

Oren Ergas

# Reconstructing 'Education' through Mindful Attention

Positioning the Mind at the Center  
of Curriculum and Pedagogy



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Oren Ergas  
Beit Berl Academic College and Hebrew University  
Modi'in, Israel

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# Introduction: The Problem of Education Is ‘Education’. Forget ‘Education’. Study the Mind

The fact that ‘education’ has problems is hardly news to anyone, at least not if one reads the daily papers, raises children of his or her own, or simply recalls his or her own experiences of being educated. Diagnoses of these problems span the gamut. Some depict them in pedagogical, curricular, and/or organizational terms. Others see them as economic or social problems as they highlight inequality, bullying, dropout, substance abuse etc. It is not that I disagree with these observations. It is rather more of a feeling that something far more fundamental is missing from our view. It is not at all surprising that it is missing for I suspect that if I am doing my job properly as a writer then that something is missing from *your* view right now – *Your own embodied experience*. I’ve tricked you by becoming the agent of your attention. If your mind attends to these words, it cannot attend to itself. This is the story of ‘education’ in a nutshell. It is I believe the biggest problem we face – the expulsion of the mind from ‘education’.

Missing from our diagnostics is the peculiar possibility: that the problem of education might be ‘education’. We might have gotten stuck in how we understand ‘education’ as it relates to all those practices that we associate with it. That’s why the word ‘education’ is going to appear in parentheses throughout the book just like many other terms like ‘society’, ‘curriculum’, ‘pedagogy’ that we have come to consider as if they are independent of the mind that perceives and constructs them.

There are numerous manifestations to the problem of education’s being ‘education’. The one we start with is that somehow much of what



is happening in *your* mind has been expelled from the constructs of 'education', 'curriculum', and 'pedagogy'. Somehow we have come to think that math counts as subject matter whereas your fear or love of math does not; that 'education' is about 'society' *out there* and not about our embodied minds *in here* – our emotions, sensations, and by all means that internal narrative to which each one of us listens individually throughout our day. The 'education' we have constructed as a 'society' will tend to shape our view so that we see these internal domains as something that is marginal or in fact *interferes* with 'education'. This book will seek to convince you that *your* mind-body is the other half of the 'curriculum'.

This mind of *yours* is that through which you are perceiving *this* word based on your past experiences. Since these words are constantly changing, you're literally changing your mind with every word you are reading. You're not really *doing* that. It just happens. It will happen if you stop reading as well, for experience will be immediately 'filled' by other stimuli. Most of what is happening right now to enable experience is hidden from you. If you need a proof for that, then consider that your mind by all means includes the experience of your body that may be noted just for this moment because of 'hearing' its name, yet a moment ago it was cast to the background for your mind is also responsible for focusing your attention so that *this* word will take center stage.

That thing we call mind is mysteriously tied to a brain, and I will be speaking of both in some chapters of this book. I will mostly speak of the mind but in some chapters brain-language will help articulate the experience of the mind as I will follow psychologists and neuroscientists who clearly associate between the two. I'll argue in this book that whether you care to note this or not, your brain-mind is 'educated' at this very moment. *Right now* neurons are firing in your brain in ways that I hope are both familiar enough so as to enable the understanding of my words, but also novel enough to begin carving new patterns of neuronal firings based on which you will come to think differently about that thing we call 'education'. This process itself might count as 'education'; however, some might not view it that way, which leads us to another problem with 'education'. Some of our minds were 'educated' to think that 'education' is more of a *formal* process that takes place at 'schools', 'universities', and even at 'home' if you will. I argue that,

if by 'education' we mean the shaping of our identity, agency, well-being, dispositions toward life, ethics, ways of being-knowing-acting in the world, and our ability to respond intelligently to life situations – and I think most would agree at least with some of these – then our brains-minds do not wait for an experience to be called a 'math lesson' in order to 'get' 'educated'. They are 'educated' here and now.

For those that are familiar with philosophers like John Dewey and Alfred North Whitehead, who viewed *all* life as education, such claim might not be considered to be novel. However, what *does* escape many is a more radical claim that I'll be making: your brain-mind-body does not care much whether the information it perceives arrives from what 'society' had thoughtfully placed in a textbook, what the teacher writes on the board/screen, what scientific research had validated, *or* whether it comes from *your* mind-body itself. The narrative that runs in your mind throughout your day (e.g., your worries, hopes, dreams, thoughts of your social-image, body-image), your emotional life, and your bodily sensations are all subject matter that forms an *inner curriculum*. This is regardless of how adequately this *inner curriculum* reflects reality *out there*, and regardless of what kind of state of mind you are in when you experience them. A child walking to school with the fear of being attacked by the school bully is 'educated' in fear as the bully waiting around the corner 'educates' himself in violence. Driving to work and worrying about being fired or planning your vacation is the subject matter created in *your* brain-mind that wittingly or unwittingly 'educates' your brain-mind then and there.

We are constantly 'educated' from within and from without, but the problem of 'education' is that we will hardly think that this is the case. Part of our 'education' has been to shape our minds to believe that 'education' is that thing that 'society' *does* to the mind, as it places the subject matter of various disciplines in front of it, and if a student's mind is preoccupied with his personal worries during a 'school-lesson' then the latter are in fact interfering with the occasion for which 'society' had gathered us. *I don't think so*. It might take quite a journey to convince you in this, but though such thoughts-emotions-sensation have not been 'willed' either by 'society' or even by *us*, they are not simply an 'attentional lapse' the consequence of which is 'missing science' or 'missing history' that the teacher is busy teaching. They are an alternative lesson. At times a good one, at others hardly so. Who governs this *inner curriculum* that simply arises in this mind? Is it

indeed justified to consider it as part of the process of 'education'? Can we do something about this *inner curriculum*? Can we engage with our minds in an 'educative' way? These questions and others are discussed in this book at length. However, our initial task will be to awaken ourselves from the spell of an 'education' that has somehow hidden this *inner* terrain from our view. We will seek to diagnose what sustains this 'social system' in such a way that makes us believe that the math and history are more important than the mind that is shaped in the process of their learning. How is it that our public 'curricular-pedagogical' practice gives the impression that academic achievements are in some way more important than how we live with ourselves and with each other?

\*

### EDUCATION IS A MIND-MAKING PROCESS

"Education," as curriculum theorist Eliot Eisner claimed "is a mind-making process" (1993, p. 5). The meaning of this statement is that there are various ways of making meaning based on our experience and 'education' is no less than an initiation into a worldview that *specifies* and *habituates* those ways. That is, 'education' 'makes' minds see things in *certain* ways for better and/or for worse. To use a metaphor that will appear later in the book – 'Education' can be likened to a process by which 'society' equips your mind and mine with a kaleidoscope through which we will come to see the world through certain settings. That kaleidoscope will determine the ways in which we will come to understand and participate in the 'social' world. Is there a problem there? – On the one hand *not at all*. There's a clear logic and desirability to this. We need to communicate and pragmatically organize our lives and we must then 'make' the 'mind' in some sense. Furthermore, the making of the mind is inevitable for this is how nature works: No matter how wisely thought and open our curricular and extra-curricular activities, they will always create patterns of automation and all learning and habits require such automation.

On the other hand there *is* a problem there. 'Education' as a mind-making process reaches far deeper, for it applies to the shaping of the mind to understand 'education' itself. 'Education' becomes a serious problem when it makes us blind to the fact that it is shaping our minds in very *particular* and *contingent* ways. Our current 'curriculum' and 'pedagogy' as I will argue, are initiating us into obliviousness to the *contingency* of the *specific* kaleidoscope

with which we are equipped. I realize that I might be confusing you so to begin to scratch the surface of this problem I’ll express this by paraphrasing the words of a contemporary curriculum theorist who wryly stated,

Our eleventh graders have one difficult problem and a number of easy problems. The difficult problem concerns how to solve equations with two variables. The easy problems are how to handle the emotional turmoil when your father is dying of cancer, the fear of living with an alcoholic mother, or the horror of escaping the neighborhood bully waiting for you behind the corner. You see, our curriculum dedicates four hours per week to the hard problem in primary school, and five in high school. The other problems must be easy for they get one per week, or an occasional “intervention.” (see Barak 2015, p. 172)

Barak’s wry observation points to two problems of ‘education’. The first is a *practical curricular problem* – students hardly ever get to discuss the problems that really trouble them in life. There’s no time for that because they need to study math and history. This is a huge problem concerned with domains of the *inner curriculum*, which we will be exploring in the third part of the book. The second is a subtler yet more profound problem that concerns the *‘educational’ construct problem*. Our minds are shaped to believe that this is what ‘education’ is – a ‘social’ process that concerns things like math and history but not life-problems. This problem concerns the mind in the most direct way. It speaks to that famous Jamesean sentence: “compared to what we can be we are only half awake” (1907, p. 3). Our minds are initiated into mass habits that create ‘education’ as a *perpetuum mobile*. ‘Education’ becomes a mechanism that is sustained by an entire ‘society’ that walks ‘half awake’, which means equally *half asleep*.

‘Education’ as we have constructed it, shapes our minds in such a way that while we are busy gazing *out there* at the incredible versatility of the world and human genius, we cannot but become blind to the genius of the mind *in here* that is constantly feeding the kaleidoscope from within, shaping the image, which we see moment after moment *out there*. Every quadratic equation, historical date, literary piece, or geography of a distant terrain is a key to the world *out there* just as much as it is a key to the *inner curriculum* that unfolds in their learning. As Parker Palmer’s (1983) book title depicts this, *we know as we are known*. But one realizes such profound idea only based on a reconstruction of ‘education’; one that drives home the idea that we are shaped from within and from without based on the

door of attention that is the gateway to our minds. It swings *out* just as much as it swings *in*, yet our minds were mistakenly shaped to associate 'education' far more with the former than with the latter.

You and I are born and initiated into a 'social narrative' that will create the feeling that *this narrative* reflects the way in which this world was made, and hence it has little to do with our own minds; as if 'education' was given to us on the eighth day of creation and now we need to cope with the consequences of an endeavor that is not really in our hands. Our general approach reflects a lack of understanding that whatever we consider to be problematic *out there* in the 'social world' must have somehow emerged from the *nature of our minds* that brought it about. Ignoring the mind as the other half of the 'curriculum', 'education' becomes a hall of mirrors in which 'society' educates the minds to mirror back its own ways of thinking and practicing 'education'. The theory constantly revalidates itself by minds that impose theory through practice. Very much following the analysis of critical pedagogues and grounded in Marx's 'social' analysis, 'education' becomes an initiation of the young in the image of the past – a *perpetuum mobile* sustained by mind and 'society'. It is a vicious cycle indeed, and attempting to diagnose a problem within such a self-justifying system means asking for trouble. Whether you gaze at 'society' that emerges from minds, or whether you gaze at the mind that was shaped in 'society's' image through 'education', you are bound to find yourself lost in a hall of mirrors. There may be a way of escape as I will propose. It involves stepping away from 'society' and 'mind' as we know them in order to complement (not substitute) our paths of knowing and being.

But first, a brief thought-experiment can demonstrate this 'hall of mirrors' formed through 'education'. It shows both the inevitability of this process and the problem that it creates. If you would somehow take a healthy baby that was born in the eleventh century, send it through a time-tunnel and raise and educate it in the twenty-first century, would this baby's mind 'catch up' with a millennium of human technology and knowledge to reflect the minds of adults today? Conversely, send a baby that was born today through a time-tunnel to be raised and educated in the eleventh century. Would the mind of that baby grow to reflect the ways of its era or would it reflect minds of a twenty-first century baby? – all this is highly speculative of course, but I think it is plausible to claim that 'education' will close the time-gap in both cases. Most minds will come to reflect the norms and ideas of their time and place through 'education' whether you think of it in its institutionalized or non-institutionalized and informal ways. If you want this in a slightly more realistic though unfortunate

version, imagine a case in which an Argentinian and an Inuit baby become orphans at the day of their birth and are sent to adoption to France and Saudi Arabia respectively. How likely are these babies to grow into adults that reflect the societies and cultures of their origin? What this comes down to is that,

‘education’ as we constructed it is a mind-making process by which a mind is shaped to mirror the ways of its time and place for better and for worse. It is a path of roads taken that is automatically the exclusion of a myriad others that ‘could have been’.

This tells us an incredible story about the mind that can be described based on two terms with which neuroscience has been busy in the past decade: *plasticity* and *pruning*.

On the one hand, we have the incredible plasticity of a brain-mind that is born into the world and can be shaped in a myriad ways depending on the kind of ‘education’ it gets. On the other hand, the kind of ‘education’ we get prunes infinite options to the particularity and contingency that is reflected in who you come to be based on the fact that your ‘society’ at this moment in time believes in *this* and not in *that*. In due time *this* might become *that* and vice versa.

We might think that the sun revolves around the earth as was customary just a few hundreds of years ago, and we might live in a ‘society’ in which women do not have the right to vote. *Whichever the case the mind will be made through ‘education’* to become blind to such contingencies. It will be made to view this as how the world *is*. Peculiarly, you and I might be sitting smugly right now thinking how wise we are now to have overcome those misconceptions about the sun, and no less about women’s rights. The great fallacy in this may escape our view. Those living a hundred years from now might view both of us and our ‘wise’ contemporary ‘society’ with a similar kind of smugness that we experience now.

## EDUCATION, CONTINGENCY, AND PRUNING

‘Education’ as a ‘mind-making process’ has shaped your mind to see the world in a way that is very similar to the way in which others around you see it and somewhat different than the way in which those living a few

hundred miles to the East or South of you see it.<sup>1</sup> That shaping can include anything from the choice of disciplines that you find on an average students' timetable comprising of the public 'curriculum' at your hometown, the skills considered as necessary for contemporary life, as well as 'social' norms such as how one is to stand in line in the supermarket and when it is customary to go to college, get married, and have kids. All these are 'housed' within what Neil Postman (1995) called a 'narrative' – a broad belief system that provides context to our actions and gives them certain meanings. Some narratives are better than others but that is not the point I am making. The point is that *mutatis mutandis*,

our mind can be shaped to see the world based on any narrative but all it gets is one. That is what I call contingency. However, contingency is not the problem. It becomes the problem when your mind is 'educated' to confuse it with necessity.

Norms such as having kids at the age of thirty or twenty, having one child, eight or none, the importance of mathematics and science or the preference of literature, the desirability of logical thinking over Romantic musings, the prestige of Harvard compared to some local college, the preference of becoming a lawyer rather than a carpenter, taking the transportation by engine cars rather than traveling in a chariot in the twenty-first century as taken for granted – these do not seem to be present in the mind that is born into the world. They are the product of 'education' that has built those meanings into that mind so that this 'educated' mind now sees things as they *ought* to be seen according to the narrative of *this* 'society'. The mind comes to see them as the way the world was made.

The point that I am making then is that our vocabulary of describing 'education' smacks of great optimism when we speak of it as a process of 'cultivation' and a 'bringing out' of potentialities (as the Latin *Educare* suggests). What we seem to miss is a different, perhaps more pessimistic perspective: 'education' very much follows the natural process that neuroscientists refer to as *pruning*. It is the sculpting of a brain-mind of a newborn that seems to be born with infinite potentials into the *person* that *you* are right now. It is not just the *positive* aspect of cultivation of certain ways of seeing, but by all means the *negative accent* of cutting off the many roads that could have been taken and were not. Truth be told, we are probably lucky to have cut off many of those roads, but the realization that things could have been different than they are *now* is crucial both to the

kind of contemplative journey that this book hopes to offer you personally, and I believe to the very idea, practice, and research of 'education'.

Let us not forget what 'education' amounts to: we are in a business in which minds are attempting to determine how to form the process that makes them. Do we have enough 'inside information' about that mind that we are attempting to shape? Are we sure that students' timetables and school and higher education curricula as we know them constitute the best mind-making processes we can come up with? What makes us so sure that what we have now needs to be replicated? I seriously believe that exploring our minds as the other half of the 'curriculum' is an extremely fruitful path by which optimism will return to the starker image that I have begun to sketch. Once we become more aware of this pruning effect both at the 'social' level of our 'curricular' deliberations but also *at the level of how our own minds participate in the process of 'education'*, I think we will position ourselves in a far more knowledgeable place from which we will be able to engage in the task of reconstructing 'education'. The manifestation of the problem of education as 'education' in this case is that we have somehow managed to construct an incredibly thoughtful operation called 'education' that is to 'make minds' yet we never quite stop to directly examine the mind that this operation is to shape.

A reasonable objection to all the above may be that in its better cases, 'education' seeks to develop a critical consciousness in tune with the tradition of 'liberal education' and in more current manifestations of critical pedagogy (Freire 2007; Giroux 2011). Indeed you will find a very Socratic kind of approach in this book as it will constantly challenge the taken for granted. Furthermore, I am all for empowering students through the creation of a critical consciousness that 'educates' them to see 'social construction' at work as it creates inequality, gender-issues, marginalization of ethnical groups, violence, and several other problems that plague contemporary 'society'. But there's something far more basic at which I am pointing. It lies beyond philosophical and 'social' critique as we commonly practice them, for these too are 'traditions' that 'educate' the mind in certain ways that risk blinding it to its pruning. I am speaking of the last resort of *agency* from which this book will begin its methodical inquiry in the next chapter – the constructor of all *identities* that resides closer than our own eye – *Attention*. I think it's time to return to a place that we can all touch – *first person experience*, as it emerges from that to which we attend. It's time to reconstruct 'education' in a way that it will become more credible for right now even when it has to do with libertarian agendas (e.g., critical pedagogy)



it seems to be too much about a thing we call 'society' as if such thing is independent of *your mind*, which perceives it *now* and is part of its makings. 'Education' and 'society' have conquered themselves a place of omniscience. Somewhat biblically stated, it's as if,

*in the beginning there was 'education' then you and your mind came along.*

'Education' is somewhat an invention of a BIG mind called 'society' that touches upon the surface of our individual minds, supposedly 'educating' us in a shared ethos of 'knowledge', skills, and norms, but leaving our interior untouched as if it has little to do with it. I see this phenomenon year after year as I meet my University students, teachers-to-be, that come to my courses during their Bachelor's or Master's programs. The first thing I ask them to do is define 'education' in two sentences. The common denominator of most of these definitions is that they all seem to emerge from that BIG mind – a 'social mind' that has come to own them. Contingent yet disguised as necessity, it hovers above the land of the living, assumes that omniscient point of view, and defines what all those subjects referred to as 'students' are to know and become. Hardly ever do I hear the word 'I' in these definitions suggesting that 'education' has something to do with an actual living person such as *you*, such as *me*. Rarely is the mind that defines 'education' included in the process that is eventually to shape it. Our 'educational' institutions across ages are pruning minds to fit the existing box of 'education'. It's 'education' that needs to be reconstructed to fit the open-ended territory of the mind.

'Education' is a mind-making process. But the mind is an 'education'-making process just as much. Our task is to awaken from our stuck-ness in the former, to position ourselves in the latter and balance between the two. Practically that means to turn to the mind from which all this is perceived and to which it is addressed.

This is what I attempt to do in my courses. This is what this book is about.

\*

## THE METHOD OF THIS BOOK

I am not arguing that 'we got everything wrong', but I do believe that we need a perspective that begins by acknowledging that the methods we use to assess and evaluate current public 'education' go hand in hand with

how we think 'education'. Our methods prune our minds and shape them. Subscribing to Albert Einstein's famous aphorism – we can't expect to solve problems with the same kind of mind that brings them about. If we seriously want to learn something new, we need to embrace a novel way of understanding. If there is something fundamentally missing from our view then it is probable that 'educational' research as it is currently conducted will not discover it for that fundamental may be missing from our methodology as well.

Two methodological contexts arise from the above: the first stems from Thomas Kuhn's (1970) analysis of scientific progress. Every certain period various anomalies arise in different fields of scientific inquiry. These are not explained by means of the established theories and the consensual methods of inquiry known as the hegemonic *paradigm(s)*. Thus for example, Newtonian mechanics' failure to explain the ways in which subatomic particles move in space, was the bedrock over which the theory of quantum mechanics emerged thus substantially challenging our understandings of space and time. When paradigms fail to provide frameworks for inquiry that yield satisfactory explanations the only recourse is to reconstruct the fundamentals of the paradigms themselves. I believe this description is directly applicable to the discourse of 'education'; to the way(s) we think it, practice it, and study it. It seems to be yielding too many problems, or accused of not solving them properly. What I believe is necessary is coming at this entire business from a completely different angle, which brings me to the second context that flows directly from this kind of approach.<sup>2</sup>

The second context comes from an unexpected place and points to an unexpected discipline. It clicked in when I heard a TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) interview with entrepreneur Elon Musk. Toward the end of this interview Musk was asked how is it that he keeps coming up with incredible ideas such as launching PayPal, initiating projects like the TESLA electric car, and building rockets that are to take us to outer space. This is what he answered:

I do think there's a good framework for thinking. It is physics. You know, the sort of first principles reasoning... what I mean by that is, boil things down to their fundamental truths and reason up from there... Through most of our life, we get through life by reasoning by analogy, which essentially means copying what other people do with slight variations. And you have to do that. Otherwise, mentally, you wouldn't be able to get through the day. But when you want to do something new, you have to

apply the physics approach. Physics is really figuring out how to discover new things that are counterintuitive.<sup>3</sup>

Don't worry. We are not going to discuss electromagnetics nor quantum mechanics, but we are certainly going to examine the fundamentals over which an entire 'social' construction stands, and it can't but stand over minds that conceived it into being. Our method then is to boil down things to a bare minimum because that is how we will be able to tell the difference between contingency and necessity. It will tell us where exactly 'society' has made unexplained leaps that have become taken for granted within our construct of 'education'.

We can begin to apply this physics-approach right now as I explain this verb – 'construct'/'re-construct' – that's in the title of this book. This will further clarify the method. There are a number of meanings involved here:

First, 'education' is not some physical fundamental of nature such as mass or energy. It is more of a conglomerate that includes many different components such as 'curriculum', 'pedagogy', 'schooling' and many others. Each of these in turn can be broken further down in to elements such as 'learning', 'teaching', 'skills', 'knowledge', 'math', 'geography' etc. 'Education' is thus not a simple element but rather a *construction* of many components, and re-constructing 'education' will mean breaking it in to basic elements and rebuilding it from there.

Second, 'education' is not some God-given Truth and hardly a law of nature. It is a human creation that has taken its current shape based on human deliberations grounded in history, culture, environmental context etc. *We* constructed it. You might not feel personally responsible for this and I do not intend to blame you. What I mean is that the way in which 'education' is understood and practiced in your vicinity is only testimony to what it had evolved to become but it hardly has a status that is similar to the law of gravitation. It only means that this is what it had evolved to at this point and there is much contingency in it. What I am suggesting is that *we – not anyone else – are responsible* for re-constructing 'education' if our construct yields problems. Re-constructing is a *verb*; an injunction; a call to heed. By the end of this book you may ponder whether heeding the call to reconstruct 'education' is an 'educational' path in and of itself.

The third point goes to the heart of matter. When I speak of re-construction I am using a language that lends itself to the image of construction sites with bricks, cement, trucks, and so forth. You can think of it exactly in that way, yet with one slight change – think of your own mind as the construction

site. We're going to be working directly with how the mind *sees* 'education'. That's not what we usually do when we attempt to solve 'educational' problems. Usually we tinker with the practices that are derived from existing conceptions of 'education' – we write new textbooks, improve teaching practice, change accountability policies etc. The course we take in this book reverses this conventional pattern. The idea is that we have been spending quite some time figuring out how to make our ideas about 'education' work *out there*. It's time to examine our internal kaleidoscope and its creation, which dyes the world *out there* (and *in here*) in accordance with the colors of its changing settings.

Changes in how the mind sees things may very well change how this mind then engages with itself and with the world.

You will be right to ask: how will we ever overcome the fact that the minds that we bring to the study of 'education' have been made by 'education'? How can we reconstruct 'education' without falling right back into the very same existing construct when all we have for the task is our own mind that has already been made by 'education'? How can we escape time and place and embrace a synoptic view that will enable us the kind of freedom from which to reconstruct 'education' to suit the assumed infinite potential of the mind? What would be the way to break the vicious cycle in which we are caught?

*Forget 'Education'. Forget 'Society'. Study the Mind*

While we are interested in 'education', and in a just 'society', what I propose is that we forget about both for a while. If 'education' is a mind-making process then what we really need to explore is the mind and what is available to it. Once we understand what's available and necessary we may reconstruct 'education' anew and adopt new curricular domains and novel pedagogies. Conversely, we might think that what we currently have is the best of all goods, yet we will at least know that based on looking beyond our past habits of understanding and practicing 'education'.

Methodologically what we are seeking here is then to step away from an 'educated' state of mind, which is our habitual way of seeing things, to a state of mind that has not been pruned to prefer one way or another. Stepping away from our 'education' means asking: what experiences are available to a mind? We need to examine the mind with as little preconditions as possible,

setting aside our wish to leap into determining what is right and what is wrong. We are seeking a mind in which all options are available; one that sets aside what it knows and returns to that place from which it could have been 'educated' to live life at other times, and other places, past or future.<sup>4</sup> We are then in search of the question: what kind of *universal* structure can we come up with that would mark the ballpark within which *any* kind of 'education' will take place?

The mind that I am speaking of is one that is grounded in *mindful attention* and contemplative inquiry. Mindfulness is no less than a discourse at this point. It runs the gamut from scientific research to wisdom traditions, and to popular culture. Important as these contexts are we are going to step away from them as well and focus on the fact that – as a *practice*, mindfulness involves turning our attention *inward* to explore our first-person experience – *our own embodied mind*.<sup>5</sup> We will not be discussing the practice or its outcomes here. We will simply attend to our first-person experience and garner data based on that. That is why you need not worry at all if you have no previous experience in mindfulness practice. In fact it might be an advantage, for you might come to the re-construction of 'education' with the exact state of mind that is required for such endeavor – a mind that is open to anything that unfolds and doesn't have too many expectations that are the product of its previous habituation. I will soon say more about *mindful attention*, but first I want to position both of us in the kind of attitude with which to engage in this journey. This involves two methodological shifts that re-establish our birth right to challenge the taken-for-granted-ness of how our minds were made by the process of 'education' and by 'society'. I call them: *reclaiming the mind from 'society' and 'education'* and *working from mind to 'education'*.

### *Reclaiming the Mind from 'Society' and 'Education'*

The 'society' in which you happened to be born (as broad as you want to think of it) is far more contingent than your embodied experience. Returning to the above mentioned thought experiment – you could have probably been born anywhere else on the globe or even at another time. Your 'society' and 'education' in such case would be different, but it is hard to imagine that the basic structure of experience as it is perceived by your brain-mind-body would change. That is, whether the stork would drop you in Mexico or Ethiopia, in the twenty-first century or the ninth, whatever experiences you would undergo as you would be 'educated' in

those respective 'societies', would probably still be experienced by you as sensations, emotions, and thoughts. The specific thoughts/emotions/sensation you would experience would clearly change according to the external situation, but *not* these basic ways in which living beings such as you and I experience the world. So what I am establishing here is the,

non-contingency of your embodied mind from which the contingency of 'society' and 'education' can be examined.

I realize that such position may send some readers moving restlessly in their chairs as it could sound 'egocentric'/'self-centered' to the point of questioning whether this is politically correct. If this is the case for you, I would encourage you to question *these* constructs in and of themselves. They might be coming from the 'educated' mind that we are supposed to leave behind us. Make no mistake. I am all for altruism, 'social'-engagement and the overcoming of self-centeredness as we colloquially understand these terms. I'm just less sure about what they mean. What *is* that 'self' around which things are centered? It sounds like something that's *in here* in this mind of mine? Do I know it well enough so as to be able *not* to act too 'selfishly'? What is the 'center' around which 'egocentrism' or 'self-centeredness' are formed? What exactly is the relationship between mind and 'self'? How does that flux of emotions/sensations/thoughts give rise to *identity* at all, and what in that flux is 'educated' when we speak of 'education'? Do you see what I mean? I think our 'social' talk about a kind, just, and equal 'society' in which people care about each other needs to be set aside for a while. I'm not sure we can be expected to overcome 'selfishness' without having a very clear embodied understanding of what it is, where it comes from and why in spite of our endless talk about overcoming it we find ourselves deeply entrenched in it. You might not suffer from this ailment, but I know *I* do, and I see others around me that may be suffering from that too. Could it be then, that moving *in* to explore this mind and this 'self' opens a way out of 'selfishness'?

The movement from 'society' and 'education' to mind is a movement into *your* own body *here* and *now*. It is an appeal to you to take charge of your own perspective, as well as a responsibility for everything that emerges from that place in which you dwell. It is an attempt to step away from the lure of the language into which we are initiated and to seriously probe what we mean by the words we use and by which we

'educate'. It's about mobilizing us form a view into which we seem to have 'educated' ourselves:

that 'education' is something that only 'society' does to us, rather than something that I do to myself.

### *From Mind to 'Education'*

The problem we face can be phrased in this way:

The mind that is born in to the world is pruned to fit the size of 'education' and 'society'. We need to de-prune 'education' and 'society' so that they fit the size of the un-pruned mind.

In order to do this then we're going to forget about 'education' as we know it (e.g., 'schools', 'timetables', 'knowledge', 'skills'), *but I am* going to provide us with something to work with and against. I call this a 'placeholder' definition. It means a sentence that might sound 'nice' yet it is almost empty of meaning for the terms it uses can mean almost anything until they too, are defined. So I will ask you to agree with me at least to the following:

'Education' is a human endeavor the aim of which is to 'develop' human beings in light of a certain 'good'.<sup>6</sup>

Note that I am not saying what 'good' we are after nor what would be considered 'development' toward it. It does suggest, however, that 'education' has to do with human beings and that there is some kind of a progression involved in it. That's really all I will commit to at this point, and I hope that it is not too much to accept.

Just to demonstrate the power of such approach in poking holes in this construct of 'education' that we edify as a 'society', you can look at this definition and candidly ask one of those unasked peculiar questions:

*What's the Problem?*

'What's the problem that 'education' is trying to solve?' This might strike you as a bizarre question to ask but the kind of openness to which I am inviting you here, has no boundaries. Setting aside 'society' and embracing a perspective from the mind, I want to be as candid as possible here and suggest that maybe, just maybe, there *is* no problem.

Maybe ‘education’ is something that is some ‘social’ circular invention that created both the problems and the system that attempts to solve them. Maybe the whole thing can simply stop at least in its formal institutionalized form? Maybe it’s just enough to grow up roaming the world based on what seems to be an innate curiosity as appears in a long history of radical educational ideas.<sup>7</sup> It does sound a little stressful to actually try this – or is it our minds that have become so used to ‘educational systems’ existence that such void will be too much for them to fathom?

What I am getting at is that the justification for the full-fledged operation called ‘education’ can’t rely only on ‘society’. It must be based on a tangible problem that is embodied and experienced in the human mind *now*. If we think we can motivate students by appealing to some future ‘society’ that lives in some transcendent world we don’t stand a chance. ‘Education’ must mean something very concrete for *you* and for *me* otherwise the problems of ‘education’ will remain something that ‘society’ needs to care about, but not *me*.

Working from the mind to ‘education’ means diagnosing whether there is a problem in the mind that warrants ‘education’, and what and who’s ‘good’ ‘education’ is to serve. Ideally, it suggests that even if there was only one person in the world – you – it would still make sense for him to ‘get educated’.

There *is* an ‘educational’ problem that exists *here* in this mind, and it needs our attention, but it will take a while until I will be able to convince you that this is the case.

### *Practically Speaking: First- and Third-Person Methods of Inquiry*

The above two movements reposition us in *mindful attention* to which I promised to return. I am seeking to prepare you to accept your own responsibility in this business of reconstructing ‘education’, to motivate you to try things that this book will propose, but also to ensure that you remain the sovereign of your own mind. I am saying this because this book itself will attempt to shape your mind. It will try to convince you of its claims with every means possible within reason while at the same time expecting you *not* to accept anything it offers without personally engaging with its claims.

Practically, to make its case, this book will span the gamut of philosophy, neuroscience, psychology, evocative and biased narratives, as well as mindfulness practices, all of which are diverse ways of making an argument



(Philips 2014). I realize that this sounds eclectic. However, given that we're dealing with the mind – something that no-one has ever managed to fully grasp and this book will probably not change this situation – I suspect that we need all the ammunition we can get our hands on. Still there is a framework within which all the above can be positioned. It follows how I teach at the university: the combination of first and third person methods of inquiry within the context of a dialogical encounter. I will only briefly explain the idea here and count far more on your actual engagement with the book for its understanding.<sup>8</sup>

Third-person methods are those with which you might be familiar from most scientific research. In our case they will give us the (more) *objective* side of things as we rely on evidence-based research in psychology and neuroscience that ground their claims in questionnaires, quantitative data, brain-imaging (e.g., fMRI) and other consensual methodologies. Based on this approach we will seek to make more general claims about the mind. However, of all ways of conviction the strongest one is the one that makes you take your hand out of the fire without requiring the need for a doctor to tell you why that might be a good idea. Quixotic as it might sound that's what I am aiming at. Such conviction is usually not achieved by third-person methods but rather by first-person methods and even more so, when the two align with each other.

First-person methods send you exploring your own experience celebrating *subjectivity* as an indispensable source of data and validation. *This book makes no sense without them.* It will simply crumble back into the problem of 'education' that has been expelling this very idea from much of its research, theory, and practice. Your *particular* mind is where this begins and if you do not validate *general* claims made about minds based on your experience, it leaves too much to be desired. If we do not send you to corroborate claims that are scientifically or philosophically grounded and leave them for you to accept or reject solely based on reading, we might as well stop right now. Don't let me reconstruct 'education' *for* you for in such case it is only my mind that's reclaimed in this business. I think you should be more interested in *your* mind and whether our minds have something in common; something that will later enable us to share visions about 'society' and 'education'.

Practically speaking, throughout the book you will be invited to try various self-experiments. These will include some brief contemplative practices but we will mostly rely on mindfulness. However, this book is not about mindfulness as much as it is about that which mindful attention

enables when applied to the study of 'education'. Contemplative inquiry<sup>9</sup> is the broader name for what we will be doing here. It involves all practices that consist of the orienting of our attention to our own experience to consider the claims that apply to our own minds and the way in which we experience existence. They are all ways for you to assess the validity of both scientific and philosophical claims that are made in regards to your own mind and the reconstruction of 'education'.

Why do we need *both* first and third person methods? – because we're trying to establish a perspective that's both embodied, concrete, and valid for *you*, but at the same time it probably applies to anyone around you. We want to make a claim that is both about *the* mind as a *universal* and about *your* mind as *particular*.<sup>10</sup> The only mind to which either one of us has a privileged access is our own. The only mind from which 'education' can be reconstructed is our own. However, if you examine your mind and I examine mine and we then compare our versions and find similar results this can become the ground for shared agreement. We could have settled for that alone, but we do need more. That's where third-person methods come into the picture. Third-person methods are required for a number of reasons: first, they provide more objective tools that help ground our claims and generalize them. Second, as you will see, we are not always very competent in our ability to report about our first-person experience. Third, some things occur in our minds that we do not directly experience, but scientific experiments and philosophical arguments can unravel. Fourth, sometimes once science shows us the way through third-person methods we in fact are 'educated' to experience our first-person experience differently. So we need both first and third-person methods. At the same time as you may have noted the book is written as a dialogical encounter between the two of us, which is somewhat of a second person method that binds the two together. While you won't be able to share your thoughts with me in real time I am constantly trying to imagine your responses as I write. I will hardly capture most of them, but I'll rely on the responses I have heard from dozens of students and at least some of those responses might perhaps resemble your own.

## THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK AND HOW TO READ IT

I want to briefly explain the structure of this book and what each of its three parts hopes to accomplish. The first part of the book consists of two chapters that work directly with the 'physics' approach. Here we

*image*

*not*

*available*

but paradoxically our hegemonic construct of 'knowledge' has expelled the mind itself from that construct. I will argue that the deepest teachings we get lie in how our attention is 'educated' in space and time, and how we have come to see 'education' as a project that teaches that *here* and *now* are not the right time or place to be at. Chapter 5 delves to the heart of matter as it reveals how this teaching comes about based on the idea of meta-pedagogy – the deepest mind-making process of 'education' – a binary deliberation that is present within every moment in the classroom: *where* we are oriented to attend to: *out there* to the world, or *in here* to the mind. Meta-pedagogy reveals the nitty-gritty of our teaching practice as nullifying *me* and *I* from the 'curriculum' and entrenching the position that meaning exists *out there*.

Following the fundamentals established in Part I and the critique that Part II proposes, our problem results in a construct of 'education' that has gotten our attention stuck in space (*out there* without *in here*) and in time (*future* without *present*). The task of Part III is twofold: first, it will demonstrate how 'society' and the mind create a self-justifying system in which our own minds participate in getting our attention stuck and expelling ourselves from the 'curriculum'. Second, it will articulate the way out of stuck-ness by elaborating what is missing from our 'educational' menu – the possibility of an attention that is turned deliberately in space and time, toward the mind *in here*, and *to now*. It will methodically describe the *inner curriculum* based on phenomenology, psychology, neuroscience, and *mindful attention*. The four chapters of this part of the book include Chapter 6, which describes the ethics of the *inner curriculum* that stems from the fundamental work conducted in Part I and the critique of Part II, and Chapters 7–9 that are each dedicated to a domain within the *inner curriculum*. Chapter 7 examines *embodied perception* to reveal how in each and every moment our mind participates in the shaping of what it perceives. Whether it is a history lesson *out there*, a worried thought in here, or a sensation of pleasure, all are perceived by a brain-mind-body that 'educates' us by meeting that moment based on its past, reacting to it in the present and shaping our future identity, and sense of agency. Chapter 8 examines the *curriculum of me* – all those thoughts experienced *in here* along with their *embodied* effect on who we are and how we act. It is a 'curriculum' that emerges spontaneously through *mind-wandering* and more deliberately through *self-reflection* that to a great extent entrenches us in a false sense of *agency* and in resisting substantial changes in our *identity*. Chapter 9 delves into the *curriculum of I* that is based on a deliberate turning of attention *in here* based on a *reflective I* and a *contemplative I*. It is based on this chapter that I will argue that

## Attention, Space, Time, and ‘Education’

*From within this mind-body things do not look quite the same as they do from out there.*

It is hard to determine the first fundamental from which to derive all else. Faced with the thickness of experience it is as if you stand in front of a heap of yarn trying to pick a loose end, so that you can work your way slowly through the pile to the other end. It is quite pretentious to think that there are loose ends *at all*, or that the whole heap is necessarily made of one string rather than many. It does help to phrase questions in various ways until somehow the mind is lured toward a place that seems plausible.

Here’s one such question:

*What is that thing on which all experience depends; without which no ‘education’ exists?*

Bizarre question indeed. It might help to begin with the fact that *your* mind must have something to do with that ‘thing’. We have to assume that if we take your mind away, no experience will be left for you to ponder, nor will the probing of ‘education’, being ‘educated’, or ‘educating’ be possible. So we can begin with something like: ‘everything depends on the *mind*’.<sup>1</sup> However, the mind is far too complex. We need to begin with something that is more basic and operative. Beginning with *your* mind then, let’s ask ourselves

personal existence. As if first there was 'knowledge' organized based on a 'curriculum' and only then came the individual that is to grasp it. I certainly do not reject human history or culture nor do I undermine their importance. I am merely grounding us in a fact:

All of society's efforts to 'educate' will eventually be determined at their destination – your mind. Without your attention there is nothing; at least not for you.

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### *Where Do We Stand?*

Recall that 'placeholder' definition I proposed in [Chapter 1](#):

'Education' is a human endeavor the aim of which is to 'develop' human beings in light of a certain 'good'.

We can actually advance with this an inch or two by saying that whatever 'good' 'education' is to serve, it will have to work with attention to get there. Thus, I propose the following two statements:

1. The foundation of any 'educational' practice is the orientation of attention.
2. Orienting attention means selecting content by which to define reality for the moment.

If you are a teacher teaching math or history, you attempt to define realities at the moments in which you teach. If you are a student, when your teacher/lecturer speaks, she is defining your reality. This might strike you as too dramatic a way of putting things. Reading James's instructions to teachers, shows that he was at least as serious as I am about this:

[i]n teaching, you must simply work your pupil into such a state of interest in what you are going to teach him that every other object of attention is banished from his mind; then reveal it to him so impressively that he will remember the occasion to his dying day. (1983, p. 10)

A teacher attempts to orient students to attend to her words, and actions. If she is successful, then the content of her words defines the reality of her students for those moments. The fact that these very words might evoke a completely different *inner* experience for each student, is a core theme of this book, but we are building it one step at a time. Our first step has been to establish the first fundamental of mind and 'education': *Attention*.

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### ATTENTION IN SPACE

The trick we played with the word WORD earlier, gave you some taste of the methodology of this book that attempts to speak directly to and with your mind. Here, I am going to ask for a little more. The following is a self-experiment I conduct in many of my courses. It will take exactly three-minutes of your time, and I would really appreciate it if you try it because this will go a long way in making our next moves far more interesting and understandable. Try to just follow these instructions without expecting too much. Explanations will follow afterward:

Please take out a piece of paper and a pen, set yourself comfortably on a chair and for the next three minutes, write down anything you attend to. As best you can avoid directing your attention to anything specific. Just let it go where it goes. Since we're not going to read your list out loud please don't censor anything. Write absolutely everything you note.

So get a pen and paper. Set a timer, and go for it.

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I may be accused of naivety, but I'll assume we're back with a list of things that you attended to during three minutes. Here are the first few items on my own list:

*Noise of fan,  
Sensation in head*

*Breath*  
*Sensation in chest*  
*Noise from construction site outside*  
*Noise from the kitchen*  
*Thought: "I'm a little tired"...*

As you can note, there's nothing here to write home about, but let's apply our mindful attention to this. What I want us to contemplate is whether we can sort the items on our lists into different categories. You can look at your list and consider this for a while before reading on. I can wait.

My students usually offer a number of possibilities. The one in which I am particularly interested that always comes up eventually, is the in/out categorization. Simply, some of the items on the list reflect things experienced *out there* (in the world so to speak) and some of them reflect things *in here* (in my mind-body). This will probably not surprise anyone. The observation that we can attend *out* to the world and we can attend *in* to ourselves, is as natural to us as breathing the air we breathe without being bothered to acknowledge such triviality. But there lays the crux of the matter. Those foundations that are most transparent become a platform that we tend to consider unworthy of further consideration. We tend to think that these can be set aside so we can move on to the more 'sophisticated business' of life. But this is actually where our lives fork out in a very certain direction without our even noticing that we have passed a junction in which more than one road can be taken.

There are certainly many other names that have been given to this in/out split (e.g., *in here/out there*, *me/not-me*, *self/world*, *subject/object*). Choosing the terms by which to describe this 'split' enables us to articulate nuances of diverse experiences we have. We'll be applying a number of possibilities so that each will allow us different ways for examining attention, mind, experience, and the reconstruction of 'education'. *In here/Out there* is the first characterization that I introduce because it is the most concrete:

It is simply the indication of where in space we wittingly or unwittingly locate that which we perceive.

When you conducted the above experiment, whenever you heard a sound (e.g., a bird, the hum of the fan), if you did *not* reflect on it



too much, you probably intuitively sensed it to arrive from outside you. If that sound came from your rumbling stomach, then you tacitly perceived it as arriving from *inside* you. *In here/out there* is a very literal spatial metaphor that mostly emerges from our sense of embodiment. Conventionally we see our bodies as marking the borderline between what we perceive as *in here* and what we perceive as *out there*.<sup>4</sup>

Some of this information may seem to you like a very complicated way of describing a simple day-to-day experience which is something you may not feel to be worth much ink. You are an expert in day-to-day experience, because *experiencing* is what you have been doing for as long as you can remember. Soon, however, this triviality will become tricky so before we move further let's practice something here to establish ourselves in this *in here/out there* language that I am applying.

*Read through the line below formed by the words 'Breathe, Breathe...?'*

*Breathe,        Breathe,        Breathe,        Breathe,        Breathe.*

*Now read again, but each time you read 'Breathe', deliberately attend to your breath before you move on to the next 'Breathe'.*

Now try to contemplate what you've just experienced. You may have noted that while reading your attention was *out there* over the written word, whereas while attending to the breath it was *in here*.

Now where does this lead us? – well, take our first fundamental – *attention* and combine it with the *in here/out there* distinction and what you get is *attention in space*:

*"For the moment what we attend to is reality," and there are only two loci in space to which we can attend: in here and out there.*

Remember that what we are trying to do here is get down to the most basic fundamentals of mind. Since 'educational' research, theory, and practice all depend on minds, and are addressed toward minds, any 'education' we shall construct will depend on these fundamentals.

An important note, however, is called for before moving on. Let's be clear about what kind of claims we are making here. Our claims

are about what we experience, and not about some reality *as such*. In this sense, let's treat *in here/out there* as a *perceived* split. The fact that both of us probably experience it allows us to say something about how reality appears to our minds. Whether this split is 'really there' or not, is not something we can prove.<sup>5</sup> Following this reservation, please doubt every conclusion at which we arrive. For example, right now we can ask: are we missing anything? Can we attend to anything that is not *in here* nor *out there*?

If *you can*, then by all means explore this and improve the argument offered here. So far, the several hundreds of students with whom I've tried this never came up with other possibilities, therefore we will progress here as if there are none. For the benefit of the doubt we will add that we know of none; at least not within the kind of day-to-day consciousness with which most of us are familiar.

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### *The Door of Attention*

Now, again, all this might seem obvious. You may have known this all along, but maybe you never bothered to actually say it and really allow the profundity of this claim to settle in. In a moment we will see how this affects 'education', but first here's a poetic way of describing life based on the above observations:

The fundamental of attention and its orientation in space proposes the possibility of considering attention as moving through a door. When the door opens one way, we get the view of the world, and when it opens the other way, we get the view of our inner experience.<sup>6</sup>

*In, out, in, in, out, out, out, in, in, in, out...* Whatever it is you experience; whatever you are doing – swimming, talking on the phone, or sitting in the classroom studying Geography; whatever you are feeling or thinking – the structure of your experience is based on the fundamentals of attention and space. Reality comes to you through the door of attention that swings in and out constantly.

However, you might now want to question this image of the door. Does it really have to be either opened in or opened out? Can we not

## THE BIRTH OF *ME* THROUGH ATTENTION IN SPACE

So far we discussed attention in space by considering that when we attend to 'something' we very naturally perceive that something as located in space. It's either *in here* (e.g., thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations) or *out there* (e.g., sound of a car, sight of the school building, smell from the cafeteria). Yet, as mentioned earlier, there are various names to this perceived split, and *in here/out there* does leave something to be desired. Underlying *in here/out there* as a spatial experience there's a deeper psychological/existential flavor, which William James expressed in his eloquent way:

One great splitting of the whole universe into two halves is made by each of us; and for each of us almost all of the interest attaches to one of the halves... we all call the two halves by the same names... those names are '*me*' and '*not-me*' respectively. (1984, p. 187, emphasis added)

I suspect that this statement matches your experience as well. This is a subtle and quite obvious spatial experience with which we travel that undergirds much of our day-to-day existence. Its content is like a statement that seems to undergird our experience:

*It's me 'in here' and there's not-me, 'out there'.*

Those things to which (or other people to whom) we attend *out there*, we consider to be 'the world', and they are what James called *not-me* – the trees, houses, birds, and other human beings surrounding us. Those things to which we attend *in here* – our thoughts, sensations, feelings, emotions, premonitions, intuitions – we usually associate in diverse ways with what James called *me*.

Reflect for a moment on that self-experiment we conducted earlier: while making a list of what you attended to, I suggest that when you sensed a sound coming from *out there*, probably undergirding this classification, there was a *tacit* sense that the sound is *not* coming from *me*.

Now, if for a moment you just

*Stop reading  
and just listen to the first sound you hear...*

*Where did that sound come from?*

Now, ask yourself this question:

*What is your relation to that place?*

You will probably feel that the sound came from *out there* – a place, which you tacitly refer to as *not-me*. Conversely, if you experience a thought, you tacitly may feel: that's *me* thinking *in here*. The term I use – *tacit* – follows Michael Polanyi's (1958) observations as to the subtler aspects of our knowing. We do not explicitly bother to tell ourselves 'that's me'/'that's not-me' with every experience we attend to. It seems too redundant to even acknowledge, but if I stopped you for a moment and asked you what was the location of an object you've just attended to, setting aside some pathological conditions and altered states of mind, I doubt that you would ever answer that the noise of the bus came from your head, and the stomach ache came from outside you.

This obvious kind of experience would not seem much to bother with. However, as you may have detected, 'obvious' in this book is a synonym for something that has become automatic and automation also happens to be the very enemy of the kind of inquisitive approach proposed here. What we have here is the birth of *me* from attention in space. That's the person who's reading now with whom 'education' is supposedly concerned and as James claims – with which *you* are utterly concerned as well. We will have far more to say about *you* in the next chapter and especially in the third part of the book, but our task at this point is merely to establish fundamentals to work with. So far we have attention and space (*in here/out there*) which undergirds *me/not-me*. We need time before we can move further in to probe *me* in the next chapter. I actually mean that literally. We need to lay the fundamental of time because it has so much to do with the sense we have of who we are, and with our existence in space.

\*

## ATTENTION IN TIME

What I recommend now is to actually repeat the same experiment that we've conducted when we first discussed space, only now we will apply it differently. In my courses too, we repeat this same experiment and each

time we repeat it, it leads us more deeply to deconstruct and reconstruct 'education' based on mindful attention.

So again, set a timer to three minutes, and make a list of all things you attend to whether these are sounds, thoughts, smells, images, feelings, emotions, sensations. Do it nonchalantly, without any preference for certain objects. It's as if you are a passive observer that is asked to document your mind's attentional habits. You are like a non-participating observer in your own life.

Ok, here's my list this time:

*Stuffy nose*

*Hum of computer*

*Hum of computer*

*'This is boring'*

*Breath*

*Hum of computer*

*'Why am I constantly drawn to the hum of the computer?'*

*Stuffy nose*

I won't spell out the entire three minutes here. I hope yours were slightly more rewarding. At the same time, methodically it needs to be clear that the whole point of this self-experiment is to shift the way in which we attend to experience normally. For our purposes, it really isn't important at all whether the content to which we attended was rewarding or not. Far more important is the fact that the list you have depicts the direct relation between *attention and time*. This relationship was there all along. Recall James, 'for the *moment* what we attend to is reality'. What you have in your hands is no other than a documentation of three minutes that amount to *your reality* as it was garnered based on your attention. More profoundly stated these were not simply moments of attention, but rather moments of *mindful attention*. Our concern with *how* we attend more than what we attend to is a feature of mindfulness practice, known as non-judgmentalism or detachment. We are basically involved in a first person method of inquiry by which we garner 'research data' that enables us to propose fundamentals of mind that we then apply to the reconstruction of 'education'. Don't underestimate the list of benign experiences you came up with. Seriously examining it will show you that mindful attention holds a key to stepping outside of time as we

normally experience it. The following might not be news for many have made the following claim, but it is important for our inquiry,

time is not something we experience directly. It is a relationship we have with those things that are attended to in space.

For example, note that this experiment lasted *three minutes*, but at no point did we attend to 'minutes'. Surely, you may have wondered at some point when the experiment will end, or how much time had passed, but that's not really attending to 'time'. It is rather attending to a thought you had in your mind, with the word 'time' in it. 'Seconds', 'minutes', 'hours', or even 'days' are not 'objects' such as a 'table' or a 'computer'. We can neither see nor hear them as such. We do see the sun 'moving' (or rather, we believe that we see it moving) and notice the shifts between light and darkness from which we derive the concept of a 'day'. Or we might enter a classroom at 12:00 and see the hands of the clock moving until at 12:45 we hear the bell, but neither the hands of the clock nor the bell constitute 'time'. They are only *representations* of 'time' attended to *in space*.

Don't surmise from this that I am claiming that 'time' does not exist! It most certainly does; otherwise we wouldn't be discussing it and we wouldn't be running around so much so that we can be *on* time and meet deadlines. In these senses, time feels almost as real as the book you're holding or the chair on which you're sitting. Our point is not to build some imaginary world that's far removed from actual experience. It is rather to probe experience deeply based on a first-person approach so that we minimize the gap between what we have gotten used to saying *about* experience, and what we *actually* experience. This will go a long way toward distinguishing between what we *say* about 'education' compared to what it comes down to in practice in many cases.

So in regards to time, we need to make a mindful observation: time seems real, but it is not the simple act of attending that makes its realness. If you look at your list above, all you *really* have there is thoughts, sights, smells, emotions etc. none of which are an *object* that is 'time'. They are just discrete events that you experienced as a concatenation of moments of reality based on attention in space. 'Someone' in your mind is doing more than just attending to objects in space...is it that same *me* that we encountered above, who's reading time into that which is attended to?

\*

*image*

*not*

*available*

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