Teaching and Teachers of Mindfulness Interventions in Western Educational Settings: A Qualitative Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Engaging with mindfulness for educational purposes continues to be a complex challenge. Mindfulness as a contemplative practice in Western educational contexts, while rising in popularity to support areas such as emotional regulation, awareness, focus, and stress reduction, is a highly ambivalent intervention. Complexity exists around purpose and place in curriculum, teacher experience, and ethics of care. In this qualitative review of 54 studies about mindfulness in Western educational settings specific educational impact/effect was considered. Each study illuminated key understandings about approaches, impact, and challenges associated with the role and place of the teacher in mindfulness interventions. The results highlighted the need to move beyond teachers teaching mindfulness as a tool to support their stress and wellbeing, to a need to think more critically about the purpose of mindfulness in Western educational settings. Illuminated is the need to move beyond seeing mindfulness as a tool or technique to alleviate stress, anxiety or to improve focus and attention that can be delivered by anyone for anyone. Instead, what is recommended is that careful consideration of teacher personal practice and training should be made in order to facilitate a connection back to traditional notions of mindfulness to allow for skills, capacity and experience to be able to transfer to work with young people in educational contexts.

Keywords: *mindfulness, teaching mindfulness, education, qualitative systematic literature review*

Introduction

The rise of mindfulness as a contemplative practice in educational contexts has sparked much interest and debate (Ergas, 2019; Hale, 2017; Kane, 2017). Consequently, there is a level of ambivalence about the role of mindfulness, its origins, and reason for practising in the classroom (Choudhury & Moses, 2016) and indeed which meaning of mindfulness in the Western context to engage with (N. Albrecht, 2018a). Although there is developing evidence about use,

application, and effects in education there is debate about who should be teaching mindfulness, and if the teacher must have a personal practice (if each of us practices mindfulness) or not to be beneficial in delivery (Bernay, 2014; Burrows, 2017; Ergas, 2017; Gupta, 2019; Kerr et al., 2017). Additionally, concerns have been raised as to if the formal and informal practices delivered are appropriate for young people when most have been trialled primarily on adult audiences (Arthurson, 2015). This discussion is exacerbated further with considerations of the place of mindfulness, or indeed if it does have a place, within the education agenda and when it should or can be offered (Ergas, 2015, 2018). Debated questions include: is mindfulness part of the curriculum, an add-on, optional or compulsory, a one-off or a series, developmental over age and year levels, sitting within one content area such as health or integrated? The complexity is real, and as Ergas (2015) reiterates:

> Framing contemplative practices as curricular 'interventions' makes one think that they are 'add-ons' patched onto the margins of the timetable. They are not part and parcel of the 'real business' of schooling, which is more likely understood in terms of the day-to-day routine of math, history, science etc. As if they might be ways to scaffold 'education' but they do not constitute the 'thing' itself…The great paradox we find is that the very richness of the wisdom traditions from which a robust educational theory might be derived is simultaneously a source of controversy that prevents many from considering contemplative practices as legitimate pedagogies in school. (Ergas, 2015, p. 207)

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has a history rooted in Eastern philosophies, although "one of its major strengths is that it is not dependent on any belief system or ideology" (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 12). Mindfulness is mostly referred to as a way of "being" which has prescribed characteristics, activities and programs designed to cultivate this state as well as ancient meditation techniques rooted in various religions (N. J. Albrecht et al., 2012, p. 3). In the West, Jon Kabit-Zinn's work with the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has been a dominate mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) deeply associated to the often heavily cited definition of mindfulness – *"paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally"* (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). With this definition there are two parts to mindfulness. The first is learning to focus attention on one thing, and then being able to bring the attention back when the mind becomes distracted. The second part is about the attitude you bring to paying attention – being open, non-judging, and curious about what you are focusing on.

There are many noteworthy definitions of mindfulness. However, there is no consensus on the definition of mindfulness. This challenge causes some confusion between practitioners, teachers, students, and researchers. As such a collective came together to problem solve the lack of consensus on the definition. They proposed, "mindfulness involves the self-regulation of attention with an approach of curiosity, openness and acceptance" (Bishop et al., 2004, p. x) Furthermore, Itai Ivtzan (2019) notes "mindfulness is any moment in our life in which our activity and attention are one" (Ivtzan & Lomas, 2016). For example, Ellen Langer defines mindfulness as "a flexible state of mind in which we are actively

engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context" (Langer, 2000a). She attends to this definition in how we move between mindfulness and mindlessness (autopilot), noting "we are stuck in a single, rigid perspective, and we are oblivious to alternative ways of knowing. When we are mindless, our behavior is rule and routine governed; when we are mindful, rules and routines may guide our behavior rather than predetermine it" (p. 220). She notes "mindfulness can be achieved without meditation" (Langer, 2000b, p. 220), however others note it is the act of meditation that enables us to be mindful (Choudhury & Moses, 2016; DeLuca et al., 2018). Additionally, often the terms mindfulness and meditation are used
loosely in Western culture with a tendency to ignore the "spiritually and culturally embedded roots of the practices" (Gupta, 2019, p. 22). What is present though, in these definitions are the fundamental intersections that are core to practice (Fletcher & Hayes, 2005; Shapiro et al., 2006), that is the mindfulness mechanisms of intention, attention, and attitude (IAA). These form "essential building blocks" (Shapiro et al., 2006, pp. 374–375), each interwoven, occurring simultaneously and are the connection point to the process of being in this moment-to-moment process.

What is the impact of mindfulness interventions in Western educational settings?

This debate is complex, and as mindfulness becomes more popular in contemporary Western society, we see more interventions of a variety of formal and informal practices with a variety of theoretical frameworks applied in the educational context. In our study we asked the question of the literature: *What is the impact of mindfulness interventions in Western educational settings?*

This paper aims to look at what the reported research is telling us through a qualitative systematic literature review. Specifically in this literature review we focus on the role and place of the teacher, and ask the following research questions in relation to Western educational settings:

1) What is the approach or philosophy to the training required to teach mindfulness?
2) What is the impact on the teacher when they facilitate mindfulness?
3) What are the challenges experienced by teachers as they engage with mindfulness?

Methodology

Research approach

Mindfulness interventions in the literature are manifold, ranging from conceptual to empirical studies, and stretching to applications in different contexts. Given this fluid nature and a lack of a comprehensive overview of the impact of mindfulness interventions, particularly in the West, this paper has set out a systematic review of the literature (Dixon-Woods et al., 2016). This approach was conducted to have a clear understanding of how mindfulness interventions are conceptualised in educational settings, and more specifically, to plot the impact that mindfulness interventions have had in different Western educational environments. A systematic literature review is a method that follows a methodical procedure, by following a series of steps that leads to the selection of key articles that are analysed to answer a specific research question (Moher et al, 2009). A systematic literature review offers a rigours and transparent methodology for answering a specific research question and reporting findings across a relevant range of studies (Dixon-Woods et al., 2016). This

makes this study replicable in its conceptualisation, literature selection and inclusion. The selected papers were analysed using a qualitative approach. Although the qualitative analysis is not replicable, the findings provide an overview of the state of practice, offer a synthesis of results, and a discussion on the gaps and future research directions.

Research Protocol

Following an adaptation of the PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009) protocol, we applied a systematic process including four main steps: identifying, screening, eligibility, and inclusion for analysis. To conduct the search, the terms mindfulness, education, and Western contexts, along with similar keywords, were included (see Table 1). The general search terms included three levels of coding. The first level included the term mindfulness and related concepts. The second level of coding was education, and the third level was western or secular. Records that conducted clinical research were excluded in this step. To ensure quality, only peer-reviewed journals were selected. The search was also limited by a specific period (2008 to 2019) and written in English. The search was conducted in five databases including APA PsycNET, Cochrane, Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCOhost. The criterion for selecting the databases was their subject coverage in humanities, social sciences, education, health and medicine, science and technology, business, and management. The APA PsycNET database was selected for its subject coverage in psychology and specialised basic, applied, clinical and theoretical research in psychology.

The screening process consisted of two main phases. For the first phase, both authors screened for eligible papers and excluded those that had no topic relevance, involved non-Western settings, were not peer-reviewed, not related to education, and not specific to the practice of mindfulness or related practices. After conducting the systematic process of identifying, screening, assessing papers for their inclusion in phase 1 (see Figure 1), a search in Sage database was conducted to ensure that all relevant papers were included, and none were missed in the initial search. From the search in the Sage database, further 97 records were added. Additionally, 89 records were manually added to the full-text appraisal stage. These records were identified and considered relevant and key in the field by the authors, however, did not emerge in the database search.

Understanding the impact of **mindfulness** in **education** in **Western** contexts

Search terms: mindfulness OR “contemplative practice*” OR meditation AND education* OR learn* OR teach* AND west OR secular NOT clinical

Databases	APA PsycNET	Cochrane	Scopus	Web of Science	EbscoHost
	125	5	94	54	161

Records after combining databases: 440

	Records after eliminating duplicates, book reviews, summaries and other records that did not match the search criteria:	328
Identification	**Screening Phase 1**	
	Records included after conducting the **first screening** (title & abstract revision) Researcher 1:	82
	Records included after conducting the **first screening** (title & abstract revision) Researcher 2:	120
	Records included after conducting a **verification search** in Sage database (1,274 records from the initial search) Researcher 1:	25
Eligibility	Records included after conducting a **verification search** in Sage database (1,274 records from the initial search) Researcher 2:	72
	Records **added manually** (researcher's expertise in the area):	89
	Total records before eliminating duplicates:	388
	Total records after eliminating duplicates:	**298**
Inclusion	**Screening Phase 2**	
	Records included after conducting the **second screening** (full-text revision) with specific criteria on all records from screening one:	126
	Records included after conducting a **second screening** (full-text revision) with specific criteria on all records from screening one (Researcher 2):	54
	Total records for qualitative analysis:	54

Table 1. Description of systematic protocol, including records identified, excluded and included throughout the process.

For the second phase of screening, a full-text revision of 26 manuscripts identified in the first screening was done to further narrow down the selection criteria. These key papers, identified by the authors, allowed for the development of more detailed, specific, and focused exclusion criteria to select key, relevant studies (see Figure 1). These focused criteria excluded research reports, discussion papers, European or Asian context-based studies, and those with a spirituality, loving-kindness meditation, yoga practice focused or interventions in general. With these criteria (see Figure 1), 126 records were selected. To further narrow this selection, additional criteria was applied, which included papers in Western educational settings with a specific educational impact/effect. Therefore, those papers covering educational settings, but not studying educational impacts, outcomes, experiences, effects or similar, as well as only a discussion of mindfulness in Western education contexts, but no empirical research, were excluded (see Figure 1). This led to the final selection of 54 records identified as suitable for analysis. Of these 54 papers qualitatively analysed, a variety of educational settings and roles within these settings was identified (see Table 2).

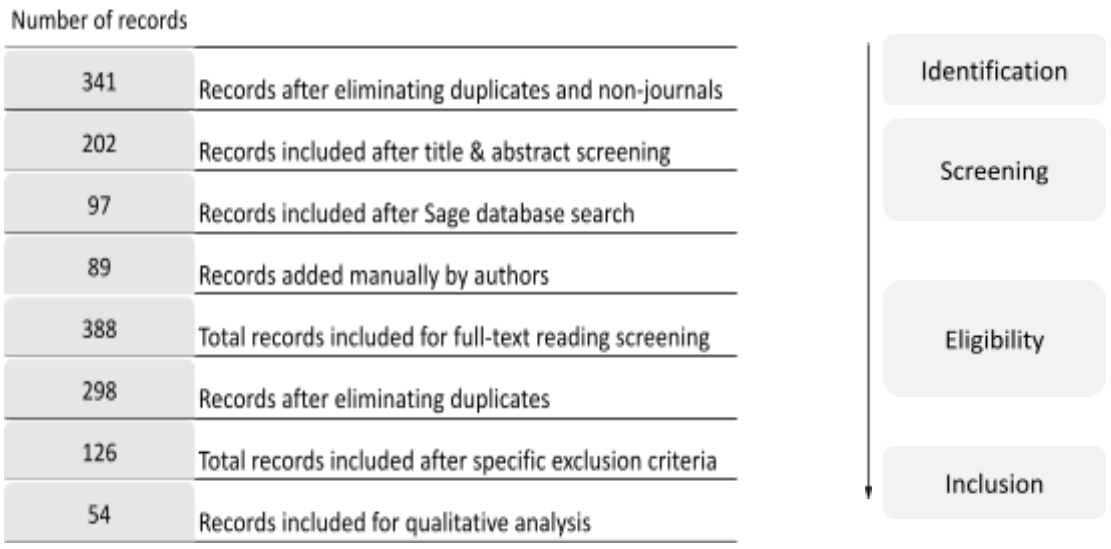

Figure 1. Flow chart adapted from PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009) *reporting the process of identification, screening, evaluating and inclusion of items for subsequent analysis.*

	Focus in Western education setting		
Educational setting	**Student focus**	**Teacher focus**	**Parent/Caregiver focus**
Non specified Western educational setting	Burrows, 2017; Eliuk & Chorney, 2017a; Ergas, 2018; Greenberg & Harris, 2012	N. Albrecht, 2018a; Bernay, 2014; Burrows, 2013a, 2015, 2017; Choudhury & Moses, 2016; Crane et al., 2012; Ergas, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019; Greenwalt & Nguyen, 2017; Hale, 2017; Kane, 2017	
K-12			Keenan-Mount et al., 2016
Early years	Khaddouma et al., 2015		Khaddouma et al., 2015
Primary/Elementary	Anglin et al., 2008; Klatt et al., 2013; Kuyken et al., 2017; Oberle et al., 2012,	Flook et al., 2013; Goldin & Gross, 2010; Gould et al., 2012; Kuyken et al., 2017	
Secondary	Arthurson, 2015; Broderick & Metz, 2009; Lomas et al., 2018	Arthurson, 2015; Sherretz, 2011	
Higher Education/Community College	Christian, 2019; Czajkowski & Greasley, 2015; Hartel et al., 2017; Kass et al., 2011; Kerrigan et al., 2017; Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2018; Mapel, 2012; Mariela et al., 2018; McCann & Davis, 2018; Song & Muschert, 2014; Stella, 2016	Brendel & Cornett-Murtada, 2018; Dobkin & Hutchinson, 2013; Gardner & Grose, 2015; Griggs & Tidwell, 2015; Gupta, 2019; Kerr et al., 2017	
Community education program/context	Burrows, 2015; Kirwin et al., 2019		
Clinical education context (education councillor, psychologist, etc.)		Burrows, 2011, 2013b; Gibbons et al., 2014; Gockel, 2010; Stella, 2016	

Table 2. Summary of educational settings and roles within these settings.

Analytical Strategy

Thematic analysis was used as the analytical strategy to study the selected papers. A thematic analysis is a theoretical method for analysing a specific set of data by identifying patterns and interpreting the emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step approach, which rather than being linear, allows a methodical way of analysing qualitative data through a recursive and flexible approach. The first step is familiarisation by reading and re-reading the data; the second step is coding relevant characteristics; step three involves collating these codes into themes; followed by step four – reviewing themes by generating a thematic map; the fifth step involves generating names to clearly represent the themes; and the final step which consists of selecting extracts from the data in the production of the report to ensure the patterns are relating to the research (Braun & Clarke 2006).

The place of personal practice, qualifications, and training as a teacher mindfulness

While mindfulness has become popular in educational settings, we found a critical and complex debate that impacts implementation and value in Western contexts.
To teach mindfulness one must or does not have to have a personal mindful practice is a contentious point within the literature, with fundamental questions asked about training processes, standards, and competence. Furthermore, this is juxtaposed to teachers being fearful that they will 'do it wrong' (Kane, 2017). Significantly, qualifications and training of teachers in and of mindfulness centres around the belief that one needs to have a personal practice in order to teach it and meaningfully incorporate mindfulness into the education context (Arthurson, 2015; Burrows, 2011, 2017; Coholic, 2011; Crane et al., 2012). It is argued that teaching mindfulness "is not merely a technique or a tool to be used to obtain a result, but rather is the result in and of itself (Griggs & Tidwell, 2015, p. 21). Mindfulness is a way of being, not purely a strategy to alleviate stress, anxiety or to improve focus and attention that can be delivered by anyone for anyone (Burrows, 2013a, 2017; Crane et al., 2012; Ergas, 2018; Griggs & Tidwell, 2015; Sherretz, 2011).

This review reveals that the tension of Western perspectives of mindfulness is often removed from historical, traditional, and cultural contexts (Ergas, 2015; Greenwalt & Nguyen, 2017; Griggs & Tidwell, 2015). The literature is strong in teachers needing to have a personal practice in order to teach mindfulness that is grounded in "living authentically with purpose and toward enlightenment" rather than "the secular therapeutic use of these practices" (Grigg & Tidwell, 2015, p. 23). This highlights the need to expand teachers' awareness to their "teaching self" because teachers "teach who they are" (Ergas, 2017, p. 218). Burrows (2017) reminds us that we must ensure that teachers have their own practice before beginning to teach *and* that they maintain their own mindfulness practice. With others reiterating that there is a strong need for a teacher of mindfulness to engage with and in different practices to learn more about the effects (Burrows, 2017; McCown, 2014). And although Western culture has especially focused on mindfulness as a tool for stress and

anxiety or for supporting productivity attached to raised awareness (Griggs & Tidwell, 2015; Gupta, 2019; Hale, 2017; Kerrigan et al., 2017), teachers of mindfulness need to live and embody a direct experience; to see this as the best way of learning and knowing (Gupta, 2019). Additionally, risks associated are required, noting a “deconstruction of the term and that such deconstruction could be beneficial to understanding exactly what it was that could be valuable and dangerous in its implementation” (Gupta, 2019, p. 22). Reiterated further by Burrows, who also reminds us that there is a sensitivity and vulnerability with mindfulness, thus teachers must be provided with training in trauma- and stress-related disorders to become more sensitive and skilled (2017) with knowing oneself, being present nonjudgmentally with radical acceptance (Bernay, 2014; Burrows, 2013b, 2013a, 2015; Gardner & Grose, 2015), and know how to be with oneself compassionately (Burrows, 2013a, 2017).

Parallel to the discussion about a personal practice and the contribution this makes to teaching mindfulness, the literature reveals a complexity in the quality of training for teachers of mindfulness. Crane et al (2011) notes that "there are only a limited number of mindfulness teachers who have received substantial and in-depth training from first- and second-generation mindfulness teachers” (p. 83). Included in this complexity is that for “those people who are able to offer training, there are imperatives and responsibilities to rise to the challenge so that there are greater numbers of available teachers who can offer” mindfulness training “with integrity” (p. 83). In reference to Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Crane et al (2011) reminds us that with "the rapid expansion of interest in mindfulness-based approaches… those people offering training for MBSR and MBCT teachers have had to consider some quite fundamental questions about training processes, standards and competence” (p. 76). They suggest mindfulness-based teaching competency framework is an ethical imperative, and that competencies would support “demonstrated acquisition of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes which added together make up competence to practice” (p. 77). Thus, this would provide a “map of the processes, behaviours and actions that will be valued, recognised and, as appropriate, rewarded” for individuals and workplaces” (p. 78). In considering competencies for mindfulness teachers, and in this case Crane et al (2011) discuss this in relation to MBSR and MBCT, however it could be argued that this may be of interest for the field as a whole. Some challenges are presented though, including 1) criteria for assessment, 2) no agreed standard for acceptable levels of training providers, and 3) no agreed benchmark for the award/training available.

There is an argument that all initial teacher education degrees should include mindfulness training with pre-service teachers (future teachers) to support their own wellbeing, but also to facilitate mindfulness practices within the classroom itself to support the wellbeing of students. This seems to be supported by an argument that Eliuk & Chorney (2017) present that illuminates that due to lack of training during initial teacher education, many teachers feel under prepared and ill-equipped to teach students about basic wellbeing and health issues (N. Albrecht, 2018a; Flook et al., 2013;

Keenan-Mount et al., 2016). And with this acknowledgement comes less comfortability or confidence to engage with mindfulness to support "ways to deal with anxiety and create connections to 'nourish the soul'" (Eliuk & Chorney, 2017a, p. 2) noting it should be "imperative that all educators receive some form of pre-service teacher training in the area of Health Education, mental well-being and mindfulness" (p. 5). Offering training at the initial teacher education stage would afford the opportunity to have qualified teachers knowing how to facilitate mindfulness. Albrecht's (2018) study states there should be "opportunity to understand the practices from a theoretical and experiential level, provide them with valuable skills for the workforce and enable them to begin their own mindful journey" (p. 19). This call for training also highlights how if pre-service teachers develop a mindfulness practice themselves, and learn how to teach mindfulness, they could in effect also know how to support their own stress (Bernay, 2014; Kerr et al., 2017), be able to create a supportive culture to problem solve dilemmas in solidarity (N. Albrecht, 2018a, Burrows 2013a, 2015 2017, Christian, 2019), and meaningfully integrate mindfulness into school curriculum. Bernay (2014) further stipulates that introducing mindfulness in initial teacher education could enhance the wellbeing of pre-service teachers that would also transfer to supporting them as they transition to beginning teachers, with ultimate impact on enhanced job retention.

If mindfulness was to be integrated into initial teacher education, there is work to be done in this area as to what this training or integration would look like. Furthermore, the presumption that initial teacher educators have the skills and training to teach mindfulness is an additional paradox of mindfulness in education. Currently, limited evidence exists on impact and what type of training would be most authentic and effective. We can draw on the work of Bernay (2014) suggesting one strategy can be introduced in a lecture with practice occurring over a week or Kerr and colleagues' (2017) suggestion of a six-week mindfulness training program, with both having reported greater emotional clarity and improved regulation of negative emotions for pre-service teachers. However, at this stage there are minimal to no follow ups in the reviewed literature regarding long term impact on the pre-service teacher, transfer to the classroom upon graduation, or understanding of personal or professional practice integration. These could be areas for further research, specifically building of Bernay (2014) work with five beginner teachers in New Zealand also noted that "first year of teaching that their personal wellbeing was enhanced, stress was reduced, and they could focus greater attention on their lesson planning and their students. They responded rather than reacted emotionally to student needs" (p. 58).

Benefits to teaching mindfulness in the classroom

The literature that reported the benefits for the integration of mindfulness into Western educational contexts was centred around teacher's being able to maintain equanimity in intense classroom and school environments (Burrows, 2011). It was noted mindfulness helped with disruptive children, with a suggestion practices utilised one-on-one are of assistance and can be beneficial when supporting students (Khaddouma et al., 2015). Additionally, the benefit of teaching

mindfulness is to assist teachers or clinical educational staff such as counsellors or psychologists working with young people who require extra support (Gibbons et al., 2014; Gockel, 2010; Stella, 2016) enabling a reduction in stress and improvement in behaviour in at-risk students (Klatt et al., 2013; Lomas et al., 2018). Mindfulness in this way is perceived as a mechanism for positive change (Brown et al., 2007; Carmody & Baer, 2008) facilitating opportunities for deep learning that is optimal when a peaceful environment is generated collaboratively (Kane, 2017, p. 162). Emotional regulation, improved attention, contribution to creativity, self-awareness (Broderick & Metz, 2009; Burrows, 2017) and focus when stressed (Mapel, 2012; Mariela et al., 2018) were specifically noted. It was acknowledged by Burrow's and Gardener and Grose's work that caution comes with how mindfulness has the potential to assist the students' that a teacher works with but it might trigger issues that could put students in a downward spiral (Burrows, 2015).

The impact on the teacher when they facilitate or practice mindfulness

Teaching mindfulness underpinned with a personal mindfulness practice was illuminated in the literature with significant benefits on cultivating attention (Flook et al., 2013), self-compassion (Flook et al., 2013), openness (Christian, 2019), and acceptance (Burrows, 2013a, 2015) for the teacher. A mindfulness practice for teachers enabled less judgement on self and on striving to be perfect in lessons resulting in greater efficiency throughout the day as one was mindful in each moment (Bernay, 2014). Burrows participants also noted less critical self-talk and more acceptance in the moment when under pressure or experiencing stress (Burrows, 2013a, 2013b, 2015). Several studies reported that mindfulness became a vehicle to become grounded (Bernay 2014; Burrows, 2013a, 2013b, 2015) and the development of mindful teacher characteristics (authority, authenticity, friendliness) (Bernay, 2014; McCown et al., 2010) with more confidence and acceptance of self. Teachers reported more courage, ability to disconnect from fear and ability to separate the thoughts and actions and feeling lighter rather than ruminating on a dilemma; being less judgemental on self and avoiding blame for a situation in the classroom or in a school environment such as a tension with a colleague, parent, or policy (Burrows, 2013a, 2015).

Some studies noted teaching mindfulness enabled a shift in stress associated to the profession (Bernay, 2014; Flook et al., 2013) with specific reference to being non-reactive in challenging situations (Burrows, 2013a, 2015; Flook et al., 2013; Gardner & Grose, 2015). Enhanced creativity, decision and problem solving was also noted (Bernay, 2014; Christian, 2019). Bernay (2014) stated that teachers were able to make connections across philosophies in education and improved ability to make curriculum connections, although it was acknowledged that there was no need to do it alone and they were able to see that others were experiencing similar events (Burrows, 2013a, 2015, 2017; Christian, 2019).

Challenges as a teacher of mindfulness

Mindfulness in Western education settings offers some challenges for teachers regarding the process of teaching and for teachers themselves in being mindful. The literature

reveals that there is a tension present between embodying mindfulness as a practice of equanimity versus it being a pragmatic approach for dealing with stress and challenges in daily life that can often occur in secular settings (Gupta, 2019). And what emerges with this is how one is and can be a mindful role model (N. Albrecht, 2018a). This is heavily connected with notions of one must practice mindfulness in order to teach it (Arthurson, 2015; Burrows, 2011, 2017; Crane et al., 2012; Gupta, 2019). Gupta (2019) raises this in relation to an embodiment of values and traditions:

> As facilitators, we provide resources, guidance, and embody the theoretical underpinnings of our disciplines within our instructional practice; so too, we embody our own values and beliefs from our cultural and spiritual traditions while using mindfulness and meditation, whether we discuss these openly or not… Nevertheless, using mindfulness and meditation as instructional methods may not be too far from our reach to go beyond the secular notion of using them as intervention tool. (pp. 29-30)

This tension of embodiment of mindfulness to teach mindfulness is nonetheless closely connected to why a teacher selects to engage with mindfulness with their students (Gardner & Grose, 2015). Is mindfulness integration into teaching a natural progression from your own practice? Is mindfulness something you have been 'told to do' as a teacher? Or is mindfulness something you have encountered in the classroom, had an opportunity to teach aspects of and now are intrigued to discover more as a teacher? It is clear in the literature that there is no one answer, and indeed that what is present is where mindfulness is rooted, the power struggles and for what purpose mindfulness is being engaged with (Gardner & Grose, 2015).

Incorporating mindfulness in Western educational settings is more complex than providing mindfulness education (N. Albrecht, 2018a). The literature does note challenges for teachers, acknowledging that although teaching mindfulness is intended, too often there is a difficulty in committing to a practice when work demands get too high for some teachers (Albrecht, 2018). There is also a tendency to put our teachers' wellbeing at the bottom of the priority list, resulting in contemplative practices routinely taken off the to-do list (Gardner & Grose, 2015).

Facilitation of inclusivity is a significant challenge across educational contexts that teachers are required to consider. For example, Kennan-Mount and colleagues (2016) researched in the areas of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and acknowledged a need to adapt practices, with considerations required for where the strategies come from and indeed how they are used with young people with ASD, including how one holds their body and how attention is drawn to neutral parts of the body. Likewise, it has been acknowledged that many informal practices are mostly adult based or have been trialed on adults with little evidence available if these practices are appropriate for young people (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). Significant is that mindfulness is also not always a positive experience, revealing vulnerability and trauma that may not have been paid attention to for some time and the need for teachers to know the practice they are

teaching, be trained and also have ongoing support structures in place to adjust intensity and practices when working with young people (Burrows, 2017; Gardner & Grose, 2015).

Conclusion

This review considered 54 studies about mindfulness in Western educational settings. A key aim of the review was to understand the impact of mindfulness, and this paper specifically focuses on one area, that is, the role and place of the teacher to better understand the approaches, impact, and challenges.

A key insight drawn from this review was that the place of mindfulness in education is complex, with substantial tension between teachers feeling ill-equipped to teach students about basic wellbeing and health issues and thus turning to perceived solutions such as teaching mindfulness (Basch, 2011; Flook et al., 2013; Lechtenberger et al., 2008; Manion et al., 2013; Walter et al., 2011), translating sustained personal mindfulness practices into the classroom to continue with and extend holistic philosophies, and some teachers teaching mindfulness to shift stress associated to the profession. The latter being three pronged: firstly, to both support oneself to be non-reactive in challenging situations (Bernay, 2014; Burrows, 2013a, 2015; Flook et al., 2013; Gardner & Grose, 2015); and/or secondly, as a tool to support students with special needs, behaviour challenges or giftedness (Gardner & Grose, 2015; Greenberg & Harris, 2012; Kane, 2017; Keenan-Mount et al., 2016); and/or thirdly, to avoid blaming oneself during or after a stressful situation with a student, collegial, parental or industry conflict (Burrows, 2013a, 2015; Christian, 2019; Gardner & Grose, 2015; McCown, 2014).

Revealed is that mindfulness in the Western educational context requires careful planning for and connection to purpose, especially in relation to how it is experienced by all with a strong need to have training and ongoing support for adaption or dialling down according to students' needs (Burrows, 2017). Teachers need to be aware of the risks associated with teaching mindfulness in educational contexts especially in relation to those deemed as at-risk (Greenwalt & Nguyen, 2017) or those who have been identified as gifted (Kane, 2017). Also revealed is that when working with young people or those with special needs, variations in practice are required (Gardner & Grose, 2015; Keenan-Mount et al., 2016) however we are making assumptions that practices that are applied to adults can also applied to young people (Greenberg & Harris, 2012). As a teacher negotiates the purpose of mindfulness in the classroom, evidence is present that sees mindfulness quickly be dropped when there are conflicting requirements or time pressures especially when a teacher does not have a personal mindfulness practice (N. Albrecht, 2018b; Gardner & Grose, 2015). This impact on students, as too the care that needs to be taken when responding to triggers and potential downwards spirals, needs to be carefully considered. Raised is the question: are Western teachers aware, qualified, skilled, and capable of how to support, minimise, reduce and carefully think through the complexity of teaching, or dropping, mindfulness in the classroom?

Challenges for the place of mindfulness in Western educational classrooms centres

around the importance of teachers' having one's own practice in order to teach (Bernay, 2014; Burrows, 2017; Ergas, 2017; Gupta, 2019; Kerr et al., 2017), training discrepancies (Arthurson, 2015; Burrows, 2011, 2017; Coholic, 2011; Crane et al., 2012), ethical practices (Crane et al., 2012), and support structures to be able to adjust to student responses are required (Burrows, 2017; Gardner & Grose, 2015; Gupta, 2019). These areas are highly contentious in the literature revealing the tension between mindfulness being taught in Western classrooms as a tool or intervention that can often be far removed from tradition and mindfulness mechanism of intention, attention, and awareness.

To teach mindfulness in the classroom it is highly recommended that teachers have a personal mindfulness practice if one is to facilitate a practice(s) with students (Arthurson, 2015; Burrows, 2011, 2017; Coholic, 2011; Crane et al., 2012). But as to what level of training is required, when, how long, offered by whom, underpinned by ethics and integrity, etc and in relation to a personal practice is heavily debated (Crane et al., 2012). The importance of a teacher's own practice and experience (Burrows, 2017; Ergas, 2017; Kerr et al., 2017) is however, a considerable influencer on confidence levels, understanding, authentic practice, modelling, and fostering the key aspects of mindfulness – acceptance, non-judgement, being present and aware compassionately (Bernay, 2014; Burrows, 2013b, 2013a, 2015; Gardner & Grose, 2015; Gupta, 2019). It is clear authentic mindfulness experience needs to be delivered by a teacher who is in tune with mindfulness mechanisms in their own life; where they embody the cultural spiritual and traditional underpinnings of mindfulness (Gupta, 2019).

We also know that teaching is a stressful career, and although this paper does not focus on this element, it has been raised by many of the papers reviewed in this systematic literature review that mindfulness training integrated within initial teacher education could be a solution to not only supporting teacher wellbeing but to additionally support the confidence of teachers in facilitating and supporting wellbeing in the classroom (N. Albrecht, 2018a; Bernay, 2014; Burrows, 2013a; Eliuk & Chorney, 2017a). This in itself is a difficult undertaking and one that requires further investigation as assumptions exist that initial teacher educators have capacity and skills to teach mindfulness, and indeed institutions and accrediting bodies value mindfulness. What we have to be careful of is the tension between embodying mindfulness as a practice of equanimity versus it being a pragmatic approach for dealing with stress and challenges in daily life that can often occur in secular settings (Gupta, 2019).

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Notes

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