

Mindfulness in Schools

Learning lessons from the adults
- secular and Buddhist

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This ancient Way of Mindfulness is as practicable today as it was 2,500 years ago. It is as applicable in the lands of the West as in the East; in the midst of life's turmoil as well as in the peace of the monk's cell.

Nyanaponika Thera, 1962: 7

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to explore the adult mindfulness landscape, secular and Buddhist, in order to inform an approach to the teaching of mindfulness in secondary schools.

The Introduction explains the background to the project and the significant overlap between secular and Buddhist practices. I explain what mindfulness is and highlight a number of important practical differences between the teaching of mindfulness in the adult world and in schools.

Balancing Calm and Insight looks at mindfulness through a lens very common to anyone with knowledge of Buddhism but infrequently explored in the therapeutic literature: that of 'Calm' meditation and 'Insight' meditation. I suggest that a slight shift in the centre of gravity towards Calm might be appropriate.

Defining Objectives considers how difficult it is to clearly articulate the objective of mindfulness in schools given a new context in which it functions as neither clinical application nor spiritual practice. A range of alternatives is considered.

Building a Scaffolding explains the importance of *context* in both Buddhist and secular practice. To succeed, mindfulness should be nested within a broader framework of understanding, or what Kabat-Zinn calls a 'scaffolding'. I suggest that perhaps the best 'scaffolding' for mindfulness in schools is its sense of possibility.

Ethics and Community describes how ethics are more important in secular mindfulness than they at first appear. I consider what shape ethics might take in a school context, before assessing the role of the teacher and what equivalent there might be for what Buddhists call *sangha*, or Community.

Methodology

This paper draws together conclusions from two main sources. Firstly, I undertook a comprehensive reading of the literature on mindfulness, both secular and Buddhist. Based on this (and on my existing knowledge of mindfulness through personal practice and teaching in schools), I compiled a questionnaire to explore in more depth the salient issues which emerged (see Appendix A). I then conducted telephone interviews with leading figures in the field, each interview lasting between 50 minutes and an hour. Having recorded these interviews I transcribed and collated responses under different headings in preparation for the writing of the document. I hope to have represented the views expressed in these interviews fairly.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

At the beginning of the academic year I thought it would provide solace for my school pupils to learn that I, their teacher, also have homework to do: this dissertation, over 15 000 words of it, due in at the end of May. I explained to them what mindfulness was, how you could see it through a Buddhist lens or a secular one and outlined the pros and cons of each approach. Afterwards a Year 9 boy called Seb put up his hand and asked me the kind of wonderfully frank question that is the preserve of children alone: “Well what do you think, sir?”, he asked, “Which option do you prefer, secular or Buddhist?”. After some consideration all I could say was that, hand on heart, I had no idea.

The objective of this paper is to consider how mindfulness is best taught in schools. As a discipline, mindfulness dovetails very neatly with the increased emphasis in schools on the social and emotional aspects of learning¹. The government, like most of us, wants children to Be Healthy², and it is a stated national objective to teach children skills that will reduce “specific mental and emotional health problems such as depression and anxiety”³, problems which mindfulness has tackled in the adult world with ‘spectacular success’⁴. MBCT (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy) is now a treatment for depression recommended by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence⁵ and in recent years there has been a proliferation of mindfulness-based applications for conditions as varied as stress in the workplace, eating disorders and intimate partner violence⁶. I don’t think it is wild speculation to suggest that within the next decade or two we will find mindfulness-based techniques used regularly within the portfolio of welfare tools employed by those caring for children and adolescents. However, very little research has been done into how mindfulness is best taught to children and adolescents, and still less into how it is used in a schools context⁷.

At Tonbridge School I have taught mindfulness while wearing two different hats: one as a teacher of A-level Religious Studies, specialising in Buddhism, and the other as a teacher of PSHE⁸, a necessarily secular subject. One day in November 2008 I taught an almost identical

¹Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) is a National Strategy of the government’s Department for Children, Schools and Families. I am looking at the teaching of mindfulness in secondary schools (11-18) and will henceforth refer primarily to ‘adolescents’. For an overview of the Secondary Seal programme see:

<http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/secondary/behaviourattendanceandseal/secondaryseal>

² ‘Be Healthy’ is the first aim of the government’s Every Child Matters (ECM) programme:

<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/>

³ See <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/66377> on how SEAL supports the ECM agenda

⁴ Dryden & Still, 2006: 24

⁵ See <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/CG23NICEguidelineamended.pdf>, section 1.6.3.10

⁶ Baer, 2006: 75-91 (eating disorders), 333-358 (intimate partner violence), 361-376 (workplace)

⁷ See Burke, C.A., 2009 for an overview of research into mindfulness with children and adolescents.

⁸ Personal, Social and Health Education covers a wide range of wellbeing topics “from first aid and personal finance to relationships and the consequences of drugs misuse”, and is likely to become a compulsory part of the curriculum for 5-16 year olds. See http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0235

mindfulness-of-breath practice to a PSHE class in the morning, and then to an RS class in the afternoon, in each case ‘presenting’ it in a very different way. Mindfulness is a discipline that can be taught as something entirely secular, as something which is part of the Buddhist path, or in countless ways in between the two. For example, if you were to go to *Amazon* and search for “mindfulness”, the first four products offered would be⁹:

1. *Mindfulness in Plain English*, a book by a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, Bhante Henepola Gunaratana.
2. *Mindfulness for Beginners*, an Audio CD by Jon Kabat-Zinn, a man trained in Zen Buddhism but who no longer identifies himself as ‘a Buddhist’¹⁰.
3. *Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: A New Approach to Preventing Relapse*, by Segal, Williams and Teasdale. A clinician’s guide to MBCT which briefly alludes to Buddhism in the Foreword (“mindfulness is at the core of Buddhist meditative practices”) but then scarcely mentions the Buddha or Buddhism in the book’s 351 pages, not even in the index¹¹.
4. *The Miracle of Mindfulness: The Classic Guide to Meditation by the World's Most Revered Master* a book by Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh.

All four of these teach very similar practices, yet two are clearly ‘Buddhist’, one is not at all, and the other is somewhere in between. Mindfulness, then, is not something easily pigeon-holed. I now like to think that the reason I couldn’t tell Seb in Year 9 which option I preferred was that I was asking the wrong question. The title that I presented to my pupils that day was: “*What is lost and what is gained in the teaching of mindfulness as a secular rather than a Buddhist discipline?*”. However, after interviewing experts who teach both ‘secular’ and ‘Buddhist’ mindfulness, three things became increasingly clear. Firstly, there is a huge degree of overlap in the early stages of mindfulness practice, be it in a secular or a Buddhist context, and it felt like I was trying to draw a clear line between them where one hardly existed¹². Secondly, nothing is really *lost* in either case because, ‘secular’ or ‘Buddhist’, mindfulness alleviates suffering in ways that can only be considered a *gain*. Thirdly, the title perhaps implied a degree of competition between rival disciplines when in fact there is a profoundly healthy and very much on-going dialogue between them.

Having said this, rather like two lines that begin running almost parallel to each other but diverge very gradually, the distance between secular and Buddhist mindfulness becomes more significant the further down the path you go¹³, and it is possible to compare and contrast them,

⁹ www.amazon.co.uk, 29th March 2009

¹⁰ Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 26

¹¹ Segal *et al*, 2002: viii

¹² Of course, there is a valid argument that there is no difference between them at all, at any level. There is nothing ‘Buddhist’ about being mindful and paying attention to the present moment. Kabat-Zinn compares this to calling gravity ‘British’ because it was discovered by Newton (Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 136). However, one has to accept that certain approaches to mindfulness are perceived as being Buddhist, others as secular, and some as a combination.

¹³ My thanks to Richard Gilpin for this analogy.

even to see pros and cons to each approach according to context. The objective of this dissertation is to explore what they share, where they diverge and what schools can learn from this. My hope is to inform and inspire the creation of mindfulness curricula in schools that are effective and compelling.

1.2 What is mindfulness?

One of the most succinct and compelling ways of explaining mindfulness to a classroom of adolescents is to show them a short clip from the animated Dreamworks film *Kung Fu Panda*. It doesn't describe what you do, it doesn't give a textbook definition of what it is, nor does it even use the word mindfulness, but it captures the flavour of it in a way that is easily understood.

Our troubled hero, a panda called Po, is very stressed about life. He stands in the moonlight beneath a blossoming peach tree and laments his many failures. "I probably sucked more today than anyone in the history of kung fu – in the history of China – in the history of sucking!" he declares. His anguished monologue is an engaging compendium of contemporary malaise: he thinks he is rubbish at everything (low self-esteem), he knows he eats too much (eating disorders), he worries a great deal (stress/anxiety). Confronted with many difficulties, he is on the verge of giving up his dream of kung-fu glory and going back to making noodles. Thankfully, staff in hand, the wise old turtle Oogway arrives, a kung-fu master approaching the end of his turtle years, and gently reprimands the troubled panda:

Quit, don't quit! Noodles, don't noodles! You are too concerned about what was and what will be. There is a saying: yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That is why it is called the 'present'.¹⁴

A look of realisation dawns on Po as he understands that he is worrying about what has happened and what might happen rather than simply being in the present moment, itself a gift that we rarely appreciate. Not only do kids understand this, it is not a million miles away from definitions of mindfulness that you will find, particularly in its therapeutic context. In her excellent overview of its various secular applications, Ruth Baer explains that mindfulness:

is generally described as intentionally focusing one's attention on the experience occurring at the present moment in a nonjudgmental or accepting way.¹⁵

This summary draws from others¹⁶ but is in essence a paraphrase of Kabat-Zinn who gives probably the most widely quoted definition of mindfulness in the clinical world:

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.¹⁷

The very first exercise in an eight week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course is to eat a raisin, but to eat it as if you had never eaten a raisin before, your attention wholly

¹⁴ *Kung Fu Panda*, 2008, Dreamworks Animation LLC

¹⁵ Baer, 2006: 3

¹⁶ Baer supports this definition with Linehan, 1993 and Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999. See Baer *et al*, 2004: 191

¹⁷ Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 4. This is from the chapter *What is mindfulness?* which provides a useful overview.

absorbed in the activity from moment to moment: first looking at it, then turning it over in your fingers, smelling it, feeling it in your mouth, biting into it, tasting the flavour as it is released, chewing, feeling the impulse to swallow¹⁸. Never has a desiccated little grape been such an experience! But we don't normally eat like this, indeed most of us are very rarely 'present' to what we do, as Kabat-Zinn explains:

we may eat without really tasting, see without really seeing, hear without really hearing, touch without really feeling, and talk without really knowing what we are saying.¹⁹

Being mindfully 'present' to experience, from moment to moment, is to be contrasted

with consciousness that is blunted or restricted in various ways. For example, rumination, absorption in the past, or fantasies and anxieties about the future. [...] Mindfulness is also compromised when individuals behave compulsively or automatically, without awareness or attention to one's behavior.²⁰

The clinical applications of mindfulness have their roots in Buddhist practice²¹, so it is not surprising that Buddhist definitions of mindfulness also stress the importance of paying attention to the present moment:

a clear awareness of what is happening each moment²²

presence of mind in the sense that...one is wide awake in regard to the present moment²³

keeping one's consciousness alive to the present reality²⁴

what so many have forgotten: to live with full awareness in the Here and Now²⁵

Mindfulness is present-time awareness. It takes place in the here and now. It is the observance of what is happening right now, in the present moment.²⁶

Indeed, Kabat-Zinn's observation above is the inverse of a well-known passage in a Buddhist text that is over 2,000 years old:

In what is seen there should only be the seen; in what is heard only the heard; in what is sensed only the sensed, in what is thought, only the thought.²⁷

So, present moment awareness is a crucial part of mindfulness. However, neither in the Buddhist nor secular understanding is it by any means *all* of it. Mindfulness would not be the

¹⁸ Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 27-29. See also Segal et al, 2002: 103-104

¹⁹ Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 24

²⁰ Brown & Ryan, 2003: 823

²¹ Unfortunately, space prohibits looking here at the history of how the psychotherapy community assimilated Buddhist mindfulness practices. However, Dryden & Still, 2006, summarises this very clearly, as does Gilpin, 2008. Kabat-Zinn, 2000, explains his early contact with Buddhist meditation and how the essence of this was 'secularised' into MBSR.

²² Goldstein and Kornfield, 1987: 76

²³ Anālayo, 2003: 48

²⁴ Hanh, 1976: 11 (one of the 'top four' books listed above)

²⁵ Nyanaponika, 1962: 40

²⁶ Gunaratana, 1991: 152

²⁷ *Udāna* I,10, in Nyānaponika, 1962: 33

successful treatment that it is for conditions such as depressive relapse if it were nothing but present moment awareness, however core this is to the discipline. Certainly, in Buddhism mindfulness is a great deal more than this, and whilst there is insufficient space in this paper to go into anything like the detail required to do it justice²⁸, we need to understand something of its broader connotations.

1.3 More than just ‘present moment awareness’

In Buddhism ‘mindfulness’ is a translation of the Pāli word *sati*, or in Sanskrit *smṛti*, a word that has connotations far broader than simply ‘present moment awareness’²⁹, as Alan Wallace explains:

Sati has a much richer connotation, so those wishing to practice Buddhist meditation are well advised to gain as clear an understanding of this and other related terms as they can, based on the most authoritative sources they can find. Otherwise Buddhist meditation quickly devolves into a vague kind of ‘be here now’ mentality, in which the extraordinary depth and richness of Buddhist meditation traditions are lost.³⁰

One of these richer connotations is that *sati* is related to the verb *sarati*, which means to remember, and that in the Buddhist context there is a close correlation between paying attention to the present moment and ‘remembering’. A Buddhist pays attention to the present moment, but with an intuitive awareness of what is happening *in* that moment, an awareness informed by certain qualities and values, for example by an understanding of what is wholesome and unwholesome, of what does and does not conduce to enlightenment³¹. One is, if you like, constantly remembering/ bearing in mind /recollecting/reminding oneself of certain things, but this is not a thinking or intellectual process so much as an *awareness*. At one level, when fully open and awake to the present moment, the mind is “like a mirror that clearly reflects what comes before it”³², but Gunaratana explains that the mirror metaphor is a limited one, because mindfulness “is not cold or unfeeling. It is the wakeful experience of life, an alert participation in the ongoing process of living”³³. Our mirror reflects each moment as it happens, but it has depth, intelligence, and ‘memory’³⁴:

²⁸ Nyanaponika, 1962 and Gunaratana, 1991 are both excellent general introductions to ‘Buddhist’ mindfulness.

²⁹ See Dryden & Still, 2006: 18-20 on why ‘mindfulness’ came to be the accepted translation of *sati*. Anālayo, 2003: 44-66 (chapter III) gives a concise and very rich explanation of *sati*.

³⁰ Wallace, 2008: 62

³¹ Needless to say it is a little more complicated than this, as there *are* certain aspects of *sati* that are non-evaluative. See Chapter 2, *Types and Functions of Mindfulness* in Kuan, J.T., 2008, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, Routledge, pp.41-42. My thanks to Jeff for clarifying this via email. Unsurprisingly, Buddhists too debate the precise meaning of *sati* and *mindfulness*. See for example Cullen, 2006.

³² Goldstein quoted in Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 109

³³ Kabat-Zinn makes a similar point: “if mindfulness is a mirror, it is a mirror that knows” (2005: 109)

³⁴ This is an image adapted from the title of the book: *In the Mirror of Memory*, a collection of academic papers on the relationship between mindfulness and memory, itself a significant field of study. See Cox, 1992 for details.

It is not memory in the sense of ideas and pictures from the past, but rather clear, direct, wordless knowing of what is and what is not, of what is correct and what is incorrect, of what we are doing and how we should go about it.³⁵

This mindfulness, then, is *more* than just paying attention to the present moment, and is closely related to wisdom. There is a highly intuitive but nevertheless informed awareness of what is going on at any particular moment. A sniper gives his undivided attention to every tiny movement and every single breath as he focuses on the victim in the cross-hairs of his rifle. Is he paying attention to the present moment? Yes. Is he being mindful? Definitely not. As Nyanaponika says, “Without memory, attention towards an object would furnish merely isolated facts, as is the case with the perception of most animals”³⁶.

Wallace’s concern is that mindfulness has often come to be equated simply with ‘bare attention’³⁷, a kind of ethically neutral, entirely non-evaluative observation. Wallace does not deny the central importance of ‘bare attention’³⁸, but his point is that to interpret mindfulness as nothing more than ‘paying attention to the present moment’ is to impoverish the practice:

When mindfulness is equated with bare attention, it can easily lead to the misconception that the cultivation of mindfulness has nothing to do with ethics or the cultivation of wholesome states of mind and the attenuation of unwholesome states.³⁹

To conclude, paying attention to the present moment is a key part of mindfulness, but it is not the only part, and to lose the rest of what mindfulness means is to risk disconnecting it from much of what is most important: its underlying values and sense of purpose. But what *are* its underlying values and what *is* its purpose? As we shall see, there is no need for these values or this purpose to be exclusively Buddhist ones, but there definitely *is* a need for them to be identified and articulated.

1.4 A different audience

It should always be remembered that in schools the audience for mindfulness is a different one. As Semple and Miller put it in their study of MBCT for children:

We found that adults rarely (if ever) use their meditation mats to construct forts, and in our experience, never experiment to see how many meditation cushions they can balance on their heads.⁴⁰

In this paper I consider the teaching of mindfulness to adolescents, and whilst fourteen year-old boys may be beyond balancing meditation cushions on their heads, the ‘Raisin

³⁵ Gunaratana, 1991: 158

³⁶ Nyanaponika, 1962:25

³⁷ See Wallace, 2008: 60

³⁸ See Wallace, 2008: 61. He explains that “there are also many accounts in Buddhist texts of people gaining profound, liberating insights through what appears to be bare attention”

³⁹ Ibid. This is a perspective I return to below when further considering the role of ethics in mindfulness.

⁴⁰ Semple and Miller, Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for children, in Baer, 2003: 143-166

Exercise⁷⁴¹ is a good example of how adult techniques need to be adapted for a younger audience. Unless teenagers are given a very clear rationale for why they are being asked to take several minutes to eat a raisin, it will not be long before they are throwing them at each other or competing to see how many raisins can be wedged between their top lip and their nostrils. I have also taught children with such a dislike of raisins that they refuse to eat them, however much you encourage them to be ‘with’ their aversion!

This reflects a general point: that attention spans are more limited. Every week you need to find a practice that will engage a conscript class of twenty to thirty adolescents. Of an adult course, Kabat-Zinn writes: “No one was in the classroom under duress. You had to want to be there to be allowed in.”⁴²; this could *not* be said of all pupils in a school!

In adult MBSR, the main practices are the ‘raisin exercise’⁴³, the ‘body scan’⁴⁴, sitting meditation⁴⁵, walking meditation⁴⁶, *hatha yoga*⁴⁷ and ‘mindfulness in daily life’⁴⁸. To this list we may add the ‘three-minute breathing space’⁴⁹ and the ‘pleasant / unpleasant events’ calendar⁵⁰ used in MBCT. With adolescents there is a place for a variety of all of these, depending on the time and the space available, two crucial factors discussed below. You may well find that a standard MBSR practice has a shelf life of two or three lessons before they begin to tire of it. On the other hand, there needs to be enough consistency from week to week for them to internalise a basic mindfulness technique. I could not agree more with Thompson and Gauntlett-Gilbert’s finding that:

A balance needs to be struck between delivering practices of sufficient variety and repeating practices so that skills can be developed. Repetitions of the same postures from session to session provide the opportunity to repeatedly encounter similar private experiences and, hopefully, respond differently to them. Conversely, only ever doing one type of practice (e.g. breathing) can appear sterile and boring, creating problems with engagement... Although balancing variety and repetition is an issue with all mindfulness treatment, we have found that greater variety consistently sustains interest and engagement in younger people.⁵¹

It doesn’t necessarily take much to add variety and a sense of fun to mindfulness exercises – sit them cross legged on their desks or ask them to stand on one leg and suddenly the breathing

⁴¹ See Baer, 2006: 6; Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 27-29; Segal *et al*, 2002: 102-110

⁴² Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 357

⁴³ See Baer, 2006: 6; Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 27-29; Segal *et al*, 2002: 102-110. For each of the exercises I give references for further information. Baer provides useful summaries; Kabat-Zinn and Segal *et al* give more detail.

⁴⁴ See Baer, 2006: 7; Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 75-93; Segal *et al*, 2002: 110-117

⁴⁵ See Baer, 2006: 8; Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 59-74; Segal *et al*, 2002: 146-147, 196-197

⁴⁶ See Baer, 2006: 9; Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 114-119; Segal *et al*, 2002: 178-181

⁴⁷ See Baer, 2006: 9; Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 94-113; Segal *et al*, 2002: 176-178

⁴⁸ Summary of practices given in Baer, 2006: 6-10

⁴⁹ Segal *et al*, 2002: 173-178

⁵⁰ Segal *et al*, 2002: 145, 155-156, 172 (pleasant) and 181, 187-188 (unpleasant)

⁵¹ Thompson, M., and Gauntlett-Gilbert, J., 2008, *Mindfulness with Children and Adolescents: Effective Clinical Application*, Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 13, pp. 395-408

exercise that they were tiring of last lesson comes to life - but its importance should not be underestimated.

1.5 A different time-frame

In Buddhist mindfulness the time frame varies tremendously, from the curious lay person on a one day course or ten day retreat, to the monk who has renounced everything to pursue the Buddhist path for the rest of this lifetime and perhaps many more.

The time-frame for an MBSR course is well-defined: there is a 2 hour orientation before you begin your course, then a 2.5 hour session every week for 8 weeks, with a whole day of practice between weeks 6 and 7. This is advertised as a total of 31 hours contact time⁵². If at home you then do your daily 40 minute to an hour assignments then you will have done between 60 and 80 hours practice during the course, a very significant exposure in a relatively short period of time.

In a schools context, the available contact time with pupils is arguably *the* key issue in determining what shape the teaching of mindfulness takes. If you teach mindfulness to adolescents 'off-timetable', perhaps to smaller groups with conditions analogous to those treated in MBSR/MBCT, you may be able to reach levels of contact time approaching the above. However, my assumption in this paper, supported by preliminary research⁵³, is that there is value in the more challenging task of teaching mindfulness as a well-being initiative *in timetabled lessons*, probably PSHE lessons, even though this drastically curtails the contact time available. If you were to teach mindfulness for one 40 minute period per week for 8 weeks, and in a highly optimistic scenario your (conscript) classroom pupils are disciplined enough to do home assignments for, say, 10 minutes a day, this would give a maximum of 13 hours practice. You could conceivably supplement this with a practice day, or perhaps two afternoons, to give a total of about 20 hours. To make a measurable difference to the lives of adolescents with so little contact time is a huge challenge, and it may be that to teach mindfulness effectively in a school context we need to rethink entirely the issue of contact time.

For instance, if a child is in the same school for 5 to 7 years, it may be that a drip feed approach is more effective than the short, high intense burst used in the adult world. Perhaps the concept of mindfulness could be introduced one summer afternoon at the very end of Year 9, when the end of year exams are over and there is less teaching pressure. This could then be refreshed in a PSHE lesson at the start of Year 10, followed by a more intensive training and an expectation of home practice for three or four weeks. In Year 11, with GCSEs around the corner, refresher lessons could be provided, perhaps on how to cope with stress or how to improve concentration during revision. In this way the issue of contact time could, with care and thorough planning, be turned into an advantage.

⁵² For UMASS Stress Reduction program brochure see:
http://www.umassmed.edu/uploadedFiles/cfm2/SRP_for_desktop_printing.pdf

⁵³ I refer here to a controlled trial of mindfulness training in schools conducted at Tonbridge and Hampton Schools in conjunction with the Department of Psychiatry and Well-being Institute, University of Cambridge. See Appendix B. Research paper currently in preparation.

1.6 A different place

In the quintessential Buddhist text on the practice of mindfulness - the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*- it is suggested that, in order to practise, monks go “to the forest, or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut”⁵⁴. Schools are unlikely to be able to provide such surroundings! At Tonbridge I have taught mindfulness in a squash court, in the cricket pavilion, in a drama room, on fields, in the school chapel, in empty offices, on the floor in my study and in the canteen, but most of the time I have taught it in a classroom, usually someone else’s, to children sitting on plastic chairs. For the foreseeable future, if mindfulness is being taught in a timetabled period then it is reasonable to assume that it is predominantly being taught in the classroom, even if this is an assumption that in the long run we should seek to overturn. This has a direct impact on the practices which can be used.

For instance the first formal MBSR/MBCT practice is a body scan which is done lying on the floor. With desks and chairs and 20-30 kids there may not be room for this, even though the same kind of scan works perfectly well when sitting on plastic chairs. Standing meditation will work, but clearly *hatha* yoga is harder unless you are in a big classroom, just as walking meditation will depend on available space. The lesson from this is that flexibility is paramount.

⁵⁴ Nāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 145. For an overview of ‘The Four Foundations of Mindfulness’ text see Harvey, 1990: 254-255 or Nyanaponika, 1962: 57-75. A comprehensive but also outstandingly readable and scholarly exposition of the text is Anālayo, 2003

2. BALANCING CALM AND INSIGHT

Mindfulness is “a crucial aspect of any Buddhist meditation”¹, and two fundamentally important Buddhist meditations are *samatha*, usually translated as ‘Calm’ meditation, and *vipassanā* or ‘Insight’ meditation². Secular mindfulness uses both of these, though without calling them this or even necessarily drawing a clear distinction between the two. Understanding the difference is highly relevant to any consideration of mindfulness in schools.

2.1 Calm meditation (*samatha*)

The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again, is the very root of judgement, character and will. No one is *compus sui* if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education *par excellence*. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical instructions for bringing it about.³

In 1890, William James hymned the benefits of mindfulness in education without being aware that, in fact, ‘practical instructions’ *did* exist and had done for over 2,000 years⁴. In Buddhism, it is *samatha* meditation which schools the mind in the art of ‘bringing back a wandering attention over and over again.’ As its English translation suggests, *samatha* meditation *calms* the mind by focussing its attention unwaveringly on a particular object of concentration. *Samatha...*

aims to cultivate the power of concentration till it can become truly ‘one pointed’, with 100 per cent of the attention focussed on a chosen calming object. In such a state of *samādhi* (‘concentration’ or ‘collectedness’) the mind becomes free from all distraction and wavering, in a unified state of inner stillness.⁵

Meditation aimed at achieving deep states of calm and concentration dates back to India in the 5th Century BCE and quite possibly earlier⁶. With his knack of translating age-old concepts into accessible Western language⁷, Kabat-Zinn describes an important aspect of ‘Calm’ meditation as ‘aiming and sustaining’ your attention on the chosen object:

Simply aiming, sustaining, recognising when the sustaining has evaporated, then re-aiming and again sustaining. Over and over and over and over again. Like the fins of a

¹ Harvey, 1990: 70

² Pāli words; Sanskrit: *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*

³ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, 1890 in Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 115

⁴ Though he may have become aware of this some years later when he met Anagārika Dharmapala following the 1893 ‘World Parliament of Religions’ in Chicago. See Carrette, J. (ed.), 2005, *William James and the Varieties of Religious Experience*, Abingdon, Routledge, p.115

⁵ Harvey, 1990: 246-7

⁶ Wallace, 2009: 83

⁷ As Teasdale wrote to Kabat-Zinn in an early exchange: “I have been very impressed by your ability to extract the essence of Buddhist mindfulness meditation and to translate it into a format that is accessible and clearly very effective in helping the average U.S. citizen.” (Segal *et al*, 2002: 44)

submarine or the keel of a sailboat, *samadhi* stabilizes and steadies the mind even in the face of its winds and waves.⁸

A mind calmed and ‘collected’ in this way is not just unwavering and single-pointed; such states of inner stillness are happy, harmonious, contented and joyful, even very deeply so⁹. As an early Buddhist text says: “He soaks, pervades, fills and suffuses this body with that joy and happiness”¹⁰. Even at a beginner’s level of Calm meditation, even in a classroom, one can experience a certain sense of well-being in a mind that is more ‘unified’ and ‘collected’. I am reminded of the words of a Tibetan contemplative: “you will experience joy like the warmth of a fire”¹¹. Such a prospect may appeal to a pupil at school during another hectic day:

It is as if, from the unpleasant closeness of a hustling and noisy crowd, one has escaped to the silence and seclusion of a hill top, and, with a sigh of relief, is looking down on the noise and bustle below. It is the peace and happiness of detachment which will thus be experienced.¹²

Mindfulness plays a very important role in Calm meditation. One of the most common objects of concentration in *samatha* is the breath; you aim your attention at your breath, perhaps at the nostrils where you can feel it passing in and out of your body, and you sustain it there. It is mindfulness that reminds you what you are doing, why you are doing it and where you are in the process, noticing if the attention has wandered, and gently bringing it back to the breath time and again. It is mindfulness that is aware of the touch of the breath, discerning whether it is deep or shallow, whether too much or too little effort of concentration is being applied. Mindfulness is the faculty that holds the whole process in awareness, not unlike an observer watching what it going on.¹³

Whilst Calm meditation can bring about these joyful states, its other crucial and equally important role is to provide sufficient clarity and stability of mind for the practitioner to observe exactly what is going on:

It gives the mind the clarity in which things can be seen ‘as they really are’; it develops the ability to concentrate on an object for long enough to investigate it properly... In these ways, then, Calm ‘tunes’ the mind, making it a more adequate instrument for knowledge and insight.¹⁴

‘Calm’ meditation provides a stable platform from which everything can then be viewed and experienced with far greater depth, clarity and insight. If your mind is the instrument used to

⁸ Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 76

⁹ In Buddhist commentaries on Calm meditation there are even five stages of joy: slight joy, momentary joy, descending joy, transporting joy and suffusing joy. See Gethin, 1998: 181-184.

¹⁰ *Majjhima Nikāya* i.276 quoted in Gethin, 1998: 184

¹¹ Dūdjom Lingpa quoted in Wallace, 2009: 58, in fact describing an aspect of *Dzogchen* meditation.

¹² Nyanaponika, 1962:43

¹³ Harvey, 1990: 246-7 gives an overview of mindfulness and Calm.

¹⁴ Harvey, 1990: 253

investigate and explore your lived experience, ‘Calm’ calibrates, sharpens and stabilises that instrument so that it can really see what is happening:

You can only look deeply into something if you can sustain your looking without being constantly thrown off by distractions or by the agitation of your own mind.¹⁵

Concentrated, calm, equanimous, unruffled, the mind is thus primed for Insight (*vipassanā*) into the true nature of things.

2.2 Insight meditation (*vipassanā*)

‘Insight’ is the second kind of meditation common to almost all Buddhist schools. *Vipassanā* involves observing, investigating and exploring experience at the deepest possible level in order to unshackle the practitioner from the underlying causes of *dukkha* through wisdom and understanding:

Insight meditation is more analytical and probing than Calm meditation, as it aims to investigate the nature of reality, rather than remaining fixed on one apparently stable object.¹⁶

Having in his day practised Calm meditation with the most learned teachers, the Buddha’s conclusion was that *samatha* only suspended our suffering temporarily, it did not uproot its causes. This is the function of Insight meditation, to cultivate the wisdom required to see what it is that causes *dukkha* and to bring those causes to an end. We shall see that this is very much the case too in secular mindfulness, where a practice such as MBCT is not just temporary relief from depression, but makes the practitioner aware of its causes and thereby much more capable of uprooting them.

Mindfulness is fundamental to Insight meditation. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* explains that it is by developing mindfulness in four particular areas that one achieves the insight required for complete freedom from suffering¹⁷. Mindfulness is the essence of Insight meditation to the extent that the two are not infrequently used as synonyms¹⁸. To expand on the quote above, notice how in Kabat-Zinn’s explanation of the interplay of these two techniques the word ‘mindfulness’ is a direct synonym for ‘insight’:

The stability and calmness which come with one-pointed concentration practice form the foundation for the cultivation of mindfulness. Without some degree of *samadhi*, your mindfulness will not be very strong. You can only look deeply into something if you can sustain your looking without being constantly thrown off by distractions or by the agitation of your own mind. The deeper your concentration, the deeper your potential for mindfulness [...] This is the domain of mindfulness practice, in which one-pointedness and the ability to bring calmness and stability of mind to the present moment are put in the

¹⁵ Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 73

¹⁶ Harvey, 1990: 255

¹⁷ Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 1995: 145 (D.i.56)

¹⁸ For example by Thanissaro in *The Path of Concentration and Mindfulness*, 1997 <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/concmind.html>, and Gunaratana in 1991: 161-169, a chapter which provides an excellent introduction of the difference between Calm and Insight.

service of looking deeply into understanding the interconnectedness of a wide range of life experiences.¹⁹

2.3 'Partners in the job of meditation'

The fundamental point here is that Insight and Calm need to work together. Anālayo describes them as “different aspects of what is basically one approach”²⁰. ‘Calm’ provides a stable platform from which practitioners can direct their undivided attention to what is happening in the present moment, internally or externally; they can be truly mindful of experience as it happens rather than ploughing down the well-worn furrows that have habitually led them into, say, depression or binge eating. As Thanissaro puts it, they are “complementary ways of relating to the present moment”²¹. Calm gives us stability, joy and motivation, but to uproot suffering we really need to *understand* how the mind works by observing it and paying attention to its habitual twists and turns. What is prompting these painfully depressive downturns? Why do I find solace in food? How do I break the repetitive chain of habitual thinking that reinforces my condition? Calm provides a stable environment for Insight to patiently and persistently observe what is happening; slowly but surely the knots in our mind begin to untangle.

As Gunaratana says of Calm and Insight: “these two are partners in the job of meditation”²². Images of light are often used to describe their complementary nature: Calm is the hand that holds the torch steady so that the penetrating light of Insight can be shone into the depths of the mind; Calm is the lens that focuses the diffuse sunlight of our awareness into a penetrating single-pointedness of mind²³. As the Buddha succinctly put it: “One who is concentrated knows and sees correctly”²⁴.

Different schools of Buddhism and different meditation teachers may well differ on the emphasis that they give to Calm and/or Insight, but what is clear is that there is always an interplay between them; it is not a case of ‘either/or’. As with the distribution of weight on our own two feet, there may be more on one foot than on the other at different moments, but both are needed to stand up and to walk:

It is a mistake to see the tension in terms of *either* the practice of calm *or* the practice of insight: the question ... is rather how much calm and how much insight is required at various stages of the path.²⁵

In secular mindfulness I would suggest that the emphasis falls more heavily on Insight than Calm, probably largely because “we’re always settling for what is possible within a context”²⁶.

¹⁹ Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 73-74

²⁰ Anālayo, 2003: 91 (pp.88-91 provide a useful overview of the balance of Calm and Insight)

²¹ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *One Tool Among Many*, 1997

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/onetool.html>

²² Gunaratana, 1991: 161

²³ Gunaratana, 1991: 162

²⁴ *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.v.3 quoted in Ñāṇamoli, 1999: 437 (*Visuddhimagga*.xiv.7)

²⁵ Gethin, 1998: 200-201 (Gethin’s italics)

²⁶ Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

The context of secular applications is often an eight-week course, which is not very long, and so whilst a degree of calm and stability is naturally established by the practices, the instructor moves fairly quickly in the direction of Insight so as to tackle early on the causes of the condition being addressed. Chaskalson:

From the *samatha* perspective it's just [establishing] the necessary minimum levels of concentration and attention that are needed to support the experiences which can bring about such insights²⁷

The overall tone of secular applications is a distinctly '*vipassanic*' one. In a very intensive way you are taught to cultivate insight - to understand the nature of what is happening in the mind. You patiently and non-judgementally observe and investigate different phenomena as they pass in and out of your field of awareness with a view to fundamentally changing your relationship with whichever form of *dukkha* brought you to the course in the first place.

An important point here is that Calm is presented predominantly as a precursor and an enabler of Insight, with its tranquil and even joyful aspects rarely being stressed. One of the main reasons for this is that in both Buddhist and secular mindfulness, but particularly in the latter, there can be a reluctance to acknowledge the joyful nature of calm states of mind for fear that they will be identified with and clung to as an experience or a goal in their own right²⁸. There is a concern that if you teach people to appreciate this calm and joy they may begin to think that this is 'the point' of mindfulness practice when clearly it is not. Furthermore if they are told about these joyful states but *don't* experience them then they may feel a sense of failure²⁹. The 'point' is to mindfully observe and accept *all* experience as it happens in the present moment, not just the good bits.

2.4 The importance of Calm in a schools context

In schools the context is very different and I wonder whether the balance between the two should be shifted slightly more in the direction of Calm. Insight remains a crucial and indispensable part of the mix, but we should be careful not to overlook the key motivational role of the tranquil and joyful mind states of *samatha*.

In a classroom we must remember that none of the children have chosen to be there and most of them would probably rather be somewhere else³⁰. As a teacher in a timetabled PSHE type lesson you may be confronted with 20-30 children sitting behind desks and have to capture their attention and interest in a relatively short period of time. In my experience you can very quickly engage adolescents' interest, attention and curiosity through simple mindfulness practices in which Calm is at least as important as Insight and probably more so. For example, it interests adolescents from the outset that

²⁷ Interview with Michael Chaskalson, 1st January, 2009.

²⁸ Kabat-Zinn, 1995: 77: "And with a degree of sustained calmness in our attending, *if we don't cling to it for its own sake*, invariably comes the development of insight" (my italics).

²⁹ Baer, 2006: 8: "It is important to point out that there is no such thing as success or failure in the body scan, because there is no goal to achieve any particular outcome, such as becoming relaxed".

³⁰ Compare this with: "We fully expect that participants in MBCT will come to class with specific aims in mind, and many will be willing to work hard to reach these aims" (Segal *et al*, 2002: 138)

- a. They can *direct* their attention. When they are asked to place their attention in their feet, or in their hands, or onto their breath, not only can they usually do it, but it *interests* them that they can do it.
- b. They can *sustain* their attention in this place, even if only for very short periods of time, say between 30 seconds and a minute. This holds their interest and extends their curiosity.
- c. They acknowledge these exercises as being of value. They understand that a mind which is usually very scattered can be more ‘collected’ and concentrated³¹ and it is something they savour.

I accept that there is a risk in placing *too much* attention on early experiences of peace and tranquillity, but I also think that something as simple as this can easily be undervalued and overlooked, when it serves as a very important motivating factor, if not THE motivating factor to begin with. Remember, these are young people who are not attending a course through volition or referral. Part of the job in the early stages of classroom contact is to ‘sell’ mindfulness, confident that it is a skill worth them developing, but accepting that there is no reason for them to believe you until they try it. Once they try it, those states of calm and collectedness are very important. In the pilot study that we did at Tonbridge and Hampton, this came out very strongly from the comments made by students³². Here is a sample of responses to the question “What did you like about the training that you received?” ranging from the single word to more developed expressions of the benefits of calm:

- Relaxing
- Made me more calm
- It made me feel calmer and more focussed
- It was calm and relaxing. I felt like it was a break from the day
- It was relaxing and prepared me to deal with people
- I think it’s good in the modern day hectic society to have some time to sit and be calm
- It has made me feel a lot more calm and it has helped me get to sleep at night because I feel a lot more at peace
- It helped me to relax and concentrate, also I did not get wound up so easily in the boarding house. It has also made me less nervous about exams and cricket matches
- Helped to concentrate and stop constant running around and thinking about lots of different things. Your mind can stay in one place and it is easy and nice to be able to relax and stop for a while to concentrate on one thing

Of the 96 respondents who gave an answer to this open question, nearly 40% mentioned the words ‘calm’ or ‘relax’³³. This is not surprising, and nor should its impact be underestimated.

³¹ Those familiar with Buddhist meditation may notice in these three bullet points a faint echo of the first three limbs of *jhāna*, albeit perhaps a coincidental one: *vitakka* (applying thought), *vicāra* (sustaining it) and *pīti* (experiencing joy).

³² Research paper currently in preparation. Please contact rb@tonbridge-school.org for further details.

³³ Own analysis carried out from database of respondents.

Even after teaching pupils relatively simple concentration exercises, it is not uncommon for their appetite to be whetted³⁴. Kabat-Zinn suggests that:

Just to experience such sustained elemental stillness outwardly and the interior silence that can accompany it is ample reason for arranging one's life to cultivate and bathe in this possibility from time to time.³⁵

Let's be realistic: there is not enough time for a child to shift their whole mode of being, but there is enough time to dip them into states of peace that are in themselves motivating and memorable. John Teasdale was sympathetic to the hypothesis that the calming effects of *samatha* can easily be overlooked when they can play such an important role as a motivating factor:

We spend an awful lot of time telling people that that's not what it's about in MBCT and MBSR when in fact it is very important, and I think it is very important because very often for people it's the thing that early on if they experience it or they hear other people have experienced something like that, it can motivate them. Just to be told over and over that "awareness is the thing, awareness is the thing; it doesn't matter whether it's good bad or indifferent, you've just got to be aware". It is a real act of faith just to plug away at that, whereas if you experience that sense of happiness, calmness, peace that is purely internal in origin and that in principle you know is there as a refuge and some place you can go ... it is very important, so I celebrate it when it happens.³⁶

In the adult world and an intensive eight-week course you can clearly go beyond these states of calm to teach a more '*vipassanic*' mode of mindfulness, shedding a more penetrative light on the suffering in question. My working hypothesis is that whilst in a classroom we can open children's eyes to the possibilities of mindfulness, there is insufficient contact time to expect a radical shift in the way adolescents perceive their world³⁷. This is a view shared by Chris Cullen, a fellow teacher of mindfulness in schools:

I suspect the benefits are going to be *samatha* benefits, with some sense of impermanence and the benefits of not judging [i.e. insight 'benefits']³⁸

To conclude, my impression is that the balance between Calm and Insight will shift slightly more towards the former in a classroom context. I am not for a minute, however, suggesting that one teaches Calm to the exclusion of Insight; far from it. These are still 'partners in the job of meditation' and Insight remains a core ingredient in the mindfulness mix.

³⁴ If only anecdotal, the most striking example of this was a boy who emailed me three years after a single *samatha*-based lesson asking where he could find out more about this.

³⁵ Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 77

³⁶ Interview with John Teasdale, 26th January, 2009. Teasdale does, though, add an important note of caution to this: "When people describe that kind of thing to me I celebrate it with them at the same time as giving them the message that it isn't a reliable thing. When it happens, be grateful for it, actually know that this is a marker of the fact that you've got this potential within you, but don't set yourself up for disappointment, don't grasp at it".

³⁷ Though provision could be made 'off-timetable' if students are interested in learning more.

³⁸ Interview with Chris Cullen, 5th January, 2009

3. DEFINING OBJECTIVES

This is one of the first questions to ask when considering the teaching of mindfulness in any context, no less so in a school. What is the objective of mindfulness in secular and Buddhist contexts? As children always ask: “what’s the point?”.

3.1 Objective of secular mindfulness

At one level ‘the point’ of secular mindfulness is very similar to ‘the point’ of its Buddhist forerunner. When I asked Christina Feldman what the two had in common her reply was that:

both share a sense of purpose, and the purpose of both communities, if I may call them communities, is to bring about the end of suffering; that is the most foundational parallel.¹

So both seek to help ‘bring about the end of suffering’; but what kind of ‘suffering’, exactly? Clinical applications of mindfulness tend to be tightly focussed on particular kinds of suffering; they are evidence-based treatments for named conditions, with techniques often being tested and honed in order to improve success rates in tackling a particular pathology. Over the last two or three decades, Kabat-Zinn’s pioneering Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) has built up its credentials in the treatment of those suffering from stress and chronic pain². One only has to read the first three pages of *Full Catastrophe Living* for a humbling snapshot of the kind of suffering that his Stress Reduction Clinic tackles: for example the pain and associated mental trauma of AIDS, cancers, brain haemorrhages and domestic violence³. By combining their own insights with Kabat-Zinn’s, it was Segal, Williams and Teasdale who then created Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), a practice specifically targeted at those at risk of depressive relapse, a condition in which suicide is an ever-present risk⁴. MBCT has been remarkably successful in treating this, almost halving the relapse rates in participants with three or more previous episodes of depression⁵. Mindfulness has since become a proven application in the treatment of eating disorders, generalised anxiety disorder, borderline personality disorder, intimate partner violence, psychological disorders in children, depression in older people, stress in cancer patients, stress in Spanish speaking inner-city medical patients and stress in the workplace⁶. On the face of it, then, mindfulness earns its clinical spurs in the treatment of specific medical conditions, i.e. particular kinds of suffering.

3.2 Objective of Buddhist mindfulness

Compare this now with Buddhism, where mindfulness plays a central role in alleviating suffering more generally as an aspect of the human condition. When Buddhists talk about suffering, the word you will hear most often to describe it is *dukkha* (Pāli; Sanskrit: *duḥkha*).

¹ Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

² See Kabat-Zinn, 1995: 17-19 for examples of chronic pain that MBSR tackles.

³ Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 17-19

⁴ See Segal *et al*, 2002: 10

⁵ See Segal *et al*, 2002: 318

⁶ A glance at the Contents pages of Ruth Baer’s *Mindfulness-based Treatment Approaches – Clinician’s Guide to Evidence Base and Applications* gives an impressive snapshot of the range of proven contemporary applications of Mindfulness (Baer, 2006: v-xii)

Dukkha is usually translated as ‘suffering’ because that seems to be the closest English equivalent, but its spectrum of meanings is much broader than this: pain, anguish, stress, anxiety, ‘unsatisfactoriness’, non-fulfilment, unease, ‘dis-ease’, sorrow, frustration: all different aspects of the ‘painfulness’ of life. *Dukkha* is a word that covers everything from the physical pain of stubbing your toe, to conditions like stress, anxiety and depression, and beyond this to the gnawing existential dissatisfaction that not everything in life is as you would like it to be. However, as the monk Gunaratana says: “pain is inevitable, suffering is not”⁷, and ultimately the aim of the Buddhist path is to free the practitioner from *dukkha* once and for all. This is what Buddhists are aiming for when they talk about enlightenment, nirvana, or ‘*bodhi*’: a state entirely free from *dukkha*. This is achieved through an understanding at the deepest level of what it is that causes this suffering in the first place:

Buddhism is therefore a soteriology⁸. In other words it is concerned with bringing about for its practitioners liberation, freedom, from states and experiences held to be negative, unpleasant, not wanted... That is, it is a transformation from greed, hatred and delusion...to the opposites of these three negative states – non-attachment, loving kindness and insight or wisdom...It is this that liberates⁹.

The ultimate Buddhist goal, then, is a soteriological one, ‘*bodhi*’, awakening, nirvana, which ostensibly seems very different from the aim of mindfulness in its clinical forms. Furthermore, whilst the Buddhisms emerging in the West tend not to emphasise it, in classical Buddhist thought liberation from *dukkha* is not only freedom from suffering in this life. Liberation is also freedom from *samsāra*, the endless cycle of rebirth and redeath from which the Buddha and many of his Indian spiritual contemporaries sought to break free. Mindfulness, then, plays a central role on a Buddhist path whose ultimate aim also has this undeniably transcendent dimension.

So whilst they both seek to free us from suffering, on the surface it can seem that ultimately they have very different objectives. In one, mindfulness is a ‘this life’ therapy targeted at specific medical conditions; in the other it is part of a spiritual path aimed at a loftier goal that may be lifetimes away. Yet in reality what happens is that they share a lot of territory. How can this be when their ultimate objectives seem so far removed from each other?

3.3 Shared territory

First of all, whilst enlightenment may be the *summum bonum* of their path, in reality what Buddhists actually practice is very much about ‘this life’; indeed were it not about ‘this life’ and more importantly ‘this very moment’, a Buddhist would be grasping for the future in precisely the way that the Buddha concluded is a cause of suffering in the first place. Very few Buddhists see themselves as being just around the corner from nirvana; most are dealing with the

⁷ Gunaratana, 1991: 109

⁸ A soteriology is a ‘doctrine of salvation’ (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1973); it is the branch of theology concerned with how we are in different ways ‘saved’, e.g. saved by God’s grace, saved from our sins, saved through repentance, saved through union with the divine, saved from suffering, saved from rebirth etc.

⁹ Williams, 2000: 2-3

everyday *dukkha* of pain, stress and illness, seeking freedom from it one step at a time. As Feldman puts it:

I would say that people practising Buddhist mindfulness are seeing liberation in bite-size pieces and not just in one grand transcendental moment.¹⁰

Secondly, whilst secular mindfulness may begin as a therapy targeted at a particular ailment, it can quickly become more than this as practitioners begin to experience what Feldman calls ‘bite-size pieces of liberation’¹¹ that lead them to reappraise their lives at a more fundamental level. These ‘bite-size pieces’ experienced in a secular context begin to move participants into new territory where mindfulness becomes more than just a treatment for a medical condition. Instructors report the goalposts for practitioners moving as they begin to experience a quality of mind not previously known. Chaskalson observes that whilst “the objective of MBSR is not to bring about *bodhi*, it can bring up profound existential questions.”¹² Whilst you may go into an MBSR or an MBCT course to sort out your backache or your depression, it may well spark you into an entirely new way of seeing things:

It’s wonderful to see people start to do mindfulness meditation for their blood pressure and by the fourth week find themselves saying, “Who’s actually thinking? Who am I? What’s going on here?”¹³

I am reminded that S.N.Goenka, now one of the world’s preeminent teachers of mindfulness-based meditation in a Buddhist context, first went on a 10 day meditation retreat in a desperate bid to cure his severe migraine headaches¹⁴. In *Full Catastrophe Living* we meet Joyce who attended Kabat-Zinn’s stress clinic to manage the consequences of a cancerous tumour on her thigh; on her first day using the tape at home Joyce experiences ‘a very powerful experience of some otherness’ and says to herself ‘oh, so this is what God is’¹⁵. We meet Art who wanted to cure his headaches and had experiences in which ‘time fell away completely’¹⁶, and Eleanor who went to the clinic for panic attacks and during the all-day session ‘touched areas of inner peace she said she has never known in 60 years’¹⁷. I imagine most experienced MBCT/MBSR instructors will have similar anecdotes to tell, and even in a school classroom, with very low levels of practice, I have heard adolescents report experiences which have been significant to them. Of course, we could simply ignore these experiences and write them off as irrelevant epiphenomena, but most experienced practitioners of mindfulness, Buddhist or

¹⁰ Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Interview with Michael Chaskalson, 1st January, 2009

¹³ Jan Chozen Bays, ‘Mindfulness – The Heart of Buddhist Meditation’, in *Inquiring Mind*, Vol 22, No.2, Spring, 2006. Of course a similar thing can happen in a Buddhist context. You might turn up to your first class to help you relax but then experience mind states that challenge you at a new level.

¹⁴ Hart, 1987: 1

¹⁵ Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 170

¹⁶ Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 426

¹⁷ Ibid.

non-Buddhist, would see this as shutting the most useful doors just as they are opening. John Teasdale:

I know within the MBCT patients that the ones who make the biggest shift are actually the ones who get the taste of this other mode of being, rather than it just being a particular focused technique for dealing with relapse, where you really see the kind of transformation of people's whole lives. You've given them a key and it's opened the door to a whole other range of possibilities.¹⁸

That is not to say that for some the easing of the backache and the respite or even cure from depression is more than enough. "Some people achieve their short term goals, secularly or non-secularly, and they retire; it's enough, it's what they wanted", says Feldman, but:

Some people don't retire. The achievement of their short term goals opens up a sense of possibility and vision which leads to a further investigation.¹⁹

Furthermore, is it surprising that participants using mindfulness to address serious clinical conditions find themselves moving in directions that take them into territory more familiar with the language of philosophy and religion? I mention above that Kabat-Zinn's MBSR addresses *dukkha* that many of us cannot imagine such as the trauma of AIDS, cancers and domestic violence. Would it be possible to loosen the grip that suffering like this has on you *without* reappraising life at a relatively fundamental level, *without* bringing to the surface questions of identity and mortality? This may be why Kabat-Zinn stresses time and again that "mindfulness is not really a therapy at all"²⁰, it is "a way of life"²¹, "a way of being"²²:

Mindfulness meditation, especially when it is understood as being a way of living life as if it really mattered, moment by moment, rather than merely as a technique... is one powerful vehicle for realising such transformative and healing possibilities.²³

In the adult world, then, mindfulness can often be more than just a therapy.

3.4 Objective of mindfulness in schools

And here lies the relevance of all this to the teaching of mindfulness in schools, which finds itself in the as yet undefined middle-ground between mindfulness as clinical application and mindfulness as spiritual practice. It cannot be the former, because in a classroom context we are not treating specific pathologies such as stress, depression, eating disorders or chronic pain²⁴; but nor can it be the latter, as a classroom is not the place for religious instruction²⁵. My own experience and that of others I know who have taught mindfulness in schools is that

¹⁸ Interview with John Teasdale, 26th January, 2009

¹⁹ Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

²⁰ Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 436

²¹ Kabat-Zinn, 1996: xxi

²² Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 19

²³ Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 272

²⁴ A few children in the class may have these issues and an 'off-timetable' clinical approach might be invaluable to these. However, my interest here in the whole class teaching of mindfulness as a well-being strategy.

²⁵ See Copley, 2009: 30-32 for an overview of Religious Education (RE) versus Religious Instruction (RI)

we are somewhere in between these two. If all that pupils come away with from a classroom-based course is relief from exam stress and a way to cope with downturns in mood then we have not given any indication of its true potential. The opening sentence of the brochure for mindfulness courses at the Massachusetts ‘Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society’ seeks to inspire with a message that goes beyond the medical conditions it seeks to address:

Meditation is not for the faint-hearted, nor for those who routinely avoid the whispered longings of their own hearts.²⁶

As teachers we should seek to inspire, and mindfulness has the capacity for this, something John Teasdale articulated very clearly:

If rather than just seeing mindfulness as a way of undoing a pathology (you are) combining it with the idea that you are removing obstacles to something slightly wonderful within... it gives the whole thing a much more inspiring feel: ‘we’re not just fixing pathology here, we’re actually learning to recognise patterns of mind that both contribute to the way in which we convert sadness into depression, mild fear into chronic anxiety but also stand between us and our inherent potential for another way of being, greater wisdom and compassion’.²⁷

Williams, too, sees this tremendous potential:

What we’re doing is cultivating a sense that there is more wellbeing to be had than we had ever imagined if we just make a little bit more use of this other mode of mind because we’ve got it here, but most of us haven’t cultivated it.²⁸

If in schools the context is a purely therapeutic then there is a risk that you strip out a wonderful and very appealing aspect of mindfulness that in the adult world is an important part of the mix. Yes, mindfulness is very ‘useful’, but it would be a shame if this were the limit to our presentation of its possibilities.

3.5 ECM, PSHE or RE objectives?²⁹

Given that there is currently no curriculum for mindfulness or any clearly articulated objectives for mindfulness in schools, what guidance can be found if we look at the UK’s broader educational objectives?

A useful place to start is the government’s Every Child Matters programme. A key ECM objective is for children to ‘Be Healthy’, with a stated 2020 goal being to “Enhance children and young people’s wellbeing”³⁰. There are targets which refer to improving ‘mental health’ and

²⁶ Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 22

²⁷ Interview with John Teasdale, 26th January, 2009

²⁸ Interview with Mark Williams, 6th May, 2009

²⁹ ‘Every Child Matters’, ‘Personal, Social and Health Education’ or ‘Religious Education’

³⁰ See <http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-00331-2008.pdf>

‘emotional and behavioural health’, but this covers a huge area³¹. What exactly should we be measuring? In a pilot study conducted at Tonbridge and Hampton schools, we used some well-established scales to measure mindfulness, resilience and well-being³², which was a useful starting point. However, my sense is that there is work to do on clarifying exactly what it is we are trying to achieve. Are we pitching this to adolescents as something relatively ‘functional’, for example, to be able...

- to concentrate better and improve their exam results
- to decrease the risk of depression in later life
- to address attention deficits and improve their behaviour

...or are our goals further ‘up’ the spectrum in terms of aspiration?

- to open a door to greater self-understanding
- to encourage pupils to see the world through a different lens
- to cultivate values like patience, tolerance and equanimity³³

When pupils at Tonbridge were asked how they might use mindfulness in the future, they gave a range of responses³⁴:

- to prepare for things to come that may be hard to deal with
- I think I will use it before bed to help clear my mind and help me sleep
- when I am tense or slightly angry
- I would sometimes use it when I am confused in life
- occasionally if I need to relax myself and forget about things
- when under great pressure mindfulness puts things into perspective
- maybe nearing GCSE where I will be under most pressure and I need to get away from the future and concentrate more
- I’m very interested in trying the training before playing sport and seeing if it helps, as from what I have seen and heard it can have beneficial effects³⁵

Mindfulness as a form of managing stress emerged as a relatively common theme amongst pupils³⁶, but even if you choose ‘stress reduction’ as the main objective, there are many different kinds of stress (*Full Catastrophe Living* looks at Time Stress, Sleep Stress, People Stress,

³¹ There are more specific targets relating to alcohol and drugs, but mindfulness in these contexts is probably best taught in smaller groups of young people suffering from addiction rather than in the classroom

³² To measure mindfulness we used the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale - Revised (CAMS-R; Feldman et al., 2006); for resilience, the Ego-Resiliency Scale (ERS; Block & Kremen, 1996); for well-being, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007).

³³ The ethics of mindfulness are considered in a later section.

³⁴ Own analysis carried out from database of respondents.

³⁵ This is a good example of how insight is context specific. Sport is an important part of life in an independent boys’ school and so we looked at the application of mindfulness in professional sport.

³⁶ Particularly exam stress in our study, though could this be a product of carrying out the research in a school with relatively high academic expectations?

Role Stress, Work Stress, Food Stress, World Stress³⁷), and adolescents will experience particular stresses related to their life-stage.

At one level, mindfulness fits well with the objectives stated in the government's Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme. Two of the three core values at the heart of this are self-awareness and managing feelings³⁸, and specific objectives include being able to:

- manage strong feelings such as frustration, anger and anxiety
- be able to promote calm and optimistic states...
- recover from setbacks and persist in the face of difficulties

Note, though, that whilst mindfulness addresses these objectives, normally within PSHE classes, it could also comfortably address at least three of the four 'key attitudes' promoted in the National Framework for Religious Education for 14-19 year olds: self-awareness, respect for all, open-mindedness and appreciation and wonder³⁹. This aptly illustrates the difficulty of articulating objectives for mindfulness in schools which embrace its full potential.

The answer to this surely lies in articulating a context for mindfulness in schools which has sufficient relevance and specificity to strike a deep chord with individuals, but a broad enough range of applications to hold the attention of 30 adolescents who have not chosen to be there. The next section looks at the importance of constructing such a framework, or 'scaffolding'.

³⁷ Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 349-420 (these are the titles of chapters 26-32)

³⁸ Department for Education and Skills, *Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning for secondary schools (SEAL) - Guidance booklet*, 2007, Section 1.3, pp. 4-5. The third value is 'motivation'.

³⁹ Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, *Religious Education: The Non-statutory National Framework*, 2004, p.13.

4. BUILDING A ‘SCAFFOLDING’

In both secular and Buddhist mindfulness, context is key. If I were to pick one theme from my research that consistently emerged as being of central importance, it would be that mindfulness must be taught within a well defined and clearly understood context. This came across in both the literature and my interviews as an underlying characteristic of successful applications. I also believe it is here that the key to teaching mindfulness successfully in schools will lie.

4.1 The importance of scaffolding

Be it secular or non-secular, the teaching of mindfulness requires what Feldman calls an ‘informational context’, what Teasdale refers to as a ‘framework of understanding’, or what Kabat-Zinn calls a ‘scaffolding’:

At every level – from the biological to the psychophysical to the social and the cultural – there is a fundamental need for what I call “scaffolding”. We depend on instructions, guidelines, a context, a relationship, a language to venture meaningfully into the wilds of our own minds.¹

The scaffolding for Buddhist mindfulness is over 2,000 years old and is an ancient and very robust structure². *Sati* sits within a broader context at lots of different levels, occupying a significant position in some of the oldest and most important Buddhist frameworks. Mindfulness is the first of seven ‘awakening factors’³; it is one of the five ‘faculties’ and ‘powers’⁴; and Right Mindfulness, as the four *satipaṭṭhānas*, is one of the eight ‘limbs’ of the Noble Eightfold Path, very much a cornerstone of early Buddhism⁵. Each of these frameworks sits in turn within the broader soteriological context of the Buddhist path. Mindfulness helps the Buddhist along that path, enabling insight into ‘the way things are’ at a profound level: the nature and causes of ‘suffering’ (*dukkha*); the ineluctable impermanence of all phenomena (*anicca*); and the uncomfortable reality that when we look for an underlying, permanent essence to what we spend our lives thinking of as ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘my’, there isn’t one (*anatta*). The interplay of these three characteristics of existence shows us that...

The world truly is a torrent of cause and effect with no stability within it, save the stability we try to make for ourselves as a refuge from change and inevitable death. That stability only exacerbates suffering because it is a fictional stability created by our desperate grasping after security.⁶

It is in some ways a radical and challenging perspective, and it is not my intention here to analyse, justify or disagree with it; my point is that Buddhist mindfulness is a central plank in a

¹ Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 95

² The exact structure of this ‘scaffolding’ varies by Buddhist school; I refer here to the Theravadin ‘scaffolding’.

³ See Anālayo, 2003: 51

⁴ See Anālayo, 2003: 50

⁵ See Harvey, 1990: 68-72 for overview.

⁶ Williams, 2000: 63 (a concise introduction to the Three Characteristics). See also Harvey, 1990: 50-53

broader Buddhist scaffolding, unmistakably nested within the context of a particular world-view and the paths that navigate through it. Mindfulness in Buddhism

sits within this broader context of the Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths so it is part of a very wide *mandala*⁷, whereas in secular mindfulness, particularly the context in which it is taught such as in an 8 week programmes or less, there is simply not the time for that kind of education even if it was sought for.⁸

The scaffolding in clinical mindfulness may be much smaller, but it is very well constructed and arguably more effective in the treatment of specific conditions, precisely because it so custom-built. Teasdale explains, though, that this is not about comparing scaffoldings to see whose is best or biggest, but simply having in place a model of understanding that works for its context:

MBCT has a model of the nature of the pathology that it is trying to focus on so it is actually quite focussed. There is a particular target that you keep coming back to, which is the awareness of rumination, the tendency to ruminate at times of potential relapse and alternative ways of responding to that. So there is a model of understanding, as with Buddhism, both of the nature of the problem and also how the techniques may fit into help it. It's a much narrower model than you get in Buddhism, but there is a model there.⁹

If you don't have a scaffolding or a model in place then mindfulness risks lapsing "into a vague kind of 'be here now' mentality"¹⁰:

whether it is MBSR or MBCT I think there is the danger that there can be much less grounding in a framework of understanding - that it can become that 'just paying attention' is all, without that being shaped and guided by any underlying framework of understanding. I think that may be a particular danger. If you look at other forms of intervention, whenever they become technique oriented rather than grounded in some understanding of what is going on ... then things can go a bit awry.¹¹

This closely echoes Wallace's concern that, in Buddhism, to equate mindfulness with nothing more than 'bare attention' and 'paying attention to the present moment' is to misunderstand what mindfulness (*sati*) means and impoverish the practice of it¹². It strikes me that the same is true of secular mindfulness. If you look closely, *when it is taught well*, the mindfulness techniques in MBSR/MBCT are constantly sitting within a broader 'framework of understanding', often nesting within the context of the pathology that is being addressed. When being taught MBCT the patients know that they are there to prevent depressive relapse; the direction and purpose of the practice is crystal clear. You are not being told simply to 'pay attention'; you are also given to understand *why* you are paying attention. One of the reasons

⁷ A geometric, often concentric representation of the cosmos, particularly associated with Tibetan Buddhism, but here used in a broader sense, as a world of meaning.

⁸ Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

⁹ Interview with John Teasdale, 26th January, 2009

¹⁰ Wallace, 2008: 62

¹¹ Interview with John Teasdale, 26th January, 2009

¹² See Wallace, 2008: 60-62

mindfulness has been so successful in the clinical world is to do with the fact that “it is so targeted, because of its very clear problem formulation”¹³. In MBCT, for example:

Everything is in the service of preventing the consolidation of self-perpetuating patterns of negative thinking that may escalate negative mood states to depressive relapse.¹⁴

In Mindfulness-based Eating Awareness Training (MB-EAT), a very similar training in mindfulness is given but with a different problem formulation, seeking insight into binge eating by enabling participants “to recognize and acknowledge their emotional states without engaging in automatic, impulsive behaviours”¹⁵. In Mindfulness-based Relationship Enhancement (MBRE), mindfulness is used for “gaining insight into the automaticity of many patterns of thought, emotion and behaviour, and also of the consequences of these for both themselves and their partners”¹⁶. In each case the context is clear. The participants and the teacher know why mindfulness is being taught, establishing a clear sense of purpose and setting up an on-going dialogue between the practice and the condition being addressed.

4.2 The importance of ‘clear comprehension’ (*sampajañña*)

A useful Buddhist term to understand here is *sampajañña*, often paired with *sati* and usually translated as ‘clear comprehension’. The compound *sati-sampajañña* has the sense of “mindfulness with clear comprehension”¹⁷. Whilst there are four aspects of *sampajañña*¹⁸, the first aspect, ‘clear comprehension of purpose’, is of particular relevance to this discussion:

The term ‘Clear Comprehension’ should be understood to mean that to the *clarity* of bare mindfulness is added the full *comprehension* of purpose.¹⁹

So this ‘paying attention to the present moment’ does not take place in an informational vacuum, but in the context of a particular understanding. This is the point that Anālayo makes, translating *sampajañña* as ‘clear knowledge’:

Such cooperation of mindfulness and clear knowledge ...points to the need to combine mindful observation of phenomena with an intelligent processing of the observed data. Thus ‘to clearly know’ can be taken to represent the ‘illuminating’ or ‘awakening’ aspect of contemplation. Understood in this way, clear knowledge has the task of processing the input gathered by mindful observation, and thereby leading to the arising of wisdom.²⁰

In other words, paying mindful attention to experience as it happens fuels your insight into that experience, awakening you as to how you might modify your response to it. In a Buddhist

¹³ Interview with Michael Chaskalson, 1st January, 2009

¹⁴ Segal et al, 2002: 90

¹⁵ Kristeller, Baer & Quillian-Wolever, *Mindfulness-based approaches to eating disorders*, in Baer, 2006: 78

¹⁶ Carson (J.W.), Carson (K.M.), Gil & Baucom, *Mindfulness-based Relationship Enhancement (MBRE) in Couples*, in Baer, 2006: 309

¹⁷ See Anālayo, 2003: 39-43 for etymology and meaning

¹⁸ Clear comprehension of purpose, suitability, domain of meditation and reality. See Nyanaponika 1962: 46-55

¹⁹ Nyanaponika 1962: 46

²⁰ Anālayo, 2003: 42

context this insight might be into the three marks of existence; in a clinical context the insight might be into the triggers of rumination or compulsive binge eating. In each case, though, it is *sati-sampajañña*, a clear comprehension of ‘the bigger picture’ accompanying mindfulness, which enables you to cut through suffering.

4.3 Choosing a ‘scaffolding’ for schools

Just as a monk or someone suffering from depression has a clear context for his mindfulness practice, so too should children have one. I return here to the ‘Raisin Exercise’. It is hard to make this work as the opening mindfulness exercise as it is in adult MBSR and MBCT²¹, where adults arrive with a reasonable understanding of why they are there and a willingness to take part. Adolescents do not. With all but the most angelic of 15 year old classes I have found myself needing to give a clear sense of purpose and context before this exercise works well. The pupils wonder why on earth their teacher is instructing them to take several minutes to eat something tiny that many of them don’t even like. With a clear sense of purpose, however, it can work well in a class, even if raisins are not the ideal food for adolescents²².

What, then, is the appropriate ‘scaffolding’ for mindfulness in schools? It is no easy task to define this. If the ambition is for mindfulness to be accepted as a well-being discipline of real value to young people, then one thing the scaffolding almost certainly *shouldn’t* be is a ‘Buddhist’ one. Kabat-Zinn goes so far as to say that mindfulness “may have to give up being Buddhism in any formal religious sense”²³ if it is to thrive. It has earned respect as an evidence-based discipline after extensive clinical trials; it is hard to imagine its incorporation as a treatment within National Institute of Clinical Excellence guidelines²⁴ if it were it to be seen as in some way ‘religious’, as William explains:

I think there is a natural caution as it goes into the NHS that we don’t complicate things by talking about something that for many people is such a loaded term, or is associated with so much abuse and difficulty in the past, that would bring up unnecessary hindrances.²⁵

Furthermore, this may potentially exclude people who could benefit from it:

If you don’t establish clear boundaries you will exclude some people. There’ll be practising Christians for example, or dedicated Dawkins style atheists coming on courses and I don’t want to exclude them from conversation. They need to feel that there is nothing they have to shut themselves down for - that they can participate.²⁶

Ruchiraketu explains that when MBSR courses were first run at the Cambridge Buddhist Centre, “we would actually put the Buddha image behind a screen, to be really clear about the secular practice”²⁷. Whilst he no longer feels it is necessary to go to quite this length, I am very

²¹ For a full description of this exercise, see Baer, 2006: 6; Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 27-29; Segal *et al*, 2002: 102-110

²² An alternative is mindful eating of chocolate, saved until the end of a lesson as a reward for good conduct!

²³ Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 136

²⁴ See <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/CG23NICEguidelineamended.pdf>, section 1.6.3.10

²⁵ Interview with Mark Williams, 6th May, 2009

²⁶ Interview with Michael Chaskalson, 1st January, 2009

²⁷ Interview with Ruchiraketu, 3rd May, 2009

sympathetic with such an approach. I feel uncomfortable teaching mindfulness in a classroom context unless very clear boundaries have been drawn and it is clear that this is not “Buddhism by the back door”. There are, of course, classroom contexts in which you *would* use Buddhism as the scaffolding, as Christina Feldman points out:

Even in schools there are different contexts... there is one context of a Religious Studies A-level in Buddhism, where it is quite appropriate to be quite forthright [*about Buddhist aspects*]. There is another context where you’re teaching kids mindfulness so that they can be less stressed out about their exams and their social life, and it’s not a Buddhist context and it’s not helpful. The whole art here is about our own flexibility in what we’re teaching and responsiveness to settings.²⁸

However, even when teaching mindfulness at school in a specifically Buddhist context, as in GCSE or A-Level Religious Studies, the emphasis tends to be on encouraging an understanding and a critical response rather than on a more experiential exploration²⁹. What’s more, the exacting demands of the syllabus limit the number of lessons you can reasonably expect to spend on mindfulness.

4.4 Specific and universal vulnerabilities

When I discussed with Mark Williams the difficulty of identifying an appropriate scaffolding for mindfulness in schools, he drew a distinction between the ‘*specific vulnerabilities*’ and the ‘*universal vulnerabilities*’ that mindfulness addresses. The former are the specific vulnerabilities related to a particular condition or life-stage; the latter are the vulnerabilities that “we just get by being human; it comes with the package”³⁰. *Universal vulnerabilities* are a product of the human mind’s innate characteristics:

those mental or behavioural habits that undermine well-being and maintain chronic feelings of dissatisfaction because of certain universal aspects of being human: having language, taking such language literally, using thought-based processes to elaborate, solve or escape from problems, and persisting in using such strategies even if these do not solve the problem (as in the ‘problem’ of sad or anxious mood).³¹

Williams suggests that by addressing such *universal vulnerabilities* MBSR has the capacity to work with ‘large classes of people with many different diagnoses and problems’³². On the other hand MBCT and MB-EAT are ‘derivates of MBSR’³³ which work in smaller classes targeting particular diagnostic groups:

²⁸ Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

²⁹ Having said this, the ‘New Methods’ approach to RE pioneered by David Hay, John Hammond and others in the early 1990’s *would* encourage a more experiential approach to the teaching of Buddhism. See Hammond *et al*, 1990: 69-89. See also Copley, 2008: 165-169.

³⁰ Interview with Mark Williams, 6th May, 2009

³¹ Williams, 2008 (see Bibliography for details – no page numbers)

³² Interview with Mark Williams, 6th May, 2009

³³ Williams, 2008

these second generation applications of MBSR use all (or virtually all) of the same practices as in MBSR, but add elements that address the *specific vulnerabilities* of the patients that come for help.³⁴

This strikes me as a useful analogue for the teaching of mindfulness in schools. The backbone of the course could be in helping children to recognise and understand at least some of these *universal vulnerabilities*. It may then be possible to indicate which *specific vulnerabilities* this might help them to address, accepting that a classroom is not the best environment to tackle these in any depth even if you were trained to do so.³⁵

My hypothesis is that the success of mindfulness in schools will rely on building a scaffolding which steers this line between the specific and the universal. When you have so much heterogeneity within a classroom of children, it would be unwise to dive headlong down the path of one *specific vulnerability*; however, there is unlikely to be enough contact time to cultivate the degree of insight into more *universal vulnerabilities* achieved in an eight-week course. In schools we have to articulate a path between the two within certain constraints. Firstly, we need to identify the best techniques for addressing *universal vulnerabilities*³⁶, but to really engage adolescents we should at least indicate the relevance of these techniques to *specific vulnerabilities* that are common to their life-stage, be it the self-consciousness of puberty, the complex peer and family pressures of teenage life, the unpredictability of mood swings or the anxiety of exams.

4.5 A sense of possibility

A final thought is that perhaps the best way of presenting mindfulness in schools is to turn this broad range of potential applications into the very scaffolding itself. In other words, might the answer be to nest mindfulness in this *sense of possibility*? We might teach a particular mindfulness technique whilst presenting to the class, one lesson at a time, a spectrum of the possible applications for this technique, rather like giving children a wonderful new toy and then telling them about all the things they can do with it. In this way you are seeking to inspire and enable, without being overly prescriptive about how they interpret this. Mindfulness practice could be nested within a broad range of possibilities, from the very functional (revision, sleep, sport) to the therapeutic (anger, anxiety, stress, depression), through to the more spiritual (mystery, wonder, meaning). For the latter, mindfulness could be presented as one contemplative discipline among many in the world's religious traditions.

³⁴ Interview with Mark Williams, 6th May, 2009

³⁵ Clearly, though, we could steer adolescents towards specialists in a particular area should they express an interest. They could then be taught mindfulness 'off-timetable' along the lines of a normal eight-week course.

³⁶ One possible 'scaffolding' for universal vulnerabilities is a framework of six 'modes of mind' being developed by Williams. This framework presents six ways in which the mind tends to get trapped in a 'doing' mode rather than a 'being' mode. 'Doing' is characterized by the way in which we try to think our way out of negative mind states when this only makes things worse; 'being' is attending to the present moment with awareness (i.e. mindfulness). For an overview of 'being' vs. 'doing' see Williams *et al*, 2007: 40-46, or Baer, 2006: 34/35. For an overview of the six 'modes of mind' see Table 1 in Williams, J.M.G., 'Mindfulness, Depression and Modes of Mind', *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, Springer Netherlands, Vol. 32, No. 6, December, 2008

To summarise, we could present mindfulness as a discipline which can be applied and interpreted in many different ways, whilst leaving it to the pupils to discover which, if any, is most relevant to them. This would be very much in the tradition of a liberal, pluralistic education in which

the true aim of everyone who aspires to be a teacher should be, not to impart his own opinions, but to kindle minds.³⁷

³⁷ Frederick W. Robertson, cited in *Great Teachers Change the World*, Pearson Education Ltd, 2006. See <http://www.pearsonlongman.com/great-teachers/pdfs/01-GT-change-the-world.pdf>

5. ETHICS AND COMMUNITY

So far I have looked primarily at the importance of articulating objectives for mindfulness and a broader framework within which these might sit. What, though, of its underlying values? Is there a place for ethics in the mindfulness scaffolding?

5.1 Ethics in adult mindfulness

Ethics are clearly central to Buddhism as a whole, running through its core; as Keown puts it: “morality is woven into the fabric of Buddhist teachings”¹. Historically, the Buddha was a pioneer in the way he “ethicised the universe”² and was at pains “to stress morality as the foundation of everything worthwhile, both within life and beyond”³. Nirvana, the *summum bonum* of Buddhist practice, is seen as liberation from everything which causes suffering, in particular “the unwholesome mental roots of lust, anger and delusion”⁴, and as such is seen by Buddhists as a state of unconditional selflessness and ethical perfection.

Needless to say, the Buddhist understanding of mindfulness (*sati*) is to a significant extent ethicised. Whilst there is a form of *sati* which is non-judgemental and non-evaluative⁵, the skilful mind’s awareness of the present moment is often infused with a sense of what is and is not wholesome and beneficial. Indeed, *sati* itself always conduces to awakening; ‘unwholesome *sati*’ is for Buddhists a contradiction in terms⁶. We return here to the fact that *sati* has its roots in the verb *sarati* – ‘to remember’ – and that in Buddhist mindfulness there is a sense of recollecting certain qualities. There is a famous text from around 100 BCE in which the revered monk Nāgaseṇa explains key Buddhist doctrines to the Greek king Menander. Here he explains the ‘not-drifting’ quality of mindfulness:

when mindfulness is uprising one does not drift in regard to mental states that are wholesome and unwholesome, blameable and blameless... the one who is devoted to mental training then follows the things that should be followed and does not follow the things that should not be followed.⁷

Mindfulness is also equated with wisdom given that you are seeing things ‘as they are’. Hence Wallace’s concern, mentioned above, that to interpret mindfulness as an ethically neutral and entirely non-evaluative ‘bare attention’, as nothing more than ‘paying attention to the present moment’, is to misunderstand it. To quote in full:

¹ Keown, 2005: 3

² Gombrich, 1996: 51

³ Gombrich, 1996: 64

⁴ Anālayo, 2003: 257 (pp.257-265 provide a useful introduction to nirvana, particularly as an ethical state)

⁵ My thanks to Tse-fu (Jeff) Kuan for clarifying this. In early Buddhism mindfulness comprises both non-judgemental attention and evaluative awareness. Of four types of mindfulness, only the first (simple awareness) is non-judgemental; the other three are evaluative. See Kuan, T., 2008, *Mindfulness in Early Buddhism*, Oxford, Routledge. Clearly it is the first type of mindfulness which most closely equates to the non-judgemental aspect stressed in the clinical applications.

⁶ This is certainly the case in Theravādin Buddhist thinking, though in Sārvāstivāda a concept of ‘wrong-mindfulness’ exists. For a discussion of this issue see Gethin, 2001: 40-44

⁷ Milindipaṇḥa.I.xii in Mendis, 1993: 37

When mindfulness is equated with bare attention, it can easily lead to the misconception that the cultivation of mindfulness has nothing to do with ethics or with the cultivation of wholesome states of mind and the attenuation of unwholesome states. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the Pāli *Abhidhamma*, where mindfulness is listed as a wholesome mental factor, it is not depicted as bare attention, but as a mental factor that clearly distinguishes wholesome from unwholesome mental states and behaviour.⁸

Even the state of deep calm and concentration brought about through *samatha* meditation has a distinctly ethical ring to it. Not only is the mind settled and sharpened through Calm meditation, it is cleared of the hindrances that obscure the mind from Insight (*vipassanā*):

And so, with mind concentrated, purified and cleansed, unblemished, free from impurities, malleable, workable, established, and having gained imperturbability, he directs and inclines his mind towards knowing and seeing.⁹

In Buddhism, then, the ethical dimension of mindfulness is paramount, whereas in secular mindfulness at first glance it plays a far less significant role. Wallace's argument suggests that the secular emphasis on being non-judgemental may be at the expense of a discernment between qualities such as 'wholesome' and 'unwholesome'. One of the hypotheses I took into research was that ethics was one of the things 'lost' in MBCT/MBSR, a hypothesis largely refuted for several reasons.

Firstly, that there is less emphasis on ethics in secular mindfulness is not wholly surprising, again given the limited time frame of an eight-week course. As a comparison, whilst Buddhism is rich in precepts and moral codes, these are unlikely to play a significant role in a mindfulness course for beginners, even in a Buddhist context.

Secondly, there is an underlying ethic in secular mindfulness that emerges quite strongly when you read the literature in more depth and speak to experienced instructors. For the same practical reason that Buddhists see sound ethical conduct as 'first base' for profitable meditation, Kabat-Zinn explains that...

The foundation for mindfulness practice, for all meditative inquiry and exploration, lies in ethics and morality... Why? Because you cannot possibly hope to know stillness and calmness within your own mind and body... or embody and enact those qualities in the world, if your actions are continually clouding, agitating, and destabilising the very instrument through which you are looking, namely, your own mind.¹⁰

He is at pains to make it clear that "You cannot have harmony without ethical behaviour"¹¹, a position that Feldman strongly endorsed...

I know very well how wholeheartedly Jon Kabat-Zinn is personally committed to ethics as being one of the conditions out of which a mind of happiness and calmness arises.¹²

⁸ Wallace, 2008: 61

⁹ Walshe, 1996: 104

¹⁰ Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 102

¹¹ Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 47

¹² Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

...and was then confirmed unequivocally by Kabat-Zinn when I asked for his views on what might be ‘lost’ and ‘gained’ in the secularisation of mindfulness:

Some might think that MBSR is a *decontextualization* of *Buddhadharma* [Buddhist teachings], picking out whatever elements we choose or are seduced by, and ignoring the rest, including the moral and ethical foundation of *sīla*¹³. I do not agree, and never would have offered it to the world in medicine and health care if I had thought so or felt so.¹⁴

Furthermore, whilst there may be no specific ethical instructions on an eight-week course, the whole ‘tone’ of it is one of trust, kindness, gentleness and acceptance. It is not an ethics of norms and precepts, but of values and virtues. If nothing else, kindness and acceptance should be directed towards oneself when faced with conditions like chronic pain, depressive relapse or terminal illness, as treatment entails a complete overhaul in the way life is approached. This is why the literature suggests another appropriate synonym for mindfulness:

The overall tenor of mindfulness practice is gentle, appreciative, and nurturing. Another way to think of it would be ‘heartfulness’.¹⁵

Lastly, there is a sense that simply by being mindful and by bringing awareness to the present moment we can trust our inherent capacity to wisely know ‘how things are’. The underlying principle is that if you trust yourself and ‘let go’ of your preconceptions, anxieties and fears, the mind “intuitively guides us and protects us from harm or self-destruction”¹⁶. So there is an “idea of inherent wisdom” which Segal, Williams and Teasdale admit “can seem strange”¹⁷. In fact, this idea of ‘inherent wisdom’ has a long history in Buddhism and is closely related to concepts such as ‘original-mind’, *tathāgata-garbha*, ‘Buddha-nature’ and the idea that the mind is ‘by nature brightly shining and pure’.¹⁸

All of this leads to the conclusion that whilst on the surface ethics may not seem to play a significant role, on further investigation there is a strong ethical tenor to the teaching of secular mindfulness, the importance of which should not be underestimated. As in Buddhism mindfulness in its secular form is not simply a rudderless ‘bare attention’:

The quality of mindfulness is not a neutral, blank presence. True mindfulness is imbued with warmth, compassion, and interest. In the light of this engaged attention, we discover that it is impossible to hate or fear anything or anyone we truly understand.¹⁹

¹³ This is a Pāli word usually translated as ‘moral virtue’ or ‘ethical conduct’.

¹⁴ Email from Kabat-Zinn, 2nd April, 2009, (Kabat-Zinn’s underlining)

¹⁵ Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 7. See also Williams *et al*, 2007: 5

¹⁶ Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 58

¹⁷ Segal *et al*, 2002: 190. They go on to suggest that it is perhaps less strange when you consider the way in which answers often tend to pop up only once you have *stopped* thinking about a problem.

¹⁸ This is an intriguing area of overlap between secular and Buddhist mindfulness and one worthy of further research. One can assume that Kabat-Zinn is conversant with the idea of Buddha-nature given his schooling in Zen, with numerous references to original-mind, beginner’s-mind and mind-essence (see Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 78, 85, 170, 320, 329, 584). For an introduction to *tathāgata-garbha*, ‘Buddha-nature’ and the natural luminosity of mind see Harvey, 1990: 114-5.

¹⁹ Feldman in Williams *et al*, 2007: 67

5.2 Ethics of mindfulness in schools

Where, then, does this leave us with the teaching of mindfulness in schools? It goes without saying that the last thing we should do is adopt some kind of moralistic tone:

While it is a good idea for these issues [ethics and morality] to be raised in some fashion from the very beginning of meditation practice, it is also too easy to fall into a kind of moralistic rhetoric that can sound a lot like sermonising.²⁰

In communicating ethics, what secular mindfulness ‘loses’ in comparison with its Buddhist cousin is an icon and an archetype in the form of the Buddha, somebody who embodies a set of values. Whether you perceive him as an historical figure or a semi-divine being, “We all like a good story”²¹, and as such the Buddha’s life is often looked upon as a teaching aid. Given the need to keep the Buddha largely out of the PSHE classroom, we are left to find other ways of bringing to life values like courage, determination, kindness, tolerance and trust in a way that engages the more affective faculties of the pupils. It ought to be reassuring, particularly in a life-stage characterised by tremendous change, for adolescents to experience that:

With regular practice, you learn to get in touch with and draw upon your deep capacity for physiological relaxation and calmness... In doing so, you also learn that it is possible to trust a stable inner core within yourself that is reliable, dependable, unwavering.²²

For adolescents to experience “the mind’s own natural capacities for calm and clarity”²³ is not only comforting but implicitly nurtures virtues like trust, patience and equanimity. Rumi’s *The Guest House* is frequently cited in MBSR/MBCT to illustrate and inspire the spirit of welcoming all experience, bad as well as good:

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.²⁴

Film can play a powerful role in the presentation of mindfulness to adolescents, particularly bearing in mind that not all classes are going to respond terribly well to poetry. Returning to *Kung Fu Panda*, whilst the turtle Oogway may not be the Buddha, there are numerous scenes where with warmth and humour he embodies the kindness, acceptance and trust of the mindful approach.²⁵

²⁰ Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 106

²¹ Williams, P., 2000: 21

²² Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 342

²³ Williams *et al*, 2007: 76

²⁴ Rumi in Segal *et al*, 2002: 222; Kabat-Zinn, 2005: 262; See Baer, 2006: 12 and Crane, 2009: 53 for an overview of the use of poetry in mindfulness training.

²⁵ *Kung Fu Panda*, 2008, Dreamworks Animation LLC. Scenes from other films illustrate different aspects of mindfulness: the kendo scenes in *The Last Samurai* the importance of single-pointed concentration; the plastic bag scene in *American Beauty* the joy of simple observation of the everyday; the first ‘therapy’ session in *I Love Huckabees* the chaotic nature of mind.

5.3 An amplified role for ethics?

For further consideration is whether there may in fact be an amplified role for ethics in the classroom. Mindfulness in Buddhism is often accompanied by meditations to generate positive affective states, particularly *mettā*, or loving-kindness, as this is seen to nurture and reinforce the wholesome qualities of a wise mind²⁶. *Mettā* involves directing thoughts of kindness to oneself, to others, and even to one's enemies, and is touched upon in MBSR on the longer practice day²⁷. Because it involves generating feelings of empathy, goodwill and forgiveness (i.e. more than simply observation), there is concern that in a clinical context this might have negative consequences because some feel incapable of having such feelings, a 'failure' which can lead to rumination. Michael Chaskalson explains how one participant...

finished a course with me, found it very helpful, went to the Buddhist centre, joined the *metta-bhavana* course, which is taught by someone who I think is absolutely top notch at teaching *metta*, couldn't do it and became depressed. I think that absolutely plays into the tendency for rumination.²⁸

However there was a strong sense among interviewees that, whilst there were some good reasons for not practising *mettā*, it was potentially a very rich seam for secular applications to explore:

On the one hand it is very charged territory and very tricky territory because it can bring up very strong negative responses in people; but equally it is very rewarding territory, so I've had people say to me "You know the most important thing in the whole course was that little piece we did on loving-kindness".²⁹

I wonder whether the classroom is in fact a safer environment in which to practice this, as it is a non-clinical and less 'troubled' audience. The objective would be to promote greater empathy, acceptance and tolerance amongst teenagers in a life-stage characterised by the shifting sands of peer relationships.

5.4 The instructor in adult mindfulness

In both Buddhist and secular mindfulness, the role of the teacher is paramount. Gethin says of the former that "The importance of the teacher is, of course, one of the great themes of Buddhist practice"³⁰. The Buddha himself is said to have taught for forty-five years after his awakening, right down to teaching the wanderer Subhadda from his deathbed³¹ and then, as all but his final act, beseeching his monks to ask him any remaining questions before he died³². The centrality of teaching and the teacher in Buddhism is reflected in the fact that:

²⁶ See Harvey, 1990: 247-8

²⁷ Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 182-184

²⁸ Interview with Michael Chaskalson, 1st January, 2009

²⁹ Interview with Ruchiraketu, 3rd May, 2009

³⁰ Gethin, 1998: 179

³¹ Walshe, 1996: 267 (D.ii.149)

³² Walshe, 1996: 270 (D.ii.155)

What the Buddha taught is often referred to in the early texts as a system of training... and his disciples may be referred to as being 'in training' or 'not in need of further training'.³³

In secular mindfulness, too, the instructor plays a very significant role. Whilst at one level the techniques are rigorously 'manualised', at another level mindfulness is much more than just a set of techniques. Gilpin paints a colourful picture of how the training and background of the teacher strongly influences the way mindfulness is presented:

Mindfulness is going to be presented in different ways depending on the teacher. This is the weird and wonderful thing about MBCT/MBSR: you've got everyone from the most dyed in the wool clinically atheistic psychotherapists running them to people who might be counsellors or therapists who already have one foot in a Buddhist tradition.³⁴

That the instructor should have a stable mindfulness practice of his or her own is stressed time and again: "the teacher's personal practice is a crucial underpinning to the teaching process"³⁵. The instructor plays an important role not only by "being able to teach through an embodiment of the qualities of mindfulness"³⁶ but because after each practice there is an enquiry session where participants are invited to comment on their experience:

That enquiry session to a very large extent is going to be flavoured and shaped by the teacher practitioner. Sometimes there are surprising outcomes in terms of insights, in terms of experiences, and if the person leading those groups is not well trained, then they're not well trained to be able to hold those openings and experiences.³⁷

Williams points out that in the clinical world the expertise of instructors becomes particularly important, as they are required to have a deep understanding of the *specific vulnerabilities* relevant to the condition they are treating:

If you're trained with schizophrenics, you don't try to work with anxious people unless you get further training, and that's because of the different specific issues.³⁸

The most evocative summary of the importance of the teacher in both Buddhist and secular mindfulness comes from Alan Wallace:

We would not entrust our teeth to someone who had simply taken a number of dentistry workshops and practiced for an hour or so a day, so shouldn't we be even more careful about entrusting our minds to meditation instructors without years of professional training in the theory and practice of meditation.³⁹

³³ Gethin, 1998: 36

³⁴ Interview with Richard Gilpin, 4th January, 2009

³⁵ Crane, 2009: 156. See also Baer, 2006: 13 and Segal *et al*, 2002: 49-50

³⁶ Crane, 2009: 155

³⁷ Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

³⁸ Interview with Mark Williams, 6th May, 2009

³⁹ Wallace, 2008: 111

5.5 The teacher in schools

It is early days, but in schools I think the instructor is equally important though in slightly different ways. Being trained in mindfulness and having your own established practice is still very important, but if you are giving a taster of mindfulness in the context of timetabled periods, I don't believe you need the same level of training as an instructor of an eight-week course.⁴⁰

Firstly, you are far less likely to be teaching to the kind of depth that is common in eight-week courses. In a 40-minute lesson, once you have settled the class down, introduced a concept and then practised it, there is limited time for enquiry. You are dipping their toes in the pool, not throwing them in. Your role is to nurture a culture of trust so that pupils are comfortable sharing their experiences with you and with others, but if something very profound emerges you would speak to them afterwards, check that things are okay, and then make sure they know how to get further support.

Secondly, the ability to teach mindfulness successfully to a class of teenagers arguably depends as much on your experience in classroom management and rapport with your sets as it does on your understanding of mindfulness. Could you keep a possibly unruly mob under control whilst embodying acceptance; model trust whilst keeping half an eye open for mischief; feel mindful in period 2 when five minutes ago in period 1 you were in chalk and talk mode with 25 thirteen year-olds? How do you manage the hyperactive show-off who simply won't take part? How do you teach it differently first period on a Tuesday compared with last thing on a Friday? How might you teach boys, girls or mixed classes differently? How on earth do you motivate them to do any home practice?

To conclude, the teacher is just as important in a classroom context, but the demands of the role and the skills required to do it are far from identical.

5.6 The community (*saṅgha*)

One further hypothesis which I took into research was that in secular mindfulness there was no equivalent of what Buddhists called *saṅgha*. *Saṅgha* is the word used to describe the community of monks and nuns which plays a crucial role in Buddhism:

The Buddhist monastic community is the prerequisite for the existence of Buddhism in a given society... The *Saṅgha* lives the teaching, preserves the teaching as scriptures, and teachers the wider community. Without the *Saṅgha* there is no Buddhism.⁴¹

The *saṅgha* is of central importance for many reasons, but of particular relevance is that if you want to learn more about mindfulness in a Buddhist context, institutions which have remained relatively unchanged for hundreds or even thousands of years are there to support you. You will find a community of people whose entire life is devoted to living what the Buddha taught, who can support each other in this venture, and part of whose role is to teach people like you who want to learn about it.

⁴⁰ If you are working with adolescents 'off-timetabled', and particularly if they have diagnosed conditions, then clearly the function of the teacher is far more similar to that in the adult world.

⁴¹ Gethin, 1998: 92

My hypothesis was that secular mindfulness had no equivalent of *saṅgha*. Once again this was not entirely correct, as in a sense, with every eight-week course mini-*saṅghas* are created with a high degree of mutual support:

Sharon related that it was extremely important to be in a room full of others who, like herself, were coming to terms with living and surviving with cancer. Being together with others sharing a similar diagnosis in a supportive context creates a sense of community that alleviates the deep sense of isolation commonly experienced by patients with cancer.⁴²

Feldman concurs, advocating the benefits of...

people being able to feel supported by others and being able to articulate their own experience without fear of blame or judgement does seem to play quite a crucial part in fostering the qualities of acceptance and letting go of aversion... These little *saṅghas* are being created over and over and they're basically providing the same service that non-secular *saṅghas* are meant to support.⁴³

However, the distinct advantage of the Buddhist *saṅgha* is that it is always there and has the capacity to support the complete beginner or the expert, whenever required and wherever they are in their practice. In a secular context, though, when the eight weeks end "there is often a feeling again of loss and going back into a more isolated existence"⁴⁴:

I think a lot of people are left wondering where to go. It's an issue for us teachers, because there are people wanting to go somewhere and not all of them feeling that Buddhism would be the right place for them to go. I often hear from participants in the clinical courses saying "What do we do now? Where do we go next? Can you give us something? Can we do something?" It's a real lack and something we do have to address.⁴⁵

Services are being developed to cater for this, perhaps along the lines of Kabat-Zinn's 'graduate classes' in MBSR⁴⁶, but one wonders whether, at a far more basic level, a similar kind of 'gap' might exist in a schools context. Even after relatively brief exposure in a classroom context there are usually a few pupils who taste something important and want to know more. Where, if anywhere, would they go? Do you respond to this with extra provision 'off-timetable'? If so, should this require further teacher training, as smaller groups for longer periods are more likely to throw up 'openings and experiences' that require more careful handling? Is this a point at which parents should be 'in the loop' in some way? To summarise, you would always hope to foster a certain sense of community during the lessons themselves, but the question is whether or not there is an extension of this in another form outside of the classroom.

⁴² Speca, Carlson, Mackenzie & Angen, *Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) as an intervention for cancer-patients*, in Baer, 2006: 249

⁴³ Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Interview with Michael Chaskalson, 1st January, 2009

⁴⁶ Kabat-Zinn, 1996: 424

6. CONCLUSION

My hope is that this study of mindfulness in the adult world informs the creation of mindfulness curricula in schools. Key themes to have emerged include: the importance of clearly articulating objectives and nesting these within a 'scaffolding' that has relevance to adolescents; the central role of 'Calm' in motivating pupils and training their attention; the underlying value and implicit communication of ethics; and the role and function of the teacher as a key dynamic in the way mindfulness is presented.

Adolescents are a different audience to the adult one and, if our ambition is to teach mindfulness in timetabled periods, this is in certain respects a very different task. However, a number of key principles that underpin the adult approach hold just as true for mindfulness in schools. Firstly, there is a lively and very healthy exchange of experience and ideas between the secular and the non-secular worlds...

There is just an enormously rich dialogue between the new insights emerging in Western psychology and the ancient insights of the *dharma*.¹

If this dialogue can extend to include the education world, then progress will be rapid; I hope this paper is a step in that direction. Secondly, mindfulness in the adult world is characterised by a tremendously open spirit of investigation, typified by the phrase that Christina Feldman returned to time and again:

I would only say that this is a work in progress. It's a *work in progress*. We don't know where this is going to end up, and we don't know where the more specific links are going to end up being made between the Buddha's teaching and the on-the-ground applications and interventions.²

Lastly, the lifeblood of mindfulness in the secular world has been its evidence-base, something we should aspire to create in schools. What we measure is uncertain, and whether it works remains to be seen, but without trials the potential of mindfulness cannot be gauged. And if the prospect of rigorous empirical testing runs against the grain of mindfulness as a spiritual practice, take heart from John Teasdale, who hails it as fuel for a creative process that has been seen many times in the last 2,500 years - Buddhism's delightfully unpredictable fusion with an entirely new culture:

My guess is that the Buddha was a genius and that he got it right, but actually to get very good empirical support not only for the model of the suffering, but also for the way in which each aspect of the practice might contribute to the undoing of that suffering: it's a way of seeing what is core and what is peripheral. It seems to me that this is one of the exciting possibilities that we in the West have got. You know, we're doing it anyway - we're making judgments about what we're going to leave out and what we're going to leave in, but to actually have some possibility of doing that on an empirical basis would be, well, more satisfying, I think.³

¹ Interview with Michael Chaskalson, 1st January, 2009

² Interview with Christina Feldman, 14th January, 2009

³ Interview with John Teasdale, 26th January, 2009

APPENDIX A

These are examples of questions asked in the recorded telephone interviews. **They were used more as a discussion guide than a formal questionnaire** as it was not possible to cover all of these in depth in less than an hour. What's more, interviewees' answers often led down new avenues worth exploring. I might add (or remove) questions depending on how fruitful initial questioning proved to be.

1. When comparing secular and Buddhist mindfulness, what do you see as the most significant similarities and differences?
2. How would you compare the aims of MBSR/MBCT with those of Buddhist mindfulness?
3. At its narrowest, MBSR is a highly effective clinical application of mindfulness. At its broadest, Kabat-Zinn would pitch mindfulness as “a way of life” or “a way of being”. Where do you see the natural limitations of a more secular approach to mindfulness?
4. Do you see the mindfulness of MBSR/MBCT as more akin to that practised in *samatha* meditation or *vipassanā* meditation in Buddhism? Why?
5. How do you manage the relationship between MBSR/Buddhism in your teaching?
6. Is it necessary to establish clear boundaries between the clinical and the Buddhist teaching of mindfulness? Why / why not?
7. Is someone looking specifically to prevent relapse into depression better off going to an MBCT class than a dharma one? For somebody clinically depressed are there indeed risks of going to a less ‘targeted’ Buddhist meditation class?
8. ‘*Sati*’, the Pali word commonly translated as ‘mindfulness’, has much stronger connotations of memory and recollection than it has in MBCT/MBSR. What does this add to Buddhist mindfulness that may not be as present in secular mindfulness?
9. Alan Wallace has said that ‘mindfulness’ in a secular context may be closer to the Pāli word ‘*manasikāra*’ which is a relatively neutral word meaning ‘attention’ or the bare cognising of an object. This is contrasted with ‘*sati*’ as an ennobling and evaluative faculty, discerning between what is or is not ‘wholesome’. Would you agree?
10. There is clearly an ethical aspect to secular mindfulness, but ethics are far less central than in Buddhist practice. What implications might this have?
11. The foundation of MBSR ethics seems to be a trust in the inherent goodness of an inner nature which “intuitively guides us and protects us from harm or self-destruction”. Do you see this as akin to a kind of buddha-nature?
12. Mindfulness in Buddhism encourages the cultivation of positive affective states such as *mettā* or the *pīti* of deeper concentration. Do you see a role for this in MBSR/MBCT?
13. Thinking of Triple Gem, Dharma is at the core of secular mindfulness, but there is (at the moment) relatively little equivalent to Sangha and obviously no equivalent of Buddha. What limitation does this place on secular mindfulness?
14. You might go to an MBSR course to lower your blood pressure and end up having life-changing experiences. Where do you go then, particularly if you are not interested in being ‘Buddhist’? Is there a middle-way between clinical mindfulness and dharma practice?
15. With adolescents in schools, mindfulness is likely to be taught as a kind of ‘life-skill’. I promote this and see it as hugely beneficial. However, in what ways do you think an entirely secular approach might impoverish what schoolchildren could potentially learn?

APPENDIX B

These are excerpts from a research paper currently in preparation.
Please contact Prof. Felicia Huppert for further information.

A controlled trial of mindfulness training in schools: the importance of practice for an impact on well-being.

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Methods

Fifteen-year-old male students from two independent (fee-paying) schools participated in this study. A total of 173 students were recruited from eleven religious education classes. Six of the classes were allocated to the mindfulness intervention and five acted as controls. In each school, the mindfulness classes were taught by two members of staff who were experienced mindfulness practitioners.

The mindfulness condition comprised four 40 minute classes, one per week, which presented the principles and practice of mindfulness meditation. The mindfulness classes covered the concepts of awareness and acceptance, and the mindfulness practices included the 'body scan', mindfulness of breathing, awareness of sounds, mindful awareness of thoughts, and walking meditation. The practices were built up progressively, with a new aspect being introduced each week.

Students in the mindfulness condition were provided with a specially designed CD, containing three 8-minute audio files of mindfulness exercises outside the classroom. Students were encouraged to undertake daily practice by listening to the appropriate audio files.

All participants completed a short series of online questionnaires before and after the 4 week intervention period. This normally took place in a computer laboratory one week before the start of the sessions (baseline) and one week after the conclusion of the sessions (follow-up)

Measures

To measure mindfulness, the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale - Revised (CAMS-R; Feldman et al., 2006) was used. To measure resilience, the Ego-Resiliency Scale (ERS; Block & Kremen, 1996) was used. To measure well-being, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007) was used. We assessed the Big-Five personality dimensions (McCrae & Costa, 1987) which measure extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience. To measure personality, we used the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling et al., 2003) which is designed to measure personality in situations where the use of longer personality instruments is not practical.

At follow-up, participants were also asked a series of questions about the number of times they had practised mindfulness outside of class, how much they felt they had learned during the course, how much they enjoyed the course, how helpful they found it, and whether the training course was the right length, and whether they thought they would continue to practice mindfulness.

Summary of Results

- Students who practiced more reported a greater increase in mindfulness.
- Students with less emotional stability at baseline reported a greater increase in ego resiliency.
- Students with greater agreeableness, less emotional stability, greater openness to experience or who practiced more reported a greater increase in well-being.

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