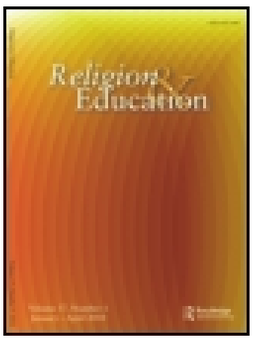

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ABSTRACT
The central question posed here is whether it is appropriate to practice meditative techniques with children at school. In recent years, we have been witness to increased implementation of diverse meditative practices in education systems in a number of countries. Effectiveness of these practices is usually measured empirically. This article attempts to examine the question of appropriateness from philosophical and moral perspectives. To that end, a comparison was made between mindfulness and Waldorf education. The difference between the two approaches, in this context are displayed. Each path has its particular advantages and disadvantages.

KEYWORDS
Meditation; mindfulness; Waldorf education

In recent years, we have witnessed the implementation of diverse meditation techniques in education systems worldwide.[1] Among others, one can find different applications of meditation in countries such as Israel (The Mindfulness Language), England (Mindfulness in Schools Project, DotB), the United States (Mindful Schools and MindUp), India (The Alice Project), and Canada (Mindful Education).[2] Many researchers use the term *contemplative education* (CE) to describe the applications in this context.[3] Chano described CE in these words: "learning infused with the experience of awareness, insight and compassion for oneself and others honed through the practice of sitting meditation and other contemplative disciplines."[4] Roeser and Peck maintained that CE aims to foster "personal growth and social transformation through the cultivation of conscious awareness and volition in an ethical-relational context."[5] Studies of CE techniques used with adults in different fields demonstrated positive results, among others in the areas of self-regulation, emotional regulation, and the ability to focus.[6] The desire to experiment with and examine the influences of these techniques with children in schools stems from these successes. A number of studies examining the implementation of meditative practices in educational frameworks have shown positive results.[7]

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The term *meditation* is a generic term that comes to describe, in its restricted sense, a formal practice of conscious attention. In its broader meaning, meditation describes the state of mind and the practice of expanding the consciousness to its fullest, to awaken to ever deeper and broader aspects of outer and inner reality, to deep self-consciousness, to experiences of satisfaction and serenity, and to develop traits of empathy, listening, openness, and self-wholeness[8].

Defined differently, and perhaps more simply, it is possible to characterize meditation as dedicating time and space to outer and inner quiet, enabling the silencing of the wandering consciousness, connection to deep and present experiences, and inner calm. These appear critical to our ability to connect to our deepest being, to our inner core, to our soul.[9] Zajonc[10] characterized meditative activity as observation and inward listening, a deeper connection to the inner core of a person. Meditation enables both a deeper connection to my innerness and connection to the lofty and exalted surrounding me, as it is said, to something greater than myself.

In educational frameworks, educators are assisted by a variety of tools and methods to reach these meditative goals. The most well-known and prominent among them are Acem, centering prayer, lovingkindness meditation, mindfulness, mindfulness-based stress reduction program, Shamatha, transcendental meditation (TM), Vipassana, and Zen (for a broader survey, see Waters et al.[11] It is important to note that these are directed meditative activity, implemented as a technique and not intended to clash with or harm beliefs, customs, or ways of life of the students.[12]

When examining school programs for meditative activity from the perspectives of effectiveness in teaching and learning, strengthening educational achievements, and creating a more pleasant and sensitive school atmosphere, then the question whether to implement these techniques with children is first a question of effectiveness.[13] Hence, educational research should examine to what extent meditative activity with children in schools achieves the aforementioned goals.[14] One can approach this question from a different angle and ask whether it is at all appropriate to do meditation with children or is meditation an activity designed primarily for adults. Moreover, perhaps the question must first be examined using philosophical and ethical tools before examining it from the angle of effectiveness and ability to achieve external goals, however important those may be. I will attempt to explore these questions by describing two different directions in spiritually inspired education: mindfulness and Waldorf education.

Mindfulness

The source of the technique of mindfulness is in the Buddhist teaching and way of life.[15] During the 20th century, there were mutually influential

relations between the fields of psychology and psychiatry and Buddhism.[16] Harrington and Dunne[17] established that one of the stronger influences, as early as the 1940s and 1950s, on the fields of philosophy and psychoanalysis was the Japanese teacher of Zen Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. Beginning in the 1960s, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi from India had tremendous influence on the founding and disseminating of the technique of TM. At the end of the 1970s, a young scientist by the name of Jon Kabat-Zinn (PhD in biology from MIT) convinced doctors at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in Worcester, Massachusetts to implement a new treatment on patients suffering from chronic illnesses, particularly those suffering from chronic pain. He called the treatment *mindfulness-based stress reduction* (MBSR).[18]

Kabat-Zinn claimed that pain related to disease and physical complications has a mental aspect that is no less significant than the physical one. The relationship of the patient to pain is no less significant and, perhaps, even more than the pain itself. If the patient, through appropriate practice, can learn to accept, recognize, and relate without judgment to his or her pain, it is possible to lessen substantially both the pain and the fear that accompanies it.[19] Kabat-Zinn, himself, was a dedicated student of Buddhist teaching who practiced meditation and who was committed to inner work. He was convinced that precisely in secular society it was possible to help people reduce pain, cope with difficulties and addictions, and accept their lives.[20]. His goal was to present MBSR simply as a technique and to distance it as much as possible from esoteric teachings, new age ideas, and religious imagery. In this way, it would be accepted by the medical establishment and diverse individuals: "to present it as commonsensical, evidence-based, and ordinary, and ultimately a legitimate element of mainstream medical care."[21]

In MBSR treatments and techniques, Kabat-Zinn essentially combined a number of meditation techniques from the Zen Buddhist tradition into a consciousness changing technique.[22] From his perspective, mindfulness meditation in its simple and narrow definition is a systematic practice of conscious attention: the attempt to remain present in the current experience, with a nonjudgmental state of mind, accepting and integrating openness and curiosity.[23] In its broader meaning, it is the state of mind in which the consciousness is opened to its lofty or highest potential. That is, awakening to its high and lofty aspects, but also to the universal aspects of each and every one of us, such as love, mercy, empathy, compassion, happiness, acceptance, and nonjudgment.[24]

MBSR technique spread in circles much broader than aid to patients with chronic pain. Among others, it is implemented today with prisoners, athletes, business people, in military training, in homes for the elderly,

birthing, and by psychologists and therapists with diverse populations.[25] Research has shown that implementation of mindfulness technique proved effective in a wide range of stress related and clinical problems and disorders for various disease groups.[26] In addition, it has been proven that mindfulness techniques can improve the quality of life for nonclinical populations by lowering stress, strengthening self-confidence, raising self-esteem, strengthening the ability to concentrate, and more.[27]

Mindfulness in education systems

Wu and Wenning[28] described in their article how mindfulness penetrated the European and American education systems. Mindfulness came as a response to scientific influences, examinations that rank and compare, and the achievement-driven education systems worldwide, all features that sever the subject from the object. Mindfulness is also the search to strengthen the subject and the search for the source of inner activity, as well as to foster inner qualities. Schools are particularly suited to interventions in the spirit of mindfulness (and, of course, for all types of interventions), where large groups of children can be reached, in particular children living in areas of risk, over the course of the school day.[29] Mindfulness can be used to advance and foster positive qualities and abilities that are preconditions for meaningful learning: ability to concentrate, directing attention, creativity, social abilities, sensitivity, and more.[30]

The task of schools, at every age level, is not only to impart material and teach children how to achieve high grades and to acquire behavioral habits of organization, planning, and discipline. No less important is the fostering of inner qualities and well-being, encouraging personal development, and advancing physical and mental health. These goals bring educators to search for methods that can nurture these qualities and successes. Mindfulness technique can respond to these challenges. Mindfulness is a type of intervention that attempts to work purposefully and consciously on the relevant inner qualities and can operate in parallel to set lessons and as part of the regular school day agenda.[31]

Thus, in the last few years, a number of countries have been implementing mindfulness methods in schools and educational systems with different age groups and in different forms.[32] Ten years ago, the Garrison Institute was established in the United States to promote "contemplation" as a way of building education systems that foster caring, reflection, compassion, creativity, contemplation, and more in elementary and secondary schools. More than a decade ago, the Association for the Contemplative Mind in Higher Education was established. The number of studies on the integration of mindfulness and other meditation techniques in schools has

increased in recent years,[33] and demonstrate positive directions in a number of areas, particularly in advancing learning abilities, lowering stress, and fostering well-being. However, the diversity of study samples, variety in implementation and exercises, and wide range of instruments used require a careful and differentiated examination of data.[34]

Steiner and the anthroposophical worldview

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was a scientist, philosopher, author, and mystic[35] who formulated a worldview he termed "anthroposophy."[36] At the start of the 20th century, Steiner joined the theosophical movement and shortly afterwards became head of the German theosophical society. Steiner became highly critical of the society, and in 1912 he left it to establish the anthroposophical movement.[37] Subsequently, and until his death in 1925, Steiner wrote books and articles and gave thousands of lectures in numerous European countries on diverse anthroposophical topics.[38] Steiner devoted his final years to what he considered as infusing European culture with spiritual impulses sourced in anthroposophy. Through his lectures, articles, and work in the field, Steiner created a basis for art, medicine, agriculture, social movements, education, and special education inspired by an anthroposophical spirit[39].

Steiner's body of research, the anthroposophy, encompasses vast areas of knowledge. Among them are the perspectives of the human as comprised of multiple "bodies;" the view that every human soul holds multiple, repetitive life processes and karmic laws that determine, even prior to one's birth, the significant events of one's life; the view that the earth developed in a series of seven different planetary stages, and thus gave rise to human development of increasingly conscious states; that multiple spiritual entities exist beyond the human and below the human; and that human development includes meditation, observation, exercises in cogitation and emotion, and moral practice, a path that should lead humanity forward in its development.[40]

From anthroposophy to Waldorf education

Waldorf education is primarily based on the ideas of Rudolf Steiner, founder of this educational approach, as laid out in his books, lectures, and studies over a period of several years when he mentored the first school as its principal, and by followers of his approach who study and work in this field to the present day.[41] It is an educational approach based on the spiritual outlook of anthroposophy. The nature of Waldorf education can be seen in the principles set out below.

The child as a spiritual entity

In his many lectures and written works, Steiner expounds upon his own spiritual learning, that the soul of every child originates from a spiritual, universal, and cosmic existence and merely finds its temporary dwelling place in its family: "From the world of the spirit, as though on wings of spirit, the soul of the individual comes to us."[42] Steiner connects at this juncture with a long standing tradition among philosophers and educators that education and teaching are far more comprehensive than merely conveying knowledge, preparation for life, or studying a profession.

The spiritual inspiration of educators ("Study of Man")

Steiner established the spiritual and psychological philosophy upon which Waldorf education is founded. He called this philosophy "Study of Man."[43] He repeatedly encouraged teachers to learn, delve into, and ponder the "Study of Man." For him such deep study served as the basis for the practical act of educating or, as he termed it, "the art of education." He saw an essential connection between the cogitative-contemplative content that the teacher was conveying and deeply exploring and the practice of education, and he worked to reinforce and encourage this connection.[44]

Karma and its significance for education and teaching

Karma and reincarnation are fundamental concepts in the anthroposophic worldview and Steiner lectured and wrote about them repeatedly.[45] For Steiner, it was clear that an educational approach developed from anthroposophy must take into account the psyche in thoughts and consequences related to the ideas of karma and reincarnation.[46]

The holistic view of the child and the educational process

Steiner repeatedly wrote about education and teaching from within the whole person: "It (the pedagogy of the times) must come wholly and solely from knowledge based on the vitality of the whole man."[47] This is a holistic outlook of the human entity or what Steiner called "relating to the whole man."[48] This holistic perspective manifests in many aspects of the Waldorf school: (1) a balance between theoretical, artistic, and physical areas in the curriculum; (2) until graduation pupils experience as many areas of learning as possible and are educated through diverse methods of study and activity without preference or specialization (true for high school as well); (3) daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly agendas allow for balanced, harmonious activity adapted to the specific qualities of the day and year (e.g.,

theoretical study in the early morning, artistic activities in the late morning, and workshop type activities in the early afternoon); (4) integration of all ages from kindergarten through 12th grade on the same school campus, as much as possible, based on the concept that children influence each other positively, and on the perception that being able to observe forwards (older children) and backwards (younger children) is vital to their development; and (5) integration of special needs children into the school as essential to the human educational vista that children must encounter.

Importance of the artistic experience in every teaching and educational process

Steiner used the term *art of education* repeatedly to describe the definitive role of art and artistic processes in the school. Among others he noted that art can empower and nurture feelings; trigger intense emotional experiences; reinforce willpower; balance between "the higher man" and "the lower man;" and must serve as a highly meaningful methodical tool during primary school such that every lesson is in fact art, and art infuses its spirit into every lesson.[49]

The question of meditating with children

The question of meditating with children is multifaceted.[50] Here, examination of the aspects of the constitutional right to freedom of religion and of child development are particularly relevant.

Constitutional right to freedom of religion

As Reveley[51] argued, using schools to target proactively the well-being of young people is by no means an ideologically neutral, welfare enhancement exercise. Contemplative practices come with "baggage" or with a hidden agenda, a worldview associated with spirituality, religion, and mysticism. In fact, sociologists identify the contemporary interest in such practices as signifying a turn to a "mystical society"[52] or "a spiritual revolution."[53]

The incorporation of contemplative practices in school is "constantly accompanied by concerns as to the danger of proselytizing and an ethos of 'secularity' as an interpretation (or misinterpretation) of the First Amendment."[54] As early as the 1970s, the constitutionality of silent meditation and transcendental meditation in schools came before the United States Supreme Court[55]. Ergas[56] suggests three alternatives for "those wishing to incorporate contemplative practices in the curriculum: 1) 'secularize' contemplative practices to comply with the current narrative; 2) re-sacralize

education as an alternative narrative; and 3) walk the thin line 'in-between.'"[57]

Child development

Waldorf education was created and developed from a spiritual worldview: Anthroposophy. As stated above, this spiritual teaching is the source of inspiration for this educational perspective as well as the smallest of its applications (Richter, 2006). Despite this, there is no contact between anthroposophy and the children themselves in Waldorf kindergartens and schools. The children do not learn the principles of anthroposophy, do not practice meditation of any sort, and, in many cases, are unaware of the theory.[58]

In the early days of Waldorf education, Steiner set this relationship between Waldorf education and anthroposophy: "A Waldorf school is not a school belonging to a worldview. We have no desire to bring anthroposophy as theoretical learning material, such as one would a particular religion, for example, before the children."[59] Steiner raises this subject in nearly every book he wrote on education and warns against teaching children the principles of anthroposophy[60]. On the other hand, Steiner required that Waldorf school teachers maintain a tight and constant connection with anthroposophic ideas because Waldorf education was born and grew from "the mother earth of anthroposophy." It is forbidden to forget that connection otherwise "while, indeed, this field or another may have the powers of a long lasting life … these powers will not last forever. The source of life will be blocked."[61]

It is interesting that exactly on this point, the connection between the anthroposophical worldview and the doing in Waldorf schools, there is criticism from different researchers of this educational stream. They claim that Waldorf schools teach the principles of anthroposophy to children under the guise of the regular curriculum.[62] Grandt emphasized this claim in his book: "The fact is that while anthroposophy is perhaps not taught directly, it is wholly practiced in Waldorf schools. That fact is that all teachers receive anthroposophic training; the fact is that the majority of learning material undergoes spiritual and/or mystical conversion."[63]

Whether or not this criticism is correct, there is no doubt the Waldorf schools desire to preserve and strengthen the connection between the anthroposophic worldview and the spirit of the school, the educational atmosphere, and the pedagogical activity in its many and complex details, but that is only through the teachers themselves. They undergo specific training that includes intensive study of anthroposophic texts[64] and regular continuing education sessions, typically weekly, at which they study

Steiner's writings in-depth.[65] Similarly, there is a meditative path suggested to the teachers that is a kind of spiritual-inner preparation and spiritual foundation for working with children in the framework of Waldorf education.[66]

The approach to implementing the technique of mindfulness in the educational system is completely opposite. Mindfulness, as with transcendental meditation, yoga, and many other spiritual techniques,[67] is practiced consciously and with the intention of meditating with children of all school ages. It is not a case of systemic change; rather, in the majority of cases the daily learning schedule remains unchanged and the meditative techniques are simply added. In contrast, Waldorf education is a spiritual worldview that penetrates every facet and detail of school activity, but refrains from implementing spiritual practices with the children themselves. In Waldorf schools, the teachers are exposed to a spiritual path and all that evolves from it, including meditative practice; in the implementation of mindfulness, the spiritual practice is first implemented with the children themselves (and sometimes also with the teachers).

What is the source of the difference? Why did Steiner refrain from practicing meditation with children? What is the fundamental difference between the practice of meditative techniques with adults and a similar practice with children? The source of the difference lies in the question of development. In contrast with other alternative or spiritual educational streams (and with some similarity to the Montessori method of education), Waldorf education is based upon the variable of development.[68] Similar to the great theories of development of the twentieth century,[69] in his research, Steiner draws a more or less uniform developmental line for every girl and boy.[70] This developmental line is the basis for the educational program, instructional methods, dialog with the child, and every other aspect in the educational experience of a Waldorf school.[71] In Waldorf schools, educational and methodological questions are not discussed generally for all age groups, rather, always in light of the question: What is appropriate for children of this specific age and developmental stage?[72]

This is also the source of the conscious separation that Steiner made, and that was preserved by his successors, between adults, independent and possessing judgment and the ability to choose, and children, for whom these qualities are still in formation and as potential that still needs developing. This is also the source of the tremendous difference between Waldorf education and democratic or open education. In Waldorf schools, there is a clear division between classes according to age group, there is no choice given in elementary school (and very little in high school), the authority of the educator is given great weight and there is great significance given to fostering qualities thought of as "childish" from a positive

perspective: creativity, free play, working with one's hands, contact with nature and more.[73]

Here, we return to the fundamental question of this article: Is it appropriate to practice meditation with children?

This article examines the question from the philosophical-theoretical perspective. A quantitative research response will result from studies done on students who underwent meditative techniques in schools. Those studies will be more significant if they are not carried out at the time of the activity but later, at the end of the year, and even better if done at the completion of school. With topics that are so essential and intimate, a retrospective evaluation, after a period of integration and reflection, is critical.

From the philosophical-theoretical perspective we can only present the possibilities and observe them. One possibility is the implementation of spiritual practices as a tool, as a technique (e.g., mindfulness), out of the understanding that these techniques have the power for essential, inner change (advancing learning ability, reducing stress levels, fostering well-being and more), and this without relation to the philosophical-spiritual teaching that stands behind them. It is possible and desirable to integrate these techniques into the regular, daily school schedule. As many studies shows, implementation of spiritual practices have positive influence in diverse areas.[74]

The second possibility is to refrain from exposing children, at least before a certain age, to adult techniques of meditation and internal reflection. This stems from the fact that these are the types of activities that are directed first and foremost to the mature individual and must initiate from the individual's free will. The danger, according to this perspective, is that children will be exposed to adult techniques (even if they are implemented differently and more "softly" for children) and thus will become aware more quickly, and at greater intensity, to the lives of their soul, to their innerness, and to their independent consciousness. Accelerated and rapid maturity, according to many psychologists and researchers of childhood, entails numerous and varied risks.[75]

Spiritual influences that foster and encourage inner development, according to this view, can only be brought to children indirectly, through stories and parables, quiet activity, art and the like, or indirectly through teachers themselves. It is clear that if the teachers are quiet, focused, inclusive, and empathic, they will significantly influence their students in this regard. In this alternative, the dangers of accelerated maturity of the children are reduced. However, it may be that we lose valuable tools that can benefit children and bestow upon them inner qualities particularly important in the industrial and technical age in which we live.

In conclusion, spiritual inspiration in educational activity and in education systems can be accomplished indirectly, through the conscious spiritual work of the teachers themselves, art, literary texts of spiritual content, and the like. Indirect spiritual influence dictates preserving a certain distance between a spiritual worldview and the spiritual methods originating from it and students. Spiritual inspiration can also be direct: experimentation of the students themselves with different spiritual techniques such as yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, and more.

The direct perspective encourages teaching students, of all ages, meditative techniques and practices. These techniques and exercises can help students understand and adjust diverse aspects of their personalities and cope with formal school tasks. In our time, when the qualities of silence, quietude, empathy, listening, and openness are so needed, it seems that we cannot neglect direct, serious development and exercise of these qualities. The second perspective is the attempt to maintain connection—indirectly—of the students with spiritual inspiration while protecting their childhood strengths. This stems from the assumption that these strengths are important for their development and that meditative exercise is a conscious, maturing activity designed for adults only.

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