Formative Experiences for Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Teachers-In-Training

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Formative Experiences for Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Teachers-In-Training

Master’s Thesis

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Lesley University

Advisor: Nancy Waring
“Our job is
to take care of the territory of direct experience in the present moment
and the learning that comes out of it.”

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn, in *Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR,*

*Skillful Means, and the Trouble with Maps*
Abstract

Teacher development is of critical importance in the relatively new field of mindfulness. This study focuses on what can be understood about teacher development, from the perspective of teachers who have trained in this field. Five U.S.-based qualified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction teachers were interviewed to find out about their formative experiences. The data were gathered from interview transcriptions, and have been presented in the context of the literature concerning teacher training pathways and recognized and/or recommended teacher development activities. The teachers described a range of formative experiences, involving formal training, professional, spiritual and ordinary life moments, and including pleasant as well as unpleasant experiences. They related experience types that are encouraged for developing teachers, and some that extended beyond the recognized training pathways. The array of experiences they counted as formative can provide a powerful window into what teachers-in-training and teacher trainers might attend to, in encouraging aspiring and experienced teachers in their ongoing development.

Keywords: mindfulness, mindfulness-based stress reduction, teaching, teacher training, competency, development, formation
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Formative Experiences for Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Teachers-In-Training

Mindfulness is now commonly defined as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.” Jon Kabat-Zinn’s “operational definition” points to the very human possibility of wakeful engagement in life (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). What I know, from my own practice and from having taught this practice to others for close to ten years is that what one might find in stepping into this practice is life itself. Here is an alternative to existing in a habit-driven way, held in place with the thoughts, emotional patterns and behaviors ingrained by one’s history and culture of origin. Mindfulness is liberative, allowing for full-on aliveness, granting access to what is new and fresh both within one’s own being as well as to what is alive around us; moreover, it has the potential to be freeing despite any kind of condition we might face. As one of my students once put it to me, “Mindfulness is a different kind of waking up.”

The potential in mindfulness practice lies in “a contemplative approach which has a long lineage in supporting people to better know the territory of their interior experience, to train their minds in a certain direction and so to radically transform their fundamental understanding of, and approach to life” (Crane et al, 2012, p. 76). The possible results of engaging in this training are well documented in the growing body of literature. Published studies demonstrate the range of physiological and psychological benefits (McCown, Reibel & Micozzi, 2010). This is borne out by the growing engagement in training and practicing mindfulness, along with the boom sales of all of the trappings of apps, guided meditation recordings, online communities, etc. It only requires an easy and non-directed walk in the world for me to see signs for Mindful Dining in the Sedexo cafeteria of a large insurance company, or to see the heaps of mindfulness coloring books at the local big box book store.
Despite the promise and the hype around mindfulness these days, and despite what many teachers propose as the inborn potential for present-moment awareness in each one of us, actually bringing the capacity of sustained awareness to life is not easy. As measured in a recent mobile-phone based study, approximately 47% of the time, people are unaware of what’s right in front of them and what they are doing at a given moment (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). Along with this lack of awareness, there is evidence of recent increases in psychological distress. In a meta-study that looked at the global incidence of anxiety and depression, 8 out of 11 studies using the General Health Questionnaire found a significant increase in psychological distress over time (Baxter, Scott, Ferrari, Norman, Vos, & Whiteford, 2014, p. 513).

Mindfulness appears to be highly valued, beneficial in many ways, and hard to come by naturally. At the same time, levels of distress are growing. How, then, does one go about developing this highly beneficial human quality? The time-honored approach is to find a good teacher. Given the increasing demand for the resulting effects of mindfulness, in a world where a simple glance at the news illustrates rising anxiety, depression and distress, the demand for good teaching and thereby for well-trained teachers must also be on the rise.

The enthusiasm to implement secular mindfulness-based programmes in a range of contexts (including healthcare, education, business, prisons and community centres), and with a diversity of client populations within these contexts, is strong and growing…In this rapidly developing context, there is a growing demand for teachers and trainers of teachers. (Crane et al, 2012, p. 77)

In recognizing the growing demand, there must be a simultaneous recognition that a life in meditation, and thus a life in teaching meditation, is a slow growth crop. It takes time to learn to really pay attention, to glean from the human experience what can be known, and then to develop
some skill to offer this understanding forward, to support others in this same development. Rushing would be contradictory, to say the least. There’s an old joke in the Zen tradition, whereby an aspiring student bangs on the gate of the monastery and asks to be let in as a student. The abbot answers his call. The aspirant is clearly worked up. “I need to study Zen. How long does it take to become enlightened?” asks the newcomer. The abbot replies “Ten years.” The student is taken aback. “Ten years! That’s so long. What if I really work hard and double my effort?” The abbot replies back. “OK, for you, twenty years.” The risk of rushing to push out more teachers is the dilution and distortion of what is so valuable about the teaching in the first place (Crane, Kuyken, Hastings, Rothwell, Williams, 2010, p. 84). The greater the hurry, the more rushed and agitated the result.

In the long-standing Eastern meditation traditions, teaching requirements started with a period of intensive and prolonged study, apprenticing under direct supervision, and culminated in recognition confirmed by existing teacher (‘lineage transmission’). Relatively few people were recognized as teachers (Piet et al, 2016, p. 76). The modern manifestation, the professional mindfulness teacher, is a very new animal. The first formal mindfulness teacher training program, represented in the literature I reviewed, started in 1982 (Horrigan, 2007, p. 11-8:3). Compared to the histories of the ancient traditions that inspire our modern mindfulness boom, the last three plus decades is a very short span.

In this brief time, what has been learned about what constitutes good teaching? How are good teachers formed? What experiences contribute to good teacher formation? What experiences in particular do teachers themselves recognize as having been impactful in their formation? In this paper, I begin by reviewing what is currently known about teacher formation in the field of mindfulness teacher training, primarily as articulated by teacher trainers. I then
describe my research objectives and methods, review my analysis and discuss the results of interviewing a small but diverse group of mindfulness teachers about the experiences that contributed to their formation as teachers. Lastly, I make some suggestions for future teachers-in-training, and for their trainers, based on the results of the study.

I bring to this investigation my own history along with the biases, prejudices and insights that come from living a life. I am a certified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) teacher, having taught Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for over 7 years, for a time through a community hospital and now at the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School (the Center.) I have almost completed a master’s degree level education through two prestigious U.S. higher learning institutions, with the biases that come along with a liberal arts education. I grew up in poor socio-economic conditions, and now enjoy a middle class lifestyle. I live in a state that I’m told has the most homogenously white population in the country. I’m a parsimonious New England Yankee. I’m a woman who came up professionally in the 1980’s, acculturated in the corporate environments I worked in to adopt masculine behaviors and values. I’m married with three daughters. I have a fierce desire to see justice done for women and for the underprivileged. I lack awareness of a broad range of my own prejudices, biases, assumptions, partialities, preferences, etc., that I can’t name because I don’t know that I can’t see them.

**Literature Review**

Given the growth in the general popularity of mindfulness practice, the recognition of the efficacy of practicing mindfulness in treatment for a broad range of medical conditions, and the growing interest in teaching mindfulness, it is of growing importance to understand 1) what
constitutes good teaching and 2) how effective teaching can be nourished and developed in those who teach.

**What Constitutes Good Teaching?**

A handful of training institutions have been engaged in training teachers for at least a decade. These professionals have each chosen a unique way to organize their thoughts about what constitutes good teaching.

In a 2007 interview with Bonnie Horrigan, who is Bonnie? Saki Santorelli, the current Executive Director of the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School frames his answer to the question into three areas: that good mindfulness teachers base their teaching in knowing how to meditate, how to work with everyday people, and the ability to transmit the heart of the practice “in a way that is grounded, commonsensical and well-suited to application in everyday life” (Horrigan, 2007, p. 11-8:4). The first is essential yet not sufficient. Having a meditation practice is a non-negotiable prerequisite. Secondly, the “how” of working with people must be grounded in the palpable sense of a **mutual** exploration; the quality of the relationship between instructor and the participant is critical. There must be a willingness of the teacher to be a “master student.” Finally, there is a set of skills that he refers to in the whole as “transmit” or “translate:” that is, to distill the essential ingredients of this practice, originally learned from Eastern teachers, “without watering or ‘dumbing down’ the essential” (Horrigan, 2007, p 11-8:5).

Susan Woods is the designer of the MBSR and MBCT professional certification programs for the Mindfulness-Based Professional Training Institute at UC San Diego. Woods describes good teaching as based in embodied awareness, awareness in dialogue, experiential
engagement, and these three infused with a lived sense of the relevance of the teacher’s personal and practical engagement with meditation. Embodied awareness is unusual when compared to typical psychological interventions. Woods writes that “the intuitive intelligence of the body is re-discovered” through direct engagement, and then catalyzed as a “reservoir of information,” as practitioner and as teacher (p. 466). Simply put, it allows for a firm stance grounded in the here and now, the present moment. From this stance, the teacher can engage with others in an exploration of their own and simultaneously the participants’ present-moment experience. Woods uses the term dialogue to describe “the unfolding meaning of the process of inquiry” between teacher and class participant, grounded in “an understanding born of his/her (the teacher’s) own encountering of what comes up in personal practice” (p. 467). Then, rather than teaching from via a rote delivery of learned concepts, the teacher is offering from an active and informed stance, coming right out their own direct learning of what it means to encounter the moment, whether joyful, mundane or distressing. The teacher embodies the potential for encountering life in this way. The teacher’s personal practice over time is present and relevant in the immediacy of the live classroom encounter with participants. Here lies the power that differentiates offering instruction in mindfulness from teaching concepts or didactic exercises (Woods, 2009).

In the book *Teaching Mindfulness*, three highly experienced teacher trainers provide a deep dive into the territory of good mindfulness teaching. The authors, McCown, Reibel and Micozzi, categorize aspects of teaching into three main areas, with further details within each area. First, they speak of the person of the teacher, and further frame this as consisting of the qualities of authenticity, authority, and friendship. Second, they describe the skills of the teacher, listing these four as organizing principles: stewardship of the group, homiletics (or talking *with*
the group), guidance, and inquiring. Third, they name the intentions of teaching offered within the frame of the MBI curriculum. These five intentions are experiencing new possibilities, discovering embodiment, cultivating observation, moving toward acceptance, and growing compassion (McCown et al, 2010).

In the most recent publication I reviewed, an international collaboration of multiple teaching institutions, gives a broad view of good teaching and names a combination of training experiences, teacher characteristics and mindset as the conditions necessary for the development of good teaching. For these three trainers, effective teaching includes these five aspects: 1) professional training and education, 2) good practice principles and standards, 3) teaching skills and competencies, 4) life practice and 5) ethical foundation (Piet et al, 2016). Note that for these authors, the ethical foundation takes a place as an overarching aspect.

Another collaboration of experienced trainers from three U.K.-based training institutions offers what currently appears to be the most fully articulated description of what constitutes good teaching. The Mindfulness-Based Interventions Teaching Assessment Criteria (MBI-TAC) was developed to assess the relative level of skill of an observed piece of mindfulness-based teaching, both to support development and growth along the teacher training pathway, as well as to assess the overall body of work of a teacher who has completed formal training, as a means for assessing for fitness to teach (Crane, Soulsby, Kuyken, Williams, Eames, 2012). With this assessment model, a particular piece of teaching, either live or filmed, is reviewed by an experienced teacher. Such a person will have been trained in the use of the MBI-TAC and tested to ensure inter-rater reliability in its application. The model rests on an understanding that, despite tensions inherent in concretizing what constitutes good teaching into a model, that “participants recognize en they are on the receiving end of an authentic, skillful, attuned teaching
process” and that therefore “a competence framework for mindfulness teaching can be
descriptive of what we see, hear and sense when we are participating in skillful teaching” (Crane
et al, 2012, p. 79). Teaching is divided into six domains of competency, with six relative levels
of skill development within each domain of the MBI-TAC (Crane, Soulsby, Kuyken, Williams,
Eames, 2012). These domains will be further described below.

With some personal familiarity with what contributes to good teaching, having completed
teacher training and the certification process through the Center for Mindfulness at the
University of Massachusetts Medical School, and with some preliminary study of the MBI-TAC
tool, I arrived as a newly hired teacher at the Center in the spring of 2015. At that time the
teacher trainers had already begun to thoroughly review the Center’s teacher training pathway
and curricula. I was asked to join this effort. By this time, I had been teaching MBSR for just
over 5 years, and had recently mentored some MBSR teachers peer-to-peer. I was therefore in
the very early stages myself of investigating what it means to train teachers. Over the weeks and
months that followed, these senior teachers met to articulate what was understood through the
lens of over 3 decades of guiding the development of teachers. I came with a pair of very fresh
eyes, to listen, to learn and also to question. Together we unpacked the ideas, the concepts and
the language for articulating both what is concrete and observable, and also what is known and
yet so slippery to describe, in the practice of teaching mindfulness.

Studying how experienced teacher trainers organize their descriptions of good teaching
allows for a clearer and clearer picture to emerge. Over time and after much diving into details,
the Center came to a summary structure, a “learning framework” for teacher education. Much of
what this consists of was already in use prior to the curriculum revisit project that I participated
in. There is nevertheless a new clarity to some of the elements, as well as a sense of how to speak
about the overarching or holistic gestalt of teacher education, and so we do recognize this recently published framework as an important update. I will use this organizing principle, which we are currently working with at the Oasis Institute for Professional Training at the Center for Mindfulness, to further expand on the details of good teaching (See Figure 1).

Across the fields of education, training and job development there is wide recognition and use of three categories of development in learning: knowledge, attitudes and skills. These three categories are represented in the Oasis Institute teacher education learning framework as Underpinnings, Attributes and Competencies; the three are then combined and enfolded into an overall or holistic sense of what we are developing toward when we agree, as Santorelli put it, to be “involved in a deliberate attempt to grow ourselves” (Horrigan, 2007, p 11-8:8). This overall sense is recognized as an embodied ethos of MBSR.

**Knowledge: Underpinnings.** The knowledge foundation of teaching mindfulness is gained both through traditional means of study as well as through direct engagement with the practice. As previously discussed, the relevance of personal practice allows the teacher to convey the wisdom they have personally developed through their natural presence (Woods, 2009). Along with inner knowledge, the Oasis Institute pathway recognizes the value of study in one’s home meditation tradition as well as engagement with the teachings of mindfulness as offered in the Buddhist traditions that MBSR is informed by. Overall, wisdom might be described as a study of a “universal dharma operating independently of Buddhism or any other religion for that matter” (Piet et al, 2016, p. 78). Through one’s own personal and direct engagement in practice, informed by study of traditional ways of describing the means and ends of such a practice, wisdom arises.
Along with the wisdom aspect, there are three additional categories that teachers in training are directed to study. Experiential learning, as understood through the work of theorists such as David Kolb, supports understanding of the style of direct engagement in learning that is encouraged in the mindfulness classroom. A basic understanding of stress physiology and psychology, the stress reaction versus “mindfulness-mediated stress response” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013, p. 335), and mindfulness-related neuro-scientific findings is helpful in placing mindfulness practice into the realm of evidence-based medicine. Familiarizing oneself with group process theory provides a basis for understanding the group education model on which mindfulness classes are based. These four categories constitute the knowledge category for MBSR teachers-in-training in the Oasis pathway.

**Attitude: Attributes of the teacher, or attitudes and qualities.** In the MBSR Standards of Practice given to all teachers-in-training, and for that matter published on the Center’s website for everyone to see, the founder of the MBSR program describes seven attitudes foundational to mindfulness practice: beginner’s mind, non-judgment, patience, trust, acceptance, non-striving, and letting go. This grouping forms the first aspect of attitudinal development for teachers (In Santorelli, 2014, MBSR: Standards of Practice, Kabat-Zinn, Appendix A).

More broadly, there is a recognized development of a range of teacher qualities that Oasis trainees discover as they move through training. Examples in the literature are numerous. Compassion is often explicitly identified as an essential quality of the teacher (Woods, 2009; Evans, 2015). The teacher must cultivate “the courage to meet the suffering of the world (Piet et al, 2016, p. 78). In the MBI-TAC, assessors are invited to recognize how they may, through observation and assessment, recognize in behavior, speech, posture, non-verbal and verbal means
the communication of such qualities as authenticity, potency, connection, warmth, curiosity, respect and mutuality, to name just a few (Crane, Soulsby et al, 2012).

**Skills: Teaching competencies.** To articulate the skills needed for good teaching, the Oasis framework draws from the MBI-TAC. This assessment tool provides detailed descriptions of the key factors for each domain, as well as guidance for recognizing skill in the domains along a spectrum of competence that spans across incompetent, beginner, advanced beginner, competent, proficiency and advanced.

Before listing the domains, here are two important notes. First, in the Oasis Learning Framework, embodiment (Domain 3 of the MBI-TAC), is seen as an aspect of the overall category, rather than as a domain of competency. For the purposes of the Oasis model, as well as this paper, embodiment is enfolded into the overall category. Secondly, the authors of the MBI-TAC fully admit to overlap and interpenetration of aspects of competency across the six domains (Crane, Soulsby et al, 2012). This seems related to what I discovered while reviewing the variety of organizing principles for thinking about and describing good teaching, as found in the body of literature. The MBI-TAC not only recognizes this, but also often provides instruction for assessors on which domains are primary when observing a particular behavior in a teaching example.

**Domain 1: coverage, pacing and organization of session curriculum.** Teaching mindfulness interventions calls for good familiarity and commitment to the particular curriculum one is offering. The teacher walks the balance of adherence to program specifications, while maintaining flexibility and openness to what is arising, moment by moment, with the participants in a given moment in the classroom. One the one hand, there is the integrity of the curriculum to safeguard; on the other, the importance of “countering speed and outcome-driven forces” so
familiar in most classroom settings (Evans, 2015, p. 575). It’s intriguing to note suggestions in the literature about teaching that actually undermine the formal curriculum. For example, the authors of Teaching Mindfulness title the entire section of their book on teaching skills as “Toward an Empty Curriculum” (McCown et al, 2010). A commitment to and simultaneous willingness to skillfully abandon the prescribed curriculum is recognized as a key aspect of teaching MBSR.

**Domain 2: relational skills.** Being with and working with participant difficulties is grounded in the experience of one’s own personal practice (Woods, 2009). Here in the MBI-TAC one finds a rich description of what in the Oasis pathway is included as attitudes and qualities. The MBI-TAC authors frame this as a skill, with assessors on the lookout for curiosity, respect, connection and acceptance, as examples (Crane, Soulsby et al, 2012).

**Domain 4: guiding mindfulness practices.** This is the only MBI-TAC domain in which a unique skill related to teaching mindfulness is specifically addressed. The formal practices are named and specific principles for guiding each are described. The specific skills of guiding can be generally understood as a facility with language to point to directly known first person experience, encouraging a stance of allowing experience (as opposed to doing something with whatever you discover,) orienting attention to develop the further skill of continuity of knowing-allowing, and simultaneously embodying and guiding from all of this as the teacher (McCown et al, 2010).

**Domain 5: conveying course themes through interactive learning.** Rather than through more familiar means of teaching (lecture, group projects, reading and restating), mindfulness is best offered using a certain way of delivering themes and didactic material by interweaving participant questions and reports with teaching stories, poetry, aspects of stress and neuroscience,
etc. Freedom and creativity allow the principles of the pedagogy of MBSR to come out in the natural language of the teacher and participants interactively (McCown et al, 2010). This domain carries with it a particular-ness in the literature. Susan Woods calls it a “special kind of responsiveness,” present-moment centered, exploratory, non-rote, nor based in technique (Woods, 2009, p. 466). This is a “mindful co-investigation of actual experience, as contrasted with discussion” (Piet et al, 2016, p. 79).

**Domain 6: holding the group learning environment.** McCown and his co-authors describe this skill as “stewardship of the group.” The teacher is acting as the lead caretaker of a non-hierarchical, participatory learning form and format. Importantly, this includes preventing the form from turning into group therapy, which is something different (McCown et al, 2010). Holding the group also includes the importance of including oneself as an equally deserving member of the group, while simultaneously unfolding and guiding the class through the curriculum (Woods, 2009).

In attempting to describe the skills of teaching mindfulness, it’s important to recognize what Crane et al describe as the paradox of operationalizing present-moment awareness and responsivity, and in particular the duality inherent in the usual language of competency (right, wrong, etc.), versus the non-duality of connection and universality of the human experience at the heart of the teaching (Crane, Kuyken et al, 2012). Articulating the behaviors of competency in teaching can begin to sound like an instruction manual; yet flexibility and responsiveness to present moment conditions is essential to teaching alive and unpredictable human beings in the MBSR classroom. In some way, decision points in good teaching will cause one to leave aside a particular criterion in favor of another equally valid and yet seemingly opposing instruction. Yet somehow, in the overall, the choice made adds up to what trained assessors will agree is good
teaching. Here is found the “overallness” of good teaching, or how all of the particulars of knowledge, attitude and skill come together.

**As a whole: An embodied ethos.** Each of the authors mentioned so far do in their own way suggest that, for whatever framework they have chosen to describe good teaching, there is something essential and real about the overall presence of good teaching. Teaching is communicated through the person’s way of being, in the classroom, with participants, in the parking lot after class, via email, and when no one else is around. There is an integrity, an intentionality to the teacher’s orientation to present-moment awareness, it has been to some useful degree internalized, and it communicates without an agenda to communicate anything particular or overt in the classroom. This is an ethical foundation for the person (Piet et al, 2016). In the Oasis pathway, we are careful to speak about this as an ethos rather than anything like a set of ethical guidelines. An ethos comes alive in a unique way for each person who engages in it.

Teaching in the way that has been described here calls for continuous engagement in one’s own learning. Teaching from direct felt and known experience means one must connect with the lived moment, with commitment and grace. Such an engagement in learning about life results in the fluid, dynamic embodiment of what has been learned and is being accessed in the here and now: the intuitive intelligence of the body, the joy of simple aliveness, and somatic awareness beyond the subset of physiological signals of pain or illness (Woods, 2009). In this way, teaching mindfulness is grounded as much in the sense of mindfulness as a way of being, rather than about the usual “doing” mode, as is the practice itself.

**How Does Good Teaching Develop?**
If good teaching is so important, and if after three decades there is some literature about what constitutes good teaching, then how good teaching develops can become an interesting investigation. Of the sources drawn from here, there is broad agreement on the overall means and structure by which teachers develop. These provide supports for personal practice, including retreats, supports for developing specific teaching skills as described above, and interaction with experienced teachers who embody the teaching themselves (Woods, 2009). The ingredients of well-tested MBI teacher training program would also include: 1) opportunities to reflect on personal and broader insights, 2) the rationale of the underpinning, 3) aims of program curriculum, and 4) practice teaching with feedback. It might also incorporate apprenticeship and/or co-teaching (Crane et al, 2010).

Practically speaking, successive phases of a typical professional training pathway are prerequisites, foundational teacher training, advanced teacher training, and ongoing professional and personal development. (Piet et al, 2016; Crane et al, 2010) Teacher development begins with what are often called pre-requisites: establishing the foundation of a stable personal mindfulness practice of some length of time and engaging in at least one multi-day mindfulness meditation silent retreat. Taking an MBSR course (or the appropriate MBI program one is training to teach) is now considered essential. Once the pre-requisites are fulfilled, trainees make an ongoing commitment to personal practice and annual retreats as they begin the teacher development process. Through this level of personal investment and intention, teacher training places great emphasis on the development of the ‘person of the teacher’ (Crane et al, 2010).

The more formal teacher training pathways typically consist of taking training courses with experienced teachers, with some elements of self-driven study, engaging in practice teaching, and mentoring and developmental assessment with senior teachers. The authors of the
MBI-TAC specifically name the following as included in good teacher development: Study of theory and methodological underpinnings; observation and description of teaching; skills practice; reflection/assessment under the mentorship of experienced teachers; co-teaching and/or supervision at appropriate times; assessment, feedback and guidance along the way (Crane et al, 2010).

In particular, working together with an experienced teacher provides for specific learning that is much harder to come by in other stages of the training. Evans et al in their article on supervision describe it as a form of mutual inquiry, the relational embodiment of present moment focus that can lead to integration and linking of teaching themes for the teacher and in the classroom. Since the framework of supervision is held overall in same container of mindfulness, the learning and integration can come through out of the very space of supervision. This learning can exist on multiple levels, both for skills, theory, and class content, as well as mutual inquiry into the “unknown” of the live encounter in the classroom. It involves confidentiality, appropriate boundaries, and space to raise relational issues, just as the teacher-in-training is learning to offer in the classroom (Evans, 2015).

As a culmination to a formal teacher-training pathway, most mature institutions now have a transparent and reliable means for assessing and recognizing readiness to teach others. Crane et al provide a description of methods for teaching competency assessment, consisting of teaching portfolios, reflective assignments, academic assignments, self-assessment, peer assessment, expert panel review by film or live observation, and comparison to rating scales (Crane, Kuyken et al, 2012).

Finally, each of these authors describes the necessity for ongoing commitment to personal and professional development. As long as a teacher is teaching, the only way to keep
that teaching alive in the way that mindfulness requires is to be in continuous engagement and inquiry with present moment experience. This involves personal commitment as well as staying current with what is known in the larger academic, medical and scientific field of mindfulness, to the degree that is possible for one person to be. This stretches beyond the moment-in-time assessment of development for readiness to teach. To support ongoing good teaching practice, institutions provide guidance for professional standards of practice and ongoing development, coupled with the requirement for ongoing commitment to adhere to such guidelines (Piet et al, 2016). An example can be found in the guidelines published by the UK Collaborative as “Good Practice Guidance for Teaching Mindfulness-Based Courses” (UK Network 2010). These are extended further in similar documents that outline guidelines for trainers and supervisors of mindfulness teachers. The activities and supports in these guidelines reflect a constellation of intention, and the interconnected aspects of commitment to daily practice, annual retreat, community of colleagues, curriculum, context, and continuing education. Here is the encompassing ethos of a life in teaching.

Taking all of the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary into account, and reflecting on how cumbersome and goal-oriented it can sound when describing a teacher development pathway, it might be especially helpful to remember in general that teachers must develop in both ‘doing’ and ‘being’ skills (Crane et al, 2010).

**Historical Context**

Over the past four decades, mindfulness teacher training has been a work in progress across the globe. Santorelli describes the early beginnings of what later grew into a formal teacher-training program, when he talks about himself as the Center for Mindfulness’ first intern in 1981. Soon after, the process began evolving from its one-intern beginning through a more
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apprenticeship-style approach as others came to learn how to teach MBSR in the earlier days. Some 16 years later, he describes the beginning of a development of a range of professional education programs (Horrigan, 2007). One can see into a window of this evolutionary process by reading through columns from the Indra’s Net bulletins, which were published newsletter-style by the Center for Mindfulness as a way of communicating with the growing population of MBSR teachers during the years of 1995-1997. At that time, a second formal follow-up training, the Teacher Development Intensive, which was to be taken after the by-then formalized apprenticeship training, was just underway for the first time.

Developmental training routes set up, like the early pathway at the CFM, still exist in certain institutions. In 2009, for example, as I began my training at the Center, there was an introductory training course for those who met the pre-requisites of practice and retreat, followed by early MBSR teaching, and then by more in-depth skills training and supervision with experienced teachers (Woods, p. 2009). Santorelli describes this introductory training course as an internship in a way, a participant/observer program with MBSR embedded within the overall learning design, which includes a separate seminar to discuss the class and what interns are discovering within themselves, while engaged in knowledge acquisition, reflection and contemplation. Later, trainees come back for the teacher development intensive, which includes simulated classroom situations, role-plays, viewing class clips, and Socratic discussion (Horrigan, 2007).

In my own experience with teacher training, I have noticed how the pathway continues to change. In 2009 when I began my studies with the Oasis Institute, I applied having never taken an MBSR course. I knew the course by reputation alone. I did have a steady daily practice, many retreats completed, and had been invited to teach in my home meditation community the
previous year. This, along with a phone interview with the teacher of the early “internship course” (what was then known as the Practicum course) was enough to grant me entrance to the training pathway. In 2017 as I write this, taking MBSR (or a CFM-specified equivalent) is now a pre-requisite that applicants must have. Back in 2009, after completing the Practicum course, trainees were invited to begin teaching MBSR, in preparation for returning for a more skills-oriented course called the Teacher Development Intensive. Nowadays, Oasis asks that trainees leaving the first course (now called Fundamentals of MBSR) offer several introductory sessions but not attempt to teach the entire 8-week curriculum on their own. Trainees are asked to wait to teach the full MBSR course until after they have completed a 9-day skills-oriented course, now called the Practice Teaching Intensive.

As those who choose to observe the world with care and precision know full well, things are always changing.

**Objectives of This Study**

With great admiration and gratitude for all of the combined wisdom and clarity in the established training pathways, there is yet something critical beyond checking the pathway as formalized and offered. This might be, for teachers at least, what Saki Santorelli once identified to me as “the hidden curriculum.” This is not to say a hidden agenda by any means; more so, it is what is learned as a result of engaging in the known curriculum, coming from the stuff of life: that learning that arises and surprises, unbidden, unconstructed, without predetermined outcome in mind. For those who engage in the practice itself, this hidden curriculum begins to be revealed through this engagement. How much more so must this be possible, then, for someone who enters into the teacher-training pathway. Given what is required to offer good teaching, as described above, then the willingness to be in direct, bare, vulnerable present-moment awareness
with oneself that is paramount to good teaching much place the developing teacher into inescapable contact with their own hidden curriculum, for better or worse.

The literature in this field provides a well-developed view from a number of mature teacher training institutions. Trainers have over the last four decades considered carefully what good teaching is made of, and how training pathways can support the formation of good teachers. What has not been specifically investigated, so far as my research tells me, is effective training from the perspective of the trainee. In this study, my aim is to look into this side of the equation of teacher formation. What do teacher trainees know about what contributes to the formation of teachers? How was it for them, to engage in both the formal and informal aspects of the training pathway? What happens with teachers as they engage with both the manifest as well as the “hidden” curricula? Specifically, my objectives are:

- To ask teacher training participants about how MBSR teaching competency develops
- To gather data from the trainee perspective on teacher development of knowledge, attitude, skills
- To develop an early taxonomy of the full range of experience types and categories that can contribute to teacher development
- In particular, to learn more about the effects on teacher development of the more informal training assignments, including maintaining a daily mindfulness practice and participating in annual retreat
- To identify any additional categories of experiences that are not specifically assigned as part of the formal pathway but have proven to be impactful for teachers in development
To learn about the relative comfort/discomfort of training experiences

To learn about the relative influence of training experiences on teacher development

To contribute any and all learning to the body of knowledge related to training MBSR teachers

**Research Methods**

The design of this study involves interviewing five U.S.-based MBSR teachers who have been deemed qualified to teach by a recognized teacher training institution, and who have taught at least one complete cycle of the 8-week MBSR course curriculum. Potential candidates were identified via networking with professional teaching colleagues. Eleven candidates indicated initial interest. These teachers received an email describing the study and a copy of the Informed Consent to review. Eight teachers replied with their assent to participate. These eight were asked to provide answers in writing to questions regarding basic demographics, teacher training and number of years of teaching experience. The eight responses (subject names removed) were coded by three independent teachers, to account for both diversity and overall demographic representation within the available subjects. The five highest scoring candidates in total were interviewed. Each of these candidates signed an Informed Consent and agreed to an audio-recorded interview.

Data were collected during one-hour, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with each of the five mindfulness teachers. I, Margaret Fletcher, was the sole interviewer for this study. The interviews were conducted either in person or via online face-to-face media. During these interviews, the subjects were first asked a set of questions designed to capture quantitative data: demographic questions, questions about their professional background, meditation history,
teacher training and teaching experience. The subjects were then asked open-ended questions
designed to capture qualitative descriptions about their teacher formation experiences. They were
asked to identify and describe those training methods and experiences that proved most salient to
their teaching and/or had the greatest impact on their teaching. A prepared script was used to
begin the interview, which provided an invitation for the subjects to reflect broadly across all
aspects of their lives and to select any experiences they felt had been important in their
development as teachers. As the subjects spoke, a range of follow-up questions were used which
were designed to elicit detail about the training experiences they described, and how these
experiences impacted on the subjects’ teaching knowledge, attitudes and skills. As the subjects
responded, the interviewer took notes to identify the discrete experiences they described. For the
last 10-15 minutes of the interview, subjects were asked to review the written list of noted
experiences to make corrections and ensure that the list was correct. They were then asked to
rank each of the formative experiences they had identified along two six-point scales, one for
relative level of impact and one for relative level of comfort/discomfort of the experience.

As a follow-up to the live interviews, the subjects were emailed one week after their
interviews and were given the option to make any additional comments to add to their interview.
These were received back in writing by email.

The interviews were transcribed, and these transcribed interviews plus the follow-up
writings were delineated into statements. The statements were assessed and coded for a range of
features that were identified during the coding process. These included type of training
experience, key words, impacts in the classroom as described by the subjects and the ranking
scores given by the subjects during the interviews. The resulting collection of coded statements
represents the complete data set for the study.
These one-on-one interviews took place within a context of professional orientation and collegial relationships. As a full-time teacher at the Center for Mindfulness, I am situated in a very specific corner of the field of mindfulness professionals. My networking with colleagues at or affiliated with the CFM led me to connect with and interview only CFM-trained teachers. The questions that I asked were framed by my understanding of teacher development, based on my own experiences with and biases toward the CFM’s training pathway. Those who train at the CFM in large part look a lot like me: white, middle-aged, socioeconomically middle range, and female. I personally represent these current limiting features in the field of professional mindfulness teachers.

The source of data chosen for this study is the inner knowing of each of the teachers I interviewed. In asking the subjects to reflect on and articulate their teacher formation experiences, the expertise regarding what can be known about what contributes to teacher formation is recognized as being within the trainees. This is in alignment with what I understand to be an essential aspect of the epistemology of mindfulness; we are each the unique genius of our own lived experience.

**Analysis of Results**

Five teachers were interviewed for this study. Two of the subjects live in New Hampshire; three live in Massachusetts. They represent a somewhat broad range of ages, years of meditation and years of teaching experience. They all reported as being of middle social class, and all but one reported being of middle economic class. Two subjects teach locally; three teach both locally and internationally. These teachers work in a range of institutional types. Additional demographic data for the interview cohort can be found in Table 1.
A total of 174 experience statements were captured during 5 approximately one-hour interviews, with an average of 35 per interview, a maximum of 50 and a minimum of 27. There were 86 discrete experiences that were discovered in total; some experiences were mentioned more than once, in the exploration of impacts on teaching. There were 25 types of experiences mentioned, categorized by type by the researcher after completing the five interviews. Some types were mentioned at a very high rate (e.g. formal teacher training and teaching experience) and others mentioned by just one interview subject (See Table 2).

Of the 86 experiences, 28 were not identified during the interviews; therefore, no coding was captured to indicate level of impact or relative comfort/discomfort. Of the remaining 58, 3 experiences were coded for relative comfort/discomfort as “range.” Of the remaining 55, there is an observable direct relationship between level of impact and high number of experiences mentioned, with the highest number of experiences ranked as having a very high impact, and lower level impacts less often mentioned (See Figure 2, Level of impact of formative teacher experiences). No low impact experiences were reported. In terms of the level of comfort/discomfort, the experiences mentioned tended toward the extremes. The most formative experiences appear to be either quite or very uncomfortable, or quite or very comfortable. The majority of experiences described were on the comfortable rather than uncomfortable end of the scale (See Figure 3, Level of comfort of formative teacher experiences).

A further breakdown of experience comfort levels shows the range of impact levels within each comfort band. The data show that the most impactful experiences for these teachers were also the most pleasant, and that there were a fair handful of very unpleasant experiences that were also highly impactful (See figure 4).
Out of 174 experience statements captured, 129 included a statement of the impact the experience had on the subject’s teaching. These impacts were studied and categorized by the researcher into the detailed categories associated with areas of teaching knowledge, attitudes and skill as identified above. Along with those recognized areas, a number of additional ideas were presented. These will be highlighted in the discussion section. For those coded experiences, impacts were counted and analyzed for the number of subjects who mentioned them (See Table 3). A further breakdown shows the level of impact for each of the impacts recorded (See Table 4).

For each learning framework where relative comfort/discomfort data is available, the data shows the types of learning outcomes that were gained more comfortably for these subjects, versus those that were more hard won through uncomfortable learning (See Table 5).

**Discussion**

The observations and questions derived from the interviews are presented with a focus first on the quantitative and then the qualitative results. The quantitative observations show the frequency, relative comfort and the kind of learning outcomes that arose out of the variety of experiences named by the interview subjects. The kinds of formative experiences, and resulting impacts from formal training pathways versus those arising in professional, practice-based or everyday life, are described in the qualitative observations. These observations are brought to life through the descriptive language of the interview subjects.

**Quantitative Observations**

The experiences most frequently mentioned as formative for teacher development were formal training, support of colleagues, teaching experience, retreats, professional training, professional experiences and spiritual pathway experiences. Interestingly, of these seven
frequently mentioned experience types, two (professional training and professional experience) are unrelated to MBSR, mindfulness or meditation.

Impacts that were most frequently mentioned were broad in nature: underpinning of universal dharma, recognition of teacher qualities, embodiment as overarching ethos and competency, inner knowing and the skill of relating to difficulty in the classroom. This points to the interrelated and combining nature of the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to teach. In speaking of their own formation, it was sometimes difficult for the subjects to tease out and articulate a particular skill or knowledge area that was the result of a formative experience.

Sixteen statements illustrate the concept of embodiment as a competency and the overarching embodied ethos of MBSR. Some specifics mentioned include the personal as the foundation for teaching, how practice enhances every moment of life, how teaching provides a particular opportunity and pressure to align with ethical principles embedded in MBSR, and the sense of challenge and responsibility of articulating MBSR in an honest and authentic way. Of all of the themes, embodiment came through at the highest frequency. This aligns with the CFM’s overarching theme of “embodied ethos,” and the importance of embodiment in the framework of the MBI-TAC. In a recent study by van Aalderen et al on the role of the teacher in mindfulness-based approaches, the authors note in their conclusion that “first and most convincing is the agreement about the importance of embodiment of mindfulness teachers.” (p. 8)

Embodiment came out in a variety of ways and through a range of experiences. Embodiment as an overarching theme seems to allow for a multi-faceted view into teaching. One subject spoke of the “flow” of embodied teaching: “what you want to convey, the dialogue, the curiosity, the … instead of the mechanistic way that you learn, you know, that flow, that by
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seeing the teacher. Many people read *Full Catastrophe* have you referenced this before? If not, you should give the full title and author and say something about the place this book holds in mindfulness literature….and then begin to teach. I remember that I have heard they have begun to teach after reading the *Full Catastrophe*. And it's fascinating to me because to observe a teacher that has embodied that, the teaching, is just a, it's dancing, it's absolutely fascinating.”

Another subject also spoke about embodiment within the experience of co-teaching. ”Watching everybody work… there are on both sides of the pond some really extraordinary practitioners, teacher practitioners, and I hope I never get to the point where I think, well, I haven't got anything to learn from this, I've been doing this for so long. There are different styles, there are different things that people shine the light on, they, so every time I watch a master teacher, I learn something, and I miss it right now, I wish I could sit in on some classes. But that to me has always been the profoundest of learning, is watching people who do it well.” Still another subject spoke about teaching in an unfamiliar context, learning to speak in a new way by using her body to communicate.

Another theme from the quantitative data can be encapsulated by one subject’s description of “learning the hard way.” There is a range of learning impacts that came out in the less comfortable end of the scale, for example, recognition of the universality of suffering through the teacher’s own difficulties, the importance of caring for the teacher through ignoring this for too long and recognizing in hindsight, and embodying authentic moments of discomfort right in the classroom.

In particular, subjects recognized the double-edged sword in the opportunity of working with difficulties in the classroom. These included experiences that were both completely personal as well as times of encountering difficulty in relationship to a participant. Interesting to
note that the many challenging emotions and patterns that were described are types of experiences that are not specifically found in the MBI-TAC, but are nevertheless important grist for a teacher’s practice: doubt, fear, people-pleaser, tripping up, panic, loneliness, exhaustion, being activated, uncertainty, struggle, lost in the default. Subjects saw these as challenging, uncomfortable, and importantly, simultaneously opportunities for development. As one teacher put it, bringing together the understanding of the universality of suffering and development through engaging with the familiar MBSR theme of transformation in the face of suffering, “We’re all in the same soup.” The look on her face of humor and recognition signaled a real sense of being on an equal footing in this respect with her participants. This being in the “same soup” is an important aspect of the ethos of MBSR. No one, whether teacher or participant, is immune or excluded. Another teacher, one who has experience training teachers, commented that many teachers don’t truly “get” this. Trainers can talk about the kind of learning that comes through the exposure of one’s blind spots, trainees can have some sense of it, it’s possible to hold an intellectual understanding of it, and there is nothing like the direct experience of this to show the difference between cognitive intelligence and embodied knowledge.

Experiences that were found on the more comfortable end of the scale related to being in a community of support of fellow teachers, guiding practice, and in connecting with the felt sense of wholeness. Pleasant and powerful is the way we’d like to have it all of the time!

Comparing those learning impacts that were mentioned during the interviews to the formal learning pathways noted in the literature review above, there are some experiences that stand out, either as potentially missing altogether from formal pathways or given modest mention within the formal pathways, compared to the importance given by the interview subjects (Observations surrounding these will be explored further in the qualitative observations):
Support of being in a collegial network

Understanding of the importance intention and form

The importance of caring for the teacher

Listening for inner knowing

Recognizing patterns in individuals and systems

The role of preparation

**Qualitative Observations**

These five interviews provided a potent window into how teachers develop and the many kinds of experiences that contribute to that development. Some experiences reported were extensive and broad, such as the kind of experience gained through spending years in running an academic department. Some experiences had a conscious training intention, as one would expect by engaging in a teacher-training pathway, while others were far afield from formal teacher training. There were those experiences that involved a more defined period and intention, such as co-teaching an 8-week cycle of MBSR with another teacher, or the particular learning that came out of a week of retreat. Still other experiences reflected the power of a single crystalline moment that can be immediate and decisive in forming us. Some were recognized as important to teaching in the instant of having them; others were only recognized looking backward in time, in some instances from a great span. At least two of these interview subjects also spoke about the great many formative moments and conditions that they somehow knew they would not be able to point to or select out of the great whole of their lives.

**Formal and formally recognized means for development.** There appears to be a well-developed understanding of what kinds of experiences contribute to teacher formation, within the
established formal training pathways. Much of what these subjects described as formative fits easily into what the literature reflects as the step-by-step of developing as a teacher.

One surprise in looking at the data from just 5 interviews is how much prior professional training and experience influenced their teaching, outside of mindfulness or mindfulness teacher training. These experiences spanned a variety of professions and situations, yet it was clear from these teachers that so much of what they bring to the MBSR classroom derives from skill and knowledge developed well before they encountered MBSR. Because it is still early in the overall unfolding of teaching mindfulness as a profession, all of these teachers initially had, and in some cases still have, a primary profession other than teaching mindfulness. For those teachers with a good few years of teaching experience, there was also the ability to recognize the source of their own creativity at times, and to name the range of personal and professional experiences that they now deploy in the service of MBSR. It’s a kind of mining your life to bring what you have to the classroom. McCown describes that as a kind of friendship, “offering all that you are” (McCown, p. 98).

Examples of these skills include a body worker who reported bringing in a sense of the “energetic read” in a room that serves well in holding the learning environment of the classroom. The built skill involved in being a body worker included the sense of being activated by someone in the classroom as well. Another experience, offering a group workshop designed to help people know and celebrate emotions and interconnection, helped to cultivate a later recognition of the universality of learning and growth potential in MBSR and related programs arising simultaneously.

One category of formative experience that appears to be mentioned infrequently by the training pathways is the power of working together. These subjects described opportunities for
co-teaching, volunteering for teaching organizations, and creating their own collegial teaching community, all as means for drawing from the collective intentions of a group. One subject described the result of co-teaching as a “kind of friendship and work relationship that had been years in the making. So it could gather things.” Van Aalderan et al describe what they observed as an underestimation of the power of the group (termed “peer support” in their paper) in MBSR (van Aalderan et al, p. 6). This can be extrapolated to apply to the teaching community as well. Another subject spoke about spending time in a teaching organization: “There are different styles, there are different things that people shine the light on, they, so every time I watch a master teacher, I learn something, and I miss it right now, I wish I could sit in on some classes. But that to me has always been the profoundest of learning, is watching people who do it well.”

The opportunity of drawing from experience is extended further, being in relationship with one who has gone before you. By assistant teaching, learning in an apprenticeship-style situation, being supervised or mentored are all ways of staying close to the teaching. McCown et al recommend that “a teacher needs to have an ongoing one-to-one relationship with someone who can hold her accountable for practice and can assist her when questions arise” (McCown, p. 45). One subject described this kind of relationship as a “heart connection”:

…being able to go to (the director’s) office, whenever I had a doubt, and just sit and say, I don't know which way? How? And having the support of (experienced teachers) that I loved, not only about the classes, but about myself, and having that support, the heart family that is built when you have a place where you can talk and you can feel supported at the personal level. And I still feel it, although I am not at (this teaching institution) so much, I still feel that heart connection. It's very alive.
Along with relating to others as a means for learning, there is relating to oneself. This was described in different ways. One subject talked about “listening at the first level,” meaning prior to attending to what is happening with participants. For another teacher, critical was the development of “inner knowing.” In describing the recognition of this skill, this person saw in her training trajectory “that first time I knew things about myself, about her, about our relationship that I'd never known before.” This teacher went on to describe the resulting turning point in teaching, a moment of inner knowing that opened the pathway to many new teaching experiences and opportunities. This is a critical and subtle skill, one not commonly taught or rewarded.

Along with these broader stretches of life experience, subjects spoke about the equally compelling power and lasting quality of the kind of learning that comes from one crystalline point, a spontaneous moment of insight in teaching, about teaching, and about life. One teacher described the full recognition of a moment of panic, happening just 10 minutes or so into Class 1 of an early MBSR cycle. There were the sensations of panic (shaking legs, dry mouth), thoughts of escape (hoping another teacher was available on site, someone else would have to teach this class, wondering if anyone had ever run out of a class in the history of MBSR). And there was the clear awareness in the moment that pretense would not serve. The movement that arose from this recognition was to pause, take a drink, and then begin to describe the sensations, emotions and thoughts. This transparency soon led to a great release of laughter, and the feeling of how this teacher again “came back to my own seat, my own horse, and began to ride again, and it was a wonderful class.” The teacher speaks now about knowing that, without that instinct to willingly expose the panic, there is a certainty that teaching would have ended at that moment. Another subject spoke of a moment of inner knowing, the humility and also simultaneous
longing found within one moment, and how following the truth of these feelings and baring them to an experienced colleague led to a series of teaching opportunities that would have otherwise never arisen. For still another, in an instance of coming undone came the recognition of a lifelong personal pattern, leading to taking a different path in the future, a tangible shift in teaching from that point forward. Here was the dharmic process of awareness-disenchantment-cessation, right in teaching (Nanamoli & Bodhi, p. 976). In some important way, it is reflective of a 10-second long retreat experience that Kabat-Zinn describes in his article on the origins of MBSR (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, p. 287). Kabat-Zinn writes about seeing the whole of MBSR in a moment, a kind of flashing insight, in what one colleague of mine describes as time-out-of-time. Can developing teachers recognize and own in themselves this same capability to know something essential, powerful and unique about teaching, in one expansive, flashing insight?

In interviewing even these few teachers, it’s clear how different kinds of learning can come at different stages of teaching and learning. These stages are well represented in the series of experiences that are required for those pursuing the formal training pathway. For example, in early stages, direct mindfulness training takes center stage. This is followed by beginning the practice of annual weeklong retreats, and then early teacher training. Next comes the extended process of learning by doing, learning to teach by teaching. In later stages, there is the possibility of learning by training others.

At first, there is the learning to teach by direct engagement with mindfulness practice itself. This is the essential ground, engagement with the core practices at the same level as the participants, and without any sense of gaining something to be used in some future time when an individual might become a teacher. Some experiences that turned out to be formative for the interview subjects were more like pre-cursors to mindfulness practice. Later, as one is teaching,
teachers draw from direct knowing from these early experiences. One teacher gave the example of knowing herself, from an early age, as having a heartfelt interest in ecumenicism. She was able to tie this forward in her life, to times of being drawn toward and formally developing awareness, along with how awareness relates to human connection. These pursuits came in both spiritual and professional domains. This trajectory has culminated for her in teaching and now also training mindfulness professionals.

One teacher described doing the exact practice assignments along with the participants in the 8-week cycle. Although not always possible, but as a learning intention, there is a particular power of “going back through” yourself. This teacher explained how valuable it is when it’s possible to follow right along in this way, saying “I'm in touch with what comes up for them.” Without the foundation of practice, teaching MBSR would be a house of cards.

The formal training pathways referenced in this study’s literature review require that aspiring teachers begin a retreat practice, if they have not already done so, once a daily practice is in place and before beginning with early teacher training. One subject spoke about taking a retreat at this stage, and encountering deep feelings of resistance relative to the retreat requirements. It was the pressure from the teaching community she was already a part of, the sense of “what would the others say” that kept her from abandoning the retreat. She reported that suddenly, halfway through the nine days, she recognizing the truth of resistance in the body, and experienced the feeling of that resistance falling away. She spoke in our interview about taking her understanding of her own resistance right into the classroom, allowing her to speak with her participants in a no-nonsense way about how resistance functions to block them from a greater connection with life. This experience also reflects the impact of having a community of supportive colleagues, even when they are not involved in the particular activity at hand.
From a grounding in practice, the formation intention in the next stage is the basic skill set of offering the MBSR class: practicing guiding with one’s peers, practicing ways to offer learning activities as a basis for encouraging a direct relationship with the moment-by-moment arising of life, learning how to authentically speak the new language of inquiry, these are skills that are introduced and honed in the formal training pathway. The interview subject with the least teaching experience spoke at length about the skills sharpening that happened between peers during a recently completed 9-day teaching intensive.

And then there is the stage of learning to teach by teaching. This can be hard to reckon with, how in early teaching there will be a lot of stumbling and humbling, learning “the hard way” as one subject put it. A kinder and perhaps more sustaining way to frame this stage, as described by one subject, as that “I feel like I'm constantly learning more about content through seeing it through their eyes and their experiences.” Many of the experiences mentioned by the subjects belong to this category. An example from an early part of this stage, the least experienced interview subject, still in the process of stabilizing into the curriculum and themes, mentioned how “I will use Full Catastrophe Living like a bible when I'm teaching, to go back through and just trying to get Jon's voice in my head of how he sees things.”

There were a number of classroom skills that came out in such interesting ways, right in the classroom. One subject contrasted the role and skill of class preparation with the act of letting go, the skill of tossing out the plan in favor of aliveness and spontaneity in the classroom. Another saw the ability to act as a curious provocateur as one of the important skills for teaching. One teacher illustrated the intersection of underlying wisdom and flexibility in offering the MBSR curriculum. This teacher pointed to the students as the greatest source for deeply understanding the innate potential within each person to wake up, to transmute suffering, and to
engage in life in the midst of great changes and loss. This recognition led to the teacher flipping one aspect of yoga practice on its head; for the particular context this teacher works in, chair poses are much more accessible and therefore now the norm in the classroom, with the standing version of poses offered as modifications. It makes sense that so many of the experiences that these teachers described belong to the long, slow growth of this particular stage of learning.

Along with classroom time, teachers are encouraged to pursue ongoing development experiences after becoming qualified and/or certified to teach. The activities and pursuits that people named in the interviews suggests how broad this continues to be, as with all the kinds of experiences that have been formative up to this point. One person described committing to a year-long Insight Dialogue practice, pairing with a teacher in that tradition and inquiring out loud together into prescribed Buddhist texts. This teacher rated the experience as quite uncomfortable, and worth the discomfort for the impact it had on understanding teachings that had been until then relatively unknown. One other described a single moment with a senior teacher, sitting on a bench having a heart-to-heart coaching talk with this revered mentor, who was confessing to not knowing “what to do with her.” This teacher’s moment of insight involved saying back, simply, “that’s okay.” There existed at that moment no need to please or to be understood: freedom!

Finally, there is the potential in learning to teach by training, the kind of development that can come by writing, developing teacher training curriculum, training others. One of the subjects who is now involved in training teachers commented about the effect on teaching that came from designing a training curriculum and offering supervision. She spoke about developing the capacity to articulate well what MBSR is, to convey the principles and purposes. She reported this as highly developmental for her as a teacher.
There might be one additional stage here, of representing MBSR in the larger world. One of the more experienced teachers described the importance of recognizing patterns in individuals and in overall systems. This person saw this a kind of parallel practice, with a sense that the external shell of the organization holds the internal shell of the individuals, and the program holds the teachers and the classrooms. The teacher noted that “if it's a solid shell and it feels like it's holding you, then it's easier to hold other people. If it feels like it's fragmented, if it's hierarchical, if you don't know when someone's going to turn and bite you then it's a different feeling.” Themes around the relationship of the teacher to hosting institutions came out of the interviews with the three most experienced teachers, but not with the two less experienced teachers. Awareness of or experience with this type of situation may be one aspect of teaching that tends to come with greater experience.

**Less formally recognized means for development.** Beyond the formulated training pathway, there remains what Santorelli hinted at as a “hidden curriculum.” Are teachers encouraged to consider the entirety of their lives as means for development? The underlying principles of MBSR as an embodied ethos suggest a “Yes” to that, in a general way. Still, there was a healthy set of experiences related by these teachers that are not overtly named or encouraged to be seen as means for formation. Looking at these might give teachers a broader context for where and when they might attend, in learning about understanding and skill that finds its way into the classroom.

One story took place as part of a college internship, in spending time with a Navajo family. There was nothing overtly spiritual about the situation, yet in learning the culture of these people, the teacher recognized how the culture paid particular respect through the simple power of silent presence. Another teacher spoke about developing an unanticipated skill in establishing
a learning environment for groups. This came by first becoming a faculty member in a hierarchically run department, seeing what didn’t work with that approach, and then later running the same group using a distributed power structure. Another story involved attending to the dying process of a parent, and being moved by bearing witness to the telling of life stories that came out to be shared, investigated and in many cases healed at that time.

What about the most foundational aspect of this universal wisdom, the dismantling and dissolving of self, or at least so much unquestioned sturdiness around the sense of being an immutable self? Such new understanding must come about to some degree if teachers really are taking up the commitment to embody a universal understanding of the transmutation of suffering and transcendence of tired, weighty, unfulfilling patterns in life? These interview subjects described coming to a direct understanding of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the arising of a new kind of human flourishing in their lives, including right in and through the process of teaching.

A momentary wobble arises in the classroom, and there are at least two possibilities in it. There is the path always taken, to go into the old belief of “how I never get it right, I’m not worthy to teach this class.” There is the new path never before taken, to wonder about “wobble,” and go right into the body to find out about it. In the moment of taking the new path, there is embodiment, inner knowing, freedom from an old self-belief, and the field of potential opens. This was described to me, happening sometimes in the immediacy of a classroom moment, and more often upon reflection after class. The process was often aided by the presence of a trusted colleague. Dismantling of self-stories around teaching happens in the way and at the rate that it happens.
Along with formation leading to skill in the classroom, there were some important themes around skill in the life of a teacher outside the classroom. One teacher spoke particularly about the importance of self-care for this one important human, herself, and also in terms of maintaining integrity with the principles of MBSR. As part of the ethos of teaching mindfulness at the CFM, we only ask others to do what we are also at minimum doing for personal practice. Therefore, if we are teaching self-agency, self-care and the value if showing up in life, over the usual modes of doing, making and achieving, then authenticity calls on us to practice these values ourselves. In reviewing the CFM’s standards for teachers, and the UK Network’s practice guidelines for teachers, trainers and supervisors, there is a gaping hole related to self-care for teachers. Of course, since self-care is taught, implied and reinforced in terms of what is being taught, it might seem like overkill to repeat it once more in the practice guidelines for teachers. That is, however, a miss. As real humans in a real world awash in busy-ness and opportunities for over-working, over-achieving, and over-everything-ing, why would teachers not be subject to the temptation of over-teaching? Skill in self-care may well deserve top billing in the practice standards for teachers and trainers.

Seeing how skill in teaching comes about, teaching the simple act of showing up for life, this simple act that comes so hard to all of us, it’s no wonder that the interview subjects struggled at times to articulate what they were simultaneously contacting in themselves about their own formation. One started off by stating outright that it was felt to be “more of a transmission than a teaching.” This is the effect of the hidden curriculum, that the learning in many ways remains hidden to us.

**Dialogue as a means for articulating development.** There is something additional to say about these interviews, more about the process than the content. There was a quality of
friendly humor and gracious humility in speaking about teaching with these individuals. We laughed a great deal during the interviews, and so often the interview subjects were laughing at their former (and even current) selves. Here is the dissolution of self, the looseness of grip on the notion of one’s oh-so-important self. Can talking about a life in teaching help to remind a teacher to keep the grip loose, to remind teachers what generates the loosening itself, and grant them again the embodied sense of what freedom from gripping feels like?

In terms of teacher development, something about the process of the interviews also allowed for these teachers to know something new, or freshly, by being asked. These conversations opened doorways into knowing and articulating something not quite realized. As one subject was speaking about a moment of recognition early in formal teacher training, I was told that “for me what I think of is this idea of having this feeling of the heart in a group. And the aliveness of that. And there's more, but I don't think I've ever voiced that.” The look on this teacher’s face, the pause that happened between us, the quality of our breath and the quality of the space between us left us both knowing that something fresh had been touched, through our spoken exploration.

This series of explorations with colleagues evoked for me a feeling of refreshment in my own teaching. There is something delicious in becoming curious about my own process, skill and lack thereof in the classes that I’m teaching right now, as a result of being engaged in this line of research.

Limitlessness of learning and development. The range and scope of what these subjects reported leads to an overall sense of the limitlessness of learning, in teaching MBSR. There is the learning that can come of teaching in new contexts and to new populations. One teacher described how this “gets me into their shoes,” and how “I have to keep finding ways to say,
given that, try this.” It’s like a constant immersion in an interesting and as yet not fully known culture. “I needed to use the same language, I need to, and I found, Margaret, to engage people, it was hilarious at times, that I would find myself coming to my, you know, lowering, using my body as a way to engage my voice, up and down (she points vertically up and down her body) and really curious.”

The idea of MBSR as a unique language has been described by MBSR’s founder, Jon Kabat-Zinn, who said “One might think of dharma as a sort of universal generative grammar (Chomsky, 1965), an innate set of empirically testable rules that govern and describe the generation of the inward, first-person experiences of suffering and happiness in human beings. In that sense, dharma is at its core truly universal, not exclusively Buddhist” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Learning, attempting, and polishing the capacity to clearly articulate the fresh reality of this moment, with uniqueness and authenticity, each with their own vernacular of MBSR, and throwing out any sense of mimicking or using the “right words” to convey what is known. This is learning what my own teacher has called “the language of my heart,” unique to each. How could this ever really run out of potential for new learning?

So here, too, the direct experience of what is “truly universal” comes forward. Each of these five teachers spoke about a particular time and way that the universality of MBSR struck them, which is to say the universal dharma, and how this was instrumental in drawing them toward teaching. Every practitioner has their own origin story with MBSR. Herein lies the brilliance of a form that allows for personal expression and just the right amount of latitude for teaching this universal dharma as a unique expression of one’s own understanding. Knowing this directly, feeling the power of this recognition, is an important aspect in the process of
considering becoming a teacher. It’s clear that the benefits of this universality include benefits for teachers as well as participants.

What brings people to teach is unique to each individual, and this did show up in the way that these teachers spoke about what has been formative for them in the classroom. For one person, community was a key feature, and they spoke a great deal about formation in community, formation of community. For another person, it was essence, and this teacher spoke about experiences that happened in working with root tradition teachers that continue to provide inspiration in the classroom. For yet another, it is “my firm belief about MBSR is about personhood rather than curriculum.” This led to the desire to help others discover self-agency and liberation through the discovery and cultivation of what is languaged for this teacher as “personhood.” Still another talked about “Something that would allow me… to bridge all of my interests.” Teachers can learn more and more about themselves by listening to the very language slipping out of their own mouths.

Limitations of this study. With all that emerged in studying the data of these interviews, there are also clearly limitations in the design of this study. To begin, there are obvious limitations in the demographic diversity of this five-person study group. On that note, it's also worthwhile to point out that the overall population of teachers as I experience it does not look like the population as a whole. To me, that means there is a likely array of experiences that could contribute to teacher development that 1) this paper won't have the means to capture or consider; and 2) beyond all the teachers I could interview, there are yet more people and experiences that would certainly lead to greater skill and understanding in the whole, that are missing because there is not such a wide range in the pathway.
Analyzing and reporting on written transcriptions of live interviews leaves a great deal of non-verbal data on the table: the giggles; the pregnant pauses; the looks, body positions and facial expression. The recordings could be analyzed for such data, and whatever might be uniquely known by analyzing that data.

More specific limitations to this study include:

- Due to the constraints of my own network and using it to identify willing subjects, I interviewed only CFM-trained teachers. There is the possibility of very different formative experiences coming from those trained in other mindfulness training pathways.
- Missing rankings for some of the discrete experience, due to a lack of time to send them back and ask the subjects to rank those experiences identified after the formal interview.
- An improvement over the course of the five interviews in identifying discrete experiences, resulting in more complete information on later interviews versus earlier ones.
- Lack of validation of interpretive coding: summaries of the interviews were not sent to the respondents for validation (member checking).
- This study is the result of this researcher’s first attempt at qualitative analysis, including coding of transcribed interviews. This is a complex process that would likely deliver more accurate results if there were more than one researcher checking the coding decisions. Recognizing additional themes as I continued to comb through the data, after the coding was complete and I had started the writing process. An example might be the skill of embodied leadership in the experience of leading a sitting group, which I only identified well after I concluded analysis of the data.
The interviewer performed the analysis, thus, any personal biases that affected the interviews themselves would also have an effect on the analysis.

Other limitations I am not aware of, that others might find in working with this data

**Implications and Topics for Further Investigation**

Considering the many points made in the interviews, and the themes that stood out in and amongst them, there are many lessons to be gleaned from this study. Teachers and teachers-in-training can find a variety of ways to reflect on their own past experiences and to gain new experiences, in service to developing in awareness, knowledge, and teaching skills. Those who offer training for new teachers can consider how to structure formal trainings and what assignments to give for independent study periods, to help encourage well-rounded teachers.

What follows here is a set of specific recommendations for further consideration by teachers and trainers.

**Implications for Teachers**

Teachers can find in these interviews a set of valuable possibilities, to be directly accessed or applied in their own teaching. Whether these possibilities represent new ideas, or reminders of those previously known, it can be fruitful to consider how the words of the teachers interviewed might impact on one’s own self-development and development as a teacher.

As much as teacher training demonstrates that MBSR is a laboratory for seeing what has been previously hidden, it still takes practice to remember this. For teachers, difficulties arise inside the MBSR classroom. The resistance felt toward certain students, the desire to be the “perfect” teacher, confusion about why a certain element is not working, anything like this is not separate or different from life itself; it is one’s life at that moment. The recommendation is to adopt a frame for understanding difficulty in the classroom, one’s own or in relationship to a
participants’ difficulty, as a learning opportunity for oneself as a teacher, as much as for the participant. The willingness to not simply stay “lost” or “caught” in moments of teaching, but to diligently inquire and identify learning potentials, points of difficulty, patterns and insights, as much as possible right in the life of the teacher as it unfolds in the classroom. This calls on teachers to maintain a continuous humility, freshness and wonder about themselves as people, about MBSR, and about life itself.

In the way that MBSR has arisen in the world, the field is still at a stage where it can feel very lonely, doing the work of cultivating interest and opportunities for teaching, and then offering the class. Rather than believing any thoughts about being alone in teaching, teachers can make or find a collegial teaching community, if one is not already associated with a group. One of the interview subjects, as she networked with other MBSR teachers, has collected a group together into a monthly online teachers’ meeting group. Nothing formal binds these people except their commitment to offering MBSR well. That is enough to keep them meeting monthly on an ongoing basis. Those teachers who have had the opportunity to engage in reflection, discussion, inquiry and shared understanding speak very highly of meeting together, in support of their ongoing engagement and development.

Taking it one step further, MBSR teachers could be well served to follow the instructions of Shonin and Gordon, to “find a suitable teacher” (Shonin & Gordon, p. 955). In the past, an ongoing relationship with an experienced practitioner who would be willing and available to fearlessly reflect back what they are seeing and hearing has been considered a basic requirement in the contemplative life. The requirement for supervision and mentoring is present during the teacher training pathways, but what about beyond the point of becoming qualified or certified? Aren’t newly qualified teachers leaving these stages as what might be called experienced
BEGINNERS IN MEDITATION? WOULDN'T THE COMPANIONSHIP OF SOMEONE WHO IS REALLY WILLING TO KNOW A PERSON WELL, TO SUPPORT THEM AND IN SUPPORTING THEM TO CALL THEM OUT WHEN WARRANTED, WOULDN'T THIS STILL BE AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT OF AN UNFOLDING IN A LIFE OF AWARENESS AND GROWTH? AS MORE AND MORE TEACHERS LEAVE THE FORMAL PATHWAY, THIS MAY BECOME BOTH MORE IMPORTANT AND ALSO MORE POSSIBLE. THIS CAN BE OFFERED BY AND FOR THE GROWING COMMUNITY OF TEACHERS.

THERE IS A POWER TO INQUIRING TOGETHER, TO KNOW MORE ABOUT TEACHING AND ONE’S OWN RELATIONSHIP WITH IT. MORE SPECIFICALLY, IT WAS OBSERVED IN MOST OF THE INTERVIEWS THAT THE ACT OF SPEAKING TOGETHER ABOUT WHAT IS FORMATIVE WAS CLARIFYING AND ENLIVENING TO BOTH TEACHERS (MYSELF AND THE INTERVIEW SUBJECT.) ONE TEACHER, WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN TEACHER TRAINING FOR QUITE SOME TIME, SHARED HER OPINION THAT EACH TEACHER HAS AN OVERARCHING THEME THAT DRAWS HIM OR HER TO TEACHING MBSR. TO SPEAK ABOUT TEACHING MIGHT BE TO DISCOVER SOMETHING ABOUT THIS, KNOW THIS, SEEING HOW IT HAS UNFOLDED, AND ALSO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR EXPANDING BEYOND ANY LIMITING FEATURES OF THIS DRIVING FORCE. DURING THE INTERVIEWS, MORE THAN ONCE, SUBJECTS TALKED ABOUT DISCOVERING SOMETHING ABOUT THEMSELVES AND ABOUT TEACHING, IN THE MIDST OF SPEAKING ABOUT THEIR OWN FORMATION. ONE TEACHER SPOKE, SAYING “AND I CAN FEEL THIS RIGHT NOW IN MY BODY, AND THERE'S A LOT OF SADNESS, A LOT OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE SO, WHO ARE NOT RECOGNIZED AND TREATED RIGHT, AND MAYBE I'M WRONG, BUT SO FAR I KNOW I WASN'T IN THE PAST, AND WHO ARE IN MANY WAYS… NOT VALUED, BUT THEY ARE NEEDED IN ORDER FOR AN ORGANIZATION TO RUN. AND THAT'S MY (PAUSE)… BUT IT'S NOT PART OF WHAT YOU'RE AFTER. BUT MAN, YOU TOUCH IT AND YOU CAN FEEL IT COMING.” FOR THIS TEACHER, THERE IS SOMETHING IMMEDIATE AND VISCERAL ABOUT THE RECOGNITION OF WORTHINESS. AS WE CONTINUED TO SPEAK, IT TURNED OUT TO BE A BIG THEME IN THIS PERSON’S HISTORY AND VERY MUCH WHAT I WAS “AFTER.”

IT WAS A RICH VEIN TO MINE, FOR BOTH OF US.
Teachers don’t need to wait for a formal interview in order to inquire together about formative experiences. This can be done together informally with colleagues, in a more structured way within communities of teachers and mentors, or even formally as a continuing education teacher training event. What might be known, together, more closely; what language might be discovered, that has been just past reach until the moment of speaking? Isn’t this one of the operating features of MBSR itself, to know and to articulate that much more about this human life, including a life in teaching for those who take it up?

It appears that most MBSR teachers, once they are deemed qualified to teach, are still having to identify and cultivate opportunities to teach in places that have little to no experience offering mindfulness training. Because mindfulness teachers are a relatively rare breed, this is so, even as this is changing and growing. It might be helpful, even essential, to understand something about approaching and working with organizations, as one begins to look for opportunities to teach. As much as teachers know and work with patterns of thought, belief and behavior in themselves and with the individuals who come to their classes, so too they will encounter these in organizations. This means there exists the potential peril of getting lost in collective versions of greed, resistance or confusion, and the possibility of bringing light to unconscious organizational patterns that are no longer serving. As delicate and dicey as this can be with individuals, it’s that much greater in groups. It’s useful and beneficial for an organization to already have a common culture of clarity and integrity, and might still be somewhat rare. The impact on these five teachers in working with and for organizations exponentially upped the ante of suffering and learning. It’s so helpful to recognize this early on. To work collectively means to be in truth with oneself and simultaneously with those we are in relationship with in hosting or sponsoring organizations, as best we are able. If, as a teacher, this notion leaves you wondering
or scratching your head, it would be important to explore this with a fellow experienced teacher with some experience in this. Some mentoring here could provide an invaluable service to the field overall.

Finally, simply, and perhaps most important of all, there is taking care. During one interview a question arose that deserves much greater attention: how do we care for the teachers? For this interview subject, it arose out of the experience of encountering so much potential in the field of mindfulness, and being drawn to pursue a number of avenues simultaneously. This resulted in cycles of high productivity and exhaustion, and eventually, recognition of too much work. This teacher said, “there's something that you know about it now, through the experience of giving, giving, you know, moving, inspired, wanting to learn, and then there's that, OH, there's something about leaving enough space for the unpredicted challenges of life.”

Because it appears that mindfulness teachers are not immune to a well-recognized phenomenon in the helping professions of over-giving of time and energy, teachers must put some attention to the intention to continuously cultivate those practices, thoughts, behaviors and speech patterns that embody the truth of being one human being, with great potential and also limited resources. Teachers must become their own best advocate toward balance and well-being. Otherwise, the integrity in being inside this practice is undermined. Otherwise, we as teachers become the first victim of our own confusion around what this practice is really about.

**Implications for Teacher Trainers**

Listening to the wisdom emerging from the experience of these teachers, it would be wise to consider formally adding some of the elements listed above to recommendations for teacher development within and beyond the early training pathway, if such elements are not already there. Particular emphasis is needed in caring for the teachers. It is imperative that there be an
aspect of the training curriculum overtly dedicated to the care and feeding of teachers, for self, and by and for organizations.

Trainers should recognize the light and shadow of teacher development, those types of experiences that are more likely to be comfortable vs. uncomfortable, and to speak openly about this with trainees. Trainers can suggest that trainees look for a tendency to go for more of one versus the other. Based on this line of inquiry, we can encourage a healthy mix of pleasant, neutral and unpleasant in teacher development experiences, as much as this can be encouraged.

Is there something important about having a richness of professional or overall life experience beyond formal mindfulness and mindfulness teacher training? There is a strong sense from these interviews that something important and formative comes from engagement in the world beyond one’s direct engagement with all things mindful. If MBSR is all about being human, it might be particularly helpful to know about this in a multi-dimensional way. Trainers can speak from their own experience, to illustrate this point to trainees and encourage them to engage in their professional lives as fuel for the fire of teaching.

The range of knowledge, attitudes and skills involved in teaching MBSR well is broadened through reviewing the data of this study. MBI-TAC provides a detailed description of classroom skills. The MBI-TAC and the CFM’s learning frameworks, both of these models provide great detail about teaching, and they also leave some skills implied, such as preparation and post-class reflection, humility in learning via peer vision and supervision. Other skills are mentioned elsewhere, some found in practice guidelines for teachers, such as discernment in self-care to protect from overwhelm or exhaustion, and the importance of the support of colleagues. Still others may be missing altogether from documents and guidelines that are shared with developing teachers. These include attenuating to the energy of teaching, to class size, to a
variety of contexts, and learning how to engage with and understand patterns in organizations, when approaching one with the intention to begin teaching there.

And here’s to appreciating some particularly unique, colorful skills in the MBSR classroom that were mentioned during these interviews: the role of provocateur, being a skillful cheerleader, midwifing something that is only born in the process of living. Is there a way to recognize and even encourage these unique skills to come through in the classroom? There might yet be unusual skills that trainees possess that have never been brought to bear in their MBSR experience? The learning framework area called “qualities” that suggests a breadth of human potentials to be developed would be able to hold these unique qualifications, perhaps, but is it possible to actually call out and encourage skill as skill, as quirky or atypical as these skills may be, if such skills do serve in the classroom? Because the last thing this field would want is to turn out crops of consistently formed MBSR clones, all sounding and acting in kind of nauseatingly “mindful” way.

It might be a very useful offering to give a frank talk, being up-front with trainees who are early in teaching and even preparing for certification about how the first few years of teaching will include times when what’s being developed feels quite instrumental and concrete, which may feel far from anything that might be thought of as “dharma.” Explaining the stages of learning and development, and normalizing this might help teachers to account for and work skillfully with feelings of unworthiness and imperfection in the early years of teaching.

Trainers can create opportunities for trainees and teachers to reflect on and develop more and more in the ability to articulate the effects of informal training and life experience on teacher development. Bring this into teachers meetings. Add it to the design of programs offered for
continuing education. Keep asking the questions, in service to recognizing and encouraging the continuous development of inner knowing in relationship to teaching ability.

Diversity in the population of teachers and teachers-in-training can only help to serve the whole in understanding and articulating this human life. It would visually signal to more people that mindfulness practice is possible and filled with potential, for a wide variety of people. Trainers can encourage teachers to look at and wonder about diversity in their classrooms. Teachers can be asked to take some risks, in where they reach out to offer introductory programs, around who they approach to consider hosting them to offer programming, and in the ways that they charge for and are compensated for teaching. Just the approaching and asking can foster an increased understanding and skill in unpredictable ways.

**Conclusion**

For those of us who teach, and who are training the next wave of teachers, what this may all add up to is this: the simple, profound, destabilizing, humbling, enjoyable, and ultimately overarching promise to “uphold the lineage of mindfulness” (Shonin & Gordon, p. 955). As Shonin and Gordon remind us, we have the tremendous responsibility and opportunity to bring dedication and diligence to our way of living, breathing and teaching. We’re called on to be all-in. We learn about this, and from this, in ourselves and by drawing from the experience of those teachers who have gone before. This is worthy work, work within which we are simultaneously formed and forming the world. This is surely the formation and transformation we ultimately seek.

For the world of people now bringing their newfound interest to mindfulness, for those on the pathway of practice and teacher training, and all the way to those institutions that are
dedicated to offering high quality mindfulness programming, such dedication and lived responsibility toward the very best teaching can only serve to mature and strengthen this lineage.
# Figures

**Figure 1: Teacher Training Learning Framework, Oasis Institute for Professional Training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commonly Recognized Frameworks of Learning</th>
<th>Oasis Teacher Training: Frameworks of Learning and Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Framework: Underpinnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wisdom*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiential learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stress physiology, psychology and neuroscience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes</strong></td>
<td>Framework: Attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes of the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualities of the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
<td>Framework: Teaching competencies **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coverage, pacing and organization of session curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relational skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guiding mindfulness practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holding the group learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Readiness for Next Stage of Learning</strong></td>
<td>Program Summation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall assessment of knowledge, attitudes and skills developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* wisdom in this knowledge framework, referring to universal dharmic principles, includes wholeness/non-duality; innate value of human beings/genius; interconnectedness/interdependence; constant change/inconstancy; and non-conceptual wisdom/direct knowing.

** as articulated in the Mindfulness-Based Interventions-Teaching Assessment Criteria, Crane et al, 2012.
Figure 2: Level of impact of formative teacher experiences
Figure 3: Level of comfort of formative teacher experiences
Figure 4: Level of comfort detailed by level of impact
### Tables

**Table 1: Characteristics of interview subjects (n=5)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of teachers interviewed</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>4 female, 1 male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td>1 white, 2 Caucasian, 1 European white, 1 Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (in years)</td>
<td>Average 59, range 47 - 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic</td>
<td>All identified culturally as middle; one identified economically as low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years meditating</td>
<td>Average 24, range 11 - 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years teaching</td>
<td>Average 11, range 2 - 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other identifying characteristics given as important to the subjects</td>
<td>1 member of LGBT community; 1 reported having received teacher training in another lineage; 1 reported “feistiness”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Counts of discrete formative experiences mentioned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience type</th>
<th># of experiences</th>
<th># of statements</th>
<th># of Subjects who mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal training</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching experience</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual path</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of colleagues</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life experience</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study resources</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional teacher training</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprentice teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-teaching</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional experience</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional training</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retreat</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-week MBSR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend mindfulness programs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading a sitting group</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being mentored</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily practice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from participants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream respect for MBSR</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>86</strong></td>
<td><strong>174</strong></td>
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</table>
Table 3: Count of impacts on teaching by type with number of subjects who mentioned

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact type</th>
<th># of mentions</th>
<th># of Subjects who mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-universal dharma</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities of the teacher</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broad impact</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-embodiment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodied ethos</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner knowing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to my own difficulties in the classroom</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-holding the group</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-interactive learning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-universality of suffering</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-relationality</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-experiential learning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-group process</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-curriculum</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundational attitudes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of colleagues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding intention and form</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of preparation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-physiology</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing patterns in individuals and systems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-guiding practice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-wholeness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for the teacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Table 4: Learning framework categories with level of impact detail

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning framework categories by impact level</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Modest</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broad</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care for the teacher</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Competency-curriculum</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competency-embodiment</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>16</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competency-holding the group</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>Competency-relationality</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embodied ethos</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundational attitudes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner knowing</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intention and form</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing patterns in individuals and systems</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to my own difficulties in the classroom</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Role of preparation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of colleagues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-experiential learning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Underpinnings-holding environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Underpinnings-physiology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-universal dharma</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-universality of suffering</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-wholeness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>44</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>129</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Average comfort/discomfort of learning impacts

(1=very uncomfortable, 6=very comfortable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CFM learning frameworks</th>
<th>Average Comfort Rating</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualities</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care for the teacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of preparation</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-universality of suffering</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodied ethos</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-embodiment</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner knowing</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-relationality</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-universal dharma</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-interactive learning</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-holding the group</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-group</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizing patterns in individuals and systems</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to my own difficulties in the classroom</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intention and form</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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<td>Competency-curriculum</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-experiential learning</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency-guiding practice</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support of colleagues</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-physiology</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underpinnings-wholeness</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Crane, R. (2014). Some reflections on being good, on not being good, and on just being. Mindfulness, 6(5), 1226-1231. doi: 10.1007/s12671-014-0350-y


Retrieved from


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8_3-Yqx2pw.


http://www.bangor.ac.uk/mindfulness/documents/MBA%20teacherGPG-Feb%202010.pdf
doi:10.1007/s12671-012-0162-x

What contributes to development in mindfulness teaching?
Purpose

- Convey the richness and challenge of teaching mindfulness
- Describe the attributes and competencies involved in good mindfulness teaching
- Speak to some of the ways these qualities can develop
- Give inspiring examples from my study
- Convince those of you who wish to teach to get good teacher training
- Answer your questions
Introduction

- Margaret Fletcher
  - Masters in Mindfulness Studies, Lesley University, May 2017
  - Certified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Teacher, April 2013
  - Teacher, Center for Mindfulness at University of Massachusetts Medical School
  - Teacher Trainer, Oasis Institute, Center for Mindfulness
Mindfulness in modern context

- Evidence basis
- Rising psychological distress
- Growing recognition by medical field
- Growth in general interest and popularity

... all adds up to pressure for more teaching
What effect does this have on teaching?

- Rushing to apply and complete training
- Petitions for shortcuts
- New, untested training programs springing up
- Untrained or poorly trained people representing the field

... none of which contributes to good teaching
What constitutes good teaching?

- Knowledge
- Attitudes
- Skills

...in the way that the Center for Mindfulness frames these.
Knowledge

- Wisdom
- Experiential Learning
- Stress Physiology/Psychology/Neuroscience
- Group Process
Attitudes

- Foundational Attitudes of Mindfulness Practice
- Attributes and Qualities of the Teacher
Skills

- Knowledge of and Capability with Curriculum
- Relational Skills
- Embodiment
- Guiding Mindfulness Practices
- Conveying Themes thru Interactive and Didactic Learning
- Holding the Group Learning Environment

Derived from Mindfulness-Based Interventions Teaching Assessment Criteria
An Embodied Ethos

- Something essential in the overall presence of good teaching
- Understanding and wisdom based on depth of personal experience
- Authenticity
- Integrated speech, posture, message
- Intentionality
- Ethos rather than ethical formula
- The Person of the Teacher
An Embodied Ethos?
How does good teaching develop?

- Practice, practice, practice...and good supports to encourage practice
  - Daily mindfulness practice
  - Annual retreat
  - Practice integrated into training programs
  - Frequent reflection on personal and teaching intentions, learnings, and insights (not separate!)
How does good teaching develop?

- Study
  - Personal pathway and wisdom tradition
  - Curriculum
  - Underpinning theory and method
  - Evidence basis in modern neuroscience
How does good teaching develop?

- Formal Training
  - Preliminary teaching skills training
  - Early teaching experiences with feedback from peers and experienced teacher
  - Practice teaching
  - Supervision and mentoring
  - Assessment and recognition of readiness to teach
How does good teaching develop?

- Beyond formal training
  - Professional development in main field
  - Learning to teach by teaching, co-teaching, assistant teaching
  - Support of colleagues
  - Life!
  - Volunteering, leading a sitting group, feedback from participants, retreat, first MBSR class, etc.
My research

- Interviews of mindfulness teachers
  - N = 5
  - Range of teaching experience, personal characteristics, locations, backgrounds, etc.
  - Basic question: what contributed to your formation as an MBSR teacher
  - Analyzed interview transcripts
What contributed to my formation? Some interesting examples...

- “We’re all in the same soup.”
  - Panic in the classroom
  - A moment of common humanity
  - Honesty, out loud
  - Authentic embodiment of the truth of distress
People I’m in the soup with!
What contributed to my formation?
Some interesting examples...

- “I don’t think I’ve ever voiced that.”
  - Heart-to-heart dialogue
  - Articulating what is true
  - Honesty, out loud
  - What deeply draws me into this work
What contributed to my formation?
Some interesting examples...

- “Self-care applies to me, too.”
  - Long pattern of over-commitment and over-extending in teaching
  - Being humbled by the truth of exhaustion
  - Only asking of others what we are honestly practicing ourselves
  - Leaving space for the unpredictable challenges of life
What contributed to my formation?
Some interesting examples...

- “It’s about personhood rather than curriculum.”
- The genius that each individual brings to their investigation
- Massage therapy and emotional intelligence training
- A teaching that is a bridge between all of my interests
What contributed to my formation?
Some interesting examples...

- “The simple power of silent presence”
  - College internship
  - Social work with Navajo families
  - For this culture, paying a home visit, mostly silent, is a sign of deep respect
What contributed to my formation? Some interesting examples...

- “Organizations have patterns, too.”
- Parallel awareness
- The quality of the overall system affects the quality of the class
- “If it’s a solid shell and it feels like it’s holding you, then it’s easier to hold other people. If it’s fragmented, if it’s hierarchical, if you don’t know if someone is going to turn and bite you, then it’s a different feeling.”
Some of my early conclusions

- Pay attention - life-long inquiry is my friend
- Take a learning stance; there is no such thing as a “perfect teacher”
- If I’m working with people, get some formal teacher training
- Stay close with my colleagues, they are my peer trainers
- Study organizational patterns if you’ll be working in or with one
- Balance your energy for the long haul
Conclusion

- Gratitude for my teachers:
  - Norman
  - Adyashanti
  - Zayda
  - Florence and Melissa
  - Saki
  - Lynn
  - Nancy and Melissa
- Thank you for your attention!
- Any questions?