

Right Mindfulness in Teacher Education: Integrating Buddhist Teachings with Secular Mindfulness to Promote Racial Equity

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Abstract: Despite decades of reform efforts, disparities in schooling persist based on race, threatening the economic and social wellbeing of the United States. Why are there still significant opportunity gaps despite decades of reform efforts to curb inequities? For one, these efforts often overlook the internal habits of mind, or inner nature of inequity, and the ways in which educators may perpetuate racism through unexamined racial biases. Secular mindfulness and its Buddhist origins could help address these harmful habits of mind and transform systems by providing tools for educators to examine their internalized beliefs around race. Realizing the potential of these practices to combat racial inequities in the classroom requires building a stronger bridge between Eastern Buddhism and the individual psychological emphasis of Westernized mindfulness. This critical theoretical paper will examine opportunities for mindfulness interventions in the United States educational context to address inequities through a deeper integration with Eastern contemplative traditions. Implications for researchers and practitioners will be presented to explore how mindfulness practices in the West might be expanded and utilized in service of racial justice.



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1. Introduction

The research on secular mindfulness began in the 1970s with Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), the first and most widely studied mindfulness intervention to date. MBSR has roots in Zen, Theravada, Tibetan, and Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhism; however, explicit connections to these traditions have largely been removed in an effort to secularize the training [1]. MBSR teaches a variety of yoga and meditation practices aimed to help chronically ill patients manage stress, anxiety, depression, and pain. Today, the program has been adapted for many contexts, including schools [2]. Despite this expansion, the aims and outcomes of secular mindfulness interventions have not changed drastically and continue to be somewhat disconnected from their Buddhist roots, primarily focused on clinical applications related to individual health and wellbeing [3].

The majority of mindfulness interventions in school settings have similarly been used to address individual wellbeing, such as reducing stress and anxiety in individual teachers and students [4]. Mindfulness in this context is primarily considered to be a self-help or self-care strategy [4]. The expansion of secular mindfulness and its focus on the individual has not been without critique, and many scholars argue that mindfulness separated from its Buddhist origins is decontextualized, self-serving, and in some cases, harmful [3,5,6]. Buddhist traditions place great emphasis on the ethical dimensions of mindfulness practice, which is one piece of a larger schema for both individual and collective wellbeing and awakening [7]. Without the Buddhist context, mindfulness risks being practiced with indifference towards others, further perpetuating inequities and harm [8].

In public school settings, vast racial inequities persist between student groups, leading to disparate academic and behavioral outcomes [9,10]. Mindfulness practiced in these

settings without an acknowledgment of the racial harm and suffering caused by educational institutions risks perpetuating harm instead of remedying it. For example, the majority of mindfulness studies in school settings do not explicitly address the harmful thoughts and actions that arise from racial biases, making it possible for educators to practice mindfulness while perpetuating racial suffering through unaddressed biases [6]. Thus, there is an opportunity to integrate mindfulness with the ethical dimensions of Buddhist teachings to ensure that the practice is used to support both individual and collective wellbeing in classrooms [11].

Scholars have begun to explore and encourage an expansion from mindfulness to “right mindfulness” to move beyond a set of decontextualized meditative practices to include a stronger connection with the Buddhist Eightfold Path, which provides a method for attaining liberation from suffering through good moral conduct, mental development, and the cultivation of wisdom [11,12]. This expanded view holds practitioners accountable for their actions, particularly in reducing the suffering of others. As Greenberg and Mitra assert, “If reduction in suffering for an individual results in increased suffering for the community, whether or not as a result of conscious attention, then such practice cannot be considered right mindfulness” [11] (p. 77). Applying the concept of “right mindfulness” to mindfulness in education could lead to more equitable classrooms by encouraging practitioners to become more aware of racial suffering. For example, right mindfulness could support teachers in becoming more aware of unaddressed biases and how they may influence their instructional decisions, which research tells us contributes to the differential treatment of students of color [13,14].

The popularity and momentum behind the mindfulness movement in the West suggests an interest and yearning among Westerners to incorporate aspects of Buddhism and contemplative traditions into their lives, including in educational settings. This critical theoretical paper will explore the possibilities of expanding secular mindfulness to be used not only as a tool for individual wellbeing but also as a tool for liberation in educational contexts in particular. First, the problems that arise from unaddressed and unexamined educator bias and internalized racism will be explored, along with the ways in which secularized mindfulness interventions in their current form may be contributing to perpetuating these biases. Returning to the historical underpinnings of mindfulness practices grounded in Eastern traditions and namely Buddhism, the potential for mindfulness to support liberation through addressing bias and cultivating a critical consciousness in educators will then be examined. Practical strategies and applications on ways to use mindfulness as a liberatory tool in the fight for justice in education will be shared.

Positionality Statement

We write this paper from an interdisciplinary perspective, bringing background and expertise from the fields of psychology and education as well as shared research interests in mindfulness-based interventions and their applications to racial and social justice work. LR approaches this topic from the perspective of a White cisgender female educator who discovered mindfulness in her first year of teaching, recognizing immediately how regular practice influenced her thinking around issues of inequity and racial justice in the classroom. Through these personal experiences, she gained firsthand exposure to the potential for mindfulness to inform equity work. She now studies mindfulness-based interventions as tools to support educators in building and sustaining a critical consciousness informed by both Buddhism and Eastern philosophy. DC identifies as a second-generation Chinese American cisgender woman, licensed clinical psychologist, and faculty member in a social work department. Her primary areas of research and clinical practice center on issues affecting the mental health of racial and ethnic minority communities, including racism in its structural, interpersonal, and internalized forms. Her interests in contemplative practices are inspired in part by her personal experiences of coping with oppression and marginalization as a woman of color living and working in predominantly White spaces,

and her explorations of mindfulness as a pedagogical and therapeutic tool to facilitate the development of critical consciousness in educational and clinical settings.

2. Educator Bias and Internalized Racism

Evidence suggests that despite their training and credentialing, the teaching population is frequently susceptible to harboring implicit biases towards historically marginalized groups in society, including students of color and students diagnosed with disabilities [13–15]. Recent studies have identified that in fact the majority of teachers in the United States harbor implicit biases and do so at roughly the same rate as the general population (77%) [13,14]. In classrooms, these biases can manifest in preferential treatment towards white students and more severe punishments and lower academic expectations for students of color [14,16–18]. On a larger scale, these biases contribute to persistent racial and ethnic disparities in math and reading test scores, access to rigorous coursework and advanced classes, placement in special education, and graduation rates [9,10,19].

While the need to shift biases is dire, addressing internalized racism and bias can be quite challenging. For one, biases are often subconscious, or implicit, learned through socialization and reinforced by the environment [20]. For instance, associating Black men with deviant labels is routinely reinforced through media and other cultural outlets [21,22]. Once a bias like this is activated, it can lead to negative perceptions and harmful reactions, such as imposing harsher disciplinary actions for Black youth in schools [23]. Additionally, teachers often experience higher cognitive load given the many demands they must balance at once in the classroom. This cognitive load can take mental capacity away from monitoring and addressing bias, making it easier to react impulsively to biased thoughts and feelings as they arise [24].

Given these challenges, it is perhaps not surprising that training designed to reduce bias has been largely unsuccessful, more often changing short term knowledge than long term behaviors [25]. Typically, interventions targeting bias have involved activities such as thinking positively about stereotyped groups, thinking about bias when making important decisions, and making decisions more slowly [26]. While some of these interventions have led to immediate gains, they are often not sustained for more than a day or two [21]. Instead, shifting the impacts of bias on educators' instructional practices may require a deeper self-awareness and understanding of the ways automatic associations may influence their practice. Becoming aware, for example, of how bias influences certain classroom decisions, such as the expectations they set for students, may support educators in shifting their actions to be more equitable [27].

One, often overlooked, lever in the reproduction of inequity and the perpetuation of bias is the internal habits of mind, or the inner nature of inequity, that serves to maintain the status quo and feelings of superiority/inferiority based on race [28]. While many theorists call for individual interrogation and critical reflection to address internalized racism and to decolonize our minds [27,29], few tools exist to support this kind of ongoing self-reflection and interrogation moment to moment. Mindfulness, the practice of training one's attention and cultivating greater insight into and awareness of the present moment, offers an approach to support the inner work required to unlearn and address harmful habits of mind, such as racial bias, and transform systems from the inside out by examining and transforming internal beliefs around race [30].

Mindfulness offers a promising tool for decreasing racial bias and the harmful effects of internalized racism in educators while supporting overall mental clarity and awareness moment to moment [31]. Mindfulness practice could aid educators in slowing down and noticing when harmful habits of mind are cropping up, providing an opportunity to decide how to respond instead of reacting instinctually. In a classroom environment that is often chaotic, a tool to slow down and increase insight and awareness could be essential to shifting educator practice by increasing awareness of bias as well as reducing emotional reactivity, enabling educators to respond more compassionately when harmful biases arise. While promising in theory, few mindfulness interventions to date have

attempted to explicitly address issues of race and racism in education or the impacts of bias in educators' instruction [32–34]. In what follows, a brief overview of the current applications of mindfulness interventions for teachers in the United States context will be presented, followed by a critique of their aims and an exploration of how a return to Eastern contemplative traditions may support efforts to align mindfulness practice with social and racial justice work in education.

3. A Review of Mindfulness Interventions with Teachers

In recent years, the use of mindfulness interventions in school settings, and for educators in particular, has expanded significantly [2]. Despite the promising possibilities of mindfulness practice to be used as a tool for equity and to address bias, rarely have studies focused on outcomes pertaining to social justice. Instead, teacher wellness and mental health are often the focus of mindfulness interventions in schools [4]. For instance, in a recent systematic review of the impact of mindfulness on the wellbeing and performance of teachers, the majority of the studies included targeted outcomes related to mental health, including anxiety, burnout, resilience, depression, distress, anger, and emotional regulation [34]. In a second systematic review of mindfulness interventions for teachers, the outcomes targeted were similarly focused on individual mental health, and included stress, emotional regulation, and self-efficacy [33]. In a third systematic review, the authors found that, similarly, the majority of outcomes in the studies included were related to teacher wellbeing and performance [32].

While many of the mindfulness intervention studies with educators theorize about how improved emotional wellness in teachers could benefit students, there is no direct measure of student level variables in the majority of the mindfulness studies with educators. In fact, little is known about the effects of these interventions on instruction and specifically student outcomes despite the pivotal role teachers play in upholding/deconstructing inequities in their classrooms [32,33]. Thus, teachers may feel less stressed after practicing mindfulness while simultaneously perpetuating harm and inequities in their classrooms through unchecked and unexamined racial biases resulting in instructional decisions that privilege some students over others [11]. This limited, and potentially harmful, application of mindfulness represents both a problem and an opportunity. Understanding the ways in which mindfulness interventions with educators have fallen short while considering how mindfulness, a practice of cultivating greater awareness and insight, might aid in the fight for social justice in education offers a promising next step for the field.

Critique of Mindfulness Interventions for Teachers

The growing interest in the study of mindfulness with teachers has not been without critique. One recent study examined a mindfulness intervention designed for preservice teachers in an urban teacher residency program located in the southeastern region of the United States through the lenses of critical race theory and critical whiteness studies [5]. They found that the training not only missed opportunities for racial justice work, but in fact perpetuated harmful ideas including race-neutral ideology and individualism as a means to subvert systems of oppression. The authors argued that “the focus on the individual may discourage teachers from engaging in collective efforts towards systemic change” [5] (p. 594). They go on to say, “we must stop treating the symptoms of compounding injustice evidenced as teacher burnout, chronic stress, and low teacher retention, among others and, instead, confront the systemic levers of injustice through developing teachers that are critically conscious, compassionate, and well” [5] (p. 595). Addressing the downstream effects of systemic oppression, while important, should occur alongside efforts to address the root causes and factors that perpetuate it [29]. Without a direct reckoning with racial oppression, educators may perpetuate it through their own unexamined harmful habits of mind and subsequent actions.

Other scholars have raised similar concerns as secular mindfulness has grown in popularity, warning that Westernized mindfulness practices in their current form preserve

the status quo by providing a means of coping with systemic oppression and the social suffering that it causes [35]. In this way, secularized mindfulness practices discourage a critical interrogation of the ways in which the status quo perpetuates harm. Mindfulness used in this way has “overstated internal pathology while understating environmental stressors” [35] (p. 212), thus maintaining an ignorance to the broader, systemic causes of suffering. This ignorance enables the status quo and the suffering caused by systemic oppression to continue, unchecked and unaddressed.

Similarly, an argument has been made that Westernized mindfulness is commercialized and productized, serving to uphold neoliberal ideals through pacifying individual practitioners and providing a means of managing and anesthetizing the suffering caused by capitalism [6]. In this way, mindfulness risks upholding and even accommodating inequities and oppression by discouraging the questioning of the deeply rooted racial ideologies that perpetuate suffering and injustice [11]. Furthermore, the medicalization of mindfulness practice and the overwhelming focus on individual health places blame on individuals for their suffering, further distracting practitioners from observing the environmental and systemic roots of our collective suffering caused by oppression [6].

The many problems associated with Westernized mindfulness practices may lead one to wonder why attempts should be made at all to transform the use of the practice in Western societies and specifically in education. The reason lies in the fact that racial justice requires inner work and a deep understanding of the ways in which racism and racial ideologies, situated within dominant cultural values and narratives, lives in and through individuals [28]. Michel Foucault once said that “power passes through individuals” [36] (p. 29) and that by not living with an awareness of the ways in which society upholds racial hierarchies, individuals become complicit and perpetuate the status quo through their thoughts and actions. In a similar vein, Paulo Freire argues that it is only through cultivating a critical consciousness and awareness of systemic oppression that collective emancipation may become possible [29]. Mindfulness offers a tool to investigate how power passes through educators, while maintaining a critical consciousness and awareness in their day-to-day interactions with students [36]. For educators, the classroom can serve as a site of social reproduction or of disruption of inequities and the status quo, and maintaining a constant, moment to moment, critical awareness of the ways in which classrooms uphold or disrupt this cycle of reproduction can be supported through mindfulness practice.

The bridging of Eastern and Western ideals could help support a collective movement towards liberation aided by mindfulness practice [6]. Western dominant culture, and specifically its preoccupation with the external reinforced through both materialism and consumerism, often discourages internal development and the cultivation of wisdom and morality [6]. This is apparent in the education system, which at present focuses predominantly on acquiring knowledge through “a banking system” approach instead of focusing on the development and cultivation of insight and wisdom present within all students [29]. Mindfulness, and specifically mindfulness informed by Eastern traditions and Buddhism, provides a tool to support this internal work [37]. It is in this way that mindfulness can benefit education and specifically educator development by supporting the ongoing, moment to moment awareness required to unlearn and resist oppressive forms of schooling that work to control and inhibit flourishing. It is only through a constant and consistent practice of honing one’s awareness coupled with a willingness to see the ways in which collective suffering in the form of racial oppression is perpetuated that one can begin to disrupt and transform racial inequities in education.

4. Mindfulness as an Eastern Tradition

The present-day applications of mindfulness and the problematic nature of many mindfulness interventions in the Western world resemble very few aspects of the Eastern practices that preceded and informed them [6,7]. While mindfulness can be traced back to many religious traditions that encourage contemplative practice, secular mindfulness is often considered to be adapted from Eastern Buddhist meditative practices. As mindfulness

has migrated to the Western world, elements of traditional mindfulness practices have been cherry picked and others strategically left out in order to secularize the practice [38]. In doing so, there has been an emphasis on the individual, with claims that meditation can lead to greater self-fulfillment and happiness [1]. This is not the original nor sole intent of the practice, and in fact the larger system of Buddhist beliefs and practices place great emphasis on the ethical and moral dimensions of mindfulness meditation, which is just one piece of a much larger pathway towards collective awakening [12,38].

Central to Buddhist teachings is the belief that the origin of suffering is ‘dukkha’, or attachment to self. Thus, foundational to mindfulness in its original form is detachment from self or the experiencing of no-self, which is an embodied, direct experience that is not intellectual in nature [39]. This notion comes into tension with Western individualism and consumer culture, which rely upon attachment to material goods and services to function [38]. Capitalism thrives on the constant seeking of fleeting pleasures and the avoidance of pain. Racism, too, is sustained in part through an attachment to privilege and power on the part of the white dominant group [38]. The Buddhist teachings of impermanence and no-self make evident that this attachment to pleasure and aversion from pain is an illusion and claim it to be the source of suffering [12]. Mindfulness meditation is one tool used to uncover and illuminate the nature of reality and suffering in Buddhist traditions, while supporting a path to collective liberation. These teachings go beyond an aim of merely achieving individual satisfaction and instead suggest that we are all interconnected, and our actions should be in service of others and of the wellbeing of our collective society [40].

There are parallels that can be drawn from the Buddhist doctrines and addressing present day inequity, specifically in the early literature about the life of the historical Buddha as well as in the doctrines of the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path. Throughout the Buddha’s life, he rejected the notion of perceived superiority based on social status [41]. In India, this superiority was determined based on caste and can be likened to current racial hierarchies in the West [42,43]. The Buddha rejected the notion of separateness and difference amongst human beings, recognizing the common humanity that exists across race and class, and required his followers to give up their social privileges and caste status to join him [44]. “The Buddha stressed the fact that, biologically, man is of one species, and on this ground” and thus no man is superior or inferior to another [12] (p. 329). Finally, the Buddha taught that it is actions, not social status, that determine one’s moral character. These teachings encourage leading a life that denounces and disrupts social hierarchies. They also challenge followers to give up, or detach from, power and privilege and the social status that accompanies them in order to enter the path towards liberation [37]. While the culture surrounding the Buddha’s initial teachings was built upon a system of castes and hierarchies, which likely perpetuated the universal problems of othering and bias, the Buddha’s philosophy explicitly opposed these structures. In the United States context, the caste system is akin to modern day racial hierarchies [45]. The Buddha’s teachings in the US context similarly suggest that in order to be collectively liberated and awakened requires giving up, or detaching from, status and privilege. This is particularly poignant in classrooms, where teachers wield a great deal of power in their instructional decisions. Creating classroom spaces where power is distributed and students have an equal voice in their learning is one application of these teachings in a modern day educational context.

In addition to the Buddha’s early teachings, the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path provide additional insights for disrupting inequity. The Four Noble Truths claim that (1) to be human is to suffer, (2) the origin of suffering is ignorance, desire, and attachment, (3) ending suffering requires letting go of attachments, and (4) the way to end suffering is through the Eightfold Path [46]. The Eightfold Path offers a guide to reduce the suffering of self and others and consists of: right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration, right view, and right thought [47]. These Truths and the Noble Path present clear directions for reducing suffering for all through the cultivation of wisdom, attention, and virtue [12]. They also emphasize ethical and wholesome conduct

based on a foundational principle of compassion for all living beings that transcends selfish needs and desires [48].

The Eightfold Path, which teaches practitioners how to live ethically and morally by ensuring thoughts and actions reduce suffering for all, offers strategies for confronting and disrupting systemic inequities. Mindfulness taught alongside the “right” or moral practices of the Eightfold Path can support a collective confrontation with suffering caused by inequities in service of sustained change. Practicing right mindfulness, one factor of the path, supports monitoring and cultivating an awareness of bias, differential attitudes towards marginalized students, and thoughts of superiority/inferiority based on race. Right effort, a second factor of the path, encourages one to engage in actions to counter these biases and unwholesome thoughts as they arise. Right view, the next factor, can further encourage practitioners to take responsibility for their actions by considering the consequences of their actions, particularly related to racial harm. Right intention supports developing intentions grounded in compassion and non-harm, ensuring that communication and interactions in the classroom are not damaging or disrespectful. Finally, right speech, right action, and right livelihood support practitioners in deeply considering how their speech, actions and work practices are impacting their classroom communities and specifically how they are disrupting or perpetuating racial inequities. This expanded view of mindfulness represents a shift from solely focusing on the self to thinking about the self in the context of the broader system to ensure one’s thoughts and actions support wholesome outcomes and reduced suffering for all [48].

Integrating the Buddhist teachings associated with moral living in addition to practicing mindfulness in schools may provide the ethical foundation required to address racial inequities. While Buddhism originated in a culture with social hierarchies in the form of castes similar to racial hierarchies in the US, the Buddha denounced the attachment to power and privilege that define one’s social status. Thus, the practices encourage a resistance to systemic inequities that perpetuate social hierarchies. The practices specifically can inform deep internal and external transformation as more individuals notice harm and shift how they respond, not as bystanders but as active agents collectively confronting suffering and being a force for positive change. Examples of Buddhist teachers who have explicitly linked Buddhist ethical teachings, mindfulness, and social justice include Thich Nhat Hanh, Gina Sharpe, Larry Yang, Reverend angel Kyodo Williams, and Rhonda Magee.

Contemplative Pedagogy and Educational Equity

The Eastern underpinnings of mindfulness present an opportunity to transform the ways in which mindfulness is practiced in much of the Western world and particularly in education. Learning from the ways mindfulness is practiced in Eastern traditions and Buddhism can help shift the use of mindfulness as a practice for personal wellness to mindfulness as a practice for racial justice and freedom. While promising, there are several challenges that may arise through an attempt to explicitly promote Buddhist teachings in K-12 schooling. For one, the religious associations connected to Buddhism as an ideology may be rejected by educators given the secularized nature of public schools in the United States. Instead of explicitly teaching Buddhism, the Buddhist teachings that underlie mindfulness may instead be adopted as a guide or framework that supports teaching mindfulness as a tool to confront and address racial inequities and the suffering caused by them [6,7]. Additionally, these teachings may be integrated with efforts that schools are already taking to promote the ethical and moral development of students, efforts that may be enhanced by integrating aspects of Buddhism and mindfulness practice.

Many of the foundational principles arising from Buddhism, such as promoting good moral conduct, are commonly taught in schools all over the world, arising and informed by various religious traditions and providing a strong basis for this work to take shape [49–51]. Buddhism offers a unique approach to teaching ethical and moral principles in schools as it is internally focused, emphasizing self-reflection and awareness in order to address harmful habits of mind such as bias in our perceptions. This approach can complement pre-existing

approaches to teaching ethics and morality in schools [49–51]. This internal focus may be particularly efficacious in schools and for educators as evidence of the prevalence and deleterious impacts of unaddressed bias emerge.

Aspects of the ethical and moral principles embraced in Buddhism already exist in K-12 schools and can be used as a starting point for integrating ethics and morality into mindfulness practices in schools. For example, social and emotional learning curricula commonly taught in public school settings often include elements associated with developing social awareness and prosocial skills [52]. Integrating these moral and ethical dimensions that extend beyond a focus on the individual and encompass a focus on the collective classroom community could strengthen mindfulness practices in service of racial justice [53]. At the same time, mindfulness practice could strengthen these pre-existing programs, promoting greater self-awareness and emancipatory instruction by offering a tool to investigate the self and the ways in which power and privilege may influence one's outlook and actions [30].

Contemplative pedagogy, an instructional approach that has largely arisen in higher education, attempts to address some of the moral and ethical dimensions of mindfulness practices informed by contemplative traditions, including Buddhism. This approach captures the essence of the ethical dimensions of Buddhism by promoting a more reflective and liberatory approach to education without explicitly teaching Buddhist concepts and instead drawing from a number of contemplative traditions [30]. Using mindfulness, for example, as a tool to examine one's own experience of racial oppression and as a tool to aid conversations around race is one application of contemplative pedagogy in service of racial justice [30]. Other applications of contemplative pedagogy include educating the whole child and considering the impacts of racial oppression and systemic injustice as a key element of education [54].

While few studies on contemplative pedagogy exist in K-12 educational settings, there is emerging empirical evidence both outside of education and in higher education settings supporting the efficacy of integrating contemplative pedagogy and mindfulness practices taught through a moral and ethical lens. Outside of education, one study found that, in comparison with a mindfulness only condition, a mindfulness condition enhanced with Buddhist ethics resulted in increased prosocial behavior and trait empathy [55]. A second study found that while a mindfulness only condition led to an increase in mindfulness, a mindfulness and ethics condition led to increases in self-compassion and well-being [56].

In higher education, promising findings are similarly emerging to support the integration of mindfulness with aspects of the ethical dimensions of Buddhism. One recent study found positive changes in interpersonal and social well-being following a 25-day meditation course for counseling students guided by contemplative pedagogy and aspects of Buddhist principles [57]. A second study found that students were more readily able to discuss social justice issues and to deeply reflect on their own personal experiences through contemplative pedagogy with an ethical bent [58]. A third study found that students exposed to contemplative teaching methods grounded in communal values enhanced their levels of cognitive empathy, attunement with others, perspective taking and their tolerance of ambiguity [59]. A fourth study found that contemplative pedagogy and mindfulness resulted in increased self-awareness and mental clarity, which the study found led to greater feelings of empathy [60]. While promising, each of these studies were conducted with students in higher education classroom contexts. Studies in K-12 settings examining the impacts of contemplative pedagogy and mindfulness grounded in morality and ethics were difficult to identify, and there is an opportunity to expand and explore this promising line of research and how it might specifically inform racial justice work in education.

There is an opportunity to extend the work on contemplative pedagogy in higher education and to consider its application in K-12 school settings, where mindfulness practices could be taught in conjunction with social justice work, capturing some of the essence of Buddhist teachings without explicitly teaching Buddhist concepts in a secular setting. For educators, practicing mindfulness as a means to address and unlearn bias and

internalized racism is one way in which this new approach might be applied in teacher education. We will explore implications for research and practice in K-12 teacher education below.

5. Integrating Mindfulness into Critical Teacher Education

Given the possibilities presented for mindfulness to support racial justice work in education, there is an opportunity to explore practical strategies for integrating mindfulness into critical teacher education and development. This approach represents a divergence from much of the mindfulness literature to date in education, which instead has focused on individual wellbeing in students and teachers without an explicit mention of justice and equity [33]. Shifting the focus of future mindfulness interventions designed for educators in particular to be informed by the ethical and moral dimensions of Buddhism not only presents promise in addressing inequities in classrooms but also may support larger aims for the practice that incorporate both individual and collective wellbeing.

There are a variety of methods through which this approach may be integrated into teacher education. First, mindfulness training may accompany and strengthen preexisting racial justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training for educators by providing a tool to deeply reflect on and interrogate one's personal experiences and the ways power and privilege show up in their interactions with students and in their teaching practices. Learning about the ways in which power and racial oppression operate in society and specifically in schools while simultaneously taking time to investigate through mindfulness how one's internal experiences may reflect elements of the broader dominant culture can strengthen the efficacy of racial justice training by ensuring that it is embodied and not merely an intellectual exercise [30,54].

Second, mindfulness training can support educators in cultivating and maintaining compassion and empathy for all students, guiding them to let go of potential judgements and assumptions they might hold towards certain students. Studies have identified a connection between mindfulness practice and greater feelings of compassion and empathy, which could support a reduction in harmful thoughts or biases [54,61,62]. Integrating mindfulness practices that promote prosociality, perspective-taking, and compassion, such as loving kindness meditation, into teacher education may support educators in replacing harmful thoughts based on stereotypes with more positive feelings towards and perceptions of all students [63]. At the same time, mindfulness practice can support cultivating self-compassion, which may help alleviate the overwhelm and guilt that teachers may feel in response to racial inequity, which can prompt defensive and avoidant behaviors that perpetuate inequity. In this way, developing self-compassion through mindfulness practice can support educators in sitting with the discomfort that racial equity work requires [30].

Third, practicing mindfulness regularly and taking mindful pauses throughout the teaching day can invite both wisdom and insight from a critically conscious perspective, which may positively impact instructional decision making. By paying attention to what is arising moment to moment without judgment, it is possible to become acquainted with inner experiences and judgements that may have otherwise been implicit or subconscious [64,65]. There is preliminary evidence suggesting that mindfulness may reduce implicit and explicit bias; however, these effects have not yet been explored with educators or in education [66–68]. There is an opportunity to explore if educators who take time to practice mindfulness regularly may exhibit less bias in their instructional decisions. Encouraging schools and school leaders to support this work could further ensure that it is sustained. Leaders can encourage their teaching staff to integrate mindful breaks into their teaching day to invite greater awareness into their instructional decisions. For example, they may model this approach by starting staff meetings with a brief mindfulness practice and they may reinforce the use of mindfulness in classrooms through their ongoing training and coaching of teachers.

Finally, mindfulness can support and encourage regular reflection to help teachers identify when they engage in harmful practices and how they can change them. Contem-

plative pedagogy integrates mindful journaling and reflective writing, for example, as pedagogical tools to support a deep interrogation of the ways in which power has informed past practices and how to shift one's engagement in these practices [30,54]. Identifying the ways in which "power passes through us" through dominant cultural narratives and noticing when these narratives crop up in one's teaching practices can be supported through mindfulness and the ability to observe thoughts and feelings without reacting immediately [36] (p. 29). This observation can support identifying the often-subtle ways in which racial ideologies and biases permeate one's thoughts and actions in a racialized society like the United States. It is only through a deeper awareness of oneself that biased thoughts informed by harmful messages in society can be brought to bear and ultimately shifted.

6. Conclusions

Cultivating a mindfulness practice that supports developing a deeper awareness of inequity and with the aim of reducing suffering for all should be the goal of future training in education. It is only through this shift and expansion of the current construct that we may begin to use mindfulness practices more ethically, specifically to confront the evils of oppression and the deep suffering caused by educational disparities. As more light is shed on systemic oppression, tools are needed to help restore and heal while also increasing awareness of the ways oppressions have been internalized and how they manifest in the world. Seeing the interconnected nature of the system can lead to a deeper understanding of the impacts of one's thoughts and actions on others and the opportunity to change. Expanding mindfulness interventions in schools to include both an examination of self and of one's impact on others will not only lead to a reduction in harm but could also lead to greater equity and positive social change in classrooms.

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