

**THE AWAKENED HEART OF THE MINDFUL TEACHER: A CONTEMPLATIVE
EXPLORATION**

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
School of Education in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

University of Pittsburgh

2016

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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This dissertation is a contemplative narration of my lived experience of bringing mindfulness into my teaching. The dissertation first portrays the process of entering into the dialogic space of mindfulness as a Buddhist concept intersecting with the scientific, educational, and public domains. I then describe the contemplative reflection process I used to explore my incorporation of mindfulness into my teaching praxis. From this, I wrote contemplative reflections during a year and half. In this way, I tried to embody mindfulness in my methodology. I used the same process to contemplate these reflections to deepen my understanding and identify themes.

The two main themes I arrived at are an openhearted quality (bodhichitta) and a newfound openness that resulted from bringing mindfulness to my professional spaces. I illustrate these themes through six contemplative narratives that portray my heightened consciousness of how my embodiment of mindfulness has influenced my classroom presence and opened my heart. Each contemplative reflection narrates the quality of open awareness towards my own and others' emotions – good and bad. Each narrative also includes a reflective aspect that explores the themes that emerged. My contemplative reflections illustrate how mindfulness helped me stay open to both the joy and the pain of teaching. Mindfulness practices also provided me with the social and emotional awareness and tools to confront the highly

emotional and sometimes volatile space of public schools. My contemplative reflections depict the lived experience of mindfully working through the positive and negative experiences of daily life in public school. Coming from the place of an open heart makes teaching much more rich and full of joy, but at the same time also makes the painful parts of teaching and working in a public, bureaucratic institution more palpable. However, by using my mindfulness practices to delve into that pain, I felt my connection to others, which brought about compassion and a desire to help.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	X
PREFACE.....	XI
1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE PROCESS OF COMING TO THE DISSERTATION .	1
2.0 BEGINNING THE JOURNEY.....	9
2.1 MY EXPERIENCE OF MINDFUL AWARENESS IN THE CLASSROOM AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION.....	9
2.2 MY MEDITATION PRACTICE	14
2.3 JOINING THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR.....	18
2.4 A NONDUALISTIC APPROACH.....	21
2.5 DESCRIBING THE INEFFABLE	24
3.0 SEARCHING FOR UNDERSTANDING.....	27
3.1 ORIGINS OF MINDFULNESS.....	28
3.1.1 Theravada Buddhism in the U.S.	33
3.1.2 The Introduction of Zen to the U.S.....	35
3.1.3 Tibetan Buddhism’s Introduction to the West	38
3.1.4 Other Sources of Mindfulness	40
3.2 SECULARIZATION AND MEDICALIZATION OF MINDFULNESS	42
3.2.1 The Relaxation Response	43

3.2.2	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.....	44
3.2.3	Secularized Mindfulness in Public Schools	48
3.3	SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON MINDFULNESS	52
3.3.1	Physiological and Psychological Mechanisms of Meditation.....	57
3.4	RESEARCH ON MINDFULNESS IN K-12 SETTINGS	62
3.4.1	Rationale behind Mindfulness Programs for Educators	64
3.4.2	Research on the Effects of Mindfulness for Teachers	66
3.5	THE COMMODIFICATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF MINDFULNESS	75
4.0	BRINGING MINDFULNESS TO MY SCHOOL	81
4.1	CONVERSATION WITH A TEACHER	83
4.2	BRINGING MINDFULNESS TO THE STUDENT BODY	85
4.3	ISOLATION.....	90
5.0	EXPLORING PRACTICE IN PRAXIS	93
5.1	THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	94
5.2	EXPLORING HOW TO BRING MINDFULNESS TO INQUIRY	95
5.3	CONTEMPLATIVE EXPLORATION	101
5.4	CONTEMPLATIVE INTERPRETATIONS	103
5.5	PREVENTING SOLIPSISM THROUGH COMMUNITY	105
6.0	MAKING MEANING OF EXPERIENCE.....	107
6.1	REFLECTION #1: BRENNAN	109
6.2	REFLECTION #2: NADINE	114
6.3	REFLECTION #3: THE SCREAMING TEACHER.....	118

6.4	REFLECTIONS #4 & 5: THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.....	122
6.4.1	Reflection #4 -- Do you give up on a child?	122
6.4.2	Reflection #5 – Do we give up on ourselves?	123
6.5	REFLECTION #6: MANAGING NEGATIVITY	125
6.6	REFLECTIONS ON MINDFUL TEACHING	131
7.0	UNITY OF PRACTICE AND PRAXIS.....	134
7.1	THE MANURE OF EXPERIENCE	137
7.2	IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, POLICY, AND INQUIRY	140
7.3	MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS.....	141
	APPENDIX A	143
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	144

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Mindfulness Journal Publication by Year 1980-2015	53
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DEDICATION

When I finished my Masters in Linguistics, the woman who was my advisor, my mentor, and my boss asked to speak to me. Dr. Christina Bratt Paulston welcomed me into her office and showed me her analysis of my transcripts and coursework. She had figured out what courses I would need to complete to get my doctorate. She explained to me how much confidence she had in my intellect and work ethic and wanted to support me. My position in the English Language Institute, of which she was director, offered me tuition benefits. She convinced me to enter into the program and work towards my doctorate. I did not finish the doctorate in linguistics. I did, however, stay in close contact with Christina, who became a friend of our family. She continued to support and encourage me when I decided to seek my doctorate in education. Unfortunately, Christina passed away a week and a half before my defense of this dissertation. I therefore thought it would be fitting to dedicate this work to her. Christina, you were my initial inspiration. I only wish you were here so I could have shared this success with you.

PREFACE

In one episode of *Cosmos*, Carl Sagan proposes, “If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe” (n.d.). In the process of writing my dissertation, I have needed a whole lifetime of events and people. Therefore, I am sure that in these acknowledgements I will not be able to include everyone that has helped and supported me. First and foremost, however, I have to thank my family. They had to create the time and space for me to accomplish this doctorate. My husband’s encouragement, proofreading, and patience with my process have been key ingredients to my successful completion of this degree and document. My mother and father have had a key role in helping make this degree possible – all the late classes and summer hours of internship could have never happened without their babysitting, cooking dinners, and hundreds of other small acts to make my life function while working full time during this degree process. Finally, I want to appreciate my daughter, Isabella, for sacrificing her time with me. At times I have missed being present with her to do this work.

We know how to sacrifice ten years for a diploma, and we are willing to work very hard to get a job, a car, a house, and so on. But we have difficulty remembering that we are alive in the present moment, the only moment there is for us to be alive. (Hanh, 1991)

Isa, you have reminded me to experience my life by being present, especially to you.

In Italian there is a saying that is hard to translate into English, “anche l'occhio vuole la sua parte.” Literally it is “The eye also wants its part.” It means that we love or crave visual

beauty, amongst other things. In the course of this dissertation, I heard an Italian colleague suggest “anche il cuore vuole la sua parte” -- that the heart also wants its part. This dissertation has been a search for my heart’s longing in my work as an educator. Although much of my work was academic, it was also a very internal, private search, yet even the most private of the work was not done in isolation. From the inception of my first idea to spend a year reflecting on how mindfulness was presenting itself in my praxis to the last presentation and defense of the dissertation, I have been engaged in dialog with others about my work.

Much of this dialog has been directly between my dissertation advisor, Dr. Cynthia Tananis, and myself. From the day I told her I wanted to use mindfulness both as the topic I was investigating and my method, she tried to help me navigate what was a new and uncharted sea for both of us. Her tireless support – provided through two years of monthly meetings – and her critical reads of my work helped shape my original, vague idea into this dissertation. Early on Cindy brought in Dr. Noreen Garman, an expert in qualitative research, to help support me in my process. Dr. Garman’s keen eye for consistency (or lack thereof) and the unifying themes in my writing often directed me in ways I would not have come to on my own. Dr. Garman also joined Cindy and me in many of our monthly meetings to guide me, forwarding important references and articles she encountered along the way. Their attention to my development and care for me, personally, in my process is deeply appreciated.

Over three years ago, Dr. Michael Gunzenhauser turned me on to qualitative research. Mike’s comments on my earlier, exploratory research and overview helped redirect my thinking. As he was teaching me about qualitative research, told me there was someone I needed to talk to about my research. From this introduction I met Dr. Andrea Hyde. Both Mike and Andrea have been crucial in supporting me on this journey as committee members. Andrea, with

her wealth of knowledge about mindfulness in education, was able to fill in so many of the gaps in my own understandings. Her contributions continuously helped me to present my work in a way that was more comprehensive and clear. Andrea also provided me ongoing support and acted as a sounding board, taking on much more than just the role of outside reader.

Finally, the mindfulness communities that I have participated in have contributed to my thinking in many ways. In particular, the Pittsburgh Shambhala Meditation Center's community has also shaped many of my ideas around mindfulness and supported my personal meditation practice. I am so grateful to have found a spiritual home there.

1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE PROCESS OF COMING TO THE DISSERTATION

Life ... is full of the immeasurable, irreducible, uncertain, and unpredictable not only because the world is simply a bewilderingly complex place; but also because when humans face the life-world, they don't just see trees, people, food on the table, money in the bank, and so on, but see and feel such strange and nebulous things as beauty, love and compassion, joys and sorrows, fear and security, fairness, injustice, and so on. These qualities belong to the realm of the meta-physical, in the sense of going beyond the tangible, quantifiable, measurable, and even effable. This meta-physical is, however, the dimension of personal meaning and insight, and there is nothing vague and inconsequential about it. Lack of the meaningful can sink us in misery, and kill our spirit, if not our body. (Bai, 2005, p. 1)

When I originally was searching for a topic for my dissertation, I wanted to work on something safe, understood, and comfortable. I wanted to work on a topic that would be neat and tidy and easily packaged up in the box of a traditional dissertation. I therefore chose a very familiar topic that was also near and dear to my heart – English as a Second Language policy. Both of my parents had learned English through the schools, as their families had immigrated to this country. My childhood was filled with multilingualism and multiculturalism and I wanted to explore the policies surrounding children in those situations.

During the past 12 years I also began a personal practice of meditation and felt a deep connection to my emerging Buddhist spirituality. I experienced personal transformation as a result of my meditation¹ practices, which, unbeknownst to me at the time, was emanating out into all aspects of my life. Just when I was beginning to write my literature review and embark on a sabbatical in 2013, the teacher at my local Shambhala Meditation Center, Acharya² Adam Lobel, mentioned that he had just returned from a meeting in Chicago with my center's lineage holder, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. They had participated in a peace conference that brought together a variety of people working to prevent youth/gang violence in the inner city. Acharya Lobel mentioned that the Sakyong was teaching meditative practices to teenage gang members. A vision of the implications of this work exploded inside my head. People were using meditation with at-risk youth to help prevent violence or extract them from lives of violence! My mind raced with the possibilities.

I knew that my own years of meditation practices had brought me a huge measure of peace and tranquility. I also knew that through these practices I had embarked on a journey of personal transformation and change. I suddenly felt “the dimension of personal meaning and insight” that Bai (2005) mentioned in the opening passage. The idea that people were trying to bring these transformational practices to youth excited and fascinated me and I knew I wanted to explore this further. I decided to shift gears and study the use of these practices in education for my dissertation. I felt that I could take areas of my life that had been separate and discrete and combine them to be a more fully integrated human being. I was also motivated to see how others

¹ Unless otherwise described, I use meditation throughout this dissertation to indicate the formal practice of sitting meditation. Meditation is defined as, “the systematic and continued focusing of the attention on a single target percept—for example, a mantra or sound—or persistently holding a specific attentional set toward all percepts or mental contents as they spontaneously arise in the field of awareness” (Goleman & Schwartz, 1976, p. 458).

² Archarya is a Tibetan term used in the Shambhala lineage for a senior teacher.

were bringing the transformation I had experienced into their professional spaces, especially schools like my own. In fact, this topic was the perfect integration of my personal, spiritual journey and my profession. I felt the “authentic call” from within of “the voice that invites me to honor the nature of my true self” (Palmer, 1998, p. 29). This dissertation topic felt much more meaningful to me.

Instead of finishing up my literature review and proposal during my sabbatical as I had originally planned, I began anew and immersed myself intensely in the unexplored field of what I learned was being called *mindfulness*.³ I spent the 2013-2014 school year reading all that I could, attending conferences, and deepening my own personal meditation training and practice. Originally I was fascinated to learn about the ways that researchers were approaching mindfulness. I read about neuroscientists that were identifying parts of the brain that changed as a result of mindfulness interventions (Kilpatrick et al., 2011; Luders et al., 2012; Paulson, Davidson, Jha, & Kabat-Zinn, 2013 among others). I learned that stress and immune responses improved pre to post meditation instruction and practice (such as, Creswell et al., 2012; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Researchers were exploring how children, youth, and adults with a whole range of psychiatric, social, emotional, and/or physical ailments could benefit from meditation and mindfulness practices (some interesting studies include: Black, Milam, & Sussman, 2009; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Himelstein, Hastings, Shapiro, & Heery, 2012). I found that researchers working with teachers and students in schools in a variety of ways were reporting many exciting, positive results (for example, Jennings, 2014; Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012; Winzelberg & Luskin,

³ Throughout this dissertation I am using the term mindfulness to mean “bringing one’s complete attention to the experiences occurring in the present moment” (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006, p. 27) usually with a quality of equanimity or non-reactivity.

1999). Methodological critiques of the research notwithstanding (discussion of these can be found in Burke, [2009]; Davidson, [2010]; and Weare, [2012] among other works), I have been delighted to learn that the practice I have found to be beneficial appears to be benefiting others and that researchers are discovering and describing the mechanisms in our physiology underlying these benefits.

During this time, I was beginning to imagine my own study. I was noticing a lack of first person accounts of the experience of mindfulness in the literature. Most of the research I was reading leaned towards a scientific and instrumental approach. I also shared this leaning and background. Much of my training in graduate school emphasized generalizability, validity, and reliability in research. I adopted the gold standard for scientific-based inquiry, such as the randomized, controlled trials in medical research. Much knowledge is being acquired through these types of scholarly work. Therefore, it is understandable that institutions such as school districts, hospitals, and government agencies demand a level of scientific oriented verification that is found in such more post-positivistic approaches. I believe that mindfulness researchers have been necessarily working to gain legitimacy for using these practices in secular institutions, often through this type of research.

At the same time, I was also researching the foundations of mindfulness in Buddhist writings and the history of mindfulness in the West (one such history is Rahula, 1974). I noticed a stark contrast between Buddhist writings on mindfulness and meditative practices and the scholarly research on mindfulness as a secular intervention. The lived experience of mindfulness and the ethical or spiritual underpinnings of the practices were absent or barely mentioned in much of the research. This left me feeling that the research had taken a very rich, multifaceted experience and compartmentalized it into very dualistic and disembodied research. This is ironic

because one of the fundamental tenets of Buddhism is nondualism and also because mindfulness must both be experienced in the body and accompanied by a parallel ethical practice (as delineated in the Four Noble Truths and Eight-Fold Path, discussed further below).

Spending my sabbatical year immersed in the research on mindfulness also showed me how mindfulness now has become a movement or a commodity (for examples see Purser & Loy, 2013; Wilson, 2014). My meditation and mindfulness practices are a very spiritual and ineffable experience. Therefore, the commodification and commercialization of mindfulness as a product or panacea feels like a trivialization of a very profound experience. Encountering conflicting discourses, including the current concern regarding the popularization and commodification of mindfulness, also disheartened me. These discoveries provided further motivation for me to write a dissertation that focuses on the deeper experience of integrating mindfulness into my life.

With all of this, I wanted to delve into a research project that would depict the lived, embodied experience of what it is like to be a mindful educator. At first, I thought that I would study a school that was based on mindfulness by conducting surveys, phenomenological interviews, and observations of the teachers to depict their lived experiences. I began to design and propose that study. However, when I returned to my classroom after my sabbatical in the fall of 2014, the jump back in was quite a shock. While off, I dedicated an entire year to deepening my own practices and understanding of mindfulness. As a result, I found my teaching presence completely transformed: I was not the same teacher. Prior to my sabbatical I would not have described myself as a mindful teacher. Post-sabbatical, I was now intentional in trying to consciously incorporate my meditation practice into my daily life as an educator. The integration of my spiritual practice into my professional life resulted in my feeling of being a more complete, less bifurcated human being. I decided I wanted to investigate my own

embodied experience of teaching mindfully. This was a totally different topic and approach than what I previously imagined as my own research agenda. However, the research question I wanted to ask required a different way of knowing.

Just as my classroom and school were becoming places of unity through integration of mindfulness, I sought the same for my research and life as a scholar. I wanted my mindfulness practices to be the lens and research instrument that shaped my study. From this new place of contemplative⁴ investigation, and searching for an embodied understanding of my own experience, I embarked on the current topic of my dissertation: the exploration of the question: *What is the lived experience of incorporating my personal practices of mindfulness into my teaching and professional life?* I spent the 2014-2015 and part of the 2015-2016 school years exploring this question through contemplative reflective writings and engaging in dialog with my advisors and fellow study group participants (other education doctoral students) around my topic.

However, coming from a strongly post-positivistic orientation, the wide-open space of interpretive exploration of such ineffableness has been disorienting. In a class at my meditation center the teacher, Acharya Adam Lobel, quoted the founder of our lineage, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, “The bad news is you are falling through the air with no parachute. The good news is there is no ground.”⁵ Although Lobel was referring to the Buddhist concept of no-self, I immediately thought of my dissertation writing process. Deciding to use mindfulness as method has launched me into a vast space of inquiry with no parachute and no ground. Sometimes I have even lacked points of reference to situate my whereabouts. The experience of engaging in this

⁴In general authors use “‘contemplative practice’ as an overarching term that encompasses contemplation, meditation, and mindfulness” (Walsh, 2014, p. 16). I am using it here to describe the process I used to approach my research, which is based on the contemplative technique presented in Mipham (2003).

⁵Although I was able to find this same passage quoted and attributed to Trungpa, I could not find where the quote originated.

process has been one of repeatedly trying to validate what I am doing through aligning myself with some genre of research, some formalized research approach or perspective, or some existing type or body of inquiry. But none fit. I have again and again found myself in that mental free fall without the solid ground of my previous post-positivistic stance. There have been works that offer what appears to be a ledge where I can position myself – but in the end these provide only a brief pause before I slid off into open space again. I often think of the famous line from Machado’s poem, “Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.”⁶ So, in that spirit, I have just put one foot in front of the other to walk through my investigation of how I have experienced bringing mindfulness to my teaching and research these past three years. In the end, I have come to realize that I can rest in that open, groundless space. That space, in fact, is the meditative space. As Chödrön (1996) explains, “To be fully alive, fully human, and completely awake is to be continually thrown out of the nest” (p. 76). My dissertation invites you to join me on this groundless path as I portray my experiences through a series of contemplative reflections and share with you glimpses of what it has meant to me to integrate my meditative practice into my teaching praxis.

To lead you through this journey with me, I provide the following roadmap of this document: In Chapter 2: BEGINNING THE JOURNEY I describe coming to my practice of meditation and mindfulness and how I incorporated these into my school. This chapter details the inspiration behind this dissertation in more detail. Chapter 3: SEARCHING FOR UNDERSTANDING depicts how I engaged in dialog with writers and researchers working in the areas of my investigation. It underscores how I became concerned by the oversimplification

⁶This translates to “Traveler, there is no path. A path is made by walking.”

of the practices and simple, one-size-fits-all interventions being designed and researched because these did not reflect my own rich, distinctly Buddhist experiences. In Chapter 4: BRINGING MINDFULNESS TO MY SCHOOL I present the backdrop of my attempts to bring mindfulness to the institution of the school. This provided me with the lived experience of the necessity of first embodying the practices in order to be able to share them with others.

In Chapter 5: EXPLORING PRACTICE IN PRAXIS I explain how I used my sitting meditation practice to contemplate the research question: *What is the lived experience of incorporating my personal practices of mindfulness into my teaching and professional life?* This generated contemplative reflections that portrayed my experiences of bringing mindfulness to my praxis. I also describe how I returned to my contemplative reflections to look for themes, once again using the contemplative exploration approach. Chapter 6: MAKING MEANING OF EXPERIENCE presents six reflections which illustrate the themes I came to. These incorporate the practices I used to mindfully work through the positive and negative experiences of daily life in the classroom. I end this dissertation with Chapter 7: UNITY OF PRACTICE AND PRAXIS. I continued to feel the call to live “an undivided life” (Palmer, 1998) and in this section I uncover how the journey of this dissertation calls me to continue the contemplative exploration of how to integrate my meditation and mindfulness practices completely into my daily living. I also suggest ways to continue the exploration of the lived experience of other mindful educators in order to further enrich the understandings of this field of study.

2.0 BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

"The relational way of knowing--in which love takes away fear and co-creation replaces control--is a way of knowing that can help us reclaim the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends" (Palmer, 1998, p. 56).

2.1 MY EXPERIENCE OF MINDFUL AWARENESS IN THE CLASSROOM AND PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

It was the first day of classes.⁷ I had just returned to teaching after a year-long sabbatical. Although the day had begun with a lot of anticipation and excitement, at the start of my sixth and final class period I found myself beginning to feel the tug of the mental and physical exhaustion that would be my companion those first few weeks back to teaching. At the same time, I smiled and greeted each of my students--most of whom I had taught before--with true affection. They were over a year older and more mature. Since I often teach students for multiple years of their middle school careers, I have the pleasure to watch them grow from children as they enter middle school into budding young women and men as they move into high school, coming out of

⁷ I am using italics to denote text that came out of my contemplative reflections.

the other side of that transformation we call puberty. I remembered one young man, Johnny,⁸ to be outgoing with a good sense of humor. He had bright red hair and freckles. He smiled easily and, although he still had the boyish look I remembered about his face, his voice had deepened and his bright blue eyes now met mine evenly.

He seemed very happy to see me and be in my class again. His class was particularly small – just 10 students. The students and I marveled at this intimate group rarely found in the public schools. I began my sixth introduction to my Spanish class that day and, as usual, tried to involve the students by having them present the rules and expectations to me. Johnny, however, began engaging in what seemed to be turning into a one-on-one conversation between him and me. When I posed a thought, he commented. If I asked a question, he answered: no raised hand, no acknowledgement that anyone else existed in the room but the two of us. None of the other students tried to butt in or participate. They sat silent. I was more amused by his behavior than annoyed, yet felt it my duty to make sure that the whole class was included in the conversation and certainly did not want to set a precedent that he and I were the sole participants in the course. So, I turned to Johnny with a smile and said jokingly, “You know that we have to include the rest of the class in our conversation, too, right?” At this he turned bright red, lowered his eyes, and said, “Sorry, Señora.” I immediately regretted the tactic I had taken. I continued on in my introduction to the class, trying to include everyone in the room, even Johnny, but my heart sank as my regret and compassion for him grew. Had I deeply embarrassed him in front of his peers? Had I named the truth that he had not realized with my question making him feel naked and revealed? Whatever the red face and lowered gaze meant for him, I was mortified.

⁸All of the names used in my reflections are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of all those mentioned.

I ruminated a bit over the experience, even recounting it to a teacher friend. But the energy with which the comment was delivered and with which I was processing the situation was new and different. I believe that in the past I might have felt some justification in having “zinged” him. After all, I had put him in his place and retaken control of the class. However, now I was in a totally different space in regards to how I viewed my role in the classroom. The intent behind the comment was coming from a playful place, even though I did want to redirect the student. This instance exemplifies how my teaching presence had been transformed by my sabbatical. I am no longer there to inflict my will on the class. I am there as a facilitator of the students’ knowledge and learning and should make them each feel valued and appreciated with every interaction that I have with them. My joking reprimand of Johnny clearly had not done that. I was ready to pull him aside before our next class and apologize, but he came in late. He entered with a huge smile and “Hola, Señora!” I felt immediately forgiven and vowed to be more sensitive to my students in the future. It was a harsh reminder for me in my reentry to the world of school that the teacher, in her position of power, is often the cause of student suffering.

As I look at this event and realize that I was not very skillful in my speech and action with Johnny, I can also see that my internal reactions were quite different from just two years prior in my same classroom. In the past, a student who was in any way disruptive was somehow taking me away from my task – to deliver that day’s lesson and curricular content. It is not the case that I now believe that my content is unimportant, but my heart is now more open. Now I allow more space around classroom interactions and my own reactions: I do not feel so tied to forcing the class forward regardless of circumstances. This change in focus makes the disruption less about them preventing me from my task and more about using each moment, each event that

is arising as our path to learning. The result of this change is that I have found more joy and I hope that the students have as well.

The other change is in how I deal with myself. Although I clearly regretted the interaction with Johnny and his reaction, I did not become self-aggressive. What I felt was regret at my miscalculation and a firm resolve to make every child feel safe and comfortable in my class. In the past this incident could have easily spiraled into an internal hostage-taking situation where my sensitivities to the students' emotions were locked up and prevented from visiting my classroom again. My new ability to sit with my own discomfort, shame, and regret allowed me to move through my discomfort and stay in a place of compassion not only for Johnny, but also for myself. This ability is the fruition of mindfulness practice: "cultivating mindfulness ... allows us to see ourselves and our world quite accurately and precisely" (Trungpa, 2009). The practice is for meditators to do this without condemnation or embarrassment at what we see. This ability made me feel more responsive and less reactive in my classroom. We do this without condemnation or embarrassment at what we see. This ability made me feel more responsive and less reactive in my classroom.

Some weeks later Johnny came to my room after classes and asked me if I would be willing to write him a letter of recommendation for a program at the zoo he wanted to participate in. Clearly I had regained his trust. Nine weeks into the school year Johnny still was trying to have a one-on-one conversation with me every now and again. Lately I have taken to acknowledging his answer the first time or two and then, if he continues along that same vein, I ask him to call on someone else to answer and let him share the responsibility in making sure that everyone is coming along with the two of us on our journey in learning.

To what do I owe my personal and professional transformation? I credit this shift directly to my mindfulness practices and rooting in Buddhist teachings. Mindfulness as a term is often used to describe the ability to bring awareness to situations or actions; Mindfulness as a practice refers to a whole constellation of practices ranging from various types of meditation to movement practices (Miller, 2014). Mindfulness was recommended in the first teaching of the Buddha. One of the eight paths to ending suffering (mentioned in the Four Noble Truths) is mindfulness (Mipham, 2003; Thich Nhat Hanh & Cheung, 2010). Indeed, in the Buddhist approach, mindfulness meditation has as its aim the empowerment of the individual to free herself from suffering through self-knowledge. The result, in my experience, is personal liberation and transformation.

I would like to make a distinction between change and transformation at this point. Change is simpler and self-driven: transformation is much more profound and uncontrolled than change. When someone wants to change something about herself, it is often because she dislikes that trait or characteristic. According to Chödrön (2001), “this is an extremely aggressive harmful way to think about ourselves. By contrast, our view is that sentient beings are basically good and complete just as they are and that meditation practice allows transformation to occur by itself” (p. 77). It is more of a process of uncovering. My experience has been that, through my practice of meditation, I have experienced positive transformation without any effort or striving to change anything about myself. Chödrön (2001) asserts that this is possible because we are seeing ourselves clearly as a result of our meditation practices, which leads to transformation. Next, I describe my meditative practices.

2.2 MY MEDITATION PRACTICE

From a high school class that surveyed religions of the world I had an interest in Eastern religion and philosophy. During my time as an undergraduate I continued to study religions of the world and felt drawn to Buddhism. In 2003 while going through a painful divorce I was handed the book *When Things Fall Apart* (Chödrön, 1996) which talked about how to relate to painful experiences in our lives. Pema Chödrön is an American Buddhist nun who writes for the general American audience. Her book showed me that there was a different way of relating to this painful occurrence in my life. This passage speaks to the new perspective I was shown:

Things falling apart is a kind of testing and also a kind of healing. We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. ... The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy. (Chödrön, 1996, p. 8)

So, I asked myself, how can I create the room for allowing difficult emotions without becoming overwhelmed? This question put me on the path of trying to meditate (which was the way that was suggested in Chödrön's book) and seeking out teachers to help me learn what Chödrön was trying to teach. Kornfield (2000) claims, "The most frequent entryway to the sacred is our own suffering and dissatisfaction" (p. 5). I tried on my own and was not very successful.

I felt like a failure, unable to calm my mind, agitated, and nowhere near the state of bliss I imagined I should attain. Luckily there was a sitting meditation group forming at my Unitarian Universalist church, which I joined. The group was small, sometimes just the woman who had started the group (Barb) and myself. Barb had been meditating for years and was a wonderful support for my budding practice. However, she and I both craved more instruction so we began

to take regular “field trips” to various local Buddhist centers or groups in our area. I began to develop a daily sitting practice and resonated deeply with the Buddhist teachings we were hearing. In the summer of 2010 I went on my first week-long retreat at Blue Cliff Monastery and took vows to become a Buddhist. These vows, known as the refuge vows, declare that the practitioner will go to the Buddha, the dharma,⁹ and the sangha¹⁰ for refuge.

After those early years of exploration and meditation, I found a local meditation center that was a good fit for me – it is not a coincidence that it is in the tradition of the above mentioned author, Pema Chödrön -- the Shambhala lineage, which has its origins in Tibetan Buddhism. I began to attend classes at the local Shambhala center and later joined. My approach to meditation has been greatly influenced by the teachings of the Shambhala lineage.

My primary practice has been sitting meditation. I try to sit every morning at my home for anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour: I probably average twenty minutes. I also try to attend open meditation at my meditation center weekly (when possible), which is about an hour of both sitting and walking meditation. I have learned and tried various techniques in sitting meditation. The fundamental meditative practice I engage in is shamatha meditation, also known as "peaceful abiding" in which "we train our minds in stability, clarity and strength" (Mipham, 2003, p. 5). This practice does include mindfulness of breath as well, where the attention rests on the sensations of the body breathing. Most frequently I start with this breath-focused awareness, where I place my attention lightly on the feeling of my body breathing and, as my mind wanders, I gently bring my attention back to my breathing. This trains the mind to be fully focused, not wandering or inattentive (unmindful).

⁹ Dharma is a Sanskrit word that has no direct translation into English. In this case it refers to Buddhist teachings.

¹⁰ Sangha is a Sanskrit word that means the community of practitioners.

Sometimes, when I feel particularly agitated, I start my sitting with breath counting – usually until I reach ten breaths – and then move to the lighter attention on the breathing. If I feel at ease with a relaxed attention on the breath, I engage in open awareness practice, where I am just present, eyes open but unfocussed, aware of all that arises within and around me. In this state, I just keep my awareness on the present experience of my inner and outer environments without trying to change, control, or do anything in particular. Through my meditation practice I sometimes arrive at a state of openness that is free of conceptual mind. This means that I am not labeling what is going on, just aware without the ongoing mental dialog about my experience. This is not the case with every sitting experience, but does happen, particularly when on longer retreats. Often, out of the state of peaceful abiding (shamatha) comes insight, referred to as vipassana. “According to Buddhist views, only insight (vipassana) can truly generate wisdom, but progress cannot be made without first developing mental focus through shamatha” (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011, p. 223)¹¹. So, shamatha and vipassana go hand in hand, and both form part of my regular practices.

Other practices that I have regularly engaged in include: yoga (as a body practice), loving-kindness meditations, tonglen, sadhana and mantra recitation, and contemplations of texts. I will be discussing tonglen and the process of contemplation of texts later on in this paper, but would like to describe loving-kindness, sadhana, and mantra practices here.

Loving-kindness meditation is a practice I sometimes engage in during seated meditation. It involves first extending loving-kindness to myself, then extending it out to others (going from those I have the most love for to those I have difficulty with. For me the practice of extending feelings of loving-kindness has been helpful in dealing with anger, dislike, or fear. It has resulted

¹¹ Shamatha-Vipassana is the type of meditation that most health researchers focus on (Thurman, 2006).

in the softening of my negativity and gaining compassion for difficult individuals. This may be because, “one cannot feel loving-kindness and hatred toward the same object in any given moment of consciousness” (Purser & Milillo, 2014, p. 10). The intent behind doing loving-kindness meditation is to develop a feeling of connectedness that changes how I relate to the world around us. Kabat-Zinn explains (2005), "Being whole and simultaneously part of a larger whole, we can change the world simply by changing ourselves" (p. 162). This underscores again how all Buddhist practices (although intimately personal) fundamentally have as the goal the alleviation of suffering of all beings.

Both sadhana and mantra practices involve recitation and/or chanting. In the case of a mantra, a single word or sentence is repeated to aid in meditation and/or gain merit. Sadhana is the chanting or recitation of a longer text, which may include mantras. The term sadhana comes from the Sanskrit *sādhana*, which means “dedication to an aim” and to “bring about” (“sadhana,” 2016). Sadhana practice is therefore a chanted practice with a purpose or aim. This practice usually also involves visualizations. The purpose or aim varies for each sadhana, but is usually to attain a new level of understanding or embodiment of the teachings.

For me, an important aspect of the practice of Buddhist teachings and mindfulness is the desire to alleviate suffering – my own and that of all others. Many Buddhists aspire to be a Bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas are those who have made “a commitment to dedicate our lives to keeping our hearts and minds open and to nurturing our compassion with the longing to ease the suffering of the world” (Chödrön , 2013, p. 5). This is the work of putting “the teachings of

Buddhism into practice in our everyday lives” (Trungpa, 2010, p. 90). Roshi¹² Joan Halifax, in a conversation with Acharya Fleet Maull, considered,

How do we cultivate the dharma as a lived experience? The root or base is deep practice. ... How do we actualize the way in our every day life? ... That everyday life is about ending suffering. When we cut carrots, it’s with that motivation. ... We cut carrots to end suffering. We sweep the floors to end suffering. We sit by the bedside to end suffering. It’s that relationship with the broken heartedness for the world. Seeing how much suffering there is in the world. And the absolute power and value of Buddhist practice. (Halifax, 2014)

I would add that we teach students, interact with our colleagues, grade papers, write emails, and call parents to end suffering.¹³ In this way, even the purpose of this investigation is the alleviation of suffering. That is mindfulness and meditation applied, in action.

2.3 JOINING THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR

My personal journey of first developing my own foundation of meditation practices intertwined with my journey to understand mindfulness during a year-long sabbatical, and finally with my incorporation of my spiritual practices and understandings into my praxis as a teacher. Praxis, as used here, is taken from the way that Aristotle used the word. According to Carr (2006),

¹²Roshi is the title given to a teacher and/or leader of a Zen Buddhist community.

¹³The Buddhist conception of suffering (dukkha in Sanskrit) is often characterized as clinging, desire, dissatisfaction, or attachment. My use of the word suffering here is more broad and includes physical, mental, emotional, real or imagined suffering; individual or at a societal or group level.

for Aristotle, praxis is also a form of action directed towards the achievement of some end, ... First, ... praxis is not to make or produce some object or artefact [sic], but progressively to realise the idea of the “good” constitutive of a morally worthwhile form of human life. ... The good of praxis cannot be “made”: it can only be ‘done’. It follows from this that praxis is a form of “doing” action precisely because its ‘end’—to promote the good life—only exists, and can only be realised, in and through praxis itself. ... In praxis, acquiring knowledge of what the good is and knowing how to apply it in particular situations are thus not two separate processes but two mutually supportive constitutive elements within a single dialectical process... (p. 426)

My years spent gaining knowledge about mindfulness and practicing mindfulness and meditation thus turned into the praxis of exploring how my Buddhist training could be used to “promote the good” in my classroom.

Neither mindfulness nor meditation can be described as a single practice or attributed to a single religion or secular approach (See University of Alberta Evidence-Based Practice Center, 2007 for a detailed list of meditation and mindfulness practices). Nelson (2012) affirms, “Mindfulness is only one aspect of certain kinds of meditation” (p. 8). There are many meditative practices and there are many mindfulness practices – not all mindfulness practices are meditative and maybe not all forms of meditation always include mindfulness. However, they do intersect in that the most basic form of meditation "is the natural process of becoming familiar with an object by repeatedly placing our minds upon it" (Mipham, 2003, p. 24), thus including mindfulness of the object of meditation.

At the outset of my study I had no idea as to what it meant to incorporate what I knew about mindfulness in education and my meditative practices into my praxis. I set the intention to apply my knowledge and practice of meditation in the concrete situation of my classroom and my school. This praxis was a joining of the sacred in my life with secular aspects of my profession. This dissertation is an attempt to take this one step further by incorporating the sacred into my scholarly pursuits as well. This research project therefore provides an opportunity for me to experience further unification of my professional and spiritual practices, thus embracing Palmer's "undivided life."

Batchelor (2015) defines "secular" as being concerned with "this world—about everything that has to do with the quality of the personal, social, and environmental experience of being alive on this planet" (p. 16). He contrasts this with what he calls a religious approach, which is more concerned with the "ultimate" or "personal enlightenment and liberation" in the Buddhist context (pp. 15–16). This research project creates a dialogic space between the secular worlds of research and education and the sacred world of meditative practice. I attempt to integrate the discourse on mindfulness and my lived experience of mindfulness practices in an educational setting. This dissertation is an attempt to take this one step further by incorporating the sacred into my secular scholarly pursuits as well.

This path of joining the sacred and the secular aspects of life is an ancient one, explored in Buddhist texts that reference the Buddha directly. The following legend of Dawa Sangpo the king of Shambhala is one such example. Dawa Sangpo asked the Buddha for advice.

He said, 'I am a king. I have a palace, a family, ministers, subjects, an army, and a treasury. I want to realize enlightenment, but cannot abandon my responsibilities to pursue spiritual practice in a monastery. Please teach me how to use life in the world to

become enlightened.’ The Buddha assured the king that he would not have to become an ascetic or a monk in order to attain enlightenment. Indeed, he could practice a spiritual path while fulfilling his many responsibilities. He could become a *sakyong*—a ruler who rules by balancing heaven and earth. Heaven is wisdom. Earth is nitty-gritty experience. When we begin to mix wisdom into our secular life, we have success—both spiritual and worldly. (Mipham, 2003, pp. 1–2)

Just as King Dawa Sangpo searched for a way to integrate an enlightened spiritual way of being into his secular life, this inquiry documents how I have attempted to bring my spiritual path into my teaching. As Mipham (2003) mentions in recounting this story, “The Buddha said to the king, ‘Don’t be biased. Look at the land and look at your people. If you can develop certainty in the indestructible basic goodness that lies at the heart of everything, then you can rule your world’” (p. 2). This quote affirms that this path is challenging and requires a belief in the basic goodness of all. With this, however, practitioners can make all secular or even mundane tasks a form of mindfulness practice through the connection “with the nondual wisdom of basic goodness—a Now [sic] that is free from past, present, and future preoccupations and neurosis” (Eppert, Vokey, Nguyen, & Bai, 2015, p. 280). Part of the motivation of this research project has been the sense that there has been a dualistic approach in much of the research I have encountered. Why is it important to have nondual wisdom as a basis for liberation?

2.4 A NONDUALISTIC APPROACH

The first line of the prologue of the book *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* is, “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert’s there are few” (Suzuki, 2011, p. 1). Suzuki’s

statement could apply to researchers – once the researcher believes she understands a phenomenon, she is not open to new interpretations of that phenomenon. Thus, the challenge that Suzuki offers to the practitioner (and that I extend to myself, as researcher) is to deepen practice and understanding of what it means to bring mindfulness into our life and work, but maintain the beginner’s mind. The key to maintaining that fresh start, full of options and open space, lies in the concept of non-dualism.

If I do not approach my meditation practice with a beginner’s mind, I can get caught up in the limiting concepts of what meditation should or shouldn’t be like. For example, if I cannot achieve relaxed open awareness in my meditation I might label that as bad or tense, while the times when I experience feelings of bliss I might label as good. Batchelor (2015) explains, “we inhabit a linguistic realm where we cannot avoid using terms like ‘is’ and ‘is not,’ and a moral realm where we are bound to express preferences and make choices” (p. 11) However, with the open space of beginner’s mind, a meditation just is what it is – not good or bad – although this experience can be difficult to express.

This idea of non-dualism is essential to Buddhist philosophy. In it is also the idea that nothing can be fully understood in isolation or as a separate entity because nothing has a separate existence; everything is interdependent (Kornfield, 2000; Suzuki, 2011; Thich Nhat Hanh, 1974). One example of how the scientific study of mindfulness can be dualistic can be found in the idea that the body and mind are separate. A dualistic approach may be helpful in understanding subcomponent parts of the phenomena of mindfulness, but Buddhists believe in the interdependent arising of all things and, therefore, separation into components is a misrepresentation of reality. According to Hanh (1974), “the concepts we have of things, as well as the categories such as existence/non-existence, unity/plurality, etc. do not faithfully reflect

reality and cannot convey it” (p. 38). This is because dividing our world, although potentially very helpful for understanding complexities, is artificial. When researchers try to isolate one mindfulness practice and measure a set of effects it has, they are looking through a lens that artificially separates what is truly interdependent.

Out of habit and convenience, humans create constructs and concepts to help us understand and describe our reality. On some level these concepts do help us gain some ground to stand on, often allowing us to share our thoughts with others. Batchelor (2015) affirms, “The polarities embedded in human consciousness are useful, if not indispensable, in providing a framework to guide our course through life” (p. 11). Yet the conceptual knowledge is incomplete or limiting in that it doesn’t fully represent reality. We all may share the concept *table*. Yet, the variety of tables is vast: my concept table might be round and oak and yours rectangular and mahogany.

A Buddhist perspective “forewarns us that conceptual knowledge is not the perfect instrument for studying truth; that our words are incapable of expressing the truth about which concerns ultimate reality” (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1974, p. 38). In sum, concepts are limiting and the language used to express those concepts can also be limiting. Difficulty notwithstanding, a nondual approach should be fundamental to mindful inquiry. So, how do I bring a nondual approach to this inquiry? The Buddha warned, “the danger of duality...does not lie in oppositional thinking itself. Rather, it lies in how we use such thinking to reinforce and justify our egoism, craving, fears, and hatreds” (Batchelor, 2015, p. 11). Batchelor (2015) continues, “The point, therefore, is not to reject dualities in favor of a hypothetical ‘non-duality’ but to learn to live with them more lightly, more fluidly, and ironically” (p. 11). Batchelor later explains this more fully:

Thinking other than in terms of ‘it is’ and ‘it is not’ goes against the grain of language itself; it is disorienting and confusing. Yet (Buddha) tells his listeners ... ‘it is fitting for you to be perplexed, it is fitting for you to be in doubt’. (p. 22)

It appears that awareness of the duality is the key to avoiding duality shaping one’s way of being and, in this case, the way of doing research. The perplexing space that is created without duality, however, is one that must be embraced. Again the key is the ability to dwell in the open space of free fall.

2.5 DESCRIBING THE INEFFABLE

I must work within the inherently dualistic limitations of human language (which is by nature concept bound) to describe reality. These linguistic concepts are also limited by their inadequacy to completely express and convey personal experiences. Bhante¹⁴ Gunaratana (2002) explains this, “Words are devised by the symbolic levels of the mind, and they describe those realities with which symbolic thinking deals. Mindfulness is presymbolic” (p. 137). According to the Buddhist understanding of psychology there is a faculty that,

...directly experiences reality without passing through concepts ... called *non-discriminative* and *non-imaginative Wisdom (nirvikalpajnana)*. This Wisdom is the fruit of meditation. ...a form of knowledge in which one does not distinguish subject and object, a form of knowledge that cannot be conceived by the intellect and expressed by language. (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1974, p. 39)

¹⁴Bhante is an honorific title used to address Buddhist monks in the Theraveda tradition.

The experience and understanding that result from meditation are difficult to express in language and therefore are ineffable. Even the fullness of an ordinary experience can be hard to put into words. “The cobbled skin of an orange that releases its fragrance to our touch” (Kornfield, 2000, p. 282) evokes a shared experience, even commonplace. Imagine a person who had never experienced an orange; Kornfield’s description would not conjure up the exact experience.

If communicating tangible physical experiences is difficult and limited, then talking about the personal experience of meditation and the mystery of life itself is nearly unachievable. Yet, this is my task. “Dharma practice exposes the limits of human thought and language when we are confronted with the puzzle of being here at all. All people, whether devoutly religious or avowedly secular, share this sense of unknowing wonder, and perplexity” (Batchelor, 2015, pp. 3–4), I am therefore taking on the task of describing the indescribable, and most assuredly I will not be successful in the full communication of my lived experiences.

The challenge I face is how to explore and write about the ineffable aspects of incorporating my mindfulness practice in my teaching and research. One author suggests, “given the complexity and enormity, not to mention mystery, of reality, our mind-body-heart-spirit, that is, our whole being, needs to be very spacious, open, wide awake, sensitive and responsive, and loving to be able to embrace reality” (Cohen et al., 2012, p. 3). One solution is to approach this inquiry from a meditative stance and use the traditional language of meditation. Such language best describes the meditative experiences and the insights that come from them. Therefore, the meditative state itself and the language that emanates from that state are necessary to reflect the lived experience of a Buddhist practitioner’s experiences. Zajonc (2009) describes how he came to a similar conclusion,

I have continually struggled to find a language that is at once accessible and authentic. Much of the language of meditation has been co-opted, commercialized, or otherwise distorted, and religious or spiritual terminology has also become an obstacle for many. As a consequence, while I may use spiritual language where it seems necessary, I attempt to stay close to the practices themselves and the experiences that arise through them. (p. 17)

This work, therefore, uses contemplation as method of inquiry and a language that emanates from the meditative state. My practice, in turn, is rooted in the meditative traditions of Buddhism, which has searched for millennia for a way to describe these ineffable aspects of experience.

3.0 SEARCHING FOR UNDERSTANDING

We do not think of the ordinary person as preoccupied with such difficult and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? To whom do I listen? What counts for me as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than an intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definition of ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private personae, and our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality. (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 3)

During my sabbatical, I needed to delve into the literature on mindfulness so that I could eventually enter the discourse through my own work. I decided that my first step should be to examine what is being termed *mindfulness*, its origins, and how it has spread from the more traditional places (such as yoga studios and meditation centers) to secular institutions like therapists' offices or hospitals, and finally to K-12 educational settings. I also wanted to explore how mindfulness is being redefined and reshaped by the transfer of this spiritual practice to its secular uses. Finally, I wanted to understand the research findings popping up in all sorts of popular media, touting its benefits. I tried to gain an understanding of what mindfulness practices

are, the nature of the body of research in the field of mindfulness¹⁵ studies, and finally how these practices are being used in schools and if they benefit students and educators. In this section, I will discuss the literature that has shaped my understandings of mindfulness.

3.1 ORIGINS OF MINDFULNESS

The introduction of mindfulness into North America was through the Buddhism, found in Eastern teachings, languages, and cultures. Therefore linguistic and cultural gaps abound in its importation into our North American ways of being and knowing. The concept of mindfulness itself was a translation of early Buddhist texts originally written in either Pali or Sanskrit – languages from India. Mindfulness has entered our idiom and culture as the translation of one term:

The Sanskrit term *smṛti* (Pali, *sati*) was first translated as “mindfulness” in 1881 by Thomas W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922), a former British colonial officer in Sri Lanka who went on to become the most celebrated Victorian scholar of Buddhism. (Buswell & Lopez, Jr., 2015, para. 3)

The decision to translate *smṛti* or *sati*¹⁶ as mindfulness in English was not universally accepted at first. Wilson (2014) asserts that early Western Buddhist writers/translations did not have references to mindfulness in their works. Wilson also states, "sati literally means memory or

¹⁵In some works the term “contemplative” is preferred and seems to be used either as a larger, umbrella term, which includes mindfulness, or interchangeably with mindfulness. I use mindfulness, as it is the common translation of the Buddhist teachings, discussed here.

¹⁶I am going to continue to use the Pali term *sati* as most of the sources I found and translations of the Buddhist scriptures use this term.

remembrance. In its usage as a technical Buddhist meditation term, it usually also implies awareness, attention, or alertness" (p. 15). The author goes on to discuss the over application of "mindfulness" as the translation of other terms and various forms of meditation, e.g. vipassana, zazen, shamatha. Wilson (2014) explains that although mindfulness became a dominating idea and term in North America, the historical place of mindfulness in Buddhist Asia was very limited.

Sati was, nevertheless, the term used in the very earliest of Buddha's teachings. The Buddha's first teaching: The Four Noble Truths, states: (1) there is suffering¹⁷ in the world, (2) individuals can know the causes and conditions that create suffering,¹⁸ (3) people can free themselves and all beings from suffering,¹⁹ and (4) there is a path to follow in order to end suffering (Hanh & Cheung, 2010; Kornfield, 2009). In this way, Buddha's main teaching describes the reason and causes of human suffering and provides a plan for the practitioner to follow in order to gain skills that will allow her to free herself and others from suffering. The path to end suffering mentioned in the fourth Noble Truth is contained in the Noble Eightfold Path. It contains the following eight components: (1) Right Understanding, (2) Right Thought, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness (sati), and (8) Right Concentration (Rahula, 1974, p. 45). Here we see the appearance of sati in the seventh as a key to following the Buddha's path.

¹⁷The original Pali word for this is "dukkha" and has the meaning of not only suffering, but also includes the ideas of "imperfection, impermanence, emptiness, insubstantiality" and is therefore difficult to translate precisely (Rahula, 1974, p. 17).

¹⁸The cause of suffering (dukkha) is referred to as craving, greed, or attachment ("tanhā" in Pali) (Rahula, 1974, p. 29).

¹⁹ The freedom or emancipation from "dukkha" is Nirvana (also "Nibbāna") (Rahula, 1974, p. 35).

Furthermore, these eight can be grouped into three areas: (1) Ethical Conduct (Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood), (2) Mental Discipline (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration), and (3) Wisdom (Right Thought and Right Understanding) (McCown, Reibel, & Micozzi, 2010; Rahula, 1974). The second area under the Eightfold Path, Mental Discipline, can be realized through meditation, which includes mindfulness (Hanh & Cheung, 2010; Mipham, 2003). There are two aspects of meditation: the first is the development of concentration or one-pointed focus²⁰ and the second is the development of insight²¹, which can lead to “complete liberation of the mind... Nirvana” (Rahula, 1974, p. 68). Indeed, mindfulness meditation has at its aim the empowerment of the individual to free herself from suffering through knowledge or insight (Mipham, 2003). This insight involves “waking up to the full spectrum of our experience in the present moment, which ... we rapidly discover is severely edited and often distorted through the routinized, habitual, and unexamined activity of our thoughts and emotions” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 148). In this way, the three elements of the eight-fold path are interconnected: the practices of mental discipline build wisdom and wisdom shows one the way to gain ethical conduct.

When I took my refuge vows to become a Buddhist, I also took vows known as precepts, which are based on the eight-fold path. These were part of my formative training. “Instruction in meditation traditionally includes talk about intentions, attitudes, impermanence, and so on. In addition, meditation training traditionally takes place with people who have made some commitment to observing precepts to guide their behavior” (Nelson, 2012, p. 12). My

²⁰“Samatha” or “samadhi” (Rahula, 1974, p. 68)

²¹Vipassana, vipasyana or vidarsana (Rahula, 1974, p. 68)

understanding is that sitting in meditation all day will not be of benefit without embodying the practice by *living* mindfully, i.e. ethically through precepts.

Another important mention of sati in Buddhist texts is found in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, “a highly revered discourse of the Buddha which is considered an exact instruction on the practice of mindfulness meditation” (Purser & Milillo, 2014, p. 3). In this discourse (sutta or in Sanskrit sutra) the Buddha lays out four foundations of mindfulness²² (satipaṭṭhāna): “mindfulness of the body (kāyā), feelings (vedanā), mind (citta), and mind-objects (also called dhammas, or phenomena)” (Purser & Milillo, 2014, p. 3). The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta²³ also includes instructions on “contemplations directed toward observing the arising and passing away of these phenomena in the stream of experience” (Purser & Milillo, 2014, p. 3). These instructions very closely resemble the way that I learned to practice (and continue to practice) meditation.

The Buddhist tradition in which I practice incorporates mindfulness practices, which “involve the expansion of attention in a nonjudgmental and nonreactive way to become more aware of one’s current sensory, mental and emotional experiences” (Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007, p. 77), just as found in many therapeutic interventions. My personal practice also incorporates aspects of the various Buddhist²⁴ traditions, where practitioners observe thoughts and feelings to develop the nonjudgmental awareness that leads to equanimity and insights. In addition, I use focus on the breath (among other foci²⁵) to increase mindfulness. But there is always the idea that the practice does not end once off the meditation cushion. Nelson asserts, “The Buddhist

²²The four foundations of mindfulness are discussed by many Western authors such as Hanh & Cheung, 2010; Kornfield, 2009; Trungpa, 2005.

²³See Rahula (1974, 109-19), for an abridged translation.

²⁴The three traditions that have most influenced me are Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism, which come from different areas of the world and vary in techniques, yet all share the basic tenets of Buddhism. I am currently a member of the Shambhala community.

²⁵Meditative practices can use many things as a focal point (see Hanh, 1975, for discussion).

idea of mindfulness is concerned with the intentional content of mindful insights, believing this content will have a profound impact on the conduct of those practicing mindfulness” (Nelson, 2012, p. 12). Again, it is living the practice that is most important.

In contrast, I found that the following definition of mindfulness is most frequently cited by researchers: “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145).²⁶ Unfortunately, this definition leaves out the interconnection that mindfulness has with the other elements of the Buddha’s Eightfold Path, which also integrates intention, ethics, and wisdom (Purser & Milillo, 2014). To remedy this, Purser and Milillo (2014) propose a Triadic Model of Mindfulness that incorporates the Buddhist ethical and transformative foundations. Their model connects mindfulness to Right View and Right Effort (two other elements of the Eightfold Path) to produce desired outcomes, which are based in the ethical stances of Buddhism as well. Furthermore, this model incorporates discernment, which is the key to understanding what the underlying causes of suffering are and how to eradicate them. This differs greatly from the common simplification of secularized mindfulness as non-judging awareness of the present moment.

Chödrön (2013) also explains the relationship between mindfulness, relating to our feelings, and one of the common precepts of Buddhism (not causing harm) as follows:

With the commitment to not cause harm, we move away from reacting in ways that cause us to suffer, but we haven’t yet arrived at a place that feels entirely relaxed and free. We first have to go through a growing-up process, a getting-used-to process. That process, that transition, is one of becoming comfortable with exactly what we’re feeling as we feel

²⁶This particular article has been cited by over 1,400 others (as per www.scholar.google.com).

it. The key practice to support us in this is mindfulness—being fully present right here, right now. Meditation is one form of mindfulness, Essentially, mindfulness means wakefulness—fully present wakefulness. Chögyam Trungpa called it paying attention to all the details of your life. (p. 52)

Consequently, the Buddhist concept of *sati*, translated into English as mindfulness, has lost some of the ethical and life-pervading elements on entry into more secular uses. However, in both the Buddhist description and in the scientific research, mindfulness is an interdependent psychological process with various components that can lead to a way of life by developing a more mindful personality (i.e. a trait), but it can also induce the temporary state of being mindful (Cahn & Polich, 2006). I explore how this concept of mindfulness has been explored in science in Section 3.3.

In this way, mindfulness meditation is one of the Buddhist practices to achieve the goal of alleviating the suffering of humankind. “Mindfulness is the fundamental attentional stance underlying all streams of Buddhist meditative practice” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 146); it is found in each of the three major traditions that have entered North America (Theravada [Hinayana], Zen [Mahayana], and Tibetan [Vajrayana]). Nevertheless, each Buddhist tradition has a slightly different approach to the path of liberation from suffering. I sought to understand the variations of Buddhist practices that the three main traditions -- Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan -- have brought to the United States.

3.1.1 Theravada Buddhism in the U.S.

Theravada Buddhism is the form of Buddhism that comes from Southeast Asia, mainly of Thai, Sri Lankan, or Burmese origin (Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007). It is noted for staying very faithful to

the original teachings of the Buddha. Bhante Henepola Gunarantana, a Sri Lankan monk, came to the United States in 1968 and began teaching about Theravada Buddhism, meditation, and mindfulness (Wilson, 2014). Gunaratana has also published widely in English, and is noted for his 1991 publication, *Mindfulness in Plain English*, which aided in popularizing the term mindfulness. Gunaratana equates mindfulness with “bare attention,” “nonconceptual awareness,” and “nonegotistic [sic] alertness” – “it takes place without reference to self” (2002, p. 140). In addition to the idea of a simple, open awareness of the present moment experiences, Gunarantana goes on to define mindfulness as a tool to live ethically. He explains that it is, “clear, direct, wordless knowing of what is and what is not, of what is correct and what is incorrect, of what we are doing and how we should go about it” (2002, p. 146). For Gunaratana, mindfulness is a quality of awareness, but more importantly it is a vehicle for the practitioner to achieve liberation. His writings and teachings continue to be important for Buddhists in America.

Vipassana (or insight meditation), which came out of Theravada Buddhist traditions, was introduced by Americans who had become Buddhists abroad. Vipassana was made widely popular in the U.S. by Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein, and Jack Kornfield (Fields, 1986). In 1976, these teachers established the Insight Meditation Society based on Theravada practices and teachings. This is the most American form of Buddhism, according to McCown, Reibel and Micozzi (2011), who also assert that it is the least hierarchical and most connected to psychotherapy. I studied Kornfield as an example of an American who brought back Theravada Buddhist teachings from Thailand, where he volunteered with the Peace Corps (Kornfield, 2009).

Kornfield stayed in Thailand, studying and living as a Buddhist monk for three years after his time in the Peace Corps. He returned to the U.S. and began teaching in the early 1970s. Drawing on basic Buddhist teachings, Kornfield (2009) defines mindfulness in terms of its four foundations from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which he lists simply as “1. body, 2. feelings, 3. mind, and 4. Dharma” (p. 103). Dharma is the term commonly used in Buddhism for the teachings of the Buddha, or the path one takes in understanding the teachings. Here Kornfield (2009) is using Dharma in a slightly different way, to mean “the elements and patterns that make up experience” (p. 104). Kornfield, who also obtained a PhD in psychology, presents a Buddhist psychology based on mindfulness practices and the self-awareness that mindfulness can develop. He claims that Buddhism is the original cognitive-behavioral therapy. Kornfield explains that, with mindfulness, practitioners learn to identify the roots of suffering in their thinking and thought patterns and then can compassionately transform these, “substituting healthy thoughts for unhealthy ones” (p. 296). Finally, Kornfield’s vision of Buddhist psychology includes the development of the stabilizing qualities of concentration and equanimity.

3.1.2 The Introduction of Zen to the U.S.

The Zen tradition is found in various cultures, including Japanese, Chinese,²⁷ Korean,²⁸ and Vietnamese, where it has mixed with indigenous spiritual traditions to create unique approaches to Buddhism. Many Japanese, Chinese, and Korean influences arrived to North America after WWII and the Korean War, respectively. In order to explore the essence of these perspectives I

²⁷Zen is called “Chan” in Chinese.

²⁸Zen is referred to as “Sŏn” in Korean.

first read the works of a Japanese Zen teacher, Shunryu Suzuki because he is credited with popularizing Japanese Zen in the U.S. during the 1960s with his focus on meditation (*zazen*) (Fields, 1986; McCown et al., 2010). Suzuki came to the United States in 1959. In the Japanese Soto Zen tradition, Suzuki founded the San Francisco Zen Center. Suzuki taught in the United States until his death in 1971 (Brown in Suzuki, 2011). The American public easily accepted him and his center gained in popularity, turning into a widespread Zen organization across the continent (Smith in Suzuki, 2011).

As with other forms of Buddhism, Suzuki taught that meditation was an avenue to know one's true nature, with posture, focus on the breath, and how you deal with thoughts being key. However, there is a paradox inherent in this teaching because, although one's *goal* is to obtain knowledge or freedom from suffering, mindfulness itself is only about being present in the moment – not about obtaining or fixing anything (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Therefore striving for wisdom or liberation will not help to achieve it. Suzuki (2011) explains this technique:

The true purpose is to see things as they are, to observe things as they are, and to let everything go as it goes. ... Zen practice is to open up our small mind. So concentrating is just an aid to help you realize 'big mind,' or the mind that is everything. (p. 16)

In this excerpt Suzuki uses “observe” and “concentration” in the way other teachers use the term mindfulness. Later in his book he defines mindfulness as follows: “When our thinking is soft, it is called imperturbable thinking. This kind of thinking is always stable. ... Thinking which is divided in many ways is not true thinking. Concentration should be present in our thinking. This is mindfulness” (Suzuki, 2011, p. 105). Suzuki saw this as essential to *zazen* (Zen meditation)

practice. Sitting meditation, with present moment focus or seeing things just as they are, is the essence of Zen for Suzuki.

Another Zen teacher, Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, has also been very influential in the West and is recognized as a master teacher of mindfulness meditation (Fields, 1986). His blending of Zen (Mahayana) and Theraveda traditions has been greatly appealing to Westerners (Mobi Ho in Hanh, 1975). During the Viet Nam War, Hanh was forced to go into exile in the West due to his outspoken resistance to the conflict (Fields, 1986; McCown et al., 2010; Morreale, 1998). Since then, his continued residence in the West has allowed him to become a prolific teacher of his version of Buddhism throughout Europe and North America. Hanh has authored more than 100 books, most teaching Buddhism to adults and children (Wilson, 2014). In fact, Wilson (2014) credits Hanh's book *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1975) in part for popularizing the term mindfulness. Hanh, like Suzuki, also views meditation as the primary vehicle to build mindfulness (Hanh, 1975). Hanh's practice suggests closing one's eyes while in a seated posture for mindfulness meditative practices and the object of focus is the breathing, but there is more flexibility than Suzuki – one can also use a chair to sit, or lie down (see especially Hanh, 1975).

More recently, Hanh and Cheung (2010) define mindfulness as follows:

To be mindful is to be completely aware of what is happening in the present, to be fully aware of all that is going on within ourselves and all that is happening around us, from moment to moment, without judgment or preconceived notions. (p. 2)

The authors focus on the lack of judgment and preconceptions in mindfulness.

Hanh and Cheung (2010) also describe the Buddha's four foundations of mindfulness (from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta) as follows: (1) mindfulness of body, which can be accomplished

through the vehicle of the breath; (2) mindfulness of feelings – to be aware of the nature of feelings (physical and psychological) as either pleasant, unpleasant, mixed or neutral; (3) mindfulness of mental formations, which is to be aware of the mind’s activities/creations; and (4) mindfulness of objects of mind, “because each mental formation has an object” (pp. 69-70). For these authors, mindfulness must have an object and these four foundations explain what the objects of mindfulness can be.

Hanh also vigorously promotes the application of mindfulness to everyday life and everyday problems (Hanh, 1975). In the book, “Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life,” he and co-author Cheung (2010) frame the issue of overeating and obesity as one of suffering resulting from a lack of mindfulness. They teach the readers how to apply the tenets of Buddhism to this problem, providing a step-by-step guide to being mindful in order to work to lose weight and be healthier. This is a very concrete example of how mindfulness and meditation are considered to be the pathway to liberating oneself of all kinds of suffering through its application in lived experience.

3.1.3 Tibetan Buddhism’s Introduction to the West

The most recent entries into Western Buddhism are the Tibetan teachers. Tibetan Buddhist monks were forced to leave their homeland in the 1950s as a result of the Chinese invasion of Tibet and the ongoing subsequent repression. Many exiled Tibetans reestablished their previously isolated monasteries and communities in India, where they have tried to replicate the elaborate monasteries and voluminous libraries of their homeland. Tibetan Buddhism is very intellectual and psychological in nature. Tibetan teachers began reaching North America in the late 1960s and early 1970s from India. One prominent Tibetan teacher in the West was the monk

Chogyam Trungpa, who came to the United States in 1970 after leaving Tibet for India by foot in 1959 and then studying at Oxford University in the U.K. (Fields, 1986; McCown et al., 2010). Trungpa is credited for taking huge volumes of previously undisclosed Tibetan Buddhist teachings and making them accessible to Westerners. He also established various monasteries, a university, and a worldwide network of practice centers, which follow his teachings. I belong to the network of practice that he established, Shambhala, and will focus on his teachings here.

Like Hanh and Kornfield, Trungpa also presents mindfulness as having four subcomponents or foundations, which come from the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, although he translates them differently. Trungpa (2005) describes these as: (1) mindfulness of the body (often using the breath to increase body awareness), (2) mindfulness of life (integrating mindfulness into daily life), (3) mindfulness of effort -- not forcing, but "right effort" (p. 32), and finally (4) mindfulness of mind, which is watchfulness or the bare attention to one's own mind. Trungpa focuses more on how to work with your mind and emotions – especially difficult emotions.

Trungpa's work in North America included integrating Buddhist with Western psychology (Trungpa, 2005). To this end, he and his students created a therapeutic community in the 1970s called The Maitri²⁹ Community. The purpose was to work with people suffering from acute psychological problems using Buddhist Vajrayana teachings and concepts, described in his book *The Sanity We Are Born With: A Buddhist Approach to Psychology* (2005). Vajrayana teachings, also referred to as Tantric teachings, have been traditionally reserved for high-level practitioners and held as secret. Therefore, it is remarkable that Trungpa brought these techniques to the traditionally secular healing communities of the West. The Maitri Community used a technique from Buddhist psychology called Maitri Space Awareness, which

²⁹Maitri is the Buddhist concept of befriending one's self or unconditional acceptance of ourselves.

focused on the physical environment as a means for healing psychological disturbances (Trungpa, 2005). Trungpa also went on to establish the Naropa Institute, which became Naropa University – the first Buddhist University in the United States – with contemplative psychology as one of its first degree programs. His work was an example and impetus for the integration of Buddhist practices and approaches to suffering into Western psychological and other therapeutic practices. This again shows the integration of meditative practices into lived experience.

Since Trungpa's death in 1987, his son and lineage heir, Sakyong Mipham has continued his work and teachings through the Shambhala organization. As did his father, Mipham (2003) sees mindfulness meditation as a starting point to develop concentration, peaceful abiding and the ability to see one's inherent Buddha nature (also referred to as basic goodness). The practice, as Mipham (2003) describes it, involves focus on the breath with nonjudgmental labeling of any thoughts or feelings that might arise, and then gently returning to the breath when distracted. As with all other teachers mentioned thus far, Mipham has a strong emphasis on the seated posture one should take. In his tradition there is much importance placed on the upright spine and open chest (symbolizing both our nobility and open heart). The jaw should also be relaxed, and possibly slack. The posture is comfortable and relaxed, but alert. Eyes should be open, with a soft downward gaze, seeing but not looking (Mipham, 2003). This contrasts with other traditions which keep the eyes closed – the point here is to more fully integrate practice into every part of experience and not shut out reality by closing the eyes.

3.1.4 Other Sources of Mindfulness

Sitting meditation with focus on the breath has been emphasized up to this point. However, mindfulness does take other forms and is not exclusively the domain of Buddhists; therefore, this

section will explore these. One Hindu-based practice, Transcendental Meditation (TM), came into vogue during the 1960s and 1970s (Benson, 2001). TM uses the repetition of a mantra as its focus point, with little focus on posture. TM became extremely popular when celebrities such as the Beatles publicly touted it (Benson, 2001; McCown et al., 2010). TM is derived from the Vedic³⁰ tradition of India and was popularized by Maharishi Mahesh (Benson, 2001; Black et al., 2009; University of Alberta Evidence-Based Practice Center, 2007). In this way, it is not Buddhist, but Hindu in origin. TM uses a meditative state that is achieved by repeating a mantra, which in itself has no meaning to the American practitioner. The complete focus on the mantra is supposed to “transcend” all thinking and lead to perfect stillness and stability of both body and mind (Benson, 2001; Black et al., 2009). Learning the technique requires extensive one-on-one instruction. TM is worth mentioning here due to its extensive use in the health sciences, with research studies often confusing or combining it with other mindfulness practices. I also found TM being used in some schools in North America as well (see, for example, Wendt et al., 2015).

In addition to TM, movement-based mindfulness practices are also very popular in the U.S. As mentioned above, body awareness is an aspect of mindfulness. This mindfulness of body can be achieved in a variety of ways: mindful movement being one. For example, walking meditation is a common Buddhist meditative practice, where the object of attention or mindfulness is the act of walking (Hanh, 1975; Kornfield, 2009). Instead of placing one’s attention on the breath, the practitioner attends to their feet and the feeling of walking. In fact, in many longer Buddhist retreats walking meditation is used to break up long periods of sitting meditation. Another physical practice is Yoga, which often includes meditation practices. Yoga

³⁰Vedic refers to the Hindu scriptures from which mantras in Sanskrit are derived for use in meditation or other spiritual pursuits.

uses “asanas,” or postures, to focus attention on the body and the breath (Black et al., 2009; University of Alberta Evidence-Based Practice Center, 2007). Similarly, Tai Chi is a form of exercise that promotes mental concentration on the very slow movements of the practice. Tai Chi also works with breathing techniques, which are coordinated with movements. Another movement practice that requires mindfulness of body is Qi Gong, which is related to traditional Chinese medicine and has as its goal the direction of energies (University of Alberta Evidence-Based Practice Center, 2007). Qi Gong also involves focus on postures (similar to yoga), regulation of breathing, and has a meditative component in its passive practices. Just like the sitting practices, these movement practices include focus of attention and some sort of meditative or breathing component.

3.2 SECULARIZATION AND MEDICALIZATION OF MINDFULNESS

In order for mindfulness to be accepted in mainstream American society and public institutions it has had to lose some of its Buddhist trappings and become a secular set of mental exercises and skills (Nelson, 2012). In my research I discovered two groundbreaking works that have spurred this secularization: the Relaxation Response and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. I will focus on these two as examples of how the original constellation of practices, guidelines, and Buddhist context evolved into secular, medicalized applications. From there I will briefly describe how mindfulness in its secular form has entered public K-12 schools.

3.2.1 The Relaxation Response

In the early 1970s practitioners of Transcendental Meditation (TM) approached Herbert Benson and asked him to study them (Benson, 2001). Benson had previously found that animals could be trained to lower their blood pressure and TM practitioners believed that TM had the effect of lowering theirs. Although skeptical, Benson agreed to study the TM practitioners and began an initial scientific study of the physical effects of meditative practices. From his work with TM meditators, Benson did indeed find that TM could lower blood pressure and slow breathing (Benson, 2001). Benson conducted research on the foundations of meditative techniques and discovered that similar contemplative practices could be found in all of the world's religious traditions – not just Hinduism and Buddhism.

He was intrigued and designed a secularized form of meditation to test if the practice could be removed from its spiritual base and still have the same effect. He found that with four essential components – (1) a quiet environment, (2) a mental device, (3) a passive attitude, and (4) a comfortable position – the same effect could be produced in a clinical context (Benson, 2001). Benson (2001) called the effect “The Relaxation Response” (RR) and published his findings in a best-selling book of the same title in 1975. Benson (2001) found that the mental device could be repeating a word, sound, or prayer -- or it could be a muscular activity; the passive attitude should be towards the thoughts or feelings that come up while practicing the RR. The RR has no component of insight, right behaviors, or spirituality. The effect of lowering blood pressure only lasted so long as the subjects continued their practice of TM. This early seminal work established the basis for future clinical and secular applications of meditation. Benson, however, was not a meditation practitioner, himself.

According to McCown, Reibel and Micozzi (2010), the majority of the practitioners of Buddhism and meditation in the U.S. have been highly educated and affluent. Many of these professionals have found that the Buddhist desire to relieve the suffering of others speaks directly to goals of the health professions of which they are a part. They have therefore introduced mindfulness meditation into academia and their fields, where they were and continue to be well placed. In this way, meditation has become one of the mainstream treatments in psychoanalytical and medical establishments -- subject to the same sort of post-positivistic measures of proof as other treatments in those professions.

3.2.2 Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

One influential Buddhist academic in the health care profession is Jon Kabat-Zinn. In 1979 Kabat-Zinn combined his personal practices of mindfulness meditation and his work as an M.D. by introducing the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. MBSR has since made major headway into the medical and psychoanalytical fields (McCown et al., 2010; Sibinga & Kemper, 2010). Kabat-Zinn (2005) describes mindfulness as “the systematic cultivation of wakefulness, of present-moment awareness” (p. xv) or, as we saw earlier, “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 4). In the MBSR program, Kabat-Zinn established an eight-week, nine-session program to teach mindfulness to people dealing with chronic stress, illness, and/or pain. MBSR was also designed as (and has become) a model that others can use to design interventions in various settings (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Because of its importance and influence in the field (nearly every mindfulness-based intervention is modeled

after it), I not only read the book which details the program, but I also took an MBSR course. From those, I describe the program here in some detail.

The foundations of the program, which Kabat-Zinn details in his 1990 book *Full Catastrophe Living*, closely parallel the tenets of Buddhist mindfulness practices detailed above. Unlike the Buddhist teachings, but similar to Benson's work on the RR, the MBSR course includes a small portion of education relating to the stress response. The rest of the course is structured to teach mindfulness practices. The course provides direct training in three of the four foundations of mindfulness mentioned above: mindfulness of body, mindfulness of mind/thought, and mindfulness of feelings. These experiences come about through the body scan, observations of thoughts and emotions, mindful eating, sitting and walking meditation, and mindful yoga. MBSR participants are also encouraged to incorporate their mindfulness practices into their daily lives by way of reflective homework exercises, thus including the fourth foundation of mindfulness -- mindfulness of life (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). The course also incorporates the paradox of nonattainment found in Buddhist teachings; this is the idea that one practices mindfulness without being attached to any particular outcome (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

MBSR offers a complete secularization of Buddhist meditation and mindfulness practices, but holds the intention of staying faithful the original teachings (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). As with the aforementioned Eastern Buddhist teachers, Kabat-Zinn (1990) describes the importance of posture, focus on the breath, and nonjudgmental awareness of thinking/thoughts/emotions—incorporating all of these into his MBSR program, but without the Buddhist spirituality or reference to ethical/moral behavior or insight.

The MBSR course consists of an information session, eight two-hour classes, and one full day of practice. Week one of this program introduces the body scan technique (where one is

guided for 45 minutes to check in with each part of the body nonjudgmentally), mindful eating, and sitting meditation, using the breath as an anchor (or focal point). Participants are asked to do a body scan daily (with the guidance of a provided CD) and ten minutes of sitting meditation as their homework each day of week one. The second week continues in much the same vein, but adds logging of positive experiences throughout the week and the participants' feelings and reactions to these. In this way, mindfulness of feelings and thoughts is introduced.

Week three introduces mindful, gentle hatha yoga postures to develop mindfulness of body. Both the body scan and the yoga are done with the focus being nonjudgmental awareness of feelings and sensations in the body. The emphasis on nonjudgmental awareness continues in these exercises even when working with pain. The participants are asked to breathe into the area that is painful and notice without labeling it as positive or negative: just be present to the physical sensations. The homework for weeks three and four includes alternating 45 minutes of hatha yoga with the body scan, every other day each, while continuing the daily ten minutes of sitting meditation. In addition, participants are asked to log their unpleasant experiences and their reactions to them during week 3, continuing mindfulness of feelings/thoughts.

In week four, MBSR participants are asked to reflect on their experiences of noticing positive and negative experiences and any feelings, thoughts, or body sensations that accompanied them. Once again emphasis is placed on nonjudgmental awareness. In weeks five and six, the MBSR instructor does some basic teaching of the body's unconscious reactions to stress and how, with mindfulness, people can notice this happening and intervene before getting thrown into the "fight or flight" response. The homework for these weeks is to alternate 45 minutes of sitting meditation with either yoga or the body scan every day. In addition, participants are asked to notice and log when they have difficult communications with others and

record their reactions to these. The idea is to attempt to bring mindfulness into our stress reactions by using mindfulness of body or breath, thus transferring the practices to daily living.

At this point (around weeks five or six) the participants attend a “day of mindfulness,” which is a single day, silent retreat. This day participants explore all of the aforementioned practices in addition to walking meditation, loving-kindness meditation, and other sitting meditation techniques. Week six’s regular session works with communications using Aikido (a martial art with no offensive movements, only responses that work in harmony with the opponent’s offensive actions [Kabat-Zinn, 1990]). Learning to work with the opponent becomes a physical metaphor for the ways participants can communicate without either being dominated by or dominating their speech partner. Week seven invites participants to begin to assume more responsibility and direction of their own practice at home and the homework is to do 45 minutes of practice each day – whatever the participant prefers, but without the MBSR CDs. The final and eighth week gives participants a chance to reflect on what their goals were for themselves in taking the MBSR course, what they got out of it, and how they plan on integrating the techniques into their daily lives. Throughout this class emphasizes personal practice and experience.

Because Kabat-Zinn started and continues the aforementioned MBSR program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, this program has been tested and researched extensively (see for example, Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992). MBSR has become a widespread model for mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs), such as Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which can be found in all sorts of medical and psychological practices (e.g. Black et al., 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). However, it is not clear that the secularization of Buddhist teachings and techniques can still maintain the nature of the original teachings. In particular, although these techniques might

be beneficial, they may lose the transformative outcomes for which they were originally intended (Nelson, 2012; Purser & Milillo, 2014).

3.2.3 Secularized Mindfulness in Public Schools

In recent years, mindfulness practices have been introduced in K-12 educational settings in a variety of ways and with different target audiences (Erricker & Erricker, 2001; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Schoeberlein & Koffler, 2005). Mindfulness practices are being used with school administrators (Fabian, 2013; McDonald, 2012) and teachers to help them deal with the stressors of the job and be more present to students (e.g. Bernay, 2012; Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011). In addition, mindfulness practices are being introduced to students in order to help them in their social and emotional learning, increase attention, promote academic achievement, and reduce misbehaviors (Erricker & Erricker, 2001; Schoeberlein & Koffler, 2005; Schoeberlein & Sheth, 2009). Some of these programs are based on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (for example Saltzman & Goldin, 2008), some on Transcendental Meditation (such as Wendt et al., 2015), while others have developed their own, research-based curriculum (as in The Hawn Foundation, 2011).

One of the earliest researchers working in education with the concepts of mindfulness and mindlessness is Ellen Langer. Coming from a psychological perspective, she started identifying mindlessness and its opposite in the 1970s and went on to do experiments on how mindfulness and mindlessness relate to teaching and learning. In her book, *Mindful Learning*, she describes mindfulness as including: "(1) openness to novelty; (2) alertness to distinction; (3) sensitivity to different contexts; (4) implicit, if not explicit, awareness of multiple perspectives; and (5) orientation in the present" (Langer, 1997, p. 23). This is contrasted with mindlessness,

which "is characterized by an entrapment in old categories; by automatic behavior that precludes attending to new signals; and by action that operates from a single perspective" (Langer, 1997, p. 4). Langer's approach is explicitly secular.

In a later article she explicitly describes "mindfulness without meditation" (Langer, 2000). She is a proponent of her secular, psychological version of mindfulness in education. Langer (1997) proposes pedagogical techniques and strategies that would promote mindful learning. Although this does not seem to contradict the definitions of mindfulness mentioned previously in this paper, it is a very different approach from mindfulness programs that are coming out of the practices of Buddhist or Hindu traditions.

The Garrison Institute's Mapping Project (Schoeberlein & Koffler, 2005) provided the first systematic look at the state of mindfulness in education as well as an analysis of the research and research gaps in the field. The Mapping Project set out to identify the "current status of programs utilizing contemplative³¹ techniques with mainstream student populations in K-12 settings" (Schoeberlein & Koffler, 2005, p. 3), but also included teacher training programs as well. The use of the term "contemplative" in this report encompasses mindfulness, but seems to be broader. The authors explain their use of the word:

According to Tobin Hart, contemplation refers to "a third way of knowing that complements the rational and the sensory." In the context of the Mapping Project, contemplative programs are those with pedagogical approaches that primarily focus on

³¹I find that in the literature contemplative is used interchangeably with mindfulness. This does create some confusion because contemplative does have a more religious or spiritual connotation. In this dissertation I use the word to refer to the process of contemplation that I employ as my approach to this investigation, described in Section 5.3. Other authors, however, use it more broadly.

developing and deepening this third way of knowing. (Schoeberlein & Koffler, 2005, p. 3)

Schoeberlein and Koffler (2005) also use the term “contemplative techniques” in a very broad sense in their report, and defined these as those that "create the possibility of contemplative awareness by emphasizing mindfulness and focus on improving students' capacity for attention" (Schoeberlein & Koffler, 2005, p. 3). These authors explain that while other programs incorporate contemplative techniques, their goals might be social and emotional learning, not mindfulness. We can see from the beginning of the use of mindfulness in schools there is a gray area as to what exactly mindfulness in a school context is and what its origins might be. Not all the schools and programs that this report looked at are secular; some “contemplative” traditions are actually based in a religious school setting.

Nevertheless, in the context of public school education in the United States, mindfulness must be a decontextualized, secular practice to gain entrance and acceptance. Even then, it does not always escape scrutiny as “religious.” The *MindUP* curriculum for elementary aged children is championed by Goldie Hawn and is research/brain-based. It appears to me to be entirely secular. However Wilson (2014) introduces a critique that has been raised of *MindUP* as subversively preying on children with a hidden Buddhist agenda. In fact one Christian web site had the following warning about it:

MindUP is nothing more than occult/new age meditation; specifically a Buddhist/Catholic contemplative hybrid – secularized and camouflaged by allegedly scientific brain research. It is simply using occult practices to effect [sic] behavior modification in children. (Jeffries, 2014, para. 1)

It and other mindfulness-based curricula (including yoga) have been removed from schools where parents expressed similar concerns, often about violations of church and state.

This sort of concern spurred mindfulness in schools researcher and advocate Patricia Jennings to write an article entitled *Mindfulness-Based Programs and the American Public School System: Recommendations for Best Practices to Ensure Secularity* (2015). In it Jennings urges mindfulness program developers and teachers: “It is critical to the success of the mindfulness in education movement that (mindful awareness practices) delivered in public educational settings conscientiously avoid any elements that are associated with religious and/or spiritual language, trappings, and belief” (2015, p. 2). Jennings however does not suggest that the origins of these programs be hidden. Instead she recommends, “that educators be especially careful to ensure that the nature of the practices they are introducing is indeed completely secular and science based, and ... that the rationale for such practices is based on science, rather than belief” (2015, p. 2). Jennings does not want her recommendations to suggest that the practices are therefore void of ethics because they are removed from the religious contexts. She asserts, “Educators can link practices to the secular ethical framework found in educational settings (e.g., the golden rule)” (2015, p. 2). There is a clear concern and debate about what is and what is not Buddhism in the mindfulness movement at large, and in schools in particular. Yet even in her advice to be purely secular, Jennings’s reference to the golden rule evokes Christianity – which would also violate the separation of church and state, albeit more socially acceptably.

Again, I find myself in a space of not knowing. There are definitely mindfulness practices and constructs that are devoid of spirituality and religion. However, there is no denying the roots of many in Buddhism and/or Hinduism. Furthermore, there is real concern over how to retain the true transformative power of mindfulness and meditative practices when

extracting these from the contexts from which they came; and yet even these decontextualized, secular applications do show promise for relieving suffering. Since the goal of Buddhism is to relieve suffering, even in the most secular, de-contextualized forms there is the possibility of doing just that (this is explored further in Section 3.5). The following section will explore how mindfulness practices have been studied in scientific research in order to establish their role in increased health and well-being.

3.3 SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON MINDFULNESS

As I began to read the research on the mindfulness it appeared that most researchers took a scientific approach of experimental design, looking for cause and effect relationships. This line of research has convinced many of the merits of mindfulness practices and has created opportunities for the spread of mindfulness to arenas that put much weight on empirical evidence. In particular, I found it encouraging that the results in the studies provide data that support the implementation of mindfulness practices with young people as well as adults. However, this methodology takes a dualistic approach, separating out mindfulness into a set of techniques, removed from their context and wider frames of reference, possibly without knowing if what we are extracting is the essential ingredient (Germano, 2014).

As the field is relatively new, there is not much written before 10 years ago. The American Mindfulness Research Association provides a summary of the number of publications on mindfulness research in academic journals from 1980 to 2015 (see Figure 1 below). The first publication appeared in 1982; it was the only one that year. The following year also had a single publication. From then through 2007 there is a slow but steady increase in publications, with

2007 recording 87 publications. Then in 2009 there was a jump to 148 publications. The number again steadily rose until the final year, 2015, where it peaked at 674 (American Mindfulness Research Association, 2013). This boom in publications provides the backdrop of the discourse that has gone on in the area of my investigation – and it appears to be continuing.

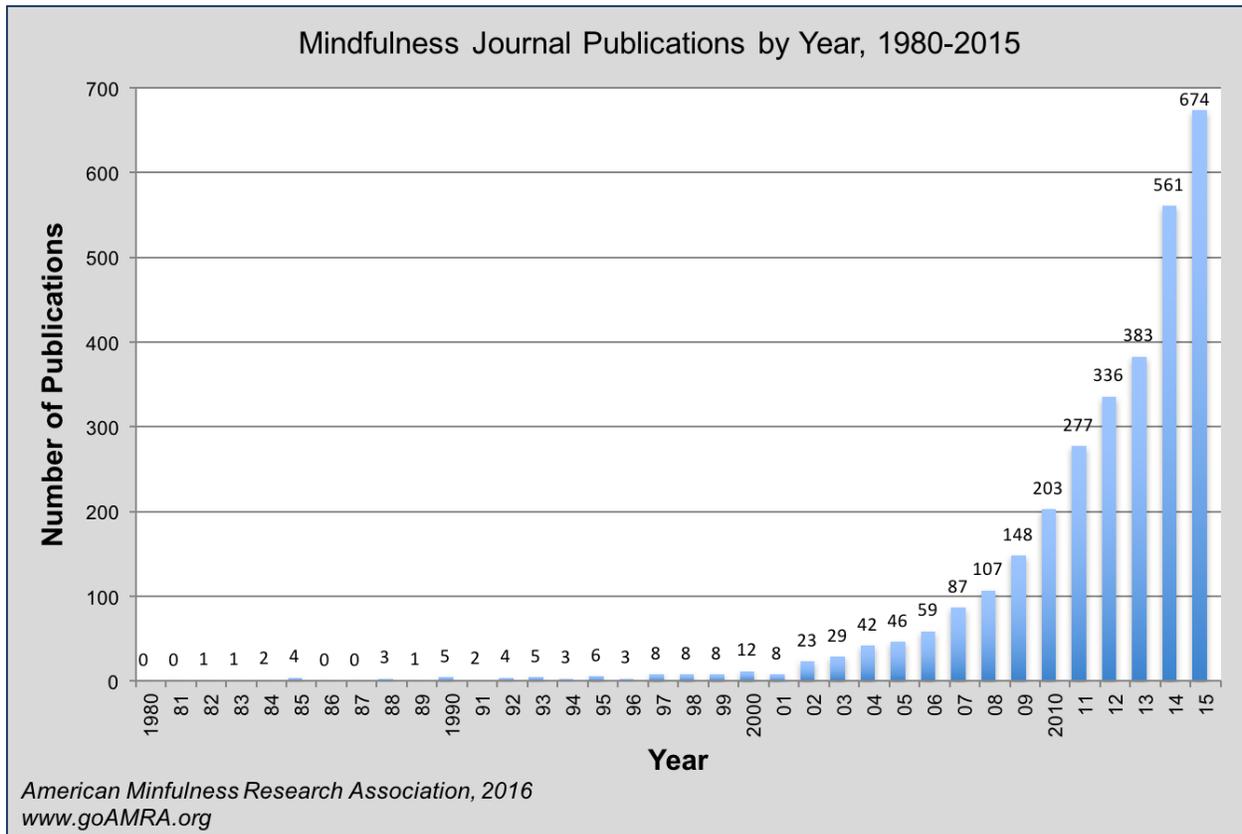


Figure 1: Mindfulness Journal Publication by Year 1980-2015

My exploration showed that the majority of research studies suggest that mindfulness practices in their various forms promote benefits in health and well-being, although there are some criticisms relating to methodology and contexts. To familiarize my reader with the findings, this section presents the results from seven publications that conduct meta-analyses or review multiple research articles on the various approaches to mindfulness; together these seven publications have examined more than 1,000 research articles. The vast majority of the

interventions are secularized, often medicalized, forms of mindfulness, a majority of which are based in some way on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (see Section 3.2.2).

One such overview of the research by Ivanovski and Mali (2007) reviewed in excess of 100 articles and found that mindfulness meditation practices reduced substance abuse and recidivism rates in incarcerated populations. Black, Milam, and Sussman (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of five studies, which measured physiological effects-- mostly cardiovascular functions such as blood pressure--of mindfulness meditation (including TM). In their meta-analysis of these studies, focusing on children and youth, they found small effect sizes ranging from 0.16-0.29.³² Supporting these results is another large meta-analysis of over 800 studies conducted by the University of Alberta (2007). These researchers also found that mindfulness meditation reduced blood pressure (MBSR and MBCT were measured together in this analysis).

Another review of 20 studies looked at a constellation of mindfulness practices including meditation, MBSR, and MBCT and found more widespread effects, such as: a reduction of anxiety, depression, and somatic distress; an improvement in self-esteem, sleep, executive function, attention, anger management, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms, and weight loss (Sibinga & Kemper, 2010). Studies that looked at TM alone also found it to be helpful in controlling blood pressure (Benson, 2001; Sibinga & Kemper, 2010; University of Alberta Evidence-Based Practice Center, 2007). Moreover, Sibinga and Kemper (2010) found TM to aid students in the reduction of absenteeism, school suspensions, general

³²Effect size calculations compare the difference between means (in experimental studies one would be a control/comparison group and the other the treatment group). The closer the number is to 1, the larger the effect size, i.e. the greater the effect of the variable being measured. If the effect size is zero, there is no effect or difference being measured.

anxiety, headaches, and to increase self-esteem, grade point average, work habits/cooperation in school.

When looking at MBSR alone, Ivanovski and Mali's (2007) review found that, in regards to treating pain, psoriasis, anxiety, and panic, participants were better able to handle negative emotions (including reactions to pain) and could modulate immune function, resulting in reduction of psoriasis symptoms. Black, Milam, and Sussman (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of studies looking at MBSR and MBCT and found an effect size ranging from a moderate 0.27 to a substantial 0.70 on psycho-behavioral variables. In contrast, Toneatto and Ngyuen (2007) examined 15 articles and found MBSR had no effect on anxiety and depression.

Although MBCT, meditation, and other therapeutic interventions were at times combined in the research results above, some studies look at these separately. For example, McGee (2008) explored the uses of mindfulness meditation in therapy to promote healing from psychiatric illnesses in over 100 studies. This author concluded that mindfulness meditation techniques used in the context of psychotherapy were effective in treatment of depression, anger, anxiety, stress, hypertension, addiction, insomnia, chronic pain, and neurosis (McGee, 2008). McGee (2008) does warn, however, that meditation could be dangerous for some psychiatric patients who are psychotic or who have character disorders. Khoury, Lecomte, Fortin, et al. (2013) also looked at mindfulness based therapy (MBT) in the treatment of anxiety, depression and stress and found effect sizes ranging from negligent at .07 to considerable at .55.

When examining the use of mindfulness movement techniques as an intervention the University of Alberta (2007) found that yoga led to greater recovery rates than exercise in the treatment of alcohol abuse and stress reduction. Sibinga and Kemper (2010) found that yoga aided in weight loss; improved balance and negative behavior and eating disorder scores; led to

better control of thoughts/feelings; and resulted in no relapse in sex offenders in treatment groups. Qi gong and Tai Chi were both found to lead to a significant reduction in blood pressure (University of Alberta Evidence-Based Practice Center, 2007).

Many of the abovementioned authors found that, in general, many studies being conducted on mindfulness are of poor quality, and therefore, inconclusive. The University of Alberta (2007) report also made recommendations for future studies suggesting, "more research should be done on the 'dose response' of meditation practices to determine appropriate study durations and to help standardize courses of therapeutic meditation" (p. 6). This report also suggests that more care be given in research design so that larger samples, control and not pre-post designs, and better descriptions of the interventions themselves guide future researchers. Another complaint of the authors was that detailed information on not only the contents of the treatments but also the level of training and experience of the therapists or teachers delivering the treatments was often excluded.

Limitations notwithstanding, when examining studies that met the aforementioned seven researchers' criteria for inclusion, all but one found significant effects in at least some of the examined variables. Findings ranged from improvements in blood pressure and stress reactivity to increased attention and memory capabilities, among many others. In fact, in more recent studies (some of which corrected the flaws commented on above) these results have continued to be supported. For example, Gregoski, Barnes, Tingen, et al. (2011) used controls in a study that found that breathing awareness meditation significantly reduced blood pressure in African American adolescents. Another recent meta-analysis of 35 studies which compared MBT with other psychological treatments found that MBT was significantly more effective than other treatment conditions ($p < .001$ for supportive therapies comparison group, and $p < .05$ for the

imagery/suppression techniques and the relaxation groups) (Khoury et al., 2013). A 2012 controlled study supported the use of the MBSR style body scan to reduce misperception of physical sensations (Mirams, Poliakoff, Brown, & Lloyd, 2013). Finally, a controlled trial involving just four days of mindfulness meditation training showed significant improvements in visual-spatial processing, working memory, and executive functioning in addition to reducing fatigue and anxiety (Zeidan, Johnson, Diamond, David, & Goolkasian, 2010). While there tends to be a general consensus that mindfulness meditation practices result in both psychological and physiological changes beneficial to practitioners, specific effects are still under study.

3.3.1 Physiological and Psychological Mechanisms of Meditation

One of the most exciting recent lines of research examines the mechanisms underlying the beneficial effects of mindfulness meditation practices (Malinowski, 2013). Brain imagery has been used to explore the differences in the neurophysiology of meditators vs. non-meditators. The two meta-analyses using tests to measure the brain's electrical activity found definite differences in the brain waves of meditators under a variety of conditions (Cahn & Polich, 2006; Ivanovski & Malhi, 2007). Cahn and Polich (2006) conducted a review of nearly 100 articles involving brain research on meditation. They found strong evidence that meditation changes both states and traits of the brain (a state is defined as “altered sensory, cognitive, and self-referential awareness whereas trait refers to the lasting changes in these dimensions that persist in the meditator irrespective of being actively engaged in meditation” [p. 181]). They noted that the differences in the results reported in the articles they reviewed might be based on the different forms of meditative practices being measured, in addition to the limitations of study designs and techniques. The majority of the changes found in both reviews were in the lower frequency brain

waves, typical of those effects seen when people are relaxed, at rest or sleeping. When researchers examined the brain anatomy of meditators and nonmeditators they found significant structural differences (Luders et al., 2012). The effect size of all these changes was correlated to the level of experience of meditation, i.e. differences increased as meditation experience increased.

In terms of the psychological and cognitive mechanisms at play in mindfulness meditation, McGee (2008) lists three primary consequences of the act of attending in meditation: (1) “an increased perceptual receptivity;” (2) “the segregation of awareness from the contents of awareness,” also called disidentification, where “the empty self is disidentified with the contents of awareness;” and (3) “concentration” (p. 32). There are also secondary consequences of mindfulness meditation. According to this research these include: “increased cognitive flexibility” and, due to the nonjudgmental attending inward, meditators develop enhanced self-awareness where “attending to their experience is then an act of self care and self love and thus strengthens these ego functions” (McGee, 2008, p. 33). Other research has framed the core processes of mindfulness practices as emotional flexibility, increased attention and cognitive flexibility, with the outcomes of meditation being heightened physical/mental wellbeing and enhanced behaviors, such as acting flexibly, autonomously, and with awareness (Malinowski, 2013).

Malinowski (2013) asserts that even brief engagement in mindfulness meditation “significantly improves attentional control processes” (p. 2). The two basic components of mindfulness meditation that Malinowski believes are crucial to improving attention are focused attention and open monitoring. Focused attention is the aspect of meditation that requires keeping one’s attention fixed on an object, such as the breath. Open monitoring is the

nonjudgmental awareness of all sensations, thoughts or feelings that arise. Malinowski takes these two components of mindfulness meditation and maps them onto the different processes involved in paying attention. He then delves into studies showing what brain networks are in use during the different attentional processes and compares these with functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) of meditators. By so doing, he is able to show that the same brain networks are involved.

Although there is strong evidence that mindfulness practices and interventions (mostly based on MBSR) do in fact improve health and well-being in concrete ways, the research on these practices is still in its infancy. I found in the above review of the scientific literature that it has been difficult to measure the effectiveness of the treatment due, in part, to the range of mindfulness practices that exist, as well as the confounded nature of many of the studies' designs. Practices range from seated, silent meditation to chanting, to body-focused movement practices. In addition, a variety of different practices were each matched to various outcomes, ranging from physiological, psychological to behavioral, making comparisons across studies difficult. Nevertheless, nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment combined with focus on an object seems common to all.

In order to resolve some methodological and conceptual issues in the literature, researchers have explored the proposition that mindfulness is multifaceted by nature and therefore cannot be researched as a single construct. Even with this improvement, there is still a tendency in the literature to remove mindfulness meditation so far from its Buddhist origins that it may also be removed from the potential transformative effects. Purser and Milillo (2014) contend that although MBSR and MBCT were based on Buddhist mindfulness practices, "an accurate reading of Buddhist theories of mindfulness has been lacking, resulting in an extremely

selective and incomplete understanding” (p. 2). These authors warn that pulling out selective mindfulness practices and turning them into a self-help tool “runs the risk of being co-opted and exploited for maintaining the status quo rather than effecting transformative change” (Purser & Milillo, 2014, p. 2). In essence, they suggest that teaching people calming techniques to manage their stress or other ailments out of the ethical context of the original Buddhist teachings loses the original orientation “toward critical engagement, discernment, and reflection on the causes and conditions of suffering” (Purser & Milillo, 2014, p. 16). Caution is warranted in the application of this Eastern paradigm to our Western epistemology:

Enriching positivist Western psychological paradigms with a detailed and complex Buddhist phenomenology of the mind may require greater study and long-term direct practice of insight meditation than is currently common among psychologists and other scientists. Pursuit of such an approach would seem a necessary precondition for attempts to characterize and quantify mindfulness. (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011, p. 219)

These authors along with Germano (2014) believe that it is therefore essential that future applications of mindfulness practices incorporate not just the techniques, but also embed these in the larger context. Possibly, one that has at its core the ethical behavior and altruistic concern for all beings. Zajonc (2009) explains the hesitation to include such ethics as those found in Buddhist precepts in modern contexts, "In our own time the strict adherence to a set of precepts, no matter how carefully formulated and well-intended, rightly violates our sense of autonomy" (p. 24). Ethical considerations notwithstanding, the potential benefits that the research has found in these practices are real.

I also became concerned that transformative sides of mindfulness practices may have been lost. This echoes van Manen (1990), “We need to be reminded that in our desire to find out

what is an effective, systematic intervention (from an experimental research point of view), we tend to forget that the change we aim for may have different significance for different persons" (p. 7). I wondered if the scientific-rational and experiential-introspective approaches could be reconciled by exploring the breadth and depth of living life mindfully and then connecting lived experience with the literature.

Other researchers have called for the linking of mindfulness research more closely to the origins and traditional practices of mindfulness (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Nelson, 2012; Purser & Milillo, 2014). To this end, Kabat-Zinn (2003) reports that when brain researchers have included experienced meditators in research design, they have found that different meditative states identified by the subject, himself, actually yielded different brain activity patterns, which could be replicated at will by the subject depending on the meditative technique he was practicing. In past research, even if the type of meditative technique and aspect of mindfulness had been clearly delineated, the researcher still had to find a way to overcome the challenge of implementing a very Eastern philosophical and spiritual practice as an intervention in a Western clinical/secular setting without losing the original transformative power (Nelson, 2012; Purser & Milillo, 2014). Ironically, Kabat-Zinn (2003) (who, as described above, was responsible in large part for the modern wave of secularization of mindfulness practices) is very sensitive to this difficulty and cautions,

...it becomes critically important that those persons coming to the field with professional interest and enthusiasm recognize the unique qualities and characteristics of mindfulness as a meditative practice, with all that implies, so that mindfulness is not simply seized upon as the next promising cognitive behavioral technique or exercise, decontextualized,

and “plugged” into a behaviorist paradigm with the aim of driving desirable change, or of fixing what is broken. (p. 145)

Unfortunately, many modern scientific investigative models do remove these practices from their Buddhist origins in order to make them both measureable and palatable as interventions to the general Western public (Wilson, 2014). It is my opinion that researchers must find a way to bring the Buddhist conception of mindfulness, with all its multifaceted and ethical components, into their completely different epistemological way of approaching life’s problems. Baer, et al. (2006) believe that many misguided researchers have oversimplified the concept of mindfulness, treating it as a single dimensional construct (see also Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). Although I found many of the research articles to be helpful and their findings very exciting, the discourses I encountered were often disembodied and flat. I was realizing that this felt artificial and incomplete.

3.4 RESEARCH ON MINDFULNESS IN K-12 SETTINGS

As I began to read the research on mindfulness in education it appeared that again most researchers took a scientific approach of experimental design and the search for cause and effect relationships. This line of research has convinced many in education of the merits of mindfulness practices and has created opportunities for the spread of mindfulness to arenas that put much weight on empirical evidence.

One example can be found in a review of eleven quantitative studies that used mindfulness meditation, transcendental meditation, or the Relaxation Response as interventions with adolescents in schools (Wisner, Jones, & Gwin, 2010). Its findings suggested that

"meditation as a cognitive-behavioral intervention for vulnerable students, improves the physical, social, emotional, psychological, and cognitive functioning and has the potential to enhance psychosocial strengths and coping abilities" (Wisner et al., 2010, p. 150). This article also discussed how the mindfulness practices reviewed "increased self-esteem, (improved) emotional self-regulation, self-control, and emotional intelligence; increased feelings of well-being; (reduced) behavioral problems; decreased anxiety; (decreased) blood pressure and heart rate; (improved) sleep behavior; increased internal locus of control; and improved school climate" (Wisner et al., 2010, p. 152). The results in the included studies provide data that support the implementation of mindfulness practices with young people. However, this methodology takes a dualistic approach, separating out mindfulness into a set of techniques, removed from their context and wider frames of reference, possibly without knowing if what we are extracting is the essential ingredient (Germano, 2014).

With the plethora of potential benefits touted by the research, it is not surprising that educators, researchers, and policy makers are investigating how mindfulness can be applied to K-12 schools. One researcher working to integrate research in cognitive psychology, the brain, and mindfulness practices is Daniel Siegel. He views clear connections between these fields and education. He states, "working together, ancient wisdom, clinical practice, neural insights, and inspired teaching may go hand-in-hand to enhance the lives of this and future generations" (Siegel, 2007, p. 256). The Mind and Life Education Research Network (2012), headed by Richard J. Davidson, states that the changes to neural substrates and psychological functions caused by mindfulness practices could reap the following potential behavioral outcomes for both educators and students: enhanced engagement, learning, well-being, prosocial classrooms, and contributions to the world. In this way, mindfulness could be an effective intervention used not

only to promote the well-being of all individuals in schools, but also to enhance academic achievement, social and emotional learning, and the attention and engagement of students. Subsequent to the publication of their report, research in this field has boomed, as illustrated in Figure 1: Mindfulness Journal Publication by Year 1980-2015. This literature review now turns to what researchers have found.

3.4.1 Rationale behind Mindfulness Programs for Educators

The backdrop of what it is like to be a teacher in our society must be mentioned to properly frame the research on mindfulness for educators. Currently, there is an overwhelming problem with attraction and retention of qualified teachers. In the United States, “about 30 percent of new teachers flee the profession after just three years, and more than 45 percent leave after five” (Graziano, 2005, para. 6). In addition, roughly 40% of new graduates from teacher training programs never even enter the profession (Riggs, 2013). The exodus from the field is due to a variety of factors ranging from the overwhelming workload, lack of support, stress, pressures of accountability, and a lack of respect for the profession (Graziano, 2005; Riggs, 2013). Students can also feel the results of teacher stress. If emotionally exhausted and burned out teachers stay in the profession, they can create a class climate that is reactive and excessively punitive or where there is poor classroom management and much disruption (Jennings, Frank, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2013).

According to Palmer (1998) the crisis in education cannot be solved with organizational or structural reforms alone. He asserts,

In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and

revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends. (Palmer, 1998, p. 3)

Palmer (1998) believes that the inner lives of teachers must be attended to in order for any educational reform initiative to be successful. Without such a focus, he insists that teachers will continue to leave the profession and our schools and students will suffer. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) contend, “Emotional stress and poor emotion management consistently rank as the primary reasons teachers become dissatisfied and leave teaching” (p. 497). Failure to address these issues is therefore felt in classrooms and schools, but also at a societal level. Winzelbert and Luskin (1999) quantify this phenomenon of teacher tension and the resulting exhaustion as costing upwards of \$3.5 billion annually in the United States and Canada. The authors submit that the impact is felt in absenteeism, turnover, and poor job performance (p. 69). Therefore, the costs of teacher burnout and exodus have ramifications that echo from the individual student, to the local district, and also to the national levels and thus cannot be ignored (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013, p. 182).

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) review the literature that has linked teachers’ wellbeing to their classroom performance and has become foundational in this field. They demonstrate that having good social and emotional skills is characteristic of high performing teachers (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). They list the characteristics of social and emotional competency (SEC) for teachers as including: high self-awareness, high social awareness, prosocial values, responsible decision-making, and healthy emotional regulation (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The authors explain that self-awareness and self-management are crucial to teachers coping with the stressful situations found in the classroom (p. 497). In addition they build a convincing and evidence-based argument that the SEC of the teacher will influence the social and emotional learning

(SEL) of the students as well as the climate of the classroom. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) propose “The Prosocial Classroom” model, which describes how the SEC of teachers leads to a healthy classroom climate and improves student’s social, emotional and academic outcomes. The model suggests that the support and training in SEC for the teacher will impact the delivery and ultimate success of SEL for students, which establishes a healthier classroom climate, leading to improved academic outcomes.

Jennings and Greenberg’s (2009) work highlights the need for teachers to enhance their own SEC to be effective. They believe mindfulness-based interventions can be used to help teachers develop a mental set that can lead to effective classroom management (p. 511). In their landmark article they introduce the idea that mindfulness or contemplative practices (they use these two terms interchangeably) might provide the tools that teachers need to reduce stress, learn self-regulation, and develop compassion for their students.

3.4.2 Research on the Effects of Mindfulness for Teachers

In the last 15 years, teacher education and support programs for educators have begun to turn to mindfulness practices to provide teachers with the tools to manage the stressors in their jobs (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). This is a logical application of the research on the benefits of mindfulness practices on general health and wellbeing. For example, interventions such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) have been found to help chronically ill or depressed patients to reduce their pain and stress reactions, in particular (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Mindfulness practices can also improve brain plasticity, increase emotional self-regulation and help build attention (Siegel, 2007). These same benefits may transfer to professions where employees experience high stress and burnout, such as teaching.

Bernay (2012) identifies three ways in which educators are being introduced to mindfulness: (1) through their pre-service training programs; (2) through renewal programs, often part of staff/professional development; or (3) through other adult education or tertiary education, designed for the general public (p. 59). Within the scope of training educators in mindfulness practices Meiklejohn (2012) also identified three distinct purposes for the introduction of mindfulness to educators: first, mindfulness may be introduced for teachers' personal practice to improve their own wellbeing; second, teachers might be trained in mindfulness practices so that they can teach these directly to students; and third, teachers might be introduced to mindfulness so that they might better their classroom climate, management, and student outcomes. In programs designed solely to support teachers, themselves, impact on students is an indirect result of depth of practice, whereby the teacher embodies and models mindfulness throughout the day and is therefore more effective in the classroom (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Schoeberlein & Sheth, 2009). This section will explore those programs whose direct aim is to support teachers, whether or not they intend to indirectly impact students.

This review found six programs specifically designed for educators (both pre-service and/or as renewal or professional development), which have had research findings published in peer-reviewed journals. The studies with established educators demonstrate that benefits of mindfulness in adults that were discussed above, can also be found in this subpopulation of teachers. Where measured, increases in various aspects of mindfulness, self-compassion, efficacy, attention, and wellbeing were found. Decreases in stress, burnout, and negative psychological symptoms are also presented. In the qualitative analyses, teachers expressed personal satisfaction with the various interventions and even suggested that they noticed improvements in their classrooms.

In 1999, Winzelberg and Luskin examined the effects of a mindfulness intervention with pre-service teachers. Their pilot study used the Relaxation Response (originally developed by Benson, 1975), a meditation technique focusing on a sound, and three corollary attention focusing practices (mantra, slowing down, and one-pointed attention). The study involved 21 education students who were either assigned to the intervention or a wait-listed control group. Winzelberg & Luskin (1999) administered a battery of surveys, pre and post intervention, followed by a focus group conducted eight weeks later. Each subject in the intervention group attended four, 45-minute meditation and stress-response training sessions. The researchers found that the meditation group showed significantly reduced stress symptoms. However the intervention did not help manage anxiety levels, nor was there any significant change in teacher self-efficacy measures. The authors believe that since they conducted the study in November and December (the end of the semester for the students), the students' level of stress due to the demands of their coursework increased greatly just when their post measures were being taken. Therefore, Winzelberg & Luskin (1999) suggest that the timing might explain the lack of reduction in anxiety levels and they call for further research.

A second study examined the use of a Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE) program for in-service teachers (Poulin, Mackenzie, Soloway, & Karayolas, 2008). This program was based on the MBSR program, with the addition of a health and wellness component. The MBWE was offered as an elective course in a university's teacher training program. The intervention lasted eight weeks and asked participants to do 15-20 minutes of daily homework, with a CD that was provided. The 28 participants in the intervention were compared with 16 volunteers who enrolled in an active control (receiving relaxation training). Both groups took a battery of questionnaires pre and post intervention and were interviewed at 8

months post. The MBWE group improved significantly more than the control on measures of mindfulness, satisfaction with life, and teaching self-efficacy (Poulin et al., 2008). The authors felt that these findings demonstrated that mindfulness practices promote wellbeing and aid in both personal and professional measures, thereby promoting skills that could help deal with stress and burnout.

A pilot study later applied the aforementioned Jennings and Greenberg (2009) Prosocial Classroom Model. The study explored the possibility that professional development (PD) using mindfulness for teachers could increase teachers' social and emotional skills, sense of wellbeing, and subsequently improve their classroom presence and instruction (Jennings et al., 2011). The researchers developed a PD program for teachers called Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) in conjunction with the Garrison Institute. The PD was designed to reduce teachers' distress and promote wellbeing, motivational orientation, efficacy, and mindfulness (Jennings et al., 2011). To these ends, CARE's PD includes three components: emotion skills instruction, mindfulness for stress reduction, and training in caring and mindful listening practices.

This pilot was run as two studies: Study 1 involved urban teachers (n=31) from a low performing, high poverty school; Study 2 engaged suburban teachers (n=43) from a high performing, wealthy school and included a waitlist control group. Both studies administered a battery of surveys pre and post intervention. Study 1 included established teachers. Study 1 had statistically significant findings pre to post, with participants reporting that CARE helped in increasing emotional regulation and classroom management. Study 2, in contrast, included 11 established teachers and their student teachers plus 21 student teachers (Jennings et al., 2011). Study 2, which also involved control groups, found that the experimental group had a significant

treatment effect on the Problems in Schools (PIS) motivating total score. Although self-report of satisfaction with the program was high, no other significant treatment effects were found in Study 2. Jennings, et al. (2011) believe that the suburban educators stress was low to begin with, therefore the impact of treatment was not as extensive as that on the urban educators, whose daily stressors were higher. In addition, student teachers (who comprised the majority of the participants) do not have to face their classrooms alone, having much more support built in than a fully certified teacher (Jennings et al., 2011). The differences in populations of the two studies may well explain the differing results.

Based on the work of the pilot study in Jennings, et al. (2011), a second, more extensive study was conducted to test the effects of CARE on educators (Jennings et al., 2013). The PD program's timing was revised slightly based on the feedback of participants in the 2011 pilot. In Jennings et al. (2013) CARE was offered as an intensive 30-hr program, presented in four day-long sessions over 4–6 weeks, with phone coaching between sessions and a booster held approximately two months later. The study involved fifty teachers who were assigned either to a waitlist control or intervention group. Teachers represented urban and suburban districts as well as various grade levels. All participants completed a battery of questionnaires pre and post intervention.

The findings for this intervention included: significant differences in some aspects of well-being; significant and positive intervention effects for teacher efficacy; significant intervention effects were found with regard to teacher burnout and time-pressure; and significant effect for observing, nonreactive and summary mindfulness (Jennings et al., 2013). From their study, Jennings et al. (2013) modified the Prosocial Classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) to propose The CARE Intervention Model. The Jennings and Greenberg (2009) work has set the

stage for researchers and teachers trainers to consider the implications of the SEC of teachers. Jennings et al. (2013) extends this to demonstrate how an intervention can support the teachers' SEC and improve student outcomes. This past school year "224 teachers from 36 New York public elementary schools located in the Bronx and Upper Manhattan participated in" a double blind, controlled trial of the CARE program (Breen, 2016, para. 6). Preliminary results show that

The classrooms of the teachers who received CARE were rated as more emotionally supportive compared to those who did not do the program. The interactions in the classroom were more emotionally positive and the teachers demonstrated greater sensitivity to their students' needs than controls. (Breen, 2016, para. 13)

In this way, Jennings and her colleagues continue to refine and research the CARE program to show that their logic model of first working on the resilience and social and emotional competency of the teacher does indeed create a healthy and higher achieving classroom.

In another study, Lantieri and Nambiar (2012) ran a randomized controlled trial to see if their Inner Resilience Program (IRP) for teachers would improve their teaching by reducing their stress and improving attention and relationship skills. The IRP was developed after the attacks of September 11th to help New York city's schools cope with the trauma of that tragedy (Lantieri, 2008). The IRP trains teachers, who in turn teach students, in contemplative education practices with the goal of helping children pay attention and manage impulsivity (Lantieri & Nambiar, 2012, p. 28). Similar to CARE, the Inner Resilience Program is founded on the idea that first teachers must be supported in their SEC and wellbeing before they can support children's SEL (Lantieri, 2008). Fifty-seven teachers of grades 3-5 as well as 855 students from New York City public schools participated in the study. The IRP intervention consisted of the following for teachers: weekly yoga classes, monthly meetings, a weekend retreat, and training

and support in implementing the curriculum for students. The researchers used a battery of surveys pre and post for teachers and students. The results of the study showed that teachers felt reduced stress, increased attention and mindfulness, and greater relational trust. Students felt they had more autonomy and influence in their classes and reported a positive impact on student wellness (Lantieri & Nambiar, 2012). This program is being introduced in a variety of school settings across the country including in Ohio, where it is currently under study as well (Ryan, 2013).

The final study of mindfulness with teachers this review considered was of the Modified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course (mMBSR) (Flook, et al., 2013). The researchers modified MBSR for the teachers so that it included more sessions (for a total of 26 hours of group practice) and varied lengths of home practices. Flook, et al. (2013) ran a pilot study with 18 experienced elementary teachers, who were assigned either to the intervention or a waitlist control group. They conducted observations of classroom teaching practices and administered computerized attention and emotion regulation tasks. Finally, they also conducted saliva sampling for cortisol as a physiological stress index. In order to track home practice, subjects used logs to record compliance. Flook, et al. found “significant reductions in psychological symptoms and burnout, improvements in observer-rated classroom organization and performance on a computer task of affective attentional bias, and increases in self-compassion” (2013, p. 182). The intervention group also had higher cortisol in their saliva at post- test, indicating less stress at the end of the treatment period.

I have discussed six research studies into the impact of mindfulness-based professional development interventions for teachers. Although the number of subjects in most of these studies was small and there were problems with timing and subject selection, decreases in

indicators of stress and/or burnout in teachers were found throughout. In addition, when mindfulness indicators were measured there were significant increases in these as well. The studies and articles reviewed above suggest that teachers, through the introduction of mindfulness practices, increase their SEC. Therefore, they are better equipped to run their classrooms mindfully and also to teach mindfulness to their students. The researchers suggested that future studies need to (1) investigate why pre-service teachers do not see as much benefit as their in-service counterparts and (2) use active controls as opposed to wait-list control groups to see if the effects hold in that more rigorous research condition.

After reading and considering the research on mindfulness interventions with teachers, my search did not uncover any deep accounts of the experience of bringing mindfulness to the classroom. I needed to search further because what I did find had not represented the fullness of my own experience. Through conversations with other mindful educators I found alternative voices to this discourse. I found two studies that did include the teachers' voices and experiences with mindfulness in the classroom. Notably, one teacher training program which integrates mindful reflection has documented the student teachers' narratives (Kesson, Traugh, & Perez, 2006). These authors found that the process of allowing the teachers the space to reflect and give voice to their experiences was crucial to maintaining the teachers' ability to respond authentically to the children in their care. For these authors educational mindfulness "intertwines three elements: a focus on strong human values, a life of the spirit, and a commitment to putting into practice human and spiritual values" (Kesson et al., 2006, p. 1867). Each of these three elements is difficult to quantify, measure, and sometimes even name. This affirmed my own experience.

The second study is a recent dissertation that looked at the lived experience of teachers who were also mindfulness practitioners by Frias (2015). Frias (2015) noticed that the majority of the literature focused on mindfulness interventions with teachers who were not already practitioners and also focused on quantifiable data sources. To fill this gap, the author conducted phenomenological interviews with four participants who were already mindfulness practitioners. She found four themes that emerged across the interviews: (1) “the belief that mindfulness practices help them cope with the demands of teaching,” (p. 82) (2) “the emphasis on teacher-student relationships,” (p. 87) (3) “teaching as an act of care,” (p. 92) and (4) “a shared sense of isolation from their colleagues” (p. 98). This qualitative study allowed the teachers to reflect on the experience of bringing their established mindfulness practices to their professional lives. Her findings resonated deeply with me. I felt an affinity with the teachers she interviewed.

Finally, it is worth discussing two articles that do present the experiences of teacher practitioners. Walsh (2014) presents her reflections on college teaching, which explore “practices for opening the heart and offering compassion towards others and also myself in the context of teaching” (p. 14). She describes challenges that she has faced in the classroom, ways she has tried to remedy difficult situations, and how “the contemplative practices with which I have engaged for many years are calling me to be more compassionate towards myself as a teacher and, in turn, towards my students” (Walsh, 2014, p. 15). Walsh uses vignettes to explore her lived experience as a contemplative practitioner bringing her practice into her teaching. The second article, “A Curriculum of Miracles” (Seidel, 2012) is an exploration of how an elementary teacher brought a meditative approach to her classroom. Seidel (2012) reflects on how schools view students through a lens of deficit and decided that she needed to create her own curriculum – “A Curriculum of Miracles” – based on the belief that all of life is a miracle. Seidel (2012)

explains, "The curriculum has no time to make children feel bad about themselves, about who they are, about their capacities as human beings. It only has time for having love, for being creative, for full and whole days of living life" (pp. 276-277). Both Seidel (2012) and Walsh (2014) provide fleshed out depictions of what it means to bring one's mindfulness or contemplative practices into the classroom. In both cases the result is deeper love and compassion for the students and self, coupled with a more intimate experience of the pain and suffering of both self and other. Both these articles present much needed descriptions of the experiences of teachers bringing their practice into the classroom, I wanted to take what they did one step further in my dissertation.

3.5 THE COMMODIFICATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness meditation has gone from being a spiritual practice to becoming the latest self-help fad (Pickert, 2014). There has been a shift from a small number of students of the teachings and practices of Bhuddhism to a secularized mindfulness that is used in health care, business, education, sports, etc. (Batchelor, 2015). Wilson (2014) describes this boom as follows:

Mindfulness's mainstream success is represented in three different phenomena: the explosion of books with "mindful" or "mindfulness" in the title, the widespread appearance of mindfulness techniques in books with no outward connection to mindfulness, and the proliferation of trademarked mindfulness brands. (p. 40)

Professional athletes are using it: "Phil Jackson, the most winningest coach in NBA history, had used mindfulness practices with his players to clear their minds and increase their performance"

(Ryan, 2013, p. 19). In 2012 the Seattle Seahawks brought in a specialist to teach their players yoga and mindfulness meditation in order to help them have the ability to stay present in the moment; they subsequently won the Super Bowl in 2014 (Gordhamer, 2014). Companies such as Google are using it to promote the wellness of their employees (Kelly, 2012). Even politicians are touting its benefits and pushing for federal funds to be used to support research in the field and to integrate mindfulness into various social institutions such as the military and schools (Pickert, 2014; Ryan, 2013). In the United Kingdom mindfulness has even made it into parliament (MAPPG, 2015).

Alongside this boom in mindfulness practices, Section 3.3 discussed how the research into the effectiveness of mindfulness practices has also grown exponentially. Studies have found that mindfulness practices are a form of mental and behavioral training that can impact brain anatomy and psychological functioning thereby reducing stress and increasing emotional regulation, attention, executive functioning, empathy and perspective taking; mindfulness practices as an intervention in clinical medical settings (such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) have been shown to improve pain management, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, anxiety, depression, and immune and endocrine function (Mind and Life Education Research Network et al., 2012). With all the hype, it is no wonder that people are eager to try it and alleviate their suffering!

But what are people engaging in? Not all researchers actually describe what the mindfulness intervention that was applied actually is. Others use a very bare bones version. Businesses are selling mindfulness products that might not be mindfulness at all. Buddhist practitioners and scholars are concerned. One expression of this concern follows:

While a stripped-down, secularized technique -- what some critics are now calling "McMindfulness" -- may make it more palatable to the corporate world, decontextualizing mindfulness from its original liberative and transformative purpose, as well as its foundation in social ethics, amounts to a Faustian bargain.³³ Rather than applying mindfulness as a means to awaken individuals and organizations from the unwholesome roots of greed, ill will and delusion, it is usually being refashioned into a banal, therapeutic, self-help technique that can actually reinforce those roots." (Purser & Loy, 2013, para. 6)

Maybe the most extreme example of "McMindfulness" can be found in certain "mindful" products. Wilson (2014) cites the example of "mindful mints." The company's web page advertises the mint stating, "It's meditation in a mint!" (Good Earth Natural Foods, n.d.).

Mindfulness has gone from being a religious or spiritual practice to becoming a commodity. In my attempts to understand this more deeply I engaged in a series of emails with a friend of mine who studies this. Her explanation of this process is worth including here:

Commodification refers to the process by which an item's use value is converted to exchange value. ... When that shift occurs, an item becomes imbued with the logic of capital ... So, to give an example, a baby blanket has a use value of keeping a baby warm and secure. When it is, say, knitted by a grandmother, it only has use value (for human needs). But when a blanket is made in a factory (in exchange for labor) and is branded and distributed in the market, its use value becomes its exchange value (because it is now a commodity that the producer can profit from). (Clark, 2016a)

³³A Faustian bargain is one where someone would give anything to satisfy and desire that is not able to be satisfied.

How does this work with mindfulness? “In the case of mindfulness, this means that awareness and attention to the present moment (use value) become important to the extent that they can be sold (exchange value) on the open market” (Clark, 2016b, p. 6). Once something is commoditized, then commercialization is the next logical occurrence. “Commercialization is the process by which a product circulates and becomes visible in the market” (Clark, 2016a). Thus, mindfulness is available for purchase, and popular consumption, even in the form of a mint.

According to Wilson (2014) Buddhism has changed to conform to predominant social and cultural norms in every new place that it has entered. He suggests that our culture is so overwhelmingly consumerist that it is a natural adaptation of Buddhism. Wilson explains,

Given these general patterns in American culture, a Buddhism that holds to more conservative views toward Buddhist cosmology and related ideas is unlikely to attract significant converts -- indeed, it may face opposition from both competing religious groups and secularists. Thus many feel it is imperative that Buddhism be reinterpreted or presented in ways that are not too challenging to preexisting American norms and mores. (p. 46)

However, Buddhist voices are starting to sound concern at the extent to which the mindfulness movement has decontextualized the practices and fit them into what can be seen as an unjust system. One article alleged that Western Buddhism, “allows adherents to decouple from the stress, whilst leaving the causes of the stress intact: consumptive forces continue unhindered along their creatively destructive path. In short, Buddhism is the new opium of the people” (Vernon, 2011, para. 3). In a recent article Bhikkhu Bhodi (a revered Buddhist monk and translator of the Buddha’s teachings) is reported to have described, “Western Buddhism as a tool for making people accepting of corporate capitalism. This is because, Bhikkhu Bodhi explains,

Buddhism as it is presented in the West teaches that one should ‘accept whatever arises’” (Whitaker, 2015, para. 4). Bhikkhu Bodhi was responding to another esteemed Buddhist priest’s concern that the “Buddhist ethical framework is missing and is really needed for mindfulness to reach its true potential” (Whitaker, 2015, para. 2).

However, as Wilson points out, “Something about Buddhism made it available for appropriation and radical recontextualization, an availability not shared by most other religious practices in America” (p. 44). Meanwhile, many proponents of using mindfulness as a secular intervention claim that this is the Buddhist way to do things! Buddhism has a concept of “skillful means” (upaya) which infers that a practitioner could use means that do not seem true to the teachings, but would nonetheless result in the liberation of some beings and therefore be acceptable due to the end result (Sivaraksa, 1992). Using this concept, the father of medicalized mindfulness claims that his secularization of mindfulness is the best strategy:

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) was developed as one of a possibly infinite number of skillful means for bringing the dharma into mainstream settings. It has never been about MBSR for its own sake. It has always been about the M. And the M is a very big M. (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 281)

Which then begs the question: “Is mindfulness, by the time it is being presented by people without Buddhist teaching credentials in a purely secular manner, in fact still Buddhist? Is it religious or not?” (Wilson, 2014, p. 66). Can it be separated from Buddhism entirely if in fact the very secularization is a Buddhist’s “skillful means?” Wilson answers his own question: "The simple truth is that terms like religion, spirituality, Buddhism, and secular are judgments of qualities and value, not inherent categories existing somehow prior to their application by

individual observers" (p. 60). So it appears to be an open question in the literature – and remains one for me as well.

The conversation around how to engage with the mindfulness movement and the transformation of Buddhist practices has been confusing and painful for me. As Clark states,

While Buddhists might argue that we should just stay out of the whole mindfulness market, it's not that easy. We are already, inextricably a part of it. Because the Buddha originated the practice of mindfulness, and those who follow the Buddhist path have served as arbiters of its meaning for centuries, we are firmly embedded in the discursive and material struggles that accompany its transformation across space and time. (2016b, para. 7)

McMindfulness may be here to stay. The question, however, is if, in certain applications, that is the best packaging.

4.0 BRINGING MINDFULNESS TO MY SCHOOL

Moments of connection
Moments of laughter
Moments of sadness
Love of the work
Curiosity
Introspection
Try, and try again
Show care
Build trust
Connect the inner and outer worlds
Teaching

(Cohen et al., 2012, p. 43)

Part of the journey of my dissertation was to share my practice with the other teachers and students in my middle school. When I returned from my sabbatical in the fall of 2014, I did a presentation during staff development time about what I had done while on sabbatical and what the research on mindfulness had taught me. In it I described the potential benefits for both teachers and students. I also talked about my own experience of personal transformation and

how mindfulness practices had helped me to change my relationship to my thoughts and especially life's difficulties. I ended that presentation by offering to lead meditation at school with staff. My principal had given me a space to meditate with others and there were around 15 folks who expressed an interest.

Being able to meditate at my school had a huge impact on my own integration of mindfulness into my professional space. I had explicit permission to bring my practice into the school. This helped me feel that the school was a sacred space of practice. I felt grateful to have a space to sit at school before I had to engage in the hectic day at school or after school. However, the presence of the physical space to meditate did not prevent me from being alone in practice. The reality was that very few teachers came to the before and after school sessions which brought on some sadness. Although many folks expressed interest they also were so stressed and strapped for time, that they just could not make it. Most morning sessions there were two regular attendees, but no one showed for most afterschool sessions. I made the decision that I would just sit regardless. On the days that I meditated alone, I imagined sending out my positive energy to the rest of the school. It was a kind of tonglen for the building – I would take in the stress and busyness that was preventing folks from coming to meditation and send out the willingness, ability, commitment, and the benefits to all my colleagues. Even still, I was alone much of the time. It was not just that I was physically meditating alone, but also that I felt alone in this project of bringing mindfulness to my school. I can now take heart in knowing that the experience was common with the participants of Frias (2015) as well. Frias found that the teachers who she interviewed also shared a sense of isolation from their colleagues. This aloneness is exemplified by an interaction I had with another teacher as recounted in the reflection below.

4.1 CONVERSATION WITH A TEACHER

Most folks are attracted to mindfulness practices because they are suffering and want to find a way to relieve their suffering. This was true for me. However, this creates a sort of paradox because mindfulness is a practice of being fully present just to what is happening right now. So, striving to be or feel something different than what is happening right now is the opposite of just being present. In meditation there can be no other goal than to be present – even if there was a goal that got us started. Suzuki Roshi (2011) states, "the result is not the point; it is the effort to improve ourselves that is valuable. There is no end to this practice" (p. 30). I found myself face to face with this paradox: I wanted to meditate with my colleagues at school because I had the hope of helping them! Yet, having this goal often took me out of the present moment experience of just meditating at school (as discussed above). I also was not sure how to explain this paradox to my colleagues, who had goals of their own. This became a dilemma for me that I was not sure how to deal with, let alone explain to my colleagues who were inexperienced in the practice. I reflect on the lived experience of this paradox here.

Although barely 40, Gabriel has struggled with high blood pressure and now takes medication for that condition on a daily basis. When I had done my presentation I mentioned that meditation had been shown to help with that. Interested, Julie asked me if I could offer meditation in the afternoons, after school, since it was just too hard for her to make the early morning sessions. Gabriel said that would be better for him as well. I said I would send out an email to the whole school and see if anyone else would be interested and what days would work for folks. Around fifteen teachers and one administrative assistant replied favorably to this idea, with most folks selecting Thursday as the day they could come. I mentioned this to Gabriel and he was excited about coming to meditation. "Hey!" he said. "I could bring my blood pressure

cuff and we could all take our blood pressure before and after. I know I can lower mine through breathing exercises!” My heart sank. I said, “That is not the point.” He looked confused. I was not sure how to explain to him that the positive effects of meditation may or may not come about, but that there is no goal, no attainment, nothing to seek after. There is only path. I felt I lacked the skillful means to explain.

How do you make someone in our society understand that the seeking out of a specific result is counter-productive? How do you explain that the positive health benefits may or may not come about, but that it is the training of our minds to be gentler with ourselves and others that is most important? It is finding loving kindness for all beings that is the core practice. The breath focus is a technique. The peaceful abiding and the calm or even elated state that meditators achieve sometimes are all just possible side effects, but not any reason to pursue it. We meditate to meditate and to learn how to be a bodhisattva. Why would we care about our blood pressure before and after? That might just be setting himself up to be disappointed one day when there is no drop – maybe one sitting with a particularly fierce monkey mind his blood pressure could go up! Would he then think that he was wasting his time? Would he then be turned off to meditation and think it’s not for him? I did not know how to convey all this to him. I walked out of the room crestfallen. How do I integrate my practice into my interactions with teachers? How do I share that meditation transforms your life, but not because you seek transformation? How do I bring people to meditate but not set them up to believe it will solve all their problems?

I did not find the way to convey any of these thoughts to Gabriel. He never did come and meditate with us, although Julie did. I meditated at the school twice a week – once before school and once after – for a year and a half. Sometimes I meditated with another person or two.

Most of the time, I was alone after school. This reflection shows the conflict I have felt between wanting to share the benefits of meditation practice with others and not wanting to trivialize practice into a technique or intervention that only provides a certain effect. I was living the huge tension between wanting to benefit others and maintain the integrity of the practice to ensure the full transformative and liberating potential of the practices.³⁴

4.2 BRINGING MINDFULNESS TO THE STUDENT BODY

Another result of the presentation I gave to staff was being invited to talk at the planning meeting of the group of teachers who run the character development/anti-bully group. This group designs the program at our school, which includes sessions for the whole school twice a month. One of the guidance counselors invited me because she saw the fit between mindfulness and what they were doing with character education and empathy building. At that meeting I very briefly explained mindfulness to the group for those who were not at my presentation. I also showed them two curricula I thought might integrate well: *Learning to Breathe* (Broderick, 2013) and

³⁴One of my readers had a very strong negative reaction to this section and the one that follows. In her comments she asked if the whole project of bringing mindfulness to my school was just my attempt at proselytizing, which was why I did not have great participation from the teachers (who maybe were turned off by me and my offerings). She asked if I made any attempt at understanding others' perspectives. I would like to address these comments here. My introduction of mindfulness to my school was always done in a completely secular way without any intention to convert or proselytize Buddhism to anyone. My intention was to bring mindfulness meditation, a well-supported intervention for reducing stress and improving wellbeing, to my colleagues. My disappointments were not at the lack of "conversion" of people; instead they were at my own failure to find skillful means to benefit others. The pain of this experience was also part of witnessing how stressed and overbooked people are. Many teachers mentioned their desire to come to meditation, but they never felt they had the time to do it. The workload and structure of the school day did not allow for it. It is, however, important to note that bringing even secularized meditation or other mindfulness practices into a secular space can evoke the reaction of my reader. To some degree this might be true of any intervention or program that a teacher wants to share because it has worked for her. Mindfulness is frequently suspect because it is an internal action that, on its face, may seem self-absorbed or self-indulgent, and more so because of its association with spirituality in general and Buddhism in particular.

Mind Up! (The Hawn Foundation, 2011). They really liked *Mind Up!* My principal said, “I even like the name!” The teacher leaders also seemed to be happy to have a set curriculum to draw from as they had been inventing things on their own for 3 years. I was excited about the opportunity, but not sure how it would play out.

The group decided that mindfulness would be the focus of at least one of the two sessions per month. The idea of mindfulness would also be introduced at an all-student kick-off assembly. I would help coordinate this. The group’s model is that two teachers design each lesson and then work with student leaders who then present the lessons to the student body. Since the student leaders are the presenters, I had to first work with the teachers who are coordinating the lessons, who in turn would train the student leaders, who in turn would train the rest of the student body. No one else in the school was a mindfulness practitioner. The following reflection on one of the lessons sums up the difficulty of such a program.

The challenge I am experiencing is bringing mindfulness to the students when the lessons are being filtered through another set of teachers who are not mindfulness practitioners. The program is set up to have two teachers who are responsible for each month with each month having a different theme. I am the one who is supposed to help incorporate the mindfulness piece with those teachers. The difficulty comes when there is a lack of coordination or communication, as I experienced this past month.

I have tried to be proactive in contacting the teachers ahead of time and getting them some materials that they can use to incorporate mindfulness into their month’s lessons. However, as no one is really familiar with mindfulness, I need to provide some education. Seraphina (the guidance counselor) and I had talked through how mindfulness fit with the

themes and discussed possible activities. I needed to communicate those and schedule a time to sit down with the teachers ahead of each month's sessions.

The first month (October) had a theme of positive attitude. This worked really well as an intro to mindfulness. I basically planned out the first lesson through a PowerPoint to be used for the single session that month. Then, I sent it to the coordinators, Seraphina and Anna, and they provided feedback and helped to tweak it and improve on the lesson. I felt satisfied with the brief introduction that was made. November's theme was respect and Seraphina and I decided that the Mind Up unit on perspective taking would work well for that month. We met with Stella and Tessa, who were in charge of that month, and talked through the mindfulness part and from there they drafted a power point, sent it to me, and I tweaked it and sent feedback. They put the final touches on it for the lesson. In both instances I also came to the F.O.R. student training session to provide help and support with the mindfulness portion of the lesson.

When it came time to plan the December lesson, I took the same approach. I sent ahead the lesson Seraphina and I thought would line up nicely with the theme of Integrity, but because it might not be entirely obvious to someone who is not familiar with mindfulness, got in touch fairly early to see if we could meet with Jennifer and Leah to plan the lesson with them. We picked a time to sit down, but when that day came one of the teachers (Leah) had a bit of a crisis getting to school and arrived toward the end of the meeting. So, that meant that only one of the teachers (Jennifer) really had the chance to meet with me and talk through/understand the mindfulness piece and how it fit with the topic. Jennifer said that she would fill Leah in. On top of that, even though I offered to help further, meet again, and/or help to design/edit the PowerPoint, etc. the teachers did not take me up on the offer and did the rest on their own. The

result was that there was a kind of disconnect between the mindfulness part and the rest of the lesson. The link between mindfulness and the theme of integrity was not clear.

The worst part of this experience for me was the anxiety and tension it created for one of the teachers and how, at a certain point, she felt like I was judging her. As always, I went to show up to the F.O.R. students' training the week before the lesson (even though I had not even seen the lesson) and only Leah was present – Jennifer (the teacher who had been at the initial meeting) had taken a personal day that day. Although it seemed that Jennifer had designed the PowerPoint, Leah had written up the notes for the F.O.R. students. On the way to the F.O.R. student training Leah handed me a copy of the PowerPoint and notes for the students. Before I could look at it she tried to explain to me (as we walked down the hall to the meeting) what they had decided to do. Although they had introduced a mindful listening activity (with a gong), I did not hear any of the ideas about connecting mindfulness to integrity in her description. What I heard was the analogy of taking a moment of mindfulness as “taking a time out” like when kids are bad when they are little. Leah saw my confusion on my face and immediately took it as judgment, got a little huffy and said, “Well it is what it is at this point.” As we sat down I looked through the PowerPoint and saw that there was a slide that tried to put the information about how we react to our own thoughts and how we can use mindful awareness to choose our behaviors. But this was a separate add-on and not integrated with the other activities which addressed integrity. The presentation did not relate the mindfulness of thoughts with choosing to react and act in ways that align with our values, thus being a person of integrity. Fortunately we had a few minutes as students were entering and signing in for me to say to Leah, “Hey the part about the thoughts is here, we just need to connect it to that other activity. And I think you

just did not focus on that when you were explaining it to me a minute ago.” I tried to validate her. I tried to seem happy about it, even though I was really concerned.

On top of that, it triggered my worst fear about bringing mindfulness to the school in this way. Because there were so many teachers implementing the mindfulness without any real mindfulness experience or training of their own, I feared the experience for them and for the students would misrepresent mindfulness practices.

I was living the much larger discussion and debate in the field of mindfulness right now. Who can teach it? Is it simply a set of techniques? Must it be a way of life? What does it mean to secularize it, extracting certain practice from their larger context? This is reminiscent of a conversation I had recently with a friend. Her mother is from India and was trained as a yoga instructor in India. The friend says that her mother gets really upset with the different forms of yoga, like “hot yoga” and “power yoga” because they have turned yoga into an exercise or work out. Yoga, according to her mother’s way of seeing and experience it, is a way of living, not a set of exercises or techniques. This is very much akin to my experience of mindfulness. Although there are mindfulness techniques (and yoga postures) that might bring benefits in and of themselves, they are devoid of the deeper and more transformative meaning of mindfulness as a way of living.

Buddhism has three parts: meditation/mindfulness (practice), ethics, and knowledge. This is reflected in the Eight-Fold Path which can also be divided up in these three ways: First, wisdom (prajna) = right view and right intention; Second, ethical conduct (sila) = right speech, right action, right livelihood; Third, meditation (samadhi) = right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. In this way, mindfulness is just one piece of a much larger puzzle. In and of itself, it may not be enough to bring about real transformation and liberation from suffering.

On a more personal level, this whole interchange was upsetting not just at the level of fearing that I am somehow involved in a big experiment that might corrupt, misconstrue or misrepresent the dharma – and this is no small thing! But as difficult as the task (i.e. the representation of mindfulness practices to a whole school via people who have no clue what mindfulness practice are) is to deal with, even more difficult is dealing with my own insecurities and self-criticism. I felt awful that Leah felt judged by me. I felt horrible that she felt like she had not done enough, or a good enough job. I only want the teachers that work with me to feel supported and validated, not insufficient and criticized. At the same time, they had not followed through. The lesson was not a good application of mindfulness. That is reality. It is also true that I felt disappointed by them and worried about the misrepresentation of mindfulness.

This journey requires that we forgive ourselves and others. At the very least, the students heard that there could be some connection between mindfulness and integrity – even if what that means was not clear. Isn't that enough for right now?

4.3 ISOLATION

By the end of my year back from sabbatical I realized that the model of trying to bring mindfulness to the students through teachers who had no idea about mindfulness was not the way to go. Very few folks were showing up for meditation and many of the folks who were supposed to be bringing mindfulness to the students did not have the time and/or desire to become familiar with mindfulness themselves before presenting it. There has to be a commitment on the part of the faculty and administration to practice themselves. Most importantly there has to be time carved out in the busy school day or year to allow teachers to try mindfulness practices and begin

to see the benefits, themselves. Over and over again teachers told me that they had no time to come and practice, even if they had the desire.

This process was very helpful to me in that it showed me through direct experience that there really first needs to be administrator buy in and participation to support the full implementation of a program. Although my principal had given me a physical space to meditate and permission to explore integration of mindfulness for students, he was not at all interested in any practice for himself. He was also not able to create time in the schedule for teachers to explore practicing mindfulness.

From the time of my return after my sabbatical, I spoke to upper administration about other ways to bring mindfulness to our district. I also asked for their support of my own continued training in mindfulness and meditation. There was no direct support (either through time or money) from administration. I was told that it was not part of the current district initiatives and that there were no budget lines from which money could be spent to support this. These interactions were always disappointing. The disappointment was personal – I felt unsupported in my own path. But the disappointment was also greater than just my own journey in my specific school district: I felt that the public school system did not tangibly support the wellbeing of its employees and the social and emotional development of its students. I realized that my school is not unique. I started to ask myself how I could make a difference in this system. How could I do the work of supporting teachers and students in this way?

This section described how I was attempting to bring mindfulness practices to my colleagues and students at an institutional level, while also personally trying to embody the practices in my spaces and specifically in my teaching praxis. It is in this milieu that I found

myself also exploring the research question for this dissertation. In the next section I describe that inquiry process.

5.0 EXPLORING PRACTICE IN PRAXIS

"To pose a question with sincerity, you need to suspend all expectations as to what the answer might be. You need to rest in a condition of unknowing, vitally alert to the sheer mystery of being alive" (Batchelor, 2015, p. 11).

McDonald (2012) quotes Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), "research is meant to be transformative, and that we do not merely analyze or study an object to gain greater understanding, but instead struggle to investigate how individuals and groups might be better able to change their situations" (p. 35). Along these lines my research also explores how I incorporate mindfulness (which has been transformative in my life) into my praxis as a teacher and researcher.

With the boom of scientific research into the effectiveness of mindfulness practices to cure a wide variety of ills, the human, experiential, and transformative sides of mindfulness practices may have been lost. As van Manen (1990) states, "We need to be reminded that in our desire to find out what is an effective, systematic intervention (from an experimental research point of view), we tend to forget that the change we aim for may have different significance for different persons" (p. 7). This project opens a dialog between the scientific and contemplative approaches by exploring the breadth and depth of me living my life mindfully in the classroom.

5.1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Buddhism positions meditation and mindfulness (which lead to clear seeing and insight) as a means of liberation from suffering. My experience of mindfulness meditation practices has been personally emancipatory. Extending this idea, the current exploration of integrating mindfulness practices into my teaching practice is situated in the understanding that the work of the teacher is to help her students free themselves of suffering. This is embodied in the Buddha's Four Noble Truths with their goal of freeing individuals of all suffering.

Hence, the educational process of creating more just, compassionate, and sustainable societies is about individual and collective awakening (or revelation) and gradual unfolding to what already is, but has been obscured. In Buddhist traditions, mindfulness meditation is one of the practices to achieve the goal of personal freedom and subsequently alleviate the suffering of humankind. (Eppert et al., 2015, p. 284)

By alleviating our own suffering and getting in touch with our basic goodness, teachers can then work to liberate the students in our care.

In other words, with trust and confidence in basic goodness, healing and transformation happen organically. This emphasis on acting without fixing, controlling, dominating—this emphasis, in other words, on active 'nonaction'—is quite different from how social action and transformation are commonly regarded. (Eppert et al., 2015, p. 284)

Eppert shows how the goal is not to transform society directly, but to transform the individual practitioner by freeing her of suffering. The individual's relationship to others, in turn, will be transformed and have a domino effect eventually impacting society.

Buddhist cosmology expects that our individual actions will impact our larger world because "we are all connected and interdependent. What one does will affect everything and

everyone else, and what everything and everyone else does will have an effect on each individual" (Thich Nhat Hanh & Cheung, 2010, p. 7). Just as in the earlier story about Shambhala (see Section 2.3: JOINING THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR) where the Buddha taught king Dawa Sangpo how to bring enlightenment to the society he ruled, socially engaged Buddhists today are trying to create a more just and enlightened society (for example, see Sivaraksa, 1992). With this orientation I approach this research project.

5.2 EXPLORING HOW TO BRING MINDFULNESS TO INQUIRY

As I began to grapple with framing my dissertation research methodology, one thing was clear to me: I wanted to use mindfulness and meditation as my inquiry methodology. I also knew that the question I wanted to answer was: *What is the lived experience of incorporating my personal practices of mindfulness into my teaching and professional life?* Since I had come from a more functionalist research background I felt inadequately prepared for the task that I was undertaking. Even though I had taken qualitative research courses and had ethnographic research training, my previous framings of my own research in education had not been interpretivist. I began to look around for a framework I could use or an example I could follow.

My advisor, Dr. Cynthia Tananis, directed me to a few dissertations where educators had looked at their own praxis and also Garman and Piantanida's (2006) book, where authors of interpretive dissertations discuss their work and the struggles they had encountered. In one dissertation, my journey was foreshadowed, "rather than to a protected sanctuary of surety, my research paths instead led me to unexpected destinations— to places where the stability of my universe was even further disrupted; where the illusion of certainty made way for the inevitable

reality of uncertainty” (Stabile, 1999, p. xx). I resonated deeply with the doubts and difficulties portrayed by the authors in *The Authority to Imagine: The Struggle toward Representation in Dissertation Writing* (Garman & Piantanida, 2006). Even the editors described precisely my experience in their preface, "the challenge lies in grappling with one's own preconceptions and assumptions about what counts as legitimate dissertation research. A willingness to enter into that struggle, in our collective experience, creates new possibilities for imagining one's self as dissertation author and as scholar" (Garman & Piantanida, 2006, p. xviii). This struggle was an experience of groundlessness throughout this process: how do I legitimize and position my research?

My advisor had gone through a similar path in her own dissertation and asked me to read her work. She describes her research, "the phenomenon under examination is the nature of my evaluation practice, not the techniques or skills involved in doing evaluation, but rather the world view that underpins my thinking about what it means to be an evaluator" (Tananis, 2000, p. 1). In the process of examining her own practice, she comes to term herself as an "epistemorph" to capture her journey of "moving toward a more discursive evaluation practice while undergoing an epistemological transformation from a positivist/functionalist to more interpretivist perspective" (Tananis, 2000, p. 4). I too have had to morph my epistemological stance from one that is more functionalist to a more interpretivist way of seeing and writing about my experience and investigation in the process of the current dissertation. As with any transformation, the process has been difficult. I have not felt fully grounded in either camp or way of being – I am neither fully functionalist nor am I fully interpretivist. Again I find myself residing in a groundless place.

Another dissertation I read used a self-invented methodology that paralleled what I was imagining. I wanted to study my mindfulness in the classroom through the lens of mindful inquiry. Marilyn Llewellyn (1998) used what she called “spiritual inquiry.” She explains, “Spiritual inquiry describes both what was under study, my spirituality and pedagogy, as well as the manner in which I engaged in the study” (p. 14). Llewellyn (1998) also used contemplative writings as her texts. Llewellyn’s work echoed what I was doing; she was investigating the spiritual side of her pedagogy and created a methodology to be true to what she was studying in the methodology as well. This example gave me some ground to stand on – I could use the lens of my own practice as a meditator to examine my incorporation of mindfulness into my teaching.

To find a concrete example of how to do this, I turned to others who had written about mindfulness as inquiry. One text I found describes the relationship between Zen Buddhism and qualitative research (Janesick, 2015). Janesick affirms that one can take a Zen or contemplative approach to qualitative research and provides concrete examples and techniques for interviewing and analysis. This work did not, however, provide me with the framework or methodology for my study of my own lived experiences.

The other source that I found outlining mindfulness as a method of inquiry was presented by Bentz and Shapiro (1998). These authors laid an epistemological foundation for this approach stating, “our philosophy of research, which we call mindful inquiry, is a synthesis of four intellectual traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical social science, and Buddhism” (p. 6). Their work gave me an entry point to think about what I was going to do in my data collection and analysis. First, they describe how phenomenology and mindful inquiry align in that they both “take seriously the fact that we are conscious beings and that everything we know is something that we know only in and through consciousness” (pp. 40–41). Just as

mindfulness practices attempt to make conscious the often unconscious habitual patterns that cause suffering, "a primary focus of phenomenology has been to ... get ourselves out of everything we take for granted about the world and about ourselves" (p. 41). I found that other authors supported this interpretation of phenomenology. For example, Morehouse (2012) indicates that:

Phenomenological inquiry examines conscious experiences of individuals ... and their interaction in the world. A phenomenological perspective also sees experiences as embodied, embedded in the world (the lived experience) and as complex and inter-connective. The hermeneutic/phenomenological perspective privileges human agency, lived experience, practice, and interpretation in context. (p. 1)

Phenomenology offered a helpful perspective since I am examining the lived experience of my praxis of bringing mindfulness into my professional spaces. Yet, phenomenology alone is not mindful inquiry.

Mindful inquiry, as described by Bentz and Shaprio (1998), also incorporates aspects of hermeneutics, as both emphasize the study of texts, but with the addition of mindfulness this is expanded to include our understanding of our own existence and being. Van Manen (1990)'s idea of hermeneutic phenomenological writing aligns with my approach to mindful inquiry as well. He asserts, "The type of reflection required in the act of hermeneutic phenomenological writing on the meanings and significances of phenomena of daily life is fundamental to pedagogic research" (p. 4). This supported my approach of presenting my experiences in the form of contemplative reflections, which could be characterized as hermeneutic phenomenological writings. However, my approach is contemplative reflective writing, which is a very direct way to bring mindfulness to the hermeneutic phenomenological approach.

This research project has been informed by hermeneutics and phenomenology, but it is also situated in the realm of interpretive inquiry, which is not included in the Bentz and Shapiro's (1998) presentation of mindful inquiry. Morehouse (2012) explains the essence of interpretive inquiry as "a hermeneutic/phenomenological enterprise" with the primary defining characteristic being that the "interpretation is contextual, creative, conceptually aware, coherent, and critically reflective" (p. 4). As mentioned, the texts under consideration herein are reflective writings, which have come out of mindful contemplations. In interpretive research "text may take the form of vignettes, profiles, stories, media excerpts, theoretic insights, images, pictures, and memos, to name only a few products of inquiry. The concern here is that these crafted texts are capable of hermeneutic interpretations and are not generally used for reductive purposes" (Garman, 2006, p. 5). The importance of texts also lines up with traditional Buddhist ways of studying and exploring teachings, which incorporates textual analysis and debate around teachings – both spoken and written texts.

The third mode of mindful inquiry incorporated by Bentz and Shapiro (1998) is critical social science, which is based on "the analysis of domination and oppression with a view to changing it" (p. 39). According to Hattam (2004), "Liberation, for Buddhism, is about awakening the mind to its non-dual nature, whilst liberation for critical theory is about struggling over the social arrangements" (p. 22). In this way, Bentz and Shapiro's integration of critical social science overlaps with the Buddhist perspective on alleviating suffering, which I have taken. This third mode of mindful inquiry connects with the fourth, Buddhism, which "is a spiritual practice that allows one to free oneself from suffering and illusion in several ways, one of which is becoming more aware" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 39). As described above, the

intention behind this project and the integration of my personal mindfulness practices into my professional life is to help alleviate suffering – my own and others’.

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) go on to expand their four aspects of mindful inquiry into the "turns" of their spiral of mindful inquiry – each of the four has 3 to 5 turns, so that there are 16 turns total. Although I originally attempted to line up their turns of inquiry with my own methodology, I found that they were too cumbersome and lacked the sort of direct and elegant simplicity that sitting meditation practice offers. This is described by one Zen master as follows:

The important thing in our understanding is to have a smooth, free-thinking way of observation. We have to think and to observe without stagnation. We should accept things as they are without difficulty. Our mind should be soft and open enough to understand things as they are. (Suzuki, 2011, p. 105)

Suzuki (2011) also described this as having a beginner’s mind.

I wanted to use the same approach that I found so helpful in my sitting practice in my research. Janesick (2015) also believed that this type of Buddhist approach to inquiry matched well with qualitative research. She explains, “in qualitative research methodology, the beginner's mind is wiped clean of proving something, generalizing findings, or fitting them into a formula” (p. 21). Therefore, I abandoned the idea of an explicit road map (and mindful inquiry) as part of the methodology – choosing instead to rest within the groundless space of just being open in my practice. I am calling my approach a contemplative exploration as my main methodology is to contemplate both my research question and my reflections, as I describe in the following section.

5.3 CONTEMPLATIVE EXPLORATION

Because I could not hold onto any one existing methodological approach, I needed to devise my own. I am calling my approach a contemplative exploration. This is because I decided to sit and contemplate my research question, *What is the lived experience of incorporating my personal practices of mindfulness into my teaching and professional life?* I then wrote reflections from the space of contemplation. This required that I spend time with the research question and the events of my professional life. Contemplative meditation differs from traditional meditation in that it moves from focusing attention on the breath, to focusing on the experience or the words being contemplated. The instructions for contemplative meditation which I followed are:

1. “Calm the mind by resting on the breathing.”
2. “When you feel ready, bring up” the object of contemplation, which could be “a certain thought or intention in the form of words.” In my case, the object was my research question.
3. “Use these words as the object of meditation, continually returning to them as distractions arise.”
4. “In order to help rouse the heartfelt experience of their meaning, think about the words. Bring ideas and images to mind to inspire the meaning.”
5. “As the meaning of the words begins to penetrate, let the words drop away, and rest in (the meaning).”
6. “Become familiar with that meaning as it penetrates.”
7. “Conclude your session and arise from your meditation with the meaning in your heart. ‘Meaning’ is direct experience free of words.” (Mipham, 2003, pp. 227–228)

I followed these steps to approach the contemplation of my question around the integration of meditation practices into my teaching praxis. After each session of sitting and contemplating, I wrote a reflection that would most often be in a narrative form.

The incorporation of contemplative writing into research has been described by at least one other educational researcher. Pinar (1975) discusses how his practice of meditation influenced his approach to the research of experience via the method he termed “currere.” For example, during the second step of this method the researcher is encouraged to:

Sit alone, perhaps in a slightly darkened room, in a comfortable chair with a writing table and a pen. Close the eyes, place the attention on the breathing. Take a few slow deep breaths as these are comfortable. The point of these minutes is relaxation. After one is relaxed (if the subject has employed any of currently-available meditative techniques, s/he knows the desirable state). (Pinar, 1975, p. 10)

According to Pinar, this method allows the researcher to better view the present experience without the veil of the past or future obscuring reality. Learning of the similarity of currere to my contemplative reflective writing supported me in my chosen approach.

My contemplative reflections are also narrative descriptions of my experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that narrative is one line of inquiry that can incorporate “the continuity and wholeness of an individual's life experience” (p. 17). In fact, narrative itself can become part of the experience that is being studied. These authors explain,

Narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it. ... Narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 18)

When I sat in contemplation of my question, most often the reflective writing that came as my answer was narrative in form. In addition, looking mindfully at my experiences has involved an embodied view of experience. Writing the contemplative reflections also influenced my praxis. This new way of seeing and being in the classroom created a kind of feedback loop, where sitting with the question of how I embodied mindfulness in my praxis led to me being more purposeful and intent upon embodying mindfulness in my classroom.

5.4 CONTEMPLATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

As I began to interpret my texts, I revisited the approach and methodology I had originally planned. I found that heuristic inquiry is a close fit to what I am doing (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990). Douglas and Moustakas (1985) state that the starting point is “a crisis that created a problem” (p. 45) which I experienced when I returned from my sabbatical and began teaching again in the midst of designing a study for my dissertation. From there I went through heuristic inquiry’s first cycle of engagement: writing about my experience. All of last year was the first step of heuristic inquiry: Immersion - Indwelling, Self-search (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 45).

I then turned outward and searched for others who had taken a similar approach to my path and found a few pieces in the literature as my second step to engagement, that of acquisition (this, of course, overlapped in time with my reflections from stage 1, which were ongoing). During this phase I also engaged in dialog with Drs. Hyde, Tananis, Garman and others about my work. Douglass and Moustakas (1985) call the stage of getting data from others Acquisition.

This part of the journey involved looking for a way (methodology) to approach my own reflections (my data) to be able to enter stage 3, synthesis and realization.

I also found Zajonc's (2009) contemplative inquiry immensely helpful in shaping my thinking and approach. Zajonc describes the importance of contemplative inquiry,

In my life as an educator, scientist, activist, father, and writer, I have come to rely on contemplative inquiry as a trusted means of moving beyond brooding and intellectual analysis to what I experience as insights that bear with them the feel of truth, and which also have proven fruitful in life. (Zajonc, 2009, p. 16)

Zajonc validated my desire to use self-knowledge generated through contemplation to discover what it means to be a mindful teacher. Although Zajonc did not provide me with a method or analysis that I could transplant to my own study, his description of the how contemplative inquiry compares to scientific inquiry opened up a world of possibilities for me to explore. He explains,

Although it seeks for objectivity like conventional science, contemplative inquiry differs from science in a very important respect. Where conventional science strives to disengage or distance itself from direct experience for the sake of objectivity, contemplative inquiry does exactly the opposite. It seeks to engage direct experience, to participate more and more fully in the phenomena of consciousness. It achieves 'objectivity' in a different manner, namely through self-knowledge. (p. 35)

From the open space Zajonc had given me, I decided that to try to impose another's interpretation strategy onto my inquiry process was artificial. I returned to the contemplative meditation technique I had used to generate my reflections and used the reflections themselves as

my object of concentration. After engaging in the contemplation, I journaled about meanings, themes, critical moments, or anything that stood out or stuck with me.

5.5 PREVENTING SOLIPSISM THROUGH COMMUNITY

Early in the process of writing my overview for this dissertation, my advisor and other readers warned me of the dangers of solipsism. Honestly, this term and concept was totally new to me. I had to investigate and discuss this phenomenon and how to avoid it. Llewellyn's (2007) words describing her process helped me understand how dialog is crucial to this:

Through engaging in an on-going, extensive, critical, and interactive reading of the literature related to my study, as well as an exegesis of the text, I have been mindful of trying to avoid solipsism. Another attempt to avert falling into solipsism has been through entering into a deliberative process with others from whom I consistently solicited critiques. (p. 15)

Through the process of sharing my work with my friends, family, advisors, and study group members, I sought to ensure that my work resonated with other educators and mindfulness practitioners. I requested advice about how I was using Buddhist terminology. I asked teacher friends, who were also mindfulness practitioners, to read the work and see if my experiences rang true for them as well. I read and re-read my works over time, using my contemplative practices to try to dig deeper into meaning and understanding.

The process was lengthy and rigorous (it took over two years and many iterations). When, at a point towards the end of the process, I felt done with receiving feedback, my advisor pushed me yet again to send out the full draft to my study group one more time to be

sure my explanations of Buddhist terminology were clear to naïve readers and that my reflections connected deeply with others. Her concerns echoed van Manen's (1990): "Human science research as writing must indeed produce oriented, strong, rich, and deep texts – texts which invite dialogue with those who interact with it. ... Similarly, a phenomenological human science text invites a dialogic response from us" (p. 21). Likewise, my research design invited my community to participate in my process. "Thus research is first and foremost a community project, not a project of the academic disciplines alone (or even primarily)" (Lincoln, 1995, p. 282). I benefited from the input of many communities: my school, fellow graduate students, family members, other practitioners, sangha members, conference attendees, and educators. I discussed many of my ideas with these groups, which all contributed to my thinking, if not directly to my writing. Therefore, although this approach to research was highly introspective and personal, it was firmly embedded in a community of ongoing dialog and critique.

6.0 MAKING MEANING OF EXPERIENCE

"To dwell in emptiness brings us firmly down to earth and back to our bodies. It is a way of enabling us to open our eyes and see ordinary things as though for the first time" (Batchelor, 2015, p. 9).

In order to interpret my contemplative reflections, I again turned to my mindfulness practice. I approached them through sitting meditation and contemplation to identify the essence of what the lived experience of embodying mindfulness in the space of my classroom has meant to me. I have found two main themes emerge from my contemplations of my reflections on bringing mindfulness to my teaching: (1) I am more able to be open to all experiences and emotions and (2) I have had a deep experience of bodhichitta – an awakened heart. Coming from the place of openness and awakened heart makes teaching much more rich but at the same time also makes the painful parts of teaching more palpable. A natural part of working with children – actually all other human beings – is that emotions are brought up. In schools both students and teachers experience together joy, boredom, fun, stimulation, tension, pain, anger, anxiety, hate, love – the whole range of human emotions – that are all part of the beauty of being sentient beings. As a public school teacher, I am expected to manage my own emotions and those of my students in order to keep us all on the task of learning my specific curricular content. Yet at the same time I am charged with making a connection with my students in order to support their development

and learning. There is a tension between being open to the students and closing down the “unwanted” emotional reactions in myself and my students so we all stay on task.

After contemplating the reflections and writing up the themes that emerged, my advisors asked me to go back to the reflections and sit with them again. It was then that I realized that my mindfulness practices had provided me with the support to sit with the uncomfortable emotions and face my own shortcomings. The openness of my practice allowed me to see my areas of deficiency as an educator. This clear seeing often put me on the path to seek out other, more skillful means to deal with the difficulties I encountered. Instead of being stuck in my habitual reactions and ways of being, I had a fresh approach that allowed me to grow as a person and as an educator.

In this section, I present my contemplative narratives to relate how my mindfulness practices and the qualities of openness and *bodhichitta* appear in my professional space. I invite you into my experience. "Contemplative knowing ... is personal and experiential. Therefore, in order to communicate it fully we must find a way to lead others to the same experience. They too must come to 'see' what we have come to know" (Zajonc, 2009, p. 184). In order to help you see what I have come to know, I have chosen a sample of my reflections, described the mindfulness practices that supported me, and provide commentary to each. I include two reflections involving students and three involving teachers as examples of how *bodhichitta* (defined within the first story) has dominated my teaching as a result of my mindfulness practice. Throughout the telling, it will be apparent that *bodhichitta* can only be accessed through openness. The final reflection I present is more a narration of the frustrations that come out of the stresses of public school teaching than it is of a specific event. I also describe how the pain of certain experiences showed me my own limitations and shortcomings. This set me on the path of searching for more

skillful ways of being in my professional space. With each reflection, I also describe the tools that have been helpful to me in bringing my practice into my praxis and for managing the pressures of teaching as well as the broken heartedness that come with being more open in my school.

6.1 REFLECTION #1: BRENNAN

The first reflection I share here is one that exemplifies how being open leads to bodhichitta. In the comments at the end of this reflection I explain bodhichitta more fully and how it became a theme that emerged in my praxis as a mindful teacher.

Last year I kept seeing a sixth grade boy that always looked angry and seemed to always be “up to something.” Sometimes he was teasing other kids or at other times he appeared to be disrespectful to teachers or just, in general, had a scowl and angry demeanor. I had unconsciously decided I did not like this kid. He was also often unkempt – his hair needed to be washed and combed and his clothing looked crumpled. At the time, I noticed this reaction, but never dwelled too much on it. He was not my student after all, so I tried not to judge myself negatively for it, but just noticed my aversive reaction to a student who really had not done anything to me. But something in his presence rubbed me the wrong way and I could not shake that. That was very interesting and at the same time disturbed my own image of myself as someone who is open and caring – my story about myself is that I am too nice to ever hate anyone! So, a strong dislike for someone (especially a child) did not fit that story.

Sure enough, this school year he was on one of my 7th grade rosters and the feeling of not liking him came back to me immediately when I saw him walk through my door. The first part of

our year together provided me with the opportunity to deal with my own preconceptions and aversions. As part of my mindfulness practice I try to notice my aversions without judgment. This can be especially difficult when I disappoint myself or my idealized image of who I think I am or who I strive to be. Facing my own limitations can be very painful. I therefore held both my negativity and self-judgments in a cradle of loving kindness and worked with both in order to find the space within me to not react from that place of aversion and disdain. The awareness around the reaction to the student and how I respond to it inside myself was very important. First I had to notice how I did not like Brennan. Then, I had to notice my own inclination to feel bad about disliking him: I had to notice my own inclination towards self-hate.

At this point, I could have become so overwhelmed with the pain of not living up to my own expectations (and the expectations of the school system, my principal, my peers, etc.) that I might have repressed my dislike for him, put on the outward face of liking him, but been closed off to my own feelings. Teaching from the place of mindfulness, however, calls me to be open to all my feelings – positive and negative. If I shut off the negative, the positive also gets closed down, too. When I try not to feel my negative feelings towards students, then I can't get to my positive feelings because my emotions cannot be auto-selected.

When I saw Brennan in our first class and put a name to the face, I was surprised to find out he was the younger brother of a student I had adored. That opened up my heart just a tiny bit – I am always surprised by and curious about how siblings can be so different! He and his sister were very different. Talking to him about his sister and asking him about her broke through his rough exterior. His soft heart towards her showed through his tough exterior. Something in me was surprised. He did have a heart! He talked about her like an adoring younger brother – how can you dislike that? Then, every so often in class he would light up

when he talked. Seeing the smile on his face and hearing the excitement in his voice when he talked about, hockey, for example also began to endear him to me. He also responded to my interest in him. He still sometimes made “tough guy” comments or put on the cloak of “I don’t care about this,” but that seemed to be happening less and less as our year together progressed.

He was not doing so well in my class, so I pulled him aside and asked him to come for extra help, which (to my surprise) he did. But he was not taking the initiative on his own. I had to do the inviting. He was not consistent with work completion either and so when he reached the 3 missing assignments in a quarter limit, I contacted his parents (as is my policy). His dad got back to me and explained on the phone that he, himself, had never been a good student and that “the apple just does not fall far from the tree.” However, he was trying to let Brennan know that he wanted him to do better and so he had taken away Brennan’s I-Pad until he made up the work and brought his grade up in my class. Dad asked me to call him back when that had happened. I agreed. I pulled Brennan aside the next class and we devised a plan to work to get the I-Pad back.

He came and worked with me to complete his work and bring the grade up. When he had hit an 80%, I said, “Brennan how about if we call your dad together so we can let him know!?” Brennan said, “well he’ll probably be in bed.” It was 2:45 in the afternoon. I said, “Oh. Does he work nights?” “No,” he replied. “He does not have a job. He just sleeps all day.” There was a sad resignation in his voice and he kind of shrugged. I did not want to lose the chance to provide instant positive results for his efforts. So, I asked, “Well how about I email him? That way when you get home, you can have him check the email with you!” “Sure! That will work,” he grinned back at me.

In this brief interchange, my heart broke open for Brennan. I recalled how I had disliked this child that I had never interacted with. I remember asking myself: Why was he so angry and nasty to the other kids? Why does he always have a scowl? Why does he seem so devious and such a smart aleck? As soon as I saw his face and looked into his eyes when he told me that his dad does not have a job and just sleeps all day, I felt like all those questions were answered. Was dad depressed? A drug addict? Neglectful? All of the above? I did not need to know. The pain and sadness of this child was all I needed to understand. That was the origin of the tough guy act. There was the birth of the lack of self-care – he, himself, was not being cared for. There too was the need to make the snarky comment and empower himself. My initial dislike for the child had turned into compassion and a desire to care for the child.

I am sure that my ability to face my dislike of Brennan also was responsible for my ability to open my heart and feel compassion and love for Brennan. Had I not been able to tenderly work through my own pain and embarrassment about disliking him, I might not have ever reached a place of compassion and loving kindness towards him. I probably would have never seen past the tough exterior and greasy hair. This same dynamic has happened to me many times in my teaching career. A child that is initially presenting as a problem or an irritation to me becomes the object of my compassion and care. Those students who rub me the wrong way are the ones I most need to open my heart to. They are the ones who need the most and are often the ones who push me away the most as well.

This quality of opening our heart to the suffering of others is called “bodhichitta.” This word comes from the Sanskrit with bodhi meaning awakened and chitta being “heart-mind” (these are not separated into two concepts in Sanskrit). So “bodhichitta” translated literally as

“awakened heart-mind.” One very thorough definition of bodhichitta divides it into two types – absolute and relative. These are defined as:

Absolute bodhichitta is our natural state, experienced as the basic goodness that links us to every other living being. It has been defined as openness, ultimate truth, our true nature, soft spot, tender heart, or simply what *is*. It combines the qualities of compassion, unconditional openness, and keen intelligence. It is free from concepts, opinions, and dualistic notions of "self" and "other." *Relative bodhichitta* is the courage to realize this tender openhearted quality by tapping into our capacity to love and care for others. (Chödrön, 2013, p. 215)

When teaching, this quality of absolute openheartedness first opens our capacity to see the pain of those in our charge and then it evokes our compassion and stimulates us to care for them. Bringing an open heart to the classroom is the source of much joy and inspiration. This is for me what feeds my soul, as a teacher. Yet, teaching from this vantage point of the open heart can also be difficult and, as described above, painful. Once the heart is open, it is open to everything. That is where the relative bodhichitta comes into play: I must find the courage to keep my heart open in the face of all the pain I encounter—my own, my students’ pain, and my colleagues’ pain as well. This is more than a simple tension: It is heartbreak. That is the openness of bringing mindfulness practice into my daily life.

I also had to experience the heartbreak of my own disappointments with myself. In my experience with Brennan I had to be honest about my own dislike of a student and my own negative judgments. As a teacher I expect myself to like all of my students and to treat all students fairly. What do I do when I am not the perfect teacher because I dislike a student? How do I handle my disappointment with myself? The open-hearted compassion of bodhichitta must

be extended to myself as well. There must be the courage to see what is truly there in myself in order to be fully present.

The tools and strength I gain from my meditation practice allow me to do that. What exactly is the means to looking at the pain of our shortcomings? For me it is the equanimity that is cultivated during sitting meditation. When I meditate, the whole range of human thoughts or emotions might arise in me, but I continuously choose not to react or engage with them. I gently let them go and return to my object of focus, usually the breath. I give myself permission on the cushion to allow those experiences to be without any reaction or engagement. Meditation allow me to "move away from the undertow of destructive emotions and take up (my) place as a witness" (Zajonc, 2009, p. 28). Therefore, when in daily life afflictive or negative thoughts or feelings arise, I have the ability to just observe what is arising without following up with self-aggression.

6.2 REFLECTION #2: NADINE

Many issues came up for me as I returned to teaching after my sabbatical. I had undertaken to fully integrate mindfulness into my classroom but even after the year of study and practice I was not clear on how to do that. It felt like every intention that I set led not to an answer, but to the question of how to change my praxis in my current situation. My heart called to me to find better ways of communicating with my students; to be able to fully listen to each of them from the heart; to help them be in touch with their own basic goodness and to have the confidence to feel their full humanity. But that was so overwhelming: How do I fully listen to each student let alone get to know my students when I have nearly 200 of them? I wanted to allow the space for

students to have some sense of agency in my classroom. How do I give students more control over the learning process while still meeting national, state and/or district standards and requirements? I wanted to allow students to be their true selves, not just appear and conform in my classes. How do I allow students to be fully themselves and get to know them as the unique individuals that they are when I am required to “maintain control” of the classroom? I want to foster cooperation and not competition, but the kids themselves become very competitive. My search to grapple with these issues is encapsulated in one afternoon’s experience with a struggling student, Nadine.

Nadine came for tutoring with a friend (a wonderful student, Taylor). Another boy in the same grade was staying after school with me to work on the same material and Taylor agreed to review with both of them. They were working together fine until it turned a bit competitive and Nadine got insulting (calling the boy stupid, for example). I tried to intervene enough to try to redirect the name calling and insults, but not take over the study session all together. I was not successful because at one point Taylor told me that Nadine had flipped the boy off. I had to take Nadine into the hall and tell her that I was surprised by her behavior because it did not seem like the Nadine I knew. And that she knew that her behavior was not acceptable in my classroom and with me. I told her that if I had seen her flip him off, it would have put me in a particularly difficult situation as it is a clear rule violation and I would have had to write her up.

Her reaction was to tell me that the previous year’s Spanish teacher (my substitute) had written her up more than once, and so that she was used to that. She seemed to have bought into the picture of herself as the bad kid. I told her that I was really surprised that she would say that because that was never my experience of her from having taught her in sixth grade and that she was always sweet and nice with me and this was not the Nadine I knew -- she was better than

that. "It is just that room!" she lamented. "It still feels the same as when Mrs. O was there and when I hated Spanish." I reminded her that it was the same room as the year with me before Mrs. O when she never hated Spanish and I never hated her. I told her that she was also a good student who seemed to enjoy being in my room before Mrs. O. "But I hated it last year," she replied with tears in her eyes and pain in her voice. I said, "Well, we need to work on moving past what happened last year so you can pass the class and be happy Nadine again." She smiled at me.

As troubling as it was to hear her be demeaning to the other student, I tried to keep myself present with the compassion I felt for her sadness, frustration and anger at not doing well in my class. I tried to stay with my compassion instead of getting angry and accusatory. I tried to approach Nadine not in a disciplinary or controlling manner, but instead with loving kindness and a curiosity about how I could help her feel comfortable and kind again. It pained me to know that she was experiencing so much insecurity and upset about my class. I tried to stay in that broken-hearted place and reach out to her from there. It is a much more vulnerable place to come from than the place of authority and control that I have assumed with my students in the past.

This was not a magic wand that I waved and Nadine instantly improved, changed her ways, and got an A in my class. Instead, it was a slow steady relationship we built together. After a few weeks, I realized that she had stopped acting out as much. She still needed a lot of reinforcement and support throughout the year, but she did end up passing my class. We had ups and downs and I had to work at being present to both my feelings about her behavior and to her. The practice of mindfulness created an open space for me to choose my reactions to her and

work with her from a place of calm and support and not from a place of anger and criticism. I hope it made as much of a difference in her life as it did in mine.

From contemplating this and other interactions with students, I gained insight about my limitations in communication. This realization forced me to seek out mindful communication techniques. I remembered learning about (and the teaching about) Nonviolent Communication (Rosenberg, 2005) when I was working with the *Path of Freedom* (Crisp & Maull, 2012) curriculum in the jail. I decided to explore Nonviolent Communication further to see if it could help me improve in this area. I spent quite a bit of time watching videos about Nonviolent Communication and reading both books by Marshall Rosenberg, its author and teacher. Rosenberg's work transformed the way I heard myself and others communicating. He describes Nonviolent Communication as:

(guiding) us to reframe the way express ourselves and listen to others by focusing our consciousness on four areas: what we are observing, feeling, and needing and what we are requesting to enrich our lives. NVC fosters deep listening, respect, and empathy and engenders a mutual desire to give from the heart. (Rosenberg, 2005, p. 12)

I took the videos and exercises to a group of mindfulness for educators that I had helped found and for three months we all watched, studied, and practiced the techniques and concepts. I set an intention to bring my mindful awareness to my interactions and to use Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication in my praxis.

Bringing mindfulness into the classroom is not a formulaic process. It is more about being present to what is and responding from the place of loving kindness and open heart. I still wish I had a single answer, technique, or procedure that could transform all my students into

happy, cooperative, high achievers. Instead I only have a compassionate presence to offer to each situation as it arises and a willingness to be open to see and improve my own limitations.

6.3 REFLECTION #3: THE SCREAMING TEACHER

There are instances when I have felt so much stress or upset in my job that all I could do was use my mindfulness practice of breathing to help me through the upset of the moment. The following incident was one of those times. I am grateful to have a practice to deal with really difficult emotions in these types of situations.

Some people are so full of anger that their behavior becomes frightening. A teacher screaming at the top of his voice has to be scary for kids. This past week I could hear a particular teacher, who is always bound up by anger, screaming and screaming in the hallway. I was returning to my classroom to get to a class that was about to start. I couldn't hear what he was saying exactly, but the screaming was oppressive.

My first instinct was to keep walking away. I had to go back to my room anyway, right? I put my head down. I minded my business – I was not going down that end of the hall. Really, I don't want to be a victim to his anger! I feel my heart pounding. I feel my jaw tense. I feel the heaviness on my chest, making my breaths shallow and quick. It isn't my place to step in to protect whichever child was the victim of this outburst, is it? As I walked back to my room I remember the psychological study I read about so long ago in an introductory to psychology class. A woman was murdered gruesomely in a courtyard surrounded by apartment buildings – I think it was New York City. She screamed for help, pled for someone to call the police, cried out that she was being attacked. It went on for some time and many people heard this horrible

murder. But no one called. Everyone thought that someone else would call. No one wanted to get involved. It was just like that in the hall at school. Everyone was wincing. No one was getting involved.

What about all the other teachers who are on his grade level team and there in that hall with him? Why don't they tell him that they are not comfortable with his behavior? I am not on his team. I don't sit and have lunch and planning periods with him every day. They do. Why do they just sit by and watch this? It happens with some frequency. What about the kids? Don't they complain to their parents? Why don't the parents call and complain to the principal? If only they would, the principal could address this with the teacher. He is in the position of power over the teachers. He should stand up to this guy and let him know that it is not appropriate ever to scream like that at a student. I am not a principal. I don't have power.

And yet, no one seems to address this. It has gone on since he moved into our building three years ago. He oozes anger. His clenched fists and the vein that pulses at his temple shows how his temper is always cocked and ready to blow. That tension and the flash of anger that flits across his eyes put everyone on eggshells around him. No one wants to confront him... after all he is the union president.

But I hear him screaming down the hallway. I want to scamper away like a bunny. I know the student he is screaming at has nowhere to scamper to. Not today. Why is this okay in our schools? Why is this okay in our society? Why can't I put myself in between him and the children? And I ask myself, why would anyone let himself get to that point? The point where they are out of control; the point where the silliness, forgetfulness, or even rebellion of a twelve-year-old child provokes a tantrum in you. Then I feel compassion for the screaming teacher: he must be embarrassed, stressed, and tortured by being so full of rage. What is at the root of all that

screaming? Is there a 12-year-old boy locked inside him just crying out for attention and love? Or maybe that little boy was living in such an out of control world as a child that any little act now outside of what feels correct and predictable make the whole world seem to explode.

I breathe in for the screaming teacher's pain and suffering. I breathe in for the child being abused by the screaming. I breathe in for myself and all the other teachers and students bearing witness to all this. It is so hard to watch. It is so hard to stand by and do nothing. I breathe out to send the whole situation relief from the suffering of all involved. I sent peace and tranquility to the screaming teacher. I send love and a hug to the victimized child. I send forgiveness to myself and all the silent witnesses to this act of violence.

It was through my meditative practice of tonglen that I was able to process and transform what I was feeling. Tonglen is a Tibetan term which means “sending and taking” (Chödrön, 2008, p. 217). The purpose of this practice is to reverse “this process of hardening and shutting down by cultivating love and compassion” (Chödrön , 2001, p. 4). Our normal reaction is to close off when we are faced with uncomfortable situations or emotions, such as the screaming teacher I describe above. Buddhist practices teach us to move into the discomfort. For example, in his book *Smile at Fear*, Trungpa Rinpoche (2009) explains, “rather than taking an analytic approach to fear, you should just look at your fear directly. Then, jump into that fear” (p. 108). Buddhist practices give us techniques to work with these difficult emotions and tonglen is one that I have found helpful. Chödrön (2001) explains, “in tonglen practice instead of running from your pain and discomfort, we acknowledge them and own them fully”(p. 4). Then we take this one step further. She continues, “Instead of dwelling on our own problems, we put ourselves in other people's shoes and appreciate our shared humanity. Then the barriers start to dissolve, our hearts and minds begin to open” (p. 4).

I did what Chödrön (2008) calls “on-the-spot tonglen” for the teacher and the student involved in this situation. To do this, I imagined breathing in the pain, anger, fear (whatever emotions came to me as what these people might be experiencing) and sending them relief with my outbreaths in the form of calm, courage, patience, or whatever came to mind. That is the taking and sending – taking in the pain of other and sending out relief. I also did this for my own feelings of discomfort, fear, disgust, etc. I breathed in those uncomfortable feelings and breathed out spaciousness, forgiveness, and relief for myself. According to Chödrön (2008) doing tonglen on the spot takes intention, bravery, and training – it is not automatic. However, the results can include the greater ability “to experience the basic goodness of ourselves and others. ... Thus tonglen begins to ventilate our prejudices and introduce us to a more tender and open-ended world” (Chödrön, 2008, p. 109). It did not take away the pain of this situation, but the practice of tonglen softened my heart towards the screaming teacher. I had more compassion for him and also for that fearful, retreating part of myself.

Tonglen is one example of how I have begun to more fully integrate the meditation practices that have been taught to me at a meditation center and practiced on a meditation cushion into the everyday experiences in my professional life. This is a clear example of how I experienced the unification of the secular and the sacred. The result has been the courage to look honestly at even my unpleasant experiences, reactions, and limitations now that I have the tools to openly face the tender, broken heart within.

6.4 REFLECTIONS #4 & 5: THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Working to bring mindfulness to my professional presence did not only include working with students, but also has been a practice with my colleagues as well. The following two reflections exemplify how the qualities of openness and bodhichitta also were present in my experiences with my other educators.

6.4.1 Reflection #4 -- Do you give up on a child?

A fellow teacher comes to me and another colleague for help and to vent. “I don’t understand why we have the policy that kids can retake tests in this department. I have so many kids that just blow off studying and goof off because they know they can retake the tests later. They are creating a lot of problems in class with their misbehaviors and I am just sick of them. They are ruining the class for everyone else. They shouldn’t have the chance to go to the next level in the high school next year. They should repeat. This retake policy is making our class just a joke to them.”

The whole conversation made me sad. I felt myself grow tense and I had to focus myself to keep my tone of voice calm and tried hard to empathize with the teacher. She was suffering and struggling in her job – working with resistant kids is tough and frustrating. Yet, I was the one who started (some years ago before she was hired) the practice of letting kids retake tests. I did not judge her or feel attacked, but tried to clarify how I used the retakes and why I found them beneficial. I also tried to explain how I thought the practice lined up with the middle school philosophy and differentiating instruction for kids who take longer to grasp concepts or learn vocabulary.

There is more to say here, but I will sum it up by saying that the teacher had given up on certain students because they were too hard to deal with in her class and she did not want to afford them the “extra chances” to get the grade they needed to pass. She felt it was a disservice to the “good students” to allow the lower level students the opportunity to move up a level. What about the “bad” kids? Isn’t giving up on them a disservice to them?! I felt the pain and frustration of the teacher – we have all been there. I also related to her desire to protect herself from the pain of her own failure as a teacher – we can’t reach them all every time. I felt the pain of the students, alienated to the point where they have become the “bad” kids.

6.4.2 Reflection #5 – Do we give up on ourselves?

It is late March and about a month away from PSSAs.³⁵ An English teacher approaches me in the hallway on my way back to my room from bus duty. She asks, “Can you believe that a student stopped me just now and asked me which way he needed to go to get on the bus?!” I was puzzled, “Was he new?” “No,” she replied, with disgust in her voice. “And I am going to be judged by how kids like that do on the PSSAs next month! It is almost the end of the year and he still doesn’t know which way is which in the school, let alone is able to do some of the things required on this new test!” “Oh!” I replied, feeling her frustration and the hopelessness that she had weighing on her shoulders.

She is in a group of teachers that had the highest test scores in the state last year, but were told that they were not performing at the level they needed to be by the state’s criteria

³⁵ Pennsylvania System of School Assessment – the state’s standardized tests which fulfill the “No Child Left Behind” evaluation requirements.

because the students had not improved enough from last year to this year. Her cynicism is born out of this evaluation process, I guessed. Now she views the lower level students as the reason she and her colleagues are not “passing.”

Society has inadvertently created a system where the lowest level students, the “slow learners” are being viewed as impediments to teachers’ ratings. The irony of it is that the principals will often give the best, most gifted teachers the lowest students because they know they will have the most success advancing their learning. But this will make the best teachers look like the worst; those students starting off below the average won’t make enough progress towards the state standards. No wonder even the best teachers get frustrated. Prior to my mindfulness practices, living with the stressors would be my only option.

My meditation practice teaches me how to lean into the pain. Therefore, the only thing I found I could do is breathe in all of our pain: the frustration of the teachers I describe in this section, with limited energy and resources, the despair of the struggling students, possibly believing they are not smart enough, and my own sadness at seeing and living in the whole situation. This breathing in our shared pain helps us realize our interconnectedness; “We all know what it is to feel pain in its many guises” (Chödrön, 2008, p. 86). I had been in these teachers’ shoes, feeling like the expectations placed on me in my job are unattainable. I had also been in the shoes of the struggling student, feeling like I was not good enough. I then breathed out, sending all of us a sense of success and achievement. I tried to send out to all teachers and students a sense of our inherent worth and dignity. I felt the wish to alleviate the suffering of the teachers and students everywhere trapped by a system of education that sets us up to fail. In the midst of all this pain, there was an encounter of a calm place within.

6.5 REFLECTION #6: MANAGING NEGATIVITY

During the 2014-2015 school year I tried to find a way to manage the overwhelming experiences that sometimes come with being a teacher and also the broken heart in the classroom. This reflection illustrates the struggles that come with being an educator. After which I describe one mindfulness method I have found to help with these.

We all hear about the large percentage of teachers who drop out of the profession. We also hear a lot in the press about the pressures of being a teacher today. Usually I feel satisfied with my job but there are days that even sometimes turn into weeks when I feel like the job is too much. How do you cope with feeling overwhelmed? What happens when your co-teachers turn to you for a reason to stay in the field at a moment when you, yourself, are feeling overwhelmed? That has been my life at school the last couple of weeks.

I got a reality check on just how precarious the balance of home-school/work is for teachers when my family took a long weekend to attend a relative's wedding in New Orleans. We left immediately following school on Friday and came home on Monday evening. So, I only missed one day. And that day was not even a day of teaching – it was parent-teacher conferences. I had tried to work ahead as much as possible. I got my lesson plans done ahead of time. I sent copies to be made to the copy center. I even tried to get ahead in my grading. However, four whole days of not doing schoolwork put me so far behind in my grading, emailing, and phone calling that, three weeks later, I am still feeling overwhelmed. The feeling of overwhelm is not just about school. It is also about home. So many nights after school I have grading to do, so I tend to do a lot of house chores on the weekends. Therefore, when I lose a weekend the house starts to feel out of control, cluttered, messy.

The situation started feeling overwhelming the Tuesday when we got back. Instead of coming home at my usual time that day (with all the time that evening to tend to my house chores), I had set up parent-teacher conferences for folks who could not make it in to see me on the previous Friday (when the hours were only 12:00-3:00). I had sympathy for working parents and so I stayed at school, first with some students who needed remediation (they were with me until 4:30) then until 6:30pm to allow the time for parents to come and meet with me. I was glad to do it, but it was one more chunk of time out of my schedule. I was feeling like at any moment life was going to put that final straw onto the camel's back and I was going to be crushed under its weight.

Then Wednesday I had a class to go to at the meditation center – again it was wonderful, but another evening taken up and not free to catch myself up. It was another straw on the camel's back. Thursday night I had We-PEACE (a group for educators that I help facilitate). I am committed to working with that group, but again that made a whole week of evenings that had not been free. My co-facilitator was clearly agitated. She was having a tough time in her teaching job. She said, “my schedule at school is unsustainable. I have tried to tell my principal this but it falls on deaf ears. So, I asked him to write me a letter of recommendation. I cannot keep doing this at the same pace. I need to slow down.” I tried to give her love and sympathy, but my own load of straw was growing to be unbearable as well. I found no solace with the group, where usually I am rejuvenated.

On top of the crazy personal schedule, that week at school we gave a unit test to one of our grade levels. The amount of grading that goes into a unit test is huge. If you lose too many of your week nights and weekends, when can you grade? I have had other teachers tell me that they show a movie the class following a unit test so that they can grade during class time. I have

had one teacher tell me she uses her sick days when she is feeling overwhelmed and needs to catch herself up on all her grading! I have had another teacher tell me he intentionally divides his unit tests into two parts then gives them over two days – telling students to bring something else to work on if they finish early either day. During day two he grades part 1 and then only has half (part 2) to grade on his own time. I do not have this luxury because our tests include listening and speaking sections, which I must administer myself. I cannot “check out” of the classroom and grade. I suppose we could show a movie, but we’d have to try to find something that the students could do that related to our curriculum because we are so tight on time to get through all our material. There is the simple reality of the sheer volume of work involved with being a teacher.

Another part of the dynamic is the pressure I put on myself – this is like me piling on the straws myself. I like to turn work back by the next class or two, but sometimes that is not possible. Then I feel like I am not doing a good job. I am not providing timely feedback. I am not meeting the high expectations of my district and I am letting the students down. I am letting myself down. I am being very self-aggressive with this, I think.

In the middle of this another colleague, who also must have had a bad week, was complaining that the way this district handles foreign language (our subject) is the worst she has ever seen in any district she has worked in. She is ready to be done with teaching, she says. She does not want to feel unvalued anymore. She does not want to be subject to the unrealistic expectations of this district that so clearly does not understand foreign language pedagogy. I try to sympathize with her without taking on her attitude myself. I felt more straws being added to the camel.

Finally on Friday after school I had a bit of a respite. My daughter and I spent the evening watching a chick flick and eating popcorn. I passed out exhausted just after trying not to feel dread about my life, my job, everything. For a moment I relaxed and stopped the onslaught of straws piling up on that camel's back. Maybe I even took a few off.

A week after returning from New Orleans we gave another grade level a unit test (I was still in the throes of grading the make ups of the first set of tests). My teaching partner (who is also overwhelmed with the grading) texts me while I am getting ready to go to bed. He starts by saying, "I hate grading. I'd rather have a root canal." I tell him I am not done either, commiserating with him. "For as much as we work, the pay isn't really that great," he texts back. Turns out he went out with a friend who used to teach with him. The friend now works for Consol Energy and makes over twice the top of our pay scale, which neither one of us is even close to. My coworker took a pay cut to come to our district – they did not honor his time taught, started him out on step one even though he'd been teaching 10 years. He took it to get out of a tough inner city school where the foreign language program was being cut. The same year they hired a new PE teacher in our school district who is also the football coach – they honored his time taught and started him on step 10.

My friend texts again, "If I didn't have morals and values, I would do the same thing. He said I could easily start out at 120k being bilingual and having a degree in management... That is now two ex-teachers that have told me this. Ugh... I have morals, right?" I reply, "Would you love what you do?" "F- no," he replies, "but that money would be nice." He has four kids, the oldest about to start college. His wife is in early childhood education – which is worse off than we are in K-12. The conversation goes on between us. He declares, "In the end, I'd rather have my legacy. Be making a difference in a kid's life than money. You can't take (money) with

you, however your legacy lives on for generations. You know?” Was he convincing himself or me? I tell him “I don’t want to be a pawn making millions of dollars for an immoral corporation, like Consol.” He answers, “but it sure is nice to fantasize.” “Yep,” I agree, “I do it all the time, too.”

So, how do I bring my mindfulness to my stressed out feelings? How do I have a bad day or week or month without letting that infect my classroom presence? How do I feel like my day to day job is more than I can handle without letting on to the students that I would love to take a few days off to just catch myself up on life? In the past I had no tools to help me cope. I just forged forward, stressed out, reactive, and waited for the rocky times to subside on their own.

Nowadays, I sit on the cushion and try to focus my mind on my breath and let go of the feelings and let go of the storyline (Trungpa, 1973). I work with the feelings of sadness, of frustration, of heartbreak. You hold the difficult emotions in your arms and say “I know you are here my anger, I am here for you” (Thich Nhat Hanh & Cheung, 2010). You remind yourself that this too is temporary, as noted in the Buddhist teachings on impermanence (Rahula, 1974).

During my nearly two years of intentionally bringing mindfulness to my teaching, I was searching for some help for dealing with the overwhelm and pain of being so open hearted in the face of so much suffering. How can I manage the pain that comes up for me when I have three minutes between classes to pull it all together before my next set of students comes in? After watching a video of Roshi Joan Halifax I was inspired to look up her G.R.A.C.E (Halifax, n.d.) model for bringing compassion to interactions with clients (she works with hospice patients). I ended up using it during my year off as a way to bring mindfulness to my work place.

G.R.A.C.E is an acronym which outlines how a clinician can bring mindfulness into her practice with patients as follows:

G = Gather your attention: You can use this moment of grounding to interrupt your assumptions and expectations.

R = Recall your intention: Remember what your service to the patient is really about: to relieve the individual's suffering and to act with integrity and preserve the integrity of the other. Recall the felt-sense of why you have chosen to relieve the suffering of others and to serve in this way.

A = Attune by checking in with yourself, then the patient: First notice what's going on in your own mind and body. Then sense into the experience of your patient... Sense without judgment.

C = Consider what is going on by observing the present moment and letting insights arise. Draw on your expertise, knowledge, and experience, and at the same time, be open seeing things in a fresh way.

E.= Engage, enact ethically, end: allow for emergence of the next step

After discovering this, I realized that what I was missing was in the "E = end: allow for the emergence of the next step" followed by a restarting of the "G" – re-gathering my intention and starting over for the next class or student. Oftentimes I would have some triggering event in my classroom that would leave me feeling angry or upset. Then, when the next class came in (since I really did not have any break between most of my classes), I would still be in that triggered state. I needed a way to remind myself to re-center and let go of what just happened and be fully present to the class about to enter. I posted "GRACE" in my room where I would see it between classes to help me reaffirm my intention to bring my mindful awareness to each class, but only after some closure of what had just transpired. Sometimes it was just as simple as seeing

“GRACE” and taking a few deep, focused breaths to transition. I have been grateful for the reminder that I can let go and start fresh.

6.6 REFLECTIONS ON MINDFUL TEACHING

Parker Palmer (1998) talks about how all teachers feel afraid that they will be “found out” and that they are somehow “faking it.” He attributes this to the reality of how daunting and impossible the task of teaching is. That is how I feel, too, about teaching, but also about the dissertation process. I am afraid that the professors who are advising me and in fact anyone who might read my dissertation in the future will find me out. They will realize that I am an imposter – not a real, worthy practitioner of mindfulness who can successfully integrate mindfulness into her teaching practice. They will see the utter failure of my attempts to be mindful and present. Palmer was talking directly to me. I have his “trembling knees” as I approach this project. How can I do justice to my topic of mindfulness? It is with the huge sense of humility and limitation that I reflect on this venture. I am attempting to sit with the uncertainty and lack of confidence. I am allowing it to be. Or, as Thich Nhat Hanh suggests when he talks of anger, I am trying to hold that discomfort in my arms like a crying baby and soothe it. Fully present; Fully aware; But going forward nonetheless. I never have gotten the ground under my feet that I was looking for all along. I have only become more at home in this groundless space.

In this process my mindful awareness has brought me insights. Sometimes those insights have given me clarity about how to act at a particular moment. At other times insight have

brought about tenderhearted empathy³⁶ for another. More difficulty, those insights have sometimes shown me my own inadequacies: I have more awareness, but sometimes that makes me just realize how lacking I am in fully integrating mindfulness into my praxis.

Through my reflections I identified the following areas that I have wanted to be able to do better at. I am including the area and short reflections on each.

- Dealing with disruptive or really talkative students – *sometimes I feel like I can redirect them and include them effectively. I want to take an aikido class – I think the model of a martial art with no offensive moves fascinates me. Can we teach like that? Can we not ever be offensive with our students, only move together with them in order to work with their energies and transform those into productive, on task behaviors? Or maybe we need to look at our tasks to make sure we are harnessing the energies of the kids in the best way.*
- Making my classroom more collaborative and less competitive. *I have all these game ideas that pit groups against one another. How do I change that so that groups work together so everyone can win? I do that to a certain point, but I want to make that more of a focus – You win if you can help you partner win, too, kind of a design.*
- Getting to the place where my first reaction is one of compassion. *The application of mindfulness to my teaching is a work in progress – I am figuring it out as I go. I hope that I can be more successful as the years go forward, and that I can meet my own failings and successes with gentleness and equanimity.*

³⁶I am using this term in the spirit of Rosenberg's (2005) definition: "Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing. Instead of offering empathy, we often have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Empathy, however, calls upon us to empty our mind and listen to others with our whole being" (p. 104)

Pema Chödrön reminds me that I should be grateful for having the awareness now, but it is hard not to get frustrated. I want to skip the painful in between stage of seeing my failings and jump to just doing everything skillfully – my old mind pattern of perfectionism and self-aggression kicks in. The job of teaching is humbling because we are faced with so many challenges at every turn. Although my mindfulness has given me many tools to apply in my praxis as a teacher, mindfulness also opens the door for pursuing a path of self-development that will never end.

7.0 UNITY OF PRACTICE AND PRAXIS

The practical legacy of the modernist tradition is a compartmentalized, fragmented way of learning and teaching, dualistic alienation of body from mind, emotion from intellect, humans from nature, and art from science, whereas the basis of contemplative understanding is wholeness, unity, integration. (Bush, 1997, p. 78)

Throughout the journey of this dissertation I have struggled with what it means to bring mindfulness into secular contexts – especially a public school. I found mindfulness showing up as a product, thus turning a spiritual practice into a commodity to be bought and sold. Mindfulness is often referred to only as a secularized practice that could bring many health and/or emotional benefits. In fact, in order to be palatable for use in secular institutions, such as schools, mindfulness has been completely extracted from its Buddhist origins and stripped of any reference to spirituality. "Mindfulness in its original context existed in a complex, self-reinforcing web of Buddhist cosmological, devotional, philosophical, psychological, ecclesiastical, and soteriological concepts and practices" (Wilson, 2014, p. 45). For many Buddhist practitioners, including me, taking mindfulness out of the Buddhist context makes it less powerful and calls into question its overall usefulness to relieve suffering.

These issues have not only come up in my exploration of the literature and research on mindfulness, but also came up for me personally during my reflections on integrating my

mindfulness practices into my teaching praxis and school. My own concern is that the reduction of mindfulness to emotional regulation techniques or psychological interventions may in fact reduce the effectiveness of mindfulness in bringing about the full transformation or liberation of individuals. In his audiobook, *Mahamudra for the Modern World*, Reginald Ray (2012) discusses the tension between wanting to adapt Buddhism to fit our modern world, but not wanting to do so at the expense of losing the depth of the teachings. Discussing his own teaching he suggests, “It is not going to do you any good if I water the tradition down and adapt it and change it to the point where maybe it becomes more palatable within the modern framework, but it loses its real power” (sec. 17). This dissertation, in part, has been an attempt to situate my own mindfulness practices as a Buddhist mindfulness practitioner into the secular context of the classroom. Yet, just like Ray, my experience has been that snippets of mindfulness extracted totally from a depth of practice probably are not enough.

Personally, I struggled with what it meant to bring mindfulness into my daily life and how to actually bring mindfulness into a secular space in an appropriate way. As described by Fenner (1994),

an earnest spiritual seeker quite legitimately and appropriately finds her- or himself wondering from time to time whether the best or most profitable spiritual activity is to do their sadhana--their insight meditation, zazen, koan practice, etc.--or transform their regular activities into a spiritual activity by adding the "right" type of attitude or motivation, or just do what they are doing without any concern at all that it is or is not a "spiritual" activity. (sec. 9)

Through this journey, I have discovered that it is the practices themselves that have been most helpful. I experienced the integration of the spiritual and the secular as personally liberating and

unifying. In addition I found that there is one unifying and underlying theme to my various experiences of bringing mindfulness to my professional life: bodhichitta or an awakened and open heart. This open heart has enabled me to have much more compassion for my colleagues, my students and me. Sometimes, the open heart causes deep pain because I am so open. At times, trying to live in the state of an open heart has made the institution of a public school district an uncomfortable place to reside. Nevertheless, an open heart has also brought much joy into my life and classroom as well.

Just as the duality and oversimplification of the research on mindfulness turned my initial enthusiasm into a need to fill a gap, the impersonalization of education in public schools has made me feel out of place. Decisions in a public school are made frequently based on best *business* practices. Schedules, activities, and curricula are often based on politics and economics. Being completely open-hearted in such a space has been painful at times. Approaching my job from a place of mindfulness has felt like a personal integration, but has underscored my alienation from the bureaucratic and results-driven institution in which I have been employed. The stark contrast between the heart-felt resonance I have when I am fully engaged in my practice and the need to act from a place of rational functionalism in my job is not a sustainable duality in my own life. This tension shows up in various ways in this dissertation as a sort of leitmotif.

Out of the feeling of isolation of being a lone meditation practitioner in my educational space, I created a group to support educators who were trying to bring mindfulness into their professional spaces. Thus, We-PEACE (Western Pennsylvania Educators for Awareness, Compassion and Empathy) was born in July of 2014 and housed at the Pittsburgh Shambhala Meditation Center. In conjunction with fellow educator and Shambhala practitioner, Michelle

King, We-PEACE began hosting monthly meetings in September 2014, inviting interested educators, administrators, and support staff to bring the transformational power of mindfulness to education systems in Western Pennsylvania. The meetings have provided a chance for personal practice, sharing of ideas and resources, support, and renewal.

Just as I have searched for full integration of my meditative practices into my classroom and this research, I am also searching for integration in my career. I again asked myself: How could I make a difference in this system? How could I do the work of supporting teachers and students? This has moved me to resign from public school teaching and explore a new avenue. Through my work with We-PEACE and this dissertation I realized that the most direct way to bring unity to my professional and spiritual lives is to work full time to support the incorporation of mindfulness into our educational institutions – both by working with teachers and students. To this end, I have recently established a nonprofit organization with a group of other practitioners to work to bring mindfulness and meditation programs into schools to bring about social transformation on a larger scale than is possible in one classroom or even in one school.

7.1 THE MANURE OF EXPERIENCE³⁷

Many readers of my dissertation provided me the feedback that my story was painful and it appeared that pain drove me to resign and leave public school teaching. I was surprised by this reaction because it is not how I experienced leaving. It is true that the intentional integration of mindfulness into the space of my professional life led me to be much more open to the pain all

³⁷This title was taken from Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's (2010) chapter title "The Manure of Experience and the Field of Bodhi" (p. 15).

around me. This is natural because “meditation is to know what is going on—in our bodies, our feelings, our minds, and in the world” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p. vii). Instead of running away, my practices allowed me to stay present to the pain and suffering around us.

So, for me, it has been a process of diving into and working with the pain that I was seeing and experiencing around me through my mindfulness practices. Hanh (1991) asserts,

If we face our unpleasant feelings with care, affection, and nonviolence, we can transform them into the kind of energy that is healthy and has the capacity to nourish us. By the work of mindful observation, our unpleasant feelings can illuminate so much for us, offering us insight and understanding into ourselves and society. (p. 52)

For me, bringing my mindfulness practices to face the suffering around me has given birth to my desire to take action to alleviate the pain around me.

In fact, this is the very process of personal transformation and how inner work leads us to take action. This is making manure out of our difficult experiences to use them to fertilize our inner and outer work.

It is said, I think in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, that unskilled farmers throw away their rubbish and buy manure from other farmers, but those who are skilled go on collecting their own rubbish, in spite of the bad smell and the unclean work, and when it is ready to be used they spread it on their land, and out of this they grow their crops. That is the skilled way. ... So the skilled bodhisattva will acknowledge and accept all those negative things. ... And then he will scatter them on the field of bodhi. ... So out of these unclean things comes the birth of the seed which is realization. This is how one has to give birth. (Trungpa, 2010, p. 21)

Using my mindfulness practices to support diving into the difficulty and suffering around me is the path of bringing mindfulness to my professional spaces. Out of the manure of this experience has first come compassion.

The truth is that in spiritual life, our awareness of suffering actually increases over the years. We see and know more clearly the sorrows of the world. We can no longer hide from their occurrence. With this knowledge comes a deepening compassion. (Kornfield, 2000, p. 235)

Actually, we must take this one step further: “we must be willing to share the suffering of others” (Sivaraksa, 1992, p. 64). This is the Buddhist doctrine of no-self or interdependence: Moving into the pain of others makes us realize our interdependence and connection to all.

Once I really saw and felt the suffering around me, then the seed of compassion bloomed into the flower of desire to take action to alleviate that suffering. Put another way, “Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what is the use of seeing?” (Hanh, 1991, p. 91). As a classroom teacher in an institution that did not allow me much space for work of the heart, I made the decision to leave and pursue a path that more directly could work to alleviate suffering. It was not a running away--It was a running towards. This entering into the pain of life is not joyless or only painful. Hanh (1991) explains,

In that intense suffering, you feel a kind of relief and joy within yourself, because you know that you are an instrument of compassion. Understanding such intense suffering and realizing compassion in the midst of it, you become a joyful person. (p. 125)

When I see others’ pain and do nothing, it can be excruciating. However, in trying to help others through compassionate actions I find joy.

7.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, POLICY, AND INQUIRY

I believe that my exploration of what it is like to be a mindful educator has implications for teaching practice, educational policy, and for future inquiry. In the realm of practice, I hope my experiences show that with mindfulness the teacher is more compassionate and present to the needs of the students. In addition, I attempted to demonstrate that mindfulness practices provide concrete tools to cope with the stresses of everyday classroom life. I have a dream of providing such tools to help teachers gain social and emotional competence in order to respond from a place of compassion. I hope that my honesty about my own limitations (and how I worked to overcome them) shows how important it is to allow the space for teachers to explore their failings and find their own paths to improvement. This type of approach to teacher supervision and professional development could have ramifications on education policy and programs for teacher education. Finally, I have introduced a different way of approaching qualitative research. I cannot claim to have developed this nor can I say it is new – I can only say that I have taken the ancient practice of Buddhist contemplation and applied it to my research. This was successful for me because it is already part my own Buddhist path of practice. I hope that my re-contextualization of this practice is not misunderstood to be something that anyone can do. I was only able to use this approach because of my already existing practice of meditation – and even then the experience was one of total groundlessness.

7.3 MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

As with any research project, this dissertation does not feel like a single, completed entity – it has opened me up to more questions than it has provided answers to my initial question of *What is the lived experience of incorporating my personal practices of mindfulness into my teaching and professional life?* According to Zajonc (2009), this is an expected result: "Through contemplative inquiry we live ever more deeply into the questions, and so change ourselves that we can live the answers also" (p. 193). The whole process of asking my question led to my living the question as a means of answering it. Out of this inquiry I am left now with another question: "Is my experience shared by others or is it unique?" In this section I present what would be the next steps in more fully answering the question of what it means to embody mindfulness in the space of education and the classroom.

In order for me to understand how my experiences resonate with other mindfulness practitioners, I would take my inquiry out of the confines of my own reflection and invite others to share their experiences with me. In fact this is the next step in mindful inquiry as presented by Bentz and Shapiro (1998). These authors suggest,

Every aspect of research ... are typifications – socially constructed abstractions and simplifications of the complexity of experience that enable us to handle it in a regular, organized, and socially shared way. ... Becoming a mindful researcher means critically knowing the array of typifications. (p. 51)

Therefore accessing a larger array of experiences is a next step. In order to critically know the array of typifications, the mindful researcher must "get the descriptions of the experience of those involved. Determine the typifications they use to function in their situation" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 51). The next phase of this research could therefore be to elicit the experiences

of other educators who are attempting to incorporate mindfulness into their professional life. My hope is that others will join to continue this contemplative exploration and create a body of reflective research that captures the complexity of our shared lived experiences and our reflective responses to each other's lived experiences.

This dissertation has attempted to enhance what is known about integrating mindfulness into educational settings by presenting my own lived experience. As Zajonc explains,

The end we seek is insight that can serve us in life, making us more fit to address the problems we meet with deep multifaceted understanding that does not spring from instrumental reason alone. The fruit of contemplative inquiry should be a wisdom born in freedom that can serve love. (2009, p. 194)

My hope is that both the insights I have added to the body of knowledge will open possibilities for other educators. I also hope that the contemplative exploration and reflection process I have developed can be used to inquire into the experiences of other mindful educators. Finally, I hope that this investigation will help to transform our educational institutions into places of compassion and care for both teachers and students. This is my own next step in my life path. Will you join me as I work towards that goal?

APPENDIX A

DEDICATION OF MERIT

By this merit, may all obtain omniscience.

May it defeat the enemy, wrongdoing.

From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death,

From the ocean of samsara, may I free all beings.

By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east,

May the lotus garden of the Rigden's wisdom bloom.

May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled,

May all beings enjoy profound brilliant glory.

(Chödrön, 2008, p. 214)

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