From Instrumental to Integral Mindfulness: Toward a More Holistic and Transformative Approach in Schools

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Abstract

Although the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in educational contexts appear to have demonstrated some benefits for students and teachers in research studies conducted over the last two decades, there are also those who criticize MBI's for their instrumental focus. Exploring this debate, this article offers a case for the implementation of a more holistic and integral approach to mindfulness in educational settings. It will draw upon the philosophical legacy of Martin Heidegger and other critical theorists, who contest the dominant framing of neoliberalism and encourage engagement with more systemic perspectives. During this exploration, we examine two polemics: (1) whether mindfulness should be implemented technically or holistically and, (2) whether the focus should be individual and/or collective. The article concludes that although mindfulness may be an efficient 'self-technology' to improve certain aspects of individual well-being, it is necessary to challenge this perspective as it promotes a type of 'iatrogenic effect'. Specifically, it is argued that systemic failure is reframed as individual fallibility via a simplistic focus on well-being that may contradictorily foster appeasement to exploitative conditions. As an alternative, we offer a more integrative version, drawing in particular on the work of Ken Wilber, which proposes systemic as well as individual transformation.

Keywords Mindfulness · Neoliberalism · Integral theory · Holistic education

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Introduction

The relationship between mindfulness and education has become a topic associated with both promises and pitfalls since the turn of the millennium (Ergas 2019a). Throughout this period, education in the United Kingdom (UK) and other westernized countries has witnessed a concerted effort to compensate the performativity agenda[1] with a range of well-being initiatives. This could be seen as an attempt to 'both have your cake and eat it' as schooling still privileges the development of cognitive skills above all else, at the service of neoliberalist economic functioning, but is now also somewhat tempered by a broadening focus on the emotional well-being of students and teachers, sometimes referred to as 'therapeutic' or even 'contemplative' turns. This counter movement, intentionally or not, has emphasized personal abilities such as self-knowledge and emotional regulation as yet another individual competence to be acquired during schooling (Hyland 2009). In this context, the encounter between education and mindfulness traditions appears initially promising in terms of efficacy, though critical voices (Brito, Joseph and Sellman 2021a; Ergas 2019b; Forbes 2019; Hyland 2016; Reveley 2016) express concern about the superficiality of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) and how they privatize well-being and thwart deeper forms of self-knowledge and social transformation.

Considering the question of what is the relationship between education and mindfulness, Ergas (2019b) asserts three main modalities for mindfulness implemented within educational contexts: mindfulness 'in', 'as' and 'of' education. Mindfulness 'as' and 'of' education are distinguished from mindfulness 'in' education as being more holistic, by which we mean broader and more inclusive in content as well as more critical. Whilst they promote a cultivation of a way of being through the whole school system, they are also rarer and more marginal as a consequence. Mindfulness 'in' education has, however, become more mainstream, largely because it operates from a more instrumental perspective. Such mindfulness training is 'attractive' as it comes packaged with a range of

[1] According to Ball (2003, p. 216), 'performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)' at the service of an increasing productivity, which is determined from agents outside of the educational world.

self-soothing and concentration techniques. From this perspective mindfulness can be seen as a tool that offers objectifiable as well as laudable attitudes and skills. This means that MBIs in schools are typically "outsourced" interventions with a focus on improving the skill-set and general well-being of students and teachers, aligned with a logic of individuality and productivity and thus reinforcing the socio-economic system, namely neoliberalism, which currently frames western education (Ergas 2019b; Forbes 2019; Hyland 2017; Scherer and Waistell 2018). Subjected to critique, mindfulness 'in' education is problematic because individuals are taught to cope with systems that may be, at least partially, responsible for their "suffering", whereas deeper understanding of self and reality is undermined (Sellman and Buttarazzi 2020).

The purpose of this article is to explore and critique the conventional implementation of MBIs in educational settings and stimulate debate regarding their merits and limitations. We will argue that although these MBIs within education result in several benefits in individualistic terms during the short-term, and thus it may be better to have these interventions instead of not having them, they also undermine broader goals for holistic education, at both individual and societal levels, and thus need to be implemented more integrally to achieve more deeply transformative and longer-term benefits. The type of integral education we propose draws heavily on Ken Wilber (see Wilber 2016, Wilber and DiPerna 2017, as well as Forbes 2019), though its heritage can be traced back to yogic and contemplative roots. An integral approach accommodates interior as well as exterior experience and has collective as well as individual dimensions, which we will explain more fully later in the article.

We begin the article however with a discussion of the historical and socio-cultural background of mindfulness and education, examining philosophical challenges relating to the framing of mindfulness "in" education by core ideas emanating from several philosophers, including the contributions of Martin Heidegger (1952/1977; 1954/1977; 1997/2006; see also Brito, Joseph and Sellman 2021b; Peters 2002), Illich (1976) and critiques of neoliberalism as a late-form of capitalism (Ball 2003; Han 2015; 2017; Reveley 2016; Rosa 2010), which is increasingly considered to be a detrimental socio-economic system by scholars more concerned with human rather than economic growth. We will then

analyze the potential and shortcomings of implementing mindfulness instrumentally first, and, individualistically second, before concluding our argument for a more holistic and integral approach. We use these terms interchangeably as they are etymologically connected to 'wholeness', but have distinct, if overlapping, literatures, both of which we draw upon. Although the space within an article is limited, we will draw upon Wilber (2016) and Wilber and DiPerna (2017) in particular towards the end of our article, to share some suggestions and examples of what a holistic/integral approach may look like.

Socio-cultural Context of Mindfulness 'in' Education

Mindfulness practices derive from broader ancient Buddhist philosophy (Feldman and Kuyken 2019; Sun 2014) and were introduced in the form of a standardized intervention called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) in western societies in 1979 by Jon Kabat-Zinn's pioneering work, first in health settings and subsequently by others in areas as heterogeneous as education, therapy and various work-places (Purser and Loy 2013; Sun 2014). Early research about mindfulness in education seemed to demonstrate that these practices have several potential benefits (Weare 2012), so much so that in 2015 the UK Parliament, as one example, advocated greater research and implementation within health and education. This was possibly in response to the alarming augmentation of teenage mental health problems witnessed over the past 30 years (Mindful Nation UK 2015). However, in the last decade, this type of implementation has been critiqued by many authors as a problematic over-simplification and instrumentalisation, subservient to a neoliberal agenda (Hyland 2017; Sellman and Buttarazzi 2020) and has become a topic of debate. On one side of this debate are some psychologists arguing from what they see as a pragmatic discourse, who affirm this kind of implementation has positive and measurable effects in educational settings. On the other side of the debate are contemplatives arguing from a spiritual, critical and/or integral standpoint that superficial implementation can have an 'iatrogenic effect' in the educational system if its socio-economic foundation is not taken into account (for a deeper explanation of this idea, see Brito, Joseph and Sellman 2021a; also Ergas 2019a). The term 'iatrogenesis' is borrowed here from Ivan Illich (Illich

1976) to describe processes where individuals are made the subject of health discourses at the expense of institutional critique.

In order to understand this polemic in greater depth, it is helpful to examine some of the key features of neoliberalism, as an exponent of late capitalism and its underpinning of a modern worldview centered on growth and individualism. One of the deepest exposés of modern times, which has relevance to our points about the effects of instrumental mindfulness, can be found in Martin Heidegger's thought on modernity as a "technical" era. According to Heidegger (1954/1977; 1997/2006), such an era corresponds with all of the world's beings, including people, becoming commodities. This means that everything (including the human being) manifests itself as an object, i.e., as a resource to the service of growth and production, necessary to maintain the efficiency of the colossal cultural, social and economic apparatus (Peters 2002). The resultant predominance of a 'calculative thinking', which transforms the organic natural and human world into a rational and controlled system was called 'enframing' by Heidegger. This process is associated with a transformation of human bodies, and relationships between them, into manipulative and instrumental enterprises, exclusively at the service of material interest (Heidegger 1952/1977; 1954/1977; see also Brito, Joseph and Sellman 2021b; Peters, 2002).

In this vein, neoliberalism operates as a socio-economic system founded on materiality and technology, in which it is possible to observe several essential traits. First, the late capitalist logic is dominated by an 'excess of positivity', which is expressed as a tendency to take on more and more things to accomplish, both personally and professionally, generating greater likelihood of burnout within society by requiring individuals to increase their productivity in every sphere of their life (Han 2015). Second, such burnout within society instills increasingly insidious processes of self-exploitation, including individualization of responsibility for the failures of the system. This means that human problems created by the system are appropriated by individuals as personal issues that need to be solved by themselves and without any serious questioning of the broader logic characteristic of 'enframing' (Han 2017). Amongst the problems generated by this system are the presence of stress, anxiety and depression as pervasive, an expansion of competitiveness in all areas

of life, and the potentially irreversible degeneration of the natural environment. Third, in such a society productivity has become the maxim to such an extent that even 'non-production time', such as leisure, is understood only as a 'functional deceleration', or necessary respite, at the service of increasing performativity and even profitability (Rosa 2010). Under the grip of this logic, any threat within this neoliberal system is reframed as in need of remedial instrumental procedures, technical rather than systemic in nature (Kristensen 2018). Thus, while there has been a surge of scholarly and practitioner interest in the promotion of well-being over the last two decades, there has not been corresponding improvements in well-being, quite the opposite. We suggest this is likely to be the case because well-being objectives have been usurped to satisfy a neoliberal agenda (Sellman and Buttarazzi 2020).

This debate is relevant to the current educational system, insofar as most authors, even policymakers, appreciate the transformative potential that mindfulness practices seem to offer both in terms of individual well-being and more socially-oriented virtues of human culture such as wisdom, compassion and purposefulness (Jennings 2015). However, critiques are well aware of how mindfulness can be made subservient to neoliberal agendas that do not necessarily have authentic individual and social needs at heart (Forbes 2019; Reveley 2016; Sellman and Buttarazzi 2020). With MBIs in both education and corporate settings, we witness a displacement of systemic issues upon students, as well as staff, rather than on matters of policy, in much the same way as employees take on the burdening issues of society rather than employers and investors. We contest that mindfulness and education will foster greater individual and societal transformation with greater emphasis on systems first, then teachers, then students. Accordingly, in this paper we will examine two core issues of the instrumentalisation process of mindfulness in educational contexts: First, we will explore the merits and limitations of implementing mindfulness from an instrumental or holistic perspective (the implementation's *format*). Second, we will examine the merits and limitations of focusing this implementation on individuals or systems (the implementation's *focus*). Our aim here is to challenge educators to consider the ways in which MBIs in education can be implemented in a more meaningful manner for students, teachers and society.

Implementing Mindfulness Within Education: Instrumental or Holistic Format?

There is no doubt that the popularity of MBIs in schools has increased exponentially over the last two decades (Ergas 2019a). There are numerous mindfulness-based educational programs working in more than 30 countries, the MindUp program (https://mindup.org/) in the United States of America and the MiSP (Mindfulness in School Project, https://mindfulnessinschools.org/), well-known as paws.b and dot.b programs, for children and adolescents in the UK being high-profile examples. Research has shown that these practices are associated with multiple cognitive and emotional benefits for children and teenagers (Flook et al. 2010; Weare 2012, Weare and Bethune 2021). Although these benefits are welcome, a debate has arisen concerning the instrumentalised mode in which this implementation has been predominantly delivered and the impact this has on the meaning, purpose and nature of both mindfulness and education more broadly (Hyland 2016; Sellman and Buttarazzi 2020, Simpson 2017). In this section, we will explore the merits and limitations of implementing mindfulness in education in formats, often derided as over-simplified and reductive.

Critiques of MBIs in education are often concerned with omission, i.e. what is lost when mindfulness is subjected to a technical rationale and standardized for implementation, as opposed to something more integral or holistic and rooted in its ethical Buddhist foundations (Ergas 2019b, Simpson 2017). Of course, any possibility that education could be colluding with indoctrination will become a sensitive issue. This is precisely why Kabat-Zinn (Kabat-Zinn 2011) sought to ‘de-spiritualize’ mindfulness when he introduced it to hospital patients, realizing that many participants would not follow such a course if it was constructed as ‘religious’ in nature. Nonetheless, we, contend that the Buddhist foundations of mindfulness can be understood philosophically rather than religiously and subsume a number of psychological insights and ethical orientations, overlooked within most MBIs. Keeping some reference to Buddhist ethics does not equate to the introduction of Buddhism within education necessarily, particularly as the insights are shared with many other

contemplative traditions. However, the preservation of some of this material allies with an approach that cultivates the growth of the whole person and their interdependence with nature and the world. For example, from a Buddhist standpoint, an individual becomes ethical and wholesome when their thoughts, actions and speech are informed by wisdom and compassion, and from a deeper understanding of self and nature as transitory and inter-connected processes (Hanh 2010).

Conversely, according to a rigorous meta-analysis of more than 400 peer-reviewed papers published in the last 15 years by Ergas and Hadar (2019), the mainstreaming of mindfulness in schools has typically adopted the format of being taught in a tightly structured manner, framed scientifically and secularly. Rather than going back to original and classical teachings, MBIs tend to look to the aforementioned MBSR program as a model for inspiration. MBSR, organized into eight classes of approximately 2.5 hours, often including a day-long retreat, is seen as the 'gold standard' for making these practices more accessible and beneficial to the general public, and when reduced in length and intensity, also for school-based teachers and students (Sun 2014).

Such an instrumental application of mindfulness in educational settings does have some support from research. According to 0'Donnell (2015), MBIs can be understood as the introduction of a 'Trojan Horse', such that this apparent de-contextualisation from the Buddhist tradition can actually be a tactic for re-contextualisation (spreading the 'Dharma'). This conjecture suggests that core principles from Buddhism are universalized and disseminated to reduce suffering in areas such as physical and emotional health as well as promoting more harmonious relationships and tentatively, improving academic performance as a by-product (Kabat-Zinn 2011). Additionally, such adoption can be defendable in terms of making MBIs more efficient, measurable and standardized, with the additional benefit of being more rigorous, accessible and comparable for the scientific research community eager to promote evidence-based impact (Hyland 2017). Although this instrumental approach currently dominates how mindfulness is applied in schools, it is necessary to evaluate the extent to which it can be regarded as successful for meta-

educational processes such as criticality, reflexivity and orientation to social justice that characterize mindfulness 'of' education and its transformative potential (Ergas 2019b).

For authors offering robust critique of instrumentalisation, MBIs can generate several limitations and genuine threats to more holistic approaches. On the one hand, the standardized implementation of mindfulness in education tends to emphasize improvement of academic achievement, cognitive performance, attention and concentration specifically, but on the other hand, often overlooks crucial interpersonal abilities such as compassion and altruism, thus transforming mindfulness into a technique at the service of productivity (Sellman and Buttarazzi 2020; Simpson 2017). Most MBIs dilute Buddhist ideas and practices to blend them with psychological and neuroscientific research to produce an intervention that is seen as politically neutral and easily marketable (Purser 2019). MBIs tend to be light on critical awareness and do not take into account how educational processes are influenced by socio-economic framing, particularly neoliberalism (Reveley 2016).

When mindfulness is implemented as a training to enhance performance and productivity it contributes to sustaining the same problematic logic, i.e., incessant acquisition of various forms of capital (e.g. educational, economic), class reproduction and unsustainable growth; instead of questioning and transforming society into a more conscious and collaborative community, a tendency which has been satirically called by some authors 'McMindfulness' (Purser 2019) and applied to educational settings in a manner that can be seen as 'iatrogenic' (Brito, Joseph and Sellman 2021a). This means that MBIs tend to emphasize competence and efficiency, subjugated to institutional and political goals, rather than the needs of an individual and/or particular group in a specific context. For those who advocate a greater social-justice orientation to mindfulness training, MBIs are seen as inculcation within existing cultural and institutional norms rather than cultivating the necessary critical and contemplative thinking required for social transformation and environmental sustainability (Berila 2016; Brito, Joseph and Sellman 2021b; Rendon 2009). As Hyland (2015) and Ergas (2015) suggest, a diluted version of mindfulness is expressed throughout the proliferation of different types of measures and scales that only evaluate specific and

isolated skills and undermine the more transformative dimensions of this practice. Thus, the steady development of greater awareness of self and reality involved with more authentic forms of mindfulness cultivation are subverted to a reduced set of specific pragmatic achievements. This corresponds with one of the fundamental problems of the whole education system, which is understood by Biesta (2015) as the 'learnification of education', which means the theory, policy and practice of education assume learning is something known in advance. Meanwhile, core educational questions are neglected, such as: (1) what can be considered relevant knowledge, (2) what the purpose of learning is and (3) who is delivering/facilitating that learning. The latter point also raises questions of power, who controls knowledge and benefits from its acquisition? As we will argue later, more integral and holistic approaches to mindfulness can embrace these fundamental educational concerns by bringing them into the spotlight.

In this vein, the idea of a standardized implementation of mindfulness in education as being a 'Trojan Horse' is perhaps nothing other than wishful thinking. Indeed, according to Purser (2019) the common belief that MBIs in any institution, including education, represent the beginning of a progressive revolution, or mass-awakening, is a misnomer without any empirical evidence as the type of mindfulness maneuvered 'under the radar' is technically rather than spiritually oriented. The principal reason for this shortcoming is that the format of current MBIs in education has a clear orientation towards self-regulation only, and the ability to cope with stress, as a self-technology device in particular. The use of MBIs in this way is convenient for the individualistic ideology of capitalistic logic and the preservation of power and inequality (Reveley 2016). Furthermore, it is helpful to analyze the concept of 'intervention' and its implications. When mindfulness in education is understood as an intervention, the worldview from which it is derived, has clear medical and economic connotations in terms of efficacy and cost-effectiveness (Ergas 2019b). In other words, mindfulness as an intervention becomes merely a set of techniques that are implemented from an external approach and from a position of supposed ethical and political neutrality. However, neutrality is never really possible in this sense as the framing in which MBIs are offered is never neutral, as Purser states, 'the depoliticized nature of

mindfulness means its therapeutic ethos of individual action supports neoliberalism' (Purser 2019, p. 37).

Thus, it is important to re-think the mainstream implementation of mindfulness in education in order to convert this promising practice into a genuinely transformative approach, assuming the purpose of education is to promote self-knowledge and well-being rather than the preparation of an obedient and sufficiently-skilled workforce. The research literature makes a distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being (Joseph 2016). Hedonic well-being refers to states of positive and negative feelings. Eudaimonic well-being refers to more existential and contemplative dimensions such as meaning and purpose in life, authenticity and agency, and the person's relation to the social world. Whereas the more instrumentalised MBIs tend to be concerned with hedonic well-being, a genuinely transformative approach would be dedicated to fostering eudaimonic well-being. We suggest this could be achieved by a more integral approach to teaching mindfulness, introduced in the next section and informing our concluding discussion.

Implementing Mindfulness Within Education: Individualistic and/or Systems Focus?

According to Forbes (2016), who draws upon integral theory, particularly Wilber's organization of theories into a single framework for understanding a broad range of phenomena (Wilber, 2017), the focus of mindfulness can also be classified into four quadrants (I/It/We/Its), achieved by intersecting two axes: individual/collective with interior/exterior (see Figure 1). Subject to this categorization, the main focus of the most conventional MBIs in education remain in the upper 'Objective' and 'Subjective' quadrants because of their focus on the individual, meaning emphasis is placed upon psychological modifications such as improved concentration and mental well-being and on corresponding observable behaviors. In this section, we will argue that although such a focus can be understood as beneficial from a superficial point of view, conversely its overly individualistic focus actually represents a threat for educational processes and human development more broadly.

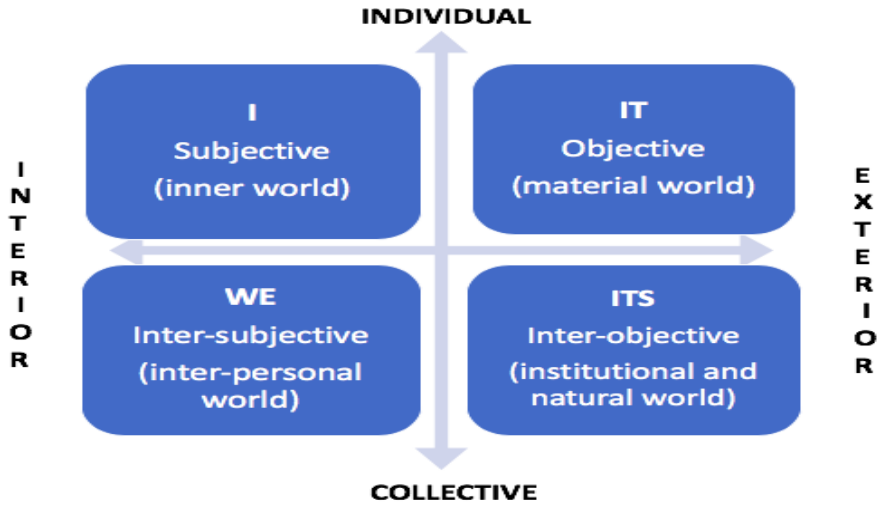

Figure 1. An Integral Framework, adapted from Wilber (2017) by Forbes (2016).

As previously introduced, there are many immediate benefits to an individualistic focus of MBIs reported in the literature. These include improved management of stress, emotional regulation, interpersonal skills and academic performance compared to those who have not had mindfulness training (Crane 2017; Jennings 2015; Weare 2012; Zenner et al. 2014). These benefits, and the research on which they are based, are generally founded on Kabat-Zinn's operational definition, according to which mindfulness consists of 'paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally' (Kabat-Zinn 1994, p. 4). As such, the emphasis is placed on the individual to observe and accept situations as they are. This is a laudable trait in most circumstances. However, in educational settings framed by performativity, and neoliberalism more broadly, it places culpability for stress firmly at the feet of the individual rather than the institution or culture, which may be the origin of the stress or suffering in the first place. In doing so, there is a 'sleight of hand' that displaces institutional or systemic culpability as individual failure to be resilient rather than deeper questioning of the circumstances in which adversity arises (Hyland 2017; Purser 2019; Sellman and Buttarazzi 2020). More integral approaches to

teaching mindfulness do not belittle the role of individual transformation but neither do they neglect the criticality characteristic of more social and/or ecologically oriented mindfulness (Purser 2019). Without this broader outlook, MBIs in education can be posited as a low-cost and superficial intervention, currently portrayed as a possible panacea for individuals to cope with problematic cultures and systems rather than questioning and reframing these contexts.

Although this focus on personal well-being is popular and enjoys much empirical evidence supporting its short-term benefit, we argue it is partial and largely uninformed about the complex network in which educational processes take place, possibly because of its underlying psychological rather than social-scientific research basis (Hyland 2016; O'Donnell 2015; Sellman and Buttarazzi 2020). The fundamental argument against the mainstreaming and instrumentalisation of mindfulness in education suggests that its neoliberal framing has implanted these practices solely as a 'self-technology', where an adequate degree of mental health for productivity is maintained (Trnka and Trundle 2014). The very terms 'well-being' and 'resilience' can be interpreted as symptoms of this dominant discourse, in which self-improvement is framed as a capital requirement for optimal functioning within broader socio-economic framing, which is questionable in terms of its ethical motives (Reveley 2016). As was explained previously, the training of these abilities usually posits time for relaxation and leisure as purely 'functional deceleration', which means its purpose is to generate greater tolerance amongst students and teachers to withstand institutional conditions characterized by excessive pressure and performativity.

Additionally, the very notion of 'well-being' has been over-simplified, emphasizing adaptive personal skills, even when pro-social behavior is considered, and neglecting wider dimensions such as those shown in the lower, collective-oriented quadrants in Figure 1 (Forbes 2016). Unlike the focus of most MBIs, suffering needs to be understood as not just individual in origin but as also arising from social and institutional conditions, if the educational process genuinely aspires to be an agent of social transformation. This is not an attempt to negate individual action but rather to orient individual action to something close

to mindfulness's Buddhist origins, especially socially engaged Buddhism[2], which emphasizes 'wholesome' action in the world for the sake of all.

Many critiques fully acknowledge the benefits of a personal-therapeutic dimension in the short-term but argue that this perspective can produce what we call an iatrogenic effect in the long-term (Hyland 2009; Simpson 2017). The term 'iatrogenesis' is on one-hand a medical term, used when treatment alleviates some individual's symptoms but who's general condition deteriorates (see Author #1 et al 2021a for a fuller discussion). Given a more sociological and philosophical meaning, Illich (1976) used the term to describe processes whereby institutional malaise is offset and privatised against the individual. Hence, in the context of MBIs in education, the individual focus can improve some desirable skills, stress management in advance of a written examination for example, but at the same time can maintain, normalise and even accentuate toxic features of the performativist and neoliberal apparatus the individual is subjected to. Kristensen (2018, p.185) helpfully summarises, '… mindfulness practices come to represent a productive break with a contradictory effect of retaining or aggravating the ill it was intended to cure'.

At this point, there are a few key elements related to the over-simplified focus of MBIs within education deserving of fuller examination. Let's begin with what Purser (2015) calls 'the myth of the present moment'. According to this idea, the practice of mindfulness trains an individual's capacity to place attention upon their current experience, reducing mental rumination, which can be useful to diminish stress and regulate difficult emotions such as mild depression. However, at the same time, when the present moment is understood merely as a pleasant and self-soothing sensory experience it overlooks deeper inquiry into the nature of that awareness (i.e. who is having the experience, what is the nature of the self?) and the net of conditions that make possible that experience (i.e. what is the nature of

[2] A relevant voice from this movement is David Loy, who applies Buddhist wisdom to understand and to solve societal problems. Loy (2003) states that modern societies are infected by three widespread poisons: greed, ill-will and delusion. Greed is the main problem in the current capitalist economy, which fosters individualism and competition; ill-will is the main problem concerning current global politics, characterised by exclusionism and ideological polarities; and delusion is widespread across social media, which generates distortions in public opinion. Correspondingly, the author proposes three core antidotes, worthy of consideration, especially in the field of education: generosity, compassion and wisdom.

reality?). Accordingly, some students of mindfulness learn to cope in ways that do not impede performance, but do not probe deeper their existential and institutional conditions, thus neither challenging structural impediments to their flourishing.

In the words of Purser, 'the products [mindfulness practices] are marketed as providing more fulfilling and sensual experiences, not the development of virtue, ethical behaviour, moral courage, and compassion' (Purser 2019, p.76, our addition in brackets). It is hence possible to make a clear distinction between training skills and cultivating virtues. While a skill is an instrumental ability, convenient to workforce preparation and strategic evaluation, a virtue involves the development of a 'way of being', which is both more authentic and holistic (Brito and Corthorn 2018; Joseph 2016), which impregnates every action with radical personal responsibility and an ethical orientation. Here we can find further heritage from the Buddhist tradition, and more broadly from eastern spirituality as well as from Aristotle's (1981) philosophy, insofar the core idea regarding ethics in education is not the notion of value as a set of ideals and rules to be followed, but the idea of virtue as experiential understanding and a flexible practice to be cultivated and applied. In the words of Keown (2013): 'rules must not just be followed, but followed for right reasons and with the correct motivation' (p. 115). Additionally, this process must be understood as an experiential path rather than as cognitive learning, as inner work and mastery rather than knowledge acquisition (Brito 2011; Varela 1996). It is a striking indictment of most western education systems that they foster subservience, rather than free-thinking, creative and critical individuals, presumably because the latter ultimately challenges hegemony and the former does not.

Taken this far, an individualistic focus could be seen to produce more problematic effects than benefits, insofar that it underestimates the conformist nature of educational processes and the way in which they continue to privilege and protect those with power and vested interests in the status quo. Broader features of mindfulness, more consistent with its spiritual and philosophical origins, such as compassion, altruism and constructive social critical thinking are currently overlooked by most commercial MBIs within education (Hyland 2016), with some exceptions such as those mentioned by Jennings (2015); CARE

(Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education) and SMART (Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques) programs, both running in the US, including self-compassion and relational components for example. Nonetheless, the main point remains the same: whether these programs are implemented with teachers and/or with pupils, the fundamental goal is generally improved intrapersonal and interpersonal skills at the behest of academic performance. MBIs can be further critiqued for being atomistic, they commodify, standardise and utilise the basic characteristics of mindfulness as psychological properties and therefore individual traits. In doing so, phenomena are understood as separated and isolated, in contradistinction to the core idea from Buddhist and East-Asian spiritual traditions emphasising unity and connectedness to reality. In this vein, Hanh and Weare (2017) express the necessity of building a mindful community of teachers in order to support a more coherent, sustainable and transformative context in which human flourishing can occur. Hence, we argue that mindfulness within education must be reconsidered carefully to rectify this narrow focus and move towards a more integral approach, which regards individuals as inter-connected 'holons' within larger and inter-penetrating layers of context (Ergas 2015; Forbes 2016; Hanh 1999; Wilber 2016).

Toward a Holistic/Integral Approach

It is now helpful to explicate some of the core features underpinning a more holistic and integral approach to mindfulness within education. For this, we take some epistemological scaffolding from Wilber (2016) and Wilber and DiPerna (2017), within which we synthesis some key suggestions from a variety of contemplative educators. Wilber's (2016) integral approach to mindfulness describes three elements, in which 'growing-up' (educational development) is balanced with 'waking-up' (spiritual development) and 'showing-up' (issues of voice, agency, ethics, purpose and contribution), all of which connect the levels of the individual with the collective. Wilber and DiPerna (2017) add 'cleaning-up' (healing our individual and collective wounds and how they impact our relationships) to these processes. We will use these categories to briefly outline what a holistic and integral approach to mindfulness and education could look like. The approach within this section is

illustrative only as in reality each element operates with varying degrees of synergy with the others. As we discuss each theme we will be attentive to the interior/exterior and individual/collective dimensions we feel are applicable.

Growing Up

Resuming Biesta's (2015) critique concerning the 'learnification of education', we argue that a holistic and integral approach to mindfulness and education can and must foster something deeper than improved cognitive learning. Whilst knowledge of the world is important, it needs to be complemented by the cultivation of inner or self-knowledge (Ergas 2019c) for genuine maturation, which also lays the foundations for the types of contemplative inquiry that aid self-healing (cleaning up) and agency (showing up). Informed by Heidegger (1969, 2006; see also Brito, Joseph and Sellman 2021b), we can helpfully distinguish here between a more basic form of critical thinking, as an analytical capability that evaluates facts and accompanying evidence, and contemplative attention[3], which involves the cultivation of an attitude of openness and curiosity, from which inner and outer phenomena are observed, recognizing both the nature of mind (e.g. rumination, judgement, resistance) and the inherent inter-dependence of all life. Contemplative attention also implies a return to the body, or direct experience, as a potential and valid site of knowledge (Ergas 2015, 2019c).

In other words, a holistic and integral approach to mindfulness must include three main pillars of knowledge as its 'curriculum' for maturation: self-knowledge (with an emphasis on attention to patterns of thinking, feeling and acting), inter-personal knowledge (with an emphasis on empathy, kindness, generosity and compassion) and knowledge of the world (with an emphasis on understanding and working alongside the dynamics of nature as well as a critical understanding of how socio-historical institutions, such as economic, political

[3] Heidegger (1969) distinguishes between two different kinds of thinking; one called 'calculative' to refer to the predominant way of reflecting within our technical world, informed by instrumental considerations of things and other humans in terms of their productive value, and another type of thinking called 'meditative', which refers to our original nature as beings capable of allowing things to arise and be as they are in the present moment. Drawing upon Cavallé (2008), this last kind of thinking opens the possibility for a way of being that is fully aware and compassionate to both ourselves, other humans and all beings in the world.

and educational activity, affect human lives both constructively and destructively). At this point, it is essential to acknowledge that a holistic/integral conceptualisation of 'curriculum' is much broader than subjects and learning objectives, and in making this point we explicate that the very concept of knowledge itself must be re-defined from its usual cognitive and content-based conception to a more experience-based conception in much the same way Fromm (2021) distinguishes between "having knowledge" and "knowing". The first conceptualisation refers to information acquisition and the second to a process by which one is in touch with reality in a more open, creative, dynamic and intuitive relationship. This is clearly an argument for a much broader 'curriculum', which includes learning through the body, relationships and nature alongside the inclusions of more critical subjects, e.g. law, economics, politics and philosophy, all notable absentees from most state-controlled education. Such deep learning, characterised as knowing both thy self and thy world (Ergas 2019a, 2019c), is inevitably interwoven with the broader purpose of education itself, which from a contemplative view, and our own, must be aligned with human flourishing in all its aspects (individual, relational, societal and ecological). Furthermore, education for human flourishing must find a balance between following an *a-priori* curriculum and self-directed learning, which is more flexible and person centred (Gray 2013).

Waking up

Spira (2017) states 'although the practice of meditation has been reduced by popular culture to a means of relieving stress and anxiety, in its original form it is the means by which awareness has access to its knowledge of itself' (p. 45). Although, Spira (2017) draws more upon Hinduism and yogic approaches in his own writing, the point made is pertinent to our argument and overlaps with Buddhist teachings showing how the cultivation of deeper awareness reveals impermanence, no-self and unity (Loy 2019). In this respect, Wilber (2016) asserts that learning mindfulness corresponds with deeper self-inquiry, which involves developing a witnessing consciousness that observes the comings and goings of the mind, how mind is conditioned by our experience and then a deeper understanding of

the Self and its interconnectedness. For Wilber (2016), the pinnacle of such understanding is an awareness of the unity of all things, much like Spira (2016). Although the idea of self has multifarious meanings (see Ergas and Ritter 2020), we suggest our true Self is the ever-present witness, unconditioned by and subsuming all experience. Learning about the Self goes well beyond any one subject area; it requires opportunities for the kinds of direct experience acquired through contemplative practices and is also informed by insights from disciplines such as psychology, science, religion and philosophy. In Wilber's (2016) approach, learning involves the integration of pre-existing theory into increasingly sophisticated syntheses and for Wilber, understanding reality as nondual represents the current pinnacle of spiritual development, which can only really be understood through experiential practice. Thus self-knowledge, as a core educational aspiration, implies a combination of both self-realization as experiential path and a proper understanding of some ideas through reflection and assimilation, as something different of mere knowledge acquisition.

Cleaning Up

Forbes (2019) insists that a holistic and integral curriculum must include features that encourage critical inquiry into the institutional roots of individual suffering (e.g., anxiety and stress); contextual reflection on self-development (including the roles of family and schooling), alongside the consideration of broader cultural, social and economic factors. Only through such 'work' can individuals attain a level of self-awareness that corresponds with being in the world in such a way that a person's deep wounds do not impact their relationships with others and subsequently underpin the cultivation of an ethical way of being, in which deep self-knowledge and compassion can be oriented toward social and ecological injustice (e.g., inequality, racism, climate emergency). Education needs to proceed in ways that allow children and young people to develop authentically, without fear that their attachment to caregivers and education providers is under threat. Where this has already been compromised, education needs to embrace rather than push away therapeutic opportunities that may be available.

Counter to much educational policy, we advocate that these processes start with teachers first (Dix 2017). It is essential that the role teachers and schools play in perpetuating suffering is recognised. Teachers need to be developed in their own inner work so harmful dynamics are not reinforced in the classroom (e.g. coercion as means to control children and young people). In fact, discipline in schools in particular, needs a radical reappraisal. Its current emphasis on reactivity and symbolic punishment[4] represents the very hegemony an integral and holistic curriculum should contest and transcend. Classroom management thus needs transformation to something more education focused and humanistic, points we will elaborate upon in the next section. Implementing such a vision requires a long-term commitment and a willingness for adults to change before students. As seminal thinker Jung (1998) elaborates, 'if there is anything that we wish to change in our children, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could better be changed in ourselves' (p. 194). Hence, self-awareness needs to feature more prominently on teacher education courses and then be seen as core an educational entitlement as any other curricular aspect, valuing inner fitness as much as we do physical health.

Showing Up

As a contemplative approach to education, knowledge arising from mindfulness practice is only relevant if it is rooted within the direct experience of pupils and teachers, culminating in a fuller comprehension of the Self, of our relationships with others and the world. Such learning cannot be achieved by didactic teaching alone, it needs to be experiential and embodied (Crane 2017). It is best served by cultivating presence, assured self-knowledge, empathy and compassion, initially by teachers, then by students (Palmer 1998, Rogers and Freiberg 1994, Sellman and Buttarazzi 2020). We are cautious of further burdening

[4] Although most of the current school education has abandoned physical punishment, it is common still to see symbolic forms of punishment, mainly through different regimes of evaluation, judgment and comparison of pupils' capabilities and conformist tendencies, which can be felt by them as a devaluation of their being, and as an expression of a kind of education built upon ontological violence rather than ontological love and acceptance.

teachers as it is no more satisfactory to lay the blame for systemic failure at their feet than those of students. Most of our recommendations speak to reform at the level of policy, teacher training/education, 'curriculum' and educational 'climate'. However, we do need to acknowledge that most close relationships, particularly those within families but also those between students and teachers are not so conscious, and as a result often reproduce power dynamics from prior experience, further reinforced by schooling's emphasis on external authority. Hence, it is an educational imperative that teachers learn mindful forms of 'discipline'[5], as previously discussed, so they do not unconsciously repeat cycles of conditioning and the suffering associated with attachment needs trumping authenticity. Educational policy needs to take a lead here but it is also possible that such change can be mobilised from the 'ground-up' also, recognising that student-teacher relationships are the fundamental 'medium' through which education takes place.

Focusing on what teachers can do to bring greater awareness into the classroom, Palmer (1998) argues the need for teachers to embody authenticity by emphasising the central role that presence and positive regard for students play in educational contexts. Should issues of 'discipline' arise, they are responded to mindfully and are not matters for control and coercion but opportunities for teaching, learning and growth (Siegel and Bryson 2015) as well as an exploration of group dynamics. More mindful 'discipline' thus possesses some of the following characteristics identified by Rogers and Freiberg (1994): students share leadership and responsibility with teachers, serving as an integral part of the 'management' of the classroom/school and authority takes the form of guidance or sharing wisdom, emphasising intrinsic ethics and motivation. These requirements also place significant demands upon teacher training and teacher education, which have largely neglected teachers' opportunities for inner-work up until now. There needs to be a seismic shift in preparing teachers for their vocation and supporting their continuing growth and development by incorporating opportunities for greater self-knowledge in their training (Dix 2017). As Naranjo (2016) states, consciousness and integration can only be awakened in others from persons already in possession of sufficient self-awareness.

[5] Etymologically linked to the ideas of teaching and study rather than control and order (Siegel and Bryson 2015)

One of the most crucial considerations of a holistic/integral approach to mindfulness and education concerns questioning who is facilitating knowledge, for what purpose and for whose benefit. Hence, we suggest all learning is accompanied by opportunities for such scrutiny. As previously discussed, this involves the development of contemplative attention as well as critical thinking, which could include understanding how one learns and processes information alongside the role of education in society, as described by Ergas' (2019) mindfulness 'of' education. In most countries, the state controls both what is taught, and how, whilst concurrently exercising judiciary responsibility for its appraisal (Biesta 2015). We would recommend these functions are separated and teachers are given greater freedom, particularly from constraining neoliberal performative apparatus, so that education can be an independent check against governmental agendas and offer greater potential for human flourishing.

The value of learning, we argue, is augmented when it is both embodied and applied. Hence, education needs to provide greater opportunity for heartfelt experiences that foster feelings of connection with other human beings and our environment as well as the capability to apply these positive attitudes within their communities, possibly in service to common humanitarian goals, and with a broader social justice orientation (see Berila 2016, Rendon 2009, Sellman and Amrhein 2022). Oriented this way, mindfulness contains a diversity of helpful practices and conceptualisations to serve human potential, particularly the cultivation of compassion and altruism. Compassion is the motivation to recognise the suffering in ourselves and others alongside the desire to alleviate it; altruism is the tendency to act concretely in that direction (Ricard, Mandell and Gordon 2015). As a practical example, one mindfulness practice to this end is the 'metta' meditation, where attention is focused in the present moment, and then with the higher intentions of love, peace and benediction for humanity and other beings with which we share the world. Without an outlet for transferring these sensibilities, Thomas (2013) reminds us: "you get good at what you practise, not at what you don't" (p. 90). Therefore, accompany inquiry and application can assist the integration of these ideals into daily life, within and beyond schools.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary of this article, we have argued that although the benefits of mindfulness in the educational system have been largely supported by a body of research on the benefits to individual well-being and stress-management, research has not been as attentive to the more existential and contemplative aspects of individual and social well-being. In this respect, the implementation of these type of practices may have longer-term detrimental effects on education as a whole when subjected to critique of the broader systems with which they interrelate, chiefly neoliberalism. The implementation of mindfulness in a standardized and instrumental way may provide accessibility and a short-term impact on 'symptom' management amongst students and teachers but with limited effect on the educational system as a whole and corresponding mitigation of human suffering in the long-term**.** The focus of MBIs on individual well-being has shown that although they have several benefits, predominantly related to cognitive and emotional abilities, they generate an effect, iatrogenic in nature, whereby student and teacher well-being is privatized, positioning ability to cope with systemic pressure as a lack of individual resilience rather than an indication of systemic failure. The nature and purpose of a neoliberal system is left beyond reproach under the shield of apparent neutrality, protecting it from critique. We have argued that formal education should be more than just workforce preparation and help cultivate deep knowledge about self and reality, subsuming both critical thinking and contemplative attention. We have also argued that such education must have an ethical disposition, whereby students have meaningful opportunities to apply their knowledge in service to the 'greater good', an element often lacking from most existing MBIs.

Hence, we urge a significant paradigm shift from instrumental applications of mindfulness within education to a more holistic/integral approach. Ergas (2019c) proposes four main epistemological characteristics of an integral approach to mindfulness and education, which

we have subsumed within our article, these are: (1) a whole-person approach, whereby educational processes incorporate an embodied perspective to learning, penetrating beyond linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, (2) a focus on the 'self' or interiority, including what constitutes self-knowledge in mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions beyond external subjects and reality, (3) a 'presence' as well as a 'spontaneous' ability to teach this 'inner curriculum', superseding rational and performative obligations, and (4) a recognition of the 'ephemeral' nature of such processes, to which we have added Forbes (2019) concern for criticality or what Ergas (2019c) has himself called mindfulness 'of' education.

Using the integral framework we have adopted from Wilber (2016) and Wilber and DiPerna (2017) we can summarize our recommendations as follows:

- *Growing Up:* students are given ample opportunity to learn experientially as well as cognitively, about the interior as well as exterior nature of experience, such that they learn about themselves, their emotions, and their relations to others.
- *Waking Up:* students are given ample opportunity to develop their contemplative practices toward the deepest level they are ready for and all students develop an appreciation of the connectedness of all things.
- *Cleaning Up:* students and teachers are given ample opportunity to heal from traumatic experience and are given the possibility of developing their awareness to such an extent that harming others and causing suffering is minimalized. There is an extra burden on teachers here to not reproduce the types of conditioning that may perpetuate trauma and further suffering.
- *Showing Up:* students and teachers are given ample opportunity to apply attitudes cultivated by mindfulness (e.g. presence, kindness, altruism) in service to others and with an orientation to social justice and ecological sustainability.

It may be difficult, even now, to predict what will be the real contribution of mindfulness to education over the next two decades and beyond because, as in the words of Kabat-Zinn (2017), it is simply 'too early to tell'. Yet, it is likely that this contribution would be more significant if those who are currently implementing mindfulness in schools were genuinely

informed about the practice, comprehend its ethical foundations and are whole-heartedly committed to a holistic/integral agenda. Such an approach to mindfulness in schools necessitates incorporation of a critical mindfulness and a social-justice outlook or at least offers a pathway to deeper understanding and application at multiple levels; an individual's inner life and their relationships with communities both locally and globally (Berila 2016, Rendon 2009). Necessary first steps include bringing contemplative practice into initial and continuing teacher education and also to (re-)introduce compassion-based practices, as exemplified by the CARE program for teachers in the United States of America (Jennings 2015) in most commercial MBIs. Our recommendations offer a pragmatic and ethical challenge to education providers, with ramifications that although indeterminable are likely to be far-reaching, and ultimately looks to educators and policy makers to question the performativity agenda of education and have the vision and will for transformation.

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