



« AWAKENING: INVESTIGATING APPROACHES THAT PROMOTE AUTHENTIC FACILITATION OF CONTEMPLATIVE TEACHING IN THE CLASSROOM »

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ABSTRACT: Teaching as contemplative professional practice involves awareness and understanding of our inner self, aspects of how we conceptualize situations, and how we act in particular moments. The element of 'presence' is also required in teaching as contemplative practice to develop a heightened sensitivity for what is happening in the moment and to fully experience the present with all of our senses. In a time where schools put a lot of emphasis on both rational and sensory ways of knowing (dealing primarily with knowledge in the past and future) it may be difficult for teachers to see the rationale in bringing into the curriculum, the practice of contemplation that focus solely on the present. However, recent studies show that contemplative practice such as mindfulness meditation is effective in fostering self-awareness and increasing capacities such as creativity, empathy, compassion, and interpersonal skills in schools and in the workplace. The aim of this study is to develop a theoretical understanding of the process teachers (who have been asked to introduce mindfulness meditation practices into their day-to-day teaching) undergo and the methods they employ to ensure that students actively engage in learning 'in the present', using a grounded theory approach. The study suggests that a process known as 'awakening' is an essential first step in establishing authentic and meaningful environment for contemplative learning and teaching to thrive.

KEYWORDS: *contemplative teaching, mindfulness meditation, teacher education*

INTRODUCTION

Contemplative knowing, which has been recognized across time, culture, and disciplines for centuries around the world (primarily in the East) has now begun to surface in mainstream western curriculum and pedagogy as a new way of nurturing authentic student inquiry for deeper understanding. According to Hart (2004) contemplative practice offers a design for curriculum and instruction that provide opportunities for learners to engage more deeply in their learning; to ask the bigger questions; challenge their preconceptions and biases they have developed through their experiences; and all the while developing intellectual and emotional understanding of oneself and its relationship with the rest of the world. Successful implementation of contemplative practice however requires a different mindset and a different set of skills to facilitate in the classroom as compared to their traditional counterpart (Miller, 2014) and is not something that can be simply added onto an already existing curriculum. The last few decades have seen a vast increase in the number of schools bringing mindfulness into their curriculum. Jon

Kabat-Zinn (2004) is often credited for this recent popularity of mindfulness, who sees mindfulness meditation, as an essential practice to cultivate the skills, habits of mind and neural pathways that enable us to sustain and maintain an attentional focus on present experience (Weare, Huppert, 2019), however other factors such as the ease in which it can be accessed and implemented in schools may have also influenced this growth in implementation. The practice does not require any special equipment and can be done anywhere at any time. While the origin of mindfulness meditation is often associated with religious and spiritual institutions, the term 'mindfulness' is now widely recognized as a secular and practical concept with a variety of scientifically proven applications from managing mental health issues resulting from stress and anxiety (Kabat-Zinn, et.al. 1992) to improving attention and self-regulated learning (Brandmo, Berger, 2013). So how are these mindfulness meditations practices actually implemented in the classroom? There is a lot of literature written by experts in the field that

introduce step-by-step methods on how to appropriately do this mindfulness meditation practice, however how effective are they in actually getting students to engage in learning 'in the present'? This study sets out to describe the process in which mindfulness meditation is first introduced and integrated into the day-to-day teaching in the classroom. The study will particularly look into how

RESEARCH SETTING

The research setting for this study was Japanese Article 1 schools in both the public and private sector. Ten schools in total were selected. Participants that contributed to this study comprised of homeroom teachers in secondary schools, ages varying from 25 to 50 years of age, with teaching experiences in Japanese schools ranging from 5 to 20 years. Data collected for this study was based on field notes that were taken during semi-structured interviews with the individual teachers, and classroom observations over a one year period. While many of the participating teachers were aware of the existence of contemplative teaching practices (such as mindfulness meditation), only a few have actually attempted to trial it in their own classroom. They were all very keen to embark in the challenge of introducing mindfulness meditation into their class, however not quite certain as yet how to go about doing it and what would result from the experience. Regarding the vast number of literature available on mindfulness meditation and its method, teachers were not discouraged to refer to them however they were encouraged to only use them as a reference and not to feel too tied down to one particular method. What was more important for this study was to observe how teachers develop their own methodologies as they attempt to overcome the many challenges they face during the course of their implementation.

RESEARCH METHOD

Grounded theory is a rigorous research methodology with a focus on the emergence of theory from data. The purpose of the methodology is to generate theory directly from data to explain a social phenomenon and/or behaviour. While data is systematically collected and analysed, "the cardinal rule in grounded theory is to not undermine the discovery of latent patterns in data by preconceiving what to look for or what type of data to use." (Holton, J., Walsh, I. 2017, p.73) The researcher therefore is required to simply follow the data, and have it guide the researcher through the process of theoretical sampling and sorting using the constant comparative method. It is a general research methodology that uses any and all types of data, both quantitative and qualitative, and "is more about the context of discovery than the context of justification." (Gibson, B., Hartman, J., 2014, p.43) The data collected from this study consisted mainly of field notes taken of homeroom pastoral care classes (and some subject area classes) that were observed and semi-structured interviews that were conducted with individual teachers over a one year period.

teachers attempt to integrate this contemplative practice into their own teaching repertoire and how they try to overcome the challenges they face during the implementation process. For some it may require having to "unlearn" some basic assumptions about the processes of teaching and learning or possibly having to develop a new classroom approach altogether.

All interviews were open-ended and care was taken to ensure that participants of the study felt comfortable in freely talking about their views and perspectives. Consequently, no audio or video was ever recorded during interviews or during any classroom observations. Instead key words were captured during the interviews and observations, and later elaborated into a more extensive field note, that would later be coded to identify relevant indicators or concepts that would be used for analysis to allow the grounded theory to emerge. Readers interested in the details of this research methodology may refer to Glaser (1978).

Careful facilitation of this research methodology provided many opportunities to capture real incidents (experiences, stories, gossip, confessions, etc.) that suggested a concept or a pattern of behaviour to help in explaining what is going on in the situation that is being studied. Codes were constantly compared to verify what concepts, if any, were buried within the descriptive content and to confirm that they were grounded in the data. Theoretical memos were kept and compiled as data were being coded, to help in uncovering what was happening in the situation at hand; to capture patterns that were repeatedly occurring in the data; and to progress the study through the different stages of the research to the eventual discovery of an emergent grounded theory. Data collected at later stages in the study (i.e. literature related to the research topic) were used to add, elaborate, and saturate codes, properties and conceptual categories to further explore the validity and relevance of the emergent theory.

THE THEORY OF AWAKENING

The theory of *awakening* emerged from the recurring conceptual patterns that were observed demonstrated by the actions of the teachers who participated in the study. They showed varying degrees of success in overcoming the main concern that was identified in this study, which was their reluctance to relinquish control. Whether it was done consciously or subconsciously, teachers from all ten schools experienced similar challenges and exhibited similar behaviours during their attempts to integrate contemplative practice into the classroom.

This study examined the conceptual structure of *awakening* within the substantive area of contemplative teaching. *Awakening* is defined in this study as a basic social process that individuals underwent to overcome the barriers that confronted them while attempting to meaningfully integrate mindfulness meditation into their day-to-day teaching. A Garrison Institute report (2005)

suggested that teachers that successfully integrate mindfulness into their classrooms have a higher likelihood of creating autonomous learning environments in which students are “primed” to pay attention, and consequently, are better prepared to learn. Interviews with participating teachers in this study who have experienced a positive change in their class confirm this, stating that not only has it had a transformative effect on empowering students to learn, it has also had a significant effect on heightening awareness of their own selves as learners as well. These teachers who have gone through the full cycle of the *awakening* process were found to be more at ease with themselves and with allowing students to take more ownership of their learning as active members of a democratic learning community.

Whilst exploring the overarching behavioural process of *awakening* and identifying the pivotal components in its conceptual structure, three stages were identified that form the basis of and the necessary situation for

awakening to occur. *Fence-sitting (stage 1)* was the first behaviour that was observed, where teachers in the interviews showed a high enthusiasm to introduce contemplative practice in their classes, however in practice it took a considerable amount of time for them to actually take the first step and introduce mindfulness meditation to their students. *Internalizing (stage 2)* was a behaviour that followed afterwards where teachers managed to make mindfulness meditation a regular routine in the classroom but it was somewhat disconnected from the rest of the learning engagements and not clear what the purpose for implementing it was. It was not until teachers began to witness firsthand the positive changes in their students’ behaviour, attitude and approaches to their learning (and the changes experienced within themselves as well) that they began *yielding (stage 3)* to mindfulness meditation, showing signs of genuine acceptance of its effects, more attention to how it can be better facilitated in a lesson, and a new found appreciation and awareness of everything around them.]

This study suggests that the transition from each of the three stages listed below in Figure 1 is not only a necessary step-wise process to ensure a higher likelihood of effective and meaningful implementation of mindfulness meditation in the classroom, but on a more conceptual level, it is also an important inquiry-driven learning process that allows teachers the appropriate time and space to construct and build-on from experience a more deeply rooted understanding of how to effectively facilitate a new teaching approach in their classroom.

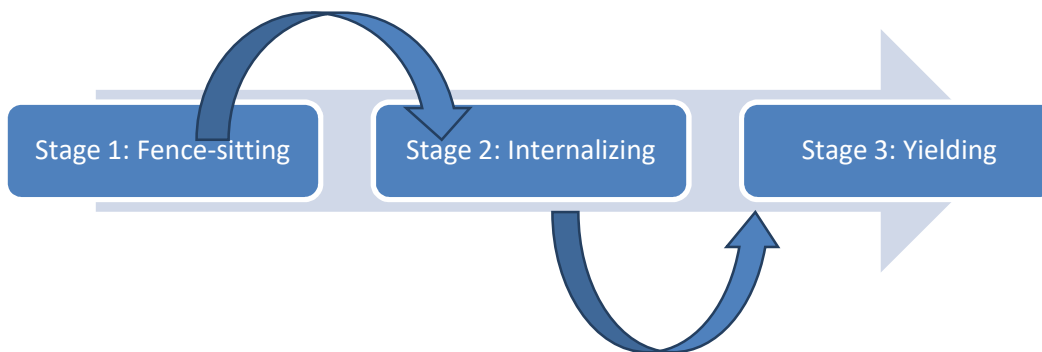


Figure 1: The basic social process of *awakening*

Fence-sitting

The teachers that were invited to participate in this study, all had little to no experience with mindfulness meditation however were all interested in learning more about it and how they could include it as part of their teaching repertoire. Despite their interest however, it took several weeks for many teachers to actually put it into practice. Not having enough time in class seemed to be a common reason for the delay, however some admitted that at times it was because it just slipped their mind, or they got caught up with other things that needed to be dealt with and they got sidetracked. This and other related responses during interviews with the teachers suggest that the delay in implementation is likely more to do with *prioritising* of time, rather than a *shortage* of time. According to many

of the teachers as soon as the academic term begins and teaching commences, teachers are bombarded with a load of other things they need to worry about apart from regular teaching and thus new initiatives such as mindfulness meditation, whether deliberately or not, tend to get pushed to the side. Other teachers replied by saying that they simply weren’t ready yet, and were still trying to figure out what the best timing was to introduce it. The duration of this *fence-sitting* stage varied from teacher to teacher ranging from a week to a few months. This may suggest that it is not enough to simply have interest in something for it to be promptly implemented in class. When asked if a little nudge or a push from their supervisors or their leadership team would have helped in

accelerating the rate of implementation, a consistent response that came back was that, a top-down approach would probably impede rather than promote progress, as it would become something teachers had to do, rather than something teachers wanted to do. The teachers felt informal follow up meetings with other teachers engaging in the same initiative (rather than teachers in a position of authority) to talk about how things are going would be a better option and more encouraging for teachers struggling with their implementation. Perhaps this mulling over period is an important and necessary first step to kick start a new teaching approach in a way that is authentic and one based on the teacher's own initiative what the best possible approach is for effective implementation.

Internalizing

Eventually, all teachers learned to find time somewhere in their lesson to engage students in mindfulness meditation. Some teachers introduced it at the beginning of each lesson, while others used it at the end as a reflection activity. Despite the regularity in which mindfulness meditation was facilitated in the classroom there was a sense that something was missing. There didn't appear to be any clear purpose for the meditation activities (aside from calming down and being silent for a few minutes), nor were there any explanation to the students of what the learning outcomes were. It appeared for the most part as an add-on standalone exercise with very little explicit links or connections with the lesson. Some teachers were initially surprised to hear that it was necessary to establish learning outcomes for mindfulness meditation, as they thought simply engaging in the activity would be enough to help students in understanding why they are doing it. Some were under the impression that they had made the objectives clear to students however realized later that they hadn't. These conversations left the teachers very puzzled during the interviews and for some to re-evaluate their whole approach. A question that came up a lot was whether it was necessary to assess, evaluate or grade students on how well they performed the meditation activity, but this was left for the teacher to decide. Most teachers carried on afterwards with their facilitation of mindfulness meditation making very little changes to their approach. Interviews with teachers continued to show however that they were making sincere efforts to incorporate mindfulness meditation into their day-to-day teaching and make it a meaningful endeavour. While at first sight it may appear as though teachers are only superficially implementing mindfulness meditation into their classroom careful analysis of the data showed that what may be happening is that during this time teachers are passively facilitating these meditation activities and just doing it for the sake of doing, but rather they are thinking about it very intently, processing everything internally and carefully monitoring their students' performance to evaluate and find evidence for the effectiveness of this contemplative practice and to inform

any modifications to be made when necessary with their implementation.

Yielding

The third and final stage of the *awakening* process is *yielding*, and it signifies the dramatic change in teacher behaviour that was observed after they witnessed firsthand the positive effects of mindfulness meditation in their student's behaviour, attitude and approach to their learning. This change was not observed in all teachers. Many remained in the second *internalizing* stage without showing any significant changes to their perspectives on mindfulness meditation and the way they facilitated it in their classes. Interviews with teacher who reached this final stage however, showed a considerable change in the way they talked about mindfulness meditation and its importance in day-to-day teaching and education in general. In the classroom, some teachers were found participating in mindfulness meditation with the students, when previously they only acted as the timekeeper and just signalling when to start and stop. They appeared more attentive to the needs of their students in the classroom, and what is more they were very frank, open and reflective of their own learning process as well. While mindfulness meditation was not formally assessed in any of the units, conversations with the teachers showed that it was slowly taking more of a center stage in their written curriculum documents as an important affective skill that requires developing to achieve high performance outcomes in all of the other learning objectives. Another notable change was the gradual relinquishing of control in the classroom, and maintaining a greater distance away from the students to allow room for more learner autonomy. While learner autonomy refers to a reshaping of the view that the learner is responsible for their own learning, the teachers were by no means abdicating their responsibilities of teaching by relinquishing control. They were still found guiding the learning process by introducing the learning objectives in class and preparing the students with the necessary tools to engage in their individual inquiries. What was different was the dynamics between the teacher and the students, and the level of mutual trust that they appeared to have established with one another allowing teachers to facilitate learning from a distance and students to appropriate the time and space granted to think and take more ownership and responsibility for their learning. In one of the classes the teacher was seen to no longer lead whole class meditation sessions and instead provided groups or individual students to meditate on their own when they felt it was necessary.

As teachers moved from one stage to the next through the basic social process of *awakening*, all teachers who arrived at the final *yielding* stage reported a transformation in their perspectives on teaching, education and life in general. They claim that the experience has really helped them to be more attentive to what is happening around

them in the present moment, and this in turn has also allowed them to appreciate what is really important in life. They also said that they saw a similar transformation in many of their students as well, which allowed them to establish a spiritual connection between them based on trust and respect, something they had never experienced before. Interviews with teachers who remained in the *internalizing* stage did not show any evidence of this level of transformation however it may just be a question of time until they too experience the same epiphany that the other teachers experienced, and display similar changes in behaviour.

DISCUSSION

To say that a good teacher should be aware of the process by which students learn is to add nothing new to pedagogical insight. Indeed, excellent teachers do not necessarily choose to teach according to this theory or that, or are even particularly aware of the influence of contemporary educational thinking on their own practice. Good practitioners are those that come up with their own methodologies by constantly reflecting on the context in which they teach in considering the needs of the students in front of them. In this study we looked at how teachers respond to the challenge when asked to come up with their own methodologies in implementing a commonly implemented contemplative teaching practice (mindfulness meditation) into their class. What was discovered was that authentic facilitation of contemplative teaching doesn't happen overnight, and for many teachers it can be a rather long and complex learning process before they reach mastery of the new teaching method. A considerable amount of trial and error and reflection is necessary, however more importantly the teachers themselves also need to experience firsthand what it means to be mindful and attentive in the present moment as well. As a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983), it is important to be aware of emerging education theory and practice to supplement and/or enhance their current teaching practice. As a contemplative practitioner (Miller, 2014) however, there is a need to consider aspects of learning that go deeper than the confines of curriculum requirements. As a contemplative practitioner, it is important to consider the real purpose of learning, and provide opportunities for all students to develop their own independent way of thinking, and consider the purpose of learning in relation to their own life. For schools to support this kind of independent thinking and learning in the classroom, the first necessary step is to support a collaborative learning community (Buchanan, 2007) that is valued and encouraged by all members of the school community. To foster and sustain such a community of learners however will require the building and sustaining of 'autonomy' not just among students and teachers but among all members of the school community, including school leaders, administrators and ideally parents as well. Care must be taken to support this sense of autonomy for

teachers to ever be able to instill the required level of independent thinking in the students they teach.

"The right kind of educator, seeing the inward nature of freedom, helps each individual student to observe and understand his own self-projected values and impositions; he helps him to become aware of the conditioning influences about him, and of his own desires, both of which limit his mind and breed fear; he helps him, as he grows to manhood, to observe and understand himself in relation to all things, for it is the craving for self-fulfilment that brings endless conflict and sorrow." (Krishnamurti, 1953, p.29)

There is no specific body of information that teachers and students must learn to be contemplative practitioners however an ability to focus, concentrate, and deploy attention is basic and essential for learning. In fact, nearly all contemplative practices "emphasize concentration, whether through repeating a mantra, focusing on love or noticing the breath." (Hart, 2008, p.239) Much is gained solely from the focused engagement of the inner self and how it is influenced and/or interacts with its surroundings. Research suggests that this fosters an objective awareness of the relationship between the knower and the world and awareness that knowledge itself is alive with issues for exploration (Semple, Droutman, Read, 2017). One of the most well-established effects of contemplation is a shift in mindset from the cognitive to the affective (Olsen, Cozolino, 2014). A contemplative practitioner therefore can also be considered to be an emotionally intelligent practitioner. Teaching with emotional intelligence entails a shift in priorities. For example, the emotionally intelligent teacher seeks to have confidence not just in their content and materials but also in their flexibility and readiness to respond; they put energy into planning a teaching session but also into preparing to meet the learners. They see their self-development as "emphasizing not just subject expertise but also the development of their self-knowledge." (Mortiboys, 2011, p.9) Ideally, every contemplative practitioner needs to be a lifelong learner in this way, as a facilitator who guides students (and oneself) through the process of self-inquiry. Self-inquiry is aimed ultimately at self-discovery, discovering the subjective aspects of the self that one grasps after the attention is turned inwards. Turning your attention inward allows learners eventually to discover that the entirety of the external world is just a projection of our internal worlds, and that they are in some ways all interconnected with one another, which is one of the aims and goals of bringing contemplative practices into education.

CONCLUSION

Contemplation has an important place in education, without which the ideal of educating the whole student physically, intellectually, emotionally and ethically cannot occur. Done well, contemplative practices can awaken within students, spiritual experiences of their own inner selves in connection with the world around them. Some of

the very best contemplative moments happen, as this study has shown, when students and teachers are in concert with one another. Bringing contemplative practices in the light of 21st-century learning may seem like a challenge however only in that it requires that school communities adapt to new processes and re-evaluate their ideas and beliefs of what the real purpose of education is. As our global community seeks learners to take on more social responsibility, engage in competition and further fragmentation of the self with the rest of the world, teachers as contemplative practitioners will hopefully find innovative approaches to support students in grounding themselves and finding their own way back in this fast-evolving unpredictable world. Contemplative practices offer an invaluable opportunity for deep independent exploration of their inner selves, resulting in meaningful articulation of desired values and attitudes.

To fully embrace contemplative practices as a whole school initiative however (whether it is logistically possible or not), what may be required is the design of a personalized curriculum for all learners. A personalized curriculum is one that does not necessarily flout the demand for standardization in what is taught and assessed but offers different learning pathways to suit different learning groups and styles. A personalized curriculum therefore features in many ways a realignment of students' expectations, where curriculum is revitalized and made suitable and visible in the minds of learners and where their own learner identities materialize and potentially flourish. Where curriculum is made engaging, learners are empowered in visualizing the knowledge they gain in more penetrative, insightful and enriched ways and making choices that influence their own knowledge journeys. Learning is neither simple nor straightforward. The more learning is probed, the more complex it becomes, because learning is a unique process for every individual. Curriculums in schools therefore should be learner-centred and learner-focused, because learning how to develop and sustain relationships, how to work with others, and to make use of and build on other's insights and experiences (building empathy and compassion) may very well be the key for young people in developing their identities as learners and, in turn, improving their inner life and its relationship with the rest of the world.

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