EFFECTIVE TO GREAT EDUCATION

Awareness and Acceptance: Tackling Cultural Appropriation in Mindfulness Instruction

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Abstract: Despite the numerous benefits of mindfulness training, the practice has faced recent accusations of cultural appropriation and commodification. This paper will address the problematic applications of mindfulness practices in a Western context in order to present a roadmap for equitable, socially-conscious, and culturally-responsive mindfulness instruction in K-12 schools.

Introduction

There is no single, universally-accepted definition of mindfulness, but it is generally understood to have two main components: awareness and acceptance, articulated by Keng, Smoski, and Robins (2011) as an "*awareness* of one's moment-to-moment experience *nonjudgmentally and with acceptance*" (1042). Bishop et al. (2004) defines "awareness" as "the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience, thereby allowing for increased recognition of mental events in the present moment." In practice, this self-regulation of attention can look like meditative practice that involves holding one's position and observing external elements (concentrative meditation) or internal thoughts and feelings (Bishop et al. 2004). "Acceptance" is the adoption of "a particular orientation toward one's experiences in the present moment, an orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance" (Bishop et al. 2004). Acceptance does not refer to resignation to one's circumstances, but rather the recognition of one's feelings, thoughts, or experiences without "excessive preoccupation" or an attempt to suppress them (Keng, Smoski, and Robins 2011, 1042).

In the West, mindfulness was formally introduced through Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a "systematic patient-centered educational approach which uses relatively intensive training in mindfulness meditation as the core of a program to teach people how to take better care of themselves and live healthier and more adaptive lives" (Kabat-Zinn 1996, 163). Its founder, Jon Kabat-Zinn, an American scientist with a Ph.D. in molecular biology who became interested in mindfulness after learning about Buddhism in college, credited Insight Meditation, a form of Western Buddhism, as inspiration for MBSR (Blum 2014; Booth 2017). Despite this

acknowledgement, Kabat-Zinn characterized mindfulness as "an inherent human capacity" rather than an exclusively Buddhist practice (Blum 2014; Kabat-Zinn 2003, 146).

For mindfulness to truly be a universal human ability, targeted action must be taken to ensure equitable access to mindfulness practices and their benefits. As is evidenced by the need for Kabat-Zinn's program, mindfulness practices are taught, not inherently known. Currently, white Americans make up the largest percentage of participants in mindfulness-based interventions (Waldron et al. 2018). Programs like Effective to Great Education (ETGE) seek to bring mindfulness and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) to the most under-resourced and underserved communities in the U.S.—specifically low socioeconomic status (SES), Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) populations—through frameworks oriented specifically for marginalized public schools. Even if we consider current, so-called "secular" mindfulness practices in the U.S. to be a distinct form of practice separate from Buddhism, it is essential to acknowledge mindfulness' origins in this ancient tradition. Both the Buddhist ideals of "Right Mindfulness" and the physical acts of meditation remain essential to mindfulness practice today, even as we seek to introduce it to a non-Buddhist population. Recently, Western practices of mindfulness have faced criticism for their increasingly commodifying nature and tendency to misappropriate elements of Buddhist practices without proper attribution or implementation. This paper attempts to address these critiques and the ways in which mindfulness has been misappropriated in Western contexts in order to inform the structuring of culturally responsive and historically just mindfulness curricula.

Mindfulness' positive impact on well-being and mental health

Before addressing the problematic aspects of mindfulness instruction in the West, it is first necessary to establish the scientific evidence for the practice and its impacts on mental health and well-being. There is a growing body of evidence on the effectiveness of mindfulness practices like meditation. Studies of the general population have found that mindfulness can contribute to a decrease in stress and detrimental symptoms of mental health disorders like depression and anxiety. For example, a study conducted by Istvan Schreiner and James P. Malcom (2008) found that mindfulness meditation contributed to the significant reduction of severity in affective states of individuals with severe depression, anxiety, and stress levels (164-165). They also suggest that a focus on "increased awareness of cognitive and emotional

states" developed through mindfulness practices of awareness, acceptance, and the "development of non-judgmental attitudes"—including "present centered awareness," "attention training," "objective, nonjudgmental, nonreactive observation," "open receptiveness," and "impersonal awareness"—contribute to the reduction of negative mental health symptoms (Schreiner 2008, 160, 165).

Another report, which employed both a cross-sectional and an experimental study to examine the relationship between meditation and "emotional intelligence, perceived stress, and negative mental health," found a positive association between meditation and emotional intelligence and a negative association between mediation, stress, and negative mental health (Chu 2010, 169, 175). Based on the evidence that higher emotional intelligence results in less stress, researchers directed participants to engage in daily, 20 minute practice sessions of concentrative meditation (fixing awareness on one object or sensation), mindfulness meditation (focused on awareness and acceptance of internal states like emotions), or integrated meditation (a combination of the two) (Chu 2010, 169, 172).

Others have looked at the impact of mindfulness on historically marginalized communities, specifically low-income and BIPOC populations. Participants in a study of the Mindfulness Allies Project (MAP) program—which "focuses on the intersection of mindfulness, Western Buddhism, socioeconomic status (SES), and race"—reported positive effects on their relationships, their physical health, and their mental health and stress levels, including increased "self-awareness, self-acceptance, [and] self-love," after just five mindfulness sessions (Blum 2014, 7). Most relevant to this research paper, a few studies have specifically addressed the implementation of mindfulness programs in majority low-SES, BIPOC schools. In "Learning to BREATHE: A Pilot Study of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention to Support Marginalized Youth," Amy Eva and Natalie Thayer looked at the effects of introducing the BREATHE curriculum to an alternative high-school for marginalized and "underachieving" students (2017, 582). Through the implementation of mindfulness practices like "body scans, mindful movement, breathing meditation, and/or loving kindness meditation," they found that students experienced a decrease in stress and higher self-esteem (Eva and Thayer 2017, 582). Other perceived benefits included increased self-regulation, attention-awareness, and positive thinking (Eva and Thayer 2017, 580).

While much more research needs to be done on the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in reducing stress and increasing self-regulation and other positive skills, especially in children, the current body of research suggests that mindfulness practices have a powerful ability to reduce the detrimental effects of mental health issues. This is particularly relevant for marginalized communities with a history of trauma-related mental health struggles, predominantly the result of decades of systemic racism, poverty, and other forms of injustice. These communities are also more likely to face punitive disciplinary measures like detentions and suspensions, practices that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2014). Yet despite these systemic inequalities, BIPOC Americans have the lowest level of access to mental health services and mindfulness programs (American Psychological Association 2016). Programs like ETGE's SEL curriculum seek to introduce mindfulness practices to these historically underserved populations, working with community members to ensure that all students have access to the transformative effects of mindfulness. In combination with SEL instruction, these programs are dedicated to building community and student mental health and well-being in marginalized schools through culturally responsive, mindfulness-based practices.

"Right Mindfulness" and Traditional Practice

While clinical definitions of mindfulness help inform the development of mindfulness training programs and curricula, they lack some of the fundamental elements of the practice as articulated in traditional Buddhist teachings. As the research discussed below illustrates, Western implementations and studies of mindfulness frequently focus on benefits of mindfulness for the individual. While stress reduction and emotional intelligence are positive competencies, they must be considered within a broader context of societal well-being. According to Ron Purser and David Loy:

> Mindfulness is often marketed as a method for personal self-fulfillment, a reprieve from the trials and tribulations of cutthroat corporate life. Such an individualistic and consumer orientation to the practice of mindfulness may be effective for self-preservation and self-advancement, but is essentially impotent for mitigating the causes of collective and organizational distress (Purser and Loy 2013).

Thus, true mindfulness practice not only aims for collective good, but also acknowledges the broader system in which mindfulness practices are taught (whether that be a school, a local community, or an entire society). The importance of contextualizing mindfulness teachings, and especially the *causes* of the stress they seek to alleviate, will be discussed in the section *Acknowledging the Impact of Structural Harms like Poverty and Systemic Racism*. For now, it is sufficient to note that a focus on developing community well-being and coexistence is a fundamental part of traditional mindfulness practices, and perhaps one that Western attempts have neglected in favor of individualistic goals. As Maria Ishikawa (2018) writes, "overall, Buddhist goals are not for the self entirely; the main goal is the betterment of civilization through the practice of mindfulness" (108). While the individualistic benefits of mindfulness (such as improved mental health) are no doubt important and worthy goals (when pursued for the right reasons), they must be accompanied by an increased emphasis on the individual *as a member of* a larger community, in addition to discussions of the ways in which individual self-awareness and well-being can contribute to social awareness and community well-being. For example, ETGE includes the goal of "community well-being" as one of its main focuses (Effective to Great Education 2022).

Ethics and "Right Mindfulness" are two other aspects of mindfulness that tend to be overlooked in Western, especially commercial, practice. Purser and Loy elaborate:

> Mindfulness, as understood and practiced within the Buddhist tradition, is not merely an ethically-neutral technique for reducing stress and improving concentration. Rather, mindfulness is a *distinct quality of attention* that is dependent upon and influenced by many other factors: the nature of our thoughts, speech and actions; our way of making a living; and our efforts to avoid unwholesome and unskillful behaviors, while developing those that are conducive to wise action, social harmony, and compassion … This is why Buddhists differentiate between Right Mindfulness (*samma sati*) and Wrong Mindfulness (*miccha sati*). The distinction is not moralistic: the issue is whether the quality of awareness is characterized by wholesome intentions and positive mental qualities that lead to human flourishing and optimal well-being for others as well as oneself" (Purser and Loy 2013).

According to Purser (2014), mindfulness programs like those introduced pre-employment by the military in order to achieve "optimal warrior performance" are an example of "Wrong Mindfulness." Even if the actual practices—awareness, attention, self-regulation, etc.—are taught according to the technical guidelines of mindfulness, if they are employed with the intention of harm (as warfare is), they violate the Buddhist tenets against killing and are thus "Wrong" (However, Purser does encourage the use of mindfulness to treat soldiers with PTSD). The same could be said of mindfulness instruction in schools if it was introduced, as some suggest, in order to promote neoliberal goals of productivity and profit, with mental health as a strategy rather than an end goal. For mindfulness training in schools to be considered "Right Mindfulness," not only must instructors implement meditative practices, but they must do so in a way that is "contextually situated and not misappropriated for individualistic purposes" (Ishikawa 2018, 113-14). Programs like ETGE, with their focus on decreasing racial academic achievement gaps and promoting equity of access and emotional well-being for marginalized communities seek to do just that.

Critiques of Mindfulness Training

Cultural Appropriation

Cultural appropriation, as defined by Bruce (2019) in her essay on the role of colonialism and racism in Western yoga practices, is "a process that deconstructs then reconstructs a cultural export, identifying it as a white construction. It also creates spaces that exclude the cultural source of the export" (2-3). Western-based mindfulness practices have faced sharp criticisms of cultural appropriation. For example, Kunie Hsu (2016) argues that, through their failure to acknowledge mindfulness' Buddhist roots, "secular mindfulness programs in education … often silently promote an unquestioned racial curriculum that at its foundation asserts white dominance and conquest through the erasure of Asian and Asian American Buddhists" (376). Educators have historically attempted to divorce mindfulness entirely of its religious associations in order to introduce the concept into public schools. While this approach may have

seemed necessary considering the emphasis on the separation of religion and government in American society, it is not culturally responsible.

To address this initial criticism, mindfulness programs, especially those introduced in an educational setting, must take care to educate students on mindfulness' Buddhist origins. This can be a difficult line to walk, especially in the United States' currently divisive climate. Directly implementing Buddhist practices would violate the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. Teachers should make clear that while mindfulness originated within Buddhist practice, its current conceptualization is secular and acceptable for students of all religions and cultural backgrounds. At the same time, this practice must be preceded by discussions of both the historical origin of mindfulness in Buddhism *and* the history of oppression Asian communities have faced precisely for their practice. As Dzung Vo, a practicing Buddhist and a pediatrician who encourages the instruction of secular mindfulness, writes, in order to avoid cultural appropriation, secular mindfulness training "needs to be considered in a larger, complex context of historical colonial legacies, imbalances of power, and privilege" (Vo 2016). These discussions should be informed by actual Buddhist voices and consultation with the community. Only by acknowledging the historical mistreatment of these populations and the power dynamics of race and appropriation around mindfulness can educators truly reorient the practice of mindfulness into a non-appropriative, culturally-sensitive form (see section *Working to actively teach anti-racism* for a more in-depth discussion on teaching mindfulness and anti-racism). Education, by definition, cannot occur void of context. Mindfulness cannot be a practice removed from space and time, but rather a practice with a rich and specific history. Simply put, if we cannot teach mindfulness in a way that includes its Buddhist origins, we should not be teaching it at all. In order to use mindfulness to help children cope with trauma, practitioners must avoid inducing further harm, especially to South and East Asian communities.

McMindfulness

In addition to appropriating mindfulness practices as their own, Western programs often misconstrue the practice in its entirety. Referencing Terry Hyland, Ishikawa (2018) writes that mindfulness practices in educational settings often prioritize the "calming" and self-regulatory aspects of mindfulness, reducing the practice into a strategy of behavioral management that "perpetuates the colonial-oppressive narrative" (112). These acts of appropriation are best

understood within the larger context of neoliberalism, which both Hsu and Ishikawa address. Appropriation of mindfulness is not only problematic because it claims mindfulness as a white, Western invention, but also because mindfulness is frequently co-opted to serve a capitalist agenda that considers human well-being as merely a means to an end—more productive workers equate more profit. Researchers like Miles Neale and Purser have referred to this form of commodifying mindfulness practices as "McMindfulness," defined as "spiritual practices that provide immediate nutrition but no long-term sustenance" (Neale 2011, 13).

It is easy to see capitalist and neoliberal forces at work in the mainstream yoga movement and the implementation of mindfulness training by corporations. Their goal—profit—is relatively transparent. For example, the yoga industry is predicted to be worth $215 billion by 2025 (Bhandalkar et al. 2019). For comparison's sake, the video game industry is currently worth $173 billion (Mordor Intelligence, n.d.). Mindfulness training, of which yoga is only a part, is already utilized by major corporations like Google and Nike (Levin 2017). While McMindfulness in these contexts is portrayed as a positive way for employees to relieve stress and achieve work-life balance, these programs often serve a more insidious purpose (Confino 2014); "rather than applying mindfulness as a means to awaken individuals and organizations from the unwholesome roots of greed, ill will and delusion, it is usually being refashioned into a banal, therapeutic, self-help technique that can actually reinforce those roots" (Purser and Loy 2013). The "acceptance" and "adaptation" skills of mindfulness are transformed to encourage pacification in the face of the abuses of neoliberalism. Mindfulness, far from its original purpose of ethical behavior and compassion, is commodified by the corporate world, harnessed as a tool to promote productivity and profit.

Beyond yoga studios and corporate boardrooms, several critics argue that the commodification of mindfulness can continue into the classroom. This misappropriation "views students as human capital," and academic success and economic goals often subvert true student well-being (Hsu 2016, 371). Hsu writes,

> While focus and self-regulatory skills are important in academic success, they are being developed in an educational context where measures for achievement have become decidedly incentivized and consequential … Without careful and critical attention to the ways in which secular mindfulness might inadvertently support neoliberal, racist

> practices and the business of education, such programs may cause students extended suffering—enabling them to tolerate the demands and consequences of high-stakes testing that much longer—for the gain of a privileged few (Hsu 2016, 378).

Thus, at five years old, students enter the assembly line of the school system, where they will spend the next 13 years being crafted into the ideal, productive worker. "Without an understanding of the neoliberal and racial frameworks which have influenced schools and American society," Hsu writes, "mindfulness programs in education will only assist students and educators in coping with an ever-compounding crisis" (2016, 377). However, mindfulness doesn't have to contribute to the automation of education as long as mindfulness is taught *in context*. Just as students should be educated on its Buddhist origins, mindfulness instruction can and should include an explicit acknowledgment of the greater systemic problems, like racism and poverty, that are largely responsible for students' trauma-related mental health problems. The assumption that teaching mindfulness must presuppose an acceptance of student trauma as inevitable and immutable is a complete misunderstanding of the concept's purpose. As Keng, Smoski, and Robins (2011) write, "'acceptance' in the context of mindfulness should not be equated with passivity or resignation … Rather, acceptance in this context refers to the ability to experience events fully, without resorting to either extreme or excessive preoccupation with, or suppression of, the experience" (1042).

Hsu (2016) writes that mindfulness programs that don't acknowledge the structural context within which they exist "treat the symptoms while enabling the social disease" (377). In other words, they reduce immediate harm while perpetuating systemic harm. To presume that immediate harm reduction and large-scale reform cannot occur simultaneously, or that one disqualifies the other, ignores the predicament of marginalized and BIPOC students *today*. Teaching students mindfulness skills helps reduce the *immediate* psychological harms that come from these structural injustices, *at the same time* as others work toward policy-oriented, legislative solutions to these societal failings. While McMindfulness in a corporate environment may encourage passivity and resignation, mindfulness in education can be taught in a way that both challenges systemic injustice and fosters student social and emotional well-being and intelligence. By coupling mindfulness instruction with education on the larger societal problems that students may face, educators can ensure that students gain valuable social emotional skills

without falling victim to the more sinister aspects of commodified mindfulness. Structural reforms that address the systemic issues of poverty and racism and their material effects on students can and should be employed simultaneously. To read more about the concept of harm reduction, see "Mindfulness as a tool for reducing harm and building social emotional intelligence in schools" on ETGE's blog.

It is also important to acknowledge that the skills of "focus" and self-regulation that Hsu (2016) mentions also contribute to combatting the structural injustices created by poverty and racism. Studies such as the one conducted by David Black and Randima Fernando (2014) illustrate that mindfulness instruction in public schools can help teachers improve classroom management. The program, implemented in a lower-income and high-minority elementary school, involved practices such as mindfulness of breathing, concentrative meditation ("mindful bodies and listening"), body awareness, and discussion and mindfulness focused conversations around noticing and reflecting on thoughts and feelings (Black and Fernando 2014, 1246). Teachers reported that students "improved at paying attention, calm and self-control, participation in activities, and caring/respect for others" (Black and Fernando 2014, 1245). According to the authors, the results "suggest that mindfulness training might benefit teacher-based perceptions of improved classroom behavior in a public elementary school, which has practical implications for improving the classroom learning environment for lower-income and ethnically-diverse children" (Black and Fernando 2014, 1242).

When classroom behavior improves, management becomes that much easier, and teachers are able to spend more energy teaching and less time trying to maintain student attention. In a country where BIPOC and low-income students are statistically more likely to attend lower-quality schools, the positive behavioral effects of mindfulness can help improve the quality of their education, and thus their learning outcomes (American Psychological Association 2017; Chetty et al. 2011, 1593). Because the employment of punitive disciplinary strategies like detention and referrals is associated with increased disruptive behavior, by increasing self-regulation abilities and therefore decreasing disruptive behavior, mindfulness practices are also likely to reduce these harmful forms of discipline (Pas et al. 2010, 23).

Cynical perspectives that might criticize such an outcome-oriented approach as a symptom of capitalism ignore the fact that marginalized students are going to have to exist in the system, as unjust as it is. One of the best ways to help them in the short term, in addition to

fostering healthy mindsets, is to elevate their learning and academic success, thus giving them more options for their future. Quality education and school performance are associated with longer lifespans and higher income levels, and thus higher quality of life (Chetty et al. 2011; International Monetary Fund 2017; Winthrop and McGivney 2016). Such an approach doesn't necessitate an acceptance of the larger system and its faults, but rather an acknowledgment that like it or not, we *do* exist in a capitalist world, and in order to change it, we must first survive it. In addition to improving students' mental health, mindfulness training can help improve their educational outcomes, and thus their quality of life, which is the ultimate end goal.

Inequity of Access

Another symptom of the appropriation and commodification of mindfulness practices is the subsequent barriers to equitable access created by wealth inequality and racism. Hsu (2016) argues that through the commodification of mindfulness practices under capitalism (McMindfulness), "neoliberalism and secular mindfulness' shared goal of enhancing human well-being … is reserved for the economically fittest among us who can acquire (through competition) enough resources to purchase it" (377). Mindfulness practices, and their benefits, are thus restricted to the wealthiest and whitest echelons of society, a phenomenon easily illustrated by the stereotype of the white, Lululemon-clad yoga mom and the fact that 77% of yoga instructors in the U.S. are white (Zippia 2021). Hsu's criticism of the commodification of mindfulness in the West is valid, and one which programs like ETGE's SEL curriculum seek to address by offering culturally responsive mindfulness training to low-income and marginalized youth.

ETGE aims to achieve this goal through the practice of *targeted universalism*, an approach that sets a universal goal for all members of a society but acknowledges that some populations may need different support than others. For ETGE, targeted universalism means implementing SEL and mindfulness curricula in low-income, BIPOC schools and communities that might otherwise not have access to these well-being-based forms of instruction. In order to meet the goal of strong emotional literacy and self-awareness for all children, ETGE focuses on the students who are most frequently overlooked. ETGE's main goal, therefore, is to broaden access to mindfulness training to under-resourced and underserved populations.

It is not only McMindfulness that perpetuates the inequity of access to mindfulness practices; in her essay on the harms of culturally appropriating mindfulness, Ishikawa seems to advocate for an all-or-nothing approach. She writes that mindfulness is misappropriated when "meditation sessions are reduced to short periods of time and individuals are no longer committed to Zen in any other aspect of their life, when, in actuality, meditation and Zen are a 'way of life' that transfers throughout all parts of one's life" (Ishikawa 2018, 141). In other words, mindfulness should be practiced with complete dedication, or not at all. While Ishikawa's intentions—to maintain traditional mindfulness practices and their Buddhist origins—are genuine, this perspective fails to acknowledge that restricting the "correct" practice of mindfulness to only those who have the time and resources to commit fully to the Zen "way of life" acts as a form of gatekeeping, limiting the ability of individuals from marginalized and low-income communities to benefit from mindfulness practices in a way that is accessible and manageable for them.

The importance of making mindfulness training accessible is well-illustrated in the study "Mindfulness-based stress reduction for low-income, predominantly African American women with PTSD and a history of intimate partner violence" (Dutton et al. 2013). In using MBSR to approach trauma, the program implemented in this study sought to address the lack of access of low SES, BIPOC communities to traditional PTSD therapy (Dutton et al. 2013). In a choice Ishikawa would most likely object to on the grounds that it exhibited a lack of commitment to true mindfulness, the program directors chose to provide shortened, 2.5 hour sessions and encouraged participants to practice informal mindfulness outside of sessions rather than enforcing a strict home curriculum (Dutton et al. 2013). These decisions were made in response to participants' concerns that longer sessions might be too difficult to sustain "due to [their] conflicting child care and work demands" (Dutton et al. 2013, 25). The authors designed the program in order "to make the delivery of MBSR culturally suitable for all participants, not to create a culturally specific adaptation of MBSR" (Dutton et al. 2013, 25). In addition, in a study investigating yoga participation among "predominantly racial/ethnic minority, low-income adults," "scheduling and time constraints" were one of three significant barriers to participation that subjects reported (Spadola et al. 2017, 100).

Our takeaway from these studies should be the importance of meeting communities where they are, ensuring that neither financial nor time constraints prevent them from practicing

mindfulness. Similar adjustments to curricula will no doubt be necessary in schools, and if we force students to adhere to one "correct" form of mindfulness, we limit the ability of already underserved communities to access these invaluable resources. Rather than enforcing "correct" mindfulness, it is far more important to make sure educational training represents "Right Mindfulness" and the ethical intentions of the practice. To label any other form of mindfulness "appropriation," simply because it fails to conform perfectly to a prescribed Zen way of life, perpetuates inequity and disproportionately harms those communities who might otherwise experience the greatest benefits from mindfulness. Rather than appropriating mindfulness, programs like ETGE's *adapt* traditional practices, not to improve them, but to make them accessible for every student.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Avoiding Cultural Appropriation in School Mindfulness Programs

The cultural appropriation of mindfulness practices by Westerners is nonetheless a valid concern which advocates for school mindfulness programs must consider. Ishikawa's other recommendations, including the requirement that mindfulness training be "contextually situated and not misappropriated for individualistic purposes," are integral to implementing mindfulness training that reduces harm, rather than inflicting more of it (Ishikawa 2018, 112). Educators should thus articulate mindfulness practices as not only beneficial to each individual student, but also as a means of creating classroom and community well-being. By employing the ethical considerations of "Right Mindfulness," instructors should keep in mind that while mindfulness practices may serve to ease classroom management and student behavior, the ultimate goal is to foster community well-being for both teachers and students.

In addition to adhering to the collectivist and ethical considerations of mindfulness, implementation of training programs must include in-depth discussion of the origins of the practice in Buddhism and the historical oppression of practicing communities. Instructors should remind students (and themselves) of their own role within the relevant power structures and their relationship to mindfulness when it comes to privilege. Such instruction should be informed by consultation with Buddhist community members and experts on Buddhist mindfulness traditions and history in order to avoid silencing the voices of those who most deserve to be heard. In this

way, educators can ensure that mindfulness training is culturally responsive, responsible, and non-exclusionary.

Acknowledging the Impact of Structural Harms like Poverty and Systemic Racism

In order to avoid falling into the trap of complacency set by McMindfulness, school mindfulness programs must consider and explicitly acknowledge the larger societal systems within which they operate. This is of particular importance to programs taught in schools within marginalized communities. In seeking to address the mental and emotional harms of trauma that come from living in poverty or under an oppressive system of systemic racism, mindfulness programs must acknowledge the origin of these stressors and the reality that mindfulness is not the singular solution to students' material struggles. Along these lines, mindfulness programs should be conducted alongside efforts to alleviate material struggles, including food insecurity and the criminalization of Black children by the school and police systems. In addition, as other efforts to introduce mindfulness practices to marginalized communities have shown, it is integral that advocates for mindfulness programs seek feedback and input from community members, including teachers and students but also parents, to form a community-led mindfulness initiative and ensure that mindfulness is taught in a way that meets the needs of a population.

Working to Actively Teach Anti-racism

As this paper has illustrated, the teachings of mindfulness reject the acceptance of one's situation or oppression. Not only should mindfulness instructors take care to inform their teachings within the sociocultural and racial context of their classrooms, but they can also take the extra step to introduce anti-racist practices. Rhonda Magee, the creator of ColorInsight Practices, "combines teaching and learning about race (including whiteness), bias, privilege and historical conditions that have contributed to their ongoing operation in our lives with regular experiential practices for opening awareness and increasing capacity for new ways of being with and minimizing racism and color-related suffering" (Magee 2015). Mindfulness programs should follow her in using practices of awareness and attention to help students acknowledge and address their relationship to race.

Final Notes

Teaching mindfulness in American public schools is certainly not without its challenges, and advocates must acknowledge the damage that inadequate and culturally insensitive approaches can create. To apply the teachings of mindfulness, educators must *accept* that these risks exist in order to avoid them and maintain careful *awareness* of the impact of mindfulness practices on the communities they serve. Through following these simple tenets of mindfulness and the recommendations above, educators can implement culturally responsive, trauma-informed mindfulness practices in schools and work with marginalized communities to develop the emotional well-being and mental health that every child needs.

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