

**ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION:
PRESCRIPTIVE QUICK FIX OR TRANSFORMATIONAL PARADIGM SHIFT?**

by

Muga Miyakawa

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**FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO**

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Abstract

While mindfulness practices have demonstrated utility in bolstering human well-being and functioning, they are certainly not beyond reproach. Purser and Loy (2013) have coined the term “McMindfulness” to refer to instrumental and prescriptive forms of mindfulness that attempt to apply scientific reductionism to isolate, quantify, and maximize components of mindfulness associated with specific outcomes, such as stress-reduction and increased attention. In this thesis, I examine mindfulness through the lens of conceptual analysis, Buddhist ontology and epistemology, and social justice. As mindfulness is mainstreamed and appropriated by various entities that attempt to capitalize on its growing popularity, it is crucial to understand what it is and how it may be applied in a holistic manner, particularly in educational contexts. Education is a critically important site from which to enact change; for this reason, it is essential to question and understand what mindfulness is before applying it as a pedagogical prescription. Furthermore, if mindfulness is to continue to be implemented in education, it should be in support of human development and human flourishing in ways that cultivate collective well-being, rather than individualistic well-being.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Mindfulness is trending. It is proliferating in the Western mainstream, accelerating its growth over the last thirty years. There are now countless books written about it (Hyland, 2015), a plethora of interventions that incorporate it in clinical contexts (Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011), and an increasing number of programs designed to help one be mindful in a busy, stressful, modern world. Mindfulness is gaining traction as a legitimate concept in scientific research, demonstrated by the increase in journal articles that include mindfulness as a keyword (Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Mindfulness is also appearing in highly corporate, intensely commercial, and seemingly contradictory contexts, like the US military and at Google—as a tool to increase productivity, performance, and efficiency (Hyland, 2015; Paulson, Davidson, Jha, & Kabat-Zinn, 2013). In light of the increasing applications of mindfulness into evermore fields, consideration must be given to potential ideological and ethical contradictions between the original conceptualization of mindfulness in the Buddhist tradition and the modern, secular conceptualization of mindfulness that is in vogue today. As mindfulness is incorporated into education and curricula, these ideological and ethical concerns require careful analysis to ensure the use of mindfulness in holistic and pedagogically sound ways.

A serious critique of contemporary Western mindfulness [going forward in this thesis, contemporary mindfulness is synonymous with Western mindfulness and vice versa], and one that is relevant to education, is that it is a prescriptive and instrumental practice, supporting the perpetuation of dominant hegemonic norms. Furthermore, I wish to problematize the use of mindfulness for individual gain and self-improvement—the dominant application of contemporary mindfulness (Hyland, 2015; Purser & Loy, 2013)—instead, proposing the use of

mindfulness to foster collective well-being. Constituent within the definition of well-being in the Buddhist framework are the qualities of non-self, interconnectedness, undifferentiated compassion, impermanence, non-harming, non-violence, loving-kindness, generosity, gratitude, and Buddha nature (Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Thayer-Bacon, 2003).

Research Questions

The central research question of this thesis is: “What is mindfulness (both historical and contemporary forms) and why is it being used in education and curricula?” Secondary questions include: “What are the implications of secularizing and simplifying mindfulness?” and “What is the transformative potential of mindfulness when explicitly associated with social justice?” The latter question represents an underrepresented area of research on mindfulness. I present the case that mindfulness used solely for personal gain is antithetical to its original aims as conceptualized in the Buddhist tradition. Instrumental mindfulness is ethically problematic, especially in some of the contexts in which it is being applied (e.g., corporations, the military). Furthermore, instrumental mindfulness has been associated with negative, self-centered behaviours due to its focus on individualism (Hyland, 2015; Purser & Loy, 2013).

When a concept such as mindfulness is haphazardly inserted into curricula without understanding what it is or what it does, then the danger of misrepresentation and misuse increases accordingly. Questions that critically examine mindfulness in education are important because they address larger issues concerning fundamental taken-for-granted beliefs about education and, to extrapolate, what we want our future to look like?

The methodology of conceptual analysis (Jickling, 2014) is used to guide my approach to this thesis. Conceptual analysis justifies the research choices made throughout this inquiry, and

places boundaries on it in order to maintain focus and clarity. The main points and/or questions addressed throughout the thesis are:

1. What is the historical (Buddhist) conceptualization of mindfulness?
2. What is the contemporary (Western) conceptualization of mindfulness?
3. Critiques of contemporary mindfulness, from the perspective of critical theory
4. How might contemporary (Western) mindfulness integrate social justice?

Confusion Surrounding Mindfulness

So pervasive is the rise in popularity of mindfulness in modern Western culture that it has become a marketing buzzword, representing an amorphous, “feel-good vibe” associated with being “present” in the “here-and-now”; this dovetails conveniently with a consumer/materialist lifestyle industry, of which the self-help market has a large share. Despite this surge in interest in mindfulness, it is not clear what mindfulness is or does. The positive benefits attributed to mindfulness by scientific research and propagated by the media must be carefully considered. Sun (2014) observes: “Mindfulness does not ‘naturally’ produce ethical, wise and serene human beings, but depends on the social and cultural contexts it is being taught in” (p. 406). The appropriation of mindfulness for profit and *self*-improvement leaves it vulnerable to misrepresentation and, even worse, wholesale misuse, especially considering its historical, ethical, and philosophical foundation in Buddhism.

Mindfulness Breaks Into the Mainstream

While the origins of mindfulness lie in Buddhism, its contemporary applications transcend religious boundaries and spill over into secular domains. An example of this, and of

primary concern for this thesis, is the use of mindfulness in education. Upon initial consideration, it is puzzling to see a Buddhist practice incorporated into mainstream Western education. This incongruence is further exasperated by the fact that mindfulness in education is increasing in countries such as the United States and Canada, which, particularly in the case of the United States, are predominantly Christian. How could this be possible? One reason is the secularization and simplification of mindfulness:

The contemporary understanding of mindfulness has been substantially simplified and divorced from its origins ... essential for the mainstreaming of the concept Far less attention has been given to the meaning and origins of [mindfulness] than what it can do for you. Few people outside of Buddhist communities or scholarship understand 'mindfulness' to be anything other than what it is portrayed as: a helpful secular technique that involves paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental way. (Sun, 2014, p. 394)

While secularizing and simplifying mindfulness may be useful for expanding its reach and maximizing its benefits, it is problematic because, as in the example of mindfulness being applied by the US military and Google, the intent behind its use may be morally and ethically questionable, untenable even. Hoyt (2016) points out several key elements that are missing from instrumental forms of mindfulness:

Clinical and educational practices intentionally avoid identifying the spiritual and religious origins of mindfulness ... rooted in Buddhist tradition. Yet such a hasty rejection also reflects certain unwillingness and/or an inability to engage in a deeper understanding of mindfulness, especially non-attachment and emptiness, which is the heart of mindfulness. (p. 126)

The question of whether the US military or Google are using mindfulness to serve these aims of non-attachment and emptiness are debatable. This question can also be extended to mindfulness in education—to what extent do curriculum designers, policy planners, administrators, principals, and teachers consider qualities such as non-attachment and emptiness important in education insofar as they concern curricular aims?

Critically Analyzing Mindfulness

The proliferation of mindfulness in the West is beginning to be countered with skepticism and criticism, perhaps as a response to its growing presence into evermore fields (Hyland, 2015; Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Purser & Loy, 2013; Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). While it may be premature to call it “backlash,” there is now a growing body of critical inquiry into mindfulness.

Scientific studies of mindfulness have legitimized the instrumental utility of mindfulness programs in schools by demonstrating positive outcomes such as increased academic performance and decreased anti-social behaviours (Bishop et al., 2004; Hölzel, Lazar, Gard, Schuman-Olivier, Vago, & Ott, 2011; Oman, Shapiro, Thoresen, Plante, & Flinders, 2008). Taking a critical perspective while analyzing mindfulness in education implicates larger philosophical questions regarding the purpose of education, schools, and curricula. This includes critically examining and questioning education and educational aims. For example, why is academic performance important? How is academic performance measured? Moreover, what are the root causes of anti-social behaviour?

Analyzing modern education through the lens of critical theory, this stance reveals the neoliberal encroachment on public education as demonstrative of a capitalist, technical/rational view of students as workers-in-training (Bai, 2001; Magill & Rodriguez, 2014). Given this

orientation of modern education as training future workers, it is logical then that instrumental forms of mindfulness are taking root in schools: “The instrumentalisation of secular mindfulness ... legitimises the practice with here-and-now goals and hard outcomes. This has been especially important in an American culture, which is strongly characterized by pragmatism and is a scientifically informed society” (Sun, 2014, p. 404). Consequently, the use of mindfulness is relegated as a classroom management “tool” or “technique,” without consideration for the liberative and transformative capabilities that may be possible when mindfulness is practiced holistically, rooted in Buddhist ethics. Sun (2014) observes:

Mindfulness is ... operating within a context of modernity, characterised by a pervasive calculative rationality oriented towards profit, productivity and efficiency. In this context, the discourse of instrumentalisation is made especially salient when mindfulness is talked about in terms of the potential profits and cost savings it could bring. (p. 405)

The modern application of mindfulness in a growing number of fields is testament to this orientation towards profit, productivity, and efficiency. Resultantly, the use of mindfulness in education calls into question the rationale(s) for its introduction into classrooms. What is the purpose of implementing mindfulness in education?

Weighing the question of whether mindfulness should or should not be used in education is a moot point, as it is already being introduced into classrooms, curricula, and teacher training (Bochun, 2011; Nadler, Cordy, Stengel, Segal, & Hayden, 2017; Schonert-Reichl & Hymel 2007; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Examples include: *MindUP*, a mindfulness-based social emotional learning program applied by the Vancouver School Board in most of their elementary and secondary schools (Bochun, 2011; Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007); CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) and

SMART (Stress Management and Resiliency Training), both mindfulness-based programs for teachers (Koch, 2016); and MBCT-C (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Children), a psychological therapeutic intervention for children (Coholic, 2011). In this regard, it is too late to ask if mindfulness should be used in education and instead, the question should be reframed to inquire into the best method of implementing mindfulness in education. Effort should be placed on developing the most ethical, virtuous, and collectively beneficial way of applying mindfulness in education. To that end, I support the use of mindfulness in education with some strong reservations and recommendations. Specifically, mindfulness should be closely linked to its original foundations in Buddhist ontology and epistemology, with explicit concern for collective well-being through other-regarding and holistic perspectives that integrate social justice.

Student Well-Being and Mental Health

There are numerous motivations for the implementation of mindfulness in schools. One of the most frequently used rationales is to combat student stress and to alleviate the effects of student mental health problems (see chapter 6). Educators, clinicians, and researchers are increasingly concerned with child and youth mental health because mental illness is predicted to become Canada's largest health care cost by 2020 (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). For example, one in five children experience mental health problems that require mental health services (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). This statistic is cause for concern because mental health problems lead to, "a myriad of social, emotional, and behavioural problems that interfere with [students'] interpersonal relationships, school success, and their potential to become competent adults and productive citizens" (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010, p. 137).

In Ontario, the definition of well-being determined by the Ministry of Education, “reflects the complex, holistic nature of well-being, taking into account four developmental domains—cognitive, social, emotional, and physical” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 6). Furthermore, the Ontario Ministry of Education identifies four policy areas that promote student well-being: “*equity and inclusive education, healthy schools, mental health, and safe and accepting schools*” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 8, emphasis in original). Of these, student mental health is an area the Ontario Ministry of Education is especially concerned, as demonstrated by the publication *Supporting Minds: An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’ Mental Health and Well-Being* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). This guide provides teachers with information to identify and address: anxiety problems, mood problems, attention and hyperactivity/impulsivity problems, behaviour problems, eating and weight-related problems, substance use problems, gambling, and self-harm and suicide (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Mindfulness is increasingly being applied in schools to counter some of these problems (Oman et al., 2008; Orr, 2014; Purser & Loy, 2013).

Envisioning the Future of Mindfulness

It is necessary to realize a holistic, embodied, and relational version of mindfulness (Thayer-Bacon, 2003) that is clearly tethered to its Buddhist foundations in order to maintain principles and guide its future development. While I concede to the necessity of removing the Buddhist elements of mindfulness in order to expand its appeal and facilitate its acceptance into secular institutions, I believe that the ethical and philosophical framework provided by Buddhist ontology and epistemology are crucial to fully realize a holistic form of mindfulness. Furthermore, I believe that integrating mindfulness and social justice together is an important

direction to pursue in future research. To amplify: the transformative and social justice potential of mindfulness has not been explored to the extent that the clinical, quantitative research on mindfulness has been, despite nascent and promising findings on the compatibility of mindfulness with social justice. The potential integration of mindfulness and social justice is a starting point from which to realize a form of mindfulness that is embodied, holistic, and relational (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Surely, there is more to mindfulness than individual well-being—valuable in its own right—given the transformative potential that mindfulness can have when collective well-being is a primary motivation. Sun (2014) posits: “The oversimplification of mindfulness runs the risk of losing its transformative potential ... mindfulness can only move beyond a fad or quick fix and become a genuine force for personal and social transformation by reclaiming Buddhist concepts, especially its ethical framework” (pp. 406-407). I align myself with the growing wave that advocates for a turn away from instrumentalism and toward wholesomeness in applying contemplative practices in education (Ergas, 2016; Hyland, 2015; Miller, 2007, 2010, 2014; Orr, 2014; Purser & Loy, 2013).

It is time to reintegrate the social and ethical dimensions back into contemporary mindfulness. Mindfulness, when used as a means of pacifying people to accept oppressive conditions in society without advocating for social justice and anti-oppression, and without challenging systemic and entrenched power inequalities at the root of suffering is problematic. Similarly, mindfulness used to comfort and soothe oppressed and marginalized people merely to allow them to survive and cope in hostile environments without empowering them, and without working toward changing the underlying conditions that perpetuate oppression is unethical and complicit with the systems of control (Berila, 2014; Magee, 2016; Orr, 2002).

Situating the Author

In order to provide context and to situate myself in this research, I will provide a brief summary of my experience with mindfulness. I have a personal practice in mindfulness and meditation, which has developed significantly over recent years. I came to mindfulness at the beginning of my Bachelor's of Education because of an interest in learning about teacher burnout. I felt that it would be prudent to learn about the pros and cons of the potential career I was embarking upon. On YouTube, I found an interview with Richie Davidson, professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Davidson is a leading researcher in the field of neuroscience and is known for studying the effects of mindfulness on the brain. Davidson is also the founder of the Center for Healthy Minds, where research is conducted to bridge science and contemplative practice. In the video, Davidson addresses some of the benefits of mindfulness related to teacher burnout. The video can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/sChYoFxPznI> or search "Dr. Richard Davidson on Teachers and Mindfulness" (Center for Healthy Minds, 2013) on YouTube. I have been interested in Buddhism long before beginning my Bachelor's of Education; however, my first encounter with "mindfulness" in a codified and structured form was through this video. Since then, I have been pursuing opportunities to research mindfulness, not only in education but also in culture and society as a whole. I have taken an Additional Qualification course at Lakehead University called "Teaching Mindfulness in the Classroom," and regularly attend mindfulness meditation sessions for students at the Student Health and Counselling Centre. Additionally, I attended an academic conference in the fall of 2016 called "the International Symposium for Contemplative Studies" organized by the *Mind & Life Institute*. All of these experiences inform my knowledge and

practice of mindfulness, and provide me with first-person experience with meditation and contemplative education.

Description of Style and Structure of this Thesis

The material constituting this thesis is gathered from a wide variety of sources, with mindfulness the connective thread. This is the result of my varied interests, which include psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, sustainability, spirituality, and philosophy. I distill the “data” into an argument that supports the use of mindfulness in education with some strong reservations and recommendations. To reiterate my position: mindfulness should be a holistic practice that integrates social justice and is primarily concerned with collective well-being. The focus of mindfulness should not be on individual benefit nor should it be used for self-improvement in ways that reinforce self-centeredness.

This thesis does not follow a traditional quantitative or qualitative organization and structure. Based on the decision to use conceptual analysis as the methodology, there is no single chapter dedicated to a literature review. Instead, the relevant literature will be analyzed throughout all of the chapters respectively.

Chapter Descriptions

Following this introduction, chapter 2 explains the use of conceptual analysis as the deliberate choice of methodology.

Chapter 3 provides a preliminary description of mindfulness. The purpose of this chapter is to serve as a primer on mindfulness for those who are not familiar. This chapter is not meant to

be a comprehensive examination of mindfulness as later chapters unpack various elements of mindfulness in detail.

Chapter 4 examines the Buddhist roots of mindfulness. As a matter of establishing a historical, philosophical, and theological foundation for mindfulness, it is important to understand the development of the “original” conceptualization of mindfulness. The level of detail is necessarily general given that this is a master’s thesis in education and not religious studies or Asian studies.

Chapter 5 moves on from the Buddhist conceptualization of mindfulness and delves into modern, secular forms of mindfulness. Contemporary mindfulness cannot be discussed without mention of Jon Kabat-Zinn and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Both Kabat-Zinn and MBSR figure heavily in this chapter, as they are pivotal to the development of mindfulness today.

Chapter 6 concerns mindfulness in education. The various applications of mindfulness in educational institutions and curricula are examined. The rationale for its use and potential ontological, epistemological, and pedagogical conflicts are laid out.

Chapter 7 examines some critiques of mindfulness salient to its implementation in education. The principle critique examined here is the instrumentalisation and denaturing of the Buddhist ethical framework of mindfulness through secularization and simplification.

Chapter 8 examines maladaptive conditioning and bias as illustrated by automaticity, priming, stereotyping, and mind wandering. These concepts are examined because they demonstrate conditioned, unconscious, and negative behaviours that mindfulness may be able to mitigate. This chapter introduces the grounds for integrating mindfulness with social justice, which is discussed in chapter 9.

Chapter 9 investigates how mindfulness can ally with social justice. This chapter focuses on the liberative and transformative potential of mindfulness. Drawing from research by Magee (2015, 2016), and Berila (2014), I examine how explicitly integrating mindfulness with social justice provides possibilities that extend beyond instrumental benefits.

Chapter 10 is the final chapter and as such, it reviews and summarizes the main points from throughout the thesis. It also closes this inquiry with some final thoughts.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Conceptual analysis (Jickling, 2014) is the methodology applied in this thesis.

Conceptual analysis is the most aligned methodology to inquire into the research question:

“What is mindfulness (both historical and contemporary forms) and why is it being used in education?” because it provides a framework from which to analyze and question concepts that are integral to this inquiry. The use of conceptual analysis in educational research can be framed within the disciplines of philosophy of education and curriculum theory.

Conceptual Analysis

Bob Jickling, a prominent researcher in environmental education, alludes to the dominance of scientific and quantitative methodologies in education. He also recognizes their limitations and offers an alternative:

Unfortunately, research in education ... has been hindered by a failure on the part of the research community to recognize the need for a more complete range of research perspectives than those customarily found I propose that conceptual analysis is an important research area. (Jickling, 2014, p. 52)

As a case in point, in my Master’s of Education program, conceptual analysis was not taught in the mandatory research methodology courses that surveyed qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This necessitated self-study on conceptual analysis and a great deal of remedial effort to make this work technically proficient.

Here, in his description of conceptual analysis, Jickling (2014) masterfully and completely encapsulates my intent for this thesis:

[Conceptual analysis identifies] pertinent conditions, or criteria, which appear to delineate a concept and give it meaning Analysis should, however, enable the researcher to better understand the concept Such analysis should enable researchers to make their positions increasingly clear, enabling subsequent readers to more easily weigh the merits of the claims provided. Further, seeking to understand and clarify one's central concepts is logically prior to commitment to implementation of a particular educational prescription. Failure to effectively do so can lead to a conceptual muddle. (p. 53)

The question: "What is mindfulness (both historical and contemporary forms) and why is it being used in education?" requires analysis of numerous concepts to begin the inquiry.

Important questions relevant to this thesis are: What is mindfulness? What are the pedagogical implications and outcome effects of using a spiritual practice in mainstream Western education? Is the use of mindfulness in education pedagogically sound? In what ways are instrumental and secular forms of mindfulness problematic? Conceptual analysis is suited for engaging with these questions.

The decision to use conceptual analysis for this thesis was carefully considered. As a relative novice to mindfulness, I am interested in learning more about the historical, philosophical, and Buddhist foundations upon which mindfulness is based. I want to understand how an ancient spiritual practice has been remolded for contemporary Western applications and used in such disparate fields. I am curious to know *how* mindfulness, with roots in Buddhism, has been accepted into mainstream Western education (primarily in Canada and the United States, but also Australia, the UK, and Europe). Additionally, I want to know *why* mindfulness is being applied in educational contexts, from K-12 to higher education. That is, what is it about mindfulness that school administrators, teachers, and staff are interested? What elements of

mindfulness are compatible with mainstream Western curricular aims? Philosophy, philosophy of education, and curriculum theory are all situated within a conceptual analytic framework from which to engage with these questions.

To restate and amplify, the methodology of conceptual analysis (Jickling, 2014) is used to guide this thesis. Conceptual analysis justifies the research choices made to inform this work, and places boundaries on the inquiry in order to maintain focus and clarity. The main points and/or questions addressed throughout the thesis are:

1. What is the historical (Buddhist) conceptualization of mindfulness?
2. What is the contemporary (Western) conceptualization of mindfulness?
3. Critiques of contemporary mindfulness, from the perspective of critical theory
4. How might contemporary (Western) mindfulness integrate social justice?

Philosophy *in* Education

Philosophy permeates the work of educators and researchers of education. Koetting and Januszewski (1991) explain: “We are concerned with philosophical questions everyday: What is real? How do we know? What is of value?” (p. 14). Koetting and Combs (2010) add, “For educators, doing philosophy is indispensable to our life in academia and our orientation to the world around us. Asking good questions leads to the possibility of good scholarship” (p. 226). Philosophy is not merely an exercise in abstract reasoning or conceptualization, rather, it is an embodied and relational activity, “When we talk about the curriculum, what to teach, and pedagogy, the praxis of being with others in an education setting, or the purpose of what we do, we are engaged in doing philosophy” (Koetting and Combs, 2010, p. 226). What follows from this proposition is that teaching is understood, “not just [as] a set of behaviors but an orientation

to the world, a way of being in the world. I talk about teaching being a moral enterprise because we intervene in people's lives" (Koetting, 1994, p. 3).

The quotidian use of philosophy by educators and the presence of philosophy in curricula is perhaps not immediately apparent. Yet, it is not possible to "do" education without "doing" philosophy.

As we debate curricular issues, as we decide educational policy, as we work with students and their 'behavior,' as we 'test' students' 'knowledge,' etc., we are concerned with philosophy Philosophical inquiry can illuminate, inform, call into question, etc., the taken for granted notions that we have. Philosophical inquiry and analysis can help conceptual clarification, as well as inform our praxis, and vice versa. (Koetting, 1996, p. 3)

In the case of mindfulness in education, teachers may find it beneficial to understand the underlying reasons for implementing mindfulness in their classrooms. Rather than *mindlessly* replicating prescriptive behaviours (i.e., by merely presenting students with perfunctory instruction for pedagogical practices, such as mindfulness-based programs), teachers that actively engage in philosophical inquiry may be better able to provide meaningful guidance for their students as a result of the conceptual clarity that is the result of philosophical understanding. That is, it may be hypothesized that teachers who understand the rationale for a pedagogical practice may be more committed and skilled to teach or guide that practice (assuming that the teacher agrees with and supports the rationale), rather than performing it in prescriptive and perfunctory ways. There is evidence to suggest that teachers trained in mindfulness (for personal use—not for teaching mindfulness to their students) demonstrate a multitude of benefits: "Teachers randomized to MT [Mindfulness Training] showed greater

mindfulness, focused attention and working memory capacity, and occupational self-compassion, as well as lower levels of occupational stress and burnout” (Roeser et al., 2013, p. 787).

Mitigating teacher stress and burnout has major implications for students because, “teacher stress and burnout may adversely affect student engagement and learning through teacher absenteeism, exhaustion, and diminished teaching effectiveness” (Roeser et al., 2013, p. 789). Furthermore, research suggests that teachers who participate in mindfulness training and/or who teach mindfulness to their students report positive benefits for themselves and their students, and are generally supportive of these programs (Roeser et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010). This demonstrates, hypothetically, how a teacher that is philosophically attuned to a pedagogical practice such as mindfulness may be more likely to apply it in ways that are holistic and concerned with collective well-being, if given compelling information to suggest the benefits of such a practice.

Philosophy of Education as Subject Area

Philosophy of education as a field of research is uniquely positioned to investigate the use of mindfulness in education because, “Philosophy and philosophy of education ... provide a framework needed for inquiry into schooling that is foundational, diverse, and critical [They] identify the major concerns of education, providing for coherence in educational practice” (Koetting, 1996, p. 1). The use of philosophy in educational research is advantageous in that it is not dependent upon positivist processes of knowledge formation. Koetting (1988) describes the difference between philosophical and positivist approaches: “Exactness and precision are needed when dealing with things (natural sciences) for purposes of prediction and control. However, latitude [*sic*] and flexibility are needed when dealing with humans for purposes of growth,

emancipation, and understanding” (p. 8). Furthermore, analyzing taken-for-granted beliefs with philosophy affords flexibility in studying human growth and flourishing because: “Analytic philosophy has as its goal to improve our understanding of education by clarifying our educational concepts, beliefs, arguments, assumptions” (Koetting, 1996, p. 4). My belief is that the aim of education should be for cultivating qualities that enable students to flourish in ways that are holistic, relational, and embodied (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). While hard skills are useful and, indeed, necessary to survive in an everyday sense, I believe that for humans to continue existing beyond the short-term future, it is essential to realize our mutual dependence on each other and on the natural world. I am interested in the use of mindfulness in education, and advocate that its application focus on collective well-being that integrates social justice as a corollary of a holistic approach, rather than the individualistic and instrumental forms of mindfulness that are dominant today.

In Defense of Philosophical Inquiry: Theorizing Curriculum

Philosophy may be overlooked as a method of inquiry in education due to the primacy of scientific rationalism as the dominant paradigm of the modern West. Positivism and instrumental reductionism are informed by Western, materialist, Cartesian (dualistic) conceptualizations of reality, leveraged by scientific rationalism (Bai, 2001; Magill & Rodriguez, 2014). This orientation toward instrumental reductionism heavily influences modern educational discourse.

A technical-rational, management model of school practice, based on behavioral, positivistic, quasi-scientific language ... has become the dominant way of perceiving and talking about schooling Mainstream educational discourse is technical/instrumental in nature. [The] language we use in talking about education has to do with a “scientific”

rationality of cause/effect, means-ends relationships and it focuses on predictability, efficiency and control. (Koetting, 1998, p. 3)

This kind of technical/instrumental discourse on education neglects the root causes of educational issues, which is problematic because, “the urgent social, political and moral crises of our time demand more than fixing/fine-tuning. These crises demand engaging in moral discourse” (Koetting, 1998, p. 5).

In instrumental forms of education, knowledge and learning become “externalized” where “real” and “objective” knowledge is believed to exist outside of the self, separate from the self (Koetting & Combs, 2005). Subjectivity is rejected as unreliable and imprecise. The ability to interpret and assimilate information determines a student’s ability to succeed within a technological society. Ultimately, this is detrimental because, “This type of curriculum does not involve students with the sociocultural world, nor does it address what is good for society” (Koetting & Combs, 2005, p. 82).

The instrumental/positivist approaches to education in North America permeates some fields in academia and creates a hierarchy whereby quantitative research is viewed as legitimate, while other forms of research are devalued. “The empirical-analytic view, posited as the only legitimate way of generating knowledge and hence theoretical positioning, is inadequate for dealing with the complexities of a field of study” (Koetting & Januszewski, 1991, p. 9, emphasis in original). Bridges (1997) adds:

The political problem ... is that in many universities the paradigm of research which is best understood and most powerful is the scientific paradigm, with all its socio-cultural baggage of expensive equipment, large scale funding, international teams and half a page of collaborating authors ... as well as its more intrinsic positivistic features of data

gathering, hypothesis testing and replicability. It is easy for research to become defined in terms of this paradigm in a way which makes the work of social scientists look like a poor imitation of ‘proper’ science and that of ... philosophy ... may ... be dignified and respected as ... ‘scholarship,’ but ... is a distant remove from research per se. (p. 2)

The scientific paradigm is the dominant research paradigm, evidenced by the majority of research on mindfulness being quantitatively informed. For example, the primary application of mindfulness in education follows its application in clinical settings, that is, for stress reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Reducing stress through mindfulness has been theoretically linked to other positive benefits, including: increased attention, memory, and concentration (Oman et al., 2008; Purser & Loy, 2013), all of which are salient to education. The focus of quantitative, results-oriented research on mindfulness skews the field toward positivism and consequently, philosophical inquiries of mindfulness in education are few. Furthermore, the study of Buddhist philosophy, while extensive and accepted in its own right, as a discipline associated with Asian Studies, is not readily accepted when attempts are made to connect it to education. I hope that this work serves as a starting point to thread these connections together, that is, mindfulness, Buddhist philosophy, education, and social justice.

Philosophy of education and curriculum theory, with their conceptual frameworks, can serve as checks and balances against the *mindless* perpetuation of dominant hegemonic norms and the status quo. Critical analysis of education is necessary to imbue curricula with ethics and values. Curriculum scholars study curricular practices to understand how those practices relate to larger social and philosophical questions regarding human development. Curriculum scholars are positioned to engage in inquiries concerning ethics, values, and how knowledge is shaped, as well as the role that education plays in the process. On this, Koetting and Combs (2005) offer:

“Curriculum studies ... concerns itself with larger philosophical questions ... closely related to the search for meaning/purpose and authenticity” (p. 85).

The philosophical inquiry of education and curricula is essential for human development precisely because it is involved, directly and indirectly, in informing the values and content transmitted through educational practices in schools. This exemplifies the interdependent and symbiotic relationship between education and society.

To summarize, the application of conceptual analysis (Jickling, 2014) as the methodology for this thesis is advantageous because it is supported by a philosophical and theoretical framework that is equipped to question and critically analyze taken-for-granted assumptions in modern mainstream Western education. Moreover, conceptual analysis, philosophy of education, and curriculum theory open up the possibility to engage in theoretical discussions about norms, values, ethics, and human development with the breadth and depth required to warrant skilled and relevant discourse on these expansive topics. Conceptual analysis, philosophy, and theory are vital in this inquiry into the application of mindfulness in education in order to ensure the rigor, integrity, validity, and reliability required of responsible scholarship.

Chapter 3: What is Mindfulness? A Primer

It is useful at the outset to provide a brief description of mindfulness—in order to build a foundation for more in-depth analyses in subsequent chapters. The most oft-cited definition of mindfulness is, “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 291). Bishop et al. (2004) add that mindfulness is, “a process of bringing a certain quality of attention to moment-by-moment experience. The capacity to evoke mindfulness ostensibly is developed using various meditation techniques that originate from Buddhist spiritual practices” (p. 320). To restate, mindfulness is clarity arising from the ability to perceive and accept things as they are, and it involves the cultivation of awareness and acceptance of the present moment, without attachment to specific outcomes. At first glance, this sounds simple, and yet it is deceptively difficult.

Bishop et al. (2004) posit several qualities that are associated with mindfulness, including: patience, trust, non-reactivity, wisdom, and compassion. These qualities are not to be confused as end goals of mindfulness practice, but rather, as incidental outcomes that arise from sustained practice. Perhaps it is prudent not to include these qualities in a definition of mindfulness, lest people come to have misinformed expectations of their mindfulness training. Bishop et al. (2004) summarize, “At a pragmatic level a definition that confounds operational features with potential benefits reduces the utility of the construct” (p. 235). I believe that the appeal of contemporary mindfulness is due to its widely advertised potential benefits. Therefore, it may be hypothesized that people are coming to mindfulness with an intention to “get” something, or to “achieve” something. In educational contexts, the “selling” of the positive benefits of mindfulness have no doubt accelerated its acceptance in schools by enticing school administrators and principals with specific outcomes, such as increased attention, memory, and

concentration in students, as well as increased awareness and responsiveness to students in teachers (Oman et al., 2008; Purser & Loy, 2013). An indirect outcome of these benefits include higher student achievement—which can be hypothesized to lead to higher rankings and a better reputation for the school—all of which presumably tempts school administrators and principals to use mindfulness, which then perpetuates instrumental and prescriptive forms of mindfulness. (Ergas, 2016; O’Donnell, 2016)

Reasons for Practicing Mindfulness

One of the aims of mindfulness is to decrease the amount of the self-narrative that guides behaviour. Self-narrative arises in part from the belief in a permanent, fixed sense of self that is independent and separate from others. Mindfulness presents the ability to cultivate awareness that is not based on self-narrative or an egocentric view of reality, instead supporting an open, context-dependent, multi-perspective sense of self that recognizes the interconnectedness of all things in a system of related causes and conditions. Decreasing self-narrative is a worthwhile aim because excessive self-narrative, and therefore self-focus, has demonstrated to have negative effects on well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). The negative effects of self-focus present in two ways: 1) fixating on negative emotions exacerbates rumination and increases probability of depression; and 2) excessive self-focus, even in a positive light, can limit or suppress feelings of empathy and compassion for others (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). While there are benefits in having egocentric motivations, particularly in guiding behaviour to satisfy basic needs and to survive, “when such thinking dominates our lives, or we become lost in thought or completely oppressed by our own thought, then we’re not free” (Paulson et al., 2013, p. 94). Narrative thought in and of itself is not

necessarily problematic; nevertheless, the conditioned and automatic ways humans enact patterned behaviour that result from narrative thought can be maladaptive.

Mindfulness practitioners suggest that mindfulness is a form of critical self-reflection in praxis—a way to disrupt automatic, self-focused behaviour (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Khong, 2009). Sustained mindfulness practice can interrupt or disrupt these habitual cycles of rumination and stress that prop up an egocentric, maladaptive sense of self. Mindfulness works to expose and ultimately, eliminate ego-reifying, self-narrative tendencies, “Mindfulness is about expanding awareness and the narrative so that you are in a different relation to your life” (Paulson et al., 2013, p. 95). The relation spoken of here refers to an embodied, holistic, and relational way of being (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). A potential benefit of mindful self-reflection is coming to understand that life is an interconnected network of causes and conditions—that no one and nothing exists in isolation.

The Role of Meditation in Mindfulness

Khong (2009) posits that mindfulness is realized through meditative awareness, cultivated through formal meditation practice. Meditation represents the embodied act of being mindful through sustained attention and awareness in the present moment. Therefore, mindfulness is the manifestation of meditation in practice; that is, meditation is the most direct expression of mindfulness. In this way, mindfulness and meditation are inextricably linked.

Meditation requires patience, calmness, and non-striving—all of which proves challenging for many people, particularly in the West, where qualities such as striving and progress are culturally reinforced and rewarded (Kasser, 2009).

Meditation is considered a Buddhist practice; however, meditation is not unique to Buddhism, as most of the world's major spiritual traditions involve some form of meditation (Oman et al., 2008). Nevertheless, meditation occupies a pivotal role in Buddhism. Khong (2009) explains: "The Buddhist practice offers a systematic and rigorous way for understanding the workings of the mind and body" (p. 121). Thayer-Bacon (2003) adds, "Buddhists ... rely on meditation ... for meditation cuts through our conceptual delusions" (p. 28). Conceptual delusions lead to suffering through clinging and/or aversion to various aspects of experience.

Jon Kabat-Zinn explains meditation as: "waking up to the actuality of our experience, using all of the different sense stores and everything else that we can bring to bear on the present moment" (Paulson et al., 2013, p. 103). Meditation is not practiced for a specific goal or outcome, although the cultivation of wise, skillful, and wholesome qualities are encouraged. This, in line with the Buddhist concept of non-striving: "The idea is to be present, right here, right now. Nothing new is created, nothing is changed, nothing is judged. There is no arising or achievement of anything. There is no special technique and no particular goal" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 31). Furthermore, meditation is bare attending to the self, "to expose and undo our socially constructed reality ... necessary to help get rid of our habits" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 31). While some habits are beneficial, there are serious implications to enacting habitual behaviours, especially those that are unconscious and maladaptive (see chapter 8).

How to Meditate

The practice of seated meditation involves sitting on a floor cross-legged or in a chair, maintaining an erect and dignified posture without strain. Attention is directed to the breath, focusing on the sensations of inhaling and exhaling, wherever it is noticeable, whether it is in the

nostrils, the lungs, the belly, or elsewhere. The breath is suited as an anchor for attention because it is a consistent physiological cue. While meditating, it is inevitable that the mind will wander and succumb to distraction, thoughts, and other mental processes, including: planning, fantasizing, elaborating, and ruminating (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Every time attention wanders away from the breath, one simply notices what is occupying the mind and observes these thoughts without judgment. Then, attention is brought back to the breath repeatedly, no matter how often the attention wanders (Bishop et al., 2004). The intent of meditation is to facilitate one's ability to be aware moment-to-moment and to be present in the here-and-now (Bishop et al., 2004).

While formal meditation takes the form of seated practice, meditation can be practiced in a variety of contexts, such as: while walking, cooking, doing laundry, cleaning, and so on (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Khong (2009) describes how mindfulness and meditation are “intimately connected with ... daily living, its activities, dilemmas, and intellectual occupations. In short, *mindfulness* [and meditation] *is a way of being, rather than doing*” (p. 122, emphasis in original). An important element of meditation practice is to embody “right mindfulness,” which is one part of the Eightfold Path (described in chapter 4). Right mindfulness is defined as attentive awareness to sensations in the body, mind, and world, moment-by-moment (DeMoss, 2011). Along with right mindfulness, meditation also requires “right effort,” another part of the Eightfold Path. In the Eightfold Path, the word “right” denotes skillful and wholesome qualities (Khong, 2009). Thus, meditation requires awareness of the body, mind, and world with skillful and wholesome effort.

To summarize, this chapter briefly described mindfulness, meditation, and some operational outcomes that arise from the practice of both. This abbreviated introduction to mindfulness and meditation was presented primarily from the perspective of modern, secularized

forms of mindfulness, as opposed to the historical, Buddhist form of mindfulness (although some basic Buddhist principles were described). To reiterate, this chapter serves as a brief primer on mindfulness to familiarize the reader with some basic concepts associated with mindfulness and to prepare the reader for more in-depth analyses of mindfulness in the following chapters.

Chapter 4: The Buddhist Roots of Mindfulness

In describing mindfulness, it is critical to inquire into its historical Buddhist roots to explicate the philosophical dimensions that are at the core of the practice. One cannot fully understand authentic mindfulness without engaging with Buddhist philosophy, ethics, and history.

A Brief History

Buddhism originates with the historical Buddha, also known as Śākyamuni, born in the 4th century BCE (Before the Common Era) in northern India/modern day Nepal. “He is said to have become awakened (Sanskrit, *buddha*) at the age of thirty-five, and spent the remaining forty-five years of his life teaching others his path to Awakening” (Dunne, 2016, p. 175). The development of Buddhism occurred over time and in various locations as it spread outward from India approximately 2,500 years ago, along major trade routes (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). From India, Buddhism spread to Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and now, the West. Buddhism has found relative acceptance throughout the regions it has travelled because of its flexibility: “Buddhism is readily accessible to foreigners because it does not try to compete with or replace other religions, and Buddhists prefer to teach the dharma in local languages. Buddhism is naturally open and flexible” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 29). In the Buddhist tradition, sutras—mnemonic devices in the form of stories, are the primary vehicle for knowledge transmission. Sutras are chanted, often aloud, and are available in various languages, further illustrating its accessibility.

There are two main schools of Buddhism: Mahayana and Theravada (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Regardless of the school one identifies with, all Buddhists attend to the *dharma* or

dhamma [teachings of the Buddha] of dependent origination, emptiness, egolessness, and Buddha nature (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Dharma or dhamma “seek to explicate the cosmic or universal laws underlying the world” (Khong, 2009, p. 119). Interestingly, Khong (2009) asserts that: “there is nothing particularly Buddhist about the *dhamma*. The Buddha’s primary aim was to help people take responsibility and reduce their own suffering through understanding the nature of life and universal experiences” (p. 119, emphasis in original).

Dharma

Dharma of dependent origination

Dependent origination describes the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all things. Nothing exists separate from its context or from its origin; everything exists as a function of mutual dependence and continuous interaction. “The Buddha does not talk about a first cause. As everything is interconnected and interrelated, a first cause is inconceivable as the cause becomes the effect, and the next moment the effect becomes the cause to produce another effect” (Khong, 2009, p. 126).

Understanding that “others” are not “other” but an extension of oneself is crucial to realizing that everything is connected. “Buddhism is meant to help us understand that not only are we related to each other personally and socially, but that we are related to a whole universe, materially and spiritually, stretching beyond the artificial boundaries of human beings” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 36).

In the West, conceptualizations of self are attributed to/in the mind, the result of Cartesian dualism, supported by Western science, creating dichotomies such as mind/body and self/other. In comparison, dependent origination forwards the notion that we must have

compassion for all beings—human, more-than-human, and the earth—because we all exist in mutual dependence. Thayer-Bacon (2003) unpacks this concept: “By realizing our nonduality with the world, we overcome the delusions of dualistic [Cartesian] views and end our suffering and alienation caused by these delusions” (p. 28). DeMoss (2011) adds that to exist is “to be a function of various causes and conditions. Things do not have intrinsic natures; they exist only as dependent arisings” (p. 312). This is in contrast to the West where individualism is valued and “finding yourself” (which presumes a permanent and fixed self) is a common pursuit (Kasser, 2009).

Dharma of emptiness

Emptiness is a difficult concept to grasp, especially when examined from a materialist perspective. Emptiness describes the core essence of things, the “thing”-ness of things, the “is”-ness of things (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Much meaning is lost in the literal translation from the Buddhist term *sunyata*. To superimpose a Western, English interpretation on *sunyata* fails to encapsulate its full scope because of the negative associations that the word “emptiness” has in the West. Reification of self is particularly strong in Western cultures, derived from dualistic categorizations of the world, predicated upon a binary in which things either *are* or *are not*. “Emptiness” is often taken literally, as if the self is *actually* non-existent. Orr (2014) describes further:

Sunyata, which is usually translated as ‘emptiness,’ is sometimes misunderstood to mean that things are non-existent but ... the existence of things in the everyday sense is not denied Uses of ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘mine’ are valid in everyday discourse as long as one avoids delusion-producing and logically incoherent reifications. (p. 47)

To this, DeMoss (2011) adds, “Things and persons are empty; nevertheless, these things do exist conventionally As a matter of empirical fact, we experience human actors in our environment Yet, according to Buddhism, this is a false supposition, for ultimately the self is empty” (p. 311). Therefore, the translation of sunyata as emptiness is incomplete, and it is rather more apt to define sunyata as meaning simultaneously empty *and* full. Thayer-Bacon (2003) gives an example: “The mind is empty *and* luminous, meaning unobstructed” (p. 30, emphasis in original). Emptiness represents a world in which there are no subjects or objects that are permanent and fixed.

As an example of emptiness, in Zen Buddhism, “beginner’s mind” represents a non-judgmental way of being (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Beginner’s mind is an orientation toward experience that is open, curious, and unconditioned. “Our original mind is empty, a ready mind, a non-dualistic mind, with no thought of achievement, and no thought of self. It is the beginner’s mind, the mind of compassion that is boundless” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 30).

Dharma of egolessness

Egolessness illustrates the importance of deconstructing and ultimately surrendering the ego (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Buddhists believe that suffering arises from the illusory nature of egoic self, demonstrated by clinging to desired outcomes, and aversion to unwanted outcomes. Reification of ego exacerbates the notion of a fixed, permanent sense of self, which in turn intensifies clinging and aversion. Realizing egolessness is to realize that: “We have no core self—the self is ‘empty,’ and the impermanent identity that we do have is spread out in a matrix of interdependent relations with lots of other empty things” (DeMoss, 2011, p. 312).

Furthermore, “A person does not have an intrinsic permanent changeless identity” (DeMoss, 2011, p. 309), which logically eliminates the need or use for an ego in Buddhism.

To reiterate, the epistemological basis of egolessness is grounded in the Buddhist conceptualization of self that is not permanent, fixed, and separate, but rather, relational, transitory, and always changing.

Buddhists believe there is no eternal and unchanging substance in the ego. All phenomena, including the self, come into and go out of being as a consequence of mutual dependence. The term “self” signifies a relation rather than an entity. Our ignorance stems from our efforts to fixate on the self as a subject/object. We want to believe that our self is continuous, solid, and permanent, instead of impermanent and constantly changing. (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, pp. 31-32).

The difficulty with understanding non-self and egolessness, particularly in the West, is precisely why mindfulness should be practiced in a holistic manner with collective well-being as the primary aim. Prescriptive and instrumental forms of mindfulness only exacerbate the problematic view of self as permanent and fixed due to its focus on self-improvement and individualism.

Dharma of Buddha nature

Buddha nature is a character of mind, referred to as “big Mind” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003), described as pure unconditioned awareness and undifferentiated compassion. All people possess Buddha nature prior to becoming culturally and socially conditioned. Buddha nature is not the addition of any quality; on the contrary, it is the stripping away of myriad layers of conditioning. Thayer-Bacon (2003) elaborates on the process of realizing Buddha nature:

Buddha nature transcends conceptual mind. Achieving enlightenment means recognizing one's own mind as unobstructed, perfect emptiness and fullness, already containing all the Buddha qualities Buddha nature is not a seed that has to grow; it is already the flower. Beings are already Buddhas; in reality there is nothing to be attained. (p. 33)

Buddha nature is manifested through the precepts of non-harming, non-violence, loving-kindness, and undifferentiated compassion (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Compassion, in the context of Buddha nature, is the wisdom arising from a state of consciousness that expresses both emptiness and fullness. Undifferentiated compassion arises by overcoming separateness, or the illusion of separateness, that people experience as individualized selves.

The Three Characteristics of Existence

Within the philosophical framework of Buddhism, there are three characteristics that define existence: impermanence (*annica*), non-self (*anatta*), and suffering (*dukkha*).

When we are mindful of how everything (including the breath) is continually changing and how no phenomenon, whether mental or physical, stays the same for any two moments, we gain insight into the nature of reality as impermanent (*annica*), and insubstantial (*anatta*). This experience can help us to realize that being attached to anything that possesses such characteristics will inevitably lead to suffering (*dukkha*).

(Khong, 2009, pp. 123-124, emphasis in original)

Together, these characteristics explicate the transitory and ever-changing nature of all things in the world. In meditation, focusing on the breath is a means for coming to understand the three characteristics of existence.

Impermanence

As a function of all things being impermanent, change becomes a prominent and defining feature of life. Nothing stays the same and everything is constantly changing (Khong, 2009). Mindfulness cultivates the ability to understand impermanence in life. Much human suffering is caused by the tendency to cling and strive for specific outcomes. Impermanence is central to understanding that everything is connected through emptiness, dependent origination, and egolessness. On impermanence, Orr (2014) adds, “All experience is fleeting, transitory, and ill-defined [Impermanence] and immutability ... give way to the experience of emptiness or non-reification and thus open space for action” (p. 51).

It is important to discern that it is not impermanence in and of itself that causes suffering, but rather, it is the striving and clinging to maintain permanence that causes suffering (Khong, 2009). According to Thayer-Bacon (2003), “We perceive and behave as though things were existent in their own right, therefore causally independent and thus permanent. But this perception of permanence is what leads to our suffering due to our ignorance” (p. 30). Clinging to maintain permanence is problematic insofar as it reifies false or incomplete notions of self and the world. Clinging to permanence may be theoretically linked to having unrealistic expectations resulting in dissatisfaction and suffering.

Non-self and suffering

DeMoss (2011) postulates that one of the root causes of suffering is craving. Craving is rooted in ignorance and fueled by the illusion of a permanent and fixed sense of self, ultimately leading to dissatisfaction and suffering. DeMoss (2011) extrapolates on the liabilities associated with believing the self to be separate, permanent, and fixed:

If in ignorance I regard myself as a fixed essence in need of protection, then this will condition my experience such that things in the world will appear as fixed and alien. I *must* possess those things that make me feel good and get rid of what makes me feel bad. This is craving Craving then conditions the cycle of suffering as each obsession in turn fails to satisfy. (p. 315, emphasis in original)

The illusion of having a fixed, permanent self activates the desire to protect and reinforce itself through self-preservation, thereby perpetuating the cycle of craving and dissatisfaction (DeMoss, 2011). In order to break this cycle of craving and dissatisfaction, it is useful to apply the concepts of emptiness and non-self both intellectually and through praxis. The cessation of craving can be brought about by an investigation into causes and conditions at their roots. DeMoss (2011) suggests: “The cure for such craving requires an understanding of why the self is empty and a mindful awareness of how patterns of cravings develop” (p. 317). Understanding the causes and conditions of these cravings may help in attenuating their effects as they arise. Rather than reacting habitually and unconsciously, mindful awareness supported by mindfulness practice is a beneficial way to counter craving.

Canonical Teachings

Buddhist epistemology is guided by two canonical teachings: the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Both the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path are fundamental in that they summarily codify the most salient principles guiding Buddhist philosophy and then distill them into a systematic schema. They both facilitate the transmission of principles by encouraging praxis.

The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths are the basis of Buddhist ontology, and as a result, informs Buddhist epistemology and all subsequent philosophical positions. Accepting and understanding the Four Noble Truths is a pre-requisite for Buddhist practice.

1. The truth of suffering: suffering is a defining quality of existence
2. The origin of suffering: suffering has its origins in clinging, striving, and aversion
3. The cessation of suffering: arises from letting go of clinging, striving, and aversion
4. The way to cessation of suffering: is realized through praxis of the Eightfold Path

Buddhist teachings stress that praxis plays an important role in realizing the Four Noble Truths. DeMoss (2011) summarizes: “The aim of the [Four Noble Truths] is to end suffering by doing something, not by believing something” (p. 313). This assertion is compelling because it foreshadows the possibility of Buddhism being action-oriented. This link will be examined later in chapter 9.

The Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is a corollary of the Four Noble Truths and it identifies eight qualities to cultivate in order to facilitate the cessation of suffering. The constituent parts of the Eightfold Path are, as described by Feuerstein (2013):

1. Right view: the view that sees things as they are and is not marred by delusions
2. Right thinking/resolve: the resolution to proceed without causing harm to others and to further their welfare
3. Right speech: speech that is spiritually sound

4. Right action/conduct: conduct that follows and promotes the basic ethical norms of Buddhism
5. Right livelihood: livelihood that does not infringe on the major ethical norms of non-harming and non-stealing
6. Right effort: effort that furthers the spiritual values of Buddhism
7. Right mindfulness: the ongoing wholesome exercise of attention
8. Right meditation/concentration: the higher meditation practices that simplify the mind and tap into its subtle potential (p. 170)

In this context, the word “right” intones the qualities of skillfulness and wholesomeness (Khong, 2009). Together, the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path provide a framework that undergirds Buddhist ontology and epistemology and informs Buddhist practice.

Chapter 5: Contemporary Mindfulness in the West

While this thesis is primarily focused on the implications of applying mindfulness in education, it is important to understand the medical and psychological contexts in which it was first embraced in the West (and continues to influence the field). This is because mindfulness in health science and clinical medicine precedes and connects to its application in education (Ergas, 2014). Modern, secular mindfulness and the history of its development in medical science and psychology provides clues as we anticipate its trajectory and development in education.

Jon Kabat-Zinn and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

As far as contemporary mindfulness is concerned, Jon Kabat-Zinn is arguably the most significant figure in the field. Kabat-Zinn developed and codified mindfulness through his work with Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Due to the success and popularity of MBSR, it is most frequently the gateway for Westerners to mindfulness. “Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR and its scientific study have arguably been the driving force behind the mindfulness revolution that has had substantial influence on many current contemplative curricular-based ‘interventions’” (Ergas, 2016, p. 52).

Since MBSR is the form of mindfulness most frequently practiced in the West, I felt it would be useful to describe MBSR by recounting its history and development. MBSR is a clinical therapeutic intervention program aimed to help patients suffering from various ailments through its focus on mediating stress. MBSR has demonstrated beneficial results in its application as a cognitive and psychological practice to bolster well-being.

Jon Kabat-Zinn founded a clinic based on mindfulness and operationalized its practice as a supplement to standard medical treatment. Kabat-Zinn’s work of connecting MBSR with

mainstream medicine and science has set the ways in which mindfulness is practiced in the West. MBSR is formally structured as an 8-week program that involves meditation, yoga, stretching, and mental training. Originally conceived for clinical contexts, it is practiced in a group setting with an instructor. Kabat-Zinn (2011) refers to MBSR as “*participatory medicine*” (p. 293, emphasis in original) in that it is co-directed by healthcare professionals along with the participant.

Contrary to the medical model of “fixing” patients in a binary disease/wellness paradigm, Kabat-Zinn (2011) affirms that MBSR “is grounded altogether in a non-fixing orientation and approach. It is less about *curing* and more about *healing*, which I define as ... *coming to terms with things as they are* in full awareness” (p. 292, emphasis in original). Participation in MBSR requires commitment and effort on the part of the participant to realize their innate capacity for healing, growing, and learning (Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

Mindfulness is considered a mode rather than a state; the distinction being that “state” suggests a transitory condition devoid of intent, while “mode” suggests a psychological process. “Mindfulness is therefore similar to a skill that can be developed with practice” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 234). The practice of mindfulness may facilitate intentional modes that lead to well-being through the cultivation of wholesome, wise, and skillful qualities.

Influences of MBSR

MBSR takes its influences from Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism, as well as other traditions such as Sufism, Taoism, Vedanta, and yoga (Kabat-Zinn, 2011; Orr, 2002; Orr, 2014). Kabat-Zinn (2011) explains: “We cannot follow a strict Theravadan approach, nor a strict Mahayana approach Although elements of all these great traditions and the sub-lineages

within them are relevant” (p. 299). Since MBSR does not align itself with a specific school or lineage of Buddhism, there is flexibility in its approach. However, this lack of connection to a specific teaching may exacerbate commodification and add to the confusion surrounding its Buddhist roots. This and other critiques will be examined in later chapters.

The Beginning of MBSR

The genesis of MBSR can be traced back to a conversation Jon Kabat-Zinn had with the directors at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in the early days of his career as a molecular biologist and researcher. The directors revealed to him that they felt they were only able to help 10-20% of the patients at the hospital (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). This revelation confounded Kabat-Zinn, justifiably: “I was astonished, and asked what happened to the others. I was told that they either got better on their own, or never got better” (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 293). This suggests that upwards of 80-90% of patients were receiving care to which they did not respond, in what appears to be a damning indictment of modern healthcare—that it fails so many. It is perhaps this context that motivated Kabat-Zinn to propose MBSR as a complement to standard care. The directors received Kabat-Zinn’s idea positively and he set about getting the program started. Physicians referred patients that were not responding to their treatments to Kabat-Zinn (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Thus, the Stress Reduction and Relaxation Program began in September 1979. After several years, the program was renamed to the Stress Reduction Clinic in order to affirm that it was a clinical service offered by the Department of Medicine (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). MBSR as practiced today arose out of the work being done at the clinic. Kabat-Zinn (2011) explains his motivation for developing MBSR:

Why not try to make meditation so commonsensical that anyone would be drawn to it?

Why not develop an American vocabulary that spoke to the heart of the matter The entire *raison d'être* of the dharma is to elucidate the nature of suffering and its root causes, as well as provide a practical path to liberation from suffering. (pp. 287-288)

Kabat-Zinn (2011) realized early on that problems could arise from transmitting teachings that are historically, culturally, and spiritually rooted in Buddhism to an American audience—the issue being that America is a predominantly Christian country, while also being a scientifically informed culture (Sun, 2014). Therefore, with MBSR, Kabat-Zinn felt it necessary to develop a language and method of delivery that was relevant and accessible for Americans. Kabat-Zinn (2011) “locates these developments within an historic confluence of two very different epistemologies encountering each other for the first time, that of science and that of the meditative traditions” (p. 281). In order for mindfulness to be considered a legitimate practice in Western scientific contexts, the Buddhist elements were taken away. Therefore, MBSR became a secularized practice of mindfulness, a therapeutic intervention accessible to people even if they were not Buddhist.

Eliminating the Buddhist Elements from Mindfulness

Reflecting on the rise in popularity of mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn (2011) now emphasizes the importance of mindfulness instructors knowing and understanding the Buddhist foundations of mindfulness as part of their professional development, even if the language, delivery, and teachings are presented in a secular manner. Surprisingly, Kabat-Zinn (2011) shares that: “MBSR was developed as one of a possibly infinite number of skillful means for bringing the dharma into mainstream settings” (p. 281). For Kabat-Zinn to divulge that the real aim of MBSR

was to introduce Buddhist teachings into the mainstream is quite an impactful statement. This is especially salient because he initially went to great lengths to cloak the Buddhist elements of MBSR in its early days. “I wanted [mindfulness] to articulate the dharma that underlies the curriculum, but without ever using the word ‘Dharma’ or invoking Buddhist thought or authority, *since for obvious reasons [emphasis added]*, we do not teach MBSR in that way” (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 282). He goes on to explain further:

From the beginning of MBSR, I bent over backward to structure it and find ways to speak about it that avoided as much as possible the risk of it being seen as Buddhist, ‘New Age,’ ‘Eastern Mysticism’ or just plain ‘flakey.’ To my mind this was a constant and serious risk that would have undermined our attempts to present it as commonsensical, evidence-based, and ordinary, and ultimately a legitimate element of mainstream medical care. (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 282)

Further elaborating on his hesitation to link MBSR with Buddhism, Kabat-Zinn recounts a story about soliciting Thich Nhat Hanh for an endorsement to his book, *Full Catastrophe Living*. Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk who has written numerous books on mindfulness. Upon receiving Thich Nhat Hanh’s endorsement, Kabat-Zinn was caught in a dilemma:

Not only was Thich Nhat Hahn definitely a Buddhist authority, his brief endorsement used the very foreign word *dharma* not once, but four times I wondered: ‘Is this the right time for this? Would it be skillful to stretch the envelope at this point? Or would it in the end cause more harm than good?’ (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, pp. 282-283, emphasis in original)

In the end, Kabat-Zinn used Thich Nhat Hanh's words in the preface of *Full Catastrophe Living*. He came to realize that his concerns were perhaps over-cautious: "In retrospect, these concerns now sound a bit silly to me. But at the time they felt significant" (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 283). Kabat-Zinn sensed that the social landscape was changing: "Perhaps by 1990 there was no longer such a strong distinction between the so-called New Age and the mainstream world Advertising alone was materializing and commercializing everything, exploiting even yoga and meditation for its own ends" (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 283).

Observing the gradual acceptance of mindfulness in the mainstream, Kabat-Zinn is beginning to consider what the most skillful course of action concerning MBSR and its relationship with Buddhism should be going forward. He has come to conclude that perhaps it is time to re-establish the connection between MBSR and Buddhism. To that end, Kabat-Zinn (2011) posits:

Perhaps there was no longer as big a risk of our work being identified with a 'lunatic fringe' Perhaps it [is] important to be more explicit about why it might be valuable to bring a universal dharma perspective and means of cultivating it into the mainstream world. (p. 283)

This appears to be an about-face from Kabat-Zinn, who earlier in his career was hesitant to link MBSR directly to Buddhism. I support Kabat-Zinn's reconsideration to make the connection between mindfulness and Buddhism more explicit, for the reason that Buddhist ethics may guide mindfulness practice to be concerned with collective well-being and social justice, rather than individualistic well-being and self-improvement.

Proliferation of Contemporary Mindfulness

Today, there are numerous variants of MBSR used in therapeutic and clinical contexts, with more being developed. Some examples include: Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Mindfulness-Based Relapse Prevention (MBRP), Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting (MBCP), Mindfulness-Based Eating Awareness Training (MB-EAT), Mindfulness-Based Elder Care (MBEC), and so on (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). On the proliferation of mindfulness-based interventions, Khong (2009) warns, “Although the Buddha would consider these approaches as skillful means, in that they help to relieve human suffering, mindfulness is not simply a good therapeutic tool” (p. 118). Similarly, Kabat-Zinn (2011) offers some cautionary words about applying mindfulness into evermore fields: “Such developments have major implications ... to skillfully deliver mindfulness-based interventions in a range of different environments without omitting or denaturing their dharma essence” (p. 284).

It is now apparent that many mindfulness-based interventions have omitted and/or denatured their dharma essence. In large part, this is the result of the commodification, commercialization, instrumentalisation, and simplification of the practice. As one of the leaders (some would say *the* leader) of the mindfulness movement, Kabat-Zinn should take a stronger stance against this commodification. However, it is not difficult to imagine the criticism that Kabat-Zinn would encounter as he himself set the stage for the separation of mindfulness and Buddhism in the early days of MBSR. Nevertheless, it would be beneficial for the mindfulness movement as a whole if Kabat-Zinn were to implore the need for a stronger connection between mindfulness and Buddhist ethics, from which it originated.

Responsibilities and Requirements of MBSR Teachers

Kabat-Zinn (2011) believes that teachers of MBSR have a responsibility to lead by example, by embodying mindfulness holistically, in order to cultivate wholesome qualities in themselves and their students. These qualities include loving-kindness, compassion, equanimity, generosity, and gratitude (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). Kabat-Zinn (2011) also stresses the significance of living and embodying mindfulness on a daily basis through praxis.

The primary responsibility of a mindfulness teacher is not to push participants toward obtaining a specific goal, but rather, their role is to provide a space where first-person experience with the present moment through openhearted awareness can emerge.

An important requirement to teach and learn mindfulness is first-person experience (Orr, 2014), that is, regular and dedicated practice of meditation and living mindfully. As explained by Kabat-Zinn (2011), “Mindfulness can only be understood from the inside out. It is not one more cognitive-behavioural technique to be deployed in a behaviour change paradigm, but a way of being and a way of seeing” (p. 248). He goes on: “Mindfulness in everyday life is the ultimate challenge and practice” (p. 296), and “Without that living foundation, none of what really matters is available to us in ways that are maximally healing, transformative, compassionate, and wise” (p. 284).

On MBSR teacher training, Kabat-Zinn (2011) emphasizes the importance of meditation, or more specifically, participation in a meditation retreat (preferably 7-10 days or longer) as a crucial experiential prerequisite. Another requirement to becoming a MBSR teacher is to have a qualified instructor, that is, to uphold a lineage of mindfulness instruction from a vetted and legitimate teacher. Kabat-Zinn (2011) restates the requirements of training in MBSR: “Mindfulness practice is ultimately not merely a matter of the intellect or cognition or

scholarship, but of direct authentic full-spectrum first-person experience, nurtured, catalysed, reinforced and guided by the second-person perspective of a well-trained and highly experienced and empathic teacher” (p. 292). Consequently, an issue that arises is whether a mindfulness teacher is required to be Buddhist, and the degree to which the teacher should be familiar with Buddhism. Khong (2009) answers:

I believe that the Buddha teaches an attitude, not an affiliation. However, although [teachers] do not need to be Buddhists, it is important for them to practice mindfulness personally It cannot be employed skillfully without practitioners familiarizing themselves with the subtleties of the practice or the aspects of the Buddha’s teachings that ground it. (p. 118)

On the subject of teaching standards, Kabat-Zinn believes that the responsibility to maintain ethical standards rests on MBSR instructors themselves: “MBSR is at its healthiest and best when the responsibility to ensure its integrity, quality, and standards of practice is being carried by each MBSR instructor him or herself” (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 295). He continues:

The responsibility to live an ethical life lies on the shoulders and in the hearts of each one of us who chooses to engage in the work of mindfulness-based interventions. It too is a distributive Dharma responsibility. And the first line of defense in terms of potential transgression or betrayal is always awareness of one’s own motivations and emotions. (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 295)

Despite Kabat-Zinn’s call for teachers and practitioners to maintain ethical integrity in their practice of mindfulness, the rise of instrumental and prescriptive forms of mindfulness, colloquially referred to as “McMindfulness” (Purser & Loy, 2013), are beginning to proliferate,

necessitating an examination into the motives and intent of these approaches. These and other critiques of mindfulness will be examined in later chapters.

Chapter 6: Mindfulness in Education

In order to weigh the consequences of applying mindfulness in education, it is necessary to first examine the reasons for, and conditions precipitating the use of mindfulness in classrooms as a pedagogical practice. By analyzing these issues, the emergence of informed insight, critique, and recommendations can arise from careful examination of the evidence. In addition, serious consideration should be given to the wide range of motivations for applying mindfulness in education. This chapter examines some of these motivations, intentions, and rationales.

Mindfulness-based programs are beginning to be implemented in schools in North America, Western Europe, Australia, and beyond. This move is supported by evidence to suggest:

A wide range of benefits ... for both teachers—improving focus and awareness, increasing responsiveness to students' needs, enhancing classroom climate—and students in supporting readiness to learn, strengthening attention and concentration, reducing anxiety and enhancing social and emotional learning. (Hyland, 2015, p. 13)

These and other compelling benefits (Oman et al., 2008) entice school administrators with the promise of higher performing students *and* teachers (Hyland, 2015; Roeser et al., 2013).

However, these purported benefits raise questions about taken-for-granted assumptions regarding education, such as: why is anxiety so high in the first place? Or, why is it beneficial to increase attention and concentration? Critically examining assumptions about the aims of education provide a way to understand the larger context of educational issues. Instrumental and prescriptive forms of mindfulness in education support instrumental and prescriptive educational goals, which are themselves informed by neoliberal capitalist principles that structurally

constitute modern Western societies. In order to transform a culture that privileges individualism toward more collectivist values, it is beneficial to see how practices such as mindfulness, when engaged holistically, may aid in this transformation.

When investigating mindfulness in education, it is prudent to evaluate the intent behind its implementation from multiple perspectives, including those of: the institution, administrators, teachers, and students. What is it that we are trying to achieve by implementing contemplative practices in the classroom? Is it to reduce stress? Or to have docile and compliant students? Or to increase test scores? Or to elevate the reputation of the school? Or as a method to manage behavioural issues? Without an ethical foundation rooting pedagogical practices such as mindfulness in education, these issues become tenuous and problematic. Hyland (2015) explains the perils of debasing mindfulness from an ethical base:

Insofar as McM mindfulness strategies separate the techniques of present-moment awareness from the ethical foundations of mindfulness in Buddhist traditions, they are rendered ineffective in terms of the important function of fostering compassion and other-regarding virtues. This is crucial in the context of mindfulness in schools and colleges in which the cultivation of values dovetails with educational aims. (p. 16)

I am interested in examining mindfulness in education conceptually, to understand how it fits with the broader aims of education and curricula. Looking at the larger context within which mindfulness in education is situated (i.e., social, political, historical) is beneficial for coming to understand how and why things work the way they do, and how and why it is necessary to make specific changes to guide the application of mindfulness in education going forward. Without a holistic, wide-angle understanding of issues in education, meaningful change cannot be enacted.

Student Well-Being and Mental Health: Redux

Using mindfulness to address student well-being and mental health is one rationale for its application in education. As stated in chapter 1, the prevalence of mental health problems among youth is growing in Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). Twenty percent of children and adolescents in Canada experience mental health problems to the extent that they require professional help (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). Furthermore, mental health is an area of major concern because, “By 2020, mental illness is expected to be the country’s leading health care cost” (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007, p. 21). Mental health is gaining attention as a policy issue for school administrators and politicians in Canada. Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) further elaborates on the looming crisis regarding student mental health and well-being:

Recent years have witnessed increased empirical attention to the school-based promotion of students’ social and emotional competence as educators, parents, policymakers, and other societal agencies contemplate solutions to persistent problems during late childhood and early adolescence such as poor academic motivation ... school dropout ... school bullying and aggression ... and mental health problems The reality is that today’s schools are facing increased pressure to improve academic performance, while also giving attention to children’s social-emotional needs, and are thus expected to do more than ever before with diminishing resources. (p. 2)

Initiatives that address student well-being is one way in which various agencies are attempting to curb the rise in mental health problems in student populations:

Increasing numbers of educators have begun to recognize the importance of the school-based promotion of children’s social and emotional competence as an integral component

of education to foster resiliency and stave off an upward trajectory of aggressive behavior and mental health problems (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010, p. 138).

To illustrate the sense of urgency surrounding student mental health, the Ontario Ministry of Education has made student well-being a priority in their policy documentation: “We must heighten our focus on well-being as a crucial prerequisite for long-term success. We must also acknowledge that the well-being of children and youth is our priority as a society” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 2). An example of this policy in practice is demonstrated by the declaration that, “All school boards now have a Mental Health Leader who develops and implements strategies to support students with mental health needs and addictions” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 4).

Increasingly, administrators, principals, educators, and researchers are finding it necessary to be proactive in addressing student mental health problems. It is under such conditions that we see many instances of the application of mindfulness in education—that is, to combat stress and to bolster student well-being. The results of applying mindfulness in education have been generally positive:

The findings demonstrate that giving children mindfulness attention training in combination with opportunities to practice optimism, gratitude, perspective-taking, and kindness to others can not only improve cognitive skills but also lead to significant increases in social and emotional competence and well-being in the real-world setting of regular elementary classrooms. (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 20)

However, as beneficial as these programs may be, mindfulness in education, like other pedagogical practices, is not morally neutral, and therefore must be subject to critical reflection

and analysis. Critiques of instrumental and prescriptive forms of mindfulness will be addressed in chapter 7.

Increased Stress Levels Among Students

As suggested above, one reason that mindfulness is being applied in schools is to counter the rise of stress and stress-related problems that students face. The study of stress has become a burgeoning field, both in academic research and in pop science. The lifestyle industry has profited from this interest in stress and stress management. Mindfulness is increasingly being used as a tool to combat stress (Purser & Loy, 2013) by peddling products that purport to promote “mindfulness.” Educational institutions, from K-12 to higher education, are seeking out various stress-management interventions to address the rise of student stress (Oman et al., 2008), among which, mindfulness is currently in vogue.

Stress is an inevitable and normal part of everyday life; however, there is evidence to suggest that cumulative stress compounds over time and has deleterious effects on well-being. That is, “Although a certain level of stress may result in improved performance, too much stress can adversely affect physical and mental health” (Oman et al., 2008, p. 569) and, more specifically, stress “may lead ... into unproductive rumination that consumes energy and compounds the experience of stress. Intensified stress can undermine resilience factors, such as hope” (Oman et al., 2008, p. 569). If left unchecked, stress may lead to serious health problems, “including anxiety and depression, suicidal ideation and hopelessness, poor health behaviors, increase in headaches, sleep disturbances, increased rates of athletic injury, and the common cold” (Oman et al., 2008, p. 569). It is not surprising then, that Jon Kabat-Zinn focused on stress-reduction in his development of MBSR, as stress is linked to so many negative health outcomes.

Administrators in institutions of higher education are looking at mindfulness and meditation as a means to counter rising stress levels because of its suggested positive health benefits, which include, “a wide range of positive outcomes related to effective functioning, including academic performance, concentration, perceptual sensitivity, reaction time, memory, self-control, empathy, and self-esteem” (Oman et al., 2008, p. 570). With this wide range of positive benefits, it is not surprising that educational administrators are beginning to pursue mindfulness as a response to stress-related issues in schools.

It is nevertheless problematic to regard mindfulness as merely a tool to mitigate stress. When used in this way, mindfulness is denatured and loses some of its transformative potential. This transformative potential is necessary to realize a holistic, other-regarding form of mindfulness that is concerned with collective well-being and social justice. Therefore, instrumental forms of mindfulness, while useful in some regards, are ethically incomplete.

Attention

One of the benefits of mindfulness championed by contemporary mindfulness programs is its ability to facilitate control of attention, described here by Bishop et al. (2004): “Mindfulness can be defined, in part, as the self-regulation of attention, which involves sustained attention [and] attention switching” (p. 233). Many of the widely touted benefits of mindfulness are related to attention and attention regulation (Bishop, 2004; Oman et al., 2008). It may be inferred that a large reason why mindfulness “works” well in educational contexts is because it augments attention and related constructs such as memory, concentration, and perception (Oman et al., 2008; Purser & Loy, 2013). While I tentatively support the use of mindfulness to help students increase their well-being, I am hesitant to support the use of mindfulness merely to

increase academic performance (i.e., if the aim of mindfulness in education is solely to increase academic performance and it is to the detriment of collective well-being and social justice).

Increasing academic performance is not to be confused as the aim of mindfulness. Nonetheless, I restate my claim that I support the use of mindfulness in education with some strong reservations and recommendations.

Critically Analyzing Modern Education

Before I look into mindfulness in education further, I will take a critical look at modern education to investigate why stress has become such a pervasive issue for students today.

The neoliberalism that has directed economic policy for the past 30 years is increasingly present in educational policy and practice, as demonstrated by programs such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the United States, which emphasizes standardization and accountability. It may be argued that such programs facilitate the view of students as data points in a data set in competition with each other rather than as whole beings in a learning community. Ergas (2016) critiques this phenomenon: “Current educational practice tends to be obsessed with assessing [performance], far more than with the ‘selves’ (or no-selves) behind the performance or with providing students with meaningful reasons for why they should perform at all” (p. 51). To extend Ergas’ questioning, why is performance so important in modern education systems? Does high academic performance benefit the greater good for society and foster collective well-being? These questions require an examination of not only the particular pedagogical practice (mindfulness in education), but also analysis of the system in which it is being applied (modern, Western, mainstream education).

Neoliberalism molds education into a system based on an input/output model where: “students and teachers [are] subjected to audit cultures premised upon control that emphasise outcomes and [performance] rather than giving them the space to be, reflect and find their own voices” (O’Donnell, 2016, p. 41). Furthermore, “by prioritising [performance] indicators and valuing only that which can be measured risks instrumentalising what is a rich existential and ethical practice using inappropriate forms of evaluation” (O’Donnell, 2016, p. 39).

The increase in stress-related problems, psychological disorders, and behavioural issues in schools are indicative of fundamental problems rooted in modern curricula and the institutional conditions that exacerbate and promote *dis-ease*. There is a lack of reflexivity on the part of institutions on their role and causal responsibility in the perpetuation of maladaptive practices. O’Donnell (2016) places the onus on institutions and administrators to critically examine important questions in this regard: “What role [do] institutional and school cultures have in creating problems experienced by many young people, the problems that mindfulness seeks to retrospectively address Do practices, institutional structures and objectives and aims in education create stress, comparison or anxiety?” (p. 40).

Focusing mindfulness interventions solely on reducing stress or increasing academic performance results in overlooking the underlying problems in modern education by “paralysing opportunities for critique and resistance whilst refusing to examine the roles of schools and educational policy in creating some of the suffering of students” (O’Donnell, 2016, p. 40). Until such critiques are addressed, it is necessary to make explicit “the responsibility of educational policymakers and of schools themselves in cultivating cultures and curricula to create ‘outer conditions’ that are more supportive to students and teachers” (O’Donnell, 2016, p. 40). Prescriptive forms of mindfulness only serve to obscure the root causes of stress in schools, and

they absolve school administrators (and society as a whole) of their responsibility to shape schools in more holistic ways with concern for student well-being.

A large problem in education is the replication of the status quo—the perpetuation of dominant, hegemonic norms. Technical proficiency, capacity for retaining information, and mechanical precision are qualities that are valued and pursued in modern education (Magill & Rodriguez, 2014). Additionally, education and the economy are inextricably linked as co-dependent agents that reinforce each other (Bai, 2001; Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007). As such, modern education is complicit in accommodating the needs of capitalist materialism insofar as it elevates certain values and skills above others (Bai 2001; Magill & Rodriguez, 2014). The ongoing decrease in funding toward the arts and humanities in North American educational institutions is an example of the erosion of the liberal arts as a valued pursuit, while the simultaneous increase in funding for the science and technology sectors may suggest the influence of the military-industrial complex on educational aims (Magill & Rodriguez, 2014; Orr, 2014). In this regard, the application of mindfulness in education for instrumental means is problematic because, as Ergas (2016) describes: “The location of the discourse surrounding contemplative practice in the curriculum within this economic orientation matches the interests of many policy makers and principals, particularly in the midst of a climate in which accountability and standardisation hover over decision-making processes” (pp. 50-51). These conditions in modern education create and exacerbate stress in students’ lives by negating embodied, relational, and holistic (Thayer-Bacon, 2003) ways of being and, instead, perpetuate short-sighted, disembodied, instrumental, and competitive ways of being.

Critically Analyzing Mindfulness in Education

While modern education is principally future- and goal- oriented (Bai, 2001), contemplative practices such as mindfulness, if practiced holistically, encourage students to inhabit the present moment. The very nature of cultivating attention to observe the present moment ostensibly call curricular goals into question, which are focused on *somewhere else* and *later*—antithetical to living in the present moment *here* and *now* (Ergas, 2016).

Proponents of mindfulness suggest that affective benefits such as stress-reduction, increased attention, calmness etc., are important outcomes—and indeed, they are—however, these benefits should not be confused as the ends to the means, particularly if the means to those ends are instrumental and prescriptive in nature. Hyland (2015) describes how instrumental mindfulness may be detrimental to education:

McMindfulness programmes are driven by the same reductionist instrumentalism—the codifying, commercializing, and commodifying of educational aims—which characterise managerial trends in education They are corrosive of fundamental values which support and nourish rich and deep learning, teaching and education. (p. 15)

There are more noble and important reasons for incorporating mindfulness into curriculum than merely for its instrumental benefits. A more wholesome reason to apply mindfulness in education is to increase students' capacity for compassion toward others “as a moral resource for personal, civil and professional life” (Orr, 2014, p. 42), which can lead to ethical and pro-social behaviour that is in harmony with personal, social, and environmental well-being (Orr, 2014).

In spite of the focus on stress reduction as a principle goal of contemporary mindfulness (as demonstrated by MBSR), stress reduction is actually an *indirect* outcome of mindfulness, not

the aim of it. Additionally, while MBSR is concerned with *reducing* stress, it is perhaps a misnomer, as the true aim of the program is to teach people to change their *relationship to* stress rather than to reduce it.

On the instrumental benefits of mindfulness in education, Orr (2014) comments, “While enhancing the student’s performance through the use of mindfulness is a valid goal, we will see in what follows that its instrumentalisation solely for self-aggrandizement is a gross violation of the spirit and purpose of this practice” (p. 43). Conversely, when compassion is the principal quality cultivated in mindfulness practice, the positive benefits manifest in a variety of ways: “Compassion is widely appealed to by Buddhist leaders as the foundation of moral action in addressing a wide range of issues, from overcoming personal suffering, to human rights, to peace work, to environmental issues and beyond” (Orr, 2014, p. 43). The key here is that personal well-being—while important—is just one component in mindfulness, and there are multiple other dimensions to consider. These dimensions will be explored further in chapter 9.

In spite of all of the criticism directed toward contemporary mindfulness, especially in regard to its deviation from Buddhist ethical and philosophical principles, O’Donnell (2016) proposes that there are more urgent questions to address, and suggests that strict adherence and fidelity to Buddhist philosophy may not be necessary:

Perhaps it might be wise to be less worried about the authenticity of secularised versions of mindfulness, and more concerned by how we can make schools more mindful places which marry the most creative pedagogies with the insights of mindful practice and creative practices of attention, helping us to reflect once more on the existential questions that philosophers of education have posed for so long: what do we hope for from

education? What do we value in education? What are the ends of education, and how do our means support those ends? (p. 45)

In order to realize the scenario in the quote above, it would be beneficial to expand the scope of self-centered, prescriptive, and instrumental forms of mindfulness that are currently dominant to become more of a “holistic practice, an ethics and a philosophy, rather than simply a tool or technique” (O’Donnell, 2016, p. 39). While I agree with O’Donnell to a certain extent (about being less concerned about the authenticity of secularized versions of mindfulness), I maintain that mindfulness rooted in Buddhist ethics and philosophy provides a foundation that is beneficial in order to realize collective well-being and social justice.

In Defense of Mindfulness in Education

Despite criticism of mindfulness in education, there are reasons to suggest that applying mindfulness in schools is better for the well-being of students than no mindfulness at all. Ergas (2016) points out that there are transformative elements extant even in instrumental versions of mindfulness:

Students that are skillfully instructed in the practice of mindfulness as part of their school day (even when instrumentally construed), are receiving deep teachings, some of which can be elaborated as follows: (a) attending the present-moment inner experience is an educationally worthwhile activity, (b) Our inner-world is a meaningful arena, (c) meaning might exist *here* and *now* and not only in the future in which a certain educational aim might be achieved. (pp. 47-48, emphasis in original)

O’Donnell (2016) likewise postulates that denatured and simplified forms of mindfulness may be beneficial to students in spite of their inherent limitations: “Even mindfulness practices

that stay at the level of somaesthetic practices, such as noticing the rise and fall of one's breath without explicit ethical exploration, may allow for 'breathing spaces' in schools and an ethos that values this spaciousness" (p. 44). Although it is not clear exactly what O'Donnell means by "breathing spaces," it may be inferred that the ability for students to regulate their breathing in a manner that is physically, psychologically, and emotionally centering may be beneficial. While I do not disagree with O'Donnell, I feel that unless the entire school embraces this form of "spaciousness," the benefit of having this breathing space may be limited. That is, unless everyone buys in (at the school), then it is difficult to create the desired change. Nevertheless, I agree that it is beneficial for students to have some time for stillness and reflection in their day.

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, mindfulness is being applied in education for a myriad of reasons, from reducing stress, to increasing attention, and more. Likewise, the type of mindfulness employed in classrooms range from instrumental to slightly less instrumental. Much more progress can be made to further more holistic forms of mindfulness to affect personal and societal transformation. These ideas will be examined further in chapters 8 and 9.

Chapter 7: Critiques of Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been hijacked by the lifestyle industry, business, the military, and others, driven by Western conceptualizations of self-improvement, which are in turn propelled by neoliberal capitalist principles of endless growth, progress, and individualism.

Hyland (2015), commenting on contemporary mindfulness, states: “The burgeoning interest in, and appeal of, mindfulness practice has led to a reductionism and commodification of the founding principles—popularly labelled ‘McMindfulness’—which threatens to subvert and militate against the achievement of the original aims” (p. 11).

Purser and Loy (2013) coined the term “McMindfulness,” referencing a well-known fast-food chain to describe a corporate, formulaic, prescriptive form of mindfulness. There are multitudes of pitfalls to applying mindfulness in unwholesome, self-serving ways:

Decontextualizing mindfulness from its original liberative and transformative purpose, as well as its foundation in social ethics, amounts to a Faustian bargain. Rather than applying mindfulness as a means to awaken individuals and organizations from the unwholesome roots of greed, ill will and delusion, it is usually being refashioned into a banal, therapeutic, self-help technique that can actually reinforce those roots. (Purser & Loy, 2013, p. 1)

The market-driven rise of contemporary mindfulness offers a plethora of programs, consumer goods, apps for devices, and other products that purport to increase mindfulness (Hyland, 2015). Mindfulness has become a kind of *Dharma-lite*, devoid of ethical and philosophical principles that root the practice to wholesome, skillful, and wise qualities of being. The commercialization of mindfulness has diluted, or in many cases, completely obscured the Buddhist foundation on which it is based. Consequently, there is a growing critique about the simplification,

commercialization, and commodification of mindfulness. Hyland (2015) comments that: “There is a special absurdity in the notion of pursuing spirituality in the same way that consumer products are pursued Such a process is clearly at odds with sound practice in both educational and mindfulness fields” (p. 16).

The use of mindfulness primarily to reduce stress, increase attention, improve executive control, and other instrumental benefits is problematic because there is a “risk of flattening and diluting [mindfulness] practices, both through the process of their remoulding to allow for scientific validation, and through their dissociation from the ethical grounds within wisdom-traditions” (Ergas, 2016, p. 47). The dissociation of mindfulness from its ethical principles in Buddhism is an ongoing point of contention and issue of concern for the future of the practice. In principle, mindfulness cannot be separated from Buddhism. Yet, as stated by Kabat-Zinn (2011) in chapter 5, the development of MBSR depended on the camouflaging of its Buddhist elements. The morally simplistic and hardline argument that contemporary mindfulness must be rooted in Buddhism is difficult to advance, realistically, even if the argument is fundamentally sound—it is difficult to go backwards and take away something that is already available.

Contemporary Mindfulness: Individualism Replaces Buddhism

Khong (2009) notes: “The popularity of [mindfulness] has sometimes led practitioners to overlook other aspects of the Buddha’s teachings. As a result, mindfulness is often leveled down to a technique, rather than an attitude towards living” (p. 120). Purser and Loy (2013) add, “The result is an atomized and highly privatized version of mindfulness practice” (p. 2).

Where Buddhism once provided an ethical and philosophical foundation for mindfulness, its secularization and simplification effectively eliminated the Buddhist elements in its contemporary forms and created a void that has been filled by individualistic values.

Uncoupling mindfulness from its ethical and religious Buddhist context is understandable as an expedient move to make such training a viable product on the open market. But the rush to secularize and commodify mindfulness into a marketable technique may be leading to an unfortunate denaturing of this ancient practice, which was intended for far more than relieving a headache, reducing blood pressure, or helping executives become better focused and more productive. (Purser & Loy, 2013, p. 1)

The original Buddhist conceptualization of mindfulness is holistic by design; furthermore, it is not about self-improvement. Instead, mindfulness “is guided by intentions and motivations based on self-restraint, wholesome mental states, and ethical behaviors—goals that include but supersede stress reduction and improvements in concentration” (Purser & Loy, 2013, p. 2). Self-restraint, wholesome mental states, and ethical behaviours are theoretically connected to collective well-being and social justice (Orr, 2002). Therefore, it is crucial to maintain a holistic approach when applying mindfulness in education and other fields, if the aim is to realize collective well-being and social justice.

Science Instrumentalizes Mindfulness

In scientific research on mindfulness, the typical paradigm follows a particular course: mindfulness is deconstructed, specific health benefits are selected for, and attempts are made to isolate and maximize their effects. As a result, terms such as “dosage” and “efficacy” begin to be applied. The quantification of mindfulness and its atomization to attain specific outcomes leads

to questions like: What type of meditation is best? How long? How often? How do we measure the results? (Dahl, Lutz, & Davidson 2015; Davidson & Kaszniak, 2015; Hölzel et al., 2011).

Such terms and questions are antithetical to the original aims of mindfulness because:

Mindfulness, as understood and practiced within the Buddhist tradition, is not merely an ethically-neutral technique for reducing stress and improving concentration

[Mindfulness is about] our efforts to avoid unwholesome and unskillful behaviours, while developing those that are conducive to wise action, social harmony, and compassion.

(Purser & Loy, 2013, p. 1)

The appeal of instrumentalising and atomizing mindfulness into component pieces in order to extricate desired effects inevitably ends up diluting the practice. Thus, scientific validation is accelerating the commodification of mindfulness.

Kabat-Zinn's position on instrumental mindfulness is diplomatic and somewhat obtuse, perhaps as a consequence of his pivotal role in essentially starting the whole (contemporary) movement in the first place. On the one hand, he asserts the importance of maintaining a strong connection between mindfulness and Buddhism: "It can be hugely helpful to have a strong personal grounding in the Buddhadharma and its teachings. In fact, it is virtually essential and indispensable for teachers of MBSR and other mindfulness-based interventions" (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 299). On the other hand, he alludes to the importance of secularizing mindfulness: "Yet little or none of [the dharma] can be brought into the classroom except in essence" (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 299). This apparent contradiction is confusing and does little to provide clear direction for those interested in applying mindfulness in various fields. It would be more helpful for Kabat-Zinn to take a stronger stance on the connection between mindfulness and Buddhism. It is only through extensive background research that I have found that Kabat-Zinn has formal

training in Buddhism. The general public, without this knowledge on Kabat-Zinn's Buddhist training will likely find his above assertions confusing, as they are confusing for me.

Contemporary mindfulness would benefit from clarity in the message, especially coming from Kabat-Zinn, the founder of MBSR.

The rise of instrumental and prescriptive forms of mindfulness in education is preceded by its application in health science, psychology, and neuroscience. To fit into the scientific paradigm, mindfulness was decontextualized to become amenable as an academic field of study. This was followed by its application as a therapeutic tool and technique (Hyland, 2015; Khong, 2009). By providing a scientific basis for studying mindfulness and meditation, an unfortunate outcome has been the “scientification” of mindfulness.

Scientific Validation

Since mindfulness has roots in Buddhism, its acceptance in the Western mainstream necessitated scientific validation—science being the gatekeeper, so to speak. In other words, to legitimize mindfulness for Western audiences, it is necessary to provide scientific evidence to support its utility and efficacy (Ergas, 2014). Scientific validation is required, principally because mindfulness is connected to Buddhism and Buddhism is a religion. O'Donnell (2016) explains that:

Mindfulness might also be described as a Trojan Horse that needed to be disguised in order to be permitted entry into those institutions and organisations that would otherwise be wary of anything that might be viewed as ideological or religious, or those institutions that accept only interventions premised upon experimental scientific evidence. (p. 39)

The acceptance of mindfulness in the West is predicated upon science and technology—mechanisms that unfortunately intensify its instrumentalisation.

As an indication of the (relative) acceptance of mindfulness in research, the number of academic publications on mindfulness has grown exponentially in the past 30 years (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011), from two in 1980 to approximately 400 in 2011 (Hyland, 2015). “The overwhelming majority of such academic publications involve the quantitative measurement of mindfulness—the mutation of present-moment ‘being’ into outcome-oriented ‘doing’” (Hyland, 2015, pp. 14-15). An online search for the term “mindfulness” results in 45 million hits on Google (June 27, 2017). The number of books written about mindfulness is also increasing, which include topics such as: mindful parenting, mindful eating, mindful teaching, mindful politics, mindful therapy, mindful leadership, and many others (Purser & Loy, 2013). This list of book topics illustrates how mindfulness is being applied liberally into many fields. On this, Purser and Loy (2013) observe how “the mindfulness revolution appears to offer a universal panacea for resolving every area of daily concern” (p. 1).

O’Donnell (2016) posits that the increasing interest in mindfulness is the result of the “psychosomatic symptoms of anxiety and stress owing to the accelerated pace of life under contemporary capitalism” (p. 29), also illustrated by the growing levels of stress and stress-related problems among students demonstrated in chapters 1 and 6.

As mindfulness spreads to wider audiences, there will be an inevitable denaturing of its Buddhist philosophical foundations (Marx, 2015). This is one of the prices of offering mindfulness on a large scale, necessitating simplification and instrumentalisation.

O’Donnell (2016) describes the transformation of mindfulness from its historical form to the contemporary form that is dominant today: “Mindfulness has been uprooted from rich

wisdom traditions and has thus lost sight of its ethical orientation becoming a programmatic rather than pedagogical practice; it is simply another element in a very profitable self-help industry” (p. 29). The for-profit, market-driven, and consumer oriented forms of mindfulness prevalent today represent a significant deviation from its original conceptualization rooted in Buddhism.

In some cases, contemporary forms of mindfulness retain elements of Buddhism. In many of these instances, the positive benefits of mindfulness (e.g., stress reduction) are significant and compelling enough for Westerners to overlook and bypass the connection that mindfulness has to Buddhism, thereby deeming that connection (between mindfulness and Buddhism) to be innocuous, and therefore “safe” to engage with. This may theoretically demonstrate the appropriation of an Eastern spiritual practice by mainstream Western culture. One can also observe evidence of this process with the commodification of yoga. Those familiar with yoga in its original, historical context will find similarities between the commodification of yoga and the commodification of mindfulness. Yoga has been absorbed and commodified by the self-help and fitness industries in the West:

The distortion, devaluation and misuse of mindfulness practice ... has been largely the fate of its mother discipline, Hindu yoga. [Yoga in the West focuses] on asana [physical poses] ... [therefore,] this vital and complex system of holistic human development has been commoditized and thereby reduced to little more than a physical exercise routine.

(Orr, 2014, pp. 42-43)

Feuerstein (2013) likewise points out the commodification and commercialization of yoga and suggests that it is more accurate to refer to the style of yoga practiced in the West as Modern Postural Yoga (MPY) to distinguish it from the historical spiritual discipline from which it

originates. MPY is primarily focused on physical fitness, while historical yoga is a holistic spiritual practice in its original conceptualization. “Today tens of millions of people around the globe ... use it to promote fitness, health, and beauty, with only a small contingent practicing Yoga as a lifestyle or spiritual discipline” (Feuerstein, 2013, p. 12). Other terms suggested to describe contemporary yoga include: McYoga, Transnational Anglophone Yoga, and Mainstream Western Physical Culture (Feuerstein, 2013). Would it be beneficial to differentiate contemporary mindfulness in a similar way?—to indicate the degree to which Buddhism remains integrated in its delivery? Should the naming of mindfulness practices include the prefixes *secular* or *historical*? These are interesting questions to consider in further research into the development of mindfulness.

Yoga could provide clues to the potential trajectory of mindfulness in the West. Similar to yoga, there are practitioners of mindfulness that engage with it in holistic ways. Nevertheless, there are undoubtedly greater numbers who come to it as a behaviour modification or stress-reduction technique. When practicing mindfulness from the Buddhist perspective, reduced stress and increased attention are merely indirect by-products that arise from praxis of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, both of which guide human development in wholesome, wise, and skillful ways that are socially conscious and ethically principled.

Corporate and Military Applications of Mindfulness

Corporations are now starting to use mindfulness (Paulson et al., 2013; Purser & Loy, 2013) as a neurocognitive performance enhancer that provides competitive advantage in a neoliberal, market-driven economy (O’Donnell, 2016). Similarly, mindfulness is being applied in

the US military to counter post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and to train soldiers to be more alert (Paulson et al., 2013).

The use of mindfulness in corporations and the military calls into question whether there are logical and ethical limits to the application of mindfulness in evermore fields. Is it a contradiction for mindfulness to be implemented in these contexts? Hyland (2015) points out,

The preposterous absurdity of divorcing mindfulness from its ethical foundations of compassionate non-harming in order to train soldiers to be more alert and efficient.

Similarly, the use of mindfulness training to boost productivity, increase profits and encourage consumer materialism is no less outrageous and oxymoronic. (p. 14)

In principle, the opposing values of corporate materialism and the military in contrast to the Buddhist aims of interconnectedness and compassion demonstrate the ethical dissonance precipitated by the application of contemporary mindfulness into evermore fields. However, the delineation between holistic and programmatic mindfulness is not always clear nor simple—there are benefits to mindfulness even when not explicitly tied to Buddhism, as demonstrated in previous chapters. Still, the criticism holds, according to Hyland (2015), insofar as, “Foundational mindfulness values such as right livelihood, loving-kindness, compassion and non-materialism are self-evidently and fundamentally at odds with aspects of the core business of corporations and the military” (Hyland, 2015, p. 14). Despite these concerns, scientists and mindfulness teachers are offering mindfulness to soldiers (Paulson et al., 2013). Researchers who support the implementation of mindfulness in the US military suggest that it assists working memory by regulating attention and stress, potentially saving lives. On this, Jon Kabat-Zinn, cited in Paulson et al. (2013) reasons:

Meditation training and practice in the military probably actually saves lives rather than [it] turns people into better killers. And this could be because a robust working memory capacity ... doesn't degrade in the Marines who actually practice mindfulness It may make the difference between killing a whole bunch of innocent people and holding fire appropriately. (pp. 97-98)

Amishi Jha, a scientist who researches mindfulness, suggests that working memory is the key to holding an ethical code of behaviour in mind during high stress situations. Without an ethical code (and to extrapolate, working memory), people fall back into reactive modes that may lead to innocent lives being lost in combat scenarios (Paulson et al., 2013).

The use of mindfulness by the US military demonstrates a prime example of the ethical complexities of using mindfulness in increasingly diverse fields. One of the largest critiques of implementing mindfulness in the military, as previously alluded to is, "There is no consideration of ahimsa, the Sanskrit term for the Buddhist precept of non-harming or non-violence that permeates ethics" (O'Donnell, 2016, p. 37).

Jon Kabat-Zinn, in Paulson et al. (2013), appears to condone the implementation of mindfulness in the US military; however, he is also cautious of its continued application:

Morally and ethically speaking, I think it's important to understand that these are complex issues, but the argument can be made that training in mindfulness may be helping soldiers to function more effectively and do what needs to be done to save lives rather than to take lives. (p. 98)

Here, Kabat-Zinn finds himself in a precarious situation where he defends (to a certain extent) the use of mindfulness in the military, while also remaining cautious not to overstate its abilities. I stand by the belief that the use of mindfulness in the military is problematic for the reason that

it goes against fundamental elements of Buddhist ethics and philosophy, most notably non-harming and non-violence.

Mindfulness as Religious Indoctrination

Van Gordon, Shonin, and Griffiths (2016) argue that contemporary mindfulness treatments are unethical because they cloak Buddhism and expose it to people who are expecting secular therapeutic interventions. According to Van Gordon et al. (2016), contemporary mindfulness is neither Buddhist: “It is questionable whether contemporary MBIs [Mindfulness-Based Interventions] actually embody and teach mindfulness in a manner bearing resemblance to the traditional Buddhist meaning to this term” (p. 94), nor truly secular:

Most participants of MBIs think that they are receiving a non-religious and non-spiritual intervention designed to enhance their levels of psychosomatic wellbeing. Therefore, it is misleading and ethically inappropriate to assert that an MBI is non-spiritual and not Buddhist-related if ... an underlying intention is to use MBIs as vehicles for introducing individuals to the Buddhist teachings. (p. 94)

Van Gordon et al. (2016) contest that mindfulness-based programs that mix dharma with psychological intervention are unethical and problematic and that separation between the two is necessary to ensure the ethical practice of both, independently. To that end, Van Gordon et al. (2016) suggest that individuals involved in mindfulness programs decide to either: 1) explicitly align their practice with Buddhism and teach mindfulness in the traditional Buddhist way so that participants are fully aware of its provenance, or 2) completely divorce mindfulness from Buddhism and structure the practice based on attention-based behavioural interventions. Van Gordon et al. (2016) present a convincing argument here; however, I do not know how realistic

this is given that, as previously mentioned, secular mindfulness is already being practiced—it is difficult to take away something that is already in practice. While I agree with Van Gordon et al. (2016) in principle, I wonder how it would be possible to realize what they suggest. It would also be interesting to know what Jon Kabat-Zinn thinks about this suggestion by Van Gordon et al. (2016), given that Kabat-Zinn has been reticent to make such declarations himself.

In response to the critique that mindfulness is religious indoctrination, Kabat-Zinn, quoted in Paulson et al. (2013), deflects these criticisms by describing the Buddha:

The Buddha wasn't a Buddhist One could think of the Buddha as more like a great scientist—a Galileo or an Einstein—somebody with very deep insight into the nature of his own experience, who developed the language, framework, methods, laboratory tools, and so forth for doing something special, which is what all these meditative practices are about. And yes, a religion grew up around it. But the religion of Buddhism, for one thing, has no God. (p. 95)

Kabat-Zinn (2011) goes on further:

The word '*Buddha*' means one who has awakened, and mindfulness, often spoken of as 'the heart of Buddhist meditation,' has little or nothing to do with Buddhism per se, and everything to do with wakefulness, compassion and wisdom. (p. 283, emphasis in original)

Here, Kabat-Zinn hints at an argument that exists with regard to whether or not Buddhism is a religion. Part of this argument posits that Buddhism is a philosophical system, ethical code, and a form of mind science (psychology), rather than a religion. This debate is beyond the scope of this thesis and is suggested as a topic of future research.

While the acceptance of mindfulness in education is relatively new, its use in the larger context of Western mainstream culture is a *fait accompli*, demonstrated by the recent explosion of interest in mindfulness (Hyland, 2015; Purser & Loy, 2013). This chapter examined several critiques that address the simplification, commodification, and commercialization of mindfulness. While contemporary mindfulness may have begun as a sincere attempt to help individuals to manage stress and pain—illustrated by the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn and MBSR—the many derivatives of mindfulness today are ethically questionable insofar as they promote individualistic notions of well-being. The commodification and commercialization of mindfulness is problematic because they denature and dilute the Buddhist roots of mindfulness, which are principally concerned with ethics. While mindfulness may be applied to facilitate individual well-being, it must not be at the cost of, or to the detriment to realizing collective well-being. Ensuring that mindfulness maintains an ethical foundation rooted in Buddhism is the best way to safeguard this aim.

Chapter 8: Maladaptive Conditioning and Bias: Automaticity, Priming, Stereotyping, and Mind Wandering

Maladaptive conditioning and bias are investigated here as a prologue to proposing the integration of mindfulness with social justice in chapter 9. Automaticity, priming, stereotyping, and mind wandering are forms of conditioning and they provide clues into the workings of human behaviour, specifically those that are theoretically linked to negative outcomes. Prejudice and oppression are examples of dysfunction that theoretically result from automaticity, priming, stereotyping, and mind wandering.

Conditioning is not negative in and of itself—in fact, conditioning is a feature of learning. However, some forms of conditioning are maladaptive and result in negative outcomes. Kang, Gruber, and Gray (2013) describe how automaticity can be maladaptive: “Highly automatized cognitive or emotional reactivity is associated with negative societal and individual outcomes, such as stereotyping that can lead to prejudice, and negative thought patterns prevalent in mental disorders” (p. 193). I wish to illustrate how mindfulness may be valuable in mediating the negative effects of maladaptive conditioning and bias, which has implications for social justice.

Automaticity

Automaticity is a type of conditioning that is the product of learning and adaptation. Kang et al. (2013) describe automaticity as: “the ability to effortlessly engage in behaviors without paying conscious attention to their operational details. Automaticity is usually a desired result of learning that reflects a degree of habit or mastery” (p. 193). To a certain extent, automaticity is beneficial and necessary: “Automaticity is adaptive in that it conserves limited attentional resources and lessens the self-regulatory burden by freeing up one’s limited conscious

attention from tasks in which they are no longer needed” (p. 194), and “Automaticity is essential in dealing with more information than our limited attentional capacity can handle” (p. 199).

However, despite these benefits, there are a number of problematic and detrimental consequences associated with automaticity. A connection between automaticity and *mindlessness* may be theoretically linked through the related constructs of priming and stereotyping. Here, Kang et al. (2013) hypothesize how automaticity manifests in everyday life: “People are often on “autopilot” in their behavior and decision-making, following habits or heuristic routines while their minds are occupied with other thoughts” (p. 194).

Like conditioning, automaticity is not inherently negative or maladaptive. Whether or not automaticity is maladaptive depends on the specific behaviour being automatically and unconsciously enacted. Mindfulness, when practiced holistically, facilitates critical self-reflection and self-awareness, which helps to guard against negative outcomes such as unconscious stereotypes. The goal then, is to have a mindful disposition. Mindfulness presents a skillful means to worthwhile ends, namely, the elimination of maladaptive forms of automaticity.

Priming

Priming occurs when exposure to a stimulus leads to an unconscious response or it affects the perception of a subsequent stimulus. Becoming aware of a prime can decrease or cancel the priming effect (Kang et al., 2013). Mindfulness can play a role in identifying priming and neutralize its effects: “A mindful person, who attends to the changing fields of sensations, thoughts, and feelings from moment to moment, may be less influenced by the priming effect, given an increased alertness to the here-and-now” (Kang et al., 2013, p. 195). Priming and automaticity are theoretically linked and are conceptually similar. In fact, priming may be

considered a condition that precipitates automaticity, that is, priming evokes an automatic response.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping is a construct that has its origins as an evolutionary adaptation to simplify decision-making. However, stereotyping is problematic because of its theoretical connections to oppression, inequality, racial profiling, and so forth. Kang et al. (2013) explicate the processes involved in stereotyping and the potential that mindfulness can have in countering it:

Stereotyping refers to a cognitive response that is based upon automatic categorization, formed by a perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about a human group

The cognitive processes that initiate stereotyping occur automatically and unconsciously . . . stereotyping is often considered to be an inescapable and necessary by-product of the categorization process However, current models of stereotype reduction argue that decreasing stereotyping is possible when people are aware of their own bias. Simply being aware of one's mental states or processes—a key ingredient of mindfulness—can reduce these automatized categorizations. (p. 196)

Stereotyping is maladaptive in an increasingly connected world through globalization. Methods to minimize stereotyping with mindfulness offer great promise in reducing oppression. It is precisely for this reason that mindfulness should remain linked to its original foundations rooted in Buddhist ontology and epistemology—to have explicit concern for collective well-being through other-regarding and holistic perspectives that integrate social justice.

Mind Wandering

The human mind spends a great deal of time not in the present, either ruminating about the past or planning, projecting, and worrying about the future. In research conducted on attention by Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010), they found that: “people’s minds wandered frequently, regardless of what they were doing A human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind” (p. 932). Mind wandering is the dissociation of attention from present-centeredness. When attention is not attuned to the experience or task at hand, then automatic behaviours are enacted in potentially negative ways that perpetuate conditioned behaviours that also reinforce dominant hegemonic norms. Maladaptive behaviours may be acted out unconsciously when one’s mind is wandering. To recapitulate, mind wandering has theoretical connections to automaticity, that is, the same cognitive processes are involved, such as lack of attunement to present moment experience. It may be hypothesized then, that mind wandering facilitates automaticity, priming, and stereotyping—a result of relying on unconscious, habitual, and conditioned processes due to lack of attention on the present moment. When people are not aware of present moment experience, it is likely that conditioned and unconscious behaviours will be enacted automatically out of efficiency, convenience, and habit. Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010) posit that mind wandering is problematic because, “Although this ability is a remarkable evolutionary achievement that allows people to learn, reason, and plan, it may have an emotional cost” (p. 932). The emotional cost may include oppression and suffering.

Culture of Overstimulation

The growing occurrence of spiritual, psychological, and somatic *dis-ease* in modern societies can in part be attributed to the oversaturation of stimuli that an average person encounters on a daily basis (O'Donnell, 2016). The constant distraction of attention is pervasive in technologically advanced societies such as Canada. This is problematic because when attention is distracted, it is difficult to be present in the moment. The inability to engage with experience in an embodied and holistic manner conditions people to function in automatic, habitual, and unconscious ways, devoid of attention and connection. O'Donnell (2016) explains: “narrowing the gap between stimulus and response creates the kind of being who does not and cannot reflect, whose experience is thinned, and who reacts rather than responds” (p. 32). Attention deficiencies will no doubt continue to rise in the general population, resulting from technological innovation, cultural dependency on technology, and voracious consumption of media, leading to near-constant stimulation:

the increasingly rapid response times encouraged through activities that promote hyper attention generate a dispersed and distracted subjectivity that constantly checks emails, social media, surfs the web, plays computer based games, and so forth, but finds it increasingly difficult to simply ‘pay attention’. (O'Donnell, 2016, p. 33)

As more people are diagnosed with attention deficit disorders and attention-based behavioural problems, the root of the issue must be addressed. We as a society need to examine the taken-for-granted cultural practices that we engage in, particularly in regard to technology, social media, and consumption of content because, “attention deficit is not, then, simply a psychological disorder but a feature of contemporary life when the organism develops in an info-saturated environment” (O'Donnell, 2016, p. 33). Perhaps it is for this reason that meditation is

helpful—because it forces one to focus on a singular point or object, such as the breath. It is reasonable to hypothesize that distraction and overstimulation are negatively correlated with present-centeredness and therefore, mindfulness.

Applying Mindfulness to Counter Automaticity, Priming, Stereotyping, and Mind Wandering

Kang et al. (2013) explore how mindfulness may disrupt some of the negative consequences of automaticity, priming, stereotyping, and mind wandering:

When our mind relies on automaticity, increased susceptibility to priming effects or reliance on simplifying tactics such as stereotyping may result. Mindfulness, on the other hand, promotes awareness of the automatic ebb and flow of mental events. This awareness can be an initial step to discontinue automatic inference processing. (p. 195)

A commitment to welcome all thoughts with curiosity and openness (core elements of mindfulness) is important in observing moment-to-moment experience (Bishop et al., 2004). Several outcomes result from taking a stance of openness. First, a person can decrease the use of maladaptive cognitive and behavioural strategies in responding to experiences. Avoidance, blaming, and self-criticism are examples of such maladaptive strategies. Second, mindfulness may lead to greater discernment between emotions and physical sensations. Emotions have the ability to automatically trigger physiological responses; for example, anger may lead to muscle tension. Khong (2009) describes this process and the role that mindfulness can play in helping to extinguish the negative effects of such automaticity:

These phases of the mind-body interaction happen so quickly that we tend to see them as one continuous occurrence, and we are often not aware of their interaction until we

become mindful of them. Mindfulness helps us to be aware of awareness—being aware of what we are feeling, thinking, experiencing, or doing when we are doing it, and to interrupt the circuit before rumination starts. (p. 128)

Bishop et al. (2004) add, “Mindfulness would likely result in a greater capacity to distinguish feelings from bodily sensations unrelated to emotional arousal” (p. 234). It follows from this that “mindfulness practices provide opportunities to gain insight into the nature of thoughts and feelings as passing events in the mind rather than as inherent aspects of the self or valid reflections on reality” (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 234). Therefore, mindfulness offers helpful cognitive tools and perspectives from which to engage with experience, resulting in mental flexibility (Paulson et al., 2013). For example, mindfulness can facilitate the realization that “I am not my pain, I am not my anxiety, I am not my cancer, etc.” (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 299). The ability to discern thoughts as different from reality is a worthwhile skill and its cultivation is an important element of mindfulness practice.

Ingrained, patterned, and conditioned behaviour can perpetuate maladaptive responses, particularly if those behaviours are devoid of awareness, attention, and intention—what O’Donnell (2016) describes as, “living out one’s habits through repetitive and broadly unconscious patterns of behaviour or engaging inadvertently in compulsive thinking or ‘mind-wandering’” (p. 41). Mindfulness, with its focus on attending to what is happening in the moment, may have transformative potential. Mindfulness could provide an antidote to negative, unconscious, conditioned behaviour by cultivating the capacity for sustained attention, creative responses, and less reactivity (O’Donnell, 2016). Furthermore, mindfulness provides the opportunity to lean into all aspects of life, whether they are “positive” or “negative,” with greater reflexivity and compassion. Here Kang et al. (2013) expound on the mechanics of this process:

When we are mindless, it is more likely that our perceptions and judgments about a person will be influenced by superficial labels associated with that person (e.g., job title, political orientation). By contrast, a mindful person relies on conscious and deliberate thought processing by having an open and flexible attitude, which can lead to nonjudgmental acceptance of multiple context-dependent perspectives. (p. 194)

The ability to take multiple perspectives and to suspend judgment is crucial in supporting the case for integrating mindfulness with social justice. As in the quote above, engaging in critical thinking and self-reflection that is open and non-reactive may be beneficial to counter the effects of automaticity, priming, stereotyping, and mind wandering because, “Being mindful requires ... cognitive control strategies ... contrasted with nonconscious attention and acting on the basis of ‘automatic pilot’” (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 3). This argument is the premise from which the integration of mindfulness and social justice is derived. A mindful disposition, when considered holistically, and rooted within Buddhist ethics and philosophy, can ally with social justice. Mindfulness, practiced with other-regarding, holistic perspectives that hold impermanence, interconnectedness, non-self, Buddha nature, and undifferentiated compassion as core principles is amenable with the aims of social justice.

Chapter 9: Mindfulness and Social Justice

Contemporary mindfulness cannot remain a self-serving, individualistic practice and instead must expand to include others in the framing of “well-being” in order to become a more holistic practice. Without other-regarding, global perspectives, mindfulness for personal benefit is an incomplete representation of its original conceptualization in Buddhism. Purser and Loy (2013) add:

[A] common misconception is that mindfulness is a private, internal affair. Mindfulness is often marketed as a method for personal self-fulfillment Such an individualistic and consumer orientation to the practice of mindfulness may be effective for self-preservation and self-advancement, but is essentially impotent for mitigating the causes of collective and organizational distress [Mindfulness] must reclaim an ethical framework and aspire to more lofty purposes that take into account the well-being of all living beings (p. 2).

While individual well-being is a constituent part of collective well-being (Orr, 2014), contemporary practices of mindfulness are often solely focused on individual well-being. Throughout this thesis, I have problematized self-focused, instrumental, and prescriptive forms of mindfulness that are proliferating in the mainstream.

Transformative Potential of Mindfulness

The transformative and social justice potential of mindfulness has not been explored to the extent that the clinical, neurocognitive, and psychological potential of mindfulness has. As illustrated above, the predominant use of mindfulness in the West is for the purpose of self-improvement (Hyland, 2015; Purser & Loy, 2013). As demonstrated in previous chapters, the

application of mindfulness in clinical and educational settings is primarily instrumental in its aims, again, focused on individual well-being. What is less known is that mindfulness is compatible with social justice when practiced in a holistic form that includes other-regarding principles that are primarily concerned with collective well-being. Unfortunately, the orientation of instrumental mindfulness practices toward individual well-being narrows the focus and scope to exclude an investigation into the larger causes and conditions of suffering:

The emphasis on transforming inner conditions of students' lives can lead to the neglect of outer conditions, such as structural inequality, or unhealthy and exploitative work practices. This can result in practices that privilege individual wellbeing over compassion and concern for the happiness of others. (O'Donnell, 2016, p. 30)

The foundational tenets of Buddhism as codified in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path offer support for moral and ethical action against inequality and suffering. This is a particularly cogent argument for integrating mindfulness with social justice.

Evidence to Support Integrating Mindfulness and Social Justice

In new research from various fields, there is evidence to suggest that mindfulness has demonstrable effects on social justice: "Studies are beginning to show that mindfulness meditation and compassion practices serve as potent aids in the work of decreasing bias" (Magee, 2015, first section, para. 6).

The research in the field of mindfulness and social justice is nascent, but it demonstrates promise in the capacity for compassionate wisdom to manifest as compassionate action:

Mindfulness practices actually do help in the fight against implicit bias and its capacity to cause explicit suffering in our lives. While they won't end racism, mindfulness and other

contemplative practices do support ways of being in the world that reflect less of the biases that each of us holds. (Magee, 2015, Introducing “ColorInsight” section, para. 7)

The processes involved in countering bias, prejudice, and oppression are complementary to the principles rooting Buddhist epistemology and, therefore, mindfulness. This is further demonstrated by new research on neurocognition, automaticity, and mind wandering—with evidence demonstrating how mindfulness may help in short-circuiting negative and conditioned thoughts and behaviours and instead effect positive ones:

Mindful individuals are more likely to understand views other than their own, recognizing that there are as many different perspectives as there are different observers This observation can lead to a less judgmental attitude and thus a reduction in stereotyping. (Kang et al., 2013, p. 196)

Being able to see the perspectives of others is crucial in working toward collective well-being.

The ability to suspend judgment, disable automatic and conditioned behaviour, as well as having an orientation toward contemplative self-reflection are all beneficial in social justice work.

Impediments to Integrating Mindfulness and Social Justice

The secularization of mindfulness may have impeded its ability to engage in critical analysis and activism. Self-centered forms of mindfulness focused on personal well-being, rather than collective well-being have distracted practitioners from engaging with social justice.

Rhonda Magee (2016) reminds us of social justice principles that are at the core of Buddhist ethics:

The early teachings of the Buddha offered counsel on such issues as the proper distribution of wealth, maintaining social harmony, and interpersonal practice [however,]

modernist adaptations have for the most part ignored the social and ethical dimensions that appear to have been as important as meditation and mindfulness training to the early teachers in the Buddhist tradition. (p. 426)

While mindfulness in the Buddhist tradition has social and ethical principles infused into the practice, modern, secular, Western versions of mindfulness are primarily concerned with individual achievement and well-being (Purser & Loy, 2013). The transformation of mindfulness from an ethical and social code of living to a self-focused behavioural/health intervention is highly problematic. It is necessary for mindfulness to reestablish connections to its original foundations rooted in Buddhist ontology and epistemology—to have explicit concern for collective well-being through other-regarding and holistic perspectives that integrate social justice.

Call for Explicitly Integrating Mindfulness and Social Justice

To revisit my assertion from chapter 1: It is time to reintegrate the social and ethical dimensions back into contemporary mindfulness. Mindfulness, when used as a means of pacifying people to accept oppressive conditions in society without advocating for social justice and anti-oppression, and without challenging systemic and entrenched power inequalities at the root of suffering is problematic. Similarly, mindfulness used to comfort and soothe oppressed and marginalized people merely to allow them to survive and cope in hostile environments without empowering them, and without working toward changing the underlying conditions that perpetuate oppression is unethical and complicit with the systems of control (Berila, 2014; Magee, 2016; Orr, 2002).

I propose increased effort and research into mindfulness that considers social justice as a core element of its practice. Explicit connection between mindfulness and social justice is beneficial to realize collective well-being rather than individual well-being. While it has been demonstrated that well-being begins at the personal level (Orr, 2014), it is questionable whether the plethora of mindfulness programs available today move beyond personal well-being toward a more holistic and interconnected notion of collective well-being.

To reiterate, research on mindfulness integrated with social justice is a nascent field, but studies are beginning to emerge that validate the positive benefits of bringing them together. For example: “a 10-minute mindfulness practice reduced race and age bias on the Implicit Attitude Test” (Magee, 2015, How to minimize bias section, para. 2), and: “Mindfulness training based on acceptance and commitment decreased racial stereotyping in a naturalistic classroom” (Kang et al., 2013, p. 196). While studies like these are few, they offer promise on the integration of mindfulness with social justice, especially as a pedagogical practice. Schools are an ideal site from which to initiate the work of minimizing/eliminating oppression and suffering through social justice.

Mindfulness, as rooted in Buddhist epistemology, provides an alternative conceptualization of the world in contrast to the capitalist, neoliberal, materialist, economic system that currently dominates Western culture (Hawken, 2007; Klein, 2014; Magill & Rodriguez, 2014). On this difference, Orr (2014) adds, “Buddhist thought provides a world-picture, or conceptual framework, radically different from the prevailing materialist model of contemporary Western culture” (p. 51). In addition to helping critically deconstruct oppressive norms in society, mindfulness is effectively positioned to engage in social justice because the philosophical core of Buddhism is compatible to social justice. This connection is demonstrated

through concern for others as exemplified by the motivation to work toward the cessation of suffering for *all* beings.

The commitments to non-harming and right relationship [part of the Eightfold Path] that are at the core of Buddhist ethics tend to heighten the sense of interconnectedness upon which compassionate action often arises, and appear to support work against structural inequality and oppression. (Magee, 2016, pp. 428-429)

While mindfulness may have theoretical connections to social justice, it is necessary to make a concerted effort to establish an explicit connection between the two. According to Orr (2014), “Developing compassion by itself will not be sufficient to regulate the public sphere, certainly not in an imperfect world of less than fully enlightened beings pursuing their own self-interest” (p. 51).

Buddhism and Social justice have a historical relation, demonstrated by the role of *Bodhisattvas*. In the Buddhist oeuvre, Bodhisattvas are people that commit themselves to helping others realize their Buddha nature. Thayer-Bacon (2003) describes Bodhisattvas, and how their work is complementary to social justice:

Bodhisattvas take a vow to have concern for the welfare of all beings, not just themselves or their own group. This compassion for others causes them to be politically and socially actively involved in the world, rather than removed from their surroundings. (p. 29)

The motivation to help others is pivotal to social justice. While mindfulness does not explicitly espouse an action-oriented approach, I propose that integrating holistic, embodied, and relational (Thayer-Bacon, 2003) awareness that is part of mindfulness with social justice is mutually beneficial because collective well-being is dependent upon people actively working toward equity in the world. Mindfulness and meditation alone will not affect this change. Having said

that, mindfulness and meditation play critical roles in cultivating the qualities of non-judgmental awareness, the ability to take multiple perspectives, and non-reactivity—all of which are beneficial for deconstructing taken-for-granted assumptions and cultural practices that may lead to suffering.

Allies Integrating Mindfulness and Social Justice

There are researchers, scholars, activists, teachers and organizations working toward incorporating mindfulness, social justice, and anti-oppression together in an organic and complementary manner; a few examples are: Rhonda Magee (2015, 2016), Beth Berila (2014), Angel Kyodo Williams (2000, 2016), Thich Nhat Hanh (2010), Zenjyu Earthlyn Manuel (2015); and organizations such as the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (www.buddhistpeacefellowship.org).

Social Justice, Suffering, and Buddhism

A Buddhist philosophical inquiry into the causes of suffering presents a starting point from which mindfulness can connect with social justice. In the Buddhist tradition, the basis of life is suffering (*dukkha*). Suffering is a fundamental and inescapable part of human existence. Understanding the way suffering manifests is important when integrating mindfulness with social justice. Magee (2016) describes the mechanisms of suffering and its relation to social justice: “This focus on suffering, its causes and our capacity to end suffering by ceasing reactivity applies not only to our personal and interpersonal experience, but also to our work within systems that create and maintain systemic suffering and structural violence” (p. 426). Ideally, a consequence of working toward alleviating personal suffering is the emergence of an ethical imperative toward alleviating the suffering of others, bolstered by a sense of connection,

compassion, and responsibility. A sense of connection with others is a fundamental motivation and catalyst for compassion because, “Many social justice theorists believe that the sense of interconnectedness is the central insight that supports compassionate action in the world” (Magee, 2016, p. 426). The concept of interconnectedness is a core element of Buddhist philosophy, as described in chapter 4. Interconnectedness, along with non-self, impermanence, undifferentiated compassion, and Buddha nature are Buddhist philosophical concepts that are compatible with social justice because they explicate how all humans, and indeed, all life—human and more-than-human—are in a relation of mutual dependence. For this reason, I reiterate that mindfulness should be linked to its original foundations rooted in Buddhist ontology and epistemology—to have explicit concern for collective well-being through other-regarding and holistic perspectives that integrate social justice.

Social Justice, Mindfulness, and Education

Beth Berila is a professor at St. Cloud State University who specializes in diversity education and feminist theory. Berila researches mindfulness in higher education and has written on the topic of applying mindfulness in education with a focus on anti-oppression. Berila (2014) suggests that “Mindfulness can help students learn how their identity locations shape their reactions to course content; as such, they help participants do the work of unlearning the effects of systems of oppression” (p. 55). The inclusion of mindfulness in education, especially in courses that engage in social justice, are beneficial as they present opportunities to develop philosophical and embodied ways of understanding self, others, the relationships and conditions that construct society, and the ways in which privilege and oppression exert their force. Berila

(2014) expounds on her logic and motivation in applying mindfulness in her anti-oppression classes:

Courses that deal with oppression and diversity can greatly benefit from contemplative practices, because they can help us unlearn the conditioned responses that uphold or result from systems of oppression Like holding a camera, our positionality frames what we can and cannot see. The critical self-reflection tools cultivated in mindfulness . . . help us see that who we are shapes what we know. (p. 57)

For example, courses that integrate mindfulness and anti-oppression may help students develop the capacity to see how gendered or racialized power dynamics operate in society and in everyday interactions, often subconsciously, in ways that are internalized and hidden (e.g., the hidden curriculum) (Berila, 2014). It is also critically important to understand that knowledge is socially constructed, particularly when examining issues through the lens of social justice. A deep inquiry into systemic forms of oppression can be undertaken as a result of becoming aware of our complicity in these systems (Magee, 2016).

Privilege and Oppression

Privilege and oppression work in ways that are often entangled and multidirectional. For example, “Intersections of oppression mean that someone may gain privilege in some ways but be marginalized in others” (Berila, 2014, pp. 61-62). Perhaps for this very reason, there is no simple way to engage in discussions about oppression. Therefore, it is necessary to practice self-reflection. Mindfulness and self-reflection are theoretically linked through the mechanism of being aware of one’s thoughts, motivations, words, actions, and the effects that one’s actions have on others (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Magee, 2015). Through this awareness of one’s positionality

in relation to others, the ability to see the interconnectedness of all beings in a holistic system can become evident. Critical self-reflection is a crucial prerequisite to engage in the work of deconstructing multiple layers of social conditioning (Berila, 2014). Mindfulness and critical self-reflection are theoretically linked through qualities such as non-judgmental awareness, the ability to take multiple perspectives, non-reactivity, and having a contemplative disposition.

Mindfulness and Social Justice Initiatives

Magee (2016) introduces a practice called “community-engaged mindfulness” as a framework for integrating mindfulness with social justice. “Community-engaged mindfulness [is] the discipline and practice of bringing mindfulness—awareness with compassion—into engagement in community, using and adapting mindfulness and compassion practices as aids in community-engaged, social justice work” (p. 429). Magee (2016) provides further details on the motivation for community-engaged mindfulness: “Since individuals and communities tend to suffer greatly ... as a result of systemic oppression and structural violence, we are often drawn to practices that inspire compassionate action to alleviate systemic and structural suffering as well” (p. 425). Mindfulness practices may facilitate efforts to counter implicit bias, racial stereotyping, gender stereotyping and other forms of conditioned prejudice (Magee, 2015). If Buddhism is concerned with the cessation of suffering for all beings, then the integration of mindfulness with social justice in practices such as community-engaged mindfulness is congruent with those aims.

Connecting Policy, Curricula, Mindfulness, and Social Justice

Carefully examining provincial education policies reveals that mindfulness is amenable with policy standards that concern a wide range of topics including: well-being, social

responsibility, and character education. For example, both British Columbia and Ontario have policies addressing social engagement and social responsibility in education. The Ontario government has implemented an “initiative to support character education in schools, to inspire students to become caring, contributing, and compassionate citizens ... [and] help students develop socially, ethically, and academically identifying the social and emotional side of learning as integral to education” (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007, p. 21). Likewise, the government of British Columbia has identified social responsibility as one of its performance standards for students. For example, the Vancouver School Board has its own Social Responsibility Department to develop and implement programs (Bochun, 2011). These standards, named “BC’s Social Responsibility Performance Standards,” include four categories that outline core expectations for social responsibility: “(a) contributing to classroom and school community ... (b) solving problems in peaceful ways ... (c) valuing diversity and defending human rights ... and (d) practicing democratic rights and responsibilities” (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015, p. 7). While these policies have different names, such as Character Education in Ontario and Social Responsibility Performance Standards in British Columbia, they can be theoretically linked to mindfulness and social justice, that is, when mindfulness integrates social justice in a holistic manner, provincial educational policy aims may be met.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social emotional learning (SEL) is an educational practice that is growing across Canada to address critical issues that students face today, including a myriad of social, emotional, and behavioural problems like those outlined in chapters 1 and 6. SEL is also one of the vehicles with which mindfulness is being introduced into schools and curricula. “SEL has become the

organizing umbrella that encompasses many different education movements emphasizing similar concepts and skills, such as programs in character education” (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007, p. 22). SEL offers educators, families, and communities with strategies to support student development and well-being in holistic ways beyond academics because, “A myopic focus on academic achievement not only undermines our children’s potential to become responsible, caring, and contributing citizens, it also threatens their psychological well-being and the Canadian economy” (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007, pp. 20-21). Moreover, “We are all in danger—as world events continue to teach—when children grow up with academic knowledge but lack essential social and emotional skills such as compassion and empathy” (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007, p. 20).

The basis of SEL is rooted in, “acquiring the competencies to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively” (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel, 2007, p. 21). One example of SEL is *MindUP* (briefly mentioned in chapter 1), a mindfulness-based SEL program, used by the Vancouver School Board and other schools in British Columbia (Bochun, 2011; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). *MindUP* incorporates developmental neuroscience, contemplative science, mindfulness, and positive psychology (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). The program teaches mindful sense awareness (mindful eating, mindful listening), self-regulation, social-emotional understanding, practicing gratitude, and practicing optimism, among other skills (Bochun, 2011; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). *MindUP* is an example of one of the more holistic and community-oriented mindfulness-based programs in education, in contrast to the plethora of mindfulness-based programs that focus on increasing academic achievement and *personal* well-being (Hyland, 2015; Shapiro, Brown, & Astin, 2011; Waters, Barsky, Ridd, & Allen, 2014).

Programs such as *MindUp* offer promise in the realization of more holistic forms of mindfulness-based practices in education that integrate concern for collective well-being.

Looking Ahead

When considering new ways forward for the development of mindfulness in education, what is needed is a holistic approach, one that looks both within the self and out in the community; an approach that is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and inclusive. Koetting and Combs (2005) conclude:

It is important for educators to turn inward in a search for meaning and a more authentic self, but an inward search is not enough. Educators must, then, turn outward and re-engage the world on behalf of children. A focus on school is not enough. Schools are not the isolated problem, but rather, are reflections of the world. Until society values justice and integrity for all citizens, society will continue to shape schools, and the curriculum, in meaningless ways, ways that leave educators and their students spiritually (and philosophically) malnourished. (p. 90)

Schools are reflections of the larger culture and society in which they are situated. Mindfulness in education is merely one piece of the puzzle required to affect change toward realizing collective well-being through holistic forms of mindfulness that integrate social justice. Mindfulness is already present in health care, psychology, education, sports, business, and the military, and is finding its way into evermore fields. While it may be hasty to make such a conjecture, perhaps this increase of mindfulness in the mainstream (even instrumental forms) is the tide that turns the dominant culture toward a more contemplative and non-judgmental disposition.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

To revisit the aims set out at the beginning of this inquiry: the methodology of conceptual analysis (Jickling, 2014) was used to clarify several points and/or questions throughout this thesis:

1. What is the historical (Buddhist) conceptualization of mindfulness?
2. What is the contemporary (Western) conceptualization of mindfulness?
3. Critiques of contemporary mindfulness, from the perspective of critical theory
4. How might contemporary (Western) mindfulness integrate social justice?

These points/questions listed above were explored to inquire into the primary research question of this thesis: “What is mindfulness (both historical and contemporary forms) and why is it being used in education and curricula?” Related questions that arise from this investigation include: “What are the implications of secularizing and simplifying mindfulness?” and “What is the transformative potential of mindfulness when explicitly associated with social justice?”

Main Themes

It was established that mindfulness has permeated into the Western mainstream and is now being applied across a wide range of fields, including education. Many contemporary forms of mindfulness bear little resemblance to their original conceptualization in the Buddhist tradition. While the secularization and simplification of mindfulness has been effective in increasing and diversifying its reach, there is a critique that mindfulness loses its transformative ability in this simplified form. Despite its current status as a popular psychological therapeutic intervention, it remains to be seen if mindfulness has longevity in the mainstream. Having said that, the inclusion of mindfulness in the conversation as a legitimate research area is a feat in

itself. Ergas (2014) comments on this improbable outcome: “Contemplative inquiry is still marginal and may remain so for quite some time. However, its inclusion as a *complementary* (not alternative) methodology alongside conventional quantitative and qualitative inquiry methods is no less than a paradigm shift” (p. 65, emphasis in original).

Research on mindfulness is still very much skewed toward quantitative and positivist methodologies. Nevertheless, for mindfulness to be considered a valid area of inquiry is significant given the larger context in which it has been included, that is, mainstream Western science. However, this acceptance comes at a cost, as the empirical study of mindfulness has instrumentalized its many contemporary forms—a pertinent critique of contemporary mindfulness.

Mindfulness as Evidence-Based Intervention

The implementation of mindfulness in education represents a larger movement often referred to as a “contemplative turn” (Ergas, 2014, p. 58), or known generally as “contemplative education” (Bush, 2011, p. 185). This contemplative turn is facilitated and supported by scientific research that demonstrates the positive psychosocial benefits of mindfulness. Bush (2011), comments: “Scientific research on mindfulness is expanding and producing results relevant to teaching, learning, and knowing” (pp. 183-184). However, the framing of mindfulness primarily from a quantitative perspective pushes the entire field toward instrumentalism. While there are benefits from secular and instrumental forms of mindfulness, there are also concerns regarding its focus on personal gain and its lack of an ethical foundation, especially when divorced from Buddhist tradition.

The Influence of Jon Kabat-Zinn and MBSR

Contemporary mindfulness is greatly influenced by the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn and MBSR. In developing MBSR, Kabat-Zinn predicted resistance to a Buddhist-informed practice being applied in mainstream Western institutions. Anticipating pushback, Kabat-Zinn preemptively made concessions by removing the Buddhist elements from MBSR, applying technical language in place of spiritually rooted terms and concepts. These tactics proved to be successful and led to the acceptance of mindfulness in health science as well as setting the precedent for subsequent developments in mindfulness. Kabat-Zinn's maneuver solidified the requirement of legitimizing mindfulness within a scientific framework—the dominant ontological and epistemological orientation of the modern West. This dominance of a technical/rational epistemology originates from, “A largely Aristotelian emphasis on logic, the natural sciences, and theology beginning at least by the 12th and 13th centuries and consolidated in the reformation or scientific revolution” (Hart as cited in Bai, Scott, & Donald, 2009, p. 326). This is also reflected in, “modern science's rather Cartesian ethos of separation between subject and object” (Ergas, 2014, pp. 65-66).

Mindfulness in Education

After mindfulness was legitimized in the realms of science and medicine, it began appearing in education. The instrumental benefits of mindfulness coincide with instrumental curricular aims, which include: increase in academic performance and decrease in antisocial behaviour (Ergas, 2014; Oman et al., 2008; Orr, 2014). While these benefits are certainly worth considering, the use of mindfulness in this manner facilitates the replication of dominant hegemonic norms in education and society. Contemporary applications of mindfulness in

education are the result of, “The compartmentalization of mindfulness to fit science’s ability to measure, accompanied by the thirst of educational policy-makers for standards and achievements” (Ergas, 2014, p. 67). The perpetuation of instrumental forms of education focused on rote memorization and computational processing is problematic because they do not take into consideration the whole person (Bai et al., 2009). When mindfulness is applied in the service of this kind of instrumentalism (i.e., to maximize productivity and to make learning content more efficient), then it becomes ethically tenuous. Mindfulness as therapeutic “tool” or “technique” is a denatured form of its original conceptualization as a holistic, embodied, and relational practice (Thayer-Bacon, 2003).

The primacy of a scientific and dualistic (subject/object) view of the world has grave implications for education because of its focus on performance rather than on meaningful educational experiences. Ergas (2014) describes the causes and conditions that precipitated modern curricular aims: “The forefathers of North American curriculum ... were inspired by the scientific model so as to mold education in its form. They thus set forth a clear rationalistic agenda applied to the curriculum’s structure and pedagogy” (p. 66).

Given the current condition of education as described above, the secularization and instrumentalisation of mindfulness was necessary to satisfy the gatekeepers of science and rationalism before granting mindfulness entry into education. Ergas (2014) intones: “Substantial paradigmatic shifts in education begin in paradigmatic shifts within science. It takes ‘normal science’ to make mindfulness acceptable as ‘normal medicine’ and then ‘normal education’” (p. 66). This process of legitimizing mindfulness, first in science, followed by medicine, then in education, reflects the primacy of the scientific paradigm as well as illustrating the dependence of education on science to inform its practices. The task now is to reinstate the Buddhist ethical

and philosophical dimensions back into mindfulness to support holistic and other-regarding practices that integrate social justice in order to realize collective well-being.

Instrumental Forms of Mindfulness

Contemporary forms of mindfulness focus primarily on instrumental benefits, such as reducing stress and increasing attention—to the extent that these effects are isolated, quantified, categorized, and maximized. Instrumental mindfulness is beginning to proliferate, particularly in the West where the Buddhist foundation of mindfulness is not explicit. Perhaps this is a logical outcome of secularizing mindfulness to make it accessible to Westerners without alienating them (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). What results is an instrumental, prescriptive, and individualistic practice of mindfulness focused on self that overlooks the transformative, socially engaged potential of mindfulness.

As mindfulness continues to be simplified, secularized, commodified, commercialized, and mainstreamed, Purser and Loy (2013) warn: “Such a colonization of mindfulness ... has an instrumentalising effect, reorienting the practice to the needs of the market, rather than to a critical reflection on the causes of our collective suffering” (p. 2). Furthermore, the spread of mindfulness into areas such as business and the military confounds its original aims as a deep philosophical inquiry into the meaning of life and the origins of suffering:

Approaches to ‘mindfulness’ that teach people how to ‘surf’ their uncertainties and anxieties without seeking to understand or become aware of the causes of suffering are at odds with the Buddhist origins of these practices which seek to develop the understanding of the causes of suffering and to cultivate compassion, ethical skillfulness, judgement, right action, and right view. (O’Donnell, 2016, pp. 34-35)

The qualities mentioned in the quote above (compassion, ethical skillfulness, judgement, right action, and right view) are compatible with practicing mindfulness in holistic ways that integrate social justice. It would be maximally beneficial to reintegrate Buddhist ethics back into contemporary mindfulness in order to root the practice to ethical and philosophical principles.

Maladaptive Conditioning and Bias: Automaticity, Priming, Stereotyping, and Mind

Wandering

Automaticity and stereotyping are processes by which people behave unconsciously and habitually as a result of conditioning. Automaticity and stereotyping demonstrate the capacity for learning, adaptation, and the ability to enact behaviours with little cognitive effort. In the context of human evolution, automaticity and stereotyping offer practical benefits in that they allow people to conserve mental resources; however, there are negative consequences that result from such automatic processes, including: bias, prejudice, and racism. Mindfulness provides a means to “short circuit” automaticity and facilitate the critical examination of taken-for-granted assumptions that guide behaviour. Bai, Eppert, Scott, Tait, and Nguyen (2015) elucidate why it is so easy to fall into automaticity and stereotyping, and the challenge of breaking free of these conditioned ways of viewing the world:

Culture is largely unconscious because individuals participating in a given culture are inducted into it as if what the culture presents is naked reality. Elements of a given culture—beliefs, values, customs, ethos, technologies, practices and habits—are presented to individuals as pre-givens, with a sense of truth that “this is just what reality is about.” (p. 638)

A theoretical connection exists between instrumental forms of mindfulness in education and automaticity through the *mindless* perpetuation of instrumental educational goals without critical evaluation. Conversely, it may be posited that mindfulness can help interrupt automaticity and stereotyping in ways that are amenable for social justice.

The potential of mindfulness to help counter implicit and unconscious processes such as prejudice and stereotyping is promising. Mindfulness presents ways to disrupt and question conditioned and unconscious behaviour. According to Kang et al. (2013), mindfulness may counter stereotyping by expanding capacity for awareness: “A mindful individual may be more likely to notice when implicit stereotyping takes place, having accurate awareness of the nature of the bias” (p. 194). If an outcome of mindfulness practice is the ability to counter unconscious biases such as prejudice and stereotyping, then that alone is reason to implement mindfulness in education as a pedagogical practice. While a critique could be made that even this aim (i.e., to counter unconscious bias, automaticity, priming, prejudice, stereotyping, and mind wandering) may become prescriptive and instrumental itself, I believe that in this case, the end justifies the means. Furthermore, I feel that it is not a significant jump conceptually, considering the current focus of mindfulness on increasing attention, to reorient the practice toward increasing awareness to biases, and then extinguishing those biases.

Mindfulness and Social Justice

This thesis examined the potential that mindfulness can have when social justice is explicitly integrated as a constituent element of mindfulness practice. The assumption that mindfulness and meditation leads to “awakened individuals” without explicit ethical volition has proven to be incomplete (Orr, 2002; Sun, 2014). On the prerequisite of ethical intent in realizing

holistic mindfulness, Bush (2011) adds, “By itself meditation does not impel human beings to social action, and it needs to be counterbalanced by a concern with social reconstruction and personal relationship” (p. 187). What is additionally required is an ethical and social imperative, realizing the collective responsibility of working toward the cessation of suffering for *all* beings. I examined examples by Magee (2015, 2016) and Berila (2014) as potential methods for mindfulness and social justice to work together to expose structural inequalities in society. The Buddhist philosophical tenets that inform mindfulness such as impermanence, non-self, interconnectedness, loving-kindness, non-harming, non-violence, equanimity, generosity, gratitude, and undifferentiated compassion provide relevant starting points from which to dive into social justice issues. Rather than practicing mindfulness instrumentally in ways that perpetuate dominant hegemonic norms, practicing mindfulness that is ethically rooted in a framework consistent with the Buddhist conceptualization of mindfulness may precipitate real transformative change.

Final Thoughts

In education, the discussion concerning human development involves philosophy of education and curriculum theory because they inform, reflect, and co-create society and culture through the practices of teaching and learning. While the proliferation of instrumental forms of mindfulness are beneficial for a host of reasons, and while it makes sense that instrumental forms of mindfulness are the most efficient methods to disseminate the practice, I want to make the case to reorient mindfulness back to its original foundations rooted in Buddhist ontology and epistemology—to have explicit concern for collective well-being through other-regarding and holistic perspectives that integrate social justice.

Ethics, values, and norms are transmitted through formal education; therefore, it is crucial that educational institutions promote human development in ways that are holistic, embodied, and relational (Thayer-Bacon, 2003). Bai et al. (2015) stress the vital role that educators play in supporting the holistic development of students:

All those involved in education need to participate in examining worldviews and values, and their enactment, assessing how they do or do not serve mutual flourishing and sustainability, and making suggestions and showing examples of different possibilities of imagining and handling reality. (p. 637)

The tendency to create division and see separateness between self and the rest of the world—the “othering” of people, more-than-human beings, and the natural world—is incoherent, illogical, and confused. It is critical to break through the illusion of separateness and realize the interconnectedness and mutual dependence that we all share. Mindfulness has demonstrated utility in realizing individual benefits; it is now time to turn our collective attention outward to include others in our framing of “well-being.” For this is what is necessary for human flourishing to occur on a grander scale.

Further research into mindfulness in education is required to understand the full scope of its potential, especially in cultivating wholesome, wise, and skillful ways of being. While this may sound abstract, vague, and even trivial, I feel that this work is essential because it ultimately has consequences for the survival of the human species. Every day, the earth is inching closer toward irreparable disequilibrium, no doubt precipitated by human activity. The disparity between the rich and the poor is growing to the extent that there is a *literal* one percent that controls the world’s wealth and resources. This is a unique time in human history where we have the capacity to direct our fate through reason, philosophy, ethics, and values in conjunction with

the scientific and technological advancements that have increased the quality of human life in recent generations.

It is time to reintegrate the social and ethical dimensions back into contemporary mindfulness. Mindfulness, when used as a means of pacifying people to accept oppressive conditions in society without advocating for social justice and anti-oppression, and without challenging systemic and entrenched power inequalities at the root of suffering is problematic. Similarly, mindfulness used to comfort and soothe oppressed and marginalized people merely to allow them to survive and cope in hostile environments without empowering them, and without working toward changing the underlying conditions that perpetuate oppression is unethical and complicit with the systems of control (Berila, 2014; Magee, 2016; Orr, 2002).

We can observe with our own eyes that individualistic values and goals can be detrimental to collective well-being. It is time to eschew short-term personal gain and work toward holistic, embodied, and relational ways of realizing collective well-being. Addressing this through mindfulness and education is a positive way forward.

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