Mindfulness, Vipassana and anti-oppressive education: Heartfelt observation to anti-oppressive action

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A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of requirements of the degree of a Masters of Education.

Abstract

Cette thèse soutient que la pratique de la « pleine conscience » (mindfulness) et de la méditation Vipassana peut contribuer à une éducation anti-oppressive. Cette pratique aide les enseignants à prendre conscience de leur vie intérieure, à interagir avec discernement et compassion, et à interrompre des habitudes maladroites. Se référant à sa propre pratique du « mindfulness » l'auteur examine la pertinence de cette approche pour l'enseignement au secondaire. Il pose aussi un regard critique sur la littérature scientifique émergeante.

Mindfulness and Vipassana can help teachers teach anti-oppressively because practitioners learn to interrupt unskillful habit patterns through practice. This master's thesis examines the author's mindfulness/Vipassana practice, in reference to current scholarship on mindfulness and anti-oppressive education. Using a self-study lens, the author looks at mindfulness scholarship critically and at his experiences discerningly, compassionately and uses them as the evidence for mindfulness' relevance within High School teaching.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge Dr. Ronald Morris' personal support, editorial suggestions and content related questions. His guidance aided me greatly in the writing of this master's thesis.

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Chapter 1: A spiritual self-study to critical vision

Introduction

I think it is safe to say that scholars are excited about mindfulness. I certainly am and so are colleagues. The topic of this MA thesis is mindfulness. However, the manner in which I will explore the topic is quite different than the majority of the literature I have read. More specifically, the topic of this MA thesis is my own mindfulness practice. The decision to approach mindfulness from a personal angle is motivated by a deep concern for the topic and for my own integrity as a scholar, educator and mindfulness practitioner.

People seem to be excited about mindfulness because it works. What it is used for is another, pertinent question. Brown & Ryan (2003) have concluded that mindfulness is positively associated with wellbeing. With the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program or MBSR for short (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) as the mindfulness program/intervention being used, there is evidence of mindfulness practice increasing people's wellbeing as well (Baer, 2003; Bishop, 2002; Grossman et al., 2004; Shapiro et. al., 2008).

Narrowing how and where it works seems necessary because it has been found to benefit so many different aspects and areas of adult people's lives. For example, there is evidence for mindfulness helping people improve their attention and awareness (Jha et al., 2007), their health and stress related problems (Grossman et al., 2004) and their quality of life, psychologically and physically (Greeson, 2009).

The empirical evidence of mindfulness working to bring about positive outcomes is exciting, and we have seen a surging increase in mindfulness scholarship in the past years, (Gause & Coholic, 2010; Shapiro, 2009) with different focuses and intentions.

Trends and intellectual fads corral thinkers into grooves of discourse, worldview, politics and epistemology. I step outside of what I perceive as the

mindfulness 'groove' in this MA thesis. As mentioned, I approach, explore and speak to the positive outcomes of mindfulness in this piece in a different way, from a personal, experiential perspective not an empirical one. And one reason for this is the following.

In my view, mindfulness cannot be supported solely or primarily by empirical findings. Mindfulness is based upon and supported by personal, experiential truth. One practices mindfulness by looking deeply, dispassionately, non-judgmentally and compassionately at phenomena within the confines of one's own body and mind, which I call 'arisings'. This is what allows one to cultivate mindfulness. The practice of mindfulness is personal and experiential, in that one finds one's own answers, truths and changes through one's own practice. The empirical evidence that people are benefiting from mindfulness practice is not the proof that it works for me. The proof that it works for me is that I have seen it work in my own life.

My intention is to demonstrate how my mindfulness practice helps me teach better in a High School setting. My approach is to explore my mindfulness practice and show how it aids and informs my teaching practice. This MA thesis is not about teaching mindfulness to adolescents or exploring how I have used mindfulness interventions in the classroom to bring about positive outcomes. This MA thesis is about showing how I embody, enact and live out my mindfulness practice in the classroom, to my own and my students' benefit. This is a matter of ontology, and spirituality.

Parker Palmer (1998) proposes that without a sense of the 'I' who teaches, we cannot know the 'thou' who learns. To me, Palmer is identifying a profound truth here. In my experience, I can say that the methods or techniques that I used within the classroom were totally dependent on who I was in the classroom, when actualizing them. In other words, techniques and approaches cannot work unequivocally; they are embedded within the being or state of consciousness of the person who is actualizing them and the being of those that they are aimed at. This is a matter of ontology, in my view.

Palmer (1998) illustrates this further by writing "in every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood-and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning." (p. 10)

For me, questions regarding how to be and who I am in the classroom are equally, if not more important than what to teach (curriculum) or how to teach it (pedagogy). How I choose/try to be in the classroom is heavily informed by my mindfulness practice and by anti-oppressive education theory.

There is burgeoning evidence suggesting that mindfulness helps adolescents in addition to adults (Barnes et al., 2004; Birbaum, 2005; Black, Milam and Sussman, 2009; Burke, 2009; Flook et al., 2010). However, empirical literature on how/whether mindfulness can benefit children/adolescents/youth is undeveloped compared to the literature focusing on adults (Schonert-Reichl & Stewart Lawlor, 2010; Semple et al., 2006).

The lack of thorough empirical evidence that adolescents benefit from mindfulness interventions or being mindful does not influence my decision to approach the topic of mindfulness and the teaching of adolescents from a personal, experiential angle. My decision to speak of my mindfulness practice from a personal standpoint, where the evidence for its viability in the classroom is my own experience is motivated by other concerns, which are explored through out the thesis.

I disagree with the position that mindfulness, as an intervention or technique should only be used as a solution or answer for the problems our students face in classrooms. This, in my view, reduces the scope of mindfulness. That does not mean that I ignore the problems students face in the institution of High School, however. What supports my position is the view that there is no panacea for the problems in High School, especially when those problems are highly intersectional.

My intention in using mindfulness in the classroom is not to bring about tangible, quantifiable, positive outcomes in student behaviour, performance or

attitude. My intention is to focus on myself as an agent of the institution, as a meditator and as a human being who wants to change himself first and the world second. I apply mindfulness in my teaching practice to teach better, more anti-oppressively and more skillfully for me first and for my students second.

Mindfulness as a theory is exposed to 'pushes and pulls' of culture, economics, ideology and academic pursuit but the theory of mindfulness is just the pointer, not the practice. The practice is always in the now, always within the confines of the practitioner's body and mind, and thus experiential. Although I disagree with the position that mindfulness can be used to fix or solve students' problems, I do want to show through my own experiences, how mindfulness can support, improve and clarify public High School teaching.

I see High School education from an anti-oppressive standpoint (Kumashiro; 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2010), in which I see the actualization of the anti-oppressive potential of education as a goal of public common-good education. This is the vision that guides my teaching, day to day in the classroom and that motivates me to offer my contribution to educational scholarship.

I see the realization of anti-oppressive education being completely dependent upon an individual teacher's ability to recognize and interrupt their own complicity with oppression and this process, in my view, is spiritual. And it is my overt view that mindfulness practice can practically aid in the actualization of anti-oppressive teaching but also provide the theoretical and conceptual lens from which to understand the practice of teaching as a spiritual practice.

Intention and organization of this master's thesis

I am a High School teacher and a mindfulness practitioner. My teaching practice has been heavily influenced and undergirded by my mindfulness practice. The confluence of my mindfulness and teaching practice has been rich and very positive for me. The aim of this thesis is to explore and promote the practice of mindfulness, as both a theoretical lens that can help clarify what goes on when we

teach at the High School level but also as a practical vehicle for teaching in an anti-oppressive fashion. In both regards, I see my mindfulness practice helping me teach better.

In chapter 2, I clarify how Vipassana is the main teaching that makes up my mindfulness practice and how it relates to mindfulness. I explain where I learned Vipassana and I give context on the organization that the teachings came out of. I also explore Goenka's Vipassana teachings with the intention of making the theoretical underpinnings of my mindfulness practice clear. Also I relate Vipassana theory to the intention of this thesis and introduce the concept of Buddhist psychology. I explore Vipassana's theory and practice more deeply through the concepts of equanimity and insight. At the end of the chapter, I analyze the anecdote of my first moment of practice, from the perspective of Vipassana theory and practice.

In chapter 3, I situate my understanding of mindfulness within Western scholarship on mindfulness specifically. I define the term Buddhist psychology (BP) and a BP vision of mindfulness. Then, I explore how Western psychology (WP) studies BP conceptualizations of mindfulness and some of the tensions in this project. I then speak to these tensions more deeply by outlining four epistemological/ontological differences that exist between BP and WP. These four differences are drawn from a table that generally compares BP and WP, provided by Grossman (2010). I conclude the chapter by speaking to these differences in sum and what they could mean for Western scholars who study (BP) mindfulness. I further justify my decision to write about mindfulness personally and experientially through these arguments.

In chapter 4, I present a story from my teaching practice that illustrates how I use my mindfulness practice in the classroom. I then explain how my teaching practice, mindfulness practice and anti-oppressive education theory come together. This confluence is then presented in a discussion of the story. The discussion is divided into 3 parts; 'crisis', 'being' and 'interruption of repetition' and is meant show how my mindfulness practice helps me teach in a better, more anti-oppressive fashion.

I conclude this master's thesis by reviewing what I have presented and by speaking to potential future research directions.

Clarification of my methodology and the terms mindfulness and Vipassana

In this thesis I use the term mindfulness to mean "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p.145). In this operational definition, mindfulness is thus a quality of awareness (non-judgmental awareness), as well as the practice of cultivating this awareness (paying attention on purpose, moment to moment). It addition to being a quality of awareness and a practice for cultivating this state of awareness, it is also a theoretical and conceptual construct (Siegel et al. 2009) studied by and subject to different academic, spiritual (teachers/scholars) and ideological forces.

The academic study of mindfulness, the way it is taught or practiced and the way it is conceptualized, affects the way it is perceived and understood. It is not a static concept or practice, it is in flux and affected by the context in which it is embedded. I explore the epistemological and ontological embededness of mindfulness in depth in chapter 3.

Vipassana* is a Pali word (the original language of the Buddha) that translates as 'insight' (Goldberg, 2001; Siegel et al. 2009) or "to observe things as they really are" (Goenka, 1999, pp.26). S.N. Goenka's vision of Vipassana or Vipassana meditation is what informs my understanding of vipassana meditation. I understand Vipassana as a methodology or practice for cultivating insight into Dharma, the law of nature or the way things are by insightful looking/observation through meditation (Goenka, 1994-a; Goenka, 1999; Goldberg, 2001; Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

This is the style of meditation that I practice and yet I feel comfortable also referring to my Vipassana meditation practice as my mindfulness practice and I will do so throughout this paper (for a description of Vipassana as taught by S.N. Goenka, see: Boisvert, 1999; Goenka, 1994; Goenka, 1994-a, 1994-b, 1994-c; Goenka 1999; Goldberg, 2001; VRI, 1994).

Not all mindfulness practices have the same means and ends as Vipassana. I treat mindfulness as an umbrella construct that includes not only Vipassana meditation but also concentration meditation and metta meditation (loving kindness meditation) to cultivate a state of non-judgmental, compassionate awareness, with the intention of liberating oneself from suffering.

S.N. Goenka (1987) teaches that theory and practice must be equal in Vipassana, like the two wings of a bird, to achieve right understanding. In this master's thesis I will try to balance both theory and experiential/practical understanding by elaborating on theory but also by providing personal stories that illustrate mindfulness theory and practice in my experience.

Methodologically, this master's thesis is conceptual/theoretical but is also a self-study of teacher education practices, known as S-STTEP for short (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). My self-study of my teaching practices also includes my spiritual practice and it is the confluence of the two that I am most interested in sharing. I understand this methodology to allow me as a researcher to explore and share this confluence and in doing so to contribute to its growth/evolution/articulation.

Also, I have chosen this methodology because I believe that this approach stays most true to the epistemology and ontology that mindfulness/Vipassana is embedded within, which is fundamentally a within-subject exploration. As mentioned, this will be explored in depth in chapter 3.

I have chosen to use personal experiences and stories to illuminate my mindfulness and teaching practices because my experiences are my evidence for the practice's effectiveness. Hence, I do not adopt the positivist assumption that only scientifically supported evidence can prove mindfulness' effectiveness or relevance. In the following section, I describe my first moment of practice in the form of a short story.

Feeling my hands: My first moment of practice

The first ever literature that I encountered on mindfulness was a self-help book written by Eckart Tolle (2005). Tolle, who to my knowledge never uses the term mindfulness once in his books, is regarded nonetheless as a current mindfulness teacher (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). I read this book in the winter of 2008, while completing my last year of my B. ed. at McGill University. I remember reading a passage regarding the mindfulness exercise of observing the sensations that are in your body, which are always 'there', always with the potential to be perceived regardless of whether you take the opportunity to do so or not, moment to moment (Goldberg, 2001; Goenka, 1994). And in this passage, Tolle encourages readers very directly and overtly to stop their reading and to try to feel their hands and then to observe the present sensations attentively.

I was sitting on my couch, it was cold. Blowing snow was whipping past the window of my living room and it was illuminated by the street lamp across the street. I remember having some kind of resistance to turning my attention away from the words in the book and to the sensations in my hands. I think the resistance was founded in the fear that if it didn't 'work', if I couldn't feel my hands, then all the previous teachings, thoughts, ideas and assertions in the book about the world and about how to live well would be untrue. And since I agreed and was excited by most of what I had read in the book, I really wanted what I had read to be 'true'.

Or maybe I was resistant because I was afraid that what was written in the book was true and that I simply didn't have the ability or sensitivity to detect the sensations in my hands, that I was somehow unfit for the exercise.

Even though I was resistant and admittedly fearful, I stopped focusing on the words on the page and the goldenly lit blowing snow outside my window. I placed the book in my lap and tried to feel my hands. I certainly felt something and immediately my mind jumped in trying to explain how I could possibly just feel my hands. My understanding of 'feeling' was based on a belief that it is the hands that do the feeling and thus if they are not in contact with any surface or phenomena, like heat or cold, how could I simply feel them, when there's nothing to feel?

My mind flung around possible explanations for the sensations that I observed and its interjection caused a phasing in and a phasing out of my ability to actually feel the sensations in my hands. Then a very salient thought arose.

I thought that this must be possible (to feel my hands) because I was holding the book for a while and thus the act of clenching and squeezing the book must have invigorated my blood flow and that was what I was feeling. I then thought that Tolle must have known that the reader would experience this physiological effect and he could count on us getting the 'trick' to work. I extrapolated that he must expect us to further buy into his message and ideas based on this, what a charlatan! Then another thought arose.

I thought that that previous thought didn't line up with my understanding of the book's message and tone; certainly I wasn't prepared to think of Tolle as a charlatan… that would invalidate the things he said that I liked!

So, I next thought that I must be inducing the sensations because I wanted so desperately to believe that the ontology put forward by Tolle, in all its wonderful novelty and richness could in fact be true. My arising thought told me that I must certainly be inducing the sensations in my hands, forcing this phenomena to happen to further enrich and validate my own reality and have it line up with Tolle's.

These sorts of thoughts and thinking, and this wayward quality of mind are still with me even though I have made mindfulness practice a big part of my life. What has changed is my relationship to these thoughts, to the wayward mind. I have changed this relationship by building on that first moment of recognizing and observing, however intermittently, the sensations in my hands. And I intend in this piece to make this process clear in theory and practice.

And right now, as I type these words, I can feel them. And right now in this moment, questions, judgmental and ruminating patterns of thought do not arise but they often do. I can observe the sensations in my hands and know that I am in a mindful place, in my body here and now.

And when scathing thoughts arise about my abilities and ideas or about the abilities and ideas of others, I can sometimes just observe them too, 'nipping them

in the bud', letting them dissipate, as they will when I do not react to them. The capacity to write these words, and remember to bring at least some of my attention to the sensations in my hands and reside in my body is the result of hard, practical, mindfulness work and this practical work and all the theory that undergirds it, is the topic of this master's thesis.

When I reread the above story about my first experience observing the sensations in my hands, I felt pleased and thoughtful. I know that at the time of the experience on my couch, my relationship to my own mind and bodily sensations was different than it is now and perhaps concomitantly, my ontological perspective was very different too.

The first thoughts that arose of totally doubting the validity of the exercise, assuming some kind of charlatan trick to manipulate me to 'buy into' Tolle's vision, in my eyes now, was a valid arising and is not nearly as threatening. Certainly while walking a spiritual path we must be discerning and critical of what is told to us to be true.

Also, I am of the belief that what is told to us to be true with regards to spiritual matters, must be practical and experientially testable. So, it is not that there is anything wrong with the arising, it is that I attached the upmost importance to this arising in that it would invalidate previous ideas that I had read in the book that I had already bought into (even though I could feel my hands)!

This was threatening to me! The arising would require me to critically touch on validating, ego building and pleasing thoughts/beliefs/emotions that I had accrued in the reading of the book. I did not want this; I wanted the pleasure of thinking that I had found something special that spoke to my spiritual hopes and aspirations.

Not wanting to unglue my already setting beliefs and identifications with Tolle's words might have led to another arising, another thought; I thought that maybe it was not the teacher who was wrong but it was me who was wrong. I thought that I must have surely been inducing these sensations in order to validate what I had accepted as truth and that I was starting to believe in and identify with.

This reactionary thought protected the teacher and the 'truth', and it was I who was to blame because clearly my eagerness to align myself with what is 'true', to build my ego around these teachings, when in reality I am inadequate, has led me to self-deception. I thought that I must be inducing these sensations through my own subjective processes; there was no other possible explanation. What a rigorous self-analysis, what a troubled and troubling relationship to my own mind, what a cacophony!

At that time I didn't know how to practice. And I didn't know either that that experience on my couch, in my living room was my first moment of practice. And I certainly didn't know that all the doubts, fears, and arisings of thoughts and images that were meant to explain, justify or condemn my experience of feeling and observing my sensations were to become the 'stuff' of my practice within an ontology that Tolle was encouraging his readers to adopt. I did not come to define this ontology or my practice through Tolle, however. His work sparked the beginning of my practice and other teachers/thinkers helped me evolve it.

How I have come to make mindfulness my spiritual practice began with feeling my hands on my couch that Winter day but only became a true practice once I began learning mindfulness meditation in earnest from a teacher.

I first learned concentration (breathing) meditation through an uncertified meetup-group teacher in 2009 and then later through a vipassana meditation teacher (in 2010-2011) associated with the organization True North Insight (TNI). With the first teacher, I learned the basic technique of focusing on one's breath to develop concentration, which is often the precursor practice before practicing vipassana meditation. Later, with the instructor from TNI, I began a daily practice of sitting (meditating) for 10 minutes every day and practiced with her a few times every month, where I first encountered Dharma discourses.

Only in the Summer of 2011 did I bring my mindfulness practice to the level it is at now. In the Summer of 2011 and in the Winter of 2012, I attended 10-day meditation retreats at Dhamma Suttama, the secular/non-religious Montebello Vipassana center that teaches Vipassana in the tradition of Syagyi U Ba Khin and his student, S.N. Goenka. I have maintained a daily practice of

sitting ever since, although now I sit for 1 hour (for a description of what a '10-day' entails, see Boisvert, 1999 and Goldberg, 2001).

Style and standpoint

I see mindfulness practice as a process that helps me see reality as it is and not as I want it to be. It is a process of unmasking and of observing what is real, moment to moment. This piece is about my practice and is about the intersection of mindfulness and my teaching practice, which is heavily influenced by anti-oppressive education (I address anti-oppressive teaching in depth in chapter 4).

I situate the reader academically through the scholarship that I cite but also through my personal spiritual/teaching narrative because the practice takes legitimate expression through me as a serious practitioner. As such, I intend to share personal experiences of my mindfulness/teaching practice and to qualify my experiences and my interpretation of them with academic literature. I try to strike a middle tone in this piece, in the space of tension between what may be constituted as the personal and the academic.

I wish to be completely forthcoming and clear regarding my level of experience as a mindfulness meditation practitioner and High School teacher. My spiritual practice is not mystical, nor does it hinge upon any deity or belief in God. I see my spirituality as the expression of my most profound hopes for myself as a person and my spiritual practice as the process/method for actualizing these deep yearnings.

But I have only been practicing mindfulness seriously for two and a half years and thus my understanding of this profound and paradoxical practice is still undeveloped compared to those who have thousands of hours on their cushions and have prioritized and succeeded in implementing the practice into all aspects of their lives. I have hundreds of hours on my cushion and I have attended two 10-day retreats, in the tradition of S.N. Goenka. Also, I am no veteran teacher. I

have taught for four years in High School in the English public school system in the Greater Montreal Area.

In addition to being overt and forthcoming regarding my level of experience with mindfulness, Vipassana and teaching, I would also like to take the opportunity in this section to further own and clarify my standpoint. I self-indentify as a white, middle class, queer-questioning man born in Quebec, Canada. I practice mindfulness from the standpoint that it is embedded within a Buddhist psychological paradigm, with its respective epistemology and ontology. As such I take issue with the Western academic project to define, operationalize or measure mindfulness. This will be explored in depth in chapter 3.

I want to state my intention to apply mindfulness and Vipassana as I understand them, as being embedded within a Buddhist psychological perspective. I have no intention of appropriating them or redefining them. That being said, the lens from which I gaze out onto the world has been shaped by a Western scientific academic paradigm and I cannot change this.

While I am critical, and uncomfortable with a scientific academic perspective on mindfulness, I exist within a scholarly institution that reinforces and celebrates a scientific epistemology. I feel both a pressure to conform to the scientific logics of Western academia but I am also critical of and resistant to this lens. Thus, I will be careful to situate my practice in scholarship that honours the Buddhist psychological roots of mindfulness, with its respective epistemology and ontology that are quite different than the Western scientific varieties.

There is one more salient issue regarding my standpoint that needs to be addressed before moving into a more in depth description and discussion of mindfulness and Vipassana. This issue, I think, is equally pertinent to me as writer as it is to you as reader. This issue is an epistemological concern regarding mindfulness.

I do not believe that one can come to understand mindfulness or Vipassana properly without practicing. I must be sure that when writing about mindfulness that I do not assume that my readers understand mindfulness the same way I do because they may or may not practice.

Mindfulness is a relatively new and paradoxical concept/practice to the West. Paul Grossman (2008) reminds us that in the view of some mindfulness scholars and practitioners (Bodhi, 2001; Gunaratana, 2001; Nyanaponika, 1962) mindfulness cannot be fully comprehended by discursive, theoretical or intellectual thinking and that understanding mindfulness relies on practical introspective practice (mindfulness practice of one form or another) to understand properly (as cited in Grossman, 2008).

Goenka (1994-a) would agree and sees the understanding of Dharma, which is the goal of Vipassana meditation, as being totally dependent upon an experiential understanding and learning:

> One should understand the law of nature not merely at the intellectual level. We cannot understand the law of nature merely by listening to discourses, by listening to Dharma talks, by reading scriptures, by discussions, by intellectualization or by emotionalization. These may make us more and more confused. The only way to understand Dharma, to understand the law of nature, is to experience it. (p.46)

I share this view. In the time before learning how to sit (meditate), I thought that I understood what mindfulness, meditation and the Buddha's teachings meant but I didn't. I only began to understand what the words I read and spoke meant when I began to experience their truth in my own body, through the diligent, rigorous and difficult technique of meditation.

I make this point not to attribute an elitist status to those who practice versus those who don't. This is a matter of standpoint. I have the overt view that mindfulness and Vipassana can only be understood and bear fruit when practiced and I must ensure that this view informs the way I write about mindfulness and Vipassana so as not to misrepresent my position.

I provide a fuller discussion of Vipassana and my mindfulness practice in chapter 2. In which I describe the history and background of Vipassana, Buddhist psychological mindfulness and analyze the story of my first moment of practice from these perspectives.

* Vipassana in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin and S.N. Goenka will be capitalized to differentiate it from other vipassana teachers/traditions.

Chapter 2: My practice, Vipassana as taught by S.N. Goenka

Introduction

This chapter will focus on my mindfulness practice by drawing from literature in the Vipassana tradition of S.N. Goenka. I use these sources first and not Western academic ones on mindfulness to situate and qualify my practice. These sources speak most specifically to the spiritual teaching and instruction that I have received and found most resonant. Furthermore, the discourses that Goenka offers on 'the technique' and the 'art of living', which are two different ways he conceptualizes Vipassana practice, are what I use as my roadmap while both sitting and trying to apply the practice in my everyday life.

In this tradition, the practice is seen as a technique because one's ability to practice and apply the technique can be cultivated, learned. It is also conceptualized as an 'art of living' because the practice and application of the technique will affect all aspects of one's life and transform it. As stated earlier, when I refer to my mindfulness practice, I am mostly referring to the practice I learned in Goenka's 10-day Vipassana courses. Goenka never uses the term mindfulness. I will now explore Vipassana's history and context and how I understand it as a 'technique' and 'art of living'.

Goenka's Vipassana, history and context

I learned Vipassana at Dhamma Suttama (http://www.suttama.dhamma.org/), a secular/non-religious** meditation center in Montebello Quebec, in the summer of 2011. Goenka has established meditation

centers like Dhamma Suttama (where 10-day courses are held consistently) in every continent and courses offered outside of established centers are offered all over the world (VRI, 2013). These courses are always run by donation and those who conduct them are volunteers (Goldberg, 2001). The courses are designed for anyone, including the 'householder' or layperson. The transmission of Vipassana to people outside of the Buddhist religious complex is characteristic of Goenka's teaching lineage (Goenka, 1994-b).

Ledi Sayadaw is the first known teacher in Goenka's teaching lineage. Sayadaw taught in the years between 1846 and 1923 in Burma (Myanmar) (Goldberg, 2001) and is remembered as a "saintly monk who was instrumental in re-enlivening the traditional practice of Vipassana, making it more available for renunciates and lay people alike." (VRI, 1994, p.78) The progressive approach of offering lay people the Buddha's teachings was continued and amplified by Goenka's teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin who was taught by Ledi Sayadaw's student, Saya Thetgyi (1875-1945) in the years between 1907 and 1914.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin (1899-1971) developed a new "set of systematic meditation instructions that he believed were more in tune with the pressing demands of the modern era." And being one of the first Eastern teachers to teach Westerners, Ba Khin "broke a cultural and linguistic barrier that had been upheld for centuries. He designed a course specifically for lay people of all religions and nationalities, rather than strictly for Buddhist renunciates who had given up the worldly life" (Goldberg, 2001, p. 20).

Expanding this approach considerably, S.N. Goenka (1924-) has established permanent meditation centers all over the world, where the teaching of Vipassana can be received in any language, regardless of one's religious affiliation or spiritual training, in the form of a 10-day course (Goenka, 1994-b; Goldberg, 2001).

The movement towards the teaching of lay people outside of a Buddhist religious context is seen as being part of a Protestant view of Buddhism. At its core, this view emphasizes that the Buddha's "soteriological doctrine and activity is universally applicable" and those who teach the Buddha's way, from this

perspective, place emphasis upon the cultivation of morality, concentration (through concentration meditation) and wisdom (through vipassana meditation) (Goldberg, 2001, p.24).

Goldberg argues that the perspective that views the Buddha's teaching as universal and non-sectarian is itself a sectarian perspective/position. Goenka teaches that the Buddha's way, the development of morality, concentration and wisdom is universally acceptable and non-sectarian in nature (Bodian, 1994; Goenka 1994-a; Goenka 1999). Goldberg (2001) argues however, through the Buddhist scholar Stephen Batchelor (1996) that not every person would believe in or accept the Buddha's vision of morality and thus it is not universal. Furthermore, before one has acquired insight into Dharma (the law of nature), namely, insight into the Buddha's understanding of impermanence, suffering (craving/aversion/equanimity) and selflessness, one must accept these truths on the basis of faith and as dogma. This is especially the case if the practitioner of the technique holds a soteriological worldview associated with Christianity, Islam or Judaism that may be incompatible with the Buddha's vision of impermanence, suffering and selflessness according to Goldberg (2001).

This is a valid critique in my view and calls into question whether one can practice Vipassana without ascribing to Buddhist dogma regarding the moral precepts one is to observe as the wholesome basis for concentration and insight meditation. Additionally, before one starts to cultivate experiential understanding or insight into the truth of the law of nature (Dharma) and its corollaries, namely, insight into impermanence, suffering (craving/aversion/equanimity) and selflessness, one might take these truths on faith, as dogma.

However, as Goldberg (2001) argues, Goenka recognizes this tension and in my view reconciles it by asking his students to remain critical of anything they learn on the 10-day course. Students are not to accept any theoretical teaching on blind faith, only to accept any teaching if it matches up with their own observed experiences (Goenka, 1987).

From my own perspective, as someone who has attended 10-day retreats with the intention of developing the technique of meditation within a non-

religious context, I was very reassured to hear this. I agree with Goldberg (2001) when he states that the "lineage's emphasis on meditation practice and moral cultivation, and their de-emphasis upon passive dependence on the Buddhist monkhood (or anyone else for that matter), has thus created an influential integration of the Buddha's teachings into the larger, modern social context." (p. 27)

I consider Goenka's Vipassana to be a non-religious technique because of Goenka's emphasis on moral cultivation, meditation practice and the development of an experiential understanding of Dharma, which requires no theistic faith-based belief to carry out. This emphasis is made on what is learned in the 10-day course framework but also more widely, encouraged within a practitioner's life. One's experiences are to take precedence over any dogmatic or blind faith acceptance of truth.

Goenka does state however, that anyone who follows the Buddha's method by developing morality, concentration and insight (the 'purification' of their mind through insight into Dharma) whether they call themselves a Buddhist or not, is a true follower of the Buddha (Goldberg, 2001). I infer from this that anyone who follows Goenka's teaching is a follower of the Buddha, in his eyes. This forces me to ask myself the question, do I self-identify as a follower of the Buddha?

Vipassana's history/context and this thesis' intention

Goenka's vision of Vipassana, unlike others that reside squarely within a Buddhist religious context, is propagated as a secular and non-religious technique that nonetheless comes from the teachings of the Buddha (Goenka, 1994-a; Goenka-1994-c; Goenka, 1999; Goldberg, 2001). What does it mean to be a follower of the Buddha? Certainly, this will mean different things to different people. I believe that what Goenka means by being a follower of the Buddha is that one is committed to understanding the law of nature within oneself, Dharma. Here the goal is to 'purify' one's mind through cultivating an experiential

understanding of Dharma, and to use the tripartite method of developing morality, concentration and wisdom in order to do so for the benefit of one-self and others.

I understand the law of nature, or Dharma to mean the truth of impermanence, suffering and selflessness. I said earlier that Goenka's vision is one of experiential understanding through observation (meditation). What one comes to understand in systematically observing themselves, is that when one lives in accordance with the truth that one observes within oneself, one lives better for oneself and others. This reworking of habit patterns is the 'purification'. The law, in the law of nature, is the line that if crossed, will create negativity and suffering in oneself and others. This vision is explored more fully later in the chapter.

When one develops insight into Dharma, he/she can be characterized as a Dharmic person, someone who understands the law of nature and who lives in accordance with it, regardless of religious identity or lack thereof (Goenka, 1999). Goenka (1994-a) argues that religious persons do not need to drop their religious affiliations or their religious practices when practicing the technique. Rather, they should ask themselves: "'Is my mind getting purified by performing all these rites, rituals and ceremonies? Am I getting liberated from anger, hatred, ill will, animosity, passion, ego?' If so, then yes, they are very good." (p.10).

Religious practice without the basis of Dharma, without the cultivation of insight into the law of nature, is not worthwhile and does not help one alleviate one's suffering, according to Goenka. And if one's goal is the 'purification' of mind, the liberation from suffering, then going to the pagoda and paying respect to the statue of the Buddha, for example, does not help at all (Goenka, 1987). This is how Goenka's teachings are intended to be practical and secular or non-religious and non-sectarien. They are rooted in the belief that one must work for one's own liberation, for one's own cultivation and that the work is practical, experiential and independent of religion and mystical intervention.

In my view, this work can be done regardless if one self-identifies as a follower of the Buddha or not. I do not self-identify as a Buddhist or as a

follower of the Buddha as such but it is the teachings of the Buddha, through Goenka, that I do indeed follow.

I see the technique as non-religious and practice it as such, with no devotional or blind-faith based practices or attitudes. However, I do see the practice as deeply spiritual. I understand spirituality to mean the process of actualizing my deepest yearnings for myself as a person and that this process relies on no theistic or mystical belief/dogma. Therefore Vipassana is my means for exploring and actualizing my spiritual yearnings, becoming who/how I want to be.

I feel comfortable applying this technique to my teaching practice within a public High School setting. I feel comfortable because the practice itself requires no prerequisite religious or spiritual beliefs (for me or those around me) to practice. Furthermore, my vision of spirituality is such that the practice of the technique is for my own benefit first and for others, secondly. And this is not a matter of teaching others how to be mindful or how to practice the technique. My comfort in practicing the technique within the classroom is based on me cultivating/influencing my own state of consciousness first, in a positive way. And secondly, my improved state of consciousness benefits those that are around me.

While Goenka's Vipassana is not Buddhist, I would say however, that it is an example of a worldview, 'way of life' or a technique that is embedded within Buddhist psychology. The concept of Buddhist psychology, in my view, falls within and without the Buddhist religious complex. Certainly Goenka's Vipassana, however secular or non-religious it may be, is heavily influenced by the rich and varied Buddhist religious traditions and their psychological learnings and teachings.

I argue that this does not render the technique or Goenka's teachings religious in nature. We see in the Western literature (Chapter 3) on mindfulness that some of the most influential secular or non-religious mindfulness based interventions (MBI) are tethered to the Buddhist psychological origins of mindfulness. As such, these MBIs while non-religious, still ascribe to a holistic

vision of mindfulness that sees it as a 'way of life', a 'way' out of suffering, spiritual in nature and soteriological in that one's own salvation or emancipation from suffering is the practical work done and the goal.

Goenka's Vipassana in theory and practice

S.N. Goenka's Vipassana is one where it is a "universal, simple and direct approach of observing the interaction of mind and matter for the purpose of acquiring insight and mitigating human suffering" (Goldberg, 2001, p.1). He argues that the Buddha was not a Buddhist and did not put forward any '–ism'. The Buddha did however put forward an 'art of living' to deal with the universal problem of human suffering.

Goenka conceptualizes the problem of human suffering as universal, the same across cultures and religions and thus the solution must be non-sectarian and non-religious (Bodian, 1994; Goenka, 1994-a; Goenka, 1999). I understand Goenka's argument as follows.

Human suffering cannot be effectively mitigated through the changing of worldly circumstances or through divine intervention or worship. Because of this, one must approach the mitigation of suffering through a methodology that does not require cultural or religious allegiance and loyalty. The work that needs to be done to reduce suffering is an individual, practical and experiential process that can be done by anybody, anywhere if one were inclined to do so.

This technique or 'art of living' is more than just the time you spend on your cushion practicing meditation; it is a way of life that uses as its core, the equanimity gained through concentration meditation and the insights gained through Vipassana meditation to 'purify' one's mind (Goenka, 1994-a), to eliminate habit patterns that lead to suffering.

When one does a 10-day retreat in the tradition of S.N. Goenka or when one practices the technique in one's life as a 'way' or an art of living, I consider this using the technique of Vipassana. However, this goes beyond the Vipassana

meditation technique itself. In my view, when one applies the technique, one also uses the theoretical and conceptual explanations made by Goenka in his discourses (See Goenka, 1987) and one then begins to look at the world from the perspective of Buddhist psychology.

The way that Vipassana is taught, in the tradition of S.N. Goenka is through three steps that gradually and incrementally lead to a 'purification' of mind on the surface and on the actual or experiential level. For Goenka, to 'purify' the mind refers to the process of cultivating the capacity to achieve a state of 'pure' mind. A state of 'pure' mind is full of love, compassion and equanimity for oneself and others and is without 'defilements' such as greed, hatred and envy (Bodian, 1994; Goenka, 1994-c; Goenka, 1999). Three steps form the structure of the 10-day retreat, the vehicle for teaching the technique. The three steps are meant to be adopted simultaneously when one begins practicing the technique in their everyday life (Goenka, 1987).

Firstly, practitioners must ground themselves in moral conduct, in which they must abstain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct and the consumption of intoxicants. Goenka (1999) argues that "one cannot work to liberate oneself from 'defilements' in the mind while at the same time one continues to perform deeds of body and speech which only multiply those defilements. Therefore, a code of morality is the essential first step of the practice" (p. 27).

From there, practitioners embark on the second step, where they calm the mind by doing concentration meditation, where the breath is observed (unregulated) and concentration and equanimity are cultivated. Cultivating concentration and equanimity of mind allows for one to take on the third step.

The third step is the process of "purifying the mind of defilements by developing insight into one's own nature. This reality is Vipassana: experiencing one's own reality, by the systematic and dispassionate observation of the ever-changing mind-matter phenomenon manifesting itself as sensations within oneself. This is the culmination of the teaching of the Buddha: self-purification by self-observation" (p.27).

These three steps function as the structure of the 10-day course, Goenka's vehicle for the transmission of the technique to anyone who attends. And this vehicle is not simply meant to be practiced in the retreat setting but in one's life as well and it is meant to bring benefit to both the practitioner and society (Goenka, 1994-a; Goenka, 1999; Goldberg, 2001). The retreat then is not a withdrawal from the vicissitudes of the world and of life. It is a medium for learning to face them better, more skillfully, always looking to integrate what is learned into the 'real world' of daily life. In chapter 4, I support this point by making clear that Goenka's 'art of living' is practical and pertinent for me in my High School classrooms.

In my view, Goenka teaches that when one controls and 'purifies' the mind through the practice of Vipassana (living morally, practicing concentration meditation and developing insight through Vipassana meditation), one is cultivating two practical fruits. The first is the capacity to be equanimous and the second is more broadly an insight into Dharma that leads to 'purification' of mind. I explore these two fruits in more detail.

Equanimity

With self-control and mastery of the mind comes equanimity. Without equanimity of mind, there is a tendency towards and a reaction to craving of pleasant sensations and aversion to unpleasant sensations and this causes suffering (Goenka, 1994-d). When one cultivates equanimity of mind, one can be on the razor's edge between not wanting to hold on to their pleasant circumstances and sensations and not wanting to change their unpleasant circumstances and sensations and in this state one is firmly within the present moment (Goenka, 1994-a).

This self-mastery of mind is achieved through training oneself to observe the breath and arising sensations in the body associated with the breath, observe them without indulging in reactionary thoughts/actions/fantasies, even when one's habit is to react to pleasant or unpleasant states/sensations/thoughts. Even when

the ‘causes’ of the reactions are strong or the reactions themselves are strong and highly habitual, one is to stay with the breath, observing its qualities all the while (Goenka, 1999).

What I have learned through my own practice is that to indulge in these reactions is to reinforce the habitual pattern of craving and aversion. And when I indulge in reactions of craving and aversion, I find myself out of the present moment. I suffer the dissatisfaction of my current circumstances and my craving or my aversion too, which are then strengthened by my reactions.

If one takes the time to practice concentration meditation, the precursor meditation technique to Vipassana meditation, one notices that when mental ‘defilements’ arise, one’s breath will lose its normality, letting you know that a reaction is soon to follow. Goenka argues that sensations in our body can be used similarly to our breath, as a ‘private secretary’, who will report when a negativity or ‘defilement’ arises: “Similarly the sensations tell me: ‘Something has gone wrong.’ I must accept it. Then, having been warned, I start observing the respiration, the sensations, and I find very quickly that the defilement passes away” (Goenka, 1999, p.24-25).

It is very difficult, according to Goenka, to observe abstract mental negativities and ‘defilements’ themselves, like abstract fear, anger or passion; when one tries to do so, the tendency is often to observe the object or ‘cause’ of this ‘defilement’ or negativity that is usually outside of us. In this way, in trying to observe our own fear, anger or passion, we seemingly naturally begin to think, fantasize about and ruminate over the object that ‘caused’ the negativity to arise within us.

For example, if I feel jealous, in trying to observe my jealousy, I begin to think and fantasize about the person or event that made me feel jealous. Goenka argues that this only multiplies our suffering and that a practical method for stopping the multiplication of one’s suffering is to observe “the respiration and the sensations both of which are directly related to the mental defilement” and that with the careful, dispassionate and compassionate observation on the breath and

sensations, that "very quickly [] the defilement passes away" (Goenka, 1999, p.24-25).

Goenka teaches that our usual habit pattern is to search out and assign the cause or the source of our pleasures and pains outside of us in the world. We must turn our gaze inward and experientially see that the true source of our own suffering is in our own blind reactions. These reactions multiply our 'defilements', our habits and thus our suffering (Goenka, 1994-c; Goenka, 1999).

Self-observation allows us to realize that we are often looking only outside for the truth of why we suffer and we direct our efforts towards 'fixing' and changing the world around us to ensure our own wellbeing and happiness. Ultimately, this is futile because so much of the outside world is beyond our control. However, changes in life circumstances; such as the elimination of family/spousal abuse, the elimination of malnourishment or hunger, or other practical changes that bring major tangible improvements of quality of life related to safety and survival, are important exceptions to note.

When one begins to practice observing the breath, then one becomes capable of directly observing the mental 'defilements' as changes in breath or as sensations (the two go hand in hand, they are concomitant). Then one can stop one's own reactive acquiescence to these arisings and thus begin to rework these habits, the real cause of one's suffering (Goenka, 1994-c). One can then face these 'defilements' without being overpowered by them and learn to remain equanimous in the face of hardships that 'cause' anger, greed, and hatred whether their 'source' be inside or out. As one cultivates their ability to practice and remain equanimous, one realizes how quickly they "can come out of the negativity" (Goenka, 1999, p. 25) and be in the now, neither craving better inward/outward circumstances nor running from unpleasant ones and live in what Goenka calls 'pure' mind.

In my view, the technique helps the practitioner break the habit pattern of reacting with craving and aversion to the ups and downs of life, which only reinforce one's dissatisfaction and negativity towards what life offers and towards what is experienced within the body/mind.

When you cultivate the capacity to cease the repetition of this pattern in your mind and in your life, you empower yourself to act and not react in response to pleasure, struggle and pain. This means that regardless of how outwardly pleasurable or painful your life's circumstances may be, you can cease the multiplication of the suffering and dissatisfaction that is inherent to craving and aversion by not reacting in this way and by remaining equanimous with the suffering that does exist.

By doing this you are reworking your habit pattern that makes you miserable (Goenka, 1994-d). As such, the mind and body stays relatively peaceful, regardless of inward/outward circumstance. This clearly has far reaching applications to a High School classroom paradigm! The process of mitigating one's own suffering, or 'nipping suffering in the bud' can be a buttress for teaching anti-oppressively, in my view and I explore this more fully in chapter 4.

Insight/Wisdom

It is my understanding that the second fruit that a practitioner of Vipassana will cultivate is insight into the law of nature, Dharma. I believe an understanding of Dharma to include an intimate and experiential understanding of impermanence, suffering (craving/aversion/equanimity) and selflessness and that this experiential understanding will lead to a 'purification' of mind (Goenka, 1994-a; Goenka, 1999; Goldberg, 2001). It must be noted however, that my own experiential cultivation of insight and wisdom into Dharma is limited.

My mind is not 'purified' and I have come to understand but a little of Dharma experientially. Goenka teaches that when one comes to understand Dharma, the law of nature, experientially and not just intellectually, one understands that the law of nature is such that anytime we generate an impurity of mind, a 'defilement', a negativity, we break the law of nature and nature punishes us then and there through suffering (Goenka, 1999). As such, he or she who has

'purified' their mind will generate no more mental 'defilements' and will live with total 'pure' mind (Bodian, 1994).

When looking at this teaching through the lens of a postmodern, non-religious or secular Western worldview, the language of punishment and law may be unpalatable. However, what Goenka argues is that when one observes the law of nature within themselves, one comes to understand that the first victim of blind reactions and negativity towards outward and inward phenomena is oneself (one suffers) and then only after one has hurt themselves, does one later hurt others (one shares the suffering) (Goenka, 1999). While this makes sense to me, and while these teachings help motivate and support my practice, I cannot say that I have come to know this, truly know this, experientially.

There are moments where the teachings resonate with my experiences but I cannot say that I have cultivated enough experiential insight into this truth that it informs my every action, thought and belief – very far from it. Therefore, I can parrot what I have read and heard in relation to Goenka's teachings on Dharma but beyond an intellectual understanding of what is supposed to happen when one reaches a point where they can begin to cultivate deep insight into the law of nature and the mind/body truth, I do not understand Dharma. But this does not suggest that I have blind faith in this truth either.

Goenka teaches that when one learns to calm the mind, and stay equanimous, one can then cultivate insight into one's own nature. One does so by observing the truth as it manifests in the body, in the form of vibrations and wavelets and thus sensations to be observed and "gradually the mind becomes freed of the defilements; it becomes pure. A pure mind is always full of love-disinterested love for all others; full of compassion for the failings and suffering of others; full of joy at their success and happiness; full of equanimity in the face of any situation" (Goenka, 1999, p.25).

Again, I cannot say that my mind is 'pure', that it is full of love, compassion and joy for myself and others while in an equanimous state, all the time. I am certainly not at this point and I want to make this explicit.

Nonetheless, I have noticed a marked shift taking place in my own life since practicing seriously. I have experienced 'pure' mind in glimpses, like a propensity of being, towards love and compassion for others and myself. Practically speaking, when I apply the technique or practice, in situations inside and outside of my regular sit, I find myself often 'nipping my suffering in the bud' by not indulging in reactionary thoughts, emotions, actions or fantasies.

When I do so and I am able to remain equanimous, I find myself in a state of being that is loving, compassionate and joyful. Do I know without a shadow of a doubt, what is causing this shift in being, in consciousness? No. And certainly there are many possible mechanisms of causality within the technique itself that are difficult to discern, even with Goenka's theoretical and conceptual clarifications (see Goenka 1987 for a complete transcription of the 10-day discourses).

I think it is unbecoming of a practitioner of this technique to simply believe what is being told within the discourses, or in the directions learned during the 10-day retreat. One, in my view has to uncover an understanding of causality for oneself, a deep understanding of how nature works, how life works and how our conditioning and ignorance stand in the way of our own emancipation from suffering.

Even though I cannot live in this state of 'pure' mind all the time, being able to cultivate the state of feeling loving, compassionate and joyous while being empowered to let this state go, as it will go, is astonishing for me in my life. To know that I can sit and cultivate the capacity to 'get here, now' and be that way, and keep remembering to apply the technique, moment to moment and that the more I remember to do so, the more I cultivate the capacity to do so, motivates me to write this thesis and to apply this technique, this practice, this 'art of living', to my teaching practice.

Before situating my mindfulness practice in Western academic scholarship on mindfulness, I analyze my first moment of practice on my couch, trying to 'feel my hands' from the perspective of Goenka's Vipassana as described above.

My practice, then and now through the lens of Vipassana

My intention in reading Tolle's (2005) book was to improve my life, to find freedom from suffering and to find happiness; lofty goals of the self-help genre they may be, this was my motivation and intention for reading the book. And when Tolle suggested the exercise of observing the sensations in my hands, I found myself practicing for the first time even though I didn't know it.

Actually, I thought that either the exercise was a charlatan trick (threatening!) or that I was simply unfit and unworthy of the exercise and the teaching (doubly threatening!).

I look at and analyze this experience from the perspective of Goenka's Vipassana and reflect on what that moment meant for me then and what it means for me now that I have been formatively changed by my practice.

The truth of the moment now is that there are sensations to be observed within my own body that allow me to practically deal with anger, jealousy, anxiety, worry and other negativities that lead to suffering. This is true for me now, I can practice to do this but I could not then, in the time of the story.

When I was asked to practice the technique (observing the sensations in my hands) an interpretation arose. I thought that clenching and holding the book led to increased blood flow and that Tolle knew this would happen and thus he was using a trick to get me to buy into his ontological vision. I did not simply observe and note the interpretation and return to the sensations in my hands, I reacted to the interpretation. My reaction was to interpret the interpretation and I thought that Tolle was not tricking me, his words and teachings were true; I had induced the sensations in my hands in order to align myself with his teachings, I felt unfit and inadequate… I felt miserable.

I know now that if a threatening interpretation arises in me, I can choose to observe it, note it and return to the sensations of breath or of the body that I am observing. If my breath becomes erratic, I know that there are probably strong feelings of aversion and negativity that are soon to follow the interpretation. I observe the storm subside through observing the breath's characteristics. When I

do this, I know from experience that it usually does not take long for subsequent feelings of aversion that follow a threatening interpretive thought to pass away rather quickly. What I am left with is a more objective, less volatile and more compassionate state where I can choose to begin considering and thinking about the interpretation as an action and not a reaction. In practicing this way, I can interrupt the reactive process of suffering, I can 'nip suffering in the bud'.

When I think about where the truth of the moment lay for me then, I wonder; how could I have recognized that the emancipatory truth was to be found in the observation of the breath and the body, when my reactions steered y mind and my consciousness?

In the time of the experience, the truth of the moment was to be found (I thought) in the uncovering of truth in the world, especially in the world of ideas. As such, my analytical, interpretive and meaning-making faculties were often the drivers/passengers of the reactionary engagement of my intellect and emotions, which I had no choice but to acquiesce to. I did not have the ability or choice to 'nip suffering in the bud' and thus my reactions were both me and the tool for acquiring truth. Because of this, truth was fleeting, subjective, whimsical and reactive, subject to reaction and the next reaction to that reaction ad. infinum; a real labyrinth.

Even though Tolle (2005) asked the reader to observe sensations in their hands and to stay with the sensations, I could not do so because my wayward mind and reactionary habit were too powerful and I had no mastery of either whatsoever. I exited the present moment through the intellectual pursuit of trying to explain what I had just felt and observed by cascading into a series of thoughts that I thought were helping me get closer to truth and to happiness (the purpose of reading the book in the first place) but that made me feel anxious, confused, insecure and inadequate.

Even though I could not participate in and understand the exercise as I do now, it still was my first moment of practice because it forced me to face two things even if I was not cognizant of them at the time. It forced me to face my own reactive habit, to acquiesce to thoughts and then thoughts about thoughts ad.

infinum. And secondly, it forced me to see that there was another way, the way of non-reactive self-observation, which Tolle was putting forward and that I might have understood intellectually but that I had no understanding of experientially.

My practice is now an incremental, daily re-working of the habit to react to outward and inward phenomena and thus a process of cultivating equanimity, moment to moment. In doing so, my propensity to reactively spiral into the labyrinth of thoughts, interpretation and judgment lessens. A thought arises, instead of validating/invalidating, accepting or challenging the thought with further thoughts and emotions, I have learned to bring the attention, bring awareness back to the body/breath and observe. I then keep an aerial view of the labyrinth, I stay equanimous and if I want to engage in thinking, interpreting, analyzing and intellectualizing, it is on my terms as an action and not a reaction. Most importantly, if it is an action, it is usually done with more love, compassion and goodwill towards myself and others and this makes me happy. I now situate my practice within Western academic scholarship on mindfulness in chapter 3.

** Relying on Taylor's vision of secularism in the context of governance, and extrapolated to Vipassana as an institution, I see Goenka's secularism as follows. I understand Goenka's Vipassana organization as an institution that does not self-identify as religious and does not discriminate against or privilege any religious or non-religious members. It does however privilege a non-religious, non-sectarian vision of the Buddha's teachings that are conceptualized as universally accessible to anyone regardless of religious or cultural background (Goldberg, 2001; Goenka, 1987).

Chapter 3: My practice situated in Western scholarship: A critical outlook

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is twofold. The first and most overarching aim is to situate my understanding of mindfulness and my own mindfulness practice within the paradigm of Western psychological (WP) scholarship on mindfulness. The chapter provides a picture of how I understand my mindfulness practice, which is very heavily influenced by Vipassana (as explored in chapter 2), in relation to current Western scholarship on mindfulness. The second aim, which is co-dependent on the first, is to look critically at the WP study of mindfulness and to further justify my decision to approach mindfulness from a personal, experiential perspective. Here, I examine the general differences between Western Pyschology and Buddhist psychology (BP) and more specifically the differences between WP and BP visions of mindfulness.

The chapter will draw substantially from the work of Paul Grossman (2011). Being a longtime mindfulness meditator and psychologist, Grossman offers an insightful and critical perspective on current WP mindfulness scholarship. In his view, the WP study of mindfulness can potentially, knowingly or unknowingly, change the BP mindfulness construct (Grossman, 2008; 2011).

His critical outlook on the literature has heavily influenced my thinking on the WP study of mindfulness and to a lesser extent, my own mindfulness practice. Before discussing the differences between Western psychology and Buddhist psychology, I will define what I mean by a BP conceptualization of mindfulness.

What is a Buddhist psychological (BP) vision of mindfulness?

The BP vision or conceptualization of mindfulness can be quite different than many WP conceptualizations of mindfulness. It is beyond the scope of this paper to thoroughly describe the differences that exist between a BP and WP conceptualization of mindfulness, especially since there is no total consensus on either side of what mindfulness actually is (Grossman, 2008). However, I consider a BP vision of mindfulness to rely upon the Buddha's teachings, first and foremost, in its expression and actualization of the practice. I consider Goenka's Vipassana to be an actualization and expression of BP mindfulness, even though Goenka's vision is non-religious. Thus, I feel comfortable calling my practice both Vipasssana and mindfulness. However, there are expressions of mindfulness that do not at all resemble Vipassana epistemologically, ontologically, theoretically/conceptually or practically. When I speak of mindfulness, I mean a BP conceptualization of mindfulness. For the sake of clarity, I now present a BP conceptualization of mindfulness that represents my practice.

When Western scholars access mindfulness from a BP perspective, they often conceptualize it as a "broad set of practices embedded in a transitional path away from ordinary modes of everyday functioning" (Grossman, 2010; Hanh 1998; Kabat-Zinn 2005). It is within the context of this transitional path, which includes affective, behavioural, cognitive, ethical, social and other dimensions, that mindfulness is believed to contribute to the promotion of wellbeing and amelioration of suffering (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011, p.220).

I understand this 'transitional path' to be similar to Goenka's vision of Vipassana as an 'art of living'; a methodology for alleviating the universal problem of human suffering that the Buddha discovered and shared.

Similarly to Goenka, Grossman (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011) also presents the view that concentration meditation is required to develop the focus that will lead to wisdom through insight (vipassana) meditation. I understand wisdom in a BP context to mean the 'right' understanding of experience, which is an insight into Dharma or the law of nature. And I understand the 'right' understanding of experience to mean quite simply, seeing things as they are and not as you want them to be. If you see things as they are and not as you want

them to be, you are dispelling the illusions that keep you from experientially realizing truth regarding impermanence, suffering and selflessness. In BP, when one begins to cultivate insight or wisdom into these truths, they transform all realms of one's life.

Grossman (2011) defines BP mindfulness as such:

> …as deliberate, open-minded awareness of moment-to-moment perceptible experience that ordinarily requires gradual refinement by means of systematic practice; is characterized by a nondiscursive, nonanalytic investigation of ongoing experience; is fundamentally sustained by such attitudes as kindness, tolerance, patience, and courage; and is markedly different from everyday modes of awareness. Mindfulness, within this Buddhist perspective, is an active investigative practice or process that inherently involves cognitive, attitudinal, affective, and even social and ethical dimensions (Grossman, 2010)." (p.1035)

Mindfulness, from this perspective is not just about the time you spend reading about mindfulness, or even the time you spend on your cushion practicing meditation. It is a multifaceted and systematic investigation that integrates 'cognitive, attitudinal and even social and ethical dimensions'. The integration of these different realms is an important feature (as we will explore later) of a BP conceptualization of mindfulness because WP, generally, conceptualizes these realms seperately (Grossman, 2010). This causes problems/tensions when WP resaerchers study mindfulness.

A BP vision of mindfulness is about personal transformation and is more akin to an 'art of living' (how Goenka conceptualized Vipassana) than to a clinical intervention strategy or technique meant to bring about an allievement of symptoms (Grossman, 2010). That does not mean that mindfulness cannot be used in a practical, clinical environement. The BP conceptualization of mindfulness always sees it as practical and applicable to any moment. However, as will be seen, there are contradictions/tensions/problems that arise when applying/studying a BP conceptualization of mindfulness within a WP research/clinical setting. Before examining these issues, I will briefly discuss WP visions of mindfulness through Grossman's critical works.

<u>WP scholarship on BP mindfulnes</u>

WP literature on mindfulness is, as a standard, assumed to reflect a BP conceptualization of mindfulness, according to Grossman & Van Dam (2011). Many scholars use the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) and the Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy program (Segal, Williams, Teasdale, 2002) in their research and both of these programs rely upon a BP conceptualization of mindfulness (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). However, when one reads the literature, one will encounter "definitions of the term that vary greatly from that of a simple therepeutic or experiential technique (Hayes and Plumb 2007) to a multi-faceted activity, which requires practice and refinement (Grossman 2010)." (p.220) Typically, mindfulness is defined "in terms of awareness and attentiveness to immediate experience" (p.88), with small variations.

For example, a mindfulness definition that I often encounter is from Kabat-Zinn (1990, p.4): "paying attention in a particular way on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judmentally." Another example would be "The awareness that arises through intentionally attending to in an open, accepting, and discerning way to whatever is arising in the present moment." (Shapiro, 2009, p.556)

Both the Kabat-Zinn and Shapiro deifnitions accommodate a vision of mindfulness as both the state of being mindful and the practice of cultivating the state of being mindful. Both definitions speak to my vision of mindfulness. I understand these deinitions, however, from the perspective of my own dilligent and rigorous practice. If I imagine someone who has no meditation experience whatsoever reading the above conceptualizations of mindfulness, a few issues arise.

Someone with no mindfulness experience who dwells within a WP paradigm might look at the definitions of mindfulness presented above and believe that they understand mindfulness. They might believe this because to attend to and be aware of one's perceptible mental states/processes is accomodated by modern psychological theories of attention and cognitive

function (Grossman, 2010). They may even see the above definitions as "absurdly self-evident and banal" (p. 88). But how one understands mindfulness depends on whether that person has practiced it or not. Furthermore, if someone has never been in contact with mindfulness teachings from a BP perspective and has not practiced mindfulness in this way, they may further misunderstand the above definitions.

Let us look at the Shapiro (2009) definition specifically: "The awareness that arises through intentionally attending to in an open, accepting, and discerning way to whatever is arising in the present moment " (p.556). The nature of 'open', 'accepting', 'discerning' here is difficult to conceptualize at first glance. From the BP perspetive from which I practice and regard mindfulness, I have a very clear picture of what these three terms mean. However, I could imagine that someone who is firmly rooted within a WP paradigm or who has not practiced mindfulness in any serious way would have a very different understanding of these terms. In fact, there is evidence that this is the case and further discussion of this fact will be presented later in this chapter.

My vision of the qualities of being 'open', 'accepting' and 'discerning' is both attitudinal and practical. The attitude of which I meet arisings/phenomena within my own body is to be open and accepting, and I would add, dispassionate and compassionate as well. Discernment in this context, to me, means to observe ardently and carefully, to openly and acceptingly see what is there, not to assume, push aside, think about, interpret or repress what I observe.

Grossman (2010) sees such an interpretation and approach to the mind as different than Western pscyhology, especially behaviorism. He states that "Mindfulness from the Buddhist Perspective encompasses and is at the same time embedded in a range of not only cognitive, but also emotional, social, and ethical dimensions, which extend beyond the usual compartmentalization of conditioning, attention, and awareness of academic psychology" (p.88). The BP approach to mindfulness is one of personal and spiritual transformation, where one cultivates and applies a technique that will equally affect all aspects of one's life if it is practiced with this intention.

The WP approach to the study of mindfulness often draws upon a BP conceptualization of mindfulness, in that its main Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBI), the MBSR (Kabat-Zinn, 1990) and the MBCT (Segal, Williams, Teasdale; 2002) use a BP vision of mindfulness. However, how these MBIs are being used in the context of WP clinical practice and academic scholarship remain problematic.

Grossman, in critiquing the problems within the WP treatment of BP mindfulness, warns that the study of mindfulness; namely, its redefinition, reconceptulization, operationalization and its measure through the scientific method,will denature, banalize and distort the originally BP construct (Grossman, 2010, 2011; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). I do not wish to contribute to this process in any way.

My first aim in this chapter is to situate my understanding of mindfulness, which I have begun and consists mainly of a BP vision of the construct, as described by Paul Grossman. My second aim is to discuss WP scholarship on mindfulness, critically. I have begun this as well and the following section, where I compare a Western Psychological and Buddshist Psychological paradigm and discuss their differences with regards to the study of mindfulnes, will achieve both my first and second aim. I now explore the differences between WP and BP and how these differences illuminate the problems inherent to the WP study of BP mindfulness and I justify my self-study methodology mentioned in chapter 1 through these arguments.

Comparison between Western psychology and Buddhist psychology

In this section, I provide a context in which to present the tensions/problems within the WP scholarly treatment of the BP construct of mindfulness. This context contains broad stroke comparisons that will help present the differences in perspective and approach between Western psychology and Buddhist psychology. Then I discuss these differences and tensions with

regards to the problems they pose for the WP study of mindfulness, more specifically.

Paul Grossman (2010) puts forward a convenient avenue of comparison that is highly salient to the aims of this chapter. In his work cited below (table 1), he compares the Western behavioral science paradigm and the consciousness discipline paradigm very broadly, using a table (pp. 95). I will draw on this comparison as a means to explore the general differences between WP and BP.

Table1 (from Grossman, 2010, p. 95):

Table 1 A contrast of central concepts of the mainstream behavioral science paradigm with the conscious disciples, including insight meditation and mindfulness practice

Behavioral Science Paradigm	Consciousness Disciplines
Verifiable phenomena central	Consciousness is central concern
Normal, waking consciousness optimal	Usual consciousness extremely suboptimal
Variety of states of consciousness ignored or pathologized	Multiple states of consciousness exist
Skepticism or denial of higher states of consciousness	Higher states of consciousness achievable
No tradition of consciousness training	Extensive mental training necessary
Goal: ME happy (some traditions of self-actualization)	Ultimate goal of liberation, awakening
Happiness = stimulation, novelty, activity, accumulation, and power	Happiness = peace, equanimity, compassion; freedom from attachment and accumulation
Psychotherapy and healthy ego stand central	Psychotherapeutic aspects largely neglected
Ultimate assessment must be scientific, intellectual, and behavioral	Approach inherently introspective
Optimal and only path to knowledge thru intellect	Language, abstract thought insufficient for understanding
Exclusively based on self-reports or observation of others	Completely grounded in personal experience
Self-report and observational measures often naïve, limited	Range and depth of personal experience
Clear ego boundaries, psychological stability, and individuality	Buddhism: fundamental concepts of no-self, impermanence
Corrective: modify avoidant, evaluative and dysfunctional behavior	Constructivist: expands range and flexibility of capacities
Clear separation of cognitive, emotional, and moral realms	Fluid integration of cognitive, emotional and moral realms

In this comparison, Grossman (2010) generalizes the Western behavioral science paradigm to Western psychology because "academic psychology and psychotherapy in the twentieth century is heavily dominated by behaviorist concepts and theory." (p.87) I too will make this generalization. Furthermore, I infer from Grossman's (2010) article that 'consciousness disciplines' can be an umbrella term that contains the concept of Buddhist psychology and its vision of mindfulness. Thus, 'consciousness discipline' can be generalized to a BP paradigm or vision. Grossman is drawing on Walsh (1980) here, where Walsh compared Western behavioral science and consciousness disciplines to comment on tensions that exist between WP and BP.

In the table, we see Grossman's (2010) vision of the differences between these two paradigms. These differences will provide a context to better understand the tensions that exist when a Western psychologist aims to conduct research on mindfulness, operationalize it, quantify it, utilize it in the treatment of a patient or seeks to make a case for or against it conceptually. I will not comment on every point of comparison and I will combine points together for the sake of brevity and clarity.

The first comparison: WP verifiable phenomena vs BP states of consciousness

The first difference I explore is that WP is concerned with an investigation into verifiable phenomena, whereas BP is centrally concerned with an investigation into consciousness and states of consciousness. In WP, we encounter concepts such as pathology and dysfunction that are based upon a normative understanding (empirically collected and analyzed data of verifiable phenomena) of waking consciousness. More simply, 'normal' waking consciousness is seen as optimal, only when it is 'normal', when it lines up with or falls within the mean of collected data. Psychotherapeutic interventions are thus corrective. How psychologists establish what is 'normal' (intentionally or unintentionally) is contingent upon their investigations into verifiable phenomena in people through observation and on empirical tools like questionnaires that collect data.

In BP, states of consciousness are the focus of investigation and these investigations are always introspective and thus based upon the personal experience of the investigator, within the confines of their own body. This investigation does not rely upon normative understandings of experience it relies upon theory (provided by the Buddha) to guide the way of observation and experience.

The Buddha's theory is not empirical in the same way that WP knowledge of the mind/body is empirical, even though the Buddha is sometimes referred to as a great scientist (Goenka, 1987). It is believed that the Buddha cultivated

experiential understanding through meditation that brought him insight into truth regarding impermanence, suffering and selflessness'. His evidence is a transformative methodology for bringing about the same understanding in anyone who follows it, as an 'art of living'. The proof that it works is only to be found in the doing, in your own experience not in the intellectual/conceptual understanding of the methodology alone. This is a very different approach to wellness and suffering/unhappiness than a WP approach.

In light of the differences between WP and BP, Grossman (2010) argues that "in the current "scientific" era, we often rely upon nomothetic, normative data to understand even our own inner workings. Precisely because of its normative quality, such information is typically flawed when it comes to within-subject relationships" (p.93). For Grossman, the mindfulness path can be seen as a radical departure away from the reliance upon WP conceptualizations of normative being/health/wellbeing.

It occurred to me early on in my reading of WP scholarship on mindfulness that there was a major difference between the scientific/academic study of mindfulness as a concept or catalyst for positive change in people, and its practice. The two processes of interacting with mindfulness, the study of it and the practice of it are ontologically and epistemologically very different. The former is rooted in a WP paradigm, where researches are attempting to collect empirical data (verifiable phenomena, evidence) on if/how mindfulness works. Whereas the latter is rooted in a BP paradigm, where one learns if/how mindfulness works by practicing it, following the methodology laid out by the Buddha. Both the theoretical and practical understanding of mindfulness are topics of WP scholarship, however.

It is assumed that WP researchers who study mindfulness with the intention of proving if/how it works are considered mindfulness experts within the field. I argue this because within the traditions of WP scholarship, intellectual/conceptual knowledge is (arguably) the prerequisite for expertise/mastery (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). However, the topic of their inquiries (mindfulness) is embedded within a different epistemological and

ontological tradition (BP); certainly this must have conceptual and practical consequences.

From my perspective, to apply a WP logic of mastery/expertise to mindfulness is problematic because mindfulness is predicated upon different 'ground rules' than those existing within the WP paradigm. Grossman (2010) speaks to this indirectly when he draws from both Kabat-Zinn (2003) and Segal et al., (2002) in stating that the BP perspective is such that a "unique knowledge is thought to derive from such individual exploration and inquiry" (Grossman, 2010, p.93) when one practices mindfulness. This knowledge is not interchangeable with intellectual or theoretical learning. This implies in Grossman's view, and it is his recommendation, that psychologists who wish to use mindfulness in clinical interventions must, as a prerequisite, have "substantial and prolonged self-experience with mindfulness" (p.93).

I would like to apply this same consideration to academic researchers as well (Grossman and Van Dam, 2011). A scholar, who is firmly planted within the paradigm of WP, with little sensitivity to the differences within BP, might take this claim to intellectual/conceptual 'expertise' as totally valid. Someone who is rooted in BP might see it false because to know and be an expert on mindfulness requires equal theoretical (theoretical/conceptual understanding is still very important in this view) and experiential understanding. The two when equal, bring about 'right' understanding and truth of a different kind than what can be accessed through the intellect alone (Goenka, 1987).

Grossman (2011), cautions that if WP researchers neglect to be aware of and acknowledge the differences between WP and BP then mindfulness will be denatured, distorted and banalized, as mentioned. The WP approach (epistemology, ontology) and study (operationalization, redefinition, empirical quantification/measurement) of mindfulness will bring about these consequences in Grossman's view. And that this will "deprive psychologists of possibilities to appreciate and, possibly, bridge fundamental differences in Buddhist and Western approaches to mind and body." (p.1038)

The second comparison: WP Happiness vs BP happiness

Still drawing from Grossman's (2010) table, we can see that WP is generally interested in bringing about happiness in people as a goal (traditions of self-actualization being a noted exception) and sees happiness from the perspective of "stimulation, novelty, activity, accumulation, and power" (Table 1, p. 95).

BP is generally interested in bringing about liberation or awakening, as opposed to happiness directly, according to Grossman. My understanding of BP and mindfulness is that happiness is a by-product of the liberatory/emancipatory process and happiness is defined in a different way. Grossman suggests that happiness from this perspective is loosely defined as "peace, equanimity, compassion; freedom from attachment and accumulation" (Table 1, p.95).

In order to make best use of this comparison, I will line up both psychotherapy and mindfulness practice as representative processes of their respective psychological paradigms. I recognize that this comparison is not only contentious but also reductive because they are embedded within different paradigms that have different ends and means but their comparison will help to bring to light the problems of WP scholars studying BP mindfulness within the WP academic/clinical paradigm.

As seen, BP has a different vision of happiness and does not view it as the goal of mindfulness practice. The goal of mindfulness practice from the BP perspective is insight, which leads to the eradication of suffering (among other spiritual outcomes) and is more akin to an 'art of living' which is a process usually measured in lifetimes rather than timed clinical sessions (Goenka, 1987; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011).

Consider a scholar/clinician applying mindfulness within a clinical paradigm that is meant to bring about WP happiness and a well adjusted, stable self that lines up with an empirical norm. In this context, a scholar/clinician might try to drive desirable short term change in spite of this methodology being at odds with a BP vision of mindfulness. Because of this, Grossman (2010) and

Kabat-Zinn (2003) warn against plugging BP mindfulness into a WP clinical paradigm to drive desirable change in the short term. Furthermore, Gause & Coholic (2010), Dimidjian and Linehan (2003) and Rosch (2007) warn of the problems that will come about in separating mindfulness from its BP (historical) roots; where it could lose its holistic or spiritual nature.

I understand this to mean that mindfulness could become a tool in a WP toolkit that is wielded to treat the existing complaints of the client, as opposed to bring about insight and wisdom that will lead to transformation or awakening, which is its purpose in the BP paradigm (Grossman, 2010).

This is of concern to me as a practitioner of a BP vision of mindfulness that is still tied to its holistic or spiritual roots. I would want others to encounter the practice as I have encountered it and practiced it because I have seen its transformative power in my own life in this form. Furthermore, this concerns me as a scholar because I aim to apply mindfulness from a BP, holistic and spiritual perspective to my teaching practice (chapter 4).

The third comparison: WP separation vs BP integration

In Western psychology there are clear separations made. Ego boundaries are well defined and cognitive, emotional and moral realms are often seen as separate. In my experience, as someone who has lived 5+ years of WP psychotherapy, I would say that implicit within my psychologists' strategy of 'treating' my unhappiness was to help me disentangle my cognitive, emotional and moral realms.

The therapeutic process, in my case, involved talking about my feelings, behaviors, my past and my life, generally. Sometimes what I was saying was heavily influenced by my emotions, sensations in the moment, biases and insecurities, and other times I felt more objective. Regardless, I was always encouraged to speak and my emotions, no matter how reactive, were always openly accepted. In engaging in this process, the implicit goal was to have more

psychological stability, less anxiety, stop ruminating and be in a better position to act out my individuality, to know and be who I really am.

In BP, there is a much more fluid integration of cognitive, emotional and moral realms than WP. And the BP perspective relies on the Buddha's fundamental concepts concerning impermanence, suffering and selflessness, where one develops insight into the phenomenological truth of these three concepts through meditation. This process applies to the realms of cognition, emotion and morality equally. They are also synergistic, mutually reinforcing or mutually undermining (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011).

Mindfulness meditation is designed to help one recognize truths (experiential, within the body) that transform one's cognitive, emotional and moral realms (Grossman, 2010). These realms in BP are lumped together as states of consciousness and thus are totally interrelated, intertwined and interdependent.

I understand mindfulness to rework one's habit pattern of reactively indulging in craving and aversion (Goenka, 1987). Thoughts, emotions, sensations/feelings, rumination, analysis, and meaning making are all processes and triggers of potential reaction within the habit pattern of craving and aversion. It is emphasized again and again in Vipassana that the only measure of one's progress on the path or when one is meditating is their ability to remain equanimous. Equanimity, in my view, is one's ability to remain non-reactive to the above processes of reaction/triggering.

What this means for me is that thinking, feeling, analysis and meaning making are all good when they are actions. However, when they trigger reactions and become processes of reaction, they become ways of reinforcing patterns of craving and aversion that unbalance the mind and lead to an un-equanimous state. This is a major source of suffering or unhappiness. The cultivation of a balanced mind that will stay balanced regardless of what is happening inside or outside is a spiritual goal that I have and is heavily influenced by Goenka's (1987,1994-a, 1994-b, 1994-c, 1994, 1999) Vipassana and his BP vision.

Other BP practitioners of mindfulness may emphasize other spiritual outcomes as the 'yardstick' of progress on the path, like one's cultivation of peace, compassion, freedom from attachment or freedom from the desire for accumulation, which are also part of Grossman's (2010) vision of happiness in BP. Happiness then is not the goal, liberation from suffering is, however one's happiness may be seen as a measure of one's progress on the path.

In my therapy sessions, I was encouraged to speak about topics that brought with them intense arisings of sensations, feelings, emotions and thoughts and consequently an unbalanced mind. I was encouraged to accept that I was feeling the affect that came with triggering thoughts/memories and analyze/interpret them to discover why I felt the way I did.

It seemed as though my affective reactions were the 'yardstick' for how salient an issue or topic was. The feelings and emotions that came with facing painful past events, guilt, unskillful behaviors I had engaged in, or future fears and anxieties were seen as separate to the event. They were necessary to the process but at the same time were the very things that I was trying to be free from. Grossman (2010) speaks to this when he writes: "Psychotherapy is almost always directed toward elimination of existing complaints" and comparatively "the primary aim of mindfulness is the development of insight and understanding of the mind in relation to all experience" (p.89). The difference in scope is made clear here.

My mindfulness practice gives me experiential insight into the cause of suffering for me, in my life. This insight is that my habit of craving pleasure and being in aversion to pain is the source of my suffering. So, my practice is specifically about re-working the habit of craving pleasurable events/phenomena and being in aversion to unpleasant ones.

More deeply, it is about reworking the habit of craving pleasurable sensations in my body and being in aversion to unpleasant ones. The thoughts, feelings, emotions, sensations and their interpretations and subsequent thoughts, feelings, emotions and sensations that come with interpretations are all equivalently impermanent (Goenka, 1987). My mindfulness practice is not about

eradicating negative thoughts, feelings, emotions and sensations but about changing my relationship to them, stopping my tendency to react to them with aversion, which multiplies my suffering and thus keeping a balanced and equanimous mind.

Grossman (2010) argues that most psychotherapeutic interventions "are aimed at modifying specific behaviors or cognitions in a previously operationalized manner and direction-not at transformation of attitudes, mindsets, and experience into a radically new structures that may take multiple, open-ended forms." (p.94) The operationalization of behaviors or cognitions is based upon the quantified, verified and statistically valid data that has been collected empirically by Western psychologists.

Grossman (2010) argues that BP mindfulness is a process meant to address the universal problem of craving and aversion (among other spiritual aims), in contrast to the goal oriented WP therapeutic processes of successful treatment of psychological dysfunction that are "inherently individual in nature--my problem, my dysfunction, my unhappiness." (p.96)

I see WP 'separation' (as opposed to BP integration) here in two ways. The first is that one's cognitive, emotional and moral processes are seen as separate, in terms of 'cognition' and 'behaviors' that have been operationalized in a specific manner and direction based on normative data. Secondly, one's dysfunction in this view, is seen as individual and not universal, an aberration from the norm where many people feel like they alone are different in their aberrations from what is normal, until they discover that many others experience the same thing.

In contrast, BP views 'normal' states of consciousness as sub-optimal and does not distinguish between what is 'normal' and pathological or dysfunctional because BP treats "constancy of personality or self as an empty fiction" (p.95). Again, this is in contrast to WP, where "the notion of a relatively enduring and coherent set of psychological traits characteristic of the individual is, in fact, one of the very foundations of Western psychology, although the concept of

personality stability has been challenged and modified in the psychological literature over the years" (Grossman, 2010, p.95).

The difference in vision is clear. Where this concerns me is in my intention of this paper. There is more and more evidence suggesting that mindfulness (with MBSR as a vehicle of the practice) works to help increase people's wellbeing (Baer, 2003; Bishop, 2002; Grossman et al., 2004; Shapiro et. al., 2008). There is even burgeoning evidence suggesting that it helps adolescents as well (Barnes et al., 2004; Birbaum, 2005; Black, Milam and Sussman, 2009; Burke, 2010; Flook et al., 2010).

I could demonstrate how mindfulness would probably help me teach better through these WP studies. However, the inherent tensions and epistemological/ontological differences between WP and BP have not been reconciled within WP scholarship on mindfulness. To rely upon the empirical data even though these tensions remain un-reconciled is irresponsible in my eyes.

To apply/study BP mindfulness within a clinical, professional or institutional environment that is heavily influenced by Western psychology is problematic because Buddhist psychology's foundational premises and expressions are largely theoretically/conceptually/practically unsupported.

The fourth comparison: WP interpretation vs BP observation

WP views the optimal and only path to knowledge through the intellect, according to Grossman (Table 1, 2010, p.95). I find this generalization contentious, as well. At first glance, my own experiences with a psychologist were as much about the process and experience of our conversations as the content. And this process went beyond what I thought and the interpretations or meaning making I was able to put forward, it also involved physically being with someone in an intimate (yet professional) space.

However, the mechanism of change within the therapeutic process for me was totally contingent upon the content of which we spoke. No matter how skillfully, warmly or cathartically we would have talked about baseball, I would

have found it very difficult indeed to bring about the changes I was seeking, to be less anxious, less ruminative, more myself and happier.

The content of our conversations then needed to be varied, personal and about me specifically. And with this content came the process of making meaning, making links and drawing conclusions, which helped me develop understanding and alternative perspectives of my experiences. When I look back, I would say that the process was more intellectual than experiential because however transformative the embodied experience of speaking to a therapist was, the treatment process was totally dependent on what we spoke about and then secondarily, how we spoke about it.

In contrast, my mindfulness practice emphasizes the process of observation over an interpretation of content and this speaks to a major epistemological and ontological difference between WP and BP.

BP sees language and abstract thought as insufficient for 'right' understanding and thus proposes an alternative approach, one of observation. There is a metaphor that illustrates this difference of approach and the resulting insight/understanding/wisdom that is cultivated through the practice of mindfulness (observation). The metaphor is described as such: the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon (Nelson, 2012).

Mindfulness still relies on language and conceptual theory (the finger pointing at the moon) to help one observe properly. With this proper observation, eventually, comes an understanding (the moon) that transcends a conceptual/theoretical knowing, where one begins to 'reperceive' mind/body phenomena in an actual sense. In other words, conceptual theory embedded within BP mindfulness helps change the way one observes mind/body phenomena, when one cultivates the ability to do so through mindfulness meditation. Khema (1989, p.1) speaks to this process when she writes: "The difference between the trained mind and untrained mind is the understood experience." (as seen in Grossman, 2011, p.1037).

This quote does not suggest that through proper observation one interprets one's experience differently. What I gain from this quote is that when one

observes mindfully, the quality of the observing mind and the phenomena that is being observed are completely and totally interdependent, they are concomitant (Goenka, 1987). The 'understood experience' then is an informed (BP theory) observing of not just the state of one's mind or body as represented by mind/body phenomena but the concomitance of the two. What is understood in that moment of observation requires no interpretation or analysis because it is 'seen' and experienced. The contact of mind/body is the observed and thus understood experience, which leads to insight regarding impermanence, suffering and selflessness.

The quote by Khema (1989) also applies to the coming discussion on mindfulness questionnaires. The questionnaires used to measure mindfulness in people are meant to measure people's self-report qualities/states of behaviour, attitude, mind and body that represent their level of mindfulness/mindlessness. In the examples within the critique put forward by Grossman & Van Dam (2011) and Grossman (2008), the understood experience of untrained people is buttressed/informed by an entirely different paradigm of theory than BP that is if the people being questioned are untrained in mindfulness.

The practice of mindfulness that is informed by BP theory leads to a 'reperceiving' of mind/body phenomena. I draw the term 'reperceiving' not from a BP source on mindfulness but from a WP source on mindfulness that I am critical of because it is proposing mechanisms of mindfulness to answer the question "how does mindfulness work?" (Shapiro et al., 2006). The article proposes three components or axioms of mindfulness: intention, attention and attitude, with reperceiving being a meta-mechanism of action.

I am critical of Shapiro et al,'s work (2006, 2009), where they have participated in a process of scholarly brainstorming. And they seek to "conceptualize mindfulness in a way compatible with both its philosophical roots and the scientific method". And where the defining and operationalization of mindfulness within WP is seen as "one of the most salient issues in mindfulness research" (2009, p.558-559).

Essentially, Shapiro et al., (2006) are positing the concept of reperceiving as a meta-mechanism of mindfulness and that it is akin to the WP concepts of "*decentering* (Safran & Segal, 1990), *deautomization (*Deikman, 1982; Safran & Segal, 1990) and *detachment (*Bohart, 1983)." (italics in the original, p.377) In simple terms, "reperceiving can be described as a rotation in consciousness in which what was previously "subject" becomes "object"" (Shapiro et. al., 2006, p.378).

I have heard mindfulness practitioners describe this as the first real step or insight of mindfulness practice, where we realize that our thoughts/emotions/fears/worries do not represent us, that we (as observer) can cultivate objectivity when observing our own mind/body phenomena. It is like a space between the observing mind and that which is observed, which allows one's mind/body phenomena to be an object of observation and not subjective, not representative of something one cannot help but live out.

This speaks to my experience and this is why I like the concept being put forward because it has helped me further clarify my own practice. However, I think Shapiro's scholarly proposal is problematic. Consider for example, the context in which WP conceptualizations/operationalizations of mindfulness are being proposed. Shapiro et al., (2009) state that even though a consensus definition of mindfulness has not been achieved:

"…the process of scholarly brainstorming has challenged and deepened understanding of how to conceptualize mindfulness in a way compatible with both its philosophical roots and the scientific method.
It will then be important to develop valid and reliable measures that capture the multidimensional nature of mindfulness and are applicable across cultures, as highlighted by Christopher et. al.'s research. It is also possible that the multifaceted nature of mindfulness is too complex to be adequately represented in a quantitative questionnaire." (p.558)

Immediately, I see problems with this research aim. I will explore them with the intention of making the differences between WP and BP clear, where embedding BP mindfulness within a WP paradigm is problematic and that WP mindfulness research may be contributing to a denaturing/distorting/banalizing of mindfulness, as suggested by Grossman (and Van Dam; Grossman, 2011).

The difference between WP and BP in the study of mindfulness, in sum

I think that the style of observation practiced in the scientific method is a very different form of observation than the type cultivated through mindfulness practice. When conducting scientific research, there is a subject observing an object but it is always of the world, outside of the body and mind of the subject. Also, the data collected is meant to be interpreted and is interpreted from a WP perspective and not a BP one.

BP mindfulness, as we have seen, proposes that one observe mind/body phenomena within the confines of one's own body and not interpret the data. However, the observing itself is informed by theory of a BP nature.

Grossman (2008; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011) offers a critique of the WP tool of self-report questionnaires in the measurement of mindfulness. He (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011) suggests that the questionnaires that are administered to meditators and non-meditators alike are often "divergently defined and operationalized by different groups of investigators, often dependent upon the specific psychological specializations of the authors (Grossman 2008)." (p.221)

There is an implicit assumption that these questionnaires are measuring the BP definition/conceptualization of mindfulness, however, these questionnaires largely focus upon attention and awareness with little mention of compassion, loving-kindness, sympathetic joy and equanimity (Grossman & Van Dam 2011), which are concepts that fit much more comfortably within an 'integrated' BP approach than a 'separated' WP approach.

Furthermore, how one interprets the language of the items within the questionnaire depends on how one understands their experience. Grossman & Van Dam (2011) argue that someone who has no meditation experience will respond to the questions on the questionnaire differently than those with meditation experience. They will understand the language being used to measure awareness, attention and intention differently than someone who is trained.

Grossman (2008) offers a startling example of this when he cites that Leigh, Bowen and Marlatt (2005), using the FMI questionnaire, found that "Binge-drinking and smoking students had significantly *higher* mindfulness scores than a matched control group of students without these behaviors." (italics in the original, p.407) These students' mindfulness scores were even higher than very experienced meditators from another study (Walach et. al., 2006)!

What Grossman (2008) found was that these students' inflated scores were "partially attributed to items related to somatic awareness, presumably due to the frequent negative physical consequences of binge drinking and smoking behavior" (p.406). Clearly, how one understands words such as 'awareness', 'noticing', 'paying attention', 'judging' and 'present moment' is dependent upon one's understanding of the words in the questionnaire and one's psychological, epistemological and ontological orientation.

Here we see the difficulty of using "reliable measures that capture the multidimensional nature of mindfulness [that] are applicable across cultures" (Shapiro et al., 2009). Does this mean that they need to be developed? Or perhaps, does this mean that the successful Western psychological, scientific measure of BP mindfulness is not just problematic but impossible?

The scientific measures will always be embedded within an epistemological and ontological paradigm that is WP in nature. They cannot easily measure mindfulness if it is conceptualized in a BP way because mindfulness is a construct at the interface of the mind/body of the practitioner and thus resists quantification/scientific objectification. This is especially true if the scientific measure is meant to measure BP mindfulness in people who have no background in BP and are themselves rooted in a WP outlook and understand their experiences from this perspective.

Secondly, if we return to Shapiro et al's (2006) project and proposed definition, we can further see the problems with the WP project of redefining and operationalizing mindfulness, especially when we consider the following argument put forward by Grossman (2011):

I argue that Western psychologists' definitions and operationalizations of mindfulness may, in fact, be near-enemies of the original Buddhist construct. At

very first glance, these operationalizations may resemble that of the MBI definition, but, in reality, we may be talking about two profoundly different things. The Buddhist construct is the result of a 2,500-year development of a phenomenological approach oriented toward a gradual understanding of direct experience. The other, Western-psychologist-defined versions are less-than-10-year-old attempts to objectify and quantify mindfulness by employing operationalizations that can be understood by and generally have been validated with people untrained in mindfulness practices. The dangers of distortion and reification would seem apparent. (p. 1035)

This quotation speaks to my experience of reading the current WP literature on mindfulness. However, I do not believe that Shapiro and colleagues are untrained in mindfulness, nor do I believe that they misunderstand mindfulness. In fact, I agree intellectually/theoretically with much of what they have written. However, they represent and work within a scholarly and psychological paradigm that relies upon beliefs/visions and demands/approaches that are in tension with a BP conceptualization and practice of mindfulness. Grossman's warning of distortion and reification is so salient because the scientific method itself, the empirical study of something in the world, is a method for delivering it into existence, proving that it exists.

But what is being brought into existence here? Mindfulness? Has it not already existed for thousands of years? Where did the burden of proof lie for the millions who have practiced it over the ages? The proof lied inside, inside the experience of the practitioner. But in the WP academic milieu, this is insufficient. The burden of proof lies outside and thus scholars like Shapiro et al., (2006) must propose conceptualizations of "mindfulness in a way compatible with both its philosophical roots and the scientific method" and develop "valid and reliable measures that capture the multidimensional nature of mindfulness [that] are applicable across cultures". Whether intended or not, these scholars will contribute to the reification of mindfulness through its measurement and quantification. And they will contribute to its distortion by embedding it within a WP paradigm. This is why my proof for mindfulness' pertinence within a High School setting is my own personal experience. To me that evidence is more convincing and true than an empirical variety.

In light of the above discussion, I now explore how my mindfulness practice has helped my teaching practice, in chapter 4. It has helped me teach better and what I mean by 'better' is that it has helped me teach more anti-oppressively, which is fundamental to my vision of education and teaching. I will explore this idea through a personal experience in the classroom and a discussion of that story.

Chapter 4 - My mindfulness/teaching practice and anti-oppressive education

Introduction

In this chapter I describe how I apply mindfulness in my teaching practice. The aim of the chapter is to illustrate how mindfulness helps me teach better, in an anti-oppressive fashion. I show this through a personal story and discussion of that story. The events took place in the Fall of 2012. I will then link mindfulness to anti-oppressive education and explain how this approach characterizes my teaching. Here I draw from Kevin Kumashiro's work on anti-oppressive education. I discuss the personal teaching story by using both anti-oppressive and Vipassana/mindfulness theory. I now present a personal story from my teaching practice.

Who am I and who are you, Breezie or Brandon?

Within the first week of this school year, I found myself within a teaching situation where I was able to use my mindfulness practice and interrupt the repetition of oppression in myself, in the classroom.
*This year, unlike the three previous where I taught English as a first language, I have been teaching Ethics and Religious Culture*** in an English public High School. I had met 2 groups so far and this was the third. Even though I had not done so previously in my other classes, I had some music playing as the students started filing into the classroom, the first time they ever met me.*

A little context; this was not the school that I was teaching at in previous years so I was totally unfamiliar with the student body. This was a Secondary 4 (grade 10) class, and the English public school itself was located in a suburb just outside of Montreal. The school population was mostly one ethnicity, however many ethnicities were represented but it was clear that the majority of students in school were one ethnicity.

The music was playing, friendly faces were filing in, I was saying hello to them and then I realized that I had forgotten my attendance sheet in the staff room! It being the 3rd day, of the first week of school, a jolt of panic coursed through me and I made the snap decision to run and get it and to leave the music playing as the students were filing in.

I knew as I was speed walking to the staff room that this was probably a bad idea and that it was likely that the students would mess with the soothing laptop-computer speaker setup that I had playing. A competing thought crept in however, and I remember it as a very simple phrase: "So what?"

So what if they tamper with the music? What would it mean? What would it cause?

As I re-emerged into the English hallway where my classroom was, I could hear the blasting crackle of cheap computer speakers pushed to their absolute capacity. I neared the doorway, and I began to anticipate the 30 some-odd eyes that would assess my reaction as teenage 'mettle-detectors' who would come to know something about what sort of teacher or even person I was based on what was about to transpire.

I felt a reaction coming together, consolidating around my anxious anticipation. The reaction felt like it was to involve firmness, assertiveness, callousness or even aggression to put them in 'their place' and to assert my authority. After all, this felt like what was expected of me.

As I neared the door and that anticipation bloomed, I realized in half a second that I was extremely anxious about what was about to happen. And as my momentum carried me to the last few steps before crossing the threshold separating the classroom from the hallway, I remembered.

I remembered to observe the state of my breath and the sensations in my body. I remembered to practice. And I stopped walking and stood there for one moment, pulling my consciousness from the object of my anticipation/anxiety to my own body and state of consciousness and what I saw interrupted what I think would have surely happened.

As I entered the room, and quickly turned the volume down, I saw that two black male students were sitting in the front row, right in front of the speakers. And what immediately arose within me was: "They did it''. Upon observing this thought, I turned my attention to the reaction in my gut, the same anxiety coming up. I knew that I had to act and not react, so I took an unexplored route.

I addressed the class: "You know when a teacher puts music on, leaves it, walks down the hall and comes back to hear it blaring… well this can be a pretty threatening moment".

Silence.

I observed my breath, my anxiety, the sensations in my body and continued. "Can I ask who turned the music up?"

Silence.

Staying as calm and warm as possible, I continued: "I am not interested in punishing the person who turned the music up, I would just like to know who did it, please." The pressure was mounting, it seemed. It is the electricity that takes many forms in classrooms when there are expectations that are not being met, where scripts are not being picked up and what is 'supposed to' happen is not.

One of the two black students in the front blurted: "It was a good song!"

I thought that he might be making fun, being sarcastic but I wasn't sure. So I said: "Ahh ok, so can I assume that you were the one who turned it up?" He sat in his chair with an expression that seemed equal parts defiant, equal parts honest and equal parts uncomfortable.

"Maybeeeeeeeeee".

I looked at him and felt the fading reaction surge, a last deathrow before disintegrating into the ether of my consciousness. The reaction would have had me force him to own it, admit that he had done it and give me the opportunity to

assert my authority, my dominance through his admission so as not to appear weak, to appear as a teacher not to be reckoned with.

But I just breathed and observed myself. I think I was smiling and after 1 or 2 seconds of this Brandon said: "Ya see all I was doin' was samplin' something that I could sample later in the studio".

I laughed and knew that certainly he must have turned it up. I repeated what I had started off with: "It's really not that big of a deal to turn music up too loud in general but on the first day, while I am out in the hall… it freaked me out pretty bad. And just for future reference, you might want to consider how a teacher would take that move on the first day and how they might respond". He nodded and smiled back.

A little while into the lesson, with this interaction still permeating my consciousness, a warm glow that made me feel very empowered and loving, I was going through the attendance very slowly, trying to learn their names and acknowledge who they are beyond just being a name on my attendance sheet. I took my time with this, saying a few words to each student as I went through the list. I took much more time than the institution would allow I think, because as I was halfway through, the hall monitor who collects the attendance sheets was waiting for me to conclude, in my classroom's doorway.

She was patiently standing in the doorway observing my small chit chat ritual with my students. She seemed to find it entertaining and it was for me because it was breaking up the script and the protocol that establishes the very unequal relations of power that are the norm in most classrooms: the protocol being that everyone is silent while the responsible adult in the room accounts for those that are present and those that are missing. I wanted to use that first roll call to establish a mutually humanizing social relation with my students and to establish rapport. As I got to Brandon's name I felt anxiety bubbling up. I anticipated a test.

I realized from his last name that I knew his brother, who was a 'troublemaker' of notable infamy in the previous school where I taught. I asked how Billy was and he told me that he was doing fine. And then he asked very cautiously: "Did you

ever teach my brother?" and I replied that I did not but I knew him well and then he asked, even more cautiously "how did you find him as a student?" and I told him that we got along very well.
This little back and forth was taking place during the roll call and at the end of it he asked if I could call him "Breezie" instead of Brandon and I said sure. At that, the attendant who had observed the entire conversation scoffed and said "What do you want him to call you, Brandon!?" Some students laughed and she looked at me with a gaze that seemingly asked for support in setting this young man straight.
Brandon looked at me, I took a breath and said "Breezie is fine, nothing wrong with it". Brandon was second to last on the list. I got through the last name quickly and handed the sheet to the attendant who walked off.

Before discussing how the story illustrates the confluence of my teaching and mindfulness practices, and where anti-oppression fits in, I clarify both my teaching practice and how I understand anti-oppressive education.

<u>My teaching practice, mindfulness and anti-oppressive education</u>

I try as much as possible in the classroom to recognize the intersections and tensions that exist between the individuals within the institution of public High School and the greater more general demands, pressures, powers, expectations, norms and policies that affect the individuals and the institution itself. Living this perspective in the classroom is difficult because it forces me to not only consider the curricular and pedagogical impact of what it is I am teaching as a representative of the institution but also to consider how I am being within the classroom and school.

My vision of being here relies upon Kumshiro's (2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2010) writings on anti-oppressive education and upon my vision of mindfulness as well.

From the perspective of anti-oppressive education, I see being as a manifestation of social relations that can reinforce and repeat oppression or work

against it (Kumashiro, 2002). Teaching is not an unproblematic transmission of knowledge from teacher to student but a performative act, "constituting reality as it names it" (Kumashiro, 2000b, p.46). This reality pressures the individuals in question to perform and embody roles, some of which are overtly oppressive, some of which are less (obviously) oppressive.

From the perspective of mindfulness, I see being in the classroom as the state of consciousness that I have or am cultivating in myself moment to moment. This can be a consciousness that is made up of morality, compassion and presence or more capricious qualities, like impatience, intolerance and apathy. How I am in the classroom has a large effect on my lens and thus on my decisions and I modulate being through both my mindfulness practice and through anti-oppressive theory.

I can summarize my approach to teaching as follows. I aim to teach my students spiritually, letting my mindfulness practice and my understanding of all the educational intersections (demands, pressures, powers, expectations, norms) I see and understand guide my mind and my heart, moment to moment. My intention to teach students spiritually is founded upon the commitment to disrupt and help students disrupt the illusions that exist around us, especially those that are especially oppressive. And this is often expressed through my curricular and pedagogical choices; however, teaching spiritually for me is a matter of being first and foremost because my choices in the classroom affect me first and my students second.

For example, if my state of consciousness is capricious and I am reactive, my unskillfullness in the classroom will reinforce my own habit patterns that cause me suffering first, then stoke unskillful student reactions secondly.

This approach to teaching is spiritual, personal and a matter of being for me because it is very problematic to help students disrupt or dispel illusions associated with the above intersections (curriculum), teach in a way that is meant to help the students understand the above intersections (pedagogy) but then repeat as habit the vicissitudes of these intersections (being). In my view, a teacher's state of consciousness is the foundation for skilflull/unskillfull teaching.

Before moving further down this line of thought, I would like to make overt that I try as much as possible not to reify or concretize the illusions that I aim to help my students dispel. I see the process of moving from illusion/ignorance to a critique, a knowing, a seeing, a knowledge or wisdom as problematic, inherently partial and inherently impermanent (Kumashiro; 2001, 2002).

When discussing the partiality of knowing, seeing and understanding in the context of education, students are often the focus. This partiality of student knowledge is sometimes seen as a "mis-knowledge, a knowledge of stereotypes and myths learned from the media, families, peer-groups, and so forth." (Kumashiro, 2001) But the partiality of student knowledge is no different from the partiality of teacher or institutional knowledge. Everyone's knowledge is partial! Therefore, what is illusory, true, wise or, ignorant for students, educators and the institution itself is context dependent and in flux and is equally deserving of being troubled.

Anti-oppressive education works paradoxically in this sense, using knowledge/theory that is itself partial to question, critique and interrupt other knowledges and repetitions that are partial as well but are sometimes not treated as such. The idea here, as I understand it, is not to move to some utopic non-oppressive reality through anti-oppressive education. The idea is to embrace as process the troubling of commonsense knowledge.

The commonsense is rife with illusion and oppressive social relations/discourse/policies and is always partial but the knowledge used to critique it is partial as well. The goal of anti-oppressive education is not complete knowledge, satisfaction or some utopic reality because these are impossible goals, illusions themselves that only repeat a reified sameness (Kumashiro; 2000a, 2000b).

To teach anti-oppressively then is to work against oppression in the world and classroom but also to recognize your own repetition of oppression and to interrupt it (Kumashiro 2000a). To me, this is not just a matter of curriculum or pedagogy but also a matter of being; hence it is more spiritual than technical. My

mindfulness practice helps me interrupt oppressive habits within me and without very effectively.

In chapter 2 and 3, I describe how I have learned to 'nip suffering in the bud' through my mindfulness practice. I see the process of interrupting the repetition of habits within oneself that cause suffering and unskillfullness as a buttress for anti-oppression work.

When one cultivates the capacity to interrupt one's own unskillfull habit patterns, the capacity for interrupting the repetition of other oppressive discourses/policies/social relations outside of oneself increases as well. I contend that the process of interrupting one's own habit patterns that cause suffering is a vital step in combating oppression outside of oneself.

We often see people in institutional spaces who are interested in fighting the monster that is oppression, whatever form it may take (racism, bigotry, heterosexism, misogyny, sexism, classism or ableism) and later becoming the monster that they are trying to slay. The anti-oppressive educator who is also oppressive at some point, in some way, is not some frightful anomaly; he/she is much more common than we may think.

Kumashiro (2000-b, 2002) writes that generally we resist unlearning our commonsense visions of the world (what is normal, natural and authentic) especially when the commonsense privileges our identities our ways of being. We also resist the notion that we can be part of the problem while actively working towards 'solutions'.

The idea that any solution can be unequivocally achieved or anyone can be completely anti-oppressive is not possible within Kumashiro's vision of anti-oppressive education (2002) and I share this view. Similarly, the mindful process of remaining present with what is, openly attending to one's arisings and not reacting to them, cultivating a state of equanimity and having it remain or last once achieved is not possible either. The state of consciousness of being equanimous or totally present and accepting of what is within and without, is just as impermanent as the thoughts, feelings and emotions that one is constantly letting go of to cultivate this presence and equanimity.

If one is to teach anti-oppressively, one is to constantly trouble knowledges whether they be part of the commonsense and overtly oppressive or part of a critical theory; they are all partial, problematic and thus worthy of troubling. My understanding of anti-oppressive education is that this approach to working against oppression is a process that is meant to be worked context to context, topic to topic and moment to moment. The mindfulness practitioner does the same, again and again interrupting their reactionary pattern of craving and aversion, regardless of the context, the topic and the moment.

I know that within my own mindfulness practice, while I am trying to work against my own habit patterns of craving and aversion, I enter a form of crisis. I sometimes mistakenly think that I am very mindful, very equanimous and balanced. The thoughts and beliefs that lead me to this conclusion are much more aligned with what I want to be (craving), rather than what is (equanimity). I will then come to realize that I am indulging in thoughts regarding who I want to be, a craving, rather than equanimously just being who I am, now.

Sometimes I will then have a strong reaction to this realization, where I indulge in strong feelings and thoughts of aversion regarding this self-deception, which will make me feel even worse about myself; like I did on my couch on that Winter's day.

If I am able to call practice to bear in that moment, I will interrupt the oscillation from craving to aversion and back to craving by observing my breath or sensations, attentively, compassionately and non-reactively, letting what arises pass away, aligning with what is moment to moment.

The above small example is what I have called 'nipping suffering in the bud', and I believe that this process can aid what Kumashiro (2000a, 2000b) calls working through crisis. Kumashiro defines crisis, in the context of anti-oppressive education as the state in which educators or students are forced to confront their own life experiences and emotions after realizing that they have been complicit in oppression even if they see themselves as working against it (Kumahsiro, 2000a).

For example students may feel bad or guilty if they realize that they "stereotyped others and were themselves stereotyped, and yet had not been aware that this was happening (because they had not considered such occurrences to be abnormal)." (p. 6) With this realization, comes a learning of how oppression works (through stereotypes and repetitions of the commonsense for example) and also an unlearning of what is normal/normative and where/whether they fit into these illusory categories.

The crisis that students enter into upon learning something that challenges their visions of normalcy and what is natural and how aspects of their identities are privileged in the commonsense of what's normal and natural, can lead to liberating change or more entrenched resistance. Because of this, students need to be given a space in the classroom in which to work through crisis, according to Kumashiro (2000a). I am interested in providing my students the chance to work through crisis but their learning/unlearning is not the real focus of this chapter.

In the discussion of the story that is presented below, I would like to focus upon and discuss my own crises in the classroom and how my mindfulness practice helped me work through them.

Discussion of 'Who am I and who are you, Breezie or Brandon?'

I discuss three aspects of this story using a combination of anti-oppressive education theory and mindfulness theory. The first aspect I discuss is the crisis that I worked through as I entered the classroom. The second is the concept of being and how it affected my pedagogical choices throughout the lesson. Lastly, I discuss the interruption of repetition and silencing.

Crisis

My crisis began upon hearing the music blaring in the hallway and then feeling the rising reaction manifest inside of me. I have been overtly and heavily oppressive to students in the past and oftentimes this was due to emotionally

reactive pedagogical/disciplinary decisions. Sometimes I would be oppressive and only realize afterwards but in this case, I caught on to what was coming before it could overwhelm me.

What I saw was that I was going to be very assertive, bordering on aggression because a student had transgressed. I felt that this was what the institution expected of me. Since the student(s) made a decision that not only affected our class, but also any other classes connected to the hallway who had their door open, this was a high stakes situation!

Professionally it threatened my image; what would other teachers think of the fact that my classroom had blaring music on the third day? These considerations were not being articulated in my arising thoughts and feelings in the few seconds that I was in the hallway just before entering the classroom. But when I look back, these considerations were probably unconsciously helping to cause my anticipation and anxiety with regards to what I was about to say and do when I stepped into the classroom.

The plot thickened when I saw two black male students sitting right in front of the speakers. In the schools where I have worked, black students have a minority status. The commonsense surrounding them, in my experience, is that they are usually students who struggle academically (sometimes) but mostly struggle in terms of behaviour and discipline. This commonsense view does not include a vision of institutional oppression and racism. However, I believe that these are key factors in understanding why some black students fit the profile and struggle in the High Schools where I have worked.

In the years that I have been teaching, I have made a conscious effort to work with and support students who are deemed 'behaviour problems'. I have a special affinity for these students because often I share their frustration and analysis regarding the oppressive nature of the institution of High School. In my experience, many of the students who have trouble existing, let alone thriving in High School, are some of the most adept at asking critical questions, being brave enough to speak truth to power (often unskillfully) and seeing through the

illusions permeating the commonsense of why we're here and what we're doing in school.

So, when I walked into class and saw two black male students sitting in the front row and then observed my own arising of 'they did it', I recognized my own potential for being complicit in oppression. I saw that I was 'monstrous' in the sense that I observed my potentiality for enacting a social relation that is oppressive (based on a commonsense vision of these students) even though I want to work against it. I began to enter a form of crisis.

One could say that students are students, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, class, social standing and reputation and what I thought in that moment ('they did it') was simply in response to the fact that the two students sitting directly in front of the speakers had likely turned the volume up because they had direct physical access to the speakers. One could say that that is not unreasonable and if anyone were to accuse me of racism/oppression in that moment for singling out, blaming or questioning the two black students in the front row, I could protect myself on the basis of where they were sitting.

To me, such a 'neutral' or 'colour blindness' line of reasoning misses the point and is highly problematic. What was so disturbing to me, and why I see this moment as an example of crisis is not because I had the arising 'they did it' by itself but that this was combined with a building reaction that was heavily influenced by a normative expectation. I felt like what was expected of me was a heavy handed, assertive, borderline aggressive approach to the situation to make clear that I was not to be messed with as a teacher, especially by 'this sort' of student. The repetition of this sort of teacher identity is putrid to me, especially when directed towards marginalized students, who are stereotypically seen as behaviour problems in the commonsense.

There are times when this sort of approach is totally appropriate, however. But on the first day, in the context that this moment found itself within, I saw how inappropriate it was. If I had made the decision to 'force' one of the two black students in the front row to 'own' that they had in fact turned the speakers up, I would be privileging a way of 'being' that I think is unskillfull and that is

deserving of being troubled/interrupted. Furthermore, I would be repeating a social relation that was based on an assumption and a commonsense understanding of who black male students are and also based on an institutional logic of how to deal with 'that sort of student'.

Being

What would have informed my decision to force them to 'own' their behaviour (that I did not observe) was a suspicion based on the context. What made me suspicious was that they were sitting in the front row, they were male/black, and that I had an arising that pointed me in their direction; these three factors got put through the filter of my experience as a High School teacher. Luckily, I remembered to practice and observed the change in my breathing and in my bodily sensations, which told me that I was about to react (not act) from a very, very partial place indeed!

Knowing that the power of this arising would soon fade, I took a moment to observe and let it pass and in its place I chose to act and enact a way of being that was more present with what was (a mystery), more loving/compassionate and much more in line with my deepest spiritual values. In my view, I worked through the crisis quickly, interrupting an oppressive habit through my mindfulness practice.

For the rest of the lesson, I enacted this presence through the pedagogical decision to expand the attendance taking roll call into an activity of getting to know one another. In my view, this decision worked against and troubled (however slightly) the roll call protocol, expanding and humanizing it. Certainly, this approach still relied upon the privilege to do so as teacher, the person in the room who gets to set the tone and make the decisions. And this activity did not allow me to actually 'get to know them'. I received extremely partial understanding of who they were but I think I was able to get to know them more this way than if I had simply done the roll call as 'scripted'. I contend that the

decision to say a few words to each student, look them in the eye, and take it slow, had a big impact on how the classroom felt for me and for them.

Kumashiro (2000a) argues that we can never control or truly know what students learn. I agree but I think as educators, we can feel significant moments in the classroom. I believe that embodying a state of consciousness that is present and equanimous, for as long as possible, moment to moment, can be felt by students. I called each by name, met the students' eyes for the first time, looked into their eyes, took a little time to ask them how they were, not from a place of normative convention but from a place of desiring to know, understand and feel. I found many students throughout this activity smiling and laughing, in acknowledgement (or so I thought/felt, I cannot be sure!) of our breaking the script together.

Staying with my action to work through crisis and address the music situation skillfully and compassionately, I was able to keep, reinforce and cultivate the state of being that I used to ground my actions in the beginning of class. This state grounded my decision to interrupt the repetition of oppressive social relations near the end of the lesson, as well.

Interruption of repetition and silencing

The attendant's decision/reaction to challenge Breezie's nickname, in my view, was the repetition of two things. It was a repetition of a discourse and a social relation that are both oppressive. The discourse that was being repeated was a commonsense vision of student identity and politeness. This discourse was mobilized through a social relation of mentorship.

While I cannot know the attendant's state of consciousness or intentions in challenging Breezie's choice of nickname, I will assume that she was trying to protect my sensibilities (politeness) from an uncouth discourse, set the young man straight (identity) and was doing so from a privileged position of authority (mentorship).

In the moment when she challenged his choice of nickname and said "what do you want him to call you Brandon!?" I recognized that she was simultaneously aligning herself with me, supporting me, as well as asking me for support; or so it seemed at the time. If I were not in the place of being that I was in, I think I may have reacted to her interpolation as I assumed she desired me to. However, because I was very present with what was, I recognized that her intervention was oppressive and that I needed to interrupt it.

In my view, she was repeating an 'appropriate' and normative commonsense vision of how to speak and self-identify. She was silencing Breezie's discursive assertion as a minority student and was doing so, perhaps, to make him more manageable for me as teacher. What she might not have realized was that I am interested in empowering my students to be themselves and to resist the oppressive and assimilatory tendencies of the institution.

In the beginning of the class, I interrupted my own habit pattern to represent these institutional tendencies and then I interrupted the attendant's and I did so by remaining equanimous, non-reactive and present with what is through my mindfulness practice.

*** See Fujiwara (2011) for a description and critical vision of the ERC program in Quebec.

Conclusion and potential future research directions

This master's thesis is my first contribution to scholarship on education. I have explored and presented my mindfulness practice through four avenues.

In chapter one, I addressed my methodology and approach, which is personal and experiential. I made clear that my intention in this master's thesis was to show how my personal mindfulness practice helps me teach better, in an anti-oppressive fashion. I also spoke to my critical vision of mindfulness scholarship and clarified both mindfulness and Vipassana as terms. Finally, I presented my first ever moment of mindfulness practice, as a story.

In chapter 2, I described my practice from the perspective of Goenka's Vipassana. I explored Vipassana's theory and practice and explained how these

teachings made up my practice. I focused upon the concepts of equanimity and insight/wisdom to illustrate how I use my practice to 'nip suffering in the bud'. I then analyzed my first moment of practice using Vipassana theory/practice.

In the third chapter, I situated my practice within Western scholarship on mindfulness that honoured the BP vision of mindfulness. I expressed my concerns on the WP academic project of studying BP mindfulness. I made this clear through four examples within a comparison of WP and BP. And I further justified my decision to write from the standpoint of the personal and experiential through my arguments.

In chapter four, I explained and illustrated how my mindfulness practice has helped me teach in an anti-oppressive fashion through a personal classroom story. After presenting the story, I gave an overview of my teaching practice. I situated my understanding of anti-oppressive education in Kumashiro's work and explained how his work influenced my teaching practice and how it intersected with my mindfulness practice. I finished by discussing three significant aspects of the story from the perspective of ontology/being, mindfulness and anti-oppressive theory in order to show how my mindfulness practice helps me teach better, more skillfully in an anti-oppressive fashion.

I now present potential future research directions related to mindfulness, democracy, education and anti-oppressive theory.

Further research directions

There was much I had to say about the topic of mindfulness, teaching and anti-oppressive education that I left unsaid in this master's thesis. In the future, I would like to illustrate and discuss how my mindfulness practice has helped me enact a democratic process in my classrooms and how this process addresses and reconciles problems of power that I see in the High School classroom.

Mindfulness helps me be more courageous. This courage allows me to push back against oppressive institutional logics that I do not agree with or believe in. And I have found the democratic process of building a constitution, to

introduce democracy into the classroom, to be extremely effective in addressing and reconciling problems of power in the classroom. Mindfulness helps me have the courage to enact this process, however it also helps me maintain and stay consistently aligned with its goals/values.

The decision to democratize my classes came to me early on last school year. I realized that classrooms are often sites of fierce power struggles. Where powerful students vie for power with other students and with the teacher. Anti-oppressive education and other critical theories help me see this reality and recognize that troubling and making overt these processes is an obligation if one wishes to help students to disrupt illusions, understand school and life more fully and experientially. Furthermore this approach can help marginalized students cultivate the capacity to self-advocate in a skillful manner.

Mindfulness and anti-oppressive theory helped me resolve in myself that I am not interested in consolidating and taking power as a teacher, to lead more effectively. The resolution has been to give power up and offer it to my students, as a gift.

When I decided to gift power to students and give them the opportunity to create legislation in the classroom (a constitution) that we co-created through a General Assembly process that was democratic (one vote per individual, myself included), we began to cooperate and not compete with one another.

Certainly, there were competing viewpoints and the amendments and voting in/out of motions was an overt power struggle. But paradoxically, making this process overt, and aligning with the process and not the outcomes, created a spirit of cooperation and interdependent responsibility for our classroom space. Perhaps giving power up is empowering; this too seems paradoxical.

In this process, there were many moments when my institutionally influenced reactions and habits came online. Mindfulness helped me see them coming, helped me let them be what they were, arisings that come and go and to act in a way to work against these habits/reactions.

It is curious to me that we live in a so-called democratic society and yet the classroom functions as a dictatorship. Fundamentally, this is a problem of

power, in my view. The problems of power in High School ultimately, negatively impact students the most. And if we seek to better the world through youth and their education, we must address oppression and power, and school's role in the repetition/perpetuation of problems of power, oppression and abuse.

I know that I can remember and call forth the equanimous state, the cultivation of presence, compassion, unattached love and awareness… my practice. I can do this through the 'art of living' that Goenka proposes. To live a life that is good for me and others, while working to share my merits, my gains as much as I can and work hard against that in myself and in the world that would oppress… this is my path to walk for me and for the 'other'.

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