TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR
A POST-MATERIALIST AGE

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Summary

This paper recognises that humanity has entered a post-materialist era and begins to address the hitherto marginalised educational implications of such. It will draw upon a synthesis of East-Asian spiritual traditions, quantum, integral and transpersonal theory to posit unity-consciousness, sometimes referred to as nonduality, as an ontological primitive. The paper will argue that learning about unity-consciousness constitutes an educational entitlement and can be understood as a pedagogical process. However, such an idealist understanding is undermined by scientific rationalism and educational orthodoxy, which instead propagates a deeply conditioned and apparently separate sense of self, with destructive individual and collective consequences. The potential of contemplative, integral and transpersonal approaches to education is examined towards the end of the paper. All of these approaches offer greater depth than mindfulness in education, which can be easily appropriated by neoliberal, materialistic, agendas. Ultimately, a programme of deconditioning and relearning is necessary within education if its ancient allegiance to human flourishing is to be realised.
Introduction

A spectre haunts the physical sciences, – the challenge of explaining sentient beings able to have subjective first-person experience, sometimes referred to as the ‘hard problem of consciousness’ (Beauregard et al 2014, Kastrup 2014, Nagel 2012, Sheldrake 2012). Famously, quantum mechanics has contested the post-Enlightenment hegemony of materialism, by showing that consciousness plays a fundamental role in creating reality and must be accommodated by subsequent theorisation (Levy 2018). Consequently, progressive researchers have turned to panpsychicism or property-dualism, where consciousness and the material world both exist synergistically, or idealism, which posits consciousness precedes all else (Haisch 2009). Although panpsychism and property dualism have gathered some popularity and momentum, these are really materialism in disguise (Kastrup 2019) and hence this paper adopts an idealistic position. This paper explores the educational implications of a post-materialist age, an era that started in the mid-twentieth century but whose radical implications have yet to be fully embraced.

The nature of consciousness as an ontological primitive will be introduced, drawing upon a synthesis of ancient East-Asian spirituality, quantum, integral and transpersonal theories, all implying a seamlessness to experience/reality. Understanding this idealist position, sometimes referred to as unity-consciousness or nonduality (Almaas 2004, Loy 2018), represents both an educational entitlement and pedagogic process. This paper will argue that the orthodoxy of modern western education, rooted in scientific-rationalism and a denial of ‘spirit’, propagates a conditioned and an apparently separate sense of self, which underlines much individual and collective human suffering, from mental ill-health to global threats such as nationalism, warfare and the species’ hitherto destructive stewardship of the environment. The final sections of the paper will discuss the potentiality of contemplative, integral and transpersonal approaches to education for harmonising with post-materialist understanding and conclude that comprehensive reform is necessary.
Post-materialism

In February 2014, a number of eminent, if marginalised, scientists and thinkers met in Arizona to discuss the limitations of current scientific thinking and research culture, culminating in a post-materialist manifesto (Beauregard et al 2014). The writings of Bernardo Kastrup (Kastrup 2014, 2016, 2019), drawn upon in this article, have also done much to reengage idealism with credibility. Amongst the contentions of post-materialists is a central role for consciousness within or as the fabric of reality. In this section, this paper argues that understanding the nature of consciousness is an educational entitlement and experiencing unity-consciousness itself can be understood as an educational process, which currently tends to occur outside of formal education.

The ontological fundamentality of unity-consciousness

Discussion of the nature of consciousness is tantamount to discussion of the nature of ‘self’. In much western thought, consensus centres on a separate, if phenomenological, ‘self’ and a knowable material external world. In ancient East-Asian philosophy and spirituality there is a greater sense of unity between self/reality. Acknowledging that many different interpretations of ‘self’, even ‘nonduality’, exist in the literature (Ergas and Ritter 2020, Loy 2019), this paper draws upon the heritage of those East-Asian wisdom traditions that assert a nonduality of subject-object, primarily Buddhism, Vedānta and Taoism, to underpin the idea of unity-consciousness used throughout this paper. This unity is not unique to these perspectives, with forms of western philosophy, mysticism and esotericism (Kingsely 2003, Magee 2016) also alluding to a similar relationship, which also poses much synergy with the findings of quantum theory (Levy 2018).

Modern western schooling remains a relic of an industrial-age, informed by a largely unchallenged materialistic scientific paradigm that propagates a separate sense of self as orthodoxy. Gatto (2017) condemns education as a process of keeping people
‘unenlightened’, educated only enough to take a position in society that favours its reproduction in favour of the powerful. To polemicise further, part of this ‘dumbing-down’ suppresses discussion of spirit and denies students much opportunity to explore the nature of consciousness and that such an opportunity actually constitutes an educational entitlement. The consequences of this neglect, according to Ergas (2017), Kohn (2011) and Mayes (2020) are that individuals internalise destructive narratives about the meaning of their lives, which are located around productive logic.

Yet, the materialism that dominates scientific and educational discourse is theoretical and surprisingly contestable, not least for its explanatory power of consciousness, the very means through which a subject knows their world (Nagel 2012). Science, as empirical first-person understanding, has much in common with spiritual-inquiry but Sheldrake (2012) argues that modern science makes many materialist assumptions that are highly contentious when properly examined, to such an extent that adherence to these maxims can itself be seen as religious, even dogmatic, practice. Analysing materialism and consciousness, Kastrup (2014, 2019) indicates there are two major issues with reducing all mental phenomenon to physical arrangements. It fails to show how non-mental material phenomena suddenly become conscious upon aggregation or how matter organises itself into coherence should all material be conscious, as suggested by panpsychism. Such is the quandary posed by these challenges, many materialists deny first-person experience all together (e.g. Dennett 1993), suggesting that consciousness must be some epiphenomenon or ‘side-effect’ of biological life.

Alternatively, the nature of reality could be posited as mental, or idealistic, and that consciousness is an ontological primitive. Kastrup (2019) shows such a position to be more coherent and parsimonious than a materialist account. Numerous theories offer a ‘middle way’; biocentrism (Lanza 2009), enactment (Varela, Thompson & Rosch 2017) and an ‘informed universe’ (Laszlo 2007) all being examples. Any serious inquiry into the sub-atomic nature of reality shows it to be informational and non-local however, so Kastrup (2014, 2019) guards against potential ‘false-friends’, models that are materialism in disguise (e.g. panpsychism).
A post-materialist view is entirely consistent with the empirical findings of quantum theory. Now famous experiments (e.g. double slit) show how the presence of a conscious observing agent, literally creates the world by collapsing the potentiality of wave functions into particles (Levy 2018). There is no certainty that anything exists in a given time and space; sub-atomically particles exist everywhere and nowhere (van Gordon et al 2016). Rovelli (2017) argues that it is uncontested, theoretically and experimentally, that the physical world does not exist autonomously. Yet, post-materialist knowledge has not percolated into mainstream society for whatever reason and this is an educational concern. Conjecturing why this may be the case; the technical achievements of materialism have been compelling and there may be vested interests in preserving forms of hegemony that have co-developed alongside these advancements despite discrepancies existing between actual scientific understanding, its application and education. Immediate day-to-day experience also fools an individual’s perception in a way that is utterly convincing and it is difficult to see through the illusory nature of reality (Hoffman 2019). However, understanding the actual nature of consciousness underlines deeper learning, healing and transformation at individual, collective and global levels (Metzner 2017, Mayes 2020).

Seeing reality as it is

Kastrup (2019) explores the fact that individuals appear to perceive a shared reality by explaining this phenomenon as a ‘dissociative-state’ he calls an ‘alter’. With such theorisation, Kastrup avoids a pitfall identified by Loy (2019); when one wishes to describe the nondual experience there are generally two alternatives; either disregard the object or disregard the subject. Although this idealist manoeuvre appears to negate the object, Kastrup is actually articulating a unified-reality with self-contained islets of the same material, ‘consciousness’. The implications of such theorisation are that consciousness only partially perceives the rest of reality from the limited perspective of one individual at a time. The self can thus be seen as a localisation of consciousness (Spira 2016), or self-excited energy (Ball 2009) or a ‘strange-loop’ (Hofstadter 2008), which has ceased to remember its nature so it
can experience something other than itself. The implications of such a model is that all relationships are actually between different manifestations of the same consciousness, a dialectic of the same *Self*, or a space where Buber’s *I* meets *Thou* (Buber 2000), which has been conditioned by both biology and culture into identifying as an apparently separate self.

In traditions with unity-consciousness as a precept, there is acknowledgement of the omnipresence of the void, or emptiness, in which reality unfolds. This is not a nihilistic or meaningless emptiness though as it is also regarded as a pregnant spaciousness, credited with possessing all potentiality, form and witness (Laszlo 2007, van Gordon et al 2016, Zimmerman 2019) - a case of nothing *matters* (is solid) rather than *nothing matters (is not important)*. More poetically, writers like Adyashanti (2010), Grof (1998), Wilber (2016) and Watts (2018) represent the relationship between individual and collective consciousness much like that between a wave and an ocean and describe a teleology of the universe with analogies to a cosmic dance, game or joke where consciousness plays an eternal game of hide-and-seek with itself.

Exploring processes of disassociation further, the body and its brain really act as a *reducing valve*, as described by Aldous Huxley (Pollan 2018), which turns a fragment of reality into a map sufficient to move and stay alive. As Kastrup (2019, p. 78,) clarifies, ‘we have evolved to perceive not the qualities that are really ‘out there’... but just a *representation* thereof that helps us to survive and reproduce’. There is no evidence of the objective existence of reality outside of experience, so much so that many authors (Adyashanti 2010, Grof 1998, Levy 2018, van Gordon 2016, Walsh & Vaughan 1993) call everyday perception a ‘consensus reality’. Wilber (2016) even goes as far to imply nondual reality an ordinary state of consciousness and duality as the ‘altered-state’. It really would be fortuitous that evolution beset us with all the necessary equipment to perceive the totality of reality. This is precisely Hoffman’s (2019) point, who describes the world everybody sees as ‘eye-candy’ and only a partial picture of reality as it is. He argues that impaired perception makes us evolutionarily more efficient. Credence for this view of consciousness is also underpinned by the research that has been conducted into near-death experiences and ‘non-ordinary’ states of
consciousness (Alexander 2012, Ball 2009, Beauregard et al 2014, Grof 1998, Laszlo 2007, Wilber 2016). Kastrup (2019) argues that many brain-imaging studies are misunderstood and misrepresented, such as those experienced when a psychedelic has been taken, showing that the reported mystical states of oneness actually correlate with a reduction in brain-activity despite their experiential richness. Interpreted in this way, such states concur with the hypothesis that consciousness is larger than the brain, which is a conduit rather than a generator.

Given the consequences of humanity’s destructive attempted mastery over nature and general dissatisfaction with life, when engaging with reality as an apparently separate ‘self’, there is now a compelling educational case for an expanded view of reality, as a means of learning to embrace interconnectedness more constructively (Macy & Brown 2014). Education in a post-materialist age needs to incorporate the possibility of this broader perspective, recognising that consciousness exists at different levels of scale and humanity is much more interconnected to each other and its environment than it realises (Bache 2008, Laszlo 2007, Metzner 2017, Mayes 2020).

Experiencing unity-consciousness as an educational process

Synthesis of scientific and spiritual insight has ramifications for the conventional view of the ‘Self’, which according to Spira (2017) does not possess awareness but is awareness itself, even the body being an appearance in the fundamental ontology of awareness. It is hence difficult for consciousness to regard itself accurately in the same way the sun cannot see its own light. In spiritual traditions, and supported by neuroscience (Damasio 2012, Wright 2017), when somebody looks for the thinker of thoughts and engages contemplative-inquiry, it evades the seeker every time (Levy 2018). Spira (2017) uses the ‘screen’ as a metaphor for the substrate of consciousness; the search for Self much like a movie character’s quest to find the screen, always present but covertly so. For this reason, those advocating processes of self-inquiry, Vipassanā meditation retreats and/or direct-paths to the awakening of
consciousness promote a series of reflections such as ‘who am I and what can I know for sure?’ (Barendregt 2011, Katie 2002, Spira 2017, Zajonc 2008), culminating in the inability to actually find the self and resting in pure spaciousness or knowing where consciousness recognises its own nature as eternal, loving and unlimited. This ‘truer-Self’ is the same unified-field reported by quantum theorists and directly experienced under powerful psychedelics (Ball 2009, Pollan 2018). Spiritual seekers, entheogenic practitioners, quantum theorists all appear to arrive at the same conclusion; there is a transpersonal-field permeating everything, a consciousness subsuming and transcending reality. As Adyashanti (2010, p. 5) eloquently articulates:

In awakening, what’s revealed to us is that we are neither a thing, nor a person, nor even an entity. What we are is that which manifests as all things, as all experiences, as all personalities. We are that which dreams the whole world into existence.

Such awareness can be achieved through both progressive and direct-paths to the awakening of unity-consciousness (Sheldrake 2017, 2019), both being educational as well as spiritual processes. There is often resistance to direct-paths because as Spira (2016) argues, people become identified with their progressive practices, which can soothe acute feelings of separation and become distractions from deeper work. In ‘consensus reality’, most people are radically disconnected from unity-consciousness (Dennis 2019) and also experience a lack of community, have unpurposeful work and receive no guidance from society about how to lead a meaningful life, sometimes referred to as an alienation of the Self. Ironically, the search for deeper meaning can lead to addictive attachments to the very paths intended to lead one to experiences of unity (Adyashanti 2010, Grof & Grof 2010, Spira 2017) and even escaping into unity-consciousness without accompanying work upon one’s own conditioning can manifest as a form of spiritual bypassing (Masters 2010). Educational responses to such malaise and the trappings that run alongside need to engage with learning holistically, or integrally (Wilber 2016), as discussed in the final section. For now, it is suffice to say that current education policy and practice is far, far away from opportunities for such deep learning.
When people experience unity-consciousness, whether abiding or non-abiding in nature, spiritual writers such as Adyashanti (2010), Almaas (2004) and Spira (2016) regard this process as ‘Self-remembering’, or ‘coming home’, more akin to a sinking beneath the accumulation of cultural conditioning obscuring the unification of Self/reality and hence the realisation of a state of being that was always ‘there’. Paraphrasing Ramana Maharshi, Walsh & Vaughan (1993) declare that all spiritual scriptures indicate that salvation requires the subduing of mind. Beneath all thinking, feeling and experiencing resides an expansive awareness of emptiness, peace and understanding common to much ancient East-Asian spirituality (van Gordon et al 2016). According to Spira (2016), education requires that we first realise the interconnected nature of reality and then act accordingly, hence why others (e.g. Ergas 2017, Hyland 2016) are keen to highlight the ethical components of contemplative practices. Awakening to, or discovering, unity-consciousness, is as much a process of loss as gain; both educational in nature, and may require unlearning what has been learned through familial, educational and religious institutions. Though some may experience bliss as a side-effect of this unlearning, the process is best characterised as destructive for many (Adyashanti 2010), involving disidentification with habitual thought-patterns (Katie 2002, Tolle 2009).

Given the case for consciousness as an ontological primitive, it would appear that precious little time is dedicated to exploring this prospect and its implications, the overwhelming focus of most educational pedagogic practice thus proceeding on false premises. This paper thus argues the opportunity to learn about the unified nature of Self and reality is an educational entitlement, because it is empirically accurate, but also because such understanding changes everything else. The alternative, an apparently separate self, is deeply conditioned and associated with destructive tendencies, as the next section shall explore.
The destructiveness of materialism and a role for education

In this section, the paper shows how modern western education serves narrow neoliberal goals of productivity. This conspires to educate people only sufficiently to reproduce wealth and falls short of genuine human flourishing, its pedagogic practice being rooted in materialistic philosophy, which inculcates a sense of separation, competitiveness and control over nature (Dennis 2014, Macy & Brown 2014, Naranjo 2016), much like a Heideggerian perspective (see Peters 2002). The paper proceeds to highlight some of the destructive elements of an apparently separate self at both individual and collective levels.

Know thy place

Ergas (2016) discusses how discussion of spirit has been excluded from much scientific endeavour, and in turn from educational practice, because it has increasingly become the case that epistemology be about knowing the world rather than knowing the Self. Although knowing the world is a private, interior experience, it is dominated by materialistic rationalism and the understandable need for corroboration of experience, thus ‘spirit’ is either left out of education or assigned to the lower-status margins of the curriculum. ‘Know thy self’ is thus replaced by ‘know thy place’. Yet, it appears humanity is potentially living on the cusp of an exciting era where science and spiritually are beginning to talk to each other again after a bitter separation (Benazzo & Benazzo 2019, Sheldrake 2017). Writers like Kastrup (2019) and Rovelli (2017) argue that our view of reality needs modification to accommodate the implications of quantum physics rather than the performance of mathematical acrobatics or philosophical sleights-of-hand to make science fit an existing view of reality. This is clearly an issue in need of resolution within education; there is no crisis in quantum physics, or even physics itself, as they are internally consistent but there is a crisis in terms of their denial by scientists holding onto a materialistic paradigm and in turn for rationalist education (Levy 2018).
Modern western education is yet to embrace a post-materialist paradigm. The nature of contemporary education is hopelessly outdated, often engaging industrial and mechanistic metaphors (Robinson 2017). As an example, most classroom management approaches are behaviourist in nature despite the evidence-base for such strategies being over a century old, initially derived from animal experiments and highly contested in terms of efficacy (Kohn 2011). The neoliberal goal of education appears to be control, educating students only enough to be productive but not enough to contest the ways in which power keeps individuals subjugated (Gatto 2017, Reveley 2016). This has a suppressive effect on agency and creativity but also holds people back from deeper explorations of consciousness. Yet ironically, the maxim ‘know thy self’, constitutes the cornerstone of the very origins of formal education and needs urgent reclamation (Ergas 2017, Kingsley 2003).

**Conditioning and its consequences**

The nature of ‘self’ that often enters the classroom, as a student or teacher, is a conditioned persona informed by one’s experience of being born, parented and schooled, which generates an inaccurate perception of being (Ergas & Ritter 2020). This conditioning is further perpetuated into professional life by centralised educational priorities that draw upon materialist/behaviourist thinking and position individuation as subservient to neoliberal goals of academic and economic progress, even when guised as well-being initiatives (Reveley 2016). It is precisely this type of conditioned ‘self’ challenged by this paper and the suffering that coincides.

Much language, and subsequently thought, is structured in dualism, hypnotising individuals to pass these assumptions onto progressive generations (Bohm 2003, Kastrup 2016). It is even said something does not ‘matter’ (etymologically connected to the word mother, does not ‘mother’) if something is perceived to be unimportant to reinforce this illusion. According to Bohm (2003), language/thought is non-proprioceptive, unaware of its role in producing reality. Hence, deep conditioning of an apparently separate self begins with those first-
utterances a baby hears as they adjust from embryonic oneness to situations requiring differentiation of the boundary of their ‘body’ and their ‘world’. Grof & Grof (1993, 2010) view ‘original’ trauma as a disconnection from unity-consciousness, exacerbated by the birth-process, early development of the bodymind during childhood and relationships, or lack of, with ‘loved’ ones. This trauma is further intensified by i) the nuclear-working family, a relatively modern invention and major departure from being raised by a tribe or village, and then by ii) processes of schooling, where desired behaviour is rewarded with receipt of approval and undesired behaviour scolded. It is extremely difficult for young children to reject their parents or teachers so indignation is often turned inward as self-worthlessness (Miller 2008). According to Rowan (1988), most close formative relationships are not conscious and involve a power dynamic, further reinforced by traditional schooling. Adyashanti (2010, p. 38) explains:

Most human beings derive their entire sense of self from their conditioning. They are literally conditioned, told, and taught who they are. If you’re good, if you’re bad, if you’re worthy or unworthy, if you’re loveable or unlovable – all this is conditioning, and all this creates a false sense of self... At the moment of real awakening, however, Spirit or consciousness is liberated from this conditioning.

The consequences of deep conditioning of an apparently separate self are multiple (Barendregt 2011). Individuals suffer greatly as statistics in mental health problems, suicide rates, incarceration figures and virtually any measure of well-being expose, this being despite massive increases in wealth and longevity of life for many (Seligman 2003), so clearly something existential is at play.

Self-referential thinking may help us function in a world defined by materialism and dualism but also belies most mental illness. Simpson (2011) and van Gordon (2016) argue that the obsession with ‘me’ causes painful illusions such as yearning for pleasurable objects/experiences and aversion, even denial, of unpleasant objects/experiences. The apparently separate self continuously tries to alleviate its suffering by addictive searching for relief in objects, activities and relationships (Spira 2017). This line of thinking suggests that all spiritual seeking involves interior housekeeping and a search for reconnection with Self and
direct experience of unity-consciousness (Grof & Grof 1993). Levy (2018) refers to identification with a separate and conditioned sense of self a case of ‘mistaken identity’, which has rampant consequences. Threats to ecology and global security caused by the incessant need for economic growth, rampant consumerism and the need for ‘manufactured’ conflicts to support current hierarchies all have a concept of separate ‘self’ and ‘other’ underpinning their delusion, a product of our collective denial of the interdependent and creative nature of our true being (Naranjo 2016). Levy (2018, p. 212) argues further ‘in excluding ourselves from the universe, materialist, reductionist science is first destroying the world in theory before proceeding to destroy it in practice’.

Another major consequence of materialism and its sense of separation is the ontological implication that life and the universe has no purpose, experienced by individuals as a form of ‘anomie’, a deep and existential state of alienation and meaninglessness (Dennis 2019, Kohn 2011, Mayes 2020). According to such a world-view, semantic value is a by-product of the biological human brain alone. In contrast, transpersonal and archetypal theories of reality (Bache 2008, Grof & Grof 2010, Mayes 2020, Metzner 2017, Peterson 1999, Tarnas 2007, Walsh & Vaughan 1993) posit that the universe is evolving and has meaning because it is inherently mental itself. Integral theory encapsulates this view further to suggest humanity is co-operating with unity-consciousness to co-create a new world (Laszlo 2007, Wilber 2016). According to Kastrup (2019) the Self-aware human gives universal consciousness a perspective unavailable to itself.

In asserting that there is no objective world out there nor no objective subject in here, the synthesis of science and spirituality into unity-consciousness offers humanity a cure to the me-world separation, its affliction to the psyche and its inherent violence (Almaas 2004, Levy 2018, Mayes 2020). Such a task requires an urgent shift in thinking (Eisenstein 2013, Naranjo 2016) to prevent impending ecological crisis. Hence, a radical process of unlearning and relearning needs to take place in schools, universities and beyond, based on the increasingly evident argument that educated humans do not see the world as it actually is (Hoffman 2019, Kastrup 2019). In the next section, the paper will discuss how education colludes with an
apparently separate self in more detail before exploring how contemplative, integral and transpersonal educational approaches can begin to address this, though they need to guard against appropriation of their goals by neoliberalism.

**Beyond contemplative and mindful practices**

Understanding consciousness as fundamental has political edge (Freire 2013, Rendon 2009). According to Gatto (2017), although certain societies and systems may appear meritocratic, freedom and educational/professional achievement simply equate to taking a position where one reproduces and legitimises the system that allowed you to get into an apparent position of power. Berila (2016) argues the need to mindfully unlearn how oppression operates inside us, but this paper argues all are oppressed because the nature of unity-consciousness and its implications for leading a more enriched life are marginalised for everybody. It is the very notion of separation that permits all types of oppression of the ‘other’.

The west has a modern education system, relatively unchanged from its design and origin in industrial Victorian Britain (Gatto 2017, Robinson 2017), which is very efficient at perpetuating continuous cycles of class-reproduction (Bourdieu 2010). In such a system, citizens are systematically taught from infancy to place authority outside of themselves rather than claim their own sovereignty and ethics (Rendon 2009). An apparently separate sense of self is maintained by education’s long-term commitment to behaviourism. The occasional concessions made to humanistic education since the mid-twentieth century are small-scale, even hollow, achievements as they easily become enculturated within the current dominant world-view as competencies to be acquired, thus serving materialist and neoliberalist agendas for education (Forbes 2016, Reveley 2016, Sellman & Buttarazzi 2020). No tokenistic change to the education system can resolve the consequences of the separate self without fundamental changes in ways of being at the heart of society and education. It is also abundantly clear that the current education system is clearly not fit-for-purpose for the third millennium, or a post-materialist age, needing complete overhaul, possibly
abandonment before re-emerging as something completely different. Here, the growth in home-schooling, self-directed education and student-strikes should be seen as healthy resistance, even leadership.

Given rising concern about mental health, the ‘side-effects’ of enhanced attention, stress management and improved well-being cultivated thus far by contemplative and mindful practices in education are welcome, as is any form of education providing respite from its performativist machinery, but falls short of fulfilling every human being’s entitlement to a greater understanding of unity-consciousness. This is the difference between learning to concentrate as a mindful competence and ‘remembrance of who you are’ as a deeper and more penetrative insight (Adyashanti 2010, Barendregt 2011, Simpson 2017). Sellman & Buttarazzi (2020) argue that there is something oxymoronic about movements like mindfulness in education when implemented instrumentally. In fact, when made subservient to the goals of neoliberalism, contemplative and mindful practices in education may only alleviate suffering superficially, even iatrogenetically, and by being subordinated to superficial personal development leave a separate sense of self entirely intact (Brito, Joseph & Sellman 2020). There is a significant difference between contemplation/mindfulness as a path and as a tool, or mindfulness as education contrasted to mindfulness in education (Ergas 2019, Sellman & Buttarazzi 2020). This discrepancy is attributable to the spiritual and philosophical roots of mindfulness being divergent to many of the neoliberal goals of contemporary education (Forbes 2016, Hyland 2016, Reveley 2016).

Rendon (2009) asks who benefits from the application of terms in particular ways. As an example, instrumental mindfulness (mindfulness as a tool, mindfulness in education) is subservient to neoliberalism and its reproductive conditioning because it encourages students to cope with and adjust to oppressive structures that exacerbate suffering rather than transform them (Brito, Joseph & Sellman 2020, Forbes 2016, Reveley 2016, Sellman & Buttarazzi 2020). Rendon (2009) calls this psychologised spirituality, commodified to serve corporate interests with too much focus on self-development and not enough on self-awareness and humanity’s interdependent nature. Farias & Wikholm (2015) contest that
contemplative practices are about inner-truth and transformation, not happiness and well-being. Similarly, Spira (2017, p. 45) states ‘although the practice of meditation has been reduced by popular culture to a means of relieving stress and anxiety, in its original form it is the means by which awareness has access to its knowledge of itself’. Hence, although contemplative education represents a promising, if not essential, means via which a more accurate view of reality can be achieved, co-option towards alternative agendas needs serious safeguarding. In the next section, this paper will landscape potential educational approaches that engage with notions of post-materialism.

Post-materialist educational approaches

Contemplative education has a long history (Barbezat & Bush 2014, Morgan 2015, Zajonc 2008) attempting to address the imbalance of head and heart, science and spirit. Kingsley (2003) and Morgan (2015) trace this back to antiquity and hence ‘self’ knowledge and human flourishing (‘eudaimonia’) has long been an educational concern. It is not anything new, particularly when global archaic, indigenous and entheogenic perspectives are included (Sheldrake 2019). Reflecting further on what is called the third wave of the re-emergence of contemplative education, Morgan (2015) notes five probable major influences: Buddhist and Hindu philosophy, the introduction of Yoga in the west, findings from cognitive, neuroscience and meditation research, transpersonal psychology and the application of mindfulness-based practices to secular contexts. The rising awareness of quantum theory within public and educational understanding contributes a possible sixth source. Many of these influences highlight how the very act of contemplation creates experience, adding credence to the seemingly radical notion that reality is some kind of shared and embodied dream, or mental phenomenon, as previously discussed (Kastrup 2019, van Gordon et al 2016, Levy 2018, Varela, Thompson & Rosch 2017).
So how can western contemporary education (re)embrace the nature of consciousness and the unity of Self and reality? This has to begin by harnessing and further developing the potential of contemplative education to promote the inner-work necessary for de-conditioning and relearning to take place. An approach to education that encourages inquiry into the nature of experience and mind, including their conditioning (Katie 2002, Tolle 2006), a process called ‘attending in’ (Ergas 2017, Spira 2019). These insights also need to be balanced by embodied action to ensure individual and collective spiritual bypassing does not occur, a process called ‘attending out’ (Ergas 2017, Macy & Brown 2014, Varela, Thompson & Rosch 2017), where agency is spirit-informed. A commitment to facilitating attending ‘in’ and ‘out’ also means that the nature of classroom organisation and pedagogic practice inevitably needs radical transformation (Berila 2016, Rendon 2009).

Integral and transpersonal approaches

Zajonc (2008) argues that the high purpose of education is to remove ignorance. Such a pursuit requires a mass program of de-education (Berila 2016, Ergas 2016, Kastrup 2019) to move from dualistic to nondualistic paradigms. Forbes (2016) argues for an integral approach, synthesising inner-knowing and healing with social justice and transformation. Integral approaches bring insights from both wisdom and spirit to aspects of everyday life, education, policy, research and scientific endeavour in a manner that dissolves subject-object dualism. This may include more critical forms of mindfulness, which include a social-justice orientation (e.g. Berila 2016), where examination of language, historical discourse and its authorship by the powerful, the nature of money and its creation occur alongside analysis of any other phenomena with a controlling affect. However, such work also involves deep scrutiny of formative relationships, agency, community and how humanity creatively and compassionately transforms these conditions. Wilber’s (2016) text on ‘integral meditation’ begins to articulate such a curriculum, offering deeper analysis of conditioned-states than typical mindfulness courses with instrumental foci, previously critiqued. Wilber (2016) describes an integral education where ‘growing-up’ (educational development) is balanced with waking-up (spiritual development) and accordingly maturation is incomplete without the
other. Added to these processes are also ‘cleaning-up’ (healing) and ‘showing-up’ (issues of voice, agency, ethics, purpose and contribution), which ensure any learning does not remain ‘lofty’ but is applied to an individual’s personal and vocational life. Approaches to such learning are also likely to be underpinned and complemented by greater independence and self-direction; suitable models are described by Dennis (2014), Gray (2013) and Miller (1993). Ultimately, this work is oriented to a broader ‘eco-consciousness’ (Eisenstein 2013, Macy & Brown 2014, Naranjo 2016) that prioritises sustainability, with flourishing rather than incessant growth and performativity as goals.

Extending this critique further, the performative agenda of inspections, testing and tables needs abandoning and replacing with something more collegiate and supportive. Many teachers indicate a desire to do this but can only behave surreptitiously until there is a change of policy (Ball & Almedo 2013). Any such change is unlikely to happen as there is too much power and status invested in maintaining hierarchies and teacher activism may thus be the only way forward. Both young people and teachers in schools and universities generally do not feel they have the agency to change the educational system, though deeper understanding of the nature of self and reality corresponds with the transformative awareness that they, teachers and students and not others, are the educational system. There is ‘safety-in-numbers’ and a completely different ‘modus operandi’ is possible if sufficient politicisation and mobilisation of stakeholders occurs.

Contemplative and integral educational approaches favour direct experience. Humanistic/transpersonal approaches also place great emphasis on developing inner-authenticity, autonomy and personal responsibility and thus offer another way of bringing nondual consciousness to the lived-experience of educational settings. Both are indebted to East-Asian wisdom and mid-twentieth century explorations of consciousness. Abraham Maslow, for example, was a contemporary and close collaborator of Stanislav Grof, both instrumental in the development of humanistic/transpersonal psychology (Walsh & Vaughan 1993). Accordingly, when Maslow wrote about ‘self-actualisation’ and ‘transcendence’, he was alluding to something deeper than the current performative preoccupation with fulfilling
potential. In researching peak-experiences and flow-states as the pinnacle of embodied human experience, states where there is an experience of union with the divine or higher-self, timelessness and oneness, Maslow was effectively winking to those with a deeper understanding, as what he really meant was actualisation of a nondual ‘Self’, or unity-consciousness, as Rowan (1988, p. 34) states:

So when Maslow talks about ‘self’-actualization, he is being consciously paradoxical and provocative. This is not always appreciated by the earnest management psychologists who sometimes study him. Maslow was very much influenced by the Taoist way of looking at things, and this must never be forgotten.

Rendon (2009) also discusses how Maslow critiqued the scientific dualism of knowing the outside as if it was separate from the inner. Chang & Page (1991) and Peary (2005) draw further parallels between the Taoist ‘sage’, the ‘enlightened’ person in Zen Buddhism and the ‘self-actualised’ or ‘realised’ person in western thought, synthesis of which suggests the notion of an inner-resource all can access. Humanistic/transpersonal psychology refer to a Self-actualised as possessing an ‘accurate perception of reality’ who then acts authentically (Chang & Page 1991, Peary 2005). Applying transpersonal theory further, Bache (2008) and Mayes (2020) urge educators to embrace consciousness as extending and uniting the individual and the collective, meaning inner-work needs to be understood as an alchemic site for collective transformation. This poses significant questions for the cultural conditions created by current educational policy priorities and their destructive impact on the individual and collective psyche (Kohn 2011).

*Inner-work as the pedagogue*

All of these aforementioned approaches raise the interesting question of ‘who is the pedagogue?’ Ignoring such an issue only serves to reinforce the status-quo, external authority and its rationalist basis. The very word ‘teacher’ and the nature of the role needs unpacking as it implies ‘other’, duality, an expert-student relation. In its place needs to emerge an understanding that *inner-work* is actually the pedagogue, and the traditional
'teacher' is more of a guide, facilitator, or sharer of experience and wisdom (Gray 2013, Dennis 2014, Ranciere 1991). Palmer (1998) suggests close harmony between a teacher’s world-view, conduct and pedagogy, through presence. Hence, it is paramount that future educators have an accurate view of the nature of conditioning and consciousness in order to challenge the materialist discourse currently dominating educational policy.

In order to facilitate such ‘inner-work’ it is a prerequisite that the process commences with teachers (Ergas 2016, 2017), who’s self-awareness needs to attend to their own conditioning and how they unwittingly contribute to circumstances that further condition children and young people. A teacher sympathetic to inner-work embodies values of positive regard for their students (Palmer 1998) and should issues of ‘discipline’ arise, they are responded to educatively and are not matters for control and coercion but issues of group dynamics as well as opportunities for teaching, learning and growth (Siegel & Bryson 2015). The tendency of teachers, even more mindful teachers, to avoid difficult material should be circumvented, as Macy & Brown (2014) highlight, education needs to allow difficult thoughts and emotions space to be heard, processed and usefully re-energised.

Such approaches potentially transform conditioning as they emphasise the cultivation of inner-awareness and responsibility. Preventing extrinsic-motivation is crucial, as behaviour only oriented to material reward (e.g. financial gain, approval of others) underpins unsustainability and can resurface as suffering in later life when inevitable challenges and disappointments arise (Kohn 2011). Modelling acceptance, non-reactivity, equanimity and embodied-awareness to young people could offset the damage caused by any unhelpful lessons and unconscious relationships previously experienced. The inner-work young people really need to accomplish is to bring a ‘witnessing consciousness’ to life’s inevitable tribulations, understanding this also connects them to the rest of humanity and then act accordingly.
Conclusion

It is extremely unlikely that a ‘humanised’ version of the current education system is radical enough to catalyse the paradigm-shift necessary for an accurate view of Self and reality to become established alone. A post-materialist paradigm-shift is educational in nature and ‘education’ is an accurate word for describing the process needed, but it really is a global transformation in consciousness that is required, which of course subsumes education and education must play its part. A conservative approach to education, the orthodoxy of materialism, technocracy and productivity, is untenable as it exposes students to further cycles of conditioning and suffering with the inevitable personal and global consequences discussed previously. What is direly needed in contrast is a significant movement towards an education of both inner and outer-landscapes (Palmer 1998) or processes of attending both in/out (Ergas 2017, Spira 2017); a balancing of the critical/intellectual with the contemplative (Wilber 2016) or the head with the heart (Zajonc 2008), all underpinned by recognition of the fundamental ontology of consciousness. Such a task requires a seismic paradigm-shift in education of such magnitude, Kabat-Zinn (2013), drawing upon a Zen maxim, has described it as a 1000 year project. Given current ecological and political fragility, alongside challenges to human mental health and spirit, it is unlikely that humanity has the luxury of such time. Hence, a radical process of de-education and relearning needs to take place in schools, universities and beyond urgently and by whatever reasonable means necessary.
References


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The Art of WAKEFULNESS