

Mindfulness *In*, *As* and *Of* Education: Three Roles of Mindfulness in Education

OREN ERGAS 

Following the exponential rise in publications on mindfulness in education and the emergence of some critical perspectives on this field, this paper articulates three roles of mindfulness practice in education: Mindfulness in, as and of education. The three are developed based on an examination of the practice as it is shaped by two different socio-historical narratives, which in turn manifest in different modalities of implementation and aims in the contemporary educational field. While much of the field is governed by 'mindfulness in education' within economic-therapeutic interventions, equal attention is given to 'mindfulness as education' as reflected in a whole school approach and to 'mindfulness of education' in which the practice radicalises the ethos of critical pedagogy. Describing these three roles, the paper introduces readers to the practice itself, offers a framework for understanding its associations with a variety of educational aims, and critically discusses these associations as well as the diverse pedagogical possibilities that this practice brings to contemporary and future education.

INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, mindfulness practice has been increasingly incorporated across educational settings. Broad reviews and meta-analyses point to hundreds of thousands of students and thousands of teachers who have been learning to practice mindfulness within school programmes of various lengths and intensities (Carsley *et al.*, 2018; Lomas *et al.*, 2017; Semple *et al.*, 2017; Zenner *et al.*, 2014). Great Britain-based Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP) reports having trained over 4,500 teachers, many of whom implement mindfulness in primary and secondary educational settings.¹ Research of mindfulness in education has now expanded to huge state-funded projects, such as MYRIAD, which includes 84 UK schools (approx. 6,000 students).²

Examining publications that discuss/study mindfulness in educational settings, however, one finds that they hardly constitute a uniform phenomenon (Ergas and Hadar, 2019). A practice that bears *one* name is framed

and implemented in a variety of ways, and toward an array of aims, such as reduction of teacher burnout and stress (Flook *et al.*, 2013), enhancement of social-emotional competencies (Jennings *et al.*, 2017), improved cognitive functions and well-being in students (Zenner *et al.*, 2014), transformative teaching and learning processes (Owen-Smith, 2017), enhanced scientific criticality (Roth, 2006), cultivation of spirituality (Wong, 2004), and critical pedagogy (Magee, 2016). Modalities of implementations are also diverse, spanning short term school mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) (Zenner *et al.*, 2014) of 4 to 12 sessions, to whole-school approaches incorporating mindfulness across the curriculum (Tarrasch, 2017), and integrations of mindfulness in higher education courses across disciplines, such as social work, communication, law and psychology (Komjathy, 2018).

Witnessing such variety, one is bound to question how can one practice be associated with so many aims, how ‘educational’ are these aims, and how seriously ought we to take this multifaceted phenomenon? Indeed, many have been posing challenging questions in regards to the development of this discourse. Eppert (2013), Hyland (2017) and Purser and Loy (2013) pointed to ‘McMindfulness’—the commodification of mindfulness, its uprooting from Buddhist ethics and its presentation as a panacea. Forbes (2019) and Reveley (2015) critiqued its shallow and self-indulging implementations that result as serving neoliberal agendas. Others warned us to ‘mind the hype’ around mindfulness, for research in this field is still in its infancy and suffers from various methodological flaws (Van Dam *et al.*, 2018).

That said, implementations of mindfulness in educational institutions across ages are clearly spreading. The number of peer-reviewed publications in this particular field had risen exponentially from 2 in 2002 to 101 in 2017, amounting to 447 overall. Half of them were published between 2014 and 2017, 294 (66 percent) of which involve actual implementations (Ergas and Hadar, 2019). In the face of this growth, these diverse manifestations, and considering critical perspectives, this paper proposes a framework for understanding different roles of mindfulness in contemporary education. The framework is developed based on depicting the encounter between the core facets of the practice and its socio-historical framings on the one hand, and education on the other hand. Based on this encounter three strands of implementations of the practice in education are depicted to explain the diversity described above: a socialisation-oriented mindfulness *in* education, a holistic mindfulness *as* education, and a radical-critical mindfulness *of* education. Each of these reflects different modalities of implementation, aims and roles of the practice in education.

The paper includes two parts. The first part of the paper deals with the practice in isolation and prior to its implementations within education. It renders its core facets and presents two narratives that contextualise it as a path or as a tool. These narratives are then explored in relation to parallel conceptions of education. The second part describes the three roles of mindfulness in education in light of this exposition. Mindfulness *in*, *as* and *of* education are explained, discussed critically, and grounded in publications in the field. The three strands are given relatively equal attention despite the fact that currently mindfulness *in* education predominates the

field. The intention behind this is to offer a broader orientation to the practice and to shed light on some of its less known emerging potentials for education.

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Three Core Facets of Mindfulness Practice

Understanding the variety within the discourse of mindfulness in education requires a definition of the practice; however, there are various definitions of mindfulness in the discourse (Bishop *et al.*, 2004; Cullen, 2011; Gethin, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Shapiro *et al.*, 2012; Yates *et al.*, 2015). I hence refer to the following as a description of the practice's core facets. The description aims to draw boundaries that are loose enough to include a variety of contemporary implementations, yet are sufficiently rigid to enable distinguishing mindfulness practice from other practices.

Mindfulness is often considered as a set of meditative practices that involve three distinct yet intertwined components: attention, intention and attitude (Bishop *et al.*, 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Shapiro *et al.*, 2012). One common way to practice mindfulness requires bringing *attention* to the sensation of the breath in the abdomen and sustaining it there. An untrained mind, however, will quickly succumb to mind-wandering; that is, one will unwittingly transition into reflecting/ruminating on past events or planning the future (Petitmengin *et al.*, 2017). This transition represents the forgetting of the object of *attention* and the *intention* to practice (Wallace, 1999). Wandering goes on until the practitioner realises his/her forgetfulness upon which s/he is to bring back attention to the breath. The recurrence of this scenario can yield irritation, frustration and reprimanding oneself for the inability to sustain attention. In the face of this inner antagonism the practitioner practices *attitude*, which means mentally fostering an acceptance of any experience within the practice, including the inability to sustain attention. *Attitude* is often elaborated based on terms, including non-judgementalism, non-striving, compassion and kindness (Cullen, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2005). The third component—*intention*—undergirds the entire process. It consists of the recurrent re-establishment of the intention to practice attention and attitude rather than succumb to rumination, mind-wandering or deliberate planning (Yates *et al.*, 2015).

The core facets of mindfulness practice hence include attention, attitude and intention. If any one of these elements is missing from the instructions, then in this paper it is not considered to be mindfulness practice. Notwithstanding, there are diverse ways to practice mindfulness, which are introduced in contemporary programmes, e.g. body scan, focused attention, open awareness, mindful walking, mindful yoga, and there are various adaptations of these practices to suit diverse ages and populations (Cullen, 2011; Roeser, 2014).

The above allows for distinguishing mindfulness from other practices, such as reflection. Though diversely implemented, reflection in education is often based in and/or aims at drawing conclusions, conceptualisation, improving performance, and decision making (Owen-Smith, 2017).

Conversely, mindfulness is grounded in attending to the present moment as it is, stepping away from interpretation, elaboration and deliberate meaning-making processes. If the latter emerge spontaneously within the practice one is to shift from them back to the breath/bodily sensations (Yates *et al.*, 2015). Volitional control is exercised here over attention but *not* over the unfolding of experience nor over the content of thoughts (Webster-Wright, 2013). It is hence a practice in which one examines pre-reflective content, grounded in ‘how’ one attends and refraining from becoming absorbed in ‘what’ one attends to (Petitmengin *et al.*, 2017, p. 173). Further details on the implications of these core facets and these distinctions will be offered in subsequent parts of the paper.

Beyond depicting the boundaries of mindfulness practice as the phenomenon under study, the articulation of these core facets serves an additional purpose, which concerns the task of this paper. It strategically separates the *internal* mental activities within practice from the *external* cultural-social-historical context within which it is practiced. It is proposed here that with some variations and remaining within the boundaries of the core facets described, the same practice can have different aims and be framed differently depending on when and where it is offered. The following section turns to depict the *external* context that shapes these framings and aims.

Mindfulness Practice: Two Narratives at the Gateway of Education

One way to understand the variety in contemporary discourse is by depicting two different narratives within which the above core facets of the practice are embedded. These two reflect different historical-social contexts and human interests. They can be viewed as providing mindfulness with different IDs and biographies that frame the practice differently as it stands at the ‘gateway’ of education. When mindfulness goes through this gateway it moulds and is moulded by contemporary educational settings, forking into diverse modalities of implementation and aims. The following presents these two narratives very briefly to position mindfulness at this gateway.

The first narrative depicts mindfulness practice as having been ‘born’ around the 5th century BCE under the Pali name *sati* (also meaning ‘remembering’) (Yates *et al.*, 2015). *Sati* connotes with a set of practices elaborated by the Buddha orally and later transcribed in texts, such as the *Satipatthana Suta*. Some of these practices correspond with the core facets of the practice described above (Gethin, 2011; Repetti, 2016). When mindfulness practice is presented based on this narrative it is both a practice and a component within a broad Buddhist path toward liberation from suffering. The practice is thus embedded in a robust ethical worldview, that stresses the socio-ethical dispositions of compassion and wisdom (Hyland, 2013).

The second narrative depicts mindfulness as having been adopted and adapted in 1979 by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Kabat-Zinn, a doctor of molecular biology, who practiced Zen meditation, realised the potential of the practice

to reduce the suffering of a variety of chronic physical and mental problems (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). However, he also acknowledged that a Buddhist framing is likely to prevent the possibility of offering it to those who may be aided by it. He hence developed ‘mindfulness-based stress-reduction’ (MBSR)—an 8 week structured intervention in which patients learned to practice mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2011). His rendition provided the practice with an alternative framing; not necessarily Buddhist, but rather secular-clinical. When mindfulness practice is presented based on this narrative it is not part of a Buddhist path, but more of a way to cope with day-to-day stress.

These two different narratives appeal to different populations. In fact, recontextualising the appeal of the practice was the very intention behind the formation of the second narrative. As Kabat-Zinn (2005) described, the patients to whom it was offered were not interested in Buddhism. They sought a solution to health problems. The existence of these two narratives in contemporary times reveals the phenomenon of two people interpreting their engagement with mindfulness practice in significantly different ways. One might be drawn to it as an inquiry into the nature of (non)self and as a path toward cultivating wisdom and compassion (the first narrative). Another might view it as a way to cope with stress or ameliorate burnout (the second narrative). Very roughly the first narrative is about ‘solving the problem of life’; the second, is about ‘solving a problem that gets in the way of life’. Shifts between these perspectives may occur as some examples suggest (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). However, for the purposes of this paper the distinction here, which seems to cut through contemporary implementations of mindfulness in general, and in education, is between mindfulness as a path versus mindfulness as a tool. Mindfulness as a path nests the practice within a broad framework in which it is embraced as a life-long ethical-existential undertaking (Hyland, 2016). Mindfulness as a tool means that it is a particular technique applied toward solving a particular big/small problem. In such a case, the practice has a functional role. It is valued if it solves the problem; however, if other tools solve it more efficiently/cost-effectively, then mindfulness might be traded for them.

To be sure, each of the narratives continued to evolve since its beginnings. The Buddhist narrative has been developing through interpretations that had led to a variety of Buddhist schools of thought-practice (Gethin, 2011; Wallace, 1999). The secular-clinical narrative was added the context of *therapy* with the development of ‘mindfulness-based cognitive therapy’ (MBCT) (Segal *et al.*, 2018). It then further expanded into the context of *economy* as its potential to contribute to occupational health, performativity and productivity began to manifest, and implementation disseminated into business, technological apps, sports, the police force, and the US army (Forbes, 2019; Purser and Loy, 2013). In the course of four decades, the second narrative has become a conglomerate that fuses *secular-clinical-therapeutic-economic* framings and implications.

A heated debate exists as to the relationships between the two narratives. Some view the second narrative, in its worthy manifestations as a clear extension of the first (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Repetti, 2016). Others construe the progression of the second narrative as leading to ‘McMindfulness’; the

commodification of the practice and its complete separation from the first narrative (Forbes, 2019; Hyland, 2017; Purser and Loy, 2013). Mindfulness stands at the gateway of education with both narratives *and* this latter debate following it as a trail wherever it goes.

Yet, prior to examining the encounter between the practice and education, it is crucial to point out that the path/tool distinction has its parallel within a broad perspective on educational theory and practice. Education as a path appears in Plato's cave allegory (the *Republic*), which depicts it as a journey toward and reflecting moral living based on inquiry into the Good, True and Beautiful. Education for tools and qualifications is found in the very same text, for the above educational journey was saved for the elite. The education of others had a functionalist-economic socialisation role aimed at preparing citizens for a productive life. Both educational orientations have continued to manifest in our times. Education as a path can be found in theory and practice (Aloni, 2007; Owen-Smith, 2017; Peters, 1973), and the economic-functional orientation can be seen clearly in our times. As Gilead (2015) described, over the passing decades a process of 'economic imperialism' has taken place. Phenomena, such as accountability, high-stakes testing, 'best practices', tools for teaching, and what Biesta (2009) called 'the learnification of education', reflect education as a vehicle of economic progress that stands for values of functionality, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and productivity.

For some, like Peters (1973), this path versus tools distinction would mark a boundary between what education is and what it is not. For Peters an activity would be considered educational only if it leads to educational aims *and* is intrinsically worthwhile. Hence some contemporary activities in school might not necessarily qualify as 'education'. In light of these distinctions between the two narratives of mindfulness practice and their encounter with parallel conceptions of education, and in light of Peters, we can turn to explore three roles of mindfulness practice in education. The three are presented beginning with the most common and conformist to the less common and radical.

THREE ROLES OF MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION

Mindfulness in Education

'Mindfulness *in* education' embeds the practice in the second narrative. It reflects the most common form of contemporary implementations of the practice in educational settings (Ergas and Hadar, 2019; Roeser, 2014). When analysing the role of the practice here, both an external perspective (focusing on the facets of the practice) and the internal perspectives (focusing on the social-historical narrative) are required because each sheds a different light on this phenomenon. The former clearly reveals mindfulness as a tool in this case, whereas the latter raises questions on whether something more profound is occurring here.

The external perspective shows mindfulness *in* education as conforming with 'the system', supporting its functioning and improving performance and well-being *within* it. I refer to this as '*in* education', thinking of

‘education’ metaphorically as a box made of certain ways of thinking and practice, rules, regulations, timetables and so forth. Mindfulness *in* education implies finding ways to take a practice that comes from radical places (the first narrative) and fitting it in to the box. This involves molding it in various ways and developing a language that appeals to policy-makers. One can detect these processes in the ways in which the practice is framed throughout publications in this domain. As Ergas and Hadar (2019) demonstrate, they will generally ground it in Kabat-Zinn’s work and either refrain from mentioning the first narrative (e.g., Bakosh *et al.*, 2016), or mention it in passing yet shift to scientific-secular language: ‘Mindfulness, which is derived from centuries-old meditative traditions *and taught in a secular way, has been linked to heightened activation in brain regions . . .*’ (Flook *et al.*, 2013, p. 183, emphasis added).

Framing the practice as a tool manifests in two fundamental conceptual frameworks from the second narrative—therapy and economy. These shape the modalities of implementation and affect the aims. Publications of mindfulness *in* education usually structure their argument in one of two ways. The first depicts MBIs as targeting the problem of stress—a therapeutic-clinical concept, thereby indirectly contributing to schooling outcomes (e.g. academic achievements, cognitive functions). MBIs address the adverse effects of stress on teachers’ and/or students’ ability to function and thus contribute to coping with school tasks (e.g. Crain *et al.*, 2017; Flook *et al.*, 2013). The second kind of argument depicts MBIs as directly contributing to cognitive functions, readiness to learn and academic performance (e.g. Bakosh *et al.*, 2016; Mrazek *et al.*, 2013), and/or to social-emotional skills and classroom climate (e.g. Jennings *et al.*, 2017).

The economic framing emerges in a variety of ways. It begins with the modality of implementation framed as mindfulness-based *interventions* (MBIs). The term ‘intervention’ is borrowed from the medical world and has an economic logic built into it. It is a short-term implementation that has a particular aim and is tested for efficacy and cost-effectiveness. This logic is clearly captured in broad projects, such as the above-mentioned MYRIAD titled: ‘The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a mindfulness training program in schools compared with normal school provision (MYRIAD)’³ and in studies that make claims, such as, ‘[I]n the long run, reducing teacher stress and burnout may reduce costs associated with teacher absenteeism, turnover, and health care . . .’ (Jennings *et al.*, 2017, p. 17), ‘[T]he personal, societal, and financial costs associated with burnout are too high to ignore’ (Flook *et al.*, 2013, p. 182). The economic orientation further manifests in seeking the ‘right dosage’ of practice (Davidson *et al.*, 2012) and in MBIs designed to minimise practice time and expenses and maximise outcomes, such as a ten-minute CD-delivered intervention that does not depend on teachers and is aimed at improving academic achievements (Bakosh *et al.*, 2016).

The logic behind MBIs is clearly understandable from an external perspective; however, when considering them in light of Peters’ (1973) criteria, mindfulness here may be *in* education but it wouldn’t qualify *as* education. Its function here is to support *other* processes and ends that are understood

as educational, but the educational merit of the actual practice; namely the engagement with its core facets, remains outside of the discussion. The very term ‘intervention’ embodies the seed of alienating the practice from education. There’s a not-too-hidden curriculum in the message of the medium: that which intervenes, is not the thing in which it intervenes. By comparison, we don’t tend to view the learning of maths or literature or learning to read as interventions in education, but rather as educational activities. A further concern here is that some of the aims that mindfulness practice addresses are not easily framed as educational. When they are framed within occupational health (e.g. reduced absenteeism and burnout) it is clearly not the case. This has little to do with the merit, logic and desirable outcomes of addressing these matters; however, the aim here is to sustain the system more than it is to engage in mindfulness as a worthwhile activity. If this is about occupational health, then maybe jogging or listening to music are preferable. An educational justification for mindfulness, construing it *as* (not merely *in*) education, would need to highlight the intrinsic educational value of the practice itself. That is, how and why do the core features of the practice reflect an educational process *and* bring about educational aims?

Additional critique emerges when pointing to a paradoxical logic at work here. Economic-driven policies, such as accountability and high-stakes testing are often the source of the stress that MBIs are to address (Roeser and Peck, 2009). Some have thus critiqued MBIs for normalising a sick system in fact ‘adding lemon juice to poison’ (Sellman and Buttarazzi, 2019). They enhance teacher and student resilience, ‘pathology-proofing’ them so that they can feel ‘good’ within an oppressive system (Reveley, 2015). From such perspective a practice originally aimed at liberation is devoured by neo-liberal agendas (Forbes, 2019), making one wonder whether this is Marx’s ‘false consciousness’ returned with a vengeance.

However, there is a need for balancing the external perspective with internal perspectives. For example, it is crucial to note that some leading scientists and leaders in this field describe quite remarkable personal stories of transformation, which have led them to the practice (Jennings, 2015), many are clearly grounded in the Buddhist path (Burnett, 2011) and some collaborate with world-renowned Buddhist leaders (Hanh and Weare, 2018). When looking at mindfulness *in* education from this perspective, its serious manifestations parallel Kabat-Zinn’s (2011) very Buddhist motivation—to address suffering in the world. The ‘tool’ seems to be studied/offered by those who see it as a path within the Buddhist concept of skillful means (*upaya*). Their work is one of crafting a language that appeals to a system that would not tolerate Buddhist terms but is well-versed in the language of market-economy. What makes mindfulness into a tool is often not those who seriously study/implement it. It is the educational system within which this takes place. The former might be interested in liberation and the reduction of suffering; the latter is more interested in a lubricant that oils its engine.

An additional aspect to be noted is that MBIs are increasingly associated with the enhancement of social-emotional skills/competencies (Jennings *et al.*, 2017). On the one hand skills/competencies reflect an economic discourse (Biesta, 2009). On the other hand, these are not the early 20th century

three Rs (reading, writing, arithmetic), but rather the attitudinal components of mindfulness practice—compassion and kindness. Mindfulness *in* education here is about creating prosocial classrooms and developing healthy teacher–student relationships (Davidson *et al.*, 2012). The potential for construing these within education as a path toward moral living is clearly there; however, currently the justification for mindfulness *in* education is mostly confined to quantitative research. This tends to exacerbate the erosion of the educational status of mindfulness for quantitative measures of mindfulness and its outcomes fail to convey the phenomenology of first-person experience (Petitmengin *et al.*, 2017). Behind improvements in occupational health, there may be a teacher who has become more attentive and feels more joy and fulfillment in her job. Behind MBIs, such as Mindfulness in Schools Project (UK) or Peace in Schools (US) there are children and teenagers who learned to cope with anxiety revealing remarkable stories of personal transformation.⁴ These need to be explored from qualitative perspectives in order to bring forth a fuller educational justification for the practice (e.g. Tarrasch, 2015).

The role of mindfulness *in* education suggests a variety of contributions to students' and teachers' well-being, cognitive functions and social-emotional competencies (Zenner *et al.*, 2014). From an external view, however, the medium of implementation, and the justifications provided for it within quantitative studies, often deprive mindfulness from being fully considered within the scope of Education. Paradoxically, this deprivation stems from the ethos of the educational system itself. Its functional-economic ethos is understandable from an external perspective, yet it erodes the educational worthwhileness of the practice.

Mindfulness as Education

The conception of 'mindfulness *as* education' takes its cue from the first narrative of mindfulness and from the broader horizons of education as a path. It positions the practice as both serving educational aims and as an inherently worthwhile activity (Peters, 1973) and gives it a far more robust presence in the curriculum (O'Donnell, 2015). Such conception implies a shift away from education that is narrowed down by 'economic imperialism' (Gilead, 2015); conversely, it grounds it in ancient and contemporary conceptions of education as a path and as a holistic endeavour that concerns character, virtue, self-knowledge and social-engagement (Aloni, 2007).

However, there is a clear issue at stake here for ideally speaking, this would imply that the incorporation of mindfulness *as* education would necessitate bringing its Buddhist roots along with it. This unlikely progression is one reason why current discourse around mindfulness *as* education is mostly theoretical and revolves around critique of mindfulness *in* education (Ergas and Hadar, 2019). Critics argue against a two-layered economic imperialism that frames education in these terms and then frames mindfulness in this very way to serve education-framed in economical terms (Lewin, 2017; O'Donnell, 2015). This process itself is part of the broader 'McMindfulness' phenomenon described as 'divorcing technique from underpinning

value foundations' (Hyland, 2016, p. 14). Eppert (2013) hence claimed that mindfulness and contemplative practices in general 'are in danger of being "used and abused", diluted and commodified, packaged and made "easy", designed to fit into society rather than rigorously question and re-imagine it' (p. 339). She called for engaging the ancestries of these practices as an antidote to these trends.

Some attempts have been made in this direction. Hyland (2013) proposed Buddhist mindfulness as a 'more suitable vehicle than religious or faith-based strategies for fostering spirituality or other-regarding values' (p. 10). O'Donnell (2015) suggested deploying 'more heterodox methods inspired by mindfulness practices rooted in the Buddhist tradition, that are both integrated into the curriculum and school experience' (p. 197). These proposals are laudable, yet they may still raise concerns of proselytising a religion to students within some Western industrialised countries (Jennings, 2016). As the following proposes, a possibly more effective way to render mindfulness *as* education, can be articulated based on certain interpretations of the core facets of the practice itself. This may offer a narrative that is not Buddhist, nor therapeutic-economic, but rather *educational*.

Demonstrating the inherent educational worthwhileness of mindfulness practice can begin with an often-cited passage from William James: 'The faculty of voluntarily *bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again*, is the very root of judgment, character, and will . . . An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence' (1981[1890], p. 401, emphasis added). Bear in mind that the italicised words can pass for the *attentional* and *intentional* core facets of mindfulness practice as depicted earlier. But why did James make such claim? Explaining this requires engaging a little more deeply with his perspective on attention, experience and the mind.

James argued that 'for the moment what we attend to is reality' (1981 [1890], p. 322). Minds select what to attend to and 'make' reality in two ways: *actively*, as one wills attention to an object, and *passively*, as attention is lured involuntarily to objects of interest (James, 1962). Our lives amount to a concatenation of moments of reality shaped by these two processes. However, James observed that we have very poor ability to sustain attention voluntarily (p. 234). This lack is an expression of lacking will, for willing something implies being able to sustain it before our minds by the faculty of attention (*ibid.*). Such lack prevents us from pursuing long-term goals, for we are constantly lured and side-tracked by a mind that keeps presenting us with alternative possibilities. These lure our judgement, resulting in weakness of character. It follows then that improving our ability to bring attention to an object of choice, we will become more capable of holding ideas in mind until they are pursued. Hence if mindfulness practice indeed enhances attention as some evidence suggests (Davidson *et al.*, 2012; Tarrasch, 2017), according to James it would reflect education par excellence.

Yet there is still a question about the nature of things we would want to pursue with this trained attention, for sustained attention is an 'ethically-neutral quality' (Conze, 1956, p. 19). One can apply it toward committing a crime as much as one can apply it toward an altruistic deed. This is why the

attitudinal facet of the practice is crucial. It includes non-judgmentalism, kindness, curiosity, non-striving and in some modalities of MBIs these are extended to practices of loving-kindness, friendliness, compassion and gratitude (Cullen, 2011; Roeser, 2014). I suggest that these practices can be seen as bringing *attitude* to the foreground and casting *attention* to the background remaining within the bounds of what has been described as the core facets of mindfulness practice. Within mindfulness practice one does not merely bring back a wandering mind to the object; one cultivates an ability to live within one's body, accepting everything experienced throughout the practice with kindness. These are hence ethical commitments built into the practice that undergird the neutrality of attention.

When framed this way this is not about Buddhism; it is about virtues. Aristotle claimed that one cultivates virtue by engaging in virtuous deeds. The question is whether one becomes kinder or more compassionate by practicing these qualities mentally on one's own? This is a basic assumption that undergirds mindfulness *as* education. Evidence from research of MBIs and from neuroscience proposes that this is indeed the case (Condon *et al.*, 2013; Davidson *et al.*, 2012; Shapiro *et al.*, 2012). Namely, habits are formed both by acting and by mentally acting upon ourselves through practices such as mindfulness.

When looking at mindfulness as an educational practice in this way the distinction between mindfulness *in* education and *as* education has far more to do with modalities of implementation than with a full investment in the first narrative of mindfulness. This is about showing how the means embody the ends and the intrinsic value of the activity itself. Lewin (2017) in fact suggested that: 'There is something about the delicate nature of attention that yields to intrinsic reward, where the mindful subject is not oriented to anything, but to being present' (p. 114). On this view, the very act of halting our doings and attending kindly to the breath reflects a sense of gratitude and appreciation of *being*.

Treating the practice thus, must imply implementing it in a way that respects this activity and not only its outcomes. Though rarer, there are some actual implementations of this approach in contemporary literature. Tarrasch (2017) studied a primary public school with a student population of low socio-economic status that in the past fifteen years has integrated 'the mindfulness language' into school life. This included, weekly sessions dedicated to mindfulness practices, as well as practices interweaved throughout the school day within disciplinary lessons. The school principal introduced this curricular reform after experiencing extreme violence and behavioural issues in the school. The curricular reform began with setting aside academic achievements completely and highlighting emotional engagement and relationships among teachers, among students, and between teachers and students (Frankel, 2008). The implementation of this 'mindfulness language' in this case, reflects the antithesis of a 'mindfulness intervention'. It is not a compartmentalised tool, but rather a language that undergirds all human interactions and permeates school life.

It is not surprising that such cases are rare. Such reforms require a huge commitment and deep understanding of the practice on behalf of the

principal and school staff. Furthermore, recruiting a community to prioritise social-emotional aspects of school life in an age of accountability and high-stakes testing is no simple matter. Interestingly, in the course of a decade this reform has led the school from the bottom of the country's rankings to the top on both school climate *and* academic achievements (Tarrasch, 2017). At least in this case implementing mindfulness *as* education, yielded the benefits sought within mindfulness *in* education. One case is certainly not enough for theory-building. It does, however, provide a concrete example of potential. Importantly, this is *not* an alternative school (e.g. Waldorf, Montessori). It is a public urban school that had to work within the realms of the autonomy given to it by a ministry of education. This implies that mindfulness *as* education can take place within the bounds of public education. It does not seem to compromise the economic-functional role of socialisation concerned with the need for engineers, lawyers, nurses, teachers. It rather opens the possibility for highlighting the education of *kind* and *compassionate* engineers, lawyers, nurses, teachers, etc.

What emerges from the analysis is that the transition from mindfulness *in* to *as* education does not necessarily involve Buddhist liberation as much as it involves liberating education from economic imperialism. This enables a more creative approach to the integration of mindfulness into curricular-pedagogical practice by adopting not a 'Buddhist language', but rather a 'mindfulness language'. I would still argue, however, that just as many of the scientists and leaders within mindfulness *in* education are versed in the first narrative, those teaching mindfulness *in* or *as* education need to be grounded in the practice and its ancestries. However, the actual words they use when teaching can rely safely on very basic human faculties of attention, attitude and intention, which can at one and the same time be viewed as core facets of both mindfulness practice and the practice of Education.

Mindfulness of Education

There is a third possibility that is conceptualised here as 'mindfulness of education' conceived as engaging in mindfulness for the purpose of critiquing education. It is far less obvious and only beginning to emerge in the discourse (Ergas, 2017; Forbes, 2019; Kaufman, 2017; Magee, 2016). However, it holds significant potential for introducing radical dimensions of critique that can inform education and critical pedagogy. To develop this, I begin by associating the act of critique with a further description of the core facets of mindfulness. Then I tie it to educational possibilities.

Critique can occur in diverse contexts, involve various methods, and be expressed in a variety of ways. Some examples include, Socratic *elenchus* in which argument and counterargument are exchanged through dialogue, self-reflection as in Descartes' *Meditations*, and Freire's dialectical analysis of social injustice. These examples differ significantly in terms of the aims of critique and the themes discussed, yet one thing they all share, is the media they are all based in—thinking processes, reasoning and language. I am well aware that pointing to what is missing from them, I will be applying the very same media, hence it should be clear that the merit of all of them is

completely beyond questioning here. I do, however, point to a modality of critique that mindfulness (and other body-based contemplative practices) can introduce, which can substantially inform critical thinking.

Scholars in the field of contemplative studies refer to this as ‘contemplative inquiry’ (Zajonc, 2009), and speak of ‘critical first-person perspective’ (Komjathy, 2018; Roth, 2006). Yet, unlike Descartes’ critical first-person philosophy, the critical stance that mindfulness practice introduces, steps away from an ‘I’ that reflects on ‘his’ thoughts. Practicing mindfulness, one is instructed to return to the moment-to-moment experience of embodied sensations whenever one finds oneself engaging in thinking, reasoning and interpreting. To some degree this can be interpreted as reversing Descartes’ mistrust of the body and adopting it as the point from which the mind itself is critiqued (Ergas, 2013). Shifting away from the content of thoughts stands in sharp contrast to conventional philosophical and day-to-day meaning-making processes. As such, I argue, it reflects scepticism applied toward the mind of the sceptic him/herself. It is a critical stance that moves away from the thoughts one has, the schemes that bring them about, and the power that these have on our formation, views, and ways of critique. This process opens us to novel perspectives and can lead to insights into the nature of experience (Zajonc, 2009).

Practicing mindfulness *of* ‘something’ means invoking the attitude of curiosity and inquisitiveness, applying them to the content of experience, while being the one who ‘has’ the experience. The expression ‘mindfulness *of*’ appears in the *Satipatthana Suta*—the fundamental text in which the Buddha explains the practice of *sati*. In this text it appears, for example, as practicing ‘mindfulness *of* the breath’ or ‘*of* bodily sensations’. This means bringing attention to their natural appearance without attempting to change them. This leads to growing discernment as to the nature of the phenomenon as it breaks down into finer elements (Young, 2016). As attention and awareness are enhanced, the breath is noted with far more detail unraveling more of its subtleties (Yates *et al.*, 2015). As I argue, we can practice mindfulness *of* the breath, but we can also practice ‘mindfulness *of* education’ in a variety of ways to which the following serves only as a primer.

Since mindfulness *of* education is a radical form of critique it can willingly engage the first narrative if this informs the critical endeavour. Consider, for example, the first verse of *The Dhammapada*, a compilation of the Buddha’s words: ‘All phenomena are preceded by the mind, issue forth from the mind, and consist of the mind’ (in Wallace, 1999, fn. 1). Fast-forward to our times and compare this with Eisner’s (1993) claim, ‘what schools allow children to think about shapes, in ways perhaps more significant than we realize, the kind of minds they come to own . . . education is a mind-making process’ (p. 5). Looking at these two very different sources, the tautological nature of education comes into view. All phenomena are preceded by the mind; ‘education’ is itself a phenomenon. It is a process that begins with minds and makes minds. Would it not then be a good idea to explore the mind that makes education? (Ergas, 2017).

To make this more concrete, I briefly present a practice that I introduce in undergraduate courses to ignite mindfulness of education. The reader is invited to try the following instructions I give to students, to enable for a clearer understanding of what follows:

For the next two minutes, your intention is to just be a witness to experience. Make a list of all things you attend to when you're not trying to do anything special. Whatever it is, a thought, a sound, an itch, just write it down. I'm not going to make you read it out loud, so you don't have to be politically correct either.

The first thing to establish is that these instructions embody the core facets of mindfulness practice. The difference is that here, mindfulness is practiced in writing and not only mentally: *intention* is set at the beginning and *attitude* of non-judgementalism is encouraged. *Attention* is practiced here within a mindfulness practice known as 'choiceless awareness', which requires one to note whatever attention selects and to let go of it without getting stuck on anything in particular (Yates *et al.*, 2015). A typical list following the above instructions can look like this:

sound of a cough
 thought: 'who was that?'
 sight of other students engaged in practice
 numb sensation in the left hip
 sound of pens writing
 thought: 'it's so quiet in the classroom'
 hum of the projector . . .

Broadly, such lists reflect what a mind does when it is not asked to attend to anything in particular. Based on our lists we uncover the phenomenology of this experience. Three fundamental observations emerge:

1. All experiences are based on the faculty of **attention**.
2. All represent the **present moments attended to**.
3. All emerge from one of two fields in **space**: *in*—private, embodied experiences (e.g. thoughts, inner sensations) or *out*—stimuli like sights, sounds, smells, which are perceived in the public sphere that is available to everyone.

On the face of it, these do not seem to hold much, until we start to consider how the above possibilities feature in education. For example, we may consider a basic definition of teaching as 'orienting students' attention to worthwhile content' (Ergas, 2017). In every moment there are only two options for teachers: either ask students to attend *in* to their own minds or *out*. In contemporary education, the former is quite rare. The public curriculum seems very rich with disciplines, but the mind, which 'precedes all phenomena', is mostly what Eisner (1994) called a 'null' curriculum. Minds created education that makes minds in a way that sends those minds to attend to everything but to the source of the endeavour.

A further implication of the above practice is that it is imprecise to claim that minds are ‘made’ by education, curriculum, schooling *or teaching*. They are made by what they attend to wittingly and/or unwittingly. Sometimes minds attend to the planned/taught curriculum; at others, they attend to a myriad other things, many of them in fact, produced by the wandering mind itself. Neuroscientists have become very interested in the latter domain, which in schools manifests in sitting in the classroom yet floating in thoughts to other places. Studies suggest that we spend close to half of our waking hours wandering and this affects our moods, behaviours and thought processes (Killingsworth and Gilbert, 2010; Segal *et al.*, 2018). Perhaps we should consider then, whether educational research should not start turning its flashlight to something that minds do about half of the time including in school and university and seems to affect who we are in significant ways? As I developed elsewhere (Ergas, 2018), education may be an external mind-making process determined by society, but we are also schooled in and shaped from within our own minds as we become absorbed in the content they produce constantly.

These ideas open additional strands of critique that emerge at the intersection of mindfulness *of* education and critical pedagogy. As Magee (2016) writes: ‘each of us teaching in traditional educational settings almost inevitably reenacts and re-inscribes prevailing cultural norms and imperatives’ (p. 11). In other words, when education makes minds through its contemporary functional-economic role this may well imply social reproduction, because minds are made to project socio-cultural norms to the next generation. Forbes (2019) and Magee (2016) hence describe a variety of ways in which mindfulness and other contemplative practices extend critical pedagogy to engage directly with the mind that has been made by education. It is this mind that reads reality through and enacts prejudice, bias and privilege. Forbes (2019) calls for re-grounding the practice in its Buddhist socially-engaged civic ethics in his critique of mindfulness *in* education as encouraging self-indulgence. Relevant implementations to this domain, which are still rare, begin to demonstrate such potential. Mindfulness practice implemented within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict led to increased support for political compromise in adults (Alkoby *et al.*, 2017) and to reduced affective prejudice and other group stereotyping in fourth and fifth grade students (Berger *et al.*, 2018).

These varieties of mindfulness *of* education present its role as an inherently worthwhile educational activity that opens new possibilities for critique. They grant us the possibility of engaging in a radical act of stepping away from thoughts and reasoning to inform our ways of individual and social critique and engagement. They connect with the first narrative for they bring forth an ethos of liberation, which is mutual to the Buddha’s teachings and to critical pedagogy. Critically considering mindfulness *of* education, however, the more libertarian and critical it gets, the more resistance it will face from the very systems that it seeks to change. Its implementations are thus likely to exist only in educational settings that are willing to face radical challenges to their foundations. Socrates paid with his life for such deeds. Are we willing to go there two and a half millennia later?

CONCLUSION

Mindfulness practice can be depicted based on three core facets, which can be grounded within the therapeutic-economic narrative (as a tool) or within the Buddhist narrative (as a path). Education meets the former as an economic-functionalist process of socialisation characterising contemporary times. In this more common case it enables mindfulness *in* education—a limited modality that is critiqued for addressing problems that the system itself creates, yet a glance from within may reveal that it is more transformative than realised. Education meets mindfulness as a path when it is itself construed as a path and enables for mindfulness *as* education—an approach that reflects the inherent worthwhileness of the practice itself. For this to be applicable in contemporary public education it needs a narrative that is not Buddhist but rather Educational. Such possibility emerges given certain interpretations of the core facets of the practice. Mindfulness *of* education brings forth the most radical possibility in which mindfulness is embraced as a practice that radicalises the act of critique. From this perspective, the mind that has been made by education becomes the object of the critique seeking individual and social liberation.

The three roles proposed for mindfulness advance from relative conformity to radicality. They reflect different potentials that are there to be explored. Mindfulness *in* education is the most common, however, the other two hold the more transformative and radical potential inherent in the practice. Yet the seeds of radicality are there present in the core facets of the practice. In that sense, mindfulness *in* education may be more radical than we realise. Is it sustaining the box of contemporary education or reconstructing education from within? It may be worth remembering that the fact that we are getting more used to the idea that students and/or teachers spend time in schools and universities attending to their breaths and examining their interiority, even within an intervention, is quite radical. Twenty years ago, this would have been unheard of.

Correspondence: Dr. Oren Ergas, Faculty of Education, Beit Berl College, Kfar Sava, 44905, Israel.
Email: orenergas1@gmail.com

NOTES

1. <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/about/about-us/>
2. <http://myriadproject.org/schools/>
3. <https://trialsjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13063-017-1917-4>
4. <https://www.peaceinschools.org/videos/>, <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/>

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