was read to the pupils and interpreted in the same way as for other classes and schools.</p> <p>The pupils took their time to listen and understand. Today the exercise lasted almost one hour – average time.</p> <p>Today's session was regular. Nothing out of the ordinary.</p> <p>As usual grateful for the smooth organisation set up by the school head - intermediary</p>
<p>Feelings</p> <p>How did the process make me feel?</p> <p>How am I feeling right now?</p> <p>How did the stakeholders feel?</p>	<p>I quite like this method of collecting data. It is efficient! I did not have to look for a parking space close to the school! The session went smoothly. It's lovely to be back in class and to see the eagerness on children's faces.</p> <p>I hope that this study will bring something out that will help children to really engage with 21st Century Skills and that may enhance their wellbeing especially psychologically. The curriculum is too vast almost suffocating any aspiration or dream that these young people may have.</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p>What worked well?</p> <p>What difficulties arose?</p> <p>How did the respondents contribute towards the experience?</p>	<p>It went well.</p> <p>Logged in ok</p> <p>Children were ready</p> <p>Teachers were also interested in the process.</p> <p>No stumbling blocks – internet connection worked well today.</p>
<p>Analysis</p> <p>Why did the process work out?</p> <p>What made the process stall?</p>	<p>I got the hang of it by now. The investment in the WIFI booster was good. They whole process is efficient and happy that I can access all respondents to ensure that they all have the same interpretation throughout. If only more parents gave their consent the sample would be much more representative!</p>
<p>Conclusion</p> <p>What did I learn from this experience?</p> <p>What could have been done differently?</p> <p>What precautions can be taken for future studies?</p>	<p>Collecting data online is proving to be a good aid especially since I can download things to excel instead of having to input each response risking to misread!</p> <p>It is good to also be in touch and have a bridge connecting me to the school – teachers and pupils. Helps me appreciate what happens in their daily routine.</p> <p>Perhaps roping in the Dept of Educ to actually push this down the schools could be useful in future – rather than just approving for ethics purposes</p>
<p>Action plan</p> <p>How can the process be improved next time?</p>	<p>The session worked well. Keeping it simple and ideally short due to attention span of pupils and their time away from lessons could help more buy in from the Head next time.</p>

7. Why are reflections useful?

Mortari (2015) suggests that researchers should engage in deep reflection for them to perform their work well. Even if we do not consciously reflect on happenings in life or on a professional level, we make mental notes about what works and what doesn't as we go through experiential events and adjust our behaviour accordingly (Gould et al., 2004). Making a deliberate effort to think about behaviour could enhance the outcome of such practice. The definition of reflection cited earlier adds relevance and practicality to the practice of the method. This critical stance sets the scene for potential learning from and improvement of one's practices.

Reflection, primarily employed in qualitative research to legitimate empirical procedures (Guillemin, and Gillam, 2004) is perceived as a critical skill by Dahlberg et al. (2002) where they argue about the value of reflexivity in academic research. Mortari (2015:1) attributes high importance to reflection due to the requirement of those practicing the skill to engage in a "thoughtful relationship with the world-life and thus gain an awake stance about one's lived experience". This process adds value to the experience of the researcher as meaning is attributed to the events that make up the experience. Through this paper these remarks are further heightened by the introduction of mindful activity to accentuate the reflective process.

8. Concluding remarks

The pandemic induced by the spread of Covid-19 provided new opportunities and learning experiences for researchers. Reflection methods are often desired and actively used as self-development tools, however, Hobbs (2007) claims that this practice ought to be pursued by researchers too. This bears relevance especially in view of the experiential learning process that is undertaken through reflection leading to potential improvement of activities.

This paper outlined how a process using mindful reflection based on the reflective cycle illustrated by Gibbs (1988) could offer a learning opportunity for the researcher. The reflection process together with the increased interest in online data collection could provide fertile grounds for in-depth study of ethical procedures to enhance and encourage researchers to engage with online methods while keeping respondents safe. The level of engagement with respondents as well as the factors that could lead to enhanced participation rates need to be explored in detail to facilitate future online research. In conclusion, this paper extends on the knowledge related to the application of reflexivity throughout the research process. The mindful reflection used exemplifies the ease of access to the practice while using a guided approach through the templates used. This may lead to further research about researchers particularly focusing on mindful behaviours and their outcomes along with confidence building that may enhance psychological wellbeing.

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Appendix 1. Sample questions used in the survey.

Sample from Karwowski et al. (2013)

Short Scale of Creative Self

- I think I am a creative person
- My creativity is important for who I am
- I know I can efficiently solve even complicated problems
- I trust my creative abilities

Sample from Mclellan and Steward (2015)

How I Feel About Myself and School

- I feel good about myself
- I feel I am doing well
- I feel I can deal with problems
- I feel bored