

Local Economic Development Postgraduate Education and Mindful Research: Deepening the Practitioner Research Paradigm

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Abstract

Practitioner research, historically, has grown out of the self-study movement initiated by British teacher educators who saw the need to interrogate their own teaching practices in order to deepen the practices of their learner teachers (Loughran 2004). Parallel to this was the reaction by teachers to the authority of academic educationists making pronouncements on what should happen in the classroom. The movement of self-study was essentially a research initiative where practitioners researched their own practice in order to bring about change in the classroom. In the last two decades a considerable body of research material has emerged (Loughran 2004), which fed into the field now called practitioner research, and which extends beyond teaching into many forms of professional practice, and especially areas where change of some kind is required.

This paper draws a distinction between self-study as a cognitive strategy (where meta-critical thinking is employed in the development of professional practice) and self-study as mindful self-observation (which is a form of meta-cognition), where the latter can be regarded as an ontological condition prior to the thinking process, and which makes for more mindful – rather than mindless – living and learning. The implications for research in general will be considered, and in particular specific attention will be given to the context of developing Local Economic Development (LED) practitioner researchers who are engaged in postgraduate study.

Keywords: Practitioner research, mindfulness, Theory U

Introduction

This paper argues for the inclusion of mindfulness as a necessary next stage in the way we conduct practitioner research, developing the thesis that mindfulness is crucial to any action research project that is focused on social change. Mindfulness is an active expression of non-conceptual awareness that deconstructs the chronic sense of separation felt by most human beings, through the primary modes of fear and self-centred activity. First, a brief background is given to both the philosophical context of mindfulness, particularly its neglect in Western thought, and to the new developments in neuroscience and Western nonduality that are bringing the concept and the experiential practice of mindfulness into greater prominence. In this paper, LED practitioner research from a postgraduate programme is considered as a practical example for deepening research practice through mindfulness. This is not the only educational context in which mindfulness has a role to play. The LED practitioner research context, intersects with many rich strands of the sciences and social sciences: technology, environmental sciences, agriculture, development economics, sociology, etc, which allows the rationale for mindfulness in research to be explored more fully. Lastly, mindfulness in practitioner research, as a form of action research, is explored through the social change model Theory U, which is proposed as a model highly appropriate for interdisciplinary action research for accessing the deepest potential of mindful practice.

There is an obvious limitation to this exploration, in that what is being used is one way of knowing – the conceptual realm – to point to another which is its polar opposite by virtue of being non-conceptual. The latter can only be meaningfully engaged with through experiential practice in order to test its truth claims.

Mindfulness: A Brief Overview of the Philosophical and Scientific Contexts

Mindfulness, as an experiential practice of non-conceptual contemplative inquiry, has its philosophical home in non-dual Buddhism where the intent – of being mindful of body, feelings, mind and phenomena – is essentially a deconstructive one so that ‘we have a clearer notion of how reality is constructed’ (Wallace & Hodel 2008:217). However, the term ‘contem-

plative inquiry' can be misleading if it is not preceded by the qualifying term 'non-conceptual'. This is because it can suggest an activity of thinking, which it is not; rather, it is an interior, non-grasping, choiceless awareness (Krishnamurti 1992).

Furthermore, while mindfulness is regarded as a type of meditation, it is not a meditative practice that is centred on stilling the mind, pursuing altered states of consciousness, or in any way goal-oriented. Mindful practice, ontologically, is simply about recognising that there exists, prior to thinking, the fact of being aware (Corrigan 2006), and thereby loosening the hold that thinking has as a medium through which we view reality. This includes viewing reality with all its attendant distortions; the primary one being that there is a separate self. For this reason *seeing* rather than *meditation* is the preferred term to describe mindful practice, because it avoids the accumulated cultural baggage that comes with the latter.

Kingsley (2003) explores the possibility that in the beginnings of Western philosophy, especially in the work of Parmenides, the ancient Greeks practiced a form of mindfulness called 'Mêtis It meant a particular kind of awareness that always manages to stay focused on the whole ...' (2003:90). But it is also Kingsley's contention that later philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, reinterpreted Parmenides' teaching to be one of utter rationality in the service of logical thinking. While it may be tempting to ascribe to this re-interpretation the very different course of philosophical development that took place in the West as compared to the East, it may be more meaningful to see the attitude to mindful practice as a psychological expression of the thinking process itself; that is, thought with its constructed sense of self is threatened by any process where it is not the dominant mode of being. And given the historical development of intellectual traditions in the West, with their strong emphasis on a rational, positivist approach to uncovering reality, it is not surprising that even with the rise of phenomenology and the focused interest in human experience, there was still no inquiry into non-conceptual awareness. Varela *et al.* comment that the inquiry was 'in a purely theoretical way' (1991:19).

Goode's (2007) survey of nondualism in Western philosophy also reveals no tradition with a specific gesture towards mindfulness (although there may have been similar but non-theorised forms in certain contemplative traditions). It is arguable that the concept perhaps only took serious hold with

the teachings of Krishnamurti (1992) and the introduction of Buddhism to the West, and the impact that these had on Western psychologists (Epstein 1995; Almaas 1986; Crook 2009) and integral philosophers like Wilber (1995; 2004). These teachings were reinforced by the English nondual teacher and writer Douglas Harding (1979; 1986; 1997) with his highly innovative *seeing* experiments. And at present, the rising phenomenon of neo-nondual teachers in the West is contributing to a greater popular practice of mindfulness. But as yet, in Western academic disciplines, there is very little interest by the social sciences, except in transpersonal psychology (Davis 1998) and perhaps within certain approaches to cognitive therapy, where the interest is mainly therapeutic. There are two notable exceptions with the publication of the books *Presence* (2004) and *Theory U* (2007) by academics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where the focus is on social change rather than therapy.

Within a scholarly exploration of the Eastern philosophical expressions of nonduality, Loy's (1988) study, *Nonduality*, is definitive, while he has also presented a compelling treatise on Buddhist social theory showing that mindlessness, both ontologically and epistemologically, has created a world driven by 'the three poisons: greed; ... ill will; ... delusion' (Loy 2003:28).

However, there is one discipline in the West where mindfulness is seriously researched, and this is in the cognitive neurosciences. The fairly recent publication of Siegel's *The Mindful Brain* (2007) outlines the current neuroscientific research that validates the importance of mindful practice:

The role of mindful awareness is to enable the mind to 'discern' the nature of the mind itself, awakening the person to the insights that preconceived ideas and emotional reactions are embedded in thinking and reflexive responses that create internal distress. With such disidentification of thoughts and emotions, by realizing that these mental activities are not the same as 'self', nor are they permanent, the individual can then enable them to arise and burst like bubbles in a pot of boiling water (Siegel 2007:77).

This captures one of the primary interests of neuroscientists in the field, i.e. how the practice of mindfulness creates psychological well-being,

which is the research mapping the neural correlates of states of consciousness. With the recent founding of the NeuroLeadership Institute in the United States, with its own academic journal, a slowly emerging pattern connecting mindfulness and interdisciplinary studies can be observed, where the scientifically validated outcomes of mindfulness are being extrapolated to areas of social action, such as leadership and action research for social change.

In the 2008 and 2009 issues of the NeuroLeadership Journal, four articles focused on mindfulness: Tang and Posner (2008); Hassed (2008); Love and Maloney (2009); and Siegel and McCall (2009). These ranged from discussing the value of mindfulness on well-being and performance, to drawing the connections with enhancing the capacities of leadership. Siegel and McCall's article is of particular importance to this paper, with its emphasis on the 'interdisciplinary inclusiveness' (2009:23) of the inquiry into mindfulness, which Siegel terms 'mindsight'.

However, it is noteworthy that the current work on mindfulness from a neuroscience perspective does not touch on the core quality of this nonconceptual awareness. This form of awareness collapses the subject-object duality and the apperception that there is no separation between observer and the observed. This insight goes beyond even the conceptual terrain of systems thinking, which has yet to shake off completely its origins in reductionistic positivism and objectivism, although the developments in soft systems thinking hold promise for a more rigorous interrogation of consciousness and other ways of knowing, which meets what has already been accomplished in the philosophy of nonduality. But a materialist worldview is – overtly or covertly, consciously or unconsciously – at the heart of most academic disciplines. Readers are alerted to Wilber's (1995) critique, especially the false knowledge claims of scientific positivism, and like Wilber, I would add that post-modernism, for all its advances in erecting meta-critical platforms for investigating all kinds of truth claims and providing alternative conceptual lenses, is nevertheless still a theoretical enterprise and not an experiential one. From a nondual point of view, all thinking is essentially about objectifying experience, that is, making conceptual objects or conceptual *things*, which are often mistaken for self-existing realities. The German word for think, *denken*, shares the same etymological root as the word *thing*. Mindfulness reveals that all our thinking is prone to this illusion.

However, this must not be seen as a rejection of the scientific method, but understanding, as Harding (1997) shows, that there are two rigorous ways of knowing, which are essentially contained in two kinds of science. The first is the science of the third person (our current science of the objective world), and the second is the science of the first person, where ‘the next stage will be about reconnecting and integrating the rigor of scientific method with the richness of direct experience [mindfulness] to produce a science that will serve to connect us to one another, ourselves, and the world’ (Senge *et al.* 2004:218).

Perhaps the concluding remark that captures the primary thesis of not just this section but the entire paper should come from a cognitive scientist: ‘In mindful, alert awareness the differences between self and other, and the mind and its contents disappear. This is known as nonduality’ (Blackmore 2003:389).

There are highly technical nuances and subtleties of difference in how mindfulness is articulated in the various nondual philosophical traditions. For the purposes of this paper, I have opted for a core generic definition contained within all the nondual traditions, both past and present: mindfulness as the recognition of nonconceptual awareness, where this awareness is prior to the fragmenting activities of thought, and which restructures the way we perceive ourselves and the world¹.

The LED Research Context and Mindfulness

The inspiration to introduce mindfulness into practitioner research arose when I taught the research module for a cohort of LED practitioners from KwaZulu-Natal who are pursuing a master’s programme in leadership and LED. It was agreed that the most meaningful research projects for this cohort was some form of practitioner research, where their formal research projects could feed into enhancing their professional contexts.

The need to bring about an awareness of mindfulness in practitioner research is based on the view that the imperatives of the LED movement will be stunted by the historical forces at play; that is, we are bound to add more

¹ This is a cursory sketch. A succinct practical guide to mindfulness as given here is to be found in Goode’s book *Standing as Awareness* (2009).

mess to a messy situation, especially in the light of our world-wide recession. This is because we hold a perspective of the world and ourselves that is inadequate to meet our complex systemic challenges. Our dominant worldview is not only a materialistic one, but is one that treats the world as made up of discrete objects that need to be subjugated and exploited, especially as the felt experience for most of us is one of separateness. And with separateness comes fear and the need to protect oneself against the other. The Buddhist three poisons referred to earlier – greed, ill will and delusion – are the mindless expressions of this condition (Loy 2003:28).

Our world history is a testament to this fact, and our current ecological and social crises signal the effects of this perspective. We do not only need change, we need radical change. I am proposing that this change, first and foremost, is located within a change of ontological perspective, that is, how we fundamentally experience and know ourselves and the world. In this nondual perspective, ontology and epistemology are collapsed into one movement of Being-Knowing.

This paper, hopefully, will reflect the quality of the change needed by its very construction. The accepted academic model of research is itself located in the worldview described above; an insistent reductionism that is characterised by ever closer scrutiny of the part with a view to understanding the whole. In our social sciences tradition, these parts are largely the conclusions of others based in turn on philosophical inquiry or empirical research, or both. However, almost always research is conducted into the part and never the whole. This has its uses, but only in certain domains of knowledge, for example, technology (Wilber 1995); and this is useful where the findings of others present the original utterances of giants rather than the regurgitations of pygmies. With this in mind, I am writing this paper not only as a theoretical description of a research perspective for LED students, but the actual writing is the outcome of my own on-going self-study (Pillay 2009).

The writing is an outcome of *seeing* and not just thinking. In fact, thinking, as we normally experience it, plays a very small part in this current construction; there is flow and hardly any intellectual effort; this part (this writing) is subservient to the whole (which cannot be defined because it is not conceptual, but which can be pointed to). And the enigmatic character of these statements will hopefully become clearer as the writing unfolds.

However, one aspect of orientating oneself to seeing rather than thinking is that flow manifests as synchronistic occurrences (Jaworski 1996), and this has huge implications for doing the practical aspects of research.

For example, as I was writing this section, I felt that I needed a particular reference, and as I searched my library for a particular book, I stumbled upon a book (April *et. al.* 2000), which opened to a chapter on awareness, which is the dominant exploration of this paper. I have no recollection of purchasing this book, let alone ever reading it, yet its timely appearance allows for this inquiry to be more firmly rooted in the innovative scholarly research of others. In this particular case, the book has added value because it emanates from the work of South African researchers.

More precisely, this endeavour is about deepening the practitioner research perspective, located as it is within the social change praxis of action research. Through this approach the LED practitioner researcher engages with concepts that allow for an emergent space to open, where there is a full spectrum engagement with oneself as the primary domain of research, because this domain, it is argued, is not separate from the larger collective.

This requires a text that hopefully engages rather than alienates. Firstly, the text is built solidly on a platform of persuasive argument rather than un-investigated assertions. Next, the text is informed by the research of others without blind acceptance. Thirdly, the text holds the understanding that both the poetic and the technical utterance are needed to effect the recognition that the goal of this form of practitioner research is finally about a *re*-cognition. In the latter process, the conceptual terrain is a servant in the service of a mindful awareness. Finally, the text is not the action of thinking – that is, incessant conceptualisation – but is prior to it.

It is important to note that only one academic research book actually approaches mindfulness as central to the research endeavour, but even here the discussion takes place in the chapter ‘Additional Suggestions’ (Braud & Anderson 1998:243) rather than in the main sections, although it is implied at the very beginning of the textbook. It is useful to note the authors’ characterisation of mindfulness, because this reinforces what is being argued here:

Mindfulness involves a clarity of perception, a clear and undistorting mirroring of the fullness of what reality presents. It is an abiding awareness, an integral awareness, an expansive awareness. It is also

a compassionate awareness – a compassionate awareness of actions, motives, and thoughts; a sweet and mellow feeling toward life and toward oneself, others, and all of nature (Braud & Anderson 1998:243).

Geake's *The Brain at School* (2009) exemplifies the current non-recognition of mindfulness in educational settings. While showing earlier that research into mindfulness is gaining momentum in the cognitive and neurosciences, it is rather surprising that there is no mention of it all in Geake's book beyond noting that there was a suggestion from an educational workshop that neuroscience should research whether 'meditation techniques in the classroom improve children's attention through enhancing executive control' (Geake 2008:19).

But meditation techniques do not necessarily have the same objectives or even the same worldviews, so this cursory reference to meditation cannot be construed to refer to mindfulness as discussed in this paper, where mindful research needs to be articulated in real world complexities where change – radical change – is needed.

Davis' work with mindfulness in ecopsychology (1998:8²) is important not only as an example of real-world mindful practice, but the domain of ecopsychology, especially in rural LED activities in South Africa, has great socio-environmental meaning for how we use our natural resources for sustainable development. Davis writes:

Ecopsychology is based on the recognition of a fundamental nonduality between humans and nature and on the insight that the failure to experience and act from this nonduality creates suffering for both humans and the environment.

The crucial question to ask is: Are LED practitioner researchers exposed to this perspective? And how can this be meaningfully enacted? Local Economic Development (LED) may appear to be one of the panaceas for our economic and development woes but, if the thinking that underlies

² This page number refers to a PDF of the journal article available from <http://www.johnvdavis.com/ep/thpeptp.htm>.

the endeavour is still situated within an economic model of ever-increasing development and unbridled consumerism, then all we are ever going to have is the illusion of change, and not change itself.

To illustrate the above point, if somewhat simplistically: If one of the objectives of LED is about getting more foreign investment to create more factories to produce more plastic goods (from a talk given by a KZN municipal LED officer), what exactly is the nature of the development? In the short term we may count the creation of a few hundred jobs and the added flow of money into the economy; this, put simplistically, has always been the model of industrial progress, local or otherwise. But what are the systemic consequences when there is environmental degradation, eventual consumer satiation, and the hidden expansionist policies of a foreign nation (ill will, greed and delusion)? What are the consequences when the policies that do not factor these effects into account are themselves holding unconscious worldviews, which can be traced to an 18th century scientific paradigm?

Both our current capitalist and socialist worldviews can be traced back 'to the strong influence of the techno-economic base of *industrialization* and the machine mentality' (Wilber 1995:417) and there is little room in these views for a discussion of mindfulness. In the dominant worldview, thought is the nexus of experience, and any discourse which allows for a consideration of consciousness or awareness is relegated to the metaphysical/spiritual and not worthy of inquiry related to concrete reality. The arguments for this exclusion are based on the apparent inability to empirically verify consciousness through third-person science. But there are now compelling arguments for a first person science (Pillay 2007). However, this bias is still the *status quo*, although there are slowly emerging signs of a new perspective developing across a range of disciplines.

Whatever is emerging that may eventually challenge the dominant discourse, the larger terrain, however, is still held within the grip of a positivist outlook so that even pioneering works on mindfulness, within a Western scientific perspective, are approached from the objective of enhancing cognitive strategies, rather than being an ontological condition as given in Eastern philosophies and experiential practices (Langer 1989:78-79), where *thinking* is contained within *mindful seeing*. Seeing is variously described as: mindfulness/mindful attention in Buddhist traditions; self-

observation (Deikman 1982); choiceless awareness (Krishnamurti 1992); and Wilber (1995:357-358) credits St. Augustine with developing the concept of the 'interior Witness' in Western thought.

But the thesis being advanced here does not exclude the growing body of work of Langer and others, and sees this work as providing empirical evidence for what has loosely (and misleadingly) been termed 'mystical' (Stacy 2007: 92-93), but which, in fact, is just simply the condition of *being* (Scharmer 2007: 108), which we overlook because thinking conceptualises itself as one's primary identity.

Within the area of practitioner research, the first recently published text book (Fox *et al.* 2007) contains no concept that comes close to mindfulness as a practice for research. There is a brief reference to the positivist criticism about 'whether self-knowledge acquired through self-reflection or introspection is a valid form of knowledge' (Fox *et al.* 2007: 15). However, it is not clear within what domain self-knowledge is placed; is it referring to the ontological condition of being mindful, or to the conceptualisation of the thinking process? It is most likely the latter because mindfulness, until recently, has had no place in general academic discourse. As we proceed, we will see that mindful awareness and mental cogitation are two very different, but complementary, ways of knowing.

However, before we can understand more deeply the relationship of LED practitioner research to mindful research, we need to understand more clearly what *mindlessness* is.

Understanding Mindlessness

Simply put, mindlessness is the act of not paying attention to the here and now of one's experience. Thinking dominates the experiential field of awareness, and while the thinking process may set up the illusion of being attentive, the very act of thinking, without standing back and witnessing one's thinking, is a fundamental form of being mindless.

However, the work of Langer (1989; 1997) provides more accessible examples of mindlessness within the domain of enlargening positive cognitive strategies. We can relate more easily to these examples because they are still within the realm of the conceptual; true mindfulness does not exclude the conceptual, but is emphatically non-conceptual. An apt analogy

is that of a bowl (the condition of being mindful) holding its contents (which are the processes of thinking and the concepts which arise from this). A simple example of a mindless action is taking a learnt behaviour into a context where it does not apply. For example, drivers accustomed to driving on the left side of the road need to be alert to their driving habits when driving in countries where the right side is legal. Being mindless in this situation could be fatal.

At a deeper level, mindlessness occurs ‘when we rely too rigidly on categories and distinctions created in the past’ (Langer 1989:11), which Scharmer (2007:37) calls ‘downloading patterns of the past’. A particular delusion arises from this; we mistake the conceptual perspective for the actuality itself. When we defend our point of view, we are actually defending a story.

Towards Mindfulness for the Practitioner Researcher

In Scharmer’s Theory U model, the journey of inquiry and transformation can only begin when we learn to suspend our mental models (Senge 1990: 8), and when we develop the capacities of seeing, sensing and presencing (Scharmer 2007:37).

Theory U is a pioneering work because mindfulness is the focus of an ontological journey which intersects with different ways of knowing, and unlike Langer’s work, explicitly honours the larger ontological enterprise of bringing presence (that is, being mindful or choicelessly aware) into being through dedicated practices like awareness training (Scharmer 2007:408).

Let us now briefly understand the different ways of knowing described by Theory U so that we can see their relevance to practitioner research. The first movement is the active suspension of the habitual downloading of mental models from the past, and Scharmer views the downloading phase as an egocentric condition ‘I-in-Me’ (Scharmer 2007:11). While there are legitimate life conditions that require the I-in-Me self-interest phase (for example, physical security), by and large the incessant identification with ‘me and mine’ constructs identities of self which limit collaboration to a very narrow field of action, and is essentially self-centred in character. In public life these play out in party politics with their competing ideologies and their essentially destructive nature. For the LED

practitioner researcher, this phase will be the most challenging, because we are normally oblivious of the psychological identities that are formed through the course of a life's social conditioning. For example, the LED context is one of multiple partnerships in the service of local social development. These partnerships cannot be decided by self-interested ideological perspectives, but by the emergent needs of the context, however, this is easier said than done. Being unaware of the psychological investment in a particular ideology, something more than self-reflective critical thinking is required, so that fearful reactions to opposing points of view are seen objectively rather than subjectively. This requires the movement into 'seeing', a term which I am now using in Scharmer's sense, rather than as a synonym for mindfulness.

The seeing phase of the U-model requires the individual and the group to consciously engage in seeing the problem situation as part of a larger natural and social context, leading to what Scharmer terms 'Open Mind' (Scharmer 2007:15). This is still an oppositional phase (I-in-It), where the social conversations are dominated by debate, nevertheless, it is more meaningful because there is at least an acknowledgment of the other; it is not only about me and mine. This acknowledgement may be antagonistic, which our current social institutions reflect through relationships, and to which our postmodern response has been to invest in the intellectual process of critical thinking. The response is an exercise of close intellectual discrimination, usually involving varying forms of conceptual deconstruction and reconstruction. This phase is dominated by mind, but in a much more discriminating, critical sense.

Within the research arena, especially action research, which is the umbrella paradigm for practitioner research, critical thinking is the foundation of the research endeavour as it is in all forms of social sciences research. What marks action research as a process of social change is the framing of critical thinking as the bedrock for the iterative experiential learning cycles which, it is theorised, will result in incremental social change. In other words, action research is about action which is informed by critical thinking.

In Scharmer's seeing, all of this is necessary, but the U-process stretches the concept of seeing to go beyond mere intellectual seeing. Nonetheless, the process includes actual empirical observation, like that of

the natural scientist, where there is an inner standing back to observe closely and objectively, without the movement of the past interfering with the seeing in the now. This seeing anticipates the third movement of the process.

The U-process's third movement, sensing, is an original contribution to action research. Conventional research processes have no equivalent for sensing because you will only find instances of this experiential practice in certain spiritual and artistic traditions, which are focused on developing mindfulness.

In this practice, sensing is the mindful awareness of the total functioning of the physical senses – which are habitually ignored, and which, in the mindful view, leads to *ignorance* – with the outcome being that of breaking down the false duality of self and other. Sensing is really about being embodied through the full functioning of the senses. This process entails allowing a non-judgmental awareness to completely accept whatever is occurring; that is, if one is tasting, then there is complete attention to what is being tasted. And if there is pain, psychological or physical, there is no resistance to it, and if there is resistance then there is an acceptance of this resistance. The experience is then not split into mindless mental activity *and* the particular sensory experience; dualistic experiencing is transcended in the moment by nondual awareness.

Sensing is somewhat paradoxical, in that one would think that complete attention to the physical senses would increase self-preoccupation, but in fact it does not because nondual awareness has no sense of separation within it as do the constructs of thought. Harrison (2002: 90) clearly defines the distinction when he writes that 'the challenge is to introduce this in a way that shifts the perspective from that of thought/ me to awareness/ us'.

Scharmer offers dialogue as the active conversation of this phase, where dialogue is about suspending one's point of view in order to see the situation through the eyes of the other. This 'I-in-You' phase is essentially the real beginning of the breakdown of our conceptual dualistic distinctions and is characterised by empathic listening and deep learning. In this fully embodied state we are more like performing artists acutely attuned to each other in the act of creation; there is actualised mindfulness with its outcomes expressing creative responsiveness. And yet, all of this is occurring without the habitual isolating self-sense normally produced by mindless thinking.

The felt experience is of one being moved by the field awareness

rather than acting upon it in a manipulative way. Expressions of this apparently counter-intuitive experience (counter-intuitive because it is radically different to our self-centred mode of wanting to control experience) can be found in the literatures and artistic expressions of all cultures down the ages (Katz 2007). In the U-model there is, perhaps for the first time, a detailed critical description of this mode of mindfulness which is outside the poetic expression or the scholarly scrutiny of mysticism, but firmly located within an experiential process that is employed in business and social change settings.

For the LED practitioner and researcher this involves the cultivation of a global, non-isolating awareness that is a prerequisite for entering into a meaningful, constructive dialogue with social partners, each coming with their own agendas. The phase of sensing offers a rich field of research into what kinds of processes will work best to facilitate the flowering of a collective wisdom amongst the participants, but it also throws up challenges for an integral learning that has not been part of our mainstream education.

In their recent work *The Power of Collective Wisdom*, Briskinet *al.* (2009) provide examples of how groups can display both profound wisdom and debilitating folly. The former arises when a creative field of potential is nurtured through mindful practices, which break down the sense of separation; folly arises when groups proceed to entrench narrow self-interests and are located in the I-in-Me and I-in-It modes of being.

The journey from sensing continues to *presencing*, which is characterised by letting go in order to let come; it is a contemplative phase of being immersed in an alert mindfulness – the I-in-Now – in order to sense what the future wants to unfold. And to the mind conditioned by linearity, this makes no sense, unless we apperceive the fact that time is a construct of thought. Again, experiential exercises can provide a deeper understanding of what appears to be highly counter-intuitive, and while it is not necessary to have intellectual proof first for mindfulness to be present, it does help to challenge the argument that this is the terrain of the esoteric. On the contrary, the case studies provided by Scharmer and others show just how rooted this perspective is in the realities of everyday life. The difficulty is not in the practice, but in the adherence to taken-for-granted assumptions of what we think is true.

Even at a very simplistic analytical level, we do not normally see that

we are moved by the future. I am writing this now in order to contribute to a journal article in the future. The future, in this sense, is orchestrating this writing. But in actuality even this is untrue from an ontological perspective; the past and future are constructs of thought, there is only the *now* in which the movement of time appears to take place. Again, thought cannot perceive this, but mindful awareness can.

For the LED practitioner researcher, this would be engaging in action research of a qualitatively different order altogether, where transformative social action arises through the following:

- Suspending out-dated mental models;
- Nurturing an embodied relationship to the world;
- Sensing that I am not separate from the world;
- Consciously surrendering to mindful unknowing (without abdicating critical thinking);
- Allowing the generative field of the collective to unfold the new;
- Developing prototypes of new social processes; and
- Engaging in continual cyclical learning.

The above summary is a description of where the practitioner research endeavour needs to go if it is to transcend current *praxis*. This is not being dismissive of what practitioner research holds as its fundamental vision, that of bringing about change. What is being argued here is that this vision requires a radical re-assessment of where the nurturing of this change is actually located.

In the book that I found synchronistically (April *et al.* 2000), the dominant theme is that of awareness as a meta-cognitive skill. Essentially, it is arguing for similarly described capacities to be developed as given here for mindful research. The book is about awareness and leadership, and this paper, ostensibly, is about mindful research for the LED practitioner-researcher, but both explorations are, finally, about the development of latent human capacities that are seen as essential to meeting our complex adaptive challenges. The fundamental capacity to be developed is a new way of seeing, which is located first in mindful awareness, and then in the process of

critical thinking. Are there actual differences between the concerns of leaders in general and LED practitioners? Are not the latter leaders of necessary social action?

As different disciplines converge with similar understandings of what it means to be fully human in a complex world, where such a complexity may actually be, at the social level, an outcome of our mindlessness, we no longer have the luxury of holding onto questionable shibboleths, however fanciful the academic dressings that support their continued existence may be.

Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that LED practitioner research is one obvious example in both postgraduate education and actual real-world practice where mindfulness in research would benefit the social change enterprise.

From the discussion of mindfulness and the discoveries of neuroscience, we can list at least three levels of value in engaging in mindful practice. Using the LED practitioner researcher as an example, we note that the first level of bringing psychological well being to a profession that is very stressful³ can only enhance research and professional competence. The research in the neurosciences attest to the positive psychological outcomes produced by mindfulness (Siegel 2007).

The second level is concerned with cognitive strategies for recognising limiting mental models in order to see the problem situation with greater systemic clarity. There are a number of effective processes that can be used in the service of cognitive restructuring. An elegant example is The Work of Byron Katie, which is a process of self-inquiry using four questions to inquire into a firmly-held belief (Pillay 2001).

The third level, as emphasised in both the perspectives of nonduality and Theory U, is living from the field of nonconceptual awareness (that is, Being/Presence), which deconstructs the sense of separation from the world and begins to heal the attendant problems that such a condition gives rise to.

However, it would be very naive to assume that such a programme of

³ My knowledge of the stressful nature of LED practice comes from my direct engagement with LED practitioners from local municipalities.

radically restructuring perception and values can happen without threatening deeply-rooted structures of consciousness, that is, the movement of thought with it constructed sense of identity and duality, which then play out in the way social forms perpetuate themselves. In Blackmore's meme theory (1999; 2003), the root is the un-investigated illusion of self. And being mindful of 'your own experience does not reveal a solid world observed by a persisting self but simply a stream of ever-changing experience, with no obvious separation between observer and observed' (Blackmore 1999:236).

This is an important inquiry, not just for LED practitioner researchers, but for all human beings. LED practitioner research, however, given its imperatives for sustainable development and social change, might just be the area in educational and professional practice where this perspective has some chance of taking hold.

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