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The Journey of Mindfulness Into Western Classrooms and Its Impact on Education

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Abstract

Everything has a story, a point of origin, a list of defining features that make it into what it is. Yet the larger and more ubiquitous something gets, the harder it can be to define. The saturation of educational related mindfulness publications, resources, and research has made mindfulness into a modern educational phenomenon. The scale of this phenomenon begins far before its western transition and includes forces throughout history and around the globe. In an attempt to truly understand the story of mindfulness many layers need to be peeled back. Layers that have made it increasingly difficult to discern what mindfulness truly is. At some point external forces can alter something beyond its original form and into a newly created entity. This new entity holds the story of its past as it forges its own future. As an educational tool, mindfulness practices have proven not only to be popular, but also useful in tackling a great variety of complex issues in education. However, before putting these tools into practice, educational settings should consider the story and implications of these tools. There in, being poised to better integrate mindfulness they may find of use. This master's thesis explores the origin, journey, applications and continued evolution of mindfulness as it became prominent in the educational framework of the west; encouraging practitioners to both thoughtfully engage with, and hold lightly the implications of its story.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The Journey of Mindfulness

Interest in mindfulness has grown immensely since its rise in popularity. In less than half a century, this topic has come to develop its own vernacular, lifestyles centering mental health and wellbeing, and even an industry unto itself. The creation of the Mindfulness Based Intervention (MBI) as a researched backed therapy in the 1970's has become a root practical approach to dealing with numerous issues including those in an educational setting (Hyland, 2015). Mindfulness, at its core, is a state of awareness and acceptance of the present (Bhodi, 2011). The purpose of which would be to gain some of a purported trove of benefits that mindfulness could bring to any situation. In the roughly 50 years that mindfulness has been on the radar of western studies, mindfulness related content is continuing to rise in popularity and prevalence and seems to thrive in a late stage capitalist society seeking answers to ailments of all varieties. A rise of cognitive capitalism, where economic activity increasingly centers around knowledge and immaterial activities, has further developed an industry and audience for mindfulness (Purser, 2020), as more of its applications continue to be studied, trialed, and discussed.

Detailing the journey of mindfulness into the classroom will require an understanding of the origins of mindfulness and how the trove of influences along the way produced the forms of mindfulness that we see today. Tracing back thousands of years to some of the oldest definitions of mindfulness will aid in the understanding of its current definition. In defining mindfulness, it will be possible to compare it to its origins and see how a Buddhist spiritual concept could have pertinence within a non-Buddhist society

more interested in the results of such a practice and less interested in its tradition (Bhodi, 2011).

In order for mindfulness to make the cultural leap across oceans and borders to non-Buddhist countries, the proper conditions must have existed and led to the proliferation of mindful practices. As mindfulness entered into popular culture the interactions between mindfulness and capitalism created great economic value which begs the question of whether mindfulness has in fact changed from a Buddhist practice and into something separate.

The Need for This Research

In examination on the ways that mindfulness has manifested itself into modern society, it has clearly evolved from the traditional spiritual practices of its Buddhist roots. To best understand how to utilize mindfulness practices in classrooms, and other institutional settings, it behooves practitioners to realize the evolution of the entire concept of mindfulness to put a context to the tools they are using in the classroom. In describing mindfulness practices in regards to teachers and their students, Hyland (2015) stated: "*when teachers are fully present, they teach better. When students are fully present, the quality of their learning is better*" (Hyland, 2015, p. 180). With a more complete understanding of mindfulness, perhaps teachers and practitioners of mindfulness in education, can gain even more insight and see more potent results that have the ability to positively impact their classroom environments and the learning that takes place therein.

Thesis Questions

With this literature review, the author will aim to gather an overview of the circumstances that brought mindfulness into classrooms and schools. These guiding

questions will be the focus of this review and the cited and sourced information will work to bring clarity to these questions:

1. What elements led to the arrival and implementation of mindfulness in classrooms?

2. How did mindfulness find such success being paired with education?

3. How has mindfulness been received and what implications does this have for is used in education?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The collection of resources for this literature review were accessed through a variety of online databases. All of these databases were authorized to be accessed through the authors enrollment at Bethel University. The Bethel University Library was the initial access point for all databases. The databases utilized include: Ebscohost Academic Search Premier, ERIC, CLICsearch, and Google Scholar. All sources were accessed in full form.

Defining Mindfulness

Understanding the journey of mindfulness from an ancient practice into the classrooms of contemporary education, requires a closer inspection of the definition and meaning of mindfulness. In their work, practitioners, researchers, and historians offer interpretations of mindfulness based on past definitions and settings with links to a multitude of ideas, feelings, and emotions. However, much like a game of telephone, where information gets warped over time and distance, the definition of mindfulness has gone on an age-old journey from Buddhist tradition all the way to that of contemporary society encountering its own variables and circumstances along the way. What started as a Buddhist way of life has traveled the world and evolved into a seeming industry unto itself.

According to Škobalj (2018), there are three primary 'streams' of literature on mindfulness: the first is of the Buddhist tradition through preserved and translated texts, the second stream is of modern scientific literature on mindfulness, and the third has grown from the popular rise of mindfulness that is intended for and consumed by the masses (Škobalj, 2018). Within the idea of these three streams is the need to look through a certain lens depending on the application of mindfulness at hand which, in turn, will

slightly influence its definition. For the purposes of this literature review, it is necessary to dive deeper into these definitions and how that has evolved over time.

The idea of mindfulness continually appears in Buddhist teachings and is an overarching theme of the lifestyle and community surrounding Buddhism. In the words of the renowned Buddhist teacher and advocate for global peace Thich Nhat Hanh, mindfulness is at the center of Buddhist teachings and involves an attention to the present moment, holding elements of love and inclusivity, and practicing acceptance without any judgement (Hanh, 1999). The term 'mindfulness' can be linked to ancient Buddhist texts (Hyland, 2015). The oldest complete collection of texts, the Pāli Canon, includes teachings of a well-known form of Buddhist meditation called satipa hāna. Within this meditation practice arise two key terms: sampajañña (clear comprehension), and sati (mindfulness). Bodhi's (2011) research and interpretation explained that the original term of sati meant memory or recollection. Rhys Davids, the founder of the Pali Text Society in 1910, originally defined sati as recollection and later added 'lucid awareness' to complete what is seen in western society as the two primary canonical meanings of sati (Hyland, 2015). Bodhi (2011) explained that mindfulness plays an important role in the Buddhist teaching of the noble eightfold path which is corroborated by Hanh (1999) who stated that if someone practices 'right mindfulness' they will also intentionally or unintentionally be practicing the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. These practices are intertwined and support each other and a consideration of each is valuable to understanding the Buddhist roots of mindfulness.

Secular definitions of mindfulness have varying degrees of difference from the Buddhist roots. Secular definitions began in the realm of scientific literature and evolved

into popular literature as mindfulness spread to a wider and wider audience (Škobalj, 2018). A great majority of mindfulness definitions in the realm of scientific literature and popular culture hold near to one of the first, and certainly most popular, definitions made by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the 1970's. His work included the creation of the 'Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction' or MBSR that is still used today. Jon Kabat-Zinn, and many of his counterparts, defined mindfulness as an awareness that is open and without judgment of an experience in the present moment (Ryan & Brown, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2005) or in other words, being purposeful to pay attention to the moment in the present in a non-judgmental manner (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). It is an awareness that has no judgement, is done with an open heart, and moves from moment to moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

Škobalj (2018) provided an array of definitions from various scholars that exemplifies this. They offered that mindfulness is *"a careful awareness of the present moment that is free of judgment"* (Škobalj, 2018, p. 1367), *"an awareness of every moment nurtured through deliberate attention to things that we generally do not pay attention to"* (Škobalj, 2018, p. 1367). Mindfulness is "*direct contact with events in the form in which they appear without discriminatory additions"* (Škobalj, 2018, p. 1367). They summarized that "*focused attention or observation appear as the central element of mindfulness*" (Škobalj, 2018, p. 1367) stating that this practice leads to asking questions, analyzing and understanding.

The idea of 'non-judgmental awareness' posed in Kabat-Zinn's widely accepted definition of mindfulness, and reiterated in many other definitions has sparked some debate. Bhodi explored the main point of contention where contemporary definitions seem to diverge from definitions rooted in Buddhist canonical perspectives. They found this

difference to be the level of awareness involved in sati. Most secular definitions include the idea of 'non-judgement' or a 'suspension of thought'. From a Buddhist perspective however, the awareness in sati (mindfulness) involves cognition, is discursive, and is more than a pre-conceptual bare attention. Going off of the Pali canon and its commentaries, mindfulness is not portrayed to be without conceptualization of oneself (Bodhi, 2011). Similarly, Hyland (2015) took issue with the idea of 'bare attention' that has been used to describe mindfulness. Instead, they prefer to describe the process of mindfulness as a "*lucid awareness*". More abstract definitions of mindfulness certainly exist, one example being that of Langler & Moldoveanu (2000) who said that mindfulness as "*the process of drawing novel distinctions*" (p. 1).

Even in an attempt to understand the foundational definitions of mindfulness it is important to consider that, like any new idea, the creators of mindfulness and new applications of mindfulness were using an existing vocabulary to describe a new concept. Bhodi explains this situation as follows:

When devising a terminology that could convey the salient points and practices of his own teaching, the Buddha inevitably had to draw on the vocabulary available to him. To designate the practice that became the main pillar of his meditative system, he chose the word sati. But here sati no longer means memory. Rather, the Buddha assigned the word a new meaning consonant with his own system of psychology and meditation. Thus it would be a fundamental mistake to insist on reading the old meaning of memory into the new context (Bhodi, 2011, p.22)

That is to say that even as practitioners attempt to account for the original meaning of mindfulness in their works, the elusiveness of a definition stems to the origins of

mindfulness itself and human's ability to use existing frameworks to lay out a new idea. This elusiveness could be seen as the most uniting force in the ever-changing arena of mindfulness where an evolving and growing number of practitioners expand their reach into new eras, regions, and demographics to help more and more people live improved lives.

Timeline of Mindfulness

Origins and Early Expanse:

The origin of mindfulness as a concept stems from the early days of Buddhism itself. The term 'mindfulness', that would eventually be brought west in the late 20th century, stemmed from the Pali word 'sati' (Baker & Saari, 2018). The concept and use of 'sati' was first developed between the 5th and 6th centuries BCE2 by Siddhattha Gotama (Guatama) who is more popularly known as Buddha. This, combined with other spiritual teachings, would become central to the religion of Buddhism that we know today. With approximately five-hundred million followers worldwide, Buddhism is one of the top five most popular religions on Earth. The central goal of Buddhism, according to Moore is "*to escape the cycle of birth-death-rebirth known as saṃsāra by both working through the kamma (in Pāli4; Sanskrit: karma) accumulated from previous incarnations and by learning not to generate new kamma*" (Moore, 2016, p. 272).

In Buddha's first sermon, *(the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta)*, some tenets of modern mindfulness are apparent within the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths are: that life is suffering or unsatisfactory; that suffering is caused by clinging to things in our lives such as desires, ideas, thoughts, and sensations; that one's suffering can be stopped by not clinging; that by following the Noble

Eightfold Path, followers could cease their clinging and find peace. The Noble Eightfold

Path includes "*practicing right understanding, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort,*

mindfulness, and concentration" (Moore, 2016, p. 273). Perhaps the most notable aspect of

this first sermon is its inclusion of the four pillars of mindfulness: "*one can build the four*

establishments of mindfulness, which are awareness of the body (sensation), feeling

(emotion), mind (thoughts), and phenomena (other mental activity)" (Moore, 2016, p. 273).

In this first sermon, the foundation of what has become modern day mindfulness is

apparent. Within Buddha's original purpose of his teachings, there seems to even be room

for an adaptation into different realms. According to Bhodi (2011), the Buddha's teachings

were not offered as a doctrine that required belief, but instead was offered as a "*body of*

principles and practices that sustain human beings in their quest for happiness and spiritual

freedom" (p. 20). Ultimately, the core of these principles is a training system that allows

practitioners to be more insightful and to overcome suffering.

Buddhism, its teachings, and the foundations of the modern mindfulness movement

crossed mountains and borders throughout Asia. From Northern India, the basic teachings

spread into Central Asia, China, Sri Lanka, Tibet, Korea and Japan. This journey was

conditioned by geographical, social, political, economic, philosophical, religious, and even

linguistic factors that had an impact on the trajectory of Buddhism and the mindful

practices that it promoted (Heirman & Bumbacher, 2007). Even these early Buddhist roots

of mindfulness, which may seem to be unaltered and pure, were not spared from

adaptation and external influences even in their earliest days. As Buddhism spread, it

encountered externalities which would mold its presence in the world. The externalities

affecting the spread and trajectory of Buddhism is nothing out of the ordinary when compared to other religions and teachings. As Heirman & Bumbacher (2007) stated:

Buddhism is an abstraction, as is any religion. Why? No single religion represents a coherent and definite system of concepts and notions, for several reasons. First of all, religions evolve and develop {....} Second, no single member of a religion can be aware of all possible interpretations (Heirman & Bumbacher, 2007, p. 1).

In some places Buddhism and its practices flourished and complemented society, in others the practices failed to take hold and were not integrated into the larger society. In its earliest days in Northern India, esoteric Buddhism (taught direct from a teacher to a dedicated student) was born out of the earlier Vedic religion (2000 - 1200 BC) as it gained traction the exoteric scriptures describe an expanding material culture that opened trade routes reaching farther than they had in the centuries past (Heirman & Bumbacher, 2007). This not only provided new physical opportunities for Buddhism to spread, but also infused wealth into the society that had adopted it, strengthening its position both spiritually and economically.

Whether or not Buddhism survived depended largely on the conditions that it encountered. For example, the Buddhist expansion into Central Asia was hindered by economic crises from the 3rd century and onward, the collapse of international trade, the growth and spread of Christianity, and finally beginning in the 7th century by the expanse of Islam that would eventually push Buddhism out of Central Asia (Heirman & Bumbacher, 2007). The eastern expansion of Buddhism however saw state sponsorship in China, Tibet, Mongolia, and Korea which further established its prominence and the influence it had. Buddhism often proved to be adaptable and was able to establish itself harmoniously with

other philosophical and religious structures. Even without state sponsorship, Buddhism

"*promoted itself as a prime protector of the state, and as an excellent curator of physical*

health" (Heirman & Bumbacher, 2007, p. 2). However, these positive political and

socioeconomic factors that led to the entrenchment of Buddhism in East Asia were not

enough to stop external factors from contributing to the eventual sidelining of the religion

in India and elsewhere in the historical realm of the expansion where it once held influence

such as the Malay Archipelago and Central Asia.

One particularly noteworthy instance where Buddhism spread through

complementing existing social structures was in China. There, Buddhist supporters initially

made use of the concepts of Daoism when texts were translated into Chinese to facilitate

spread (Heirman & Bumbacher, 2007). This confluence of Daoism and Buddhism

eventually created Chan Buddhism which would be an important development in linking to

the modern mindfulness movement. What began as a Chinese school of Mahāyāna

Buddhism, would spread into Vietnam, Korea, and into Japan. The Japanese adoption of

Chan Buddhism in the 12th century marks a set up for the eventual propagation of

Buddhist teachings into western societies. This form of Buddhism is most commonly

known by its Japanese name of Zen Buddhism. The modern familiarity to the word 'Zen' in

western cultures is evidence of a spread that would soon occur and fuel yet another

iteration of Buddhist teachings and new expanses for the concept of mindfulness to inhabit.

Offshoots and Westernization:

Maintaining a notable presence for over two millennia, Buddhism has shown to be

highly adaptable. If the past is any indication, the journey and evolution of Buddhism will

not stop. According to Wood (2011) we are living in an era of Buddhist Modernism which

they define as a "new form of Buddhism that is the result of a process of modernization, westernization, reinterpretation, image-making, revitalization, and reform that has been taking place not only in the West but also in Asian countries for over a century" (p. 5). Further expanding into the idea of Buddhist Modernism, Wood (2011) illustrated that this is a blended tradition that stems from a blended cultural background. For example, the European Enlightenment and Romanticism has as much of an influence on Buddhist Modernism as the enlightenment of Buddha and the text of the Pāli canon. The melding and clashing of Asian cultures and the European colonial powers had as much of an influence as meditation and mindfulness. They further expressed that Buddhist modernism is a mix of traditions that shares roots with the European Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the clash of Asian and colonial cultures just as much as it shares roots with the enlightenment of the Buddha, the Pāli canon, and meditation. This modernization of Buddhism has been shaped by numerous forces over hundreds of years and cannot be the product of any single influence.

The first form of Buddhism to reach western societies in great numbers was the variety of Zen Buddhism from Japan in the middle of the 20th century. Compared to other Buddhist countries at the time, Japan was quickly developing and had rebounded, both economically and socially from a tumultuous period of war. In becoming an economic partner with western powers, a new cultural exchange would emerge similar to the cultural exchange that helped Buddhism to spread from its birthplace in northern India over two thousand years prior. Bhodi (2011) illustrated how in the 1960's and 70's cheap airfare and international travel would create an almost cross-pollinating cycle of cultural exchange. With fewer barriers to travel, teachers of Buddhism, yoga, and other eastern

spiritual practices traveled to western societies. These practitioners quickly developed

followings of younger Americans who were feeling a need to disassociate from the

"*materialism, militarism, and the flatlands of modernity"* (p. 20). This cultural exchange also

worked in the opposite direction with younger westerners traveling to practice and study

Buddhist practitioners to return home and share what they learned. Through this

exchange, a foundation was laid to bring the concepts of Buddhism in front of a more

mainstream audience.

Through this exchange between eastern and western cultures, the spiritual

practices of Buddhism such as meditation gained in popularity and became a more

mainstream concept. This soon caught the attention of medical professionals,

neuroscientists, and psychotherapists and opened up a new collaboration between the

practitioners of eastern spirituality and western scientists (Bhodi, 2011). One mindfulness

tool, and its creator is widely credited for secularizing and mainstreaming mindfulness as a

skill and practice in the United States as a therapeutic discipline. In 1979, Jon Kabat-Zinn

created the mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program at the University of

Massachusetts Medical Center (LaRock, 2014) (Bodhi, 2011) (Baker & Saari, 2018). In

doing so, they bridged the gap between mindfulness as a spiritual Buddhist practice and

mindfulness as a tool that can be measured to help people in controlled settings. The MBSR

was likely the most important factor in making mindful meditation popular among Western

audiences and for legitimizing it as a scientifically measurable practice with cultural

credibility (Wilson, 2014). Kabat-Zinn's experience prior to the creation of the MBSR

program highlighted the importance of the cultural exchange that brought mindfulness to

western societies in the first place. While studying at MIT, Kabat-Zinn's was introduced to

Buddhist meditation through a Zen missionary. From this initial experience, he started

studying meditation under teachers of Zen Buddhism including renowned Zen master

Thich Nhat Hanh. Kabat-Zinn would go on to create his own brand of meditation which he

called 'mindfulness' by blending his Buddhist training and yoga practices which had gained

increased popularity through the same cultural exchange that brought the Zen Buddhist

teachings to him in the first place (Engle, 2019) (Bodhi, 2011).

The creation of the MBSR program would set in motion a wave of mindfulness as a

therapeutic discipline. Its use as a mechanism to reduce stress and pain has since been

utilized by hundreds of medical facilities globally. These clinical applications have been

used far beyond stress and pain reduction and since have been used in psychotherapy to

address depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorders (Bodhi, 2011) giving rise

to other scientific application of mindfulness therapies that closely followed the structures

and ideas laid out by Kabat-Zinn in the MBSR program.

The transmission of mindfulness practices from its spiritual origins in the east to

new western audiences is yet another progression of the spread of Buddhism as a spiritual

practice. Along with this westward spread, mindfulness found its way into a scientific

setting as yet another chapter in its evolution with the creation of MBSR and later, MBCT.

This relatively recent development continues to unfold and brings about new insights and

applications.

Applying Mindfulness in Academic Studies and Institutional Environments:

Given the adaptability of mindfulness in the two millennia prior to its arrival into

western societies, it comes as no surprise that it has made strides into a variety of fields

like psychotherapy, positive psychology and psychological counselling (Škobalj, 2018).

Mindfulness has indeed transitioned beyond a mere mechanism for wellbeing. The base of

academic and institutional applications of mindfulness lies within the creation of the MBSR.

The goal of reducing stress through mindfulness is attempted by following the structure of

the program and implementing its mindful practices. The MBSR program is made up of

eight weekly sessions each 2 ½ hours long as well as 1 full day of mindful practices. The

mindful practices include meditation, yoga, and a body-scan that calls the user to pay

attention to their body and the sensations that they are feeling. Mindfulness is also

practiced through daily routines such as eating and using it in decision making or conflict.

Participants are encouraged to practice mindfulness for 45 minutes of formal and informal

exercises (Zenner et al., 2014). Zenner et al. (2014) categorizes the overarching themes of

the MBSR to include: "*psycho-education, and attitudes such as not judging, a beginner's mind,*

trust, non-striving, acceptance, letting go, and patience" (para. 4).

From the creation, use and acceptance of the MBSR stemmed several variations of

mindfulness-based therapies. The most ubiquitous of which was the MBCT, or Mindfulness-

Based Cognitive Therapy, which was developed to prevent the relapse of depression in

patients. The MBCT has also been used to treat cancer patients, patients with drug

addiction, and to assist in the care for elderly persons in long term care facilities and

nursing homes (Hyland, 2015). Other cognitive-behavioral therapies such as acceptance

and commitment therapy (ACT), and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) emphasize

acceptance as well as change through their treatment and have been formulated to best fit

a larger number of clinical conditions (Chiesa, 2012).

With all of these new therapies existing in a research-based environment there was

a desire to measure their results. A variety of scales to measure mindfulness were

developed to work alongside these newly developed therapies. Some of these scales include: The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale (CAMS), the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), the Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS), and the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) to name a few (Hyland, 2015) (Chiesa, 2012).

The basic framework for all of these therapies and their measurements began with the MBSR. The MBSR is indeed like the parent of all mindfulness-based interventions (Drage, 2018). As Drage (2018, para. 22) stated: "*The essence of mindfulness, in the form of MBSR, was passed down between generations, from experienced teachers to experiencing students.*" Interestingly this is not much different from the way that esoteric Buddhism was passed down between generations of teachers to their students in the two millennia prior.

The immense research and quantification of mindfulness has led to its inclusion into a variety of spaces and social structures within institutions. Since the research began in the 1970's mindfulness has touched an overwhelming variety of subjects: parenting, leadership, social justice, in sports, in the workplace, in prisons, and many more places (LaRock, 2014). Baker & Saari (2018) depict three distinct waves that encompassed mindfulness in the 20th century from meditation in the 1970's inspired by Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis, to the 1980's with a focus on relaxation, then the 1990's with more structured MBSR therapies, and even suggesting a fourth wave near our present moment with a focus on mindfulness practices actually changing the makeup and wiring of one's brain. It is possible to generalize the applications of mindfulness by focusing on studies with social implications and categorizing them as focusing on health, business, or education (Langler & Moldoveanu, 2000).

Health implications associated with mindful practices received some of the first attention in studies. There are now countless studies and research surrounding health and mindfulness. Some of the initial integrations of mindfulness came through channels of meditation, yoga, and other health-conscious circles that were bringing these new practices to the West. Some of these initial studies on health addressed aging and perceived control finding that perceived control had positive impacts on stress reduction and overall health. Additionally, studies found that mindless behavior did not present a perception of control. Something as simple as giving residents control over their schedule or the daily plans had positive impacts on health such as lowering adverse health impacts of arthritis and alcoholism as well as increasing longevity (Langler & Moldoveanu, 2000).

Business is another context in which mindfulness studies have shown social relevance. Generally, these studies surrounding mindfulness in business have been associated with increases in creativity and decreases in burnout. Some studies even cite increased productivity and decreases in accidents (Langler & Moldoveanu, 2000). Mindful practices in business have made their way to the highest rungs of the business and organizational world. In fact, Google staff development programs and U.S. army training programs incorporate mindfulness practices (Hyland, 2015). While being critical of the secularized nature of modern mindfulness practices that some call 'McMindfulness' as a nod to mindfulness for the masses being like McDonalds in its mass appeal, Hyland (2015) posits that this "*stripped-down, secularized technique*" (p. 181) is more palatable for the corporate world as compared to more traditional mindful practices.

Education is the third general area to receive oversized attention in regards to mindfulness studies according to Langler & Moldoveanu (2000). With education being the

final stop of this investigation into the journey of mindfulness into classrooms, this

segment will be expanded upon in the following chapter of this thesis titled, Mindfulness in

Education.

CHAPTER III: MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION

Mindfulness: A Likely Fit Within Education

Much like the previously discussed evolution of Buddhism and the journey of mindfulness practices to the west, there are many facets and influences to consider. The exact pathway of mindfulness practices into our educational framework is not a specific historical event. Langler & Moldoveanu (2000) explained why mindfulness seems to have had such a sizable influence on education by highlighting the best strategies of learning a new task. Instead of mindlessly partaking in rote memorization of the basics, learners should be able to question and adapt the basics through mindful thinking and further adapt and progress the task that they are learning. From the studies of mindfulness in clinical settings, leaders in educational settings have been informed on the impacts that MBIs, and mindfulness practices in general, can have in k12 schools (LaRock, 2014). Positive learning impacts from mindful techniques such as breathing and walking meditation or mindful movement have been documented within school age children and lifelong adult learners (Hyland, 2015). It is worth examining the implications of mindfulness in schools and with a few details it is possible to see how mindfulness found itself a likely partner in education.

In the mid-20th century, mental health began to be recognized as an important element to address within schools of public health when John Hopkins University implemented the country's first mental health department. A report published in 1959 shined light on the need for mental health training to be integrated into the teachings at schools of public health and laid out some basic principles of the subject. This focus slowly caught on within these schools and by the 1970's many graduates of these schools felt that mental health issues were important. Since the 1970's chronic diseases, including mental

disorders have taken over the majority of the cost and burden of illness within the healthcare system. Over time, the importance of mental health became even more mainstream in our society and has even been a focus in major legislation such as the Mental health Parity Act of 1996 and the Affordable Care Act of 2010 (Elizabeth et al., 2016).

This mainstreaming of mindfulness in institutional and medical settings began to show up in classrooms when teachers who had experienced mindfulness practices themselves began experimenting with techniques in the classroom. By the early 2000's schools began to see more mental health professionals housed inside of their buildings. It is now common to have a school social worker, or a school psychologist, and many teachers have experienced mindfulness training. It is commonplace for a teacher to have had training to instruct specific mindfulness exercises in the classroom such as mindful breathing, and mindful movement. Purser (2020) viewed this application of mindfulness in classrooms as a variety of 'thin' mindfulness that is "*the typical psychotherapeutic, individualistic, and ethnically-neutral variety" (p. 166)* which has made the practice into a commodity and thus giving it a foothold in public schools across the United States.

Hyland (2015) cited fifteen years of mindfulness techniques utilized in schools and colleges of the United States to observe that mindfulness "*promotes resilience and enhances social and emotional competence*" (p. 173) and that when combined with other emotional attributes, mindfulness "*supports constructive action and caring behaviour*" (p. 173). They go on to express that there is a beautiful interwoven relationship between mindfulness and education explaining that mindfulness is about being fully present. In their words: "*when teachers are fully present, they teach better. When students are fully present, the quality of their learning is better*" (Hyland, 2015, p. 180).

At present, it seems that education is saturated with its connections to mindfulness (Langler & Moldoveanu, 2000). LaRock (2014), attempted to simplify this apparent saturation with four general areas that mindfulness has impacted education: Psychology, Educational Leadership, Neuroscience, and Well-Being. In other words, mindfulness has impacted our inner thoughts and feelings; it has impacted the way we lead; it has impacted the way we know brains to work; and it has impacted our outlook on what it means to be healthy. Langler & Moldoveanu's (2000) analysis of drawing novel distinctions details the ways in which attention and observation, a principal tenant of mindfulness, produces outcomes that are greatly beneficial to the educational environment. Langler & Moldoveanu stated that drawing novel distinctions leads to four main outcomes: *"(1) a greater sensitivity to one's environment, (2) more openness to new information, (3) the creation of new categories for structuring perception, and (4) enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving" (Langler* & Moldoveanu*, 2000, p. 2).* Although there is a great amount of overlap in the transmission and use of mindfulness for students and teachers, it is worth examining each perspective individually to draw a few unique distinctions.

For Students

Mindfulness used to impact for students is perhaps the first thing that comes to mind when one considers how mindfulness has integrated into education. Generally speaking, the goal of this integration is to benefit the learning and overall health of the student and to foster a better learning environment. Education is designed with students' well-being in mind however the mounting clinical issues, stress related problems and social pressure are continuing to pile up. Zenner et al. (2014) illustrated this situation saying that

children often have stressful experiences inside of school and that has an impact on their brain structures that are supposed to focus on cognition and mental health. This issue becomes more concerning when faced with the fact that *"21% of the 13 to 18 year olds in the US are currently suffering, or have at some point during their life suffered, from a severe mental disorder, with ADHD, behavioral or conduct problems, anxiety, and depression being the most prevalent current diagnoses"* (Zenner et al., 2014, para. 9)*.* Certainly, there are actions that can be taken to counter this including the results of neuroimaging studies with evidence that point to the possibility that mindfulness-based interventions may have positive effects on the structures of the brain (LaRock, 2014).

Sheinman (2018) explained that preparing students for their futures not only focuses on academic skills but also supports their process of becoming an adult and that schools need to be places that support positive development. Conveniently, a majority of youth aged 6-18 attend some type of school for a majority of the day. Schools also are in a unique position to foster and protect the health of a large portion of the population and to promote their well-being and support them through the stresses of everyday life by taking a preventative approach with minimal extra costs (Zenner et al., 2014) (Sheinman, 2018). The stresses that students experience show up as behaviors in the classroom and schools have an opportunity to intervene in a positive manner. Mindfulness based practices, which have been commonly accepted in school settings, are one of the ways in which schools can intervene positively to reduce the stress and overall health of their students. As Zenner et al. (2014) argued, mindfulness practice has the ability to *"enable children to deal with future challenges of the rapidly changing world, ideally becoming smart, caring, and committed citizens"* (para. 8)*.* This echoes Hyland's (2015) thoughts that education and mindfulness

are almost a perfect match since their goals and outcomes are closely related. With the added benefits of *"supporting readiness to learn, strengthening attention and concentration, reducing anxiety and enhancing social and emotional learning"* (Hyland, 2015, p. 180) mindfulness seems positioned to assist students in their learning and educational growth.

Outside of mindfulness exists an area of learning that may have helped in the normalization of mindfulness-based practices in schools. In an attempt to address the entirety of students' needs and help them to identify and manage their emotions, 'social emotional learning', or SEL as it is commonly referred, quickly became a household name in education. According to Schonert-Reichl & Roeser (2016), SEL aligns with the goals of MBIs in education with both focusing on the *"education of the whole child with emphasis on the development of positive self, moral, social, and emotional understanding"* (p. 65). Because SEL practices in education already had a well-established research base, mindfulness didn't need quite the mountain of evidence and faced few roadblocks. MBIs in schools conveniently fit into the popular evidence-based mold as if going with the current of a river.

As if mindfulness needed any more help integrating itself into education, a movement described as 'contemplative education' provided further assistance. Schonert-Reichl & Roeser (2016) described contemplative education as a 'natural bridge' between mindfulness and SEL. Contemplative education is rooted in contemplative traditions that are thousands of years old that actively engage students with a skilled teacher with a focus on experiential learning. The focus here is on awareness and personal growth which is achieved through various activities including: *"seated meditation, movement (e.g., yoga, tai*

chi), guided imagery, community service learning, storytelling, active witnessing, Japanese

calligraphy, music, art, and literature" (Schonert-Reichl, 2016, p.67).

After many student interactions, there is a large swath of academic work focused on the effects of mindfulness practices on students and their learning and well-being. These works have continued to inform educators, teachers, and psychologists to help prevent disorders, improve the environments and practices in their schools, and foster the well-being and development of their students (Zenner et al., 2014). MBIs and other mindful practices and curriculums can all help with these challenges and goals. The usefulness of using a school to deliver these methods is that education can be provided at the same time as prevention, therefore addressing many needs and giving many students more opportunities to explore their potentials.

For Teachers

Teachers, not surprisingly, have also been impacted by the integration and transmission of mindfulness into the classroom. Active thinking and an adherence to the present moment by teachers has benefits beyond having students that are more well-adjusted to deal with stress and in touch with their own self, teachers have been able to use mindfulness practices to better prepare themselves to work in their own stressful environment and career. Indeed, mindfulness has shown itself to be a tool for teachers to impart to their students and for teachers to integrate into their own lives.

Mindful Teaching Practices

Mindful teaching practices have had a positive effect on student learning (Sherretz, 2011). Sherretz (2011) continued to describe what the actions of a mindful teacher might look like in the classroom. First, mindful teachers demonstrate how to think about the

subject at hand. Second, mindful teachers give choices to their students allowing them to decide how they want to learn and show that they have learned. Third, mindful teachers insist that students further elaborate on their thought process. Finally, mindful teachers maintain a positive classroom atmosphere. In consideration of these qualities, it becomes apparent that they can have positive impacts for students for a variety of subjects and are just as relevant outside of the classroom when students encounter real world situations.

The previously mentioned positive impacts for students are a large reason why there are teachers utilizing mindfulness techniques in their classrooms. However, teachers also are able to use the outcomes of their own mindfulness to enhance their classroom. Hyland (2015) cited teachers experiencing benefits to focus and awareness, an increase in responding to student needs, and an enhanced classroom climate. Another impact to teaching practices is that mindfulness frameworks have given some teachers the ability to *"address spiritual, ethical and affective dimensions of learning/teaching" (p. 179)* that have been deemed to have been brushed aside by modern measurements of educational success.

Behavioral Strategies and Curriculum

Teachers have been using mindfulness concepts to implement as behavior management strategies and as full curriculums. These tools can be adopted on a classroom basis and as a whole school approach. Regardless of the scale they are implemented on, these tools are another way that mindfulness practices have influenced the very core of education practices.

A noteworthy academic behavioral strategy known as conscious discipline has been influenced by MBIs and is the most utilized and well-known mindfulness based behavioral strategy for classroom management. Anderson et al. (2020) defines conscious discipline as

a *"social-emotional learning classroom management program that uses classroom activities and routines to teach children problem-solving skills and to foster a sense of safety in the classroom" (p. 14).* This program has seen widespread implementation. As of 2018 it was practiced in 47 countries and has seen the most use in the United States where over 10,000 Head Start classrooms, as well as 935 school districts, have used it as a classroom management tool. Benefits of this program include executive function skill development by reducing stress and increasing a sense of safety in the classroom. Additionally, since conscious discipline emphasizes relationships with friends and family, as well as being concerned about others led to a more developed set of awareness skills both self and social (Anderson et al., 2020).

Another way that mindfulness has appeared for teachers is how it has been implemented beyond just classroom activities or individual interventions. Mindfulness as a whole school curriculum has become increasingly popular and is referred to as the WSMED or 'whole-school mindfulness in education' approach. Sheinman (2018) examined the WSMED approach and found that a whole school approach enhanced the likelihood that a student will utilize the mindful strategies that they have practiced, and that girls had a much higher tendency to use mindful based coping strategies.

Teacher Well-being

The job of teachers is notoriously difficult and it is all too common for teachers of all abilities to feel insecure about their ability to handle their work-related emotions and challenges faced daily (Garner et al., 2018). According to international research cited by Preston & Spooner-Lane (2019), the highest-ranking stressors of teachers include "maintaining *classroom discipline, teaching students who lack motivation, constant*

evaluation by others, challenging interactions with colleagues, curriculum reform, and

increasing workload" (p. 111). With all of these factors, emotional regulation comes up as an

effective way for teachers to deal with mounting stressors (Preston & Spooner-Lane, 2019)

(Csaszar et al., 2018). Not surprisingly mindfulness yet again comes up as an answer for

teachers to boost emotional regulation to combat stress and reduce their likelihood of

burnout (Preston & Spooner-Lane, 2019). Csaszar et al. describes how teachers not dealing

with their stress can experience teacher burnout, decreased empathy, fatigue, loss of

compassion, avoidance, and a reduced effectiveness which all lead to a deteriorated

classroom environment and exacerbate the cycle of stress (Csaszar et al. et al., 2018). Crain

et al. (2017) listed the benefits of participating in workplace mindfulness training as a

rebuttal to the cycle of stressors that teachers can experience. These outcomes include:

"less frequent bad moods at work and home, greater satisfaction at work and home, more

sleep on weekday nights, better quality sleep, and decreased insomnia symptoms and daytime

sleepiness" (p. 138). Again, it is easy to see the fit of mindfulness as an answer to the issues

that teachers face day in and day out. Those stressors don't seem to be going anywhere and

implementing mindful practice seems to be a strategy for teachers to control their own

emotions.

Embrace & Criticism

        In their work, Hyland (2015) argued that the new applications of mindfulness in the

areas of education, health, psychology and psychotherapy, represent a "*dynamic and*

optimistic new wave of Western dharma" (p. 173)*.* Hyland even compared this modern

chapter to early developments in eastern religious and spiritual tradition where teachings

travelled from India and into other realms. This 'new wave of western dharma' was even

designed to be useful, attractive, and palatable to its western audience. In fact, while Kabat-Zinn was designing his initial programs, he modified much of the vocabulary surrounding the mindfulness practices to make it sound less Buddhist. This strategy of modification was even praised by the Dalai Lama as it made mindfulness acceptable to non-Buddhists (Engle, 2019).

With the sheer number of mindfulness related material, it is apparent that there is a large contingency of positive embrace for mindfulness practices. One only needs to look at raw data to see that the concept and practice of mindfulness has forged its position in our society, not just in ancient history but modern history as well. According to Moore (2016) Google is able to calculate the number of times certain words appear in books over time by using what they call the Ngram tool. Using this tool, they have discovered that 'mindfulness' increased in its frequency by 225% between the 1980's and 2000's. Additionally, analyzing Google searches for 'mindfulness' between February 2014 and January 2016 found a nearly 1000% increase. Even more telling is the number of published books containing a keyword of 'mindfulness'. The WorldCat database showed that 187 books contained mindfulness as a keyword between 1980 and 1989. Between 1990 and 1999 that number of books increased to 512, between 2000 and 2009 there were 2093, and between 2010 and 2016 there were 4878 (Moore, 2016). There is no shortage of mindfulness material or studies either. In fact, since the year 2000, there has been a nearly 1000% increase in the number of mindfulness studies that have been published (LaRock, 2014). The dramatic ramp up in the frequency of 'mindfulness' as a keyword in published books and as a general Google search showed that mindfulness as a concept has certainly gained its footing and popularity as a modern practice. To some, this popularity shows more than just popularity

and traction however, this shows the prominence of mindfulness as an institution that has

cemented and defined itself as an industry unto itself.

Bhodi's (2011) work brings up a critical view of the application of mindfulness in

new western settings. They highlight the problematic nature of transplanting Buddhist

meditation from its traditional settings within the Buddhist doctrine and faith into a

"*secularized culture bent on pragmatic results'' (p. 35)*. The search for results and evidence

leading to a plethora of measurement scales has drawn its fair share of criticism for having

limitations in their efficacy and effectiveness (Chiesa, 2012) (Baker & Saari, 2018). The

traditional purpose of Buddhist meditation to assist people in releasing from the cycle of

birth and death has been morphed into this new western dharma which aims to assist

people to obtain release from "*the strains of financial pressures, psychological disorders, and

stressful relationships*" (Bhodi, 2011, p. 35). Gethin (2011) echoes the sentiment that

mindfulness has been placed in a context far from its original Buddhist context and believes

that this new 'Western dharma' is minimizing necessary elements from the traditional

Buddhist account of mindfulness. Gethin (2011) is even critical of the initial therapeutic

uses of mindfulness as they relate to Buddhism stated that "*the elements of remembering,

recalling, reminding and presence of mind which are present in the traditional Buddhist

account of mindfulness seem to be minimized or even absent from the application and context

of the MBCT and MBSR*" (p. 275).

Škobalj *(*2018*)* introduced a thought-provoking idea that the tenets that make up

the modern mindfulness movement are not in fact unique to Buddhism. In examining

mindfulness, Skobalj illustrated its parallels to critical thinking in that the methods used to

achieve mindfulness are more in line with the practices of the Socratic method of

questioning. Within this parallel, ancient Greece provided an example of some of the earliest documentation of critical thinking processes.

Škobalj *(*2018*)* introduces a thought-provoking idea that the tenets that make up the modern mindfulness movement are not in fact unique to Buddhism. In examining mindfulness, Skobalj illustrates its parallels to critical thinking in that the methods used to achieve mindfulness are more in line with the practices of the Socratic method of questioning. Within this parallel, ancient Greece provides an example of some of the earliest documentation of critical thinking using the Socratic method of questioning where people would reorganize their thoughts and opinions and where vigilance was intentional and reasoning was done logically all to avoid an automatic response.

Although there is a distinction between mindfulness and critical thinking, it is worth considering that the mindfulness we see in modern western practice has adapted from its original form and has potentially been molded by the history and influences of ancient Greece as well. This adaptation is a product of time, place, and external influences. The influence of critical thinking and the connection to the Greek Socratic model is worth examining and at the very least acknowledging that externalities beyond the roots of Buddhism have impacted the modern mindfulness movement. Some critics cite the inclusion of traditions from Hatha yoga, Hinduism and other eastern religions in mindfulness practices to constitute mindfulness as nonsectarian (Engle, 2019). The comparisons to the Socratic method of questioning, and inclusion of other religious traditions draws similarities to other critics that say that the modern mindfulness movement is its own creation that has more to do with contemporary values and borrowed traditions than it does with the ancient roots of Buddhism.

A stripped-down, secularized technique, cited by Hyland (2017) as 'McMindfulness', a nod to mindfulness practices having the same popularity and mass appeal that McDonalds does, made an ancient Buddhist practice easier to swallow for the corporate environment that has increasingly used mindfulness practices as tools and instruments in their health and wellness programs. These decontextualized notions of spirituality have been separated from their original purposes of liberation and transformation on a foundation of social ethics. Instead of inspiring the Buddhist principles of repressing greed, ill will, and delusion, mindfulness has been repackaged into more of a self-help method that might even reinforce the behaviors it was initially designed to repress (Hyland, 2015). Moore echoed this sentiment stating that misaligned practice of mindfulness could make practitioners *"less humble, less flexible, less tolerant, and less willing to engage with people who believe different things"* (Moore, 2016, p. 282). All of those behaviors are far from the intended outcomes.

Many critics see this modern repackaging of mindfulness to be "stealth Buddhism" (Purser, 2020) (Engle (2019). There is a sense of distrust, skepticism, and even some flat-out negative reception of mindfulness by some critics. Purser (2020) labels mindfulness as "*another neoliberal-friendly trend that makes many promises"* (p. 165) and lists the many mentioned academic skills that school based mindfulness interventions are purported to develop deeming them as aligned with "*new forms of cognitive capitalism"* (p. 165). This critique that the growth of mindfulness in schools exists as an example of the 3rd phase of capitalism beyond mercantile and industrial capitalism which assumes that capitalism is evolving into a framework that accumulates assets that are immaterial such as mindfulness practice.

Engle even stated that practicing mindfulness in publicly funded institutions, like schools, violates neutrality in the religion clause of the first amendment and is essentially state endorsement of a particular religion. Purser (2020) puts forth some shifting 'whataboutism' when questioning why, since there are studies that show mental and physical benefits to prayer, Christian prayer is forbidden but mindfulness programs that they deem to be Buddhist get a pass. Beyond the evolutionary distancing that the modern mindfulness movement has been able to do from Buddhism, another way that mindfulness has mended into the fabric of schools around the world is because the original teaching of the Buddha was not intended to be a set of "d*octrines demanding belief but as a body of principles and practices that sustain human beings in their quest for happiness and spiritual freedom"* (Bhodi, 2011, p. 20)*.* Kabat-Zin (1994), known as the creator of the MBSR and the modern mindfulness movement, has responded to religious critiques of mindfulness in a way that even further distanced the practices from its seemingly Buddhist and religious roots. They went on to say that mindfulness has little to do with religion, is not conflicting with traditions, beliefs, or science, and is not trying to sell anything, and that wellness practices are a useful tool to experience more fullness in life's experiences by observing oneself, inquiring about oneself, and acting mindfully.

Larock (2014) expanded beyond the association to a religious ideology as a barrier into integrating it as a part of k12 education in the United States. They deem that other challenges to implementation are concerned over how mindfulness frameworks are integrated into schools, and how they are evaluated. Additionally, more people are concerned with the ability of educational leadership to undertake such an integration while keeping up with the need for them to actively oversee and facilitate successful schools.

Zenner et al. (2014) points out that others are concerned that the excitement surrounding

the integration of MBI's in schools outweighs the evidence of its benefits, however pivots to

make clear that it would be unwise to ignore the *"potentially plausible, cost-effective, and*

*promising approach" (*Zenner et al., 2014, para. 11) that mindfulness offers to its

practitioners in such a variety of venues.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The manner in which mindfulness found its way through the spread of Buddhism and mixed with factors of globalization and cultural exchange is quite remarkable. It is a story of ages. One that begs the question, is anything pure? Is anything authentic and without external influences? In the case of mindfulness and its journey into the classrooms of the west, the sheer number of external influences has made it into what it is today. These influences are what many cite as the reason mindfulness has found so much success in the west and contemporary culture. For it would not have the mass appeal it does were it a pure form of Buddhism. The reason for its effective spread across western culture was its unique mix of familiar and exotic details; its ability to be new and familiar at the same time.

As mindfulness was picked up by researchers for its therapeutic properties, it became apparent that its applications would be much farther reaching. Institutions, businesses, healthcare systems and more found use for mindfulness practice and its benefits. Education was all too likely a match for mindfulness as studies expanded and more evidence began to appear. A ubiquitous tool that offers answers to education's toughest problems seems too good to be true, but the abstract nature of the tool encourages users of mindfulness in the classroom to keep on trying. There are, of course, specific approaches one can take in implementing mindfulness in a classroom setting. Perhaps a MBI for a singular student, maybe a whole school mindfulness approach, or even just simple mindful thinking on the part of the teacher. All of these tactics have shown to produce results that tend to foster further benefits for classrooms. This cycle of benefits hints to why mindfulness has become so entrenched within education. As educators are

faced with more complex issues, multi-use tools with a variety of positive impacts will be more welcome than ever. Whether it is Buddhist or not, teachers will do what works for them, what is able to be implemented, and what gives them the most positive impacts for their efforts. So far, mindfulness seems to be doing that job and might just continue to stay in the toolbox of education.

Limitations in Research

This master's thesis is not without its limitations. The immense quantity of publications, journals, studies, opinions, and applications of mindfulness are far too vast to cover in any manner. The intent of this work is to provide an overview of mindfulness' journey into classrooms and by nature needs to take a higher-level overview that brushes over details of that journey. A selection of sources that provided a comprehensive understanding were selected and a majority of the material relating to mindfulness were passed by to tell this particular story.

To chronicle the thousands of years of evolution of Buddhism and its spread will undoubtedly leave some details linked to mindfulness unmentioned. In order to make it through those thousands of years and connect that to a modern classroom, one needs to work quickly and with a focus on the bigger picture. Another limitation is detailing the exact manner in which mindfulness entered into classrooms. In this area the author was required to examine the available details and make educated inferences and connections. The documentation of the specific and initial instance where mindfulness was practiced in a classroom setting is not documented. Later however, the results of that spread are widely documented. Much like the exact instance when Zen Buddhism spread from Japan to the west. We know that it happened, and we know its impacts and where we stand today. From

that information inferences and connections allow the story to be told and connect the parts of the story that we do know and create a complete story.

With such a vast array of sources on mindfulness, the final limitation is really that of choice. In choosing the sources and details to include in this thesis, the author has left out other ways to tell the story. This is a comprehensive overview of the journey of mindfulness and yet it still has its tendencies to lean towards one way of seeing that story. The journey of mindfulness into classrooms could be written many different ways and this is the way this author has chosen. That is not to say that this story, or others for that matter, are flawed but it is to say that we all bear our implicit biases and predisposed dispositions as to how we want to see the world. This is one interpretation of the story of mindfulness and its journey in our world.

Professional Implementation

As mindfulness has been touted as a versatile tool in classrooms, it is important to consider how one might utilize a more grounded understanding of the context in which mindfulness entered into the classroom. The plethora of material and resources on mindfulness make choices overwhelming and practitioners will have to choose which resources they incorporate and how they incorporate them. My hope as the author is that aspiring and experienced practitioners would, with this information, find themselves in a better position to sift through the vast amount of mindfulness content and resources to find an interpretation that works for them and allows them to hold the historical context both lightly and with reverence at the same time. With a more complete understanding of what mindfulness is and why it has paired so well with the educational process, teachers may find it easier to make decisions to implement mindfulness and to persist in their endeavors.

Future Research Implications

Research implications into the field of mindfulness have been ever evolving. Since Kabat-Zinn first introduced the concept of mindfulness to the scientific and academic communities, there has been a flow of development and research into the various applications of the practice. There have been a multitude of mindfulness rating scales used to measure the effectiveness and prevalence of mindfulness in practitioners. More recently, the use of neuroimaging to look at changes in brain structure has created new possibilities for rating and measuring the effectiveness and prevalence of mindfulness (LaRock, 2014). This promising method could unlock a new way to look at mindfulness and provide some much-needed answers. More broadly, future research increasingly will have to deal with the criticisms of mindfulness and its evolution. In order for research to be conclusive, it should have a firm grasp of what it is investigating. The abstract nature of mindfulness and its evolution from its Buddhist roots make it increasingly difficult to discuss with concrete terms. The proliferation of mindfulness interventions, programs, and practices makes studying mindfulness into an uneven field that is saturated with possible participants. Not all mindfulness uses are created equal and studies will increasingly need to ensure that their samples are applying mindfulness in a manner that is not only scientifically validated, but also equally applied across participants.

Conclusion

Mindfulness has found a likely match interwoven within education. The multitude of applications make it a versatile instrument to enact positive dispositions both within and between people. With the variety of uses for mindfulness in education, it is valuable to take an inventory of what exactly mindfulness is, and how we have arrived at these uses.

Understanding the history of mindfulness is valuable to educators and other practitioners of mindfulness so that they understand the underlying implications of their practice and to stay connected to the original intent. At the same time, it is important to understand the history to see how modern mindfulness has forged its own path and created its own realm. Recognizing how the modern therapeutic uses of mindfulness might differ from the ancient Buddhist intent is not to discourage modern uses, but instead to provide a better understanding of the present moment. This is in fact, the purpose of mindfulness; taking a pause to realize where we find ourselves in the present moment. The work of this thesis encourages practitioners of mindfulness in education, and elsewhere, to be mindful in regards to their mindfulness practice. Through highlighting the importance of considering the history, journey, and implications of mindfulness practitioners can be more informed about their mindfulness practices and gain perspective to enhance their experience.

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