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Moral Education, Mindfulness, and Social Engagement: Fostering Social Capital Through Therapeutic Buddhist Practice

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Abstract

Although there have recently been indications in U.K. educational policy and practice of a movement away from the dominance of economic capital and employability as primary goals of education and toward social capital with an emphasis on the affective domain and greater concerns with personal and social well-being, the prevailing instrumentalist and economistic function of learning still reigns supreme. Moreover, even though the neo-liberal hegemony and associated materialistic culture have been severely dented following the 2008 financial meltdown and current global economic recession, there are few signs of any marked trends away from selfish capitalism. This article suggests ways of foregrounding social capital through programs that incorporate "mindfulness"—non-judgmental present moment attention and awareness drawn from Buddhist traditions—as a means of rejuvenating the affective domain of learning concerned with emotions and values. The analysis will also address the recent challenge to what has been (mistakenly in my view) called a "therapeutic turn" in education claimed by critics who suggest that learning is or should be about intellectual-cognitive matters not feelings or emotional development. In the process, the links between mindfulness, the affective domain, and social engagement will be explored as ways of developing the social values that support community well-being and trust.

Keywords

mindfulness, affective education, social engagement, Buddhism and education, therapeutic education

> The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of . . .We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart
>
> —Blaise Pascal

Introduction

In a recent book exploring the links between education and therapy, Smeyers, Smith, and Standish (2007) declare that they are

> interested in ways in which education may itself stand in need of therapy—perhaps through the incorporation of therapeutic approaches but especially, and more importantly, in terms of the need to retrieve education from the current state of its debilitation. (p. 4)

The debilitation referred to by such critics is located squarely in recent policy and practice—from school to life-long learning—by commentators such as Allen and Ainley (2007) and Avis, Fisher, and Simmons (2009) who point to the dangers of arid technicism, performativity, managerialism, and a loss of teacher and student autonomy in an instrumentalist system dominated by skills and competence outcomes linked to employability goals.

Recent commentators have linked this state of affairs with an incipient revival of interest in the non-cognitive function of education (Standish, 2007) concerned with personal and social development. The obsession with standards and league tables in the school sector since the 1990s is directly connected with the emergence of concerns about the affective side of education. As Cigman (2008) suggests,

> A standards agenda involves identifying and possibly shaming children and schools that fail. The social consequences of educational failure include disaffection, delinquency, violence and so on: the very problems that the standards agenda set out to address . . . It was this concern that led to a supplementary agenda focusing on so-called non-cognitive traits like confidence, motivation, resilience, well-being and self-esteem . . . The idea emerged that there are necessary affective conditions for successful learning, and that these can be usefully boosted, heightened or enhanced. (p. 540)

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In a similar vein, Suissa (2008) argues that the "attention to pupils" well-being is surely to be applauded in the light of the growing realization among teachers that "the obsession with testing and assessing children has had detrimental effects on children's emotional and mental health" (p. 576).

In the postschool sector, policy studies (Allen & Ainley, 2007; Hyland & Merrill, 2003; Lea, Hayes, Armitage, Lomas, & Markless, 2003) suggest that the key trends at this level over recent years have been the rise of undifferentiated skill-talk, an obsession with prescriptive learning outcomes and the dominance of competence-based education and training. All these trends have resulted in the radical de-skilling of countless occupations (including teaching), the downgrading of vocational studies, and the rise to prominence of a perversely utilitarian and one-sidedly economistic conception of the educational enterprise in general (Avis, 2009; Hyland & Winch, 2007). The lip service paid to the fostering of social capital in New Labour's education policy was always overshadowed by economic capital priorities. These policy developments seem to be continuing seamlessly from the previous New Labour administration as the current Conservative-Liberal coalition in established in Britain in May 2010 pushes ahead with an almost identical "modernising" reform agenda (Department for Education [DFE], 2010). It is against this background that the more recent developments concerned with introducing non-cognitive curriculum elements and increased attention to the all-round development and well-being of learners need to be placed.

Has British Education Taken a Therapeutic Turn?

Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) have recently collaborated on a book that charts the "dangerous rise" of therapeutic ideas at all levels of the system. A central claim is that

> sponsored enthusiastically by the British government and supported by numerous academic researchers and a huge professional and commercial industry, a deluge of interventions throughout the education system assess the emotional needs and perceived vulnerability of children, young people, and adults and claim to develop their emotional literacy and well-being. (p. ix)

Offering general support for these critics of therapy within the context of the discourse on adult education theory and practice, Thompson (2007) has expressed similar misgivings about the concern with emotional aspects of learning. Such trends, Thompson argues, are dangerous—not only because they neglect or marginalize some of the traditional core values of adult learning concerned with developing knowledge and understanding for active citizenship—but also in their tendency to suggest that "developing confidence and self-esteem can remedy a wide range of personal and social problems" with the result that this "distracts attention from the structural causes of inequality . . . and from the widening gap between rich and poor more generally" (p. 304).

Does this dystopian vision of contemporary learning and education accord with reality? What do these claims about a therapeutic turn actually mean and are they justified in terms of educational policy developments and practice over recent years. First of all we need to be certain of what exactly we are looking for in the form of a turn toward therapeutic education. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) assert,

> We define any activity that focuses on perceived emotional problems and which aims to make educational content and learning processes more "emotionally engaging" as "therapeutic education." (p. x)

I am concerned to advocate an enhancement of the affective domain of learning and would not naturally choose to use the term "therapeutic education" but—as this seems to have become the label of choice that informs the debate in this sphere—I will use it as a short-hand way of referring to those features of educational development I wish to discuss. I would not object to the heavy emphasis on emotions revealed in the above quotation as standard accounts of affective learning emphasize the role of emotions, and emotional development is also central to my own thesis. However, it needs to be pointed out here (and this will be stressed later) that the cognitive and affective domains can be viewed as inextricably connected and mutually dependent (Hepburn, 1972; Peters, 1972), and that the references to emotions in an educational context directs attention to learning experiences that encapsulate quite complex activities such as receiving, internalizing, and organizing information from a wide range of sources, in addition to "developing a value system and demonstrating self-reliance" (Fawbert, 2008, p. 90). There is a cognitive aspect of all emotions and an affective dimension of cognition; this is what Scheffler (1991) is wanting to emphasize in his work on the "cognitive emotions." However, recent trends in educational policy development have paid scant attention to the importance of these cognitive-affective learning connections.

Given the critiques of recent policy trends from school to lifelong learning referred to above, it is difficult to sustain the claim that such developments indicate a movement toward emphasizing the affective dimension of education. As mentioned already, schooling has been obsessed with a standards agenda in which centrally imposed targets have prevented teachers from giving due attention to the values and emotional elements vital to personal and social development (Elliott, 2007; Jones, 2003). As the post-16 sector has been influenced even more than schools by the imposition of top-down policy changes (a fact specifically mentioned by Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009, p. 65) linked to the skills and employability agenda, it is not difficult to understand why a post-16 counter agenda concerned—as in the schools—with affective learning outcomes might well emerge. My argument, however, is that this reaction has been far too timid, lacklustre, and indiscriminate, and that there should be a more vigorous and systematic re-emphasis of affective

objectives in this sector. Most learners in the postschool sector are either studying (increasingly preparing to *re-sit* examinations these days) for GCSEs/A-levels or pursuing vocational qualifications, so the notion that such programs are more than marginally concerned with building self-esteem or emotional intelligence is difficult to accept.

There is more than enough scope to argue that much of this post-16 learning is grossly *deficient* in precisely this affective area; it does not connect or engage sufficiently with the emotions, values, and wider interests that learners bring with them to postcompulsory institutions (Avis et al., 2009; Hyland & Merrill, 2003). Writing about American education in recent years, Palmer (1998) noted similar tendencies and criticized educators' "excessive regard for the powers of the intellect . . . our obsession with objective knowledge" and recommended learning programs that stress "subjective engagement . . . the power of emotions to freeze, or free, the mind" (p. 61) The increase in mental health and emotional/behavioral problems in the postschool sector is now being acknowledged with a view to researching and implementing strategies to remedy the main problems (Warwick, Maxwell, Statham, Aggleton, & Simon, 2008). All this is symptomatic of the wider emotional distress experienced by many people in Western industrialized states that Harvey (2005) and James (2008) have linked with the relentless rise of neo-liberalism since the 1970s. Such distress has been magnified by the recent financial meltdown and global economic recession (Chang, 2010; Judt, 2010).

Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) provide lots of evidence in their book based on conversations with selected teachers, analysis of mission statements of schools, and the management industry but, as Kinman (2008) noted in her review of the book, the "authors provide little in the way of peer-reviewed evidence for the strong assertions in the book" and "rely heavily on 'pop psychology' texts and unsupported hypotheses" (p. 50). To be fair, Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) do confront this issue of evidence for the therapeutic turn fairly and squarely and argue that they are charting a broad "cultural shift" in politics and society that has become a "central focus for education policy" (pp. 146-147). However, even though I think it is better to maintain a reflective agnosticism about the precise extent of any therapeutic turn, my central argument is that if there is little evidence of such a trend then it is a great pity as the widespread transformations of the system mentioned above do seem to merit a resurgence of attention to this dimension of education.

Education and Therapy

In their investigation of the various accounts of the relationship between therapy and education, Smeyers et al. (2007) identify three principal "climates of thought." They observe that

> first, there is the conception of therapy as an obvious good, a practice that helps people lead more fulfilled and less unhappy

lives . . . Second, and partly in reaction to the first, there is increasing scepticism, even hostility, towards therapy and its influence . . . Therapy is charged with encouraging a debilitating climate of dependence to which it then presents itself as a solution. Third, it may seem to some that the only essential and important questions concerning therapy are whether or not it can be proved to be effective and if so how to do it. (p. 1)

The writers go on to justify their rejection of all three approaches in favor of a "more balanced and nuanced treatment of therapy and its connections with education" and which argues against "the idea that a sharp conceptual division can be made between education and therapy" (Smeyers et al., 2007, p. 1). This broadly sums up my own position, though the particular emphasis placed on mindfulness and affective education in later sections represents an extension of this perspective.

Wilson (1972) has pointed out that there are many connections and overlaps between the two fields of activity. He observes that

> education involves initiation into activities, forms of thought, etc. which conceptually must be . . . worthwhile or justifiable. Different types of justifications, or different descriptions of the mode in which they are worth-while, may apply to different activities or groups of activities. Thus, some may be called "therapeutic," others described as "enlarging the personality" . . . . These justification phrases may be said to represent the "aims of education"; and "therapeutic" or "contributing to mental health," may represent one such aim. (pp. 91-92)

Similarly, Peters (1972) has demonstrated the clear and distinct connections between human emotions, motivation, and the sort of reasoning associated with the development of knowledge and understanding. In considering why we attach the label "emotions" to concepts such as "fear, anger, sorrow, grief, envy, jealousy, pity, remorse, guilt, shame, pride, wonder, and the like," Peters argues that our main criterion for selection is "the connection between emotions and the class of cognitions that are conveniently called appraisals" (pp. 466-467). He goes on to suggest that such appraisals are

> constituted by seeing situations under aspects which are agreeable or disagreeable, beneficial or harmful in a variety of dimensions. To feel fear is, for instance, to see a situation as dangerous; to feel pride is to see with pleasure something as mine or as something that I have had a hand in bringing about. (Peters, 1972, p. 467)

As "emotions are basically forms of cognition," we may legitimately refer to and recommend the "education of the emotions" (Peters, 1972). Wilson (1972) is getting at something similar when he argues that "we can say that certain educational processes just *are the same as* some processes which increase mental health: that some forms of teaching are identical with some forms of psychotherapy" (p. 89, italics in original). The idea is that learning and therapy involve

the development of knowledge, values, emotions, understanding, reason, skill, experience, and insight, and both are equally necessary for accessing work, social relationships, and the wider communities of practice that constitute the good life.

In this sphere of philosophical conceptions of educational development, it is worth concluding this section by referring to the very last sentence in the book by Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) that serves to bring out the profound differences between us. They conclude with the claim that "what makes humanity is the intellectual and an education based on *cogito ergo sum* not *sentio ergo sum*" (p. 164, italics in original). One of the main reasons for seeking to re-affirm the value of the affective domain is to caution against such dangerously one-sided conceptions of the educational enterprise in the attempt to regain a broader notion of the education of the whole person (Hyland, 2011). It is worth looking at this *cogito* claim in more detail.

Descartes' infamous *Cogito* has, arguably, been responsible for more philosophical wrong turnings than anything else in Western thought. Ryle (1973) demonstrated how "Descartes' myth" had resulted in the "intellectualist legend" that wrongly assumed that there was "an antithesis between the physical and the mental" (p. 32), and this led to the false dualisms between mind and body, theory and practice, knowing how and knowing that. That other famous Frenchman, Rousseau (1966), was equally mistaken in declaring that "to exist is to feel" as "we had feelings before we had ideas" (p. 348). As Pinker (1997) shows, human activity cannot be defined exclusively in terms of either one or the other as all aspects of behavior necessitate mind/body and cognitive/affective elements working together in conjunction. Searle (1985) criticizes the legacy of Descartes on the grounds that it has led to an "inherited cultural resistance to treating the conscious mind as a biological phenomenon like any other" (p. 10). Placing all this in the context of human evolution, Pinker (1997) explains clearly "why we have emotions"; he argues that the

> emotions are mechanisms that set the brain's highest level goals. Once triggered by a propitious moment, an emotion triggers the cascade of goals and sub-goals that we call thinking and acting . . . no sharp line divides thinking from feeling, nor does thinking necessarily precede feeling or vice versa. (p. 373)

This connects well with the analysis of the education of the emotions, particularly with the Scheffler's (1991) notion of cognitive emotions. In commenting on Scheffler's thesis, Standish (1992) explains how it is a "rationality which transcends the dualism of head and heart" and

> explicitly rejects the common assumption that cognition and emotion are worlds apart and illustrates coherently the ways in which rationality and the passions are intertwined. What is of interest to the scientist and what is understood in the work of art . . . involve a combination of perception and feeling. (p. 117)

Transforming Education in Destitute Times

In a number of writings over the last few years, Oliver James (2007, 2008) has argued that levels of emotional distress in industrialized, urbanized societies are much higher for English-speaking countries such as Britain, United States, Canada, and New Zealand than they are in other nations such as France, Spain, Belgium, Japan, and the Scandinavian states. Using the World Health Organization (WHO) definition of emotional distress to include illnesses such as "depression, anxiety, substance abuse and impulse disorder," James (2008, p. 10) contends that—contra recent fashionable notions about genes—such distress has little genetic causation but is directly linked to parental upbringing and the impact of "selfish capitalism" that expounds radically materialistic values in conjunction with bringing about a deterioration of income levels and working conditions for millions of ordinary people in mainly English-speaking countries over the last 30 years or so. Gerhardt (2010) presents similar arguments in her survey of the "selfish society" brought about by neo-liberal economic policies. Addictive and mindless consumption connected to growth for its own sake (or rather for the sake of a minority of rich capitalists) has brought us to the brink of disaster. She expresses this in graphic terms in saying that, over the last few decades, many people in the developed world have been

> Like children let loose in the sweet shop, we have gorged ourselves on everything we could get hold of, blissfully unaware of the true cost of our activities. We have been careless or ignorant of the impact of our behaviour on the poorest and most powerless inhabitants of the planet, on our own children, and on the environment itself. (p. 17)

Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) have demonstrated the impact of such careless self-interest on the world's richest nations in indicating direct correlations between inequality of income and levels of mental illness, addiction, rates of imprisonment, levels of trust, and the general health and well-being of nations. In all cases, the data are unequivocal: "Most of the important health and social problems of the rich world are more common in unequal societies" (p. 173).

We might safely assume that the global economic meltdown and recession that has occurred in the last few years has exacerbated these problems. Indeed, in a U.K. survey in March 2010 by the mental health charity *Together–UK* (Hyland, 2011, pp. xii-xiii), it was revealed that 62% of British people had recently experienced mental health problems. All of the critics of selfish capitalism point to the need to return to collective values and more caring, less materialistic communities characterized by trust, compassion, and empathy. Gerhardt (2010) is clear that the "moral makeover" required to bring about change involves attention to emotions, a feature noticeably absent from materialistic individualism and neo-liberal conceptions of society. As she puts it,

The moral and emotional issues that we have to deal with as a society are the same as those we begin to grasp in the cradle: how to learn to pay attention to others and their feelings, how we manage conflict between people and how we balance our own needs with those of others. (p. 310)

Clearly, education has a vital role to play in this important sphere of personal growth and development and, traditionally, it has been the broad affective domain (Hart, 2007, Weare, 2004) that has been concerned with this sphere of activity. However, the current technicist and outcome-driven system is ill-equipped for the task. Allen and Ainley (2007) argue that recent U.K. education policy has produced "not a learning but a certified society," and suggest that

It is tragic that just at the point in human history when in the interest of human survival social control has to be asserted over the economy, the possibility of even attempting to do so has been abandoned by triumphalist free-market fundamentalism. Education at all levels has played large part in enabling and celebrating this new millenarianism while increasingly closing off any alternatives to it. (p. 89)

Expressing similar criticisms of the system, Avis (2007) observed that

At the time of writing whilst the competitive settlement is firmly in place and managerialist forms well established, the negative consequences of neo-liberal economics are becoming increasingly apparent. Although the state remains wedded to performativity, the language of targets, performance indicators and so on, there are embryonic attempts to soften these and ameliorate the crasser effects of neo-liberal economic practices. (p. 177)

What a difference a few years of economic and political history make. Although the neo-liberal project—as the global financial collapse of 2008 and the current recession, described by Chang (2010) as the "second-largest economic crisis in history" (p. xiii)—has quite justifiably lost its swaggering triumphalist edge, there are few signs of any fundamental changes in either education or social-economic policy. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the establishment of a Conservative–Liberal coalition government in Britain in May 2010 seems to have led to business as usual. Unemployment, tax rises, cuts in welfare benefits and social services, and the multi-billion pound bail-out of failed banks are firmly located in the public domain funded by taxpayers while free marketeering profits remain strictly private. Indeed, in education the privatizing agenda established in the 1980s Conservative Thatcher period and further developed by New Labour from 1997 is now taken up again by the new coalition government which looks like extending this process to health, welfare, and other public services (BBC News, 2010).

Mindfulness, Moral Values, and Emotions

Against the challenging background of debilitation sketched above, there is a need for a re-affirmation of the importance of the fostering of moral and emotional development characteristic of the affective domain. I suggest that this task can be substantially assisted by drawing on the tradition of "mindfulness" practice. This is a core concept in Buddhist philosophy and practice—traditionally the seventh strand of the eightfold path leading to nirvana and the end of suffering—and is currently attracting widespread attention in a large number of spheres far removed from its natural and original home. In the context of the *Dharma* (literally the fundamental nature of the universe revealed in the Buddhist canon of teachings and precepts; Keown, 2005), mindfulness is of overriding importance and—as recent commentators have argued (J. M. J. Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2013)—contemporary mindfulness practice needs to acknowledge these origins and the crucial links with Buddhist traditions.

Thich Nhat (1999)—the renowned Vietnamese Buddhist teacher and campaigner for world peace and justice—describes mindfulness as being "at the heart of the Buddha's teachings." It involves "attention to the present moment" that is "inclusive and loving" and "which accepts everything without judging or reacting" (p. 64). Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990, 1994) and associates have been largely responsible for transforming the original spiritual notion into a powerful and ubiquitous therapeutic tool based on forms of meditation and mindful practices. Mindfulness simply means "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally" in a way which "nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality." Such practice—whether this involves breathing or walking meditation or giving full non-judgmental attention to everyday activities—can offer a "powerful route for getting ourselves unstuck, back in touch with our own wisdom and vitality" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, pp. 4-5). Such a simple idea has proven to be astonishingly successful in a vast range of contexts including the treatment of depression, addictions of various kinds, and the promotion of physical and mental health and well-being generally (Baer, 2006). Harris' (2006) robustly secular notion of such strategies—which are applicable to any everyday activity such as driving, washing dishes, or solving problems, not just to contemplative or meditative practices—describes them in terms of "investigating the nature of consciousness directly through sustained introspection" (p. 209).

Like any process or activity that is concerned principally with introspection and a focus on inner thoughts and feelings, there seems to be a natural tendency to assign it a limited value because of its apparent passivity and subjective inward-looking character. The description of mindfulness by M. Williams, Teasdale, Segal, and Kabat-Zinn (2007, p. 48)

brings out the active, developmental, and educational features of such practice. They note that mindfulness is

1. *intentional*—concerned with cultivating an awareness of present moment reality and the choices available to us
2. *experiential*—focusing directly on present moment experience rather than being preoccupied by abstractions
3. *non-judgmental*—it allows us to see things as they are without a mental assignment of critical labels to our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions

In a similar context, Smith (2002) observes that some sort of "inward turn" is "often (but wrongly) associated with therapy in general" (p. 95). However, mindfulness does seem to be able to deal with such criticisms effectively, particularly when the concept is interpreted within the context of its original home in Buddhist philosophy and practice. In recent years, there has been a lively debate about the relevance of Buddhist thought to Western psychology and psychotherapy (Segall, 2003), and a consensus seems to have emerged about the commonalities and mutual objectives of the different traditions. Rubin (2003) explains how "Buddhism points toward possibilities for self-awareness, freedom, wisdom and compassion that Western psychology in general, and psychoanalysis in particular, has never mapped" (p. 50). These possibilities are realized in the growing range of therapeutic mindfulness strategies used in health programs (M. Williams et al., 2007) and in the demonstration of the educational value of mindfulness (Siegel, 2007).

There are clear and direct links between mindfulness strategies and educational practice at all levels. The "present-moment reality" developed through mindfulness is widely acknowledged in educational psychology as not just "more effective, but also more enjoyable" (Langer, 1993, p. 43) in many spheres of learning, and there is now a wealth of evidence aggregated through the *Mindfulness in Education Network*[1] about the general educational benefits of the approach. On the basis of work done in American schools, Schoeberlein and Sheth (2009) list a wide range of benefits of mindfulness for both teachers—improving focus and awareness, increasing responsiveness to student needs, enhancing classroom climate—and students in supporting readiness to learn, strengthening attention and concentration, reducing anxiety, and enhancing social and emotional learning. As they put it,

> Mindfulness and education are beautifully interwoven. Mindfulness is about being present with and to your inner experience as well as your outer environment, including other people. When teachers are fully present, they teach better. When students are fully present, the quality of their learning is better. (p. xi)

The use of mindfulness in British schools is showing similarly promising results. Burnett (Hyland, 2011, pp.102-39)

has shown its value when incorporated into moral/religious education or personal and social health programs, and the controlled trial conduct by Huppert and Johnson (2010) with 173 secondary school pupils indicated a positive impact of mindfulness-based approaches on emotional stability and an increase of well-being. The therapeutic applications of mindfulness strategies were recommended in the report sponsored by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, *Mental Capital and Wellbeing* (Government Office for Science, 2008), and there are a number of well-established centers for the research and teaching in mindfulness-based approaches such as the Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice at the University of Bangor, Wales; the Oxford Cognitive Therapy Centre; and the University of Exeter.[2]

The links between inner clarity and the clear vision that Siegel (2010) calls "mindsight"—the "focused attention that allows us to see the internal workings of our own minds" (p. xi)—are brought out in Kabat-Zinn's (2005) discussion of mindfulness and the moral life. As he suggests, the "wholesome mind and body states" resulting from the practice include

> Generosity, trustworthiness, kindness, empathy, compassion, gratitude, joy in the good fortune of others, inclusiveness, acceptance and equanimity are qualities of mind and heart that further the possibilities of well-being and clarity within oneself, to say nothing of the beneficial effects they have in the world. They form the foundation for an ethical and moral life. (p. 103)

Such qualities of mind—functioning as cardinal virtues—play a central role in all systems of morality whether the ultimate justifications are found in naturalistic, utilitarian, or deontological ethics (Trusted, 1987). Keown (2005) classifies Buddhist ethics as "virtue ethics" (p. 30) that—as in Aristotle's system—is essentially concerned with the development of character in certain desirable and wholesome directions, though he points out that the key precepts of non-harming, compassion, and lovingkindness are also central to most mainstream moral systems.

The compassion and lovingkindness of mindfulness traditions can be seen to dovetail with the moral foundations of human existence in general. What mindfulness adds to the moral tradition is, first, the clarity of vision and equanimous stability of mind and body that allow for the full expression of moral principles and practice and, second, the passionate motivation to engage with the world in the moral project of challenging injustice, poverty, inequality and all the other factors that stand in the way of human flourishing and well-being. It is for this reason that the "socially engaged" aspects of ancient and modern mindfulness traditions (Garfinkel, 2006) have encompassed a broad and diverse range of social movements including peace movements, environmental campaigns, projects to combat urban poverty around the world, work in prisons and hospices, and projects to temper the harmful effects of globalization (see the *Dharmanet International Learning Resource Site* for information on the array of such socially engaged projects[3]).

Conclusion: Mindfulness, Moral Education, and Social Engagement

Mindfulness practice is designed to promote well-being in ourselves and others or—in the language of the Buddhist noble truths—to work toward the reduction of the suffering of all living beings. What stands in the way of achieving such objectives? Clearly, the key *internal* obstacles are located in the instincts and capriciousness of the emotions, and mindfulness can help in fostering the requisite control and, eventually, transforming these to promote equanimity. Once this is achieved, however, there is a host of *external* factors that clearly contribute to what Schopenhauer (1970) called the "suffering of the world" (p. 41) or, to express this in a less negative way, which militate against the promotion of human flourishing and well-being. Thus, the internal and external can be seen to come together in mindful engagement to bring about the desirable ends.

As Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) conclude in their analysis of levels of inequality around the world, "further improvements in the quality of life no longer depend on further economic growth: the issue is now community and how we relate to each other" (p. 254). The idea of education as the prime mover in the fostering of economic capital—always suspect as Dore (1997) graphically illustrated—is now an empty and hollow slogan, particularly as countries around the world struggle with the consequences of the abject failure of neo-liberal economics. Yet, it is not only the economic consequences of Chicago school free marketeering (Klein, 2007) ideas that have turned out to be disastrous but also their impact on the social fabric in glorifying selfish and materialistic possessive individualism. The selfish capitalism that James (2008) and Gerhardt (2010) have criticized so forcefully has produced sickness—mental, physical, and psychological—in all nations in which it has gone unchallenged by social-democratic and moral values concerned with societal well-being and the common good. Levels of public and community trust have plummeted in recent years (Judt, 2010; Seldon, 2009) and the fostering of social capital—always overshadowed by the dominance of economic capital arguments in New Labour's lifelong learning policy (Hyland, 2008)—has never been more urgently needed from our education system.

Along with most other public institutions, education has been debilitated and grossly mutated by this materialistic and instrumentalist culture over the last few decades but, as the critical commentators mentioned above have suggested, it is still a lively and hopeful vehicle for change. However, such change will not be brought about by purely intellectual and cognitive means—by celebrating the *cogito* as Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) suggest—but by giving equal attention to the *sentio*, the crucial sphere of human emotions. In answer to Thompson's (2007) concerns about the decline of education for social transformation, we might say that before we attempt to change the world we may have to change ourselves, especially our "destructive emotions" (Goleman, 2003), and mindfulness approaches have been proved particularly effective in this respect. An education concerned only with the intellectual and cognitive domain seems destined to bring about the very diminishment of learning and learners that Ecclestone & Hayes are earnestly warning us about. Moreover, thinking by itself, without feeling and the motivation to moral practice—resting on the "radiant calm of mind and spacious stillness of heart" (Salzberg & Goldstein, 2001, p. 161) associated with mindfulness—could never produce any of the desirable changes outlined above. Passionate commitment to the values that inspire community well-being and trust require a rejuvenation of the affective domain of education, ideally underpinned by the mindfulness precepts and values found in Buddhist traditions.

Notes

1. Mindfulness in Education Network (www.mindfuleducation.org).
2. Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice at the University of Bangor, Wales (www.bangor.ac.uk/mindfulness), the Oxford Cognitive Therapy Centre (www.octc.co.uk), and the University of Exeter (www.exeter.ac.uk).
3. Dharmanet International Learning Resource Site (www.dharmanet.org/lcengaged.htm).

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