

# A Brief History of the Current Reemergence of Contemplative Education

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## Abstract

This article explores the history of the current reemergence of a contemplative orientation in education. While referencing an ancient history, it primarily examines the history of contemporary contemplative education through three significant stages, focusing on the third. The first was arguably initiated by the introduction of Buddhism to the United States through Chinese immigration that started in 1840, and the second began in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the establishment of three significant tertiary institutions that engage contemplative practice and theory. The third, which began in 1995 with the founding of the Centre for Contemplative Mind in Society, is introduced through five developmental influences. Linked with this is the concurrent development and growing intersection of contemplative and transformative education. This contemporary and ancient history traces the continuing presence of the contemplative in education to counter suggestions that contemplative education may be a fleeting trend. Rather, it indicates that contemplative practice, which grounds this approach in education, is an essential aspect of who we are and how we learn.

## Keywords

holistic education, experiential education, critical reflection

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It used to be fashionable to think of ancient Greek philosophy chiefly as a preface to modern logic and scientific method. Scholars nowadays recognize that it was also concerned with a wide range of contemplative issues, which included the creation of self-knowledge through intellectual or spiritual exercises. This interpretation is particularly accurate for the later ancient period, when Greek philosophy was enriched by Judeo-Christian themes.

Stock, 2006, p. 1761

The gaps in educational philosophy as outlined above by Brian Stock, introduce this article to highlight the continuing presence of the contemplative in education. Contemplative theorists (Bai, Scott, & Donald, 2009; Bush, 2010; Gunnlaugson, 2010; Hart, 2004, 2008; Sarath, 2003, 2006) allude to the history of what I term the “third wave” of contemplative education,<sup>1</sup> but to my knowledge they and others have not produced a work dedicated to such a history. With an understanding that historical reflection informs our ways of knowing and acting (Roth, 1995, p. 2), this article attempts to reconstruct this aspect of “collective memory” (Cofino, 1997) that has been marginalised in mainstream education for more than 200 years. My aim in doing this is to provide a preliminary historical platform for the growing number of contemplative theorists and practitioners. In this account of the current reemergence of contemplative education, I have focused on its third wave, alluded to the growing intersection with transformative education and only briefly touched on other stages of its history. Despite my brief engagement with its earlier history, examining these stages led to my conclusion that the contemplative has been a continuing but not always obvious presence in education. By highlighting this presence, I suggest that contemplative education isn’t something faddish. Rather the contemplative state of consciousness that grounds this educational approach is an essential part of who we are and how we learn.

The third wave or current reemergence of contemplative education was arguably initiated in 1995 with the establishment of the Centre for Contemplative Mind in Society (CCMIS), Massachusetts (Bush, 2010; Repetti, 2010; Sarath, 2010). This stage, I suggest, was preceded by two others. The second, which began with the establishment in 1968 of the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) San Francisco (the precursor to the CIIS, the American Academy of Asian Studies, was formed in 1951), Naropa University, Colorado, which opened in 1974 and the Maharishi University of Management (MUM), 1971. This wave is underpinned by the first, in which Buddhism was introduced to the United States by Chinese immigrants to the West Coast starting in 1840. This contemporary history is supported as Brian Stock proposed earlier by a more extensive history reaching back to Ancient Greece. This I suggest can be traced even further to prehistoric ritualised forms of learning that incorporated trance and meditation (Fisher-Yoshida, Geller, & Schapiro, 2009, p. 3). These early and more recent histories of contemplative education are outlined here to support the proposition that what arose with the founding of the CCMIS, CIIS, Naropa, and MUM is not an “emergence” but a “reemergence.”

Current contemplative education discourse commonly emphasises the physiological and psychological benefits of contemplation in learning (Oman et al., 2008). Contemplative theorists using this research who also allude to the history of contemplative education include Bush (2010) with her focus on the development of the third wave of contemplative education, Sarath (2003) in his definition of contemplative education and its practices, and Gidley (2010) and Sarath (2010) who link the contemplative and the integral. Further, Molz and Hampson (2010) provide an overview of the origins of contemporary integral education, which has links with contemplative education. Hampson (2010) introduces what he terms the Western Islamic and Native American genealogies of integral education, with the former starting in the Middle Ages and the latter in the pre-Columbian era. Stock (2006, 1998) traces contemplative education back to Ancient Greece, and Hart (2004) refers to the contemplative histories of Christianity, Buddhism, Sufism, Judaism, and Hinduism.

The work of these and other theorists supports this examination of the contemporary history of contemplative education, which is introduced here with a brief overview of its history. This is followed by an investigation of what I believe are five central influences on contemporary contemplative education. They are Buddhist and Hindu philosophy, transpersonal psychology; mindfulness-based practices in medicine, psychology, business and sport psychology; Yoga in the West; and cognitive and neuroscience and meditation research. The description of these influences leads to an overview of the current reemergence or third wave of contemplative education. The article concludes with a sketch of the links between contemplative and transformative education, which offers insight into a shared history.

### *Historical Sketch of Contemplative Education History*

It can be argued that the history of contemplative education leads back to antiquity, starting with archaic trance ritual practices, followed by early monastic traditions of Classical Greece (5th–4th centuries BC) and Classical India (2nd century BC–13th century AD) through to the contemporary Western religious education that has evolved from Greek monastic traditions (Stock, 1998, 2006). In his investigation of the history of contemplative education, Stock (2006) critiques the general acceptance of a one-dimensional understanding of Greek philosophy in which it is only viewed as the precursor to modern logic and the scientific method. He proposes that there is a spiritual and contemplative aspect to the Greek philosophical tradition, as it engaged a “range of contemplative issues, which included the creation of self-knowledge through intellectual *or* spiritual exercises” (p. 1761).

Elements of this history are outlined by the contemplative theorist and professor of psychology Tobin Hart (2004) who asserts that there is a long and rich history of cultivating the contemplative in the “wisdom traditions.” He cites the ancient histories of the philosophical and religious institutions that have supplied the practices used in contemplative education. These include Buddhist meditation, various forms of yoga from Hinduism, Christian prayer exemplified by contemplatives such as

Saint Theresa of Avila, radical questioning through dialogue as it was expressed by Plato, the self-inquiry of Ramana Maharishi, meta-physical reflection from the Sufi tradition that leads to the deeper intuitive insight of the heart (*qalb*), and the absorbed contemplation recommended in the Jewish Kabbalah (Hart, 2004, p. 29).

Repetti (2010), like Hart, alludes to the ancient history of contemplative education, suggesting that its practices can be found in varying forms in the histories of the Jews, Christians, Muslims, and Indigenous Americans and Australians. Repetti also introduces the influence of what he terms the Asian Academy in both early and contemporary contemplative education, claiming that the “Asian Academy has a vast history of contemplative practices, studies, and pedagogies, and the philosophies in which they are embedded are continuous from the Classical era to the present” (Repetti, 2010, p. 6). The importance of contemplative practices in the Asian philosophies that developed in ancient Indian, Buddhist, and Taoist monasteries can, for example, be seen in the empirical and theoretical foundations of Chinese Buddhism (Poceski, 2012). Finally, Stock (2006) suggests that the roots of contemporary contemplative education, which he describes as an approach to education that “deals with the whole person,” lie in ancient thought (p. 1761).

This early history grounds the reemergence of contemporary contemplative education in what I have termed its first, second, and third waves. The first, as mentioned earlier, can be said to have started with the introduction of Buddhism to the United States in the 1840s. Followed by visits to the United States by Yogic and Vedantic scholars such as Protap Chunder Mozoomdar in 1883 (Flood, 1996) and Swami Vivekananda who gave his famous speech in 1893 at the Parliament of World Religions, Chicago. Furthermore, the emergence of transpersonal psychology in the late 19th century was significant in the first wave. The second wave began with the establishment in 1968 of the CIIS, the founding of the MUM in 1971 and Naropa University in 1974, and the third, arguably commenced with the opening of the CCMIS in 1995.

### *Developmental Influences on Contemporary Contemplative Education*

After engaging with current contemplative education literature including Brady (2007); Burggraf and Grossenbacher (2007); Bush (2010); Duerr, Zajonc, and Dana (2003); Hart (2004, 2008); Jones (2009); Miller (1994); Molz and Hampson (2010); Stock (2006); Repetti (2010); Roth (2008); Sarath (2010); Seitz (2009); Sellers-Young (2013); Smith (2006); Stock (2006); Solloway (2000), and Zajonc (2006, 2008, 2010); I have identified five primary influences on the current reemergence of contemporary contemplative education in the West. They are Buddhist and Hindu philosophy; transpersonal psychology; medicine, psychology, business and sport psychology and meditation research; Yoga in the West; and cognitive and neuroscience and meditation research. The first has directly affected the founding of educational institutions that incorporate the contemplative practices of their Buddhist and Hindu foundations. The impact of the other four is less explicit and their

outcomes not always obvious, which makes it difficult to quantify their influence although I suggest that it is significant. It is important to remember that these influences are provided as a means to initiate dialogue not as a conclusive list.

*Buddhist and Hindu philosophy.* The first proposed influence on contemplative education is the introduction of Buddhist and Hindu philosophy to the United States starting with Chinese immigration and then solidified through the influence of the New Age and the establishment of tertiary institutions established by Buddhist and Hindu scholars. Both Bush's (2010) and Repetti's (2010) sketches of the contemporary history of contemplative education emphasise the importance of the Asian Academy, acknowledging, for example, the significance of the Tibetan Buddhist scholar Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's founding in 1974 of the Naropa Institute. However, they don't mention the equally important establishment of the CIIS in 1986 by Harida Chaudhuri and the inauguration in 1971 of the MUM by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Aligned integral institutes, such as the John F. Kennedy University, San Francisco, and the Integral Institute, Colorado, are also significant, as aspects of their curricula engage with the Asian Academy. In addition, there are the thousands of informal associations such as yoga schools, ashrams, and Buddhist and Hindu sanghas and satsangs that range throughout the United States. The growth and continuing support of these institutions can in part be credited to the New Age movement in the United States (Wright, 2000, p. 55), with its awareness of, and openness to, Buddhism and Hinduism. Although it is extremely difficult to calculate the wider impact on contemplative education of these informal and formal institutions, I would suggest it is profound.

*Transpersonal psychology.* Transpersonal psychology is the second primary influence on the development of contemporary contemplative education. It is acknowledged by Bush (2010), cofounder of the CCMIS, in her article "Contemplative higher education in contemporary America," where she suggests that the originating point of contemporary contemplative education was the publication in 1890 of the "Principals of psychology" by the transpersonalist William James. She asserts that in his treatise on psychology, James, who is credited with coining the phrase "transpersonal," argued that any comprehensive account of human nature needs to include what he terms "mystical states," which can be read as contemplative states. James maintains that "no account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded" (James in Ferrer, 2002, p. 8). James's wide ranging personal and academic research into transpersonal states of consciousness is said, by Bush and others, to underpin the modern transpersonal movement that has in turn influenced the development of contemplative education.

The impact of James and other transpersonalists who followed him, such as Timothy Leary, Michael Washburn, Stanislav Grof and Jorge Ferrer, is important in this history of contemplative education. Two other significant aspects are the influence of transpersonal psychology through its humanistic orientation and

contemplative education theorists' engagement with transpersonal developmental models. The humanistic approaches inherent in transpersonalism can be said to link it with humanistic psychology, which is a psychotherapeutic approach that has affected education. Norwich (2002, p. 41) traces this to what he describes as "person-centred views" in philosophy and education that originated in the enlightenment and are still pervasive in society today. More recently, humanistic psychology and particularly the writings of the psychologist Carl Rogers (Prever, 2010, p. 9) have made their way into educational philosophy and practice. The links between Rogers's work and contemplative education can be found in aspects of his nondirective counselling. These include the practices of "disinterested openness" and "interpersonal listening," where the latter can be understood as a form of contemplation (Waks, 2011, p. 2747).

Transpersonalism's influence can also be seen in the use, by contemplative theorists, of various developmental models from humanistic and transpersonal psychology. This starts with the *hierarchy of needs* created by the humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow, followed by the developmental model of Ken Wilbur who is arguably the most influential developmental theorist after Maslow. Wilbur's complex schema of human development is founded on what he titles the "all quadrants all levels" (AQAL; Wilbur, 2000). These four quadrants are Intentional, Behavioural, Cultural, and Social, which have multiple associated lines of development or "intelligences." Coupled with these quadrants are levels of development, namely, egocentric, ethnocentric, world centric, and being centric. It is within these levels that Wilbur positions transpersonal experience, for connected with these broad stages are the ascending sublevels of prepersonal, personal, and transpersonal. There are a number of integral, transformative, and contemplative educators who draw from this and other aspects of Wilbur's theories including Esbjörn-Hargens (2007); Esbjörn-Hargens, Reams, and Gunnlaugson (2010); Gidley and Hampson (2005); Gidley (2010); Gunnlaugson (2010); and Karpiak (2010). Wilbur's work has been linked with contemplative education by the professor of music and contemplative theorist Ed Sarath (2003). He has identified commonalities between the peak state in Wilbur's model and that of the developmental psychologist and philosopher Jean Piaget, whose cognitive developmental theories have been particularly influential in education. Sarath (2003, p. 226) suggests that Wilbur "situates four levels of transpersonal development—what he calls, subtle, psychic, formal, and nondual—to follow Piaget's highest stage, formal operations." The similarities between Wilbur and Piaget's developmental models and their use in education are illustrative of transpersonalism's impact on contemporary contemplative education as is the use of Wilbur and Maslow's schemas by contemplative theorists.

These theorists' engagement with transpersonalism, the correspondence between contemplative education and transpersonal psychology, and the recognition of William James's impact on contemplative education are important factors when considering the influence of transpersonalism on contemplative education. However, what most directly links transpersonalism and contemplative education is contemplative

theorist/practitioners' theoretical and experiential engagement with transpersonal or contemplative states of consciousness.

*Medicine, psychology, sport psychology, and business and meditation research.* The third influence on contemporary contemplative education is what Repetti (2010, p. 6) terms a “variety of academy-extrinsic contributory phenomena.” He is referring to the areas of medicine, psychology, sport psychology, and business management that engage and research a range of contemplative practices including that of mindfulness. This form of contemplation is based on a particular kind of attention, which Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of mindfulness-based stress and pain reduction, defines as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). As with each of the other strands of influence in this historical sketch, medicine, psychology, sport psychology, and business and meditation research is included first because it examines the experience of contemplative states of consciousness, second because discourse from these areas of research are commonly referenced by contemplative theorists, and third, while the links between these areas of research and contemplative education are hard to quantify, they are apparent and substantial.

This can be most clearly seen in medical and psychology and meditation research as there are a large number of contemplative education theorists who engage it, including Davidson et al. (2012); Hart (2008); Holland (2006); Grace, (2011); Greenberg and Harris (2012); Roeser and Peck (2009); Shapiro, Brown, and Austin (2011), and many others. One of the medical researchers who arguably has most significantly impacted contemplative theory is Jon Kabat-Zinn, the professor of medicine Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School and founder of its world-renowned Stress Reduction Clinic. Two others are Herbert Benson and Dean Ornish. Benson is a cardiologist and founder of the Mind/Body Medical Institute at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. He is said to be the originator of mind-body research, beginning his seminal work in experiments with Buddhist monks, which continued in exchanges with Tenzin Gyasto, the 14th Dalai Lama. Dean Ornish a clinical professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, is the president and founder of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute. His “lifestyle-driven” approach for the control of coronary artery disease includes changes to diet and exercise and, importantly, here the use of meditation and yoga. It is harder to single out early influential psychologists in the area of psychology and meditation research, as there are many, although Roger Walsh’s work on Buddhism and applied psychology, Frances Vaughan’s on psychology and spiritual growth, Daniel Siegal’s investigation of the psychobiology of interpersonal relations, and Richard Davidson’s brain plasticity research are just a few whose work is commonly referenced by contemplative theorists.

The links between contemplative education and sport psychology and business and meditation research aren’t currently as clear. Although the growth in business and mindfulness research can be illustrated in a number of ways, starting with the

rising number of organizations that work with the Centre for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Currently, they work with more than 30 organizations in both the public and the private sectors. Carroll in his (2008) "The mindful leader: Awakening your natural management skills through mindfulness meditation" lists a range of companies that provide mindfulness-based training programs. Hunter and McCormick (2008) use the increase in the number of popularist books dealing with this topic to suggest that interest in and use of mindfulness-based practices in business is increasing. Academic interest in business and mindfulness is also growing, with research occurring in areas such as organizational behaviour, leadership and ethics, information systems, business management, entrepreneurial experience, stress reduction in the workplace, and corporate citizenship. This is exemplified in the work of Daniel Barbezat, Professor of Economics, who developed and now facilitates the "Buddhist economics: Skilful means and the market place" course at Amherst College, Massachusetts (<http://www.contemplativemind.org/archives/fellowships>, ¶17).

The links between contemplative education and business and mindfulness research are also not distinct, although fruitful interdisciplinary exchanges are emerging. A good example is the work of William George who investigates "mindful leadership" in his role as the professor of management practice at Harvard Business School. Others are Sadler-Smith and Burke's (2009) examination of intuition in management education, La Forge's (2004) introduction to moral imagination in ethical management decision making, and Maia Duerr's (2004) exploration of the "contemplative organization."

There are parallels between business and mindfulness and sport psychology and mindfulness research, with the latter generally focusing on stress reduction and performance enhancement (Gardner & Moore, 2007; Haberl, 2007; Kee & Wang, 2008; Ryback, 2006).<sup>2</sup> This form of research is a recent trend in sport psychology, which in the past aimed to systemise psychological skills training. The sport psychologists Robert Weinberg and Daniel Gould refer to this approach as the "systematic and consistent practice of mental or psychological skills for the purpose of enhancing performance, increasing enjoyment, or achieving greater sport and physical activity self-satisfaction" (Weinberg & Gould in Birrer & Morgan, 2009, p. 78). However, over the past 20 years, the focus has shifted, where once sport psychology aimed to assist athletes to identify their individual performance-facilitating states of arousal in each stage of competition, the emphasis is now on an "acceptance model." This easily aligns with mindfulness and programs have developed such as sports-focused mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and Gardner and Moore's (2004) "mindfulness-acceptance-commitment approach."

As with the other influences outlined here, the growing awareness in the mainstream of sport psychology practices such as the use of mindfulness in training is potentially leading to a widespread acceptance of contemplative practices such as mindfulness. Currently, there is little direct evidence for the influence of sport psychology and mindfulness research on the third wave of contemplative education.



Nonetheless, the intersection of sport psychology, contemplative practice, and education is an emerging interdisciplinary spearheaded by theorists such as Laura Douglass (2010) who uses sport psychology theory in her research into yoga as a pedagogical tool.

*Yoga in the West.* The fourth significant influence on contemplative education is the exponential growth of yoga in the West. It is relevant here first because the experience of embodied and contemplative states that practitioners can engage through yoga, potentially leads many to an acceptance of the contemplative in other settings such as education. Second, its rapid growth in the past 30 years has resulted in the worldwide dissemination of its contemplative practices. According to Singleton and Byrne (2008), yoga has now become a globalized phenomenon. They suggest that yoga classes and workshops can be found in nearly every city in the Western world and increasingly throughout the Middle East, Asia, South and Central America, and Australasia.

Figures relating to the practice of yoga are difficult to find and often unreliable, but to gain an impression of the increase in the popularity of yoga, Singleton and Byrne (2008) quote a Roper Poll commissioned initially in 1994 by the *Yoga Journal*, which they describe as the world's most popular yoga magazine. This poll estimated that 6 million Americans, approximately three and a third percent of the population, were practising yoga. Ten years later, in 2004, the same poll found that 17 million, more than 10% of the population, were regularly practising yoga. Repetti (2010) also quotes the *Yoga Journal's* 2008 "Yoga in America Study," which reported that Americans spent nearly 6 billion dollars annually on yoga-related products such as equipment, holidays, clothing, books, and DVDs.

Singleton and Byrne (2008) claim that this boom in yoga originated, as was mentioned earlier, with visits to the United States in the late 19th century by sages such as Swami Vivekananda and Protap Chunder Mozoomdar. Goldberg (2010) contends that it began a little earlier, in approximately 1830, when a group of American transcendentalists were introduced to Vedic philosophy through their reading of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Upanishads*. Goldberg (2010), Alter (2004), De Michelis (2005), Singleton and Byrne (2008), Syman (2010), and Worthington (1982) each provide varying histories of Yoga's arrival in the West. Nonetheless, despite some uncertainty about its origins, modern Western yoga developed as a number of Indian yoga sages and teachers travelled to the West, where they established ashrams and educational institutes that continue to disseminate their teachings. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's founding in 1959 of the *Transcendental Meditation* (TM) Movement in the United States is a good example, for there are now a thousand TM centres worldwide, and high estimates of individuals who have participated in the TM training are in the several million (Melton, 2003, pp. 945–946).

Of the numerous styles of yoga now taught in the West, there are three prominent forms. The first is the *Iyengar System*, which was brought to the West by B. K. S. Iyengar in the early 1950s. Iyengar's "Light on Yoga," often described as the bible

of yoga, has sold more than a million copies. The second, *Ashtanga Yoga* was developed by K. Pattabhi Jois who initially travelled to South America in 1974 and then onto California in 1975. Pattabhi Jois is known for his celebrity students such as Madonna, Sting, and Gwyneth Paltrow who have popularised this form of yoga. Both B. K. S. Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois were students of the renowned teacher and Vedantic scholar Tirumalai Krishnamacharya (1888–1989) whose son T. K. V. Desikachar along with A. G. Mohan established the *Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram* in Chennai, India, which disseminates his teachings worldwide.

The students of these yoga sages and teachers and their students continue to develop Modern Yoga, which has led to the profusion of hybrid yogas, some of which adhere to elements of Classical Yoga, while others blend different forms of physical exercise such as the Yogalates (Yoga and Pilates) and Yogaerobics (Yoga and aerobics). Yoga has been commercialised further with innovations such as “Hot Naked Yoga” and “Dogya” (Yoga for Dogs). Alongside the widely varied practices of Modern Yoga, yoga philosophy continues to be developed by Western Yoga scholars such as Elizabeth De Michelis, Joseph Alters, Sarah Strauss, Christopher Chapple, Jim Morley, Ian Whicher, Georg Feuerstein, and many others. The authenticity of Modern Yoga, philosophy, and practice is a common theme in their work, but as Singleton and Byrne (2008, p. 2) indicate, Modern Yoga is not cohesive, rather it is a “profusion of styles and agendas . . . [not a] contained entity.” It may even be the lack of cohesion in yoga that has led to its exponential growth in the West, and its ubiquity, has I believe, significantly impacted contemporary contemplative education. This has not happened in a systematized way but generally through yoga students’ growing familiarity with and acceptance of its contemplative practices and specifically with those contemplative theorists who are yogis and now engage its philosophical underpinnings in their work.

*Cognitive and neuroscience and meditation research.* The influence of cognitive and neuroscience and meditation research on contemplative education can be seen in the increasing use of its findings by contemplative theorists. They include but are not limited to Cranson et al. (1991), Downey (2010), Hart (2008), Kezar (2005), Repetti (2010), Roth (2008), Sarath (2003), Smith (2006), and Varela and Poerksen (2006). Questions about consciousness have in part led cognitive and neuroscientists to the study of meditation and other contemplative practices. Their growing interest in these practices diverges from early stages of cognitive science, which retained a reductionist bias where the brain was designated the site of consciousness and modelled on the architecture of the first computers. In the last two decades, cognitive scientists and neuroscientists have challenged the brain–computer model in a variety of ways. One that is relevant here is the “embodied cognition perspective” developed by theorists such as Antonio Damasio (2000) and Francisco Varela and Shear (1999). They suggest that consciousness research was limited by considering the brain to be a type of computer. This approach viewed thinking and perceiving as forms of data processing that computationally transformed experience into useable

symbols. However, this can only ever provide a cache of self-sufficient symbols and their rules. A more comprehensive way of understanding how the brain functions is as a “dynamically organized system; [for] numerous interdependent variables have to be taken into account, which can only be dissociated from each other in an arbitrary way” (Varela & Poerksen, 2006, p. 37).

In addition to this ecological understanding of the brain, Varela developed an “embodied approach” to cognition that he termed *enactive*. It challenges the understanding of cognition as a fundamentally representational function situated in a “pregiven mind” within a “pregiven world.” Rather, it suggests that cognition is the “enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993, p. 9). This *enactive* approach led to Varela’s creation of the hybrid discipline neurophenomenology, which combines a first-person phenomenological report of subjective experience with the experimental study of brain activity. Neurophenomenological research into lived, embodied, first-person experience challenges what Varela and Poerksen (2006) term a rift between natural science and immediate experience. Neurophenomenology is also pivotal in Varela and his colleague’s work on the “hard problem” of consciousness, which asks why we have qualitative phenomenal experience. Findings resulting from their research regarding the positive physiological and psychological impacts of contemplation on learning have been fortuitous for contemplative education theorists who now commonly draw on them.

In addition to neurophenomenological research, contemplative theorists reference the growing findings in the more general area of neuroscience and cognitive science and meditation research. A commonly quoted project is that of the neuroscientist Sara Lazar and her colleagues (2005) who found that long-term meditation changes the physiology of the brain. In their research with 20 long-term insight meditation practitioners, they discovered that regular meditation practice is associated with increased thickness in the frontal cortex. This is particularly significant for educators, as this region of the brain is associated with higher cognitive function. Lazar and her colleagues’ research is just one example of the cognitive and neuroscience and meditation research that contemplative theorists are now using (see Brady, 2007; Bush, 2011; Davidson et al., 2012; Ferrari, 2011; Grossenbacher & Parkin, 2006; Shapiro, Brown, & Austin, 2011; and Zajonc, 2006). Its pervasive influence on contemplative education can be attributed to its identification of a neural substrate that underpins the positive impacts of contemplation in education. Although there may be questions about methods used and the validity of claims arising from this field, there is no doubt about the legitimacy that it has supplied for an approach that has been viewed as questionable in mainstream education.

Cognitive and neuroscience and meditation research, Yoga in the West, medicine, psychology, business and sport psychology and meditation research; transpersonal psychology; and Buddhist and Hindu philosophy continue to influence contemplative education as it develops in a variety of ways across a wide range of disciplines. Interestingly, contemplative education’s engagement with these areas

is reverberating back into them. Scholars from medicine, psychology, business and sport psychology and meditation research, for example, are now being influenced by contemplative education scholars. These cycles of influence are an important factor in the growth of contemplative education theory and practice.

### *The Third Wave of Contemplative Education: The Recent Reemergence*

The five influences outlined earlier have supported the return of contemplative education as it has evolved over three successive waves. Bush (2010) focuses on what I term the third wave in her investigation of contemplative education and the establishment of the CCMIS. She starts in 1995 with Charles Halpern's creation of the Working Group on Contemplative Mind in Society (WGCMS). Halpern, the president of the Nathan Cummings Foundation, then invited a number of contemplative scholars to contribute to the "White papers on contemplative education." A series of related events followed that Bush (2010) details in this overview:

- 1997—The WGCMS, renamed the CCMIS, is incorporated.
- 1999—The first "Mindfulness in Education Conference," University of Massachusetts, United States.
- 2000—Harvard University's "Humane Creativity and the Contemplative Mind Project" established.
- 2000—University of Michigan offers the first Contemplative BA.
- 2003—The CCMIS hosts the first *Symposium on Contemplative Practice and Higher Education*, Amherst College, Massachusetts, United States.
- 2004—Arthur Zajonc, professor of physics at Amherst College, becomes the director of the CCMIS's academic program.
- 2004—*Columbia Teachers College Bulletin* publishes a special issue on Contemplative Education.
- 2005—Brown University, Rhode Island, United States, establishes a Contemplative Studies Initiative.
- 2005—The first "Summer Session on Contemplative Curriculum" development at Smith College, Massachusetts, United States.
- 2007—Six hundred educators attend the *Uncovering the heart of higher education: Integrative learning for compassionate action in an interconnected world conference*, San Francisco, United States.
- 2008—"Toward the integration of meditation into Higher Education: A review of Research" is prepared by Shauna Shapiro, Kirk Brown, and John Astin (Bush, 2010, pp. 4–8).

Bush (2010) concludes her timeline here, suggesting that by 2008, the field had expanded at such a rate that there were too many activities to catalogue. She firmly places the contemporary reemergence of contemplative education with the establishment of the CCMIS, which houses the Association of Contemplative Mind in Higher

Education. The educational philosopher Repetti (2010, p. 6) asserts that the formation of both has been the most significant catalyst for contemplative pedagogy in North America. The contemplative theorist Ed Sarath (2010, p. 175) supports Repetti's proposition, maintaining that the contemplative education movement arose from the establishment of the CCMIS. The CCMIS's efforts to support contemplative education research and pedagogy through their Contemplative Practice Fellowship Program (CPFP), meetings, national conferences, research, and webinars have significantly advanced contemplative education. However, I would suggest that the work of other educational institutes with a contemplative orientation is also important. They are the CIIS with their philosophy, cosmology, and consciousness, East-West psychology programs, Naropa University's department of contemplative education, and the MUM's courses, which all include meditation.<sup>3</sup> Having said this, the CCMIS is definitely at the forefront of the third wave of contemporary contemplative education. Accompanying these initiatives is the work of an increasing number of independent contemplative pedagogues, some of whom can be seen on the CPFP section of the CCMIS website (<http://www.contemplativemind.org/archives/fellowships>).<sup>4</sup>

Recipients of the CCMIS's fellowship and other contemplative educators are currently forming contemplative education networks (Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003) such as the Five Colleges of Western Massachusetts with its network of 60 professors, and the University of Michigan with a network of 50. I am also aware of the City University of New York (CUNY) Contemplatives, a loose knit group of contemplative scholars from three of the eight CUNY campuses, the small Contemplative Education group I belong to at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, and the growing number of more structured organisations such as the Mindfulness in Education Network (MIEN), the David Lynch Foundation, the Garrison Institute's Contemplative Teaching and Learning Initiative, the Hawn Foundation and Yoga.edu to name just a few. Duerr et al. (2003) propose that the growth in these initiatives indicates that the "field of higher education is at an important juncture in its development, one in which the contemplative and spiritual can be integrated into learning and personal transformation" (Duerr et al., 2003, p. 178). In my 6-year involvement with contemplative education, I have been gratified to see the exponential growth of a diverse range of approaches to contemplative education, often developing around a specific discipline such as the contemplative law movement.

### *Links Between Contemplative and Transformative Education*

Relevant here are the parallels between contemplative and transformative education, where aspects of transformative theory and practice are currently being taken up across a range of disciplines. This can be seen in Moore's (2005) work on "transformative learning" in sustainability education and Jones's (2009) research in social work, where in part he outlines the reach of transformative approaches across

disciplines. It appears that as their interdisciplinary range develops they are progressively intersecting, which I suggest is an important aspect of their growth and uptake since the late 1960s. In some cases, the transformative and contemplative are directly linked as Zajonc (2006, p. 3) does in his call for peace in plural societies, where he states that “[o]nly a profoundly contemplative and transformative education has the power to nurture the vibrant, diverse civilization that should be our global future.” More directly, in practice, Robinson (2004, p. 107) outlines the use of one of the defining aspects of contemplative education—its contemplative practices—in transformative education, describing them as a gateway into “higher dimensions of learning.”

Links between the contemplative and transformative, prior to the early 1990s, were made when these and other approaches, such as integral education, were gathered under the collective title of “alternative education,” with their pedagogy often described as alternative and holistic. This aspect of their shared histories can be seen in the influence that important theorists in alternative education have had on contemplative, integral, and transformative education. According to Esbjörn-Hargens et al. (2010), some of these philosopher sages are Rudolph Steiner (1861–1925) founder of the Waldorf Education System, Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) founder of the Krishnamurti Foundation, Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) English mathematician and philosopher, Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) founder of the “Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education” and Integral Yoga/Education, Maria Montessori (1870–1952) founder of Montessori Education, and John Dewey (1859–1952) American philosopher, psychologist, and educator (Esbjörn-Hargens, Reams, & Gunnlaugson, 2010, p. 2). There are others I believe who need to be added to Esbjörn-Hargens and his colleagues’ list, such as the transpersonalist and psychologist William James (1842–1910), Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) founder of the Theosophical Society, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1914–2008) yogic sage and founder of the MUM, Jean Gebser (1905–1973) German integral philosopher, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939–1987) founder of the Naropa Institute, and Haridas Chaudhuri (1913–1975) founder of the CIIS. Esbjörn-Hargens et al. (2010) suggest that the current integral, transformative, and contemplative approaches influenced by these theorists are now developing alongside mainstream education.

It is difficult to define contemplative and transformative education as they are emerging holistic approaches that are changing rapidly and developing across a wide range of disciplines, which is a problem they share with integral education. Murray (2009) confirms this with his claim that the “integral” means many things to many people. Diverse understandings of “contemplative” and “transformative” provide a similar challenge. However, Murray’s call to situate integral education as a “progressive” approach supports an understanding of integral and I would suggest contemplative and transformative education. As he suggests, “[T]he integral approach can embrace . . . most of the values and deep principles embodied in progressive thought, and thus not only compatible with them but offers a generous and welcoming meta-container” (Murray, 2009, p. 96).

Esbjörn-Hargens et al. (2010) engage the issue of definition by proposing multiple and possibly contradictory definitions of integral education, which by association can shed light on transformative and contemplative education. They supply a list of key characteristics that are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive, starting with integral education's multiple perspectives. It also includes first-, second-, and third-person methodologies of learning and teaching; weaves together domains of self, culture, and nature; combines critical thinking with experiential feeling; includes insights from Robert Kegan's constructive-developmental psychology (Moss, 2008); engages regular personal (body, mind, spirit) practices of transformation; incorporates "other ways of knowing" (including the contemplative); recognises various types of learners and teachers; and acknowledges a wide range of approaches to education (Esbjörn-Hargens et al., 2010, pp. 5–6). This loose definition of integral education, which I suggest can be applied to the contemplative and transformative, also suggests that their combined influence is widespread and that they provide sites of practice for each other. Despite the integral, transformative, and contemplative being meta-containers of sorts and the complexity of their characteristics, there are certain aspects that set them apart from each other.<sup>5</sup>

Transformative education's origins in the Transformational Learning Theory of Jack Mezirow are primarily what distinguish them from contemplative approaches. The foundation in Mezirow's work, the continuing debates about the cognitivist bias of his developmental model, and calls from second- and third-wave transformative theorists for the inclusion of the spiritual, contemplative, and affective, and more integrative and participatory approaches in transformative education also distinguish it from contemplative education. Despite some of the transformative pedagogy of second- and third-wave transformative education theorists engaging contemplative practices, the use of contemplation in educational settings has until recently differentiated contemplative education from the transformative. However, as can be seen in Robinson's work, this delineation may no longer be valid. What might now differentiate the contemplative from the transformative is the growing influence of neuroscience and meditation research on the development of contemplative education theory and practice and current debates questioning its secular or religious nature and legitimacy in education.

Although the contemplative and transformative can be defined in these ways, and while they have distinct methods, with their own pedagogies, journals, institutions, and conferences,<sup>6</sup> their histories, principles, and practices intersect. Each contains contemplative and transformative aspects, both take a holistic approach to education and share elements of their histories. This can most directly be seen in their emergence from archaic ritual (Fisher-Yoshida et al., 2009) to some extent later development in early Buddhist and Hindu monastic traditions<sup>7</sup> (Repetti, 2010) and the common influence of seminal theorists such as William James, Rudolph Steiner, and Sri Aurobindo (Bush, 2010; Esbjörn-Hargens et al., 2010). Despite their differences, the commonalities and shared histories of contemplative and transformative education are currently leading to the growing intersection of their theories and practices.

This can clearly be seen in the increasing numbers of contemplative theorists publishing in this journal and their claims for the transformative nature of contemplation in education. In addition, the growing use of contemplative practices by transformative theorist pedagogues reinforces this sense of the boundaries merging between these two educational approaches. The reason for this might arise out of their shared origins in archaic ritual, although whatever it may be, the benefits related to their intersection are clearly outlined in Robinson's proposition that contemplative/mediative practice is a significant facet of transformational learning (Robinson, 2004, p. 112) and that it has a significant role in serving "an integrative/integral and transformative vision for adult and higher education" (p. 108).

## **In Summary**

The aim of this historical overview was to present the complexity of contemplative education's current reemergence. This in turn may shed light on its continued recurrence, despite distrust of the contemplative and subjective in cognocentric and rationalist approaches to education. Why it is currently reemerging and why it has been suppressed in prevailing rationalist education systems are questions for an analysis of the politics of subjectivity in education, which is beyond the scope of this article. However, in brief, I suggest that there is a growing dissatisfaction with the impacts of the Cartesian mien, which underpins current mainstream education and has variously repressed contemplative education since the Industrial Revolution. Contemplative education has reemerged, I believe, because of a desire for the holism that was lost through Cartesian efforts to "cut man off from his deeper embodied perplexities as a whole knower" (Holbrook, 1987, p. 46). Although Cartesian reason produced an exponential growth in the natural sciences, it obscured the passage back to a locus of meaning, knowledge, and sense of wholeness, which lies within the individual's subjective consciousness (Schiro, 1978).

It appears that educational practitioner theorists struggling with their own and their students' chronic stress, fragmented attention, time poverty, and quest for meaning are now finding that contemplative practices provide a means to navigate both the entry and the exit of a passage back to wholeness that contemplation can provide. The ability of these practices to link the inner and outer worlds, the psyche and soma, frames these practitioner theorists' restoration of the subjective and somatic in education through their development of contemplative pedagogy. This article's sketch of an ancient and contemporary history of contemplative education suggests that the pedagogy they are developing is, in essence, a return to an approach that has had a continuing presence in education, so suggesting that it is an essential part of how we learn.

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## Notes

1. It is important to note that while there are examples of contemplative education worldwide, this article focuses on the development of contemporary contemplative education in the United States.
2. See the special issue of the *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*, December 2009, “Special issue: Mindfulness- and acceptance-based approaches to sport performance and well-being” published by *Human Kinetics Journals*.
3. There are a number of other universities and institutions in the United States that are currently providing various forms of contemplative education, some of which are The Association for Mindfulness in Education <http://www.mindfuleducation.org/index.html>; The Brown University Contemplative Studies Initiative <http://www.brown.edu/Faculty/ContemplativeStudiesInitiative/>; Education as Transformation at Wellesly <http://www.wellesley.edu/RelLife/transformation/>; the Garrison Institute <http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/>; Indiana State University’s Centre for the Study of Health, Religion and Spirituality <http://www.indstate.edu/psychology/cshrs/test.htm>; Leadership Programs at St Marys College of California <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/academics/schools/school-of-liberal-arts/departments-programs/ma-in-leadership/>; Mindfulness in Education Network <http://www.mindfuled.org/>; Minding your Life <http://www.mindingyourlife.net/>; Mind & Life Institute <http://www.mindandlife.org/>; University of Arkansas’s, Mindfulness-Based Campus-Community Health Program <http://www.ualr.edu/mindfulness/>; University of Michigan program in Creativity and Consciousness <http://www.sitemaker.umich.edu/pccs/home>; and The University of Virginia’s Contemplative Science Center <http://www.uvacontemplation.org/content/home>
4. Sarath (2003, p. 215) maintains that support from the American Council of Learned Societies and now the Centre for Contemplative Mind in Society’s (CCMIS) contemplative practice fellowships enabled the integration of contemplative practices in over 75 colleges and universities throughout the United States.
5. As this section is primarily about the links between contemplative and transformative education, I will only outline distinctions between the two.
6. Currently, there are seven significant institutions in the field of contemplative education in the United States; they are the Contemplative Science Centre at the University of Virginia, Virginia; the Contemplative Studies Initiative Brown University, Rhode Island; the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), San Francisco, CA; Naropa Institute, Boulder, CO; the Garrison Institute, Garrison, NY; the Mind and Life Institute, Hadley, MA; and the CCMIS, MA. In 2013, the first journal dedicated to contemplative education, *The Journal of Contemplative Inquiry* was published online by the CCMIS. The CCMIS hosts a range of workshops and conferences such as the annual “Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education Conference.” Contemplative theory can also be found in a

number of journals including the *Journal of Transformative Education* and the *Teachers College Record*. Two important tertiary centres for transformative education are the Teachers College, Columbia University, NY, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, Canada. The peer-reviewed *Journal of Transformative Education* is published 4 times a year by Sage Publications, and there are a number of academic transformative learning conferences including the “International Transformative Learning Conference” run by the Columbia University’s Teachers College and associates. It is important to note that the list of Institutes, journals, and conferences is by no means exhaustive, as new initiatives in contemplative, and transformative education are regularly emerging in academic and private sectors worldwide.

7. This is more relevant for parts of the second wave of transformative education.

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