

Andrea Crawford, Stephen Joseph & Edward Sellman

A quiet revolution? Reflecting on the potentiality and ethics of mindfulness in a junior school.

Abstract

This article examines the potentiality, acceptability and ethical considerations of a mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) for supporting pupils' mental well-being in a junior school. To date, research has predominantly focused on the psychological or behavioural benefits of MBIs rather than broader and more philosophical issues of implementation. The findings reported in this article are positioned alongside recent debates critiquing the neoliberal agenda of 'privatising' well-being and downplaying the role of the institution and its cultural context. The study synthesises the perspectives of pupils and teachers to provide more in-depth insights into the everyday realities of MBIs in educational contexts. The study highlights and critically examines the inherent ethical dilemmas of implementing MBIs in contexts that include vulnerable and conscripted audiences in particular. As such, this article argues the case for those individuals involved in developing, administering, and/or advocating MBIs to acknowledge these ethical dilemmas with greater transparency and integrity and consider the aims of MBIs in relation to their potential instrumental or holistic possibilities and processes of 'schoolification'.

Keywords: Mindfulness-based Interventions, Contemplative Education, Well-being, Neoliberalism, Ethics

1. Introduction

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have become increasingly popular in educational institutions (Ergas, 2018; Roeser, 2014; Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz and Walach, 2014). In a systematic review of the literature and evidence supporting the application of mindfulness in schools, Weare (2013) concluded that considerable evidence has emerged to validate the potential of MBIs and called for further research. Wider implementation and further research were also endorsed by The Mindfulness Initiative (2015). The Oxford Mindfulness Research Centre's Myriad project has since secured funding for a large randomised-controlled-trial (RCT) and is investigating the impact of the '.b' curriculum for students aged 11-14 offered by the UK Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) and its counterpart, 'paws.b' for younger children (7-11).

Critiques of mindfulness have suggested one of the issues with mindfulness may not be that it does not work but that it works too well, meaning it can easily be appropriated as a neutral approach for enhanced performativity, divorced from its ethical, philosophical and spiritual foundations (Ergas, 2017; Flores, 2016; Forbes,

2019, Hyland, 2016; Purser, 2019; Reveley, 2016; Simpson, 2017; Sellman and Buttarazzi, 2020). Whereas the oft-reported associated benefits of mindfulness on well-being and concentration are welcome, these can actually be posited as 'side-effects' of enhanced awareness, which raises critical and ethical issues as enhanced awareness may increase the capacity to observe the negative and dysfunctional as well as the positive and functional (Sellman and Buttarazzi, 2020), something hitherto under-researched. For Ergas (2019), this is characteristic of a debate emerging in education between advocates of an instrumentalised version of mindfulness (mindfulness in education), a more holistic and integrated approach (mindfulness as education) and critical mindfulness (mindfulness of education), which will be more fully outlined shortly. Such debates are of critical concern to readers of this journal as it poses deeper questions about the purpose and direction of education.

This article contributes to this debate by juxtaposing the findings from a small-scale qualitative study, incorporating the perceptions of pupils and teachers recipient of an MBI, with considerations from a critical review of the literature. It will discuss the less welcome ethical dilemmas that emerge when a MBI is implemented without critical awareness of the broader neoliberal context in which education operates (Hart, 2014). It will consider the consequent subservience of mindfulness to neoliberal agendas; its resultant submissiveness to the purposes of school readiness and adjustment, and as such, its relegation to being a tool for behaviour management, managing stress, or way of coping with schooling, whose role in producing the sources of distress is somewhat, and ironically, protected from awareness and critique (Flores, 2016; Reveley, 2016; Sellman and Buttarazzi, 2020). The voices of interviewees shared, both young and adult, seem to be aware of these inherent contradictions but are all too accepting of the status quo.

Hence, we argue that the 'quiet revolution' is all too quiet in at least two ways. First, the voices of both pupils and teachers underpin a desperate desire for a different model of education – something deeper, more creative and meaningful and less constricted by performativity, though lack the agency to do otherwise in light of pressure from both parents and governmental diktat. Second, the instrumental manner in which mindfulness is implemented colludes with neoliberal agendas of performativity at the expense of opportunities for self-awareness, growth and learning offered by a deeper engagement with the experience. Ultimately, we argue those individuals involved in developing, administering, and/or

advocating MBIs show greater awareness of the ethical dilemmas inherent in 'implementing' mindfulness in an instrumental manner in contexts including conscripted and vulnerable audiences. We recommend the intentions, aims, and context of MBIs are made transparent, set against and within the broader framework offered by Ergas (2019): mindfulness in/as/of education.

2. Mindfulness in Education - The Background

The concept of mindfulness originates from numerous East-Asian wisdom traditions (Ergas 2018), often associated with meditation practice, emerging from Hinduism and Buddhism (Shapiro et al., 2006). Taking Buddhism as an example, many consider mindfulness to be at the heart of the Buddha's teaching (Thera, 1962), as a significant component of the Eightfold Path, with its broader emphasis on wholesome living (Monteiro et al., 2014). Mindfulness itself is conceptualised as an observational capacity, its cultivation leading to enlightenment or the end of repeated patterns of suffering (Crane, 2009). Sellman and Buttarazzi (2020) discuss how the roots of the word mindfulness are closer to an act of remembrance, which recalls the impermanent nature of reality. This deeper type of awareness is distinct from more contemporary definitions applying mindfulness outside of spiritual practice. For example, Williams et al., (2007, p. 47) state mindfulness is 'paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to things as they are'. This kind of attention brings greater awareness, clarity and acceptance of moment-to-moment experience; the present being the focus, rather than the past or future, which are seen as likely sources of rumination and/or anxiety.

The operationalisation of mindfulness in this way has been utilised effectively with clinical populations of adults after their introduction and subsequent augmentation in the last quarter of the twentieth century (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Such success galvanised school-based psychologists towards incorporating and adapting mindfulness for specialist treatment with children (Semple et al., 2010) and as a potentially effective way of countering education's performative turn (Shapiro et al., 2014; Schonert and Lawlor, 2016). For Ergas (2019), the growth of mindfulness within educational contexts, coupled with its varied manifestations, prompts the need for a framework for understanding its different roles in contemporary education. A framework based on making explicit the encounter between the core facets of the practice and its socio-historical framings on the one hand and education on the other. According to Ergas (2019), three strands of

implementations of the practice in education can be employed to explain the current diversity - a socialisation-oriented mindfulness *in* education, characterised by an instrumental approach; a holistic mindfulness *as* education, characterised by an integral approach and a radical-critical mindfulness *of* education, characterised by discernment and eco-consciousness. Each reflects a different way of implementing mindfulness, its aims and role of the practice within education.

Until now, limited research exists on pupils' and teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of mindfulness within a school context, including views on its acceptability, potentiality and ethical basis. Most studies have taken a psychological approach, directed towards understanding its impact on pupil well-being (Zenner et al., 2014), or a behaviourist approach directed towards understanding its impact on improving social behaviour, social skills and attention (Semple et al., 2010).

The MBI implemented and scrutinised in this article can be characterised as mindfulness *in* education with its undoubtedly instrumental orientation, evidenced by the pupils' and teachers' reflections on their experience reported later in this article. Their reflections reveal how mindfulness was viewed as a tool for coping with exam stress, improving focus and attention to help raise academic standards, and for behaviour management. Such reflections echo the observations of Simpson (2017), who argues students are only taught mindfulness to a degree sufficient to focus on themselves and their performance and, as such, shifts the locus of culpability for stress production and management away from the institution to the individual. In pacifying the individual, the scope for personal growth and transformation is actually limited. As the data is integrated with a review of literature it becomes clear that insufficient attention is being granted to the voices of both those dissatisfied with mindfulness's narrow focus and the remit of education more broadly, i.e. the 'quiet revolution' is a bit too quiet.

3. Methodology/Theoretical Approach

To date, studies on MBIs within education have invariably employed quantitative research methods. These have been met with scepticism by some (e.g. Hyland, 2016) for attempting to measure the immeasurable and in doing so only researching rather narrow understandings and applications of mindfulness, and subsequently reinforcing an instrumental interpretation and agenda. In contrast, this study adopts a qualitative approach to gain richer understanding of the participants' personal views of the phenomena, enabling an examination of their experiences of learning

mindfulness; particularly pertinent as the practice is primarily learned experientially (Feldman and Kuyken, 2019). As their reflections are integrated with a continuing literature review, note only a small selection of examples of their experiences are shared, although these are generally indicative of the majority of the whole sample.

Twelve teachers and classes, averaging 30 pupils per class, participated in the independent study discussed in this article. It took place in a mixed and ethnically diverse government-funded English junior school for pupils aged 7-11. Four pupils, (two male, two female) selected by their teacher, from each class formed a focus group, with pseudonyms given to protect their anonymity. A focus group approach allows multiple voices to be heard simultaneously, and the opportunity for salient views to be contested or conferred by others, thereby facilitating more rounded and reasoned responses to discussion topics (Barbour, 2007). Free discussion, lasting around thirty minutes, was encouraged, but a schedule of questions guided the group when necessary. The discussion took place upon completion of Paws b, a six-week MBI designed by the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP), delivered by a qualified Paws b teacher. Nine class teachers also took part in semi-structured interviews of a similar length. The majority of the teachers had little or no prior experience of mindfulness. Like their pupils they too were being introduced to it. However, in retrospect, some orientation may have proved to be beneficial in their acceptance and more in-depth understanding of the concept. Thematic Analysis, following the six-step guide outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to ascertain the significance of experiences reported.

Findings and discussion

The research findings are presented under several discursive themes. They commence with a discussion of potentiality and acceptability before critically examining several challenging ethical issues via the types of messages communicated by adults to children. The data is perceptual, which maybe a source of critical ammunition for some, however, this study champions such data as a means of offering insight into the direct experiences of those immediately affected by the MBI - the teachers and pupils. In synergy with this endeavour, credence was given to the significance of perceptions shared and not just their typicality. In so doing, it accounts for everyday reality and highlights the associated ethical dilemmas present. The views expressed and shared are interwoven with an extensive discussion of relevant literature on the relationship between mindfulness

and education, which ratchets up the ethical debate as the article proceeds, showing how education locates issues of well-being and development around the individual rather than the institution.

Potentiality

Current research on the benefits of MBIs reveal they could improve pupils' brain functioning, leading to changes in brain structure that support academic success (Lyons and DeLange, 2016); for example enhanced attentional control, emotion regulation and cognitive processing (Wisner et al., 2010; Weare, 2013;); higher self-esteem (Brown and Ryan, 2003), greater task persistence (Evans et al., 2009), a decrease in negative affect and improvement in metacognition and executive functioning (Vickery and Dorjee, 2016), as well as improving behavioural regulation (Flook et al., 2010). At the school in this study, the routinely positive findings subjectively reported by the participants regarding the potentiality of mindfulness are in accord with research in the field confirming the positive benefits and enjoyment of MBIs (Greenberg and Harris, 2011). The reflections reveal how some pupils perceived mindfulness as being supportive of their well-being by reducing feelings of stress, inducing calm, improving relationships or increasing the ability to focus, thus supporting them academically.

Georgia - I thought it was very helpful and that I could like when I was feeling really nervous about something, it really helped me get over the nerves and just think this is all going to be fine because normally I don't really think about the positives. I always think about the negatives. I was just thinking oh well why do I think like this, so I think it's pretty good for me (year 5 pupil).

Keira - It's sort of like relaxing your mind to not like stressing and like worrying about the tests (year 6 pupil).

As Hart (2014) highlights, all initiatives in social and emotional learning, and on contemplative teaching and learning, emphasise the inner and interpersonal are essential to well-being. In this respect, implementing mindfulness in schools looks like a promising solution for supporting pupils. However, as the next section illustrates, this is not a straightforward endeavour.

Acceptability and ethics

Despite tentative evidence that mindfulness may support academic success, it is this 'side-effect' that is predominantly used to market mindfulness to schools (Davis, 2015; Sellman and Buttarazzi, 2020). Mindfulness is packaged as a way of offsetting academic stress so exam performance may be maintained or improved. This rather narrow focus has been met by considerable critique from writers eager to promote debate about definitional and implementational concerns (e.g. Hyland, 2016). As Forbes (2019) argues, many advocates of MBIs seem disinterested in critically reflecting on both the social context of schooling but also on how this frames MBIs in schools. For Drougge (2016, p. 169) this is a consequence of mindfulness being severed from its ethical and ontological Buddhist worldview while being turned into a 'neutral technique' for non-judgemental attention.

Such critique raises questions about how ethical it is to implement MBIs in schools without critical awareness of the broader neoliberal context in which education operates. As Hart (2014) further observes, while well-intended initiatives often respond to a perceived need and can make a difference, they generally underappreciate that the system in which they are being implemented is outdated. Hart (2014, p. 9) states:

The vision and view of education and of human consciousness are simply not adequate for this century, and so these programmes remain add-ons to the "serious curriculum" and thus are likely to be unsustainable. When the political, economic, administrative, or social winds change, these programmes may become distorted or diluted or fall by the wayside altogether.

Arguably, this is where the real problem lies. A study by Piotrowski et al., (2017) highlights how teachers concluded that the current education system does not provide opportunities for risk-taking; a finding that resonates with this investigation, where Claire, a year 3 teacher, offered a view typical for staff interviewed in this study:

I don't think I would be comfortable teaching it. ...I think I like the idea of it, but I think that I don't know it would necessarily be manageable. It, almost feels to me like one of those things where it would be good to start off with but because there's so many other things that you have to do it would then be the first thing then to sort of fade out if that makes sense. It's like when you do all of these sorts of things it starts off as a really good idea, and then you just can't maintain it.

A pertinent question might be to ask what makes a school elicit so many references to stress from its community? However, an equally pertinent, and arguably fundamental question to ask when contemplating MBIs within education is - what is the purpose of education? (Forbes, 2015). Is it for the betterment of the individual? To provide skills to survive as an adult? To prepare pupils to become functioning members of society? In which case to what degree does mindfulness fit in within the context of the current educational climate of performativity? A question we will return to later.

At the school featuring in this study, the pupils were more accepting of the MBI than their teachers. They enjoyed learning about mindfulness and the support they felt it offered them. Any challenges to the acceptability of the MBI were generally deemed as surmountable; less so for the teachers.

Sarah – Erm... and our teacher is very forgetful, so she probably forgets (year 3 pupil).

Lily - Teachers forget. They never have time to do the practice with us (year 5 pupil).

I wouldn't say we like dedicate time to it – no like I say sometimes they mention it before an activity, but I wouldn't say I try and consciously school it in. We just couldn't time table it in. When we sat down on Friday at Planning, Preparation and Assessment, we just tried to find you know... and the timetables are just so strict, aren't they? And you've got so much to fit into the time anyway.... (Holly – year 3 teacher).

Lack of time, or inability to remember to practice, were the main reasons given for little or no practice each week. These findings are in line with the findings of a survey conducted by MiSP (2019) where lack of time, alongside lack of 'buy-in' from staff and school leadership teams, were cited as the two most significant barriers to practising mindfulness in schools.

The teachers in this study perceived mindfulness as cognitive and behavioural based; a 'technique' to learn and calm children; thus, morphing mindfulness into a form of behaviour management. All participants considered mindfulness as useful in negative or challenging situations, an association that could be attributed to the narrow focus of the MBI with its emphasis on practices for improving focus, attention, reducing stress and worries.

We did it a couple of times at sort of like home time. Sort of like to calm them down a bit, and coming in after break (Claire - year 3 teacher).

The biggest thing that they'll probably take away is the techniques and things like that from it, and about having to ...allowing them to cope, allowing them to focus and allowing them to do those things (Paul – year 3 teacher).

Going beyond these superficial 'narratives' where teachers allocate time to mindfulness when the class is 'buzzy', triggers the question what happens to Buddhist mindfulness teachings and practices when they are de-contextualised, adapted, and applied in secular contexts? When implemented in schools, do they become just another form of behaviour management as opposed to a way of being (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), thereby ignoring the primarily embodied and experiential nature of mindfulness, one of its most defining characteristics (Brito, 2013)? Indeed, in such diluted form, can they be anything else?

"That wasn't very mindful was it?"

Arguably, from a critical perspective, in this diluted form, MBIs are utilised in early educational settings for purposes of school readiness and schoolification (Flores, 2016). School readiness is the notion of a child's ability to comply with the behavioural demands of school as an institution. For example, follow school rules, display appropriate emotional responses, practice cooperation, and pay attention to teacher-directed activities. Schoolification is the phenomenon of early childhood education settings moving toward more academic curriculums, requiring distinctive goals and standards, enabling measurement of pupils' achievements (Flores, 2016). Results gained from MBIs inadvertently align well with these underlying intentions (Flores, 2016).

Undeniably, the externalization of some challenging behaviours, usually considered disruptive to the school readiness agenda, prompt many teachers to rely on behavioural interventions. While these help a child find emotional stability, many classrooms adopt MBIs to implement school readiness practices (Farran, 2011). In this study, teachers and pupils shared perception that mindfulness was a reactive strategy for emotional and behavioural regulation.

Herjeet - The year 3 classes are bonkers. It would help them stepping up into the school, a sense of the maturity. The year 3s are violent people some of them (year 5 pupil).

I don't know if the programme would have a better... be more effective if the children weren't erm... were a bit more challenging. I know here we do things

like... Emotional Literacy Support Assistants... and that's all emotional support and stuff like that... it's that essentially. It's like a kind of therapy thing (Paul – year 3 teacher).

All are attempting to fit it (mindfulness) here and there and especially when something happens that triggers us to return to it. (Headteacher).

Looking at the 'bigger picture', if the goal of schoolification, in conjunction with school readiness, is to promote 'normalized' behaviour, reduce emotional outbursts, and teach children to accept and endure frustration, as Albrecht et al., (2012) suggest, mindfulness could just have become the tool to achieve this. If so, ethical dilemmas abound, particularly so when we consider how certain mindfulness practices about acceptance are misunderstood, thus giving mixed messages about not speaking up in the face of adversity and injustice. Potentially this could also affect children's later participation in social-activism (Flores, 2016).

Teachers interviewed as part of this study also perceived mindfulness as supporting academic achievement, demonstrated by their increased commitment to mindfulness practice during the Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs) period, a commitment remarked on by the headteacher, who stated:

To me, that's a bit of what's in it for me as well. Year six staff could see - well actually this could be something really powerful to help these children cope with the SATs. And I think the children will be able to look at it the same ... "Oh yes, I am one of those people really worried about SATs this might be able to help me".

The headteacher recognised the pressure accompanying SATs - the requirement to achieve excellent results in an assessment-driven culture. It marks a return to the question raised earlier regarding the degree to which mindfulness fits in within the context of the current educational climate of performativity; it also begs two further questions. The first is posited by Sellman and Buttarazzi (2020), who ask is mindfulness in education an ambitious vehicle for human flourishing or an intervention to help students cope with school? A second question arises from Ergas (Ergas 2013, p. 66), who asks whether we are now moderating stress levels of students with 'just the right dosage' to keep them on track? As such, is mindfulness practice becoming a healthier, cheaper, more acceptable 'Ritalin' to ensure students sit down and study? If we consider these questions, further ethical dilemmas start to emerge. While it could be deemed churlish, even uncaring, not to welcome what proponents of mindfulness regard as a helpful intervention for providing pupils skills

to gain academic success and personal well-being, it would also be lax not to adopt a more critical approach and give some consideration to these crucial questions.

MBIs are generally not presented around a prescribed ethical frame within education, rather they assume the ethical framework provided by the context in which they are implemented (Pradhan, 2016). So while mindfulness seems to offer a strategy for calming classrooms, increasing self-esteem, or improving academic performance within education, little effort is made to position all aspects of learning within a 'moral community inspired by the loving-kindness and compassion which are fundamental to the universal *dharma* within which mindfulness has its origins' (Hyland, 2016a, p. 394). Indeed, using schools to actively target the well-being of young people is not an 'ideologically neutral welfare-enhancement exercise' (Reveley, 2016, p. 498).

On the contrary, according to Purser (2019), within an under-theorised neoliberal climate, MBIs in schools become a form of governmentality. They assist in shaping individuals to adjust to the needs of a society required to compete in a global economy. As Arthington (2016, p. 87) elucidates, from a Foucauldian perspective 'mindfulness reinforces a neoliberal ideology by promoting the concept of the responsible, autonomous, choosing individual who dedicates themselves to a lifelong project of self-improvement and self-discipline'. Consequently, pupils and educators become independent, emotionally adjusted entities able to function and thrive in a market-based consumer society (Lavelle, 2016; Purser, 2019). On closer inspection, it could be argued that within this neoliberal climate, MBIs aimed at increasing resilience and ability to cope in the face of inequalities and adversity are perhaps unintentionally used to pathologise the pupils themselves and ultimately maintain the status quo.

"It's all in your head"

Forbes (2019) considers how the current focus of MBIs in schools on emotional regulation of pupils results in discriminatory, inequitable, anti-critical, and depoliticising structural arrangements existing within the education system left unaddressed. This is a particularly pertinent issue when considered in the context of the drive to implement MBIs into deprived inner-city schools attended by non-white pupils. Their challenges cannot be an individualised matter of poor emotional

management skills, rather they are indicative of more significant socio-political problems; ones related to race, class and poverty.

Extending this argument, Lavelle (2016) challenges the rhetoric of the universality of MBIs; the assumption that causes of stress or suffering can be overcome via the application of a singular method. Such rhetoric tends to privilege highly individualised descriptions of mental-health, thereby eschewing social and systemic causes of suffering (Lavelle, 2016). Kirmayer (2015) notes how much of the literature assumes essential processes of change will be found in the brain, thereby leaving unanswered questions regarding the extent to which context and culture play a role in these processes. Indeed, the effects of meditation on the brain may also be dependent on the individual's developmental history in addition to the challenges and affordances of current social contexts – all of which, in turn, depend on culture.

Individuals may then internalise messages like there is nothing inherently dysfunctional with capitalism itself. Widespread societal stress and social suffering cannot be blamed on vast inequalities, material conditions, immoral corporate business practices, or political corruption. Instead, they are due to individuals not being mindful or resilient enough to be fully functioning, authentic, and happy despite having all the opportunities to be so (Purser et al., 2016). Arguably therefore, teaching mindfulness that lacks a critical lens can promote and perpetuate what Purser and Milillo (2014, p.16) refer to as 'institutional blindness', helping maintain the status quo rather than encouraging the transformation of power structures. Goddard (2014) also observes how current mindfulness practice has succumbed to an individualistic worldview, overemphasising internal pathology while understating environmental stressors. This medicalisation of mindfulness, where 'critique is turned inward' (Davies, 2015, p. 10), diverts critical attention away from broader political and economic problems resulting in the emancipatory potential of mindfulness for addressing social suffering remaining neutered and limited (Davies, 2015).

Also relevant to the discussion, Davidson et al., (2012) note how research on mindfulness uses medical terms such as 'intervention' and 'dosage'. Such terms prompt Ergas (2013) to interrogate the reason for their use, and hypothesise it is for supporting other processes underlying the 'contemplative turn' in education;

processes pointing to control and a more sophisticated 'mode of domination'. Ergas (2013, p.66) states:

For what are such terms if not a reflection of the scientific ethos of *control*? Of reducing perhaps, the original numinous 'no-self', as the peak of the Buddhist path that mindfulness traditionally sought to unfold, to the phenomenon of 'self', now equipped with a technology geared toward coping with an achievements-based life?

Such terms position mindfulness within a medical model. Undeniably, as mindfulness has become mainstreamed, as Sellman and Buttarazzi (2020) observe, course developers have abandoned any return to the original teachings, instead referring to mindfulness-based health interventions. Such interventions typically have an instrumental focus designed to alleviate or manage symptoms. This medical position has 'over-emphasised by-proxy foci such as stress management, concentration, and happiness to such a degree that it is politically non-threatening when applied to a context such as education' (Sellman and Buttarazzi, 2020, p.73).

Radical action, from this perspective, is not required. The solution for addressing these societal problems and effecting social change will come about through a conservative mindful revolution; one that is primarily therapeutic. It will occur 'without any political agenda, or any substantial challenge to the institutional structures which enable capitalism to inject its toxicity system-wide' (Purser et al., 2016 p. xvii), and will happen via the training of individuals in mindfulness (Goto-Jones, 2013). It is a hypothesis known as the 'Trojan horse' (Purser et al., 2016, p. xvii); which advocates more mindful, compassionate and authentic individuals will gradually and peacefully ensure a humane and compassionate capitalist society emerges (Purser et al., 2016). Loy (2016) however, questions such a mindfulness revolution; a revolution with an individual does not work; it needs to be collective. While social transformation does require personal change to succeed, the opposite is also true. Teachings promoting individual awakening cannot avoid being affected by social structures supporting collective delusion and docility.

"Are you sitting quietly?"

Being part of a conscripted audience was an issue raised at the school by multiple pupils:

Max – *I didn't like it very much because when I was doing the practices I was just sitting there, and I was just doing these finger things, and I didn't*

know what I was meant to do and it got really frustrating because I just didn't really want to do mindfulness (year 5 pupil).

Charlotte – There are people sort of whispering to each other who are just ...they, they, don't want to and they've just decided right I'm not going to take part in it and it gets... it gets on my nerves and the nerves of other people who find it ...who find it useful (year 6 pupil).

There are always some pupils less engaged than others in any lesson, yet, forcing pupils to practice mindfulness seems the antithesis of mindfulness. Furthermore, when mindfulness is implemented in education, superficially or otherwise, it can potentially release repressed and traumatic material (Farias and Wikholm, 2015). Many techniques on mindfulness courses aim to help people deal with difficult emotions by simply being with them, as opposed to escaping them through futile worry or experiential avoidance in the pursuit of temporary pleasure (Crane, 2009). However, from a critical perspective, is it right, for example, to give a child who is suffering abuse at home space and time to allow for thoughts to drift through their mind?

While Sellman and Buttarazzi (2020) contend processing such issues is valuable on an educational and therapeutic level, crucially they also stress it requires dedicated and qualified support. Without it, MBIs in educational institutions could be considered very cost-effective if used to replace higher salaried, skilled and experienced counsellors and therapists; also, ethically very dubious as it could elicit disturbances in their emotional lives in unpredictable ways, which are difficult to handle and support (Ergas, 2017).

An ethical concern also emerges regarding impressionable children being taught skills that may change how they think, perceive and interact in the world. It is claimed mindfulness alters the structure and functioning of the brain; therefore, in children, we are changing the structure and operation of developing brains in as yet unknown ways (Semple et al., 2017). As Rosenbaum and Magid (2016, p. 6) state:

Whenever something has the power to help, it will inevitably have the power to harm; it could not otherwise be effective. There is no medication that doesn't cause side effects in some people; there is no solution that doesn't create unexpected consequences.

Expanding the discussion, if teaching MBIs to pupils results in them gaining greater awareness of the conditioning and reproductive functions of schooling, yet receive no support or possess little agency, it raises questions around the ethics of teaching

MBIs (Sellman and Buttarazzi, 2020). Pupils in such circumstances are left with two unpleasant options: quietly tolerate the now prevailing feeling of dissatisfaction until schooling is over, a manner Sellman and Buttarazzi (2020) describe as inauthentic or 'unmindful', or question/challenge the system and risk the consequences.

Given that pupils are subject to demands and systems they have little or no control over, it is necessary, as argued previously, to communicate the broader context in which an MBI is presented (Chadwick and Gelbar, 2016). Human flourishing requires mindfulness 'as' and/or 'of' education, but if the focus is mindfulness 'in' education, it needs to be clearly framed and ideally should be called exactly what it is: breathing exercises for stress management and concentration – not mindfulness, which has a far broader outlook. Without critical awareness of the broader neoliberal context in which education operates, MBIs emphasising individually-focused consciousness and behaviour act as a form of social control, potentially masking social and cultural factors, often the main reasons for teacher and pupil stress and difficulties in the first place (Forbes, 2019). Ironically, disregarding the socio-political nature of schools leaves the stress and problems for pupils and teachers alike still intact and the very reason why MBIs are warranted at all.

"Are you paying attention?"

In this study, the MBI privileged attention over intention. Bishop et al., (2004) highlight how intention, i.e. why one is practising, is a central component of mindfulness and crucial to understanding the process as a whole. Walsh (2016) stresses that while mindfulness practices should represent a full breadth of social interests, it is essential they also delve deeply into the practitioner's context and intentions. Intention is often overlooked in contemporary definitions of mindfulness (Hyland, 2016). The pupils at the school demonstrated no real understanding of it due to the narrow focus of the MBI, where intention had no pivotal role. As Purser and Milillo (2014) insist, mindfulness is not just a compartmentalised tool for enhancing attention. While increasing awareness and fostering stillness in the present moment is useful for improving focus (Peacock, 2014), they are not an end in themselves. Instead, they provide the necessary conditions for engaging with the broader enterprise of cultivating the moral and spiritual virtues that can assist us in dealing with everyday life challenges (Teasdale and Chaskalson, 2011; Hyland, 2016).

It raises the question is there something inherently unethical with a partial application of mindfulness? Burnett (2009) suggests while a teacher trained in mindfulness with an established practice of their own is important, if a taster of mindfulness in the context of timetabled periods is what is being offered, debatably this will not require the same level of training as an instructor of an eight-week course aimed at adults. In a classroom context, there will be less depth, with limited time for inquiry. As Burnett (2009, p. 42) states: 'you are dipping their toes in the pool, not throwing them in'. In a classroom setting, children's eyes can be opened to the possibilities of mindfulness, but there is not enough time to expect a radical shift in the way children perceive their world.

This seems attainable enough for schools. Indeed, we could ask should we not be providing a 'toolkit' for children in self-awareness and stress management, and creating interest or initial understanding of mindfulness which could be pursued later if desired? Undoubtedly few would not contend that something is better than nothing. However, whatever we ask or believe, if we consider how competencies for teaching mindfulness to adults are becoming increasingly tightly prescribed (Crane et al., 2012), arguably teaching young people should be equally tightly monitored, if not more so given their vulnerability. It also raises the question of just how much training is enough for safe and effective dissemination of mindfulness on a large scale to young people (Johnson et al., 2016)?

Conclusion

The study at the school discussed in this article explored the potentiality, acceptability and consequent ethical dilemmas that emerge when introducing mindfulness via an MBI into a junior school. Regarding potentiality of the MBI, the resultant increase in focus, attention, emotional regulation and reduction in stress reported by participants was in line with current research; research invariably employing a quantitative methodology, which typically espouses the benefits of MBIs in this respect. Regarding the acceptability of the MBI, by employing a qualitative approach enabling a more in-depth examination of those affected by the MBI and their accompanying experience, numerous and oft under-reported ethical dilemmas abounded. These undoubtedly have implications for both its acceptability and consequent implementation.

It would seem, therefore, as Ng (2016, p. 149) wisely suggests, 'we thus face a collective search for a more critically and civically oriented discourse of mindfulness'. One that does not hinder the helping of individuals with their well-being, but supplements it by a greater identification and acknowledgement of both the prevailing cultural logics and the current precarious socio-political conditions and effects (Ng, 2016). Without this discourse, there is a real danger of MBIs becoming nothing more than short-term commercialised self-help strategies, implemented into schools as a 'quiet-revolution' to provide a quick fix, or cure-all, while leaving the neoliberal agenda of performativity intact, as per the warnings of Ergas, (2013); Reveley, (2016); Hyland, (2016) and Sellman and Buttarazzi, (2020). Or, as Hart (2014) cautions, for MBIs to become mere add-ons that, like many other interventions in schools, ultimately disappear when their utility to a neoliberal agenda is outgrown.

While exceptions do exist such as the CARE project (reported by Jennings et al., 2013), many MBIs offered to schools have an instrumental emphasis, therefore, moving forward, we urge those individuals involved in developing, administering, and/or advocating MBIs to an indisputably vulnerable and conscripted audience, to be more mindful themselves of the ethical dilemmas outlined here. To demonstrate greater integrity by becoming more transparent with their intentions, and admit they aim to provide an intervention primarily focused on attention and behaviour. Furthermore, to acknowledge the relationship that exists between MBIs and the current neoliberal agenda and, with this explicit acknowledgement, recognise the potential MBIs have for devaluing the concept of mindfulness. More radically, we argue the need for a 'louder revolution', whereby education deepens its engagement with mindfulness, or alternatively considers abandoning mindfulness rhetoric altogether, particularly as the interpretation of mindfulness is fundamentally different from the Buddhist interpretation of this term.

Word count (including references): 8084

References

Albrecht, N., Albrecht, P. and Cohen, M. (2012). Mindfully Teaching in the Classroom: A Literature Review. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(12), doi: <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n12.2>

Arthington, P. (2016). Mindfulness: A Critical Perspective. *Community Psychology in Global Perspective CPGP, Comm. Psych. Glob. Persp.*, 2(1), pp.87-104.

Babbie, E. (2007). *The practice of social research*. 11th ed. Belmont, C.A. USA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Baer, R. (2011). Measuring mindfulness. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12(1), pp.241-261, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2011.564842>

Barbour, R. (2007). *Doing focus groups*. London: Sage.

Barker, K. (2014). Mindfulness meditation: Do-it-yourself medicalization of every moment. *Social Science and Medicine*, 106, pp.168-176, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.01.024>

Bishop, S. (2004). Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 11(3), pp.230-241, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy/bph077>

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Brito, G. (2013). Rethinking Mindfulness in the Therapeutic Relationship. *Mindfulness*, 5(4), pp.351-359, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-012-0186-2>

Brown, K. and Ryan, R. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), pp.822-848, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822>

Burnett, R. (2009). *Mindfulness in Schools. Learning lessons from the adults – secular and Buddhist Report*. [online] Mindfulnet.org. Available at: <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Mindfulness-in-schools-dissertation-Burnett.pdf> [Accessed 28 Nov. 2019].

Chadwick, J. and Gelbar, N. (2016). Mindfulness for children in public schools: Current research and developmental issues to consider. *International Journal of School and Educational Psychology*, 4(2), pp.106-112, doi:

<https://doi.org.10.1080/21683603.2015.1130583>

Crane, R. (2009). *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy: Distinctive Features*. East Sussex: Routledge.

Crane, R., Soulsby, J., Kuyken, W., Williams, J., Eames, C., Bartley, T. and Silverton, S. (2012). *The Universities of Bangor, Exeter and Oxford Mindfulness-based Interventions Teaching Assessment Criteria*. [online]

Mindfulnessassociation.net. Available at: <http://oxfordmindfulness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/MBI-TAC-manual-summary-addendums-05-16.pdf>

[Accessed 28 Nov. 2019].

Davidson, R., Dunne, J., Eccles, J., Engle, A., Greenberg, M., Jennings, P., Jha, A., Jinpa, T., Lantieri, L., Meyer, D., Roeser, R. and Vago, D. (2012). Contemplative Practices and Mental Training: Prospects for American Education. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), pp.146-153, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00240.x>

Davies, W. (2015). *The happiness industry*. London: Verso.

Drougge, P. (2016). Notes Toward a Coming Backlash: Mindfulness as an Opiate of the Middle Classes. In: R. Purser, D. Forbes and A. Burke. In: R. Purser, D. Forbes and A. Burke, ed., *Handbook of Mindfulness Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp.167-178.

Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R. and Schellinger, K. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), pp.405-432, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>

Ergas, O. (2013). Mindfulness in education at the intersection of science, religion, and healing. *Critical Studies in Education*, 55(1), pp.58-72.

Ergas, O. (2017). Reclaiming ethics through "self": A conceptual model of teaching practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 68, pp.252-261, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2014.858643>

Ergas, O. (2018). A contemplative turn in education: charting a curricular pedagogical countermovement, *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2018.1465111>

Ergas, O. (2019). Mindfulness *In, As and Of* Education: Three Roles of Mindfulness in Education, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, (ahead of print), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12349>

Evans, D., Baer, R. and Segerstrom, S. (2009). The effects of mindfulness and self-consciousness on persistence. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 47(4), pp.379-382, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2009.03.026>

Farias, M. and Wikholm, C. (2015). *The Buddha Pill: Can Meditation Change You?* London: Watkins Publishing.

Farran, D. (2011). Rethinking school readiness. *Exceptionality education international*, 21(2), pp.5-15, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377900903379125>

Feldman, C. and Kuyken, W. (2019) *Mindfulness: Ancient Wisdom Meets Modern Psychology* (London, Guildford Press).

Flook, L., Smalley, S., Kitil, M., Galla, B., Kaiser-Greenland, S., Locke, J., Ishijima, E. and Kasari, C. (2010). Effects of Mindful Awareness Practices on Executive Functions in Elementary School Children. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 26(1), pp.70-95, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377900903379125>

Flores, N. (2016). A critical and comprehensive review of mindfulness in the early years. In: R. Purser, D. Forbes and A. Burke, ed., *Mindfulness in behavioural health, culture context and social engagement*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp.441-446.

Forbes, D. (2019). *Mindfulness and Its Discontents: Education, Self, And Social Transformation*. Black Point NS, Canada: Fernwood Publishing Co., Ltd.

Goddard, M. (2014). Critical Psychiatry, Critical Psychology, and the Behaviorism of B. F. Skinner. *Review of General Psychology*, 18(3), pp.208-215, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000012>

Goto-Jones, C. (2013). Zombie Apocalypse as Mindfulness Manifesto (after Žižek). *Postmodern Culture*, 24(1), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2013.0062>

Greenberg, M. and Harris, A. (2011). Nurturing Mindfulness in Children and Youth: Current State of Research. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), pp.161-166, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2011.00215.x>

Hart, T. (2014). *The integrative mind transformative education for a world on fire*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Hyland, T. (2016). Through A Glass Darkly: The Neglect of Ethical and Educational Elements in Mindfulness-Based Interventions. In: R. Purser, D. Forbes and A. Burke, ed., *Handbook of Mindfulness Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp.383-396.

Jennings, P., Frank, J., Snowberg, K., Coccia, M. and Greenberg, M., 2013. Improving classroom learning environments by Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE): Results of a randomized controlled trial. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 28(4), pp.374-390, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000035>

Johnson, C., Burke, C., Brinkman, S. and Wade, T. (2016). Effectiveness of a school-based mindfulness program for transdiagnostic prevention in young adolescents. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 81, pp.1-11, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2016.03.002>

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), pp.144-156, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy/bpg016>

Kirmayer, L. (2015). Mindfulness in cultural context. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 52(4), pp.447-469, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461515598949>

Lavelle, B. (2016). Against One Method: Contemplation in Contexts. In: R. Purser, D. Forbes and A. Burke, ed., *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*. AG Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp.233-242.

Loy, D. (2016). The Challenge of Mindful Engagement. In: R. Purser, D. Forbes and A. Burke, ed., *Handbook of Mindfulness Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp.15-26.

Lyons, K. and DeLange, J. (2016). Mindfulness Matters in the Classroom: The Effects of Mindfulness Training on Brain Development and Behavior in Children and Adolescents. In: K. Schnoert-Reichl and R. Roeser, ed., *Handbook of Mindfulness in Education. Mindfulness in Behavioral Health*. New York: Springer, pp.271-283.

MiSP (2019). *Schools Project (MiSP) Teacher Survey, 2019 Summary of Responses*. [online] Mindfulnessinschools.org. Available at: <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MiSP-Teacher-Survey-2019.pdf> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2019].

Monteiro, L., Musten, R. and Compson, J. (2014). Traditional and Contemporary Mindfulness: Finding the Middle Path in the Tangle of Concerns. *Mindfulness*, 6(1), pp.1-13, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-014-0301-7>

Ng, E. (2016). The Critique of Mindfulness and the Mindfulness of Critique: Paying Attention to the Politics of Our Selves with Foucault's Analytic of Governmentality. In: R. Purser, D. Forbes and A. Burke, ed., *Handbook of Mindfulness Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp.135-152.

Peacock, J. (2014). Sati or Mindfulness? Bridging the Divide. In: M. Bazzano, ed., *After Mindfulness New Perspectives on Psychology and Meditation*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.3-22.

Piotrowski, S., Binder, M. and Krmpotić Schwind, J. (2017). *Primary Teachers' Perceptions of Mindfulness Practices with Young Children*. [online] Learning Landscapes. Available at: <https://www.learninglandscapes.ca/index.php/learnland/article/view/Primary-Teachers%E2%80%99-Perceptions-of-Mindfulness-Practices-With-Young-Children> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2019].

Pradhan, R. (2016). Mindfulness and growing pains. [Blog] *Levekunst art of life*. Available at: <http://levkunst.com/mindfulness-and-growing-pains/> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2019].

Purser, R. (2019). *McMindfulness. How Mindfulness Became The New Capitalist Spirituality*. London: Repeater Books.

Purser, R. and Milillo, J. (2014). Mindfulness Revisited: A Buddhist-Based Conceptualization. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 24(1), pp.3-24, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492614532315>

Purser, R., Forbes, D. and Burke, A. (2016). *Handbook of Mindfulness Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing., p.v-xxv.

Reveley, J. (2016). Neoliberal meditations: How mindfulness training medicalizes education and responsabilizes young people. *Policy Futures in Education*, 14(4), pp.497-511, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210316637972>

Roeser, R. (2014). The Emergence of Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Educational Settings, *Advances in Motivation and Achievement*, 18, 379-419. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/S0749-742320140000018010>.

Rosenbaum, R. and Magid, B. (2016). *What's Wrong with Mindfulness (And What Isn't)*. Somerville, MA, USA: Wisdom Publications Ltd.

Schonert-Reichl, K. and Lawlor, M. (2010). The Effects of a Mindfulness-Based Education Program on Pre- and Early Adolescents' Well-Being and Social and Emotional Competence. *Mindfulness*, 1(3), pp.137-151, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-010-0011-8>

Sellman, E. and Buttarazzi, G. (2020). Adding Lemon Juice to Poison – Raising Critical Questions About the Oxymoronic Nature of Mindfulness in Education and its Future Direction. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 68 (1), 61-78, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2019.1581128>

Semple, R., Drouman, V. and Reid, B. (2017). Mindfulness goes to school: things learned (so far) from research and real-world experiences. *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(1), pp.29-52, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21981>

Semple, R., Lee, J., Rosa, D. and Miller, L. (2010). A Randomized Trial of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Children: Promoting Mindful Attention to

Enhance Social-Emotional Resiliency in Children. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 19(2), pp.218-229, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-009-9301-y>

Shapiro, S., Carlson, L., Astin, J. and Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62(3), pp.373-386, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20237>

Shapiro, S., Lyons, K., Miller, R., Butler, B., Vieten, C. and Zelazo, P. (2014). Contemplation in the Classroom: A New Direction for Improving Childhood Education. *Educational Psychology Review*, 27(1), pp.1-30, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-014-9265-3>

Simpson, D. (2017) From me to we: Revolutionising Mindfulness in Schools, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 18:1, 47-71, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2017.1301032>

Teasdale, J. and Chaskalson, M. (2011). How does mindfulness transform suffering? II: the transformation of dukkha. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12(1), pp.103-124, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2011.564826>

Thera, N. (1962). *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. 1st ed. London: Rider and Co.

Trochim, W. and Donnelly, J. (2006). *The research methods knowledge base*. 3rd ed. Mason, OH: Cengage Learning.

Vickery, C. and Dorjee, D. (2016). Mindfulness Training in Primary Schools Decreases Negative Affect and Increases Meta-Cognition in Children. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.02025>

Wallace, B. (2008). *A Mindful Balance*. [online] Tricycle: The Buddhist Review. Available at: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/mindful-balance-0/> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2019].

Walsh, Z. (2016). A Meta-Critique of Mindfulness Critiques: From McMindfulness to Critical Mindfulness. In: R. Purser, D. Forbes and A. Burke, ed., *Handbook of Mindfulness Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, pp.153-166.

Weare, K. (2013). Developing mindfulness with children and young people: a review of the evidence and policy context. *Journal of Children's Services*, 8(2), pp.141-153, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/jcs-12-2012-0014>

Williams, J., Teasdale, J., Segal, Z. and Kabat-Zinn, J. (2007). *The Mindful Way through Depression*. New York: Guildford Publications.

Wisner, B., Jones, B. and Gwin, D. (2010). School-based Meditation Practices for Adolescents: A Resource for Strengthening Self-Regulation, Emotional Coping, and Self-Esteem. *Children and Schools*, 32(3), pp.150-159, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/32.3.150>

Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., and Walach, H. (2014) Mindfulness-based interventions in schools—a systematic review and meta-analysis, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 1–20. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00603>