

A CONTEMPLATIVE DIALOGUE: THE INQUIRY PROCESS IN MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS

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DISCLOSURES: None

FUNDING INFORMATION: None

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ABSTRACT

Inquiry in group-based mindfulness programs is an integral part of the curriculum. It supports the investigation of experience arising from a specific form of conscious mindful awareness, or meta-awareness, developed through the practice of mindfulness. Although often cited by new teachers as one of the most difficult skills to learn, there is relatively little published on inquiry. Teaching it in a formulaic manner risks reducing inquiry to a mechanistic format that belies its nature as a mindfulness practice in and of itself. Becoming proficient in delivering inquiry will rely on teacher training, mentorship, teaching experience and a consistent mindfulness practice. Essential elements include an embodied mindful presence, specific attitudes, and a present moment focus. This is underpinned by the themes, rationales, intentions and practice skills embedded in the protocol of the mindfulness-based intervention. These elements are discussed in detail, using case examples, to explore the unique process of inquiry and encourage dialogue and study on this essential aspect of mindfulness based teaching.

KEYWORDS: Mindfulness · Inquiry · Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction · Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy · Mindfulness Teacher Training · Mindfulness Facilitation

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In group based mindfulness-based interventions (MBI), an integral part of the curriculum is reserved for the exploration of participants' experience of formal and informal practices in class and at home. This process is most commonly called *Inquiry* (McGown et al 2010; Segal et al 2002; Crane 2009; Crane et al 2015) or, *Dialogue and Inquiry* (Woods 2010; Santorelli 2014). Inquiry is a contemplative dialogue between teacher and participant that supports the investigation of experience arising from a developed conscious awareness, or meta-awareness, sustained by the practice of mindfulness.

Despite inquiry's prominent role little is written about it either in describing the process or researching its delivery. Crane et al recently published a qualitative study using conservation analysis of inquiry delivered by senior teachers (Crane et al 2015). However, the remaining literature consists of relatively short descriptions in manuals of various MBI (Crane 2009; Woods 2010; McGown et al. 2010; Segal et al. 2002; Santorelli 2014). It is also the 5th of 6 domains in the Bangor, Exeter and Oxford Mindfulness Based Intervention-Teaching Assessment Criteria (Crane et al 2012) with an emphasis on conveying course themes through both interactive inquiry and didactic teaching.

Inquiry is often cited by trainees as the most challenging part of the curriculum to master as it requires the teachers to stay present with the participants', and their own, experience while resisting the urge to teach didactically, give advice, or reassure in moments of suffering. It is a departure from traditional Buddhist pedagogy where the teaching is delivered didactically through Dharma talks. However, inquiry, as a contemplative dialogue, may be practiced by skilled meditation teachers during one-on-one interviews.

As three teacher trainers who have been teaching Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction/Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBSR/MBCT), as well as training new teachers for many years, we view inquiry as a process-oriented contemplative dialogue that does not rely solely upon a specific methodology. Predictably this brings an inherent tension to

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explanations or descriptions in training modules designed to chart the process of inquiry. In a well-intentioned desire to offer MBSR/MBCT trainees high quality professional training we are at risk of reducing inquiry to something that is mechanistic and goal directed. Although it is initially useful to have an understanding of a “method”, we would challenge the view/position that inquiry skills can be solely acquired by parsing them into constituent parts through an intellectual, albeit experiential process. In fact to take such a reductionist approach loses what is essential to the inquiry process.

When training future MBSR/MBCT teachers, we often begin with using three layers of questioning and a method for their delivery (Crane 2009; Segal et al. 2013). While a necessary and valuable foundation, we are at risk of creating a rigid system where trainees learn rules and techniques that become an end in themselves rather than a useful framework from which to inquire into the experience of others. The emphasis in learning inquiry must be placed upon how to internalize the process of a contemplative dialogue that is both fluid and contingent on what is expressed in the group. This learning also includes appreciation and experiential understanding of mindful awareness and how this informs group process.

We can consider that any mindfulness-based group intervention has four major agents of change. These include the protocol of the intervention itself, the delivery of the mindfulness-based practices, the group process and the presence of the teacher. We are therefore proposing a multifaceted approach to inquiry that reflects these agents of change. The following areas are of particular interest: an embodied mindful presence and intuition (intuition as the sum of the skills, experience and knowledge of the teacher); attitudinal foundations such as compassion and curiosity; and a present moment focus. Embodying these results in the development of a conscious awareness, or meta-awareness, in the teacher. This process is scaffolded by the teacher’s knowledge of group process and the structure of the MBI protocol, and includes the

themes, rationales, intentions and practice skills embedded in such programs as proposed by Woods (2012/2013).

An Embodied Mindful Presence

Embodied mindful presence requires that a teacher express an experiential understanding, and insight(s), arising from her personal mindfulness practice. This is then used as the platform from which to deliver mindfulness-based practices as well as when responding to participants' questions and reflections. The teacher guides her participants and herself in an investigation of experience using all six senses (mind as the sixth sense consisting of cognitions and emotions). Included in this noticing, tracking and investigation of experience are two variables: 1) paying attention moment by moment (bare attention); and 2) the awareness of the nature of the relationship to what is being observed, whether wanted or unwanted. Significant emphasis in inquiry is placed on the ability of the teacher to be willing to engage with challenging mind and mood states. Woods writes that the

“...teacher demonstrates by her presence and through the inquiry dialogue process, the invitation and possibility of approaching anxiety, fear, sadness and anger rather than denying, avoiding, pushing away or struggling with these emotions. Simply by being with, allowing and tuning into the difficult, a well of deep self-compassionate caring is revealed. This provides the template for understanding how we relate to the difficult/unwanted can be a choice. We appreciate that suffering is actually universal...”
(and impersonal). (Woods 2013, p.4)

By embodying an understanding of the universality and impersonal nature of suffering, a teacher reflects that one's narratives of suffering and attachment to them are not so important, allowing for the possibility of becoming more present and at ease in one's life. This then reduces self-concern and feelings of isolation, engendering a deeper sense of interconnection and concern for

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others. This is a radical position to hold and provides a container for actually being with difficult states such as anxiety, anger, fear and uncertainty when they arise. Thus participants are given the opportunity to reduce experiential avoidance, increase distress tolerance and learn that difficult states pass. A teacher is compassionately aware of what is needed in those moments for participants, and for herself. She is a steady and gentle barometer measuring the affective charge in the room, facilitating the present moment tracking of experience, and supporting a moment-to-moment acknowledgement of the movement of sensations, cognitions and emotions. In this way, a teacher reflects one of the important tenets of mindfulness, impermanence.

A large part of mindfulness practice uncovers deeply conditioned patterns of mind. These “conditioned” patterns refer to the fact that events in our lives, and our reactions to them, are contingent. We are also conditioned to react in particular ways (both operantly and classically) through repeated exposure and reinforcement. Within the context of mindfulness-based teaching what tend to be salient are unhelpful patterns of mind and their attendant difficult and painful emotions. When facilitating inquiry, a teacher must know how to encounter those moments safely, and with compassion, but also when indicated to recommend additional professional support.

Embodying mindfulness therefore is not an esoteric practice but rather a pragmatic attitude to living life fully. A teacher must be able to reflect this by having experienced the relevance in her own life and to clearly embody its unfolding nature. She will be able to demonstrate that, in mindfulness practice, developing this conscious awareness is not an end in itself but rather an engagement with whatever is showing up whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Mindfulness-based teaching is not about adopting an expert role or of taking a position of leadership with one’s participants. It is much more about allowing each moment to reveal itself, and being comfortable not knowing what may occur at any given time. This means being at ease with uncertainty and understanding the transience of all things.

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Attitudinal Foundations

Embodying a mindful presence and having the skill to facilitate a process oriented contemplative dialogue will require a teacher's understanding of universal mindfulness-based attitudes. These reflect a deep and heart-felt¹ sense of kindness, compassion and curiosity, and include the seven key attitudinal foundations of non-judging, patience, beginners mind, trust, non-striving acceptance and letting go, first delineated by Kabat-Zinn (1990). This orientation underpins the delivery of mindful inquiry.

An experiential understanding of these attitudes emerges from a dialogue about whatever is arising from the program's formal and informal practices and from participants' daily lives. One of the primary intentions of inquiry is to increase conscious awareness, or meta-awareness, beginning with one's self to promote self-efficacy and self-regulation. By framing the process of inquiry with these attitudinal foundations, participants are given the opportunity to receive, experience and explore all experience. The discussions include a heart-felt appreciation for the many ways insights arise for participants. This allows for the key learning points to emerge from the group versus being delivered by the teacher.

An example of this is given below and follows a conversation between a teacher and a participant after a forty minute sitting meditation.

Participant: It's no good. I'm hopeless at this. (Pauses). In fact I'm not much good at much. Never have been.

Teacher: Do you have a sense of when you first became aware of this hopelessness in the practice?

¹ Heart-felt denotes an emotional and sensorial experience of these attitudes vs. a cognitive understanding.

Participant: (Pausing). I don't know. (Looks unhappy).

Teacher: Could we take a moment to pause here, spend a few moments noticing the breath and paying attention to what you might be aware of in this moment? Thoughts, emotions, body sensations?

Participant: Sadness.

Teacher: Sadness is here. Would it be possible to notice where in the body you sense sadness?

Participant: All over. In my chest, head, arms.

Teacher: And the breath?

Participant: Tight. In my chest.

Teacher: Would it be possible to pay attention to the breath and to these sensations of sadness? Giving sadness and the breath as much space as they need?

Participant: (Has been slumped forward in the chair; now sits up, straightens the back and lifts the head up; takes a few long breaths).

Teacher: If I might ask.... What is in your awareness right now?

Participant: I feel a little easier. Not so tight.

Teacher: Would it possible to bring awareness to the "not so tight" and notice what is happening with those sensations?

Participant: (taking a few moments). They seem to be changing, lessening a little. I feel lighter and not so sad.

Teacher: And the breath?

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Participant: Freer.

Teacher: So if possible bringing this awareness to the next few moments. Thank you.

In this excerpt, the teacher has gently inquired, assisting the participant to engage in a present moment awareness of what might be underneath the thoughts and memories of hopelessness. She has maintained a genuine, steady and compassionate curiosity, in relation to what is being revealed without knowing what may arise. She has not focused on the self-view (thoughts) of being “not good at much”. Instead she has supported the possibility of tracking sensations, lessening the hold on a fixed idea of anything, let alone a sense of a fixed identity around hopelessness. This exemplifies a universal principle of mindfulness, that all is subject to change, even a fixed view of who we think and believe we are.

An Engaged Present Moment Focus

Inquiry as a contemplative dialogue must ground both the participant and the teacher in the unfolding nature of experience. The conversation has a present moment orientation, as both an intention and a stance, inviting reflection on what was experientially noticed (felt, thought, heard, seen, tasted, and/or touched). In this context we are also including descriptions of thoughts and emotions as part of that direct experience, as well as body sensations.

By attending to and describing each moment as it is noticed, rather than interpreting, judging, comparing, predicting or moving into memories, inquiry models one of the practice elements of mindfulness, staying present. This means a teacher is attentive to guiding conversations that describe and discuss sensorial experience rather than the story of experience. This is fundamental to the process of inquiry. We are much more accustomed to engaging in a narrative about experiences in which we are the central character, becoming identified and fused with them.

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Therefore a primary intention of inquiry with this engaged present moment orientation is to recognize, track and integrate experience. Thus, a teacher may either be focusing on what is current or reflecting on a practice recently completed or both. Initially this is done “horizontally” with the group, in which a number of participants briefly report on their experience. At the beginning of such a group intervention this is important because it normalizes what participants are encountering as a result of the practices. In addition, the process of inquiry highlights the ways in which we embellish, react and relate to what we are meeting. Later, usually following the third session of an eight-week MBI, while continuing to check in with participants there is a move to more “vertical” inquiry in which one person’s experience is explored and tracked in depth.

Operationally what does this look like? Participants are asked a variety of questions and the teacher will offer a mixture of simple and complex reflections to their responses. Questions such as, “What did you notice?” or “What showed up?” are aimed at instructing the participant to reflect on what has been experienced and attended to during the practice, and is preferred to “what was that like?”, “how was that” or “how did that feel?” which will invite narrative and preferential, comparative thinking. Below is an example of a conversation between participant and teacher encompassing the full range of experience.

Participant: This was difficult for me today. I noticed I was distracted.

Facilitator: How did that show up?

Participant: I felt agitated.

Facilitator: Hum... how did you sense you were agitated?

Participant: My mind was all over the place. Lots of thoughts. I kept trying to focus on my breath but then my mind would take over.

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Facilitator: Yes, our minds can have a habit of doing that. (Some laughter in recognition of this from the participant and the group). So there were lots of thoughts... anything else?

Participant: Yes, I felt anxious.

Facilitator: How did you sense that? In the body? An emotion?

Participant: The body.

Facilitator: Any particular part of the body?

Participant: (Pauses). Here in the chest. It's really interesting. I'd forgotten I felt anxious. I was only focused on being distracted.

Facilitator: And now... what is present?

Participant: (Taking a moment) I don't feel particularly agitated or anxious.

Facilitator: That's interesting. A shift?

Participant: Yes.

In this excerpt, the participant has noticed agitation and thoughts. This can be challenging for a participant to be with over the period of a sitting practice lasting 20 - 30 minutes. The teacher first normalizes the experience for the participant and engages the group by identifying how easy it is to be pulled away from concentrating on the sensations of breathing. By including the group, she is indirectly conveying a key mindfulness teaching point regarding the universality of experience. The teacher then inquires if the participant noticed anything else. Here she is teasing out the full landscape of sensations by including any mood and bodily sensations that the participant may not have initially noticed. She also asks what might be present in the moment as this is a potentially important teaching on impermanence. Sensations and the experience of them

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change. The teacher doesn't know if that is the case here, but is genuinely interested to see if it is a possibility.

A way to engage in a present moment oriented contemplative dialogue with novice MBI teachers is to first work with the three layers of inquiry. These include noticing and recognizing what bodily sensations, thoughts and emotions are present. Awareness is then brought to how mindful attention is a different way of attending to what is normally habitual, by tracking and staying with sensations, cognitions and emotions from a de-centered perspective. The third layer focuses on understanding the relevance of mindful attention to stress reduction, difficult mind and mood states and how the practice of mindfulness is being integrated into everyday life.

As discussed in the literature (Segal et al. 2002; Crane 2009), the layers are in part a heuristic device to help both teacher and participant develop a common language in which to review what occurs in the practice. It also provides a structured way of thinking about the process, particularly for mindfulness-based teachers in training. Participants are often asked in the first layer of questions aimed at recognizing what is present for them, “what showed up in the body? What did you notice about this experience? This sitting meditation, etc.? They often respond with comments about thoughts, preferences or an assumption about causality, even though the teacher may have asked specifically about the participants’ bodily experience. The facilitator may then reflect, “oh so you noticed a lot of thoughts coming up, or it sounds like there’s some judgment here.” This aims to disrupt the constant narrative in which we engage, in order to return attention to a present that is anchored in the body. What is also gently brought into participants’ awareness is how commonly they engage in negative self/other evaluations and the effect of this on mood and behavior. The impact of cultivating attention to present moment sensations, suspending the immediate evaluation of experience, is supported by neuro-imaging studies in both meditators and participants in mindfulness groups. These studies show how in response to emotional challenges there is less reliance on cortical midline regions associated with

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narrative self-focus and dysphoric reactivity, in favor of a balance between such narration and more lateral non-conceptual sensory pathways. (Farb et al. 2012).

What is referred to as the second layer asks participants to reflect upon how they are meeting their experience, their relationship to what is being noticed in the first layer and how this might be different from how they normally pay attention. This is intended to help participants recognize that there may be a different way to relate to experience. Later, the tracking of experience is emphasized by asking, “And then what happened? And then?” This form of inquiry stresses attention to the internal, unfolding, moment by moment discernment of what is occurring sequentially. Discovery is therefore one of the important elements of the second layer of inquiry. Through the use of a series of open-ended questions, observations, wonderings, and reflections that follow from the meditation practices in each session, as well as in the discussions of the weekly home practices, participants and teachers engage in this mutual process. The conversation assists and strengthens the ability to be both participant and observer of our internal and external environment.

Another way of saying this is that this kind of discussion helps create an observational stance or meta-awareness. Cultivating meta-awareness and insight leads to a view of the self as a process, one that is responsive, flexible and adaptable. The resulting states of de-centering, de-fusion and re-perceiving, are essential for attention and emotional regulation. The ability to lessen the attachment to personal narrative and instead articulate experience without identifying with it, with less reactivity and less attachment, carries with it insight and wisdom. This sagacity allows for intentional skillful responses and actions. When using the word wisdom we are highlighting a specific process as well as state. Teacher and participant become more skilled at identifying habitual moments of reactivity, leading to more choice in dealing with challenging experiences.

A core feature of this second layer of inquiry, particularly with respect to Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), is that it is intended to enable participants to develop a new

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perspective on habitual negative ways of thinking and an enhanced awareness of contingencies. Highlighting these components attempts to make difficulties more manageable, keeping people in the present, reducing the habitual activity of falling into a cascade of ruminative or obsessive thinking that may then hijack mood in a downward spiral. The practice of mindfulness and the process of inquiry enhance mindful attention, distress tolerance and affect regulation.

The third layer of inquiry is about the integration of, or linking to, what has been learned beyond the group setting to everyday life. Common questions ask group members to consider how the practices might help them reduce stress, stay well, or be relevant to depression, anxiety or distress. This implies that there is a skillful next step to dealing with problems and that this can be learned. The third layer is therefore hopeful and embodies personal accountability for making change. Early on in an MBI this line of questioning helps participants make connections between seemingly idiosyncratic practices like eating a raisin, scanning one's body, or following one's breath, and staying well beyond the common misconception that the practice of mindfulness is simply about relaxation.

Through this third layer of inquiry, participant difficulties are normalized, neither to be avoided nor clung to. No experience is privileged over another. This does not mean that some problems don't need addressing; it is discerning if, when and how they are to be addressed that is the issue.

Developing a Framework for Inquiry

We are of the opinion that it is essential that teachers have a framework from which to organize their thinking when delivering an MBI. This framework has a direct impact on and informs the process of inquiry. These programs follow a structured trajectory so that participants develop practice skills to enhance affect and attention regulation and to increase their options regarding their responses when difficulties arise. The programs are modular to assist teachers to locate themselves within the intentions of a specific session and to build the skills of participants in a

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developmental fashion. Organizing the teacher's approach to each session supports directed inquiry that is then session specific, and includes meeting participants where they are in the curriculum. One way to do this is through the use of the following framework: *Themes* (for each session); *Rationales* (for what a teacher is being asked to facilitate); *Intentions* (the underlying teaching points) and *Practice Skills* (being conveyed) (See Appendix 1 - supplementary electronic document).

Themes: an understanding of the relevant themes for each session assists the teacher to direct the discussion, reflections and inquiry around key points of that specific class. The teacher will be able to observe and attend to what is landing in the experiential field of the participant(s) within the thematic context. These themes are laid out to varying degrees within different MBIs. For example, within MBCT they are clearly identified, blending mindfulness principles and cognitive behavior therapy to convey important drivers in depression and depressive relapse. (Segal et al. 2002).

MBSR works with a more heterogeneous population and implicitly, and explicitly, operates from a broader base of understanding about the nature of suffering, identifying the recognition of stress as an overarching theme for the intervention. To support an informed and skillful inquiry, we propose the following session themes as a useful approach for an MBSR teacher to consider. These themes have been acknowledged as useful and supportive to trainees coming through an MBSR teacher training intensive. Session 1: Introduction to mindfulness; "Being" mode of mind; the experience of all six senses as a platform of "knowing"; Session 2: The role of perception and how that shapes our understanding; Session 3: The value of being vs. doing; Session 4: Stress and stress reactivity; Session 5: Our relationship to stress; responding versus reacting; Session 6: Difficult and challenging communication; Session 7: Incorporating what we are learning; Session 8: Keeping mindfulness practice alive. By clearly articulating these themes, the teacher will have an informed sense of what she has taught in the previous session,

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where she is currently and what she will be teaching in the next session. It is essential to hold the themes lightly as this will have important ramifications for the timing of what is highlighted in inquiry dependent upon what is coming up for participants.

Rationales: It is vital that a mindfulness teacher understands why she is teaching what she is teaching. She must be up to date with the current research although she need not be a researcher, nor necessarily talk about research. However, an understanding of the evidence of the effectiveness of mindfulness practices, including some indications of what is happening to the brain when people meditate is valuable. Importantly evidence is accruing regarding the potential risk factors and relative contraindications of which teachers must be aware in order to practice responsibly (Dobkin et al 2011). In addition to having a working knowledge of the current research, it is essential to have a foundational knowledge of mindfulness principles as well as a personal mindfulness practice. This means acknowledging the place of practice in one's own life and, a basic understanding of the philosophy/psychology of mindfulness as well as an appreciation of the Buddhist roots of secular mindfulness.

Intentions: Intentions are crucial in the teaching of a MBI. Intentions rely heavily on a teacher's understanding of the underlying philosophy of mindfulness as well as the practices themselves. Intentions along with the embodiment of certain attitudinal foundations (Kabat-Zinn 1990; Crane 2009; Woods 2013) are a key component of the inquiry process. They set the focal point for what is being taught and for the delivery of inquiry. The intentions in a mindfulness-based group intervention may be manifold but to a greater or lesser degree consist of the development of the following for a teacher: awareness of current experience, focused and open/receptive attention, an embodied experience of the sensorial correlates of emotion, distress tolerance, a reduction in judgment toward the self and others, an understanding of reality as a construct, of impermanence, and experience as impersonal. These are cultivated within an atmosphere of the above-mentioned attitudes and it is from the expression of these attitudes that contemplative

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inquiry should come. One of the major purposes of intention is there is no attachment to a particular outcome in support of the attitude of non-striving. As Kornfield has said: “intention is a direction, not a destination” (Kornfield 2009).

Practice skills: There are various skills needed to teach a mindfulness-based group intervention. These include the ability to guide specific mindfulness meditation practices, mindful movement, and teach specific didactic pieces that convey important information specifically related to the population with whom a teacher is working. A teacher will be embodying her instruction rather than providing an intellectually driven teaching. As she leads a meditation she too will be practicing with dual attention to herself and the group. This informs the languaging and pacing of the guidance. Furthermore, she will bring this to her delivery of inquiry, keeping herself alive to the moments as they unfold.

Common pitfalls and developmental challenges

Our personal experience as trainers is that inquiry is often the most challenging part of training teachers, and one of the last areas for trainees to achieve competence. There are a number of common pitfalls and developmental challenges. One of these is the tendency to fall into formulaic inquiry and reflections. For those making the leap into delivering an MBI they may find themselves engaged in talking too much. This often results from the need to “teach” out of an internal pressure to ensure everyone understands the teaching points, rather than eliciting them from the group. Mindfulness first and foremost is about experiential learning. This cannot be over-emphasized. The teacher is frequently too attached to, or excited by participant insight. Inquiry and its results are intellectually stimulating but one can privilege insight over experience itself. Zindel Segal has said, “Insight has a very short half-life” (personal communication). Further, didactic teaching, and in particular lecturing, can keep participants focused on cognition at a time when what is to be promoted is sensorial experience.

In addition, many mindfulness teachers become overinvested in problem solving and rescuing, especially in moments of participant distress. By and large we are accustomed to “fixing things” and providing reassurance. An ability to turn towards the difficult and tolerate distress is a hallmark of the process of mindfulness teaching and inquiry. Sometimes the teacher has to allow this to unfold with compassion being communicated by silent presence over reassuring comments. This is illustrated in the excerpt below of an inquiry following a body scan:

Participant: (tearful) I couldn’t do it. When I got to my breast I got really scared thinking about the surgery and the cancer coming back.

Teacher: So you had thoughts of the cancer returning. You mention being scared but were there other emotions present?

Participant: I don’t know; I guess sadness. I just really hate this all and want it to be over. (Starts to audibly sob).

Teacher: Is it possible to let this sense of sadness be here. (Pauses). No rush, no need to push it away, allowing for these moments of sadness to be recognized and letting the breath be present as best you can. (Pause. Silence except for participant crying).

Participant: Sometimes it feels too much. I just wish I could cope better. I’m just so tired of it all and worried I’m failing everyone.

Teacher: So recognizing thoughts are here, including some judgmental ones, and some strong and perhaps mixed emotions. (Pause). In addition to the tiredness and worry you feel, is there a sense of related physical sensations in the body?

Participant: I get so knotted in my stomach I feel nauseous. Plus a tightness in my shoulders and jaw.

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Teacher: A sense of body sensations associated with these feelings. (Pause). Is it possible to be with these strong emotions and sensations, even for a moment, without needing things to be different? Allowing the breath to be a part of the experience? (Participant nods and starts to breathe more deeply as the crying slows).

Teacher: Thank you for having the courage to share this with us.

This excerpt illustrates how the practice may elicit strong emotions that are revealed through inquiry. Often this can be unsettling for a new teacher who may have difficulty with challenging emotions, and is concerned for the participant, and other group members. This may then lead to formulaic empathetic responses, reassurances or strategies to diffuse the distress. In the dialogue above the teacher tries to remain present with her own potential discomfort, as well as the participant's distress, while modeling a turning towards and acceptance of whatever is arising. Supporting the group so that it can willingly stay with whatever is occurring is a critical job of the facilitator and emphasizes the need for the facilitator to stay present with her own experience throughout inquiry.

Another pitfall is that inquiry can become an interrogation, especially if one spends too long investigating the experience of one person, or misses participant cues indicating it is time to move on. It is also particularly important to ask for permission to continue, especially if the exchange is becoming affectively charged. One must also be careful not to express judgment about participant responses. This is easy to identify with respect to negative evaluations but may be missed with respect to the positive. For example, to say, "That's good or great," in response to a participant's reported ease in a practice or new insight may seem trivial but sends a message that one experience or answer is preferred over another. This is the antithesis of what we as teachers are trying to convey during the inquiry process when we are attempting to embody the welcoming of all experience with the same equanimity.

Lastly, we believe that humor, poetry, self-disclosure and story-telling as part of the reflective process should be used judiciously by teachers. These can be powerful tools for engaging and instructing the group but can also derail the process, display self-importance, and demonstrate lack of mindfulness or boundary confluence, while also keeping participants “in their heads” and removed from sensorial experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that the art and skill of inquiry lies with the mindfulness teacher’s synthesis of the practice of mindfulness and her ability to embody it. What we have attempted to convey by detailing elements of an embodied mindful presence, specific attitudinal foundations, a present moment orientation, and case illustrations, is that the inquiry process is a mindfulness practice itself. This is an added component from the more traditional forms of silent formal/informal practices which entails individually observing what is arising.

Inquiry supports a verbal articulation of internal and external experiences that takes place as a dialogue in a group setting. By discussing what is being noticed, inquiry strengthens the development of an observational stance of how we perpetuate our suffering. In addition this stance teaches the participant about the nature of impermanence, exemplifying that all states pass including the dysphoric, and de-emphasizes the personalizing of experience. In MBIs turning towards the difficult can produce equanimity, heightened self-care and skillful response over reactivity.

This process-oriented contemplative dialogue is not for the faint hearted as it asks for the acknowledgment of ambiguity and a willingness to embrace uncertainty. Inquiry is a skill that needs time to mature. For these reasons not only should a mindfulness teacher have her own regular mindfulness practice, but it will be important for trainee teachers to have the guidance of a more experienced teacher (through co-facilitation or formal supervision), peer support

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(working in isolation tends to breed unskillful teaching habits), and time for the knowledge to be assimilated and embodied.

The delight of inquiry is that it offers both teacher and participants a connection to a shared humanity that encompasses a visceral sense of the wisdom that kindness and compassion have to offer. The intentional, overtly expressed use of inquiry in MBIs is a significant departure from its Buddhist roots. It is widely held that the deliberate use of inquiry within the group context is a valuable tool and that it is an essential part of all programs using the descriptor “mindfulness-based”. Further study would determine whether or not this is in fact the case, and if inquiry and reflection enhance and hasten the capacity for mindfulness in those engaged in the practice.



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Supplementary Electronic Document – Appendix 1

TEACHING GUIDELINES: PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE THEMES, RATIONALES, INTENTIONS, PRACTICE SKILLS OF THE MBSR/MBCT PROGRAM

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TEACHER GUIDELINES: PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE THEMES, RATIONALES, INTENTIONS, PRACTICE SKILLS OF THE MBSR PROGRAM

| SESSION # | THEMES | RATIONALES | INTENTIONS | PRACTICE SKILLS |
|-----------|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | Introduction to mindfulness. 'Being' mode of mind. Using all the senses, including the thinking mind. Mindfulness and wellness. | Paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally. 'Moments to live'. By paying attention to experience in each moment, we can develop a different relationship to ourselves and how we relate to stress. | Accessing the 6 senses. Present moment focus. Introduction of body awareness. Dropping into stillness. The normality of wandering mind. Investigating each experience with curiosity. Mindfulness of process rather than content. | Brief breath awareness. Standing Yoga practice. Raisin exercise. The Body Scan. Mindful Inquiry. Non-striving. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations by the teacher. Assigning home practice. |
| 2 | The role of perception in shaping our sense of reality. Learning to be with all experiences, particularly in those moments we perceive as unsatisfactory, or even dislike. | Establishing bare attention and the breath as an anchor. Supporting & strengthening curiosity, non-judgment, non-striving, a 'non-doing' mode of mind. Noticing what gets in the way of paying attention in the present moment. Bringing practice into daily life. | Supporting curiosity, non-striving & non-judgment. Awareness of thoughts, emotions & body sensations. Normalizing & welcoming obstacles. Awareness of aversion/ and attachment. Increase body awareness. Importance of homework. | Body Scan. Standing Yoga practice. Short sitting practice: AOB Mindful Inquiry Exercises to demonstrate different ways of seeing/not seeing. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations by the teacher. Assigning home practice. |
| 3 | The value of "being" vs. doing: being present to, allowing for the richness of non-doing. There is freedom and connection in a present moment awareness; developing a different relationship to suffering. | 'Being' mode of mind - understanding how the breath can be used as an anchor in establishing a sense of connection to the present moment, and how this relates to reducing stress reactivity. Developing and sustaining a welcoming and curious attitude to all. Bringing practice into daily life. | Mindful awareness during movement: approaching one's limits with gentleness. Choice. Encouraging modes of mind that embrace allowing, acceptance, patience & kindness. | Yoga Practice. Walking Meditation. Sitting meditation: AOB & B. Mindful Inquiry. Review of Pleasant Events Calendar. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations by the teacher. Assigning home practice. |
| 4 | Stress and stress reactivity. Education about stress reactivity – the role of mindfulness. Awareness of being stuck in a certain pattern of reactivity. | Our conditioning and perceptual biases shape our experience. Stress effects the psychophysiological systems; internal & external stressors. Identifying the patterns of escape; Flight/fight/freeze. Effect of emotional reactivity & negative thinking on the body, mind & heart systems. Maladaptive coping. | Exploring physical sensations, emotions, thoughts associated with stress. Noticing the nature of the conditioned mind and habituated behaviors. Embodying acceptance and compassion. Working wisely. Impermanence. Expanding the field of awareness. | Standing yoga practice. Sitting meditation: B, BS; how to work with intense physical sensations. Mindful Inquiry. Review Unpleasant Events Calendar. Discussion of Stress reactivity Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations. Assigning home practice. Handout Midway assessments. |

TEACHER GUIDELINES: PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE THEMES, RATIONALES, INTENTIONS, PRACTICE SKILLS OF THE MBSR PROGRAM

| SESSION # | THEMES | RATIONALES | INTENTIONS | PRACTICE SKILLS |
|-----------|---|--|---|--|
| 5 | Responding to Stress. The role of mindfulness in responding vs. reacting. | Brief review of last week's session. The platform of bare attention & mindful awareness as a different consciousness for noticing external and internal stressors. The role of mindfulness practices. Self-care. | Allowing/creating space for the difficult. Nurturing a compassion stance. Honoring full range of emotions. Responding rather than Reacting. Strengthening the concept that everything can be held in mindfulness awareness. | Yoga practice. Sitting meditation: B/B/S/T&E/CA/B. Discussion on Stress Response. Mindful Inquiry. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations by the teacher. Assigning home practice. Return Midway assessments. |
| 6 | Difficult (or Challenging) Communications. Being mindful of how we feel, what we say and our actions. Interpersonal mindfulness. | The role of mindfulness practice in stressful communications. Continuing to support & strengthen the participant observer. The usefulness of mindfulness in everyday life. | Mindful resilience. Kindness & Compassion. Emphasizing choice & possibilities. Continuing to normalize the ups and downs of life of mindfulness practice. Discussion about the Retreat Day. | Yoga practice. Sitting meditation: B/B/S/T&E/CA/B Review Difficult Communication Calendar. Mindful Inquiry. Aikido-based exercise/other suitable exercise. Short sitting meditation. Discussion of All Day Retreat. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations by the teacher. Assigning home practice. |
| 7 | Incorporating what we are learning. Considering wisely how to take care of ourselves. Nurturing wise choices vs. what is unhelpful. | Supporting & strengthening an attending to, an awareness of that supports a healthy & compassionate engagement towards self & towards others; a commitment to live each moment fully. Acknowledging the essential nature of one's own wisdom. | Self-care. Kindness. Nurturing confidence & self-efficacy. Resilience. The role of daily mindfulness practice. Preparing for the end of the course & a new beginning. Interdependence and interconnectedness. | Changing Seats exercise. Yoga. Sitting meditation: B/B/CA/B Discussion about retreat day. Discussion on developing healthier patterns Mountain/Lake meditation. Mindful Inquiry. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations by the teacher. Assigning home practice. |
| 8 | Keeping Mindfulness alive. | Maintaining balance in life supported by mindfulness practices. The importance of self-care. The practice of kindness. Finding ways to continue with mindfulness practices. | Endings and beginnings. Review of the 8 week program. Closing ceremony. | Body scan. Yoga practice. Mindful Inquiry. Brief sitting practice. Ongoing home practice. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations by the teacher. Closing ceremony. |

TEACHER GUIDELINES: PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE THEMES, RATIONALES, INTENTIONS, PRACTICE SKILLS OF THE MBCT PROGRAM

| SESSION # | THEMES | RATIONALES | INTENTIONS | PRACTICE SKILLS |
|-----------|-------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 1 | Awareness & Automatic Pilot. | <p>A present moment awareness.</p> <p>The systematic moving of attention.</p> <p>The 6 senses.</p> <p>Noticing the nature of the conditioned mind and habituated behaviors.</p> | <p>Accessing the 6 sense gates.</p> <p>Introduction of body awareness.</p> <p>The normality of wandering mind.</p> <p>Mindfulness of process.</p> <p>Investigating experience with curiosity.</p> <p>Mindfulness and wellness.</p> | <p>Raisin exercise. The Body Scan.</p> <p>Mindful Inquiry.</p> <p>Short breath focus.</p> <p>Paying attention on purpose, non-judgmentally in the present.</p> <p>Non-striving.</p> <p>Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations/mindfulness by the teacher.</p> <p>Assigning home practice.</p> |
| 2 | Living In Our Heads. | <p>The nature of the wandering mind and the chatter of mind.</p> <p>Wandering mind is not a problem.</p> <p>The hindrances: what gets in the way of paying attention in the present moment.</p> <p>Developing a relationship to what gets in the way.</p> <p>Establishing breath as an anchor.</p> <p>Single-pointed attention.</p> <p>Starting to learn to be with all experience.</p> <p>Bringing practice to daily life.</p> <p>Relevance & importance of home practice.</p> | <p>Normalizing & welcoming obstacles.</p> <p>Approaching & attending to vs. struggling with/pushing away/avoiding.</p> <p>Awareness of aversion/attachment.</p> <p>Lens of curiosity.</p> <p>Noticing the critical voice.</p> <p>Increase body awareness.</p> <p>Noticing thoughts, emotions & body sensation.</p> <p>ABC model.</p> <p>Noticing the movements of the thinking mind.</p> | <p>Body Scan.</p> <p>Short sitting practice - noticing the breath and the body.</p> <p>Walking down the street exercise.</p> <p>Mindful Inquiry.</p> <p>Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations/mindfulness by the teacher.</p> <p>Assigning home practice.</p> |
| 3 | Gathering the Scattered Mind. | <p>Practice of using breath as an anchor.</p> <p>Developing and sustaining a welcoming and curious attitude to all.</p> <p>Bringing practice to daily life.</p> <p>Pragmatic use of mindfulness.</p> <p>Relevance & importance of home practice.</p> | <p>Acceptance. Patience. Allowing.</p> <p>Compassion. Light touch.</p> <p>No one way/Choices.</p> <p>Establishing mindful awareness during the movement of the body.</p> | <p>Mindfulness of Seeing/hearing.</p> <p>Sitting meditation - Mindfulness of Breath & body, how to respond to intense physical sensations.</p> <p>Mindful Stretching/Yoga.</p> <p>3-minute breathing space.</p> <p>Mindful Inquiry.</p> <p>Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations/ mindfulness by the teacher.</p> <p>Assigning home practice.</p> |

TEACHER GUIDELINES: PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE THEMES, RATIONALES, INTENTIONS, PRACTICE SKILLS OF THE MBCT PROGRAM

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|---|-------------------------|--|--|--|
| 4 | Recognizing Aversion. | Avoidance and attachment. Externalization of depression. Mindfulness is transportable. Loosening the attachment to "I". Turning towards the difficult; a different place from which to view thoughts/ emotions/body sensations/behaviors Relevance & importance of home practice. | Hopefulness. Embodying acceptance and compassion. Safety. Impermanence. Acceptance, allowing for without judgment. Exploring the territory of depression. | Mindfulness of seeing/hearing. Sitting meditation (30 -40 min). Mindful Inquiry. Territory of Depression: ATQ & DSM. 3 minute breathing space. 3 minute breathing space—responsive. Mindful walking. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations of mindfulness by the teacher. Assigning home practice. |
| 5 | Allowing & Letting Be. | Establishing a different relationship to the unwanted. Reducing avoidance and over-whelm. Moving towards self-care. Acceptance(active). Relevance & importance of home practice. | Relating differently to the difficult; the possibility of creating space, allowing for the unwanted thus developing a different perspective. Befriending. Nurturing kindness, compassion. Responding rather than reacting. Strengthening the concept that everything can be held in mindfulness awareness. | Sitting meditation /bringing the difficult to mind (30/40 min). Mindful Inquiry. 3 minute breathing space – responsive. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations/ mindfulness by the teacher. Assigning home practice. |
| 6 | Thoughts Are Not facts. | Thoughts are state dependent/mood influences thoughts. Thoughts as mental events. Developing and strengthening the participant. Observer. Relevance & importance of home practice. | You are not your thoughts. Liberation/freedom. Emphasizing multiple possibilities. Thoughts often dependent on mood /the role of mindfulness based skills. | Sitting meditation – particularly noticing how we relate to thoughts that arise. Mindful Inquiry. Alternative viewpoints exercise or story about boy <i>from Mindful Way through Depression</i> . Breathing spaces. Relapse signature. Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations/ mindfulness by the teacher. Assigning home practice. |

TEACHER GUIDELINES: PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE THEMES, RATIONALES, INTENTIONS, PRACTICE SKILLS OF THE MBCT PROGRAM

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|---|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 7 | How Can I Best Take Care Of Myself? | <p>Specific things can be done.</p> <p>Developing an Action Plan.</p> <p>Identifying relapse signatures; one's own unique relapse signatures.</p> <p>Skills to prevent relapse.</p> <p>Behavior and mood are inter-related.</p> <p>Reviewing the program.</p> <p>Relevance & importance of home practice.</p> | <p>Instilling hope; encouraging resilience; preparing for the end and the beginning.</p> <p>Nurturing confidence (belief in self) and self-efficacy.</p> <p>Practice leads to balance in life.</p> <p>Normalizing relapse Interdependence and interconnectedness.</p> | <p>Sitting meditation (30 -40 mins) breath & body; noticing reactions we have to thoughts, feelings, body sensations particularly as they reveal themselves in the body.</p> <p>Mindful Inquiry.</p> <p>Exercise to explore links bet. activity and mood. Plan how best to schedule activities for when mood threatens to overwhelm.</p> <p>Rebalancing nourishing & depleting moments. Generating Pleasure/Mastery activities.</p> <p>3 minute breathing space as first step before choosing whether to take a mindful action.</p> <p>Identifying actions to deal with threat of relapse.</p> <p>3 minute breathing space.</p> <p>Mindful walking.</p> <p>Assigning home practice.</p> |
| 8 | Maintaining & Extending New Learning. | <p>Endings and beginnings.</p> <p>Maintaining balance in life supported by mindfulness practices.</p> <p>The importance of self-care.</p> <p>Finding ways to continue with mindfulness practices.</p> | <p>Review of the 8 week program</p> <p>Review Relapse Prevention Plans.</p> | <p>Body scan.</p> <p>Mindful Inquiry.</p> <p>Review Relapse prevention plans.</p> <p>Discuss how to keep the momentum going for mindful practice.</p> <p>Embodiment of Attitudinal Foundations/mindfulness by the teacher.</p> <p>Closing exercise.</p> |