HOW MINDFULNESS IS TAUGHT TO K-12 TEACHERS WITHIN A
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: A DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY OF THE
TEACHING OF AN EXPERIENCED MINDFULNESS INSTRUCTOR FROM A
SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation in
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by

Kevin J. Hulburt

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The dissertation of Kevin J. Hulburt was reviewed and approved by the following:

Bernard J. Badiali
Associate Professor of Education (Curriculum & Instruction)
Dissertation Adviser
Chair of Committee

Robert Roeser
Professor of Human Development and Family Studies
Bennet Pierce Professor of Caring and Compassion

Rachel Wolkenhauer
Assistant Professor of Education

Deborah L. Schussler
Associate Professor of Education

Kimberly Powell
Associate Professor of Education, Art Education, and Asian Studies
Director of Graduate Studies
ABSTRACT

This descriptive case study focuses on the teaching of an experienced mindfulness instructor over the course of an implementation of the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance program (MBEB) designed for K-12 educators. The intent of this study is to contribute to an understanding of the curriculum and pedagogy within a mindfulness program generally and, more specifically, one designed for K-12 educators. From a sociocultural perspective, this study describes the practices and guided assistance offered by the mindfulness instructor. The research questions are: 1) What are the curricular activities of the program and how is the time spent? 2) What are the practices that come to constitute mindfulness as introduced and developed within a mindfulness-based program for teachers? 3) What are the ways that a mindfulness instructor scaffolds learning experiences and offers guided assistance as a more capable other to the teacher participants? 4) How is transfer of mindfulness practices to the teachers’ teaching practices designed and scaffolded by the instructor throughout an implicit approach to mindfulness training for educators? Using a case study approach to analyze video recordings of an implementation of the MBEB program led by the program’s developer, this study identifies the practices and methods of assistance within the program as well as offers a sociocultural model for how these practices may be taught and learned.
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LIST OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

**Activity** – In this context, activity is a generic term for a shared social endeavor within a community of practice. It includes practices of that community intended to be practiced beyond the context of a learning experience, but also includes learning activities within a curriculum designed to introduce or support practices but which are not necessarily intended to be practice beyond that context. For example, the formal practice of seated meditation is an activity that is offered to participants as a way to cultivate mindfulness outside of the mindfulness-based intervention (MBI), whereas whole group discussion activities may be useful within the MBI context for understanding a formal practice but are not intended to be a practice participants will continue to engage in beyond that context.

**Assistance** – The ways in a more capable other aids in expanding the zone of proximal development of a learner within a community of practice. This can include scaffolding and modeling as well as constructing activities that introduce and refine the learner’s understanding of the actions and meanings of practices within that community.

**Community of Practice** – Characterized by the identification of group members as part of a common whole, collaboration between members (Shaffer & Amundsen, 1993) in which learning taking place through the legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). New members of a community of practice engage with more capable others, first through low risk involvement in the practices, eventually developing towards full personal ownership of their learning and practice.

**CoP** – Community of Practice

**Curricular Choices** – This term refers to the choices made at the design level of the intended curriculum. These choices include the structuring of curricular activities to shape the experience of the participants within the temporary community of practice of an MBI.
**Dereification/Reification** – Dereification “reflects the degree to which thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are phenomenally interpreted as mental processes rather than as accurate depictions of reality” (Lutz et al., 2015, p. 11). Reification then reflects the acceptance of thoughts, feelings, and perception as true depictions of reality often without the experience that there are potential alternative ways that one could make sense of a given phenomenon.

**Internalization** – Internalization is a social-to-psychological process whereby higher order functions are transmitted to the learner through “speech, social interaction, in the process of cooperative activity” (Leont’ev, 1981, as cited in Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p.29) with the more capable other.

**MBEB** – Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance

**MBI** – Mindfulness-Based Intervention

**MBSR** – Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

**More Capable Other** – Any member of a community of practice that offers assistance to expand another’s zone of proximal development within that community. This often refers to a teacher or instructor, but also includes peers who offer assistance.

**Pedagogical Choices** – This term refers to the choices made by an instructor in the enactment of the curriculum and together form the taught curriculum. These choices can be moments when a teacher choses to speak (such as offering guidance during a guided practice in this context) or when a teacher makes a choice in how to respond to a comment made by a learner (such as in response to a participant comment during whole group discussions in this context).

**Practices (formal and general)** – In this context, practice refers to a type of activity that includes a set of actions and meanings that members of a community of practice engage in as individuals or together and which is central to the purpose of that community. Formal practice, in an MBI context, refers to specific mindfulness practices intended for participants to continue to practice outside of the temporary MBI context. These formal practices are thought to continue the participants’ development of general mindfulness practices. For example, seated meditation is a formal practice offered in MBEB with the intention that participants can engage in that practice after completing the program. General mindfulness practices refers to internalized ways of relating to experience that can be engaged at any time, during formal practice or in one’s daily life.
**Perezhivanie** - Perezhivanie refers to the subjective and affective experience of the individual and suggests that the context of all experiences are “refracted through the prism of [each person’s subjective] emotional experience” (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 336 as cited in Brennan, 2014).

**Reification** – See “Dereification”

**Scaffolding** – Refers to a specific form of assistance in which a more capable other intentionally simplifies the learner’s role in a practice “by means of graduated assistance” without changing the nature of the practice itself (see Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p.34 for further description).

**SMART** – Stress Management and Resiliency Training. This was the name used for the program under study. It was conceived as a modified version of the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB) program specifically for educators. More recent research on the program and its use with educators has referred to the program as MBEB and given that this is the same program, MBEB is used in this study for clarity purposes.

**Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)** – Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development as: “The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978, p.86).
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I also want to dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Amanda. Without her patience and support, this would not have been possible.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

For over 15 years, interest in researching the benefits of mindfulness practices has grown rapidly alongside the general public's interest. From 2000 to 2013, the number of peer-reviewed journal articles written about, and research grants funded on, the topics of mindfulness, yoga, and meditation published per year has increased dramatically (Roeser, 2014). Beginning with applications in medicine, mindfulness-based programs have also been developed and tested in fields including psychology, business, sports. In the field of education, mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) for teachers have also been developed, largely in response to teacher stress and burnout (e.g. Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) but also to support teachers in their development of what has been called the fourth or unnamed domain of teacher knowledge or mindful teaching (Taylor, 2016; Taylor et al., 2019).

Based on a definition of what a person who is mindful looks like offered by Daniel Goleman as one who is “calm in body, clear in mind, kind in heart” (MLERN; see Mind and Life Institute, 2009), this fourth domain of teacher knowledge highlights the inner work and visible embodied manifestations that constitute the social and emotional skills of teaching (see Colaianne et al., 2020; Hulburt et al., 2020; Rickert, 2016; Rickert, Skinner, & Roeser, 2019; Taylor, 2016). This domain of social and emotional skills builds on the three-domain model proposed by Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005)
which includes (a) knowledge of learners & their development in social contexts, (b) knowledge of subject matter and curriculum goals, and (c) knowledge of pedagogy (p.10). Mindfulness programs then are posited the development of this fourth domain, allowing for the ability to better access the other three. Taylor et al. (2019) aligns three mindfulness training programs within this framework, CARE, MBEB, and CALM, and makes the case that the emotional regulation, attentional regulation and compassion cultivated through mindfulness training impact a teacher’s ability to be calm, clear, and kind respectively.

The research to date on this type of MBI and the ability of these programs to cultivate this fourth domain has been promising, demonstrating well-being-related effects in developing teacher mindfulness, emotional regulation, as well as decreasing stress and anxiety, depression and burnout (Zarate et al. 2019; Emerson et al., 2017). Research on the impact of these MBIs on classroom practice to date is also promising, with effects on mindful teaching using the mindful teaching scale (Frank et al. 2016), and the emotional support domain of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta et al., 2008) (Jennings et al., 2017; Braun, 2020).

These promising findings however have also often been coupled with a call for a better understanding of the “nuances in the design of the mindfulness programme” (Emerson et al., 2017) in order to better understand the mechanisms of change for how MBIs lead to these outcomes as well as to compare curricular approaches between
program approaches. Emerson argues that research in this area will allow for a better understanding of the differences between MBIs for teachers, such as the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB) program under study here, as well as inform work on the effectiveness of different program components or approaches. In addition, a better understanding of how mindfulness is taught and learned within these MBI could inform mindfulness teacher preparation and development. Finally, as a part of a research agenda to understand how this fourth domain can be developed in teacher participants, research on the curriculum and pedagogy within these programs could help to describe these same four domains as seen in the teaching of mindfulness itself.

To date however, very little research-based work has been done to respond to this call within the context of MBIs for teachers or MBIs generally. This study is the continuation of a previous case study (Roeser, 2016) that sought to respond to this need to “look inside the ‘black box’ of these interventions in order to understand how the skills and dispositions of mindfulness are taught and learned” (p.167). That study took a mixed method and sociocultural approach (Rogoff, 2003; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) to understanding the teaching and learning within an implementation of the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB) program for educators that took place in 2012. From this theoretical perspective, the teaching and learning of mindfulness is understood in terms of social processes in which the instructor invites participants to jointly attend to shared practices, offering guided assistance as the participants internalize the actions and
meanings of those practices. Through an analysis of instructional time spent in different activities, this sociocultural lens proved a good fit as there was a clear curricular focus on experiential learning through guided practice and whole group discussion. In addition, an analysis of the instructor’s language and word choice during these whole group discussions indicated a focus on invitations to practice mindfulness as well as offering assistance in how to practice and how to understand the purpose of practice. The study also found evidence of transfer and internalization of the instructor’s instruction in post-program interviews with participants. These participants described hearing the instructor’s voice in their mind and applying self-talk in the form of language from the program as they related practicing mindfulness in their lives and classrooms.

This current study continues that work and seeks to contribute to further our understanding of how the outcomes of these MBIs for educators are achieved and also to inform work on mindfulness teacher development.

**Purpose of this Study**

This case study describes the choices made by Margaret Cullen, an experienced mindfulness instructor, in the design of a mindfulness program for educators (curricular choices) and in Cullen’s approach to teaching in this context (pedagogical choices) in order to better understand how mindfulness is taught within an MBI community of practice. The context of this study is one implementation of the well-researched (see
chapter 3) Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB) program for educators. The implementation is of particular interest because Margaret Cullen is both the instructor and the designer of the program’s intended curriculum and has published scholarly writing on the intended curriculum of mindfulness trainings generally and MBEB specifically (Cullen, 2011; Cullen et al., 2019) as well as a workbook version of the curriculum (Cullen & Pons, 2015). These aspects of the case gave access to both her choices in the program and implementation and her reasoning behind those choices.

The research questions for this study were: 1) What are the curricular activities of the program and how is the time spent? 2) What are the practices that come to constitute mindfulness as introduced and developed within a mindfulness-based program for teachers? 3) What are the ways that a mindfulness instructor offers guided assistance as a more capable other to the teacher participants? And 4) How is transfer of mindfulness practices to the teachers’ teaching practices designed and scaffolded by the instructor throughout an implicit approach to mindfulness training for educators?

Video recordings of the nine-week implementation of an MBEB training for educators in the Western US were analyzed and the mindfulness practices and pedagogical practices identified were triangulated with a mid-analysis interview with the instructor as well as with her professional writings. Taking a naturalistic (Stakes, 2000) approach to understanding the practices being introduced and assisted by the instructor of the MBEB program, this study provides contextualized and illustrative examples of the
instructor’s pedagogical approach. These illustrative examples—selected as representative of the themes identified through an analysis of her pedagogical choices—as well as the descriptions of her approach can support our understanding of what teaching mindfulness looks like, in action, within a program for educators.

Also, building upon the previous sociocultural approach to understanding teaching and learning in this context (Roeser, 2016), this study elaborates on what such an approach means for our understanding of the social processes involved in MBIs and the role of the instructor in the internalization of practices. Based on the findings of the case, it offers a theoretical model for the sociocultural process of learning mindfulness practices as well as a complimentary process of learning to recognize and consider one’s habitualized patterns of relating to experience.

This sociocultural approach to understanding teaching and learning is based on the work of Leo Vygotsky and frames mindfulness programs as temporary communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Within the temporary community of the implementation, there are practices, both formally identified in the curricular choices of program activities and those less clearly bounded but visible within the pedagogical choices that constitute the taught curriculum of the implementation. Rather than a banking model of teaching, where the instructor delivers mindfulness into the minds of participants, or an individual learner model, in which participants assume a position for silent practice and develop mindfulness independently, this model highlights the social
nature of learning generally and within mindfulness programs specifically.

Chapter 2 presents the basis for this sociocultural approach and provides an overall conception for how the teaching and learning of mindfulness will be described from this perspective. Chapter 3 offers a review of the research literature to date on MBIs for educators generally and the work associated with the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB) program specifically. It describes the framework for understanding how this program is intended to develop the fourth domain of teacher knowledge and the research to date on its outcomes. This chapter also presents how mindfulness and the teaching and learning of it have been previously conceptualized in the professional literature of mindfulness teachers and teacher educators. Finally, it positions this study as a part of this larger research agenda to better understand how the downstream outcomes of the MBEB program are achieved and to inform mindfulness teacher training. The research questions and methods are then further described in Chapter 4 before a presentation of the findings and implications within Chapters 5 and 6.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the basis of a sociocultural framework for understanding the teaching and learning of mindfulness in MBIs and to highlight how this framework can fill gaps in the literature and advance educational practice and science on teacher MBIs. A sociocultural theoretical view of teaching and learning is commonly cited in the field of education research but has rarely been applied to learning mindfulness in an MBI with a few notable exceptions I will describe in detail below. I will here first describe what a sociocultural theory of teaching and learning is, then apply this theory to an MBI context.

Theoretical Framework: Sociocultural Learning Theory

The sociocultural learning theory applied in this study is based largely on the work of Tharp & Gallimore (1988) as well as the role of meaning from Leont’ev’s Activity Theory and Vygotsky’s conception of perezhivanie (1994).

Sociocultural Learning Theory has its origins in the writings of Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky and his colleagues. It argues that higher order functions develop through social interactions in cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings.
Vygotsky argues that higher order functions “appear first on the social level, between people, and later on the individual level” (Rogoff & Gardener, 1984, p.97 as cited in Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 7). Learning then is situated, both in that it takes place in a specific physical context and time and in that it takes place in a negotiated social space of meaning and actions (constituting activity) in what is called a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Developmental processes take place through participation with a more capable other, such as a teacher or peer, in a kind of “assisted performance”. This allows the learner to participate in the activity, mastering skills or practices by employing them with assistance, in a process of internalization (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 57 as cited in Tharp and Gallimore, 1988, p. 29). The expansion of what the learner is capable of doing is understood as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and internalization is a social-to-psychological process whereby the higher order functions are transmitted to the learner through “speech, social interaction, in the process of cooperative activity” (p.29) with the more capable other. Vygotsky described the ZPD as:

The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

(Vygotsky, 1978, p.86)
Tharp and Gallimore theorize this developmental learning process as taking place in four stages:

![Diagram of Tharp & Gallimore's Four Stages of Sociocultural Learning](image)

Figure 2-1: Tharp & Gallimore’s Four Stages of Sociocultural Learning

In Stage I of the ZPD, the performance of the activity requires the assistance of the more capable other in the form of modeling and/or directions through which the actions and meanings of the practice are transmitted. An important aspect of this stage, and assisted performance, is scaffolding, or the simplification of the learner’s role “by means of graduated assistance” from the more capable other; however, for Tharp & Gallimore, assisted performance can take many forms in addition to scaffolding, and they
argue that there is need for more differentiated concepts that are not just a varying in quantity of assistance but also quality (p.34). Globally though, this Stage I is characterized by what Bruner refers to a “handover principle” (Bruner, 1983) in which the learner transitions from a spectator role to a participant. This is, at first, on the “interpsychological plane of functioning” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 35) but moves over the course of practice to where performance is assisted by the self in Stage II.

Before moving to Stage II of Tharp & Gallimore’s model however, it feels important to interject here the Activity Theory of Leontiev (1981 as cited by Feryok, 2012) which “distinguishes between social motives at the level of activity, individual goals [meanings] at the level of actions, and concrete operations used to achieve goals [actions]” (p. 96). This sociocultural concept, not explicitly present in Tharp & Gallimore’s model of ZPD, defines activity as being comprised of both meaning and actions and further distinguishes meanings in terms of social motives, a kind of shared conception of purpose that could generally be communicated by members of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and personal meanings held by those members. From this perspective, during Stage I, learners are not only practicing the actions of the activity but are also making personal sense of the meanings of those actions that may or may not be explicitly presented to them. The development of these two aspects, actions and meanings, are therefore not necessarily lock step aligned. Tharp & Gallimore do recognize the “intermental plane of discourse and meaning [as] inseparable
from the social plane of shared activity” (p.274), offering that as “people work together and use the same words to refer to their acts and experiences, they come to share the same lexicon, and they internalize the same meanings of those words” (p.266) and acknowledging that at Stage I, “the apprentice may not conceptualize the goal of the activity in the way the expert does” (p.251). However, activity theory would make the distinction between having “the same meanings” and having similar personal meanings with a lessening gap between them (Feryok, 2012). The relevance of Leontiev’s contribution to this study is that as we consider the role of the mindfulness teacher in offering assistance to participants, they are not only assisting in how to perform the practices of mindfulness, but also assisting in how to make sense of those practices within the participants’ lives. Thus assistance on the level of actions and meanings are both important in order to create a community of practice that develops towards a shared understanding.

Returning to Stage II, the learner is able to perform the actions independently, but not yet in an automatized fashion. Here, the learner is using self-directed assistance, which could take the form of self-directed speech that is internal or even external. This self-guidance is, in effect, the internalization of the assistance that was previously offered by the more capable other and is “gradually taken ‘underground’” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p.253) as it is automatized. In terms of the meanings of these actions, given that activity theory is not a part of Tharp & Gallimore’s conception of the ZPD, it is unclear.
However, this is important to recognizing because the ability to perform the actions without guided assistance is not, in and of itself, evidence of a completely shared meaning or the adoption of a community’s shared social motive.

Stage III involves a dropping away of the self-directed assistance as the learner emerges from the ZPD having automatized the actions. The actions have been “automatized” and also “‘fossilized’, emphasizing [their] fixity and distance from social and mental forces of change” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 38). At this stage, we can assume the learner has a constructed personal interpretation of the meanings involved in the activity, though how this aligns with the meanings held by others or a shared social motive can not be assumed.

Finally, Stage IV of this developmental process involves a “de-fossilization” (p.39) and a return to an earlier stage. Tharp & Gallimore indicate that this stage can occur as a result of not being able to perform the action such as by “major upheavals or physical trauma” (p.39). Activity theory might suggest that confrontations with alternative meanings for the activity may also de-fossilize.

Teaching from this sociocultural vantage then is a matter of constructing experiences and offering “frequent and elaborate” (p.40) guided assistance during the first stage and transitioning to more abbreviated, less directive responsive assistance over the course of development. Tharp & Gallimore summarize their definition of teachings as follows: “teaching can be said to occur when assistance is offered at points in the ZPD
at which performance requires assistance” (p.41). They offer the following examples of what this assistance can look like: “modeling, contingency managing, feeding back, instructing, questioning, and cognitive structuring” (p. 44).

Given the prominent roles of emotions and relating to one’s own subjective experience in the concept of mindfulness, it seems also relevant here to also introduce an aspect of Vygotsky’s theory that is underrepresented in much of educational literature: his conception of “Perezhivanie”. Perezhivanie refers to the subjective and affective experience of the individual and suggests that the context of all experiences are “refracted through the prism of [each person’s subjective] emotional experience” (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 336 as cited in Brennan, 2014). This metaphor of refraction through a perezhivanie prism captures the subjective psychological and emotional experiences of all participants as being potentially varied and integral to the activity being practiced. Within a sociocultural learning theory, the significance of perezhivanie is that it names the role that reified subjective experience plays in teaching and learning and highlights that in addition to being external and social, activity is also “an internal changing phenomenon that is constantly reorganized through the lens of each person’s affective experience” (Gonzalez Rey, 2011, as cited in Brennan, 2014).

Together then, educators can offer learners guided assistance in the form of assisting with how to do the actions of the activity, how to understand the meanings behind the actions and activity itself, and on the level of how to relate to one’s own
perezhivanie experience of the activity (or the experience of learning the activity). This also highlights that there is a role of the mindfulness instructor’s own perezhivanie experience in that their experience of the learning activity is also refracted through the prism of their own perezhivanie and thus impacts their pedagogical choices.

Communities of Practice

Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the social learning concept of communities of practice as they sought to explain how learning takes place between people who collaborate on learning and doing shared practices, largely in informal learning spaces. Communities of practice are characterized by the identification of group members as part of a common whole, collaboration between members (Shaffer & Amundsen, 1993) and learning taking place through the legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) of new members who engage with more capable others, first through low risk involvement in the practices and eventually to full personal ownership of their learning and practice.

This framing of learning greatly mirrors that of Tharp and Gallimore’s sociocultural learning theory in that it aligns with the concept of the ZPD of the learning and the importance of the more capable other’s assisted performance. A contributing aspect though is that Wenger (1998a) emphasizes that learning within CoPs takes place through the community or learning by belonging in addition to learning by doing and
learning by meaning making. This means that the success or failure of the community is not only a matter of new participants learning the practices of the community but also assessing their connectedness to the community and the community’s relationship to any larger related organization (1998b).

In the case of a mindfulness training for teachers then, the teaching and learning of mindfulness will be here framed as a process in which the mindfulness instructor is not only collaborating as a more capable other to develop the participants’ ability to practice, but also must be concerned with the participants’ sense of belonging within the community (how that is established and maintained) and how they come to see it in relation to the larger “organization” (of being educators in this case).

**Mindfulness Training from a Sociocultural Perspective**

Considering mindfulness from this sociocultural perspective frames it as a set of activities (hereafter referred to as practices for the purpose of aligning with the terminology used in mindfulness literature) within a temporary mindfulness training community of practice that are learned through the internalization of actions and meanings introduced largely by the instructor and experienced through the individual meaning making of each member of that community. The teaching of mindfulness then is framed as the construction of experiences and the offering of guided assistance in those experiences as a more capable other. Teaching also then means attending to the
participants’ sense of belonging within the community of practice and how they see it as being valuable to their lives or work.

This approach to understanding what happens in MBIs highlights the social nature of learning generally and in the teaching of mindfulness specifically. It emphasizes the importance of more research into how the instructor invites participants to jointly attend to mindfulness practices both within guided formal practice and in the discussions that are a substantial part of the curricular approach within many MBIs including MBSR and MBEB. The pedagogical choices that instructors make in the language they use to describe the actions and meanings involved in mindfulness practice and how they chose to respond to participant questions and comments shape the participants’ experience as they make sense of what mindfulness is for themselves.

In Chapter 3, I position the current study within the wider literature on defining mindfulness, the teaching and learning of mindfulness, and mindfulness programs for educators. Gaps in the research were identified through the review including the value of defining what kind of curricular and pedagogical choices are made when designing and implementing a mindfulness program generally as well as for this specific population of educators.
CHAPTER 3
REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

In this chapter, I first describe the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program and its attendant definition of mindfulness, and trace some of its history as background to the program studied here. Not only did MBSR establish a research base for the benefits of mindfulness, but it also established a tradition for how mindfulness is taught. The subject of this study, Margaret Cullen, was one of the first to be trained in the teaching of MBSR and credits the MBSR curriculum as a lineage source for the curricular choices made in the creation of MEBE (Cullen, 2019). Then, I offer three approaches to defining mindfulness as well as the research to date on the teaching and learning of mindfulness and the perspectives and approach of a prominent professional text in mindfulness teacher development by McCown et al., 2010. Finally, I situate the present study within the wider research agenda around understanding the benefits of MBIs for educators.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

The cultural and linguistic translations of Buddhist mindfulness that arguably had the greatest influence on how secular mindfulness is understood and operationalized today in the west are those that converged to influence Jon Kabat-Zinn, the creator of
mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). MBSR is the most researched and likely most well-known mindfulness program. Research on MBSR is often referenced in research literature reviews as the basis for the field and has influenced the intended curricula of many mindfulness-based programs and interventions including the MBEB program that is the focus of this study (Cullen, 2019). Therefore, in conceptualizing the intended curriculum of MBEB, it seems valuable to briefly describe some of Jon Kabat-Zinn’s history in order to tease out what is being pointed to by Kabat-Zinn’s definition for mindfulness of “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (1994, p.4).

In addition to studying Zen and previously helping to establish the Cambridge Zen Center with Seung Sahn; as well as studying with the Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh, an important thread of Jon Kabat-Zinn’s narrative connects with Theravadan Buddhism and to the work of Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield, two Americans who were introduced to Buddhism while traveling to Thailand with the Peace Corps in the 1960s. In 1976, Goldstein and Kornfield opened the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts and later, Kornfield would open the Spirit Rock Meditation Society in 1981. These centers offered, and continue to offer, lay person-centered, mindfulness-based meditation retreats and have played a critical role in the lives of many eminent voices in both American Buddhism and secular mindfulness including that of Jon Kabat-Zinn.
Within this insight tradition, the concept of mindfulness is generally related back to the Satipatthana Sutta and the four foundations of mindfulness described therein (Goldstein, 2013). These foundations describe what one attends to when they are practicing mindfulness and include attending to the arising and passing away of experiences in the body, mind, feelings, and dhammas. Here, attending to the body primarily refers to noticing sensations or directing attention internally within the body. Mindfulness of the mind then refers to attending to the arising and passing away of thoughts without identifying with them. At its most basic, mindfulness of feelings means attending to our experience of the present moment as being pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, but there is also debate as to whether this also includes attending to emotions (Cullen et al., 2019). Finally, there is mindfulness of dhamma. The concept of “dhamma” includes traditionally can refer to the explicit teachings of Gotama Siddhartha, the Buddha, but is often also used in a more general sense to refer to phenomena or “things that hold us back from making progress in our meditation” (Gunaratana, 2012). From a strict Buddhist perspective, the teachings of the Buddha and the nature of reality are one and the same; however, from a secular mindfulness perspective, it may be more appropriate to use Gunaratana’s word “phenomena” as referring to the nature of things with a particular focus on the nature of the mind and how it relates to itself and the external world. From this perspective, mindfulness is a kind of perceiving (Pali: saññā) of these aspects of experience in order to develop wisdom (Pali: paññā) through the
witnessing of aspects of experience arising and falling away without identifying with these aspects (Kuan, 2007).

In the Spring of 1979, during the tenth day of a vipassana retreat at the Insight Meditation Society, Kabat-Zinn experienced what he referred to as a flash of insight that "had to do with the question of how to take the heart of something as meaningful, as sacred if you will, as Buddha Dharma and bring it into the world in a way that doesn't dilute, profane, or distorted, but at the same time is not locked into a culturally and tradition-bound framework that would make it absolutely impenetrable to the vast majority of people, who are nevertheless suffering and might find it extraordinarily useful and liberative" (Kabat-Zinn, 1999, pp.226-227). This insight was then the impetus for the creation of MBSR.

While there had been others who sought to investigate the potential secular benefits of mindfulness practices, such as Herbert Benson's work on transcendental meditation (1975), Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) established a curricular approach for teaching secular mindfulness and the research associated with this program established MBSR as a kind of gold standard for how to define mindfulness and approach developing and implementing curricula for mindfulness-based trainings.

In terms of the effectiveness of MBSR, focusing only on non-clinical populations, Khoury et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 29 studies on the effects of MBSR
implementations for “healthy” participants and found moderate effects on measures of depression, anxiety, and distress in addition to a large reduction in stress. These findings strongly suggest that, in addition to clinical applications, MBSR—and by extension mindfulness training—can improve the well-being and quality of life of participants in other contexts as well. This is a single snapshot of the extensive research conducted on the program. Of particular interest though, Khoury et al. also noted that the population that benefited the most in the studies analyzed where healthcare workers and posited that this was a result of “the high level of stress among healthcare professionals” (p. 524). This is often the same rationale used for bring MBIs to teachers as a high stress profession.

While the research on the effects of MBSR and other MBIs continues to mount, “a consensual definition of mindfulness is lacking, and the myriad definitions in the literature can be seen as generating more confusion than clarity” (Lutz et al., 2015, p.2). From the perspective of research on program outcomes, this is a critical issue for conceptualizing the mechanisms of change. However, Lutz et al.’s (2015) work highlights the challenges in coming to a shared, discreet definition. What follows is a review of three types of approach to coming to a definition based on the work of Lutz et al. (2015) and is included to demonstrate these challenges. It also highlights the gap in research to understand how mindfulness is taught and learned from any of these definitional perspectives. Finally, it makes the case that an umbrella understanding of
mindfulness, such as used by Kabat-Zinn is the appropriate starting position for a study that takes a sociocultural approach to understanding how mindfulness comes to be defined through the social process of a specific implementation.

**Defining Mindfulness as a Trait or Tendency**

Stemming from efforts to measure the effects of mindfulness programs, several self-report questionnaires were developed that are intended to measure dispositional mindfulness in both subjects who have been trained in mindfulness and those who have not. Dimidjian and Linehan (2003) describe an agenda for research on mindfulness that included the development of a “psychologically sound measure of mindfulness” (P. 169), an agenda that led to the development of several self-report questionnaires including the mindful attention awareness scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003), the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI; Buchheld, Grossman, & Walach, 2001) the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS; Baer, Smith & Allen, 2004), the Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale (CAMS; Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, & Greeson, 2004), and the Mindfulness Questionnaire (MQ; Chadwick, Hember, Mead, Lilley, & Dagnon, 2005). Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, and Toney (2006) then sought to assess the internal consistency and intercorrelation of these questionnaires as well as their correlation to other constructs of well-being thought to be related or unrelated to mindfulness. These other constructs included emotional intelligence (Trait Meta-Mood
Scale (TMMS); Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995), emotional regulation (Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS); Gratz & Roemer, 2004), the ability to identify and describe the feelings and one’s internal experience (Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20); Bagby, Taylor, & Parker, 1993), disassociation (Scale of Dissociative Activities (SODAS); Mayer & Farmer, 2003), and self-compassion (Self-Compassion Scale (SCS); Neff, 2003) and all of the mindfulness questionnaires showed correlations in the expected direction. Bear et al. then used factor analysis to establish what led to the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006) which frames mindfulness as being comprised of:

- Nonreactivity to Inner Experience
- Observing/Noticing/Attending to Sensations/Perceptions/Thoughts/Feelings
- Acting with Awareness/Automatic Pilot/Concentration/Non-Distraction
- Non-Judging of Experience
- Describing/Labeling with Words

The FFMQ long- and short-forms retain items with the highest factor loading for each of the five facet and have become a common measure for this trait mindfulness construct. While the complete uni-dimensionality of the individual facets has been challenged to some degree, they were found to be substantively uni-dimensional (Pelham et al., 2019).

More importantly though, conceptually, these five facets represent how mindfulness within the research can be defined as a trait. They define mindfulness in a way that is intended to align with the definition of Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Paying attention (observing), in a particular way: on purpose (Acting with Awareness), in the present moment, and
nonjudgmentally (non-judgmentally and non-reactively)” and in terms of a human trait—
albeit one that can be developed and cultivated through practices. From this vantage,
everyone has some ability to be mindful or exhibits qualities of this mindfulness trait. As
a measure used with MBIs, the FFMQ and this trait approach offers a way to pre- and
post-test for development of mindfulness given that participants enter the program with a
level of mindfulness (whether or not they conceptualized it as such) and can be shown to
improve (or not) in these areas at post-intervention. However, very little research has
been done on what is taught and learned within these MBIs to achieve this and scales
developed from this line of reasoning have been criticized as potentially having more to
do with “exposure to the rhetoric of mindfulness practice” (Lutz et al., 2015) that aligns
with the language of the scales than an accurately measured outcome.

This “rhetoric”, from a sociocultural perspective, is not to be discounted in that
language plays a critical role in the guidance and assistance offered by an instructor as
well as in the social processing that happens in group discussions. However, this does
highlight a potential limitation of the value of these measures and how coupling
outcomes based research with qualitative research on the experience within programs can
give a more robust understanding.

**Defining Mindfulness as a Skill or Mode**

Bishop et al. (2004) take the position that Kabat-Zinn’s definition cannot be
operationalized from a research perspective and that defining its components and psychological processes is necessary in order to develop instruments and identify the mechanisms of change or action in the field. In response to this, the authors developed a two-component model of mindfulness comprised of self-regulation of attention and “adopting a particular orientation towards one’s experiences in the present moment, and orientation that is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance” (p. 231).

The first component of self-regulation of attention is then comprised of skills in sustained attention, regulating attention to maintain focus, and attentional switching, regulating attention to bring focus back to an object again and again. This aspect of the definition also then fosters “non-elaborative awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they arise” (p.232), which allows for and acknowledges these mental experiences but seeks to not elaborate or ruminate on them. Ultimately then, this component is a metacognitive skill of monitoring and controlling attention.

The second component is an orientation towards experience that maintains a curiosity about what the mind does naturally and an acceptance or openness towards the experience. The authors suggest here that mindfulness is an active process of intentionally abandoning “one’s agenda to have a different experience” (p. 233).

From this perspective, the context or situation of the practitioner is not relevant so long as they are engaging in this “mode of awareness” (p. 234) or practice this as a psychological process or skill. Mindfulness then is an intentionally evoked and
maintained mode rather than a trait.

Bishop et al. also draw a distinction of this definition from definitions that include the concept of embodying qualities or components such as patience, trust, and compassion, a concept that is emphasized in Kabat-Zinn’s conceptualization and literature on the processes of learning and teaching MBSR and MBCT (e.g. Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Crane, 2004; Brandsma, 2017). These, the authors suggest, are more likely outcomes of engaging in the practicing of mindfulness skills.

In framing mindfulness as a skill, or a set of skills falling into these two categories of self-regulation of attention and an accepting orientation to experience, this definition aligns more closely with a community of practice view of what happens in an MBI. The instructor and participants, from this view, are jointly attending to practice these skills and apply them to the community members’ own experience. This study seeks to contribute by identifying what these skills come to be in this MBI context and how they are developed.

**Defining Mindfulness as an Umbrella Term**

While the first two definitions of mindfulness stem from quantitative research that necessitates an operational definition, Kabat-Zinn’s intentionally took a broad approach to defining mindfulness in order to give room for the work that would follow. This definition also is useful for a starting place for a study of this kind. In addition, given the
predominance of MBSR and its role in both the curricular development of MBEB and Cullen’s own development as a teaching of mindfulness, it seems important to also describe Kabat-Zinn’s offered definition.

Taking a more general approach, Kabat-Zinn, in a special edition of *Contemporary Buddhism* (2011), describes the process by which he sought to “[bridge the] two epistemologies of science and dharma” (p. 288) by intentionally using the word ‘mindfulness’ as an umbrella term, or “place-holder for the entire dharma, that is meant to carry multiple meanings and traditions simultaneously, not in the service of finessing or confounding real differences, but as a potentially skillful means for bringing the streams of alive, embodied dharma understanding and of clinical medicine together” (p.290). He also suggests that the “details concerning the use of the word mindfulness…could be worked out later by scholars and researchers…interested in making such distinctions and resolving important issues that may have been confounded and compounded by the early but intentional ignoring or glossing over of potentially important historical, philosophical, and cultural nuances” (p.290).

Lutz et al. (2015) advance that this broader definition of mindfulness may allow “participants to conceive of it in the larger sense of a stance towards experience or even as a way of life” but they also raise the concern that this may be too broad for empirical study, echoing Kabat-Zinn’s suggestion that “scholars and researchers” may need to investigate the distinctions for certain purposes (2011).
This study’s focus is on describing the practices as they are introduced and supported by an instructor within an implementation of the MBEB program and sought to take a more emic approach to investigating what is happening rather than taking a etic approach of seeking to confirm that an etic definition is the right one. From a sociocultural perspective, this umbrella conception of mindfulness constitutes all the ways mindfulness comes to be understood within different communities of mindfulness practice, recognizing and even embracing the social construction of the concept that occurs within those communities and the differences between them. Here, the purpose is to describe the curricular and pedagogical choices made to shape the understandings of the participants, in effect offering how the instructor construct a definition of mindfulness for these participants.

**Research to Date on the Teaching and Learning of Mindfulness from a Sociocultural Perspective**

The present study aims to adopt a sociocultural perspective to better understand teaching and learning of mindfulness within a program for K-12 teachers. Here, mindfulness is viewed as a joint activity between the participants and the instructor within a mindfulness program. The program aims to enact this joint investigation of mindfulness with the instructor introducing how to practice mindfulness and the value of these practices and the participants developing their own sense of these practices through
their shared experiences. While more work is needed in this area, there is research that has sought to work from this sociocultural perspective and consider what mindfulness is from within the social phenomena of a mindfulness training and how it comes to be constructed by the participants and their interactions with a mindfulness instructor. In addition to the previous case study that took this view (Roeser, 2016; described further below), there are two other studies that offer examples of this approach, a dissertational study by Dyer (2011) that focuses on the joint activities of mindfulness in the whole group discussion, or “Dialogue and Inquiry”, periods of an MBSR implementation and a study by Mamberg and Bassarear (2015) who sought evidence of transfer in the language of MBSR participants in post-intervention interviews. Here, I describe both of these studies and describe the relationship they have to the current study.

In her dissertational study (2011), Dyer describes herself as a “moderate constructivist (more specifically, social constructivist)” (p. 8) citing Martin and Sugarman (1997, 2000) who argue for a bridge between the socially constructed nature of knowledge of social constructionism and the “individual agentic consciousness” of cognitive constructivism (Martin & Sugarman, 1997, p. 377). Working from this perspective then, Dyer applies a contextual action theory (Valach, Young & Lynam, 2002) theoretical lens and method to investigate the experience of mindfulness as it is socially constructed within the Dialogue and Inquiry (D&I) activities in an implementation of an MBSR training. The D&I activities within both the MBSR
curriculum are group conversations intended to be “dedicated to an exploration of the participants’ firsthand experience of the formal and informal mindfulness practices (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2001/2007, as cited in Dyer, 2011, p. 58) which align with the whole group discussion activities described in this study.

Mindfulness is then viewed as a joint action between the participants and the instructor within a mindfulness project of enacting that action repeatedly. Furthermore, if this project is picked up and practiced over a long period, Dyer argues it can be considered what in action theory is called a career or “an organization and construction of projects that exist over the long-term and/or have a highly significant place in one’s life” (Young et al., 2005, p. 217 as cited in Dyer, 2011, p. 70). That is, having been introduced to mindfulness practices in a training, their understanding of how to practice and the meaning of practice will continue to be refined through further practice and further exposure to communities of practice.

Through an analysis of the conversations between the instructor and participants coupled with self-confrontation interviews with both, Dyer found that the participants brought with them into the MBSR training “life projects” involving wanting to “get rid of something unpleasant: physical aches and pains, insomnia, chronic pain, sadness, self-criticism, and the stress of daily life” and projects of “self-improvement and relationship enhancement” (p.103) that impacted their understanding of what mindfulness is and is for.
In terms of the mindfulness project, Dyer argues they came to understand it included sub-ordinate projects of “joint attention…noticing with gentle kindness” (p.111), “noticing what was unnoticed” (p. 113), “noticing thoughts and stories” (p. 117), “separating thoughts and feeling states” (p.118), “noticing the body” (p.120), and what Dyer refers to as a “joint language project” in which participants shifted how they described their lives and experiences (p.127). Dyer then argues that this impacted their ability to pay attention, to develop interoception, and to approach or stay with unpleasant experience. In addition to these projects, Dyer argues that how mindfulness came to be constructed within the training included projects to understand the nature of the mind, understand the mind of others, to develop compassion and self-compassion.

Together then, these practices constituted what mindfulness came to mean for the participants of the training researched and from an educational standpoint may better represent aspects of the taught and learned curricula of mindfulness then an a priori theoretical definition would. This approach to defining mindfulness can contribute to quantitative research and operational definitions of mindfulness by validating or adding nuance to aspects of how we, as researchers, conceptualize it. The present study shares this approach to understanding how mindfulness comes to be defined and further contributes to this approach by describing the instructor’s approach to constructing these joint projects across all activities of an MBI implementation including not only the discussion periods, but also the guided practice ones.
Mamberg and Bassarear (2015) sought to apply Dialogic Self Theory (DST) and an analysis of how MBSR program participants’ conceptions of self appear to exist on a developmental continuum from an unexamined position of reified selves to “more developed self-narratives” that suggest an understanding and application of what Lutz, Jha, Dunne, and Saron (2015) referred to as dereification. This dereification process “reflects the degree to which thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are phenomenally interpreted as mental processes rather than as accurate depictions of reality” (Lutz et al., 2015, p. 11). After interviewing 20 participants who had completed an MBSR training about their experiences with meditation both before and after the training, and conducting content analyses of these conversations, Mamberg and Basarear coded instances of self references in order to categorize this talk about themselves into a continuum from a “monological reified self” to “portrayals of being” which suggest that the participants de-center in the way they relate to their own experience and reflect on previously reified self-concepts (p. 23).

Their analysis suggests that monological reified self positions can be seen in language such as “I’ve always been judgmental” where the participant appears to be fully identified with a permanent self position or in describing oneself as being controlled by one’s emotions (p. 24). Language further along in the continuum on the other hand suggested that participants related to aspects of their experience by noticing or observing it, giving them more agency in how they related or responded to it. In the later stages of
the continuum, the authors describe a developmental process of moving from an experience of stepping back and observing experience to accepting and being with experience. Mamberg and Bassarear’s final “level” is one where there is no separation between the observer and observed a state of non-self is described. However, it is of note that while they describe this final level and offer evidence that it might be visible, for example by the absence of a self-referencing pronoun in descriptions of experiences arising, no extensive examples are offered.

In considering the relationship of this work to the purpose of my study, I would note that Mamberg and Bassarear frame this developmental continuum as being one of developing a MBSR voice that “[originates] with the instructors classroom discourse” and the internalization of which is made visible in the participants’ speech. They suggest that it is important for mindfulness instructors to be aware “of their own dialogical impact on their students’ self-portrayals” (p.31) as they model this voice. The current study is aligned with this position and offers an analysis of a mindfulness instructor’s language choices in terms of how mindfulness and dereification is introduced, how an instructor offers guided assistance for participants to practice it, and how it is modeled.

These two studies offer access to what happens within the social processes of an MBI (Dyer, 2011) and how participants develop a refined understanding of what it means to be mindful as they practice (Mamber and Bassareer, 2015). While the current study does not use a strict activity theory approach for describing the joint projects, it does
similarly focus on what the instructor and participants jointly attend to, framing these as shared practices. Applying this similar approach to an MBI for educators similarly aids in our understanding of what is happening within an MBI and in how the instructor in a program with an implicit approach to transfer relates to aspects of the participants’ careers as educators.

**Perspectives on the Teaching and Learning of Mindfulness from Mindfulness Teachers and Teacher Educators**

While more research is needed to understand the teaching and learning of mindfulness through looking at it in action as it unfolds within an MBI, there is a great deal of professional writings describing it from the perspective of highly experienced instructors and teacher trainers. In this section, I begin by offering the work of McCown et al.’s *Teaching Mindfulness: A Practical Guide for Clinicians and Educators* (2010). I discuss how the teaching of mindfulness is framed and how it relates to the socio-cultural approach in this work. Then, I describe theoretical work to understand how mindfulness is learned with the developmental learning theory of Marx & Marx (2012) with a focus on the role of the mindfulness teacher in that process.

In setting out to capture the complexities of the teaching and learning of mindfulness, McCown et al. (2010) state that they share a social constructionist approach to that of this study, explicitly declaring their belief that:
There is no “true” definition of mindfulness — they are all “working” definitions, shaped by the assumptions, aims, and strategies of those at work in the moment. This is the case inside the professions, say, as the MBIs attempt to define and operationalize mindfulness for research purposes. More important for us, this is the case within each group or dyad; teacher and participants will hold many different “working” definitions throughout their time together, moving from basic shared language to highly nuanced tacit understandings co-constructed in practice and dialog.

(p.62)

As such, they frame the role of the instructor as a steward of the MBI community, creating a co-created space of practice and discovery that emphasizes listening “to the rich, information laden insights and examples provided by program participants and then, in turn, to use as much as possible these participant-generated experiences as a starting point for ‘weaving’ the more didactic material into the structure and fabric of each class” (Santorelli, 2001; as cited in McCown et al., 2010, p. 115). This ‘weaving’ asks of the instructor that they are deeply listening to what the participants share about their lives and experiences, validating those experiences and inviting the participants to jointly attend to aspects of those experiences that deepen the participants’ understanding of mindfulness and how it could relate to their daily lives. The authors emphasize how instruction cannot be scripted, given the need to be responsive and adapt to what participants offer to the community. There is also an emphasis on the mindfulness teacher’s language and non-verbal communication, such as on considering the variety of ways participants may make sense of the teacher’s words. For example, they point to the use of the present participle and definitive articles in guided practice, where for example “Now you will lift
your leg” could be better invited as “When you are ready, lifting the leg” which can foster a sense of freedom and non-identification. However, here too there is the suggestion that this “should not be held too tightly” (p. 121), suggesting that this example is not offering a specific concrete set of rules that instructors need follow in all cases.

McCown et al.’s frame for the teaching of mindfulness highlights the complexities of teaching a curriculum that centers around the participants’ experience in a community of practice. It takes a clear social constructivist perspective that privileges interactions as the place where learning takes place. This current study offers a description of what that might look like and how one experienced teacher approached it in one implementation of an MBI for educators.

Also of relevance to this study is Marx and Marx’s (2012) three-stage process for how mindfulness is developed. The purpose of their work was within the context of how the self is perceived and referred to within a cognitive analytic therapy (CAT) and within Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT). They problematize conceptions of therapy as being a process of modeling and constructing through dialogue a “more reflective, independent, subordinate and complex ‘I’” that is socially experienced by the participant and internalized (Ryle and Kerr, 2002, as cited in Marx and Marx, 2012). The relevance to this study however is how they offer a three-stage process of an internal observer that is developed in MBCT that moves from being experienced as somewhat separate from the observed aspects of experience to an experience that has less of a
marked separation and, ultimately, may move to a place where the observer aspect completely disappears and the participant is simply attending to experience without an internal conversation.

In this first stage, they posit that participants experience a sense of distance between this observing aspect of themselves and other aspects of themselves as they begin to practice Segal, Williams, and Teasdale’s concept of “decentering” (2002, as cited on p. 500), or what Lutz, Jha, Dunne, and Saron (2015) referred to as dereification. This dereification process “reflects the degree to which thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are phenomenally interpreted as mental processes rather than as accurate depictions of reality” (Lutz et al., 2015, p. 11) and Marx and Marx’s framing of this way of relating aligns with Roeser’s argument that this is often experienced as the kind of “I-me” relationship of self that William James suggested (1890 as cited in Roeser et al., 2006), a relationship where the “I” is experienced as a stable and separate observer self that is not, in actuality, separate.

The second stage then is the direct experience of this non-separation. Marx and Marx cite Kabat-Zinn here who suggests the second stage is:

an experience of all separation between subject and object evaporating. There is knowing without a nowhere, seeing without a seer, thinking without a thinker, more like impersonal phenomena merely unfolding in awareness… The ‘I’ centeredness falls away, there is no longer a center or periphery to awareness. There is simply knowing, seeing, feeling, sensing, thinking, feeling. (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 168-9 as cited in Marx & Marx, 2012, p. 501)
Here, Marx and Marx suggest that the distinction between the observer and the observed becomes more subtle as the sense of the “I” observer is experienced as less solid and possessing less intentionality in the observing. This stage is marked by less internal speech that guides the observation and more of an experience that observation is occurring or arising without the intentionality of the first stage. Returning the Tharp and Gallimore’s learning model, this may be consistent with the fossilization of mindfulness practices that no longer include internalized self-assistance.

Finally then, Marx and Marx argue that there is a third stage in which there is a non-dual awareness that experiences no separation, only the “discovering and abiding in the deep, silent source from which all experience arises” (Welwood, 2002, p. 111, as cited in Marx and Marx, 2012, p. 501). Here, all observing would drop away, leaving only the arising and passing of experience.

The authors suggest that this first stage is a worthy goal for eight-week or similar mindfulness trainings and that the experience can be life-changing if participants only have experiences of this first stage of experiencing dereification. Marx and Marx described the learning of mindfulness as a process of internalizing from the instructor the “conceptual understandings” and “quality of the open and available presence of the [instructor]” (p.504), to which I would only add that this “quality” or qualities can also be at times visible in speech and may at least in part be identifiable as intentional practices that are then internalized by participants in a mindfulness training.
Marx and Marx’s three-stage model is included to highlight three key points in the literature and field. First, it points to a tension in mindfulness trainings generally between moments of mindfully observing experience—following the verbal guidance of an instructor or using internal self-talk to label that experience—and moments where this language drops away to a more direct experiencing. Marx and Marx suggest the first stage is itself a worthy goal for mindfulness trainings, a position shared by Margaret Cullen (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020); however, this study’s sociocultural model may contribute to our understanding of how a learner moves from this first stage towards later stages.

Secondly, Marx and Marx illustrate that the language and practices around an “observer self” or the one who is doing the practices of being, are often understood as a way of moving along this continuum from experiencing a somewhat separate observer self that is witnessing the experience to a more immediate experiencing of what is arising without description or the sense of witnessing. The sociocultural approach to learning of this study would frame this to be a natural outcome of the internalization and fossilization of mindfulness practices. From this perspective, at first, mindfulness is practiced with the guided assistance of an instructor, then internalized as self-talk between an observer aspect of self and an experiential self, and then fossilized as habits of the mind (Roeser et al., 2012, 2016).

Thirdly, this stage model highlights a primary outcome of mindfulness trainings
to create experiences of dereification or decentering. Dereification can be understood as the process of cultivating non-identification with thoughts that arise and the perezhivanie of one’s lived experience. It is an experiential movement from “I am sad” to “I am experiencing sadness” or “there is sadness here now”. This dereified position of “there is sadness here now” recognizes the experience of sadness as authentically taking place—as opposed to attempting to take a counter position of denial such as “I am not sad”. It is an acceptance of the experience of sadness without identifying it as permanent or inherent to a permanent self. Working from Marx and Marx stage theory then, the learning of mindfulness can in part be understood as an approach to dereification through the use of an observer providing self-talk and an attention to present moment experience without reifying that experience through judgment and interpretation.

The Construct and Role of (Self)-Compassion

When considering the ways that mindfulness comes to be constructed within a mindfulness training, it is also important to discuss the concept of compassion for others and one’s self. Gilbert defines compassion as “a deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it” (Gilbert, 2010, p. 13; as cited in Jennings, 2018, p. 131) and Neff operationalized self-compassion as being comprised of kindness (being “supportive and understanding towards ourselves” (Neff & Dahm, 2015, p. 5)), common humanity (recognizing that we, just like everyone else “fails, makes mistakes,
and gets it wrong sometimes” (p.5)), and mindfulness.

In the Buddhist tradition, self-compassion is considered part of the concept of compassion and mindfulness and compassion are considered to be like the two wings of a bird (Krauss & Sears, 2009; as cited in Neff, 2012). This image of the bird may speak to the paradox of how these two constructs are both part of the same whole and separate. Trying to consider the two as entirely separate constructs or arguing a case that one is more beneficial than another would be like, as Neff puts it, “like trying to argue whether food is better than water” (Neff, K & Chen, 2012, p. 28) and returning to the idea that mindfulness is often an umbrella term used by a wide community of mindfulness practice, self-compassion and compassion for others are often considered to fall under that umbrella. However, research supports that mindfulness-based curricular programs designed specifically around practices of compassion for oneself and others may have different outcomes from general mindfulness programs like MBSR.

For example, the Mindful Self-Compassion program (MSC; Neff & Germer, 2012) was modeled on MBSR but is more targeted towards compassion-based practices such as loving-kindness meditation (Metta) practices, interpersonal practices designed to cultivate common humanity, and home practices such as writing a compassionate letter to oneself (Neff & Dahm, 2015). In comparison with a waitlist control, participants in this program demonstrated increased self-compassion levels, mindfulness, and decreases in depression, anxiety, stress, and emotional avoidance (p.18). While research is needed
that directly compares MSC to MBSR or other mindfulness programs, Neff argues that a review of the literature suggests that MSC has a greater impact on self-compassion than MBSR; and the trait of self-compassion, as measured by the SCS, was a better predictor of depression, happiness, and life satisfaction (in preparation; as cited in Neff & Dahm, 2015). Again, more research is need here, but it does suggest that there is value in exploring the impacts of explicit curricular programming around self-compassion training as opposed to more embedded approaches within mindfulness programs. The intended curriculum of MBEB, the context of this study, seeks to include self-compassion more explicitly in comparison to MBSR, as I will discuss in more detail later in the discussion of the intended curriculum of the program.

In the next section, I move to the state of research on mindfulness training for teachers in order to provide the context for this study.

**Research on Mindfulness Training for Teachers**

As introduced in chapter one, a majority of research on mindfulness for teachers to date has understandably concentrated on the value of mindfulness training as a method of impacting teacher well-being and their social and emotional skills. In addition, there is significant research indicating that these teacher outcomes in turn have effects on teacher-student relationships, classroom dynamics, and the development of student social and emotional learning. Both the Prosocial Classroom model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009)
and the Habits of Mind model (Roeser et al., 2012) posit that mindfulness training’s impact on emotional regulation, attentional regulation and compassion can translate to these changes in the classroom leading to improved student outcomes such as classroom engagement, improved student motivation, and ultimately academic outcomes. Although more work is needed to confirm, the research to date, predominantly through experimental designs and self-report measures, supports that mindfulness trainings positively affects teacher stress, emotional regulation, and teacher self-compassion (Emerson et al., 2017).

Meta-analysis also suggests that the great deal of diversity in the intended curricula of mindfulness trainings may strongly impact the differences between findings on different programs. While many implementations studied have been based on close adaptations of MBSR (e.g. Beshai et al., 2016; Flook et al., 2013; Frank et al., 2016; Gold et al., 2010, Poulin et al., 2008), others have developed curricula based more heavily on mindful movement (e.g. Community Approach to Learning Mindfully, CALM, Harris et al., 2016) or sought to adapt programs developed for younger populations up to preservice teachers (Kerr et al., 2017). In addition, still others have worked to integrate mindfulness training into experiential learning related to the neuroscience of learning (Ergas et al., 2018) or one-on-one models of mindfulness instruction (Singh et al., 2013). This diversity suggests that future studies need to explicitly focus on the curricula of these programs in order to better theorize the mechanism of change involved. Describing
the curricular choices of these programs and investigating the pedagogy of how they are being taught, may allow for a deeper understanding of what elements are most important and what aspects of the teacher’s pedagogy are critical to the stewardship of the group (McCown et al., 2010).

More recently, as introduced in the beginning of chapter 1, there has been work to bridge these differences and bring the models of mindfulness for teachers together by describing what can be observed of a teacher who exhibits the fourth domain of teacher knowledge (Taylor, 2016; Taylor et al., 2019), and are mindful and compassionate in the classroom. Based on a definition of what the fourth domain entails, with the teacher being “calm in body, clear in mind, kind in heart”, this research agenda is developing methods for understanding and measuring the inner work and visible embodied manifestations that constitute these social and emotional skills of teaching (see Colaianne et al., 2020; Hulburt et al., 2020; Rickert, 2016; Rickert, Skinner, & Roeser, 2019; Taylor, 2016). Rickert et al. (2020) developed a multidimensional and multi-informant measure which seeks to triangulate data from teacher self-report measures with student reports and observation data using the CLASS-S (Pianta & Hamre, 2009) in order to measure teacher mindfulness in the classroom using this calm, clear, kind framing.

A better understanding of what is taught in MBIs for educators can inform our understanding of the role of these programs in developing this domain of being mindfulness and compassionate and this study will posit that this could occur in two
ways. Firstly, through the focus of the program to learn mindfulness and transferring these mindfulness practices to one’s teaching practices. And secondly, by having the teacher participants learn alongside a mindfulness teacher whose own teaching can serve as a model for what mindful teaching looks like (albeit within a different subject area and learning context). While this study does not include data to support that this transfer to classroom practice took place, it does describe Margaret Cullen’s methods of assisting learners and how she and the program approach this issue of transfer.

An essential question of the purpose and practices of a mindfulness as professional development for teachers is how to balance the purposes of teaching mindfulness for the well-being of professionals in a stressful job and teaching mindfulness in conjunction with what may be considered “mindful teaching practices” in order to improve educational outcomes. If seen as a spectrum of implicit transfer to explicit transfer, the MBSR (e.g. Gold et al. 2010), WBWE (e.g. Poulin et al., 2011), CALM (e.g. Harris et al., 2016), and MBEB programs seem to be primarily built on an implicit theoretical model in which the cultivation of mindfulness itself is the primary objective and the impacts this would have on student-teacher interactions, classroom climate, and reflective teaching practices are either considered a natural extension of developing mindfulness or are seen as a secondary benefit with teacher wellness being of primary value in and of itself—such as was stated outright in the Gold et al. study (2010) and in regard to MBEB (Roeser, 2016). On the other hand, curricula such as those in
CARE (e.g. Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) and the Ergas Brain Plasticity and Human Development training (Ergas et al., 2018) have a more explicit approach of transfer to teaching practices with training elements like the roleplays of CARE and the “teacher-relevant curricular content based on brain theory” in Ergas’ course (2018).

There is evidence of transfer to classroom outcomes with several of these trainings from both ends of the spectrum. For example, both CARE and MBEB have shown positive effects on the CLASS classroom observation measure (Jennings et al., 2017; Braun et al., 2020) and research on the MBEB training suggested teachers related mindfulness to their classroom and that it influenced their teaching practices such as through their response to challenging students (Taylor et al. 2015). This said, more research is needed into the “black box” (Roeser 2016) of the teaching and learning of mindfulness to understand the practices of mindfulness and how these, as well as the mindful teaching approach of the instructor, may transfer to participant’s lives and classrooms. This study offers access to the reasoning and approach to transfer within a more implicit model of transfer as well as access to aspects of what mindful teaching looks like in the context of a mindfulness program. Research to date on transfer of MBEB indicates signs of transfer in the language of participants’ self report (Roeser, 2016; Taylor, 2016). This current study can inform future work to trace the practices of the program (both mindfulness practices and teaching practices) as well as how these practices are described in order to better understand what transfers and how best to
Research on MBEB and the Implementation Context for the Current Study

The Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB) was created in 2009 by Margaret Cullen in collaboration with Linda Wallace and Betsy Hedberg and research on the effects of the program, led by Dr. Robert Roeser, began at the same time. The research on the effects of the MBEB program was positioned in the Habits of Mind conceptual framework (Roeser et al., 2012) that posits mindfulness training can improve educators’ emotional and attentional self-regulation as well as self-compassion and that this in turn could improve teacher-student relationships and classroom climate by supporting the development of the educators’ social and emotional skills and dispositions.
This framework framed mindfulness as learning a set of mindfulness, self-compassion, and emotional regulation skills that then have teacher well-being outcomes as well as classroom outcomes related to the develop of fourth domain knowledge.

From this perspective, teaching involves “high levels of uncertainty, emotion, and attention to others” and is “saturated with interactions with students, colleagues, administrators and parents—interactions that require significant attentional and emotional resources”. In addition, teaching often requires the ability to respond to problems “on the fly” (Roeser et al., 2012, p.168). The complexity of this causes high levels of stress and
teachers who have not developed skills to “manage relevant resources and demands effectively, [can experience] problems that undermine teacher well-being and instructional practice” (p.168). Mindfulness then, with its associated research showing stress reduction and positive impacts on emotional regulation, prosocial disposition, and general health, can fill a gap in teacher professional development.

There have been several randomized controlled trials of the program to support this conceptual framework (Benn et al., 2012; Crain et al., 2016; Roeser et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2016; Taylor, 2016) and finding suggest that in addition to teachers finding the program to be feasible and helpful (Roeser et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2015), they also reported greater mindfulness as defined by the FFMQ (e.g. Roeser et al., 2013), self-compassion as defined by a modified version of the SCS (Neff, 2003; Roeser et al., 2013), and decreased occupational stress and burnout through the use of a developed measure and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 2001; Roeser et al., 2013). They also reported less rumination about work while at home and improved sleep (Crain et al., 2017) as well as decreased levels of depression and anxiety (Roeser et al., 2013).

Most recently, research on the effects of the MBEB program has indicated improvement in teachers’ efficacy to forgive colleagues and students and reported tendency to forgive.

As mentioned previously, the current study is a continuation of the research agenda associated with an MBEB implementation conducted in the Western US in 2012. Sixteen public school teachers in Northern California participated in the 8-week, 35-hour
version of MBEB and, in addition to pre/post/followup surveys and interviews, HD recordings were made of the training sessions. The purpose of this uncontrolled study was focused on documenting the instructor’s teaching in addition to conducting participant surveys and interviews in order to better understand how mindfulness is taught and learned within a mindfulness training and how this may transfer to classroom practices.

Consistent with previous randomized controlled studies of MBEB (Benn et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 2013), pre-/post-measures on the self-report FFMQ and SCS indicated significant effects of the program on all five factors of mindfulness (Labeling experience, Awareness of Mental Life, Awareness of Behavior, Non-judgement, and Non-Reactivity) as well as self-compassion at post-program. These effects with the current implementation participants were also seen at follow-up (except self-compassion which was not assessed at follow-up). Cynthia Taylor’s dissertation work (2016) included a case study of three teachers who attended this implementation. Using the Calm, Clear, Kind Framework (CCK), the teachers were given a survey measure that assessed the teachers’ perceptions about their own behavior in the classroom and how calm, clear, and kind they felt they are. Then, there were also one-on-one interviews with each teacher about their embodiment of these aspects as well as observational measures using the CLASS system (LaParo and Pianta, 2003) to score videotaped classes and language analysis to identify language thought to be associated with calm, clear, and kind
or their associated opposites of reactive, distracted, or coercive. All three teachers self-reported increases in classroom mindful behaviors; however, this was not particularly visible in the language analysis or CLASS scores, possibly indicating that more work is needed in developing methods of measuring CCK in the classroom such as now is being developed (Rickert et al., 2019; Colaianne et al., 2020).

In terms of the line of research on this implementation related to the intended and taught curricula, initial analysis of the curriculum and the instructor’s language use revealed several aspects of Cullen’s teaching that are further explored in this present study. Firstly, the study broke down the time spent in different activities, finding that there was an emphasis within the intended curriculum on experiential learning through the “whole group discussion” activities and the “guided practice” activities and that this also suggests an emphasis on the instructor and participants jointly attending to shared practices of mindfulness. Roeser (2012) also found that 65% of the instructor’s language related to “invitations to practice mindfulness skills” defined using the FFMQ facets of acting with awareness, noting and labeling of experience, awareness of mental states, non-judgment of experience, and non-reactivity to experiences as well as “invitations to practice self-compassion”. This supports the conception of mindfulness training as being a temporary community of practice in which the instructor as a more capable other, offers guided assistance for the participants to engage in the practices of what constitutes mindfulness within that community. This study also found evidence on the kinds of
guided assistance offered including the scaffolding of silence during guided formal
meditation practices wherein the instructor increased the length of time the participants
were in silence over the course of the sessions, reducing her external cues and increasing
the participants’ independent practice. The guided assistance also included “autonomy-
supportive and inquiry-focused” language, suggesting an emphasis on the participants’
own self-inquiry and personal experience as opposed to more didactic approaches to
teaching.

The current study is intended to build upon this previous sociocultural analysis of
the MBEB implementation by working across the types of activities to describe the types
of curricular and pedagogical choices that were made in the creation of the intended
curriculum and in the taught curriculum as well as to explore the reasoning and beliefs
behind these choices as described in the instructor’s writings as well as in a mid-analysis
interview.

The research questions of this current study were:

**RQ1: What are the curricular activities of the program and how is the time spent?**

This first question is intended to most broadly describe the curriculum of the
MBEB program and whether the structure of the program aligns with a sociocultural
view of learning. Does the design of the curriculum create opportunities for this
temporary community to practice mindfulness and for the instructor to offer assistance
towards that practice?
RQ2: What are the practices that constitute mindfulness as presented by an instructor within a mindfulness-based program for teachers?

From a sociocultural perspective, the definition of mindfulness as a single, a priori construct may be set aside and mindfulness can instead be viewed as a constructed set of practices and ideas within a community of practice. In the case of a mindfulness program, the participants come with some ideas of what it means and then an instructor (more capable other) helps shape the construct (or constructs) with them through the offering of practices and through discussion of the practices’ meaning and purpose.

The purpose of this question is not to define mindfulness globally but rather to understand how the instructor defines it and how it is being presented within the context of this specific and temporary community of practice. This is based on the idea that the educator-participants come to understand what mindfulness is through the practices and meanings shared within the group and primarily introduced by the instructor. The practices that the instructor shares with them may be both explicitly identified as formal mindfulness practices (e.g. Body Scan, Mindful Movement, Seated Meditation) and be embedded practices across these activities and the discussions that follow them.
**RQ3:** What are the ways that a mindfulness instructor scaffolds learning experiences and offers guided assistance and modeling as a more capable other to the teacher participants?

Tharp and Gallimore (1988) offer the term guided assistance to include a range of methods used by educators to expand learners’ zone of proximal development and help them to independently participate in the community’s practices such as scaffolding, encouragement, directing attention, and sequencing (1989, p. 10). If this model of learning is appropriate for understanding how mindfulness is taught, then the guided assistance of the instructor should be visible in her language and actions.

The purpose of this question is to describe the kinds of choices made by an experienced mindfulness teacher at the intended and taught curricular levels to develop the participants’ understanding of the practices and ability to practice independently in their lives beyond the program.

**RQ4:** How is transfer of mindfulness practices to the teachers’ teaching practices designed and scaffolded by the instructor throughout an implicit approach to mindfulness training for educators?

Cullen, the instructor and developer of the MBEB program, argues that in addition to the potential benefits of creating mindfulness training tailored to specific groups like “people with depression, the military” or teachers, something can be lost in that mindfulness should emphasizes first that they are not there as “broken”, but rather whole people gaining access “to that part of us which is never broken” (Cullen, 2011).
For the first session of the training, the MBEB teaching manual recommends:

Begin by emphasizing that this course is probably unlike any other that participants have experienced. Invite them to approach this course as a unique opportunity to experience and learn something just for themselves. Typically teachers take classes that have a focus on the curriculum, the students, or achievement. They are used to viewing course material from the perspective of how it will directly impact their students. While this is a laudable goal and is appropriate for most teacher workshops and classes, this course will focus instead on the teacher and how the material and practices can impact teachers’ own lives.  

(Impact Foundation, 2009)

This represents a particular and important choice within the MBEB program that impacts the intended and taught curricula between it being a program for teachers as teachers and for teachers as individuals. Given that this implementation of MBEB was created for a cohort of educators, it is logical to assume that this identity of being educators will impact how this community makes sense of what happens throughout the training as they consider how to integrate this new knowledge into their professional knowledge. This raises the question of how the instructor supports this integration within her curricular and pedagogical choices given the intentionally implicit approach.

This question is not to argue for or against explicit or more instrumental approaches to teaching mindfulness within educational contexts but rather to describe how it is approached in this implementation of MBEB in which the integration of new fourth domain knowledge into the teacher participants’ professional knowledge is a process led by the professionals themselves.
Summary

The MBEB program was developed out of a tradition that begins with a conception of mindfulness with roots in Buddhism that was translated into a secular context and then adapted for a target population of educators. It draws heavily on the MBSR program, but also includes a focus on compassion and mindfully relating to emotional experience. The research to date on MBIs for educators generally and MBEB specifically has primarily focused on the outcomes these programs can have on teacher well-being and classroom outcomes. MBEB has been shown to have positive effects on these outcomes; however, more research is needed on the teaching and learning within the program in order to better understand how these outcomes are achieved and the domains of teacher knowledge of a mindfulness teacher. While the literature on this subject by practitioners and mindfulness teacher educators offers conceptualizations of how mindfulness teachers act as stewards that shape social processes by which mindfulness is learned, research on what this looks like in action can support these conceptualizations and potentially refine them. This case study builds upon previous work in this area (e.g. Roeser, 2016; Dyer, 2011; Mamber & Bassarear, 2015) by offering a description of the curricular and pedagogical choices of MBEB’s developer and experienced instructor. This description offers access to how practices of mindfulness are introduced and developed through the social processes of MBEB and how an instructor supports the participants’ internalization of these practices.
CHAPTER 4

METHOD

As laid out in the literature review (Chapter 3), understanding the choices made in the design and implementation of mindfulness programs for educators can inform innovation in mindfulness teaching practices in the field generally and in the programs tailored to specific populations like educators. The purpose of this chapter is to articulate the methodology of this qualitative study that was designed to answer the following research questions, that were refined through a process of “focusing exercises” (Angelillo, Rogoff & Chavajoy, 2007) and to describe the specific methods of this study. The research questions were:

1) What are the curricular activities of the program and how is the time spent?

2) What are the practices that come to constitute mindfulness as introduced and developed within a mindfulness-based program for teachers?

3) What are the ways that a mindfulness instructor scaffolds learning experiences and offers guided assistance as a more capable other to the teacher participants?

4) How is transfer of mindfulness practices to the teachers’ teaching practices designed and scaffolded by the instructor throughout an implicit approach to mindfulness training for educators?
Rationale for Method and Design

This study takes a case study approach in order to give access to the decisions Margaret Cullen made in the design and implementation of an implementation of the MBEB program for educators. Describing the curricular and pedagogical choices made in this program shows how a highly experienced mindfulness teacher stewards (McCown et al., 2010) the group of educators into practices of mindfulness. Case study research can draw a kind of “petite generalizations” that can inform and modify work to create “grand generalizations” (Stakes, 1995, p. 7). The findings of this case informed the development of a theoretical framework for a sociocultural model of the teaching and learning of mindfulness in an MBI and provides a four foundational approach to mindfulness pedagogy with the addition of focus on mindfully relating to emotions.

Few studies to date have examined processes of teaching and learning within MBIs for teachers; much work has focused instead on documenting program impacts. This important work has helped to measure the impacts these programs and mindfulness generally can have on educator well-being as well as classroom outcomes. That said, qualitative and interpretivist research that seeks to focus on “the person in context” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 33) and the socially constructed experience as a focus of study is also needed in order to better understand how those effects are achieved and refine our understanding of what is happening inside these programs. This is especially valuable as the field considers approaches beyond intervention models to include
mindfulness in more systemic, school-wide cultural reform (i.e. Meyers & Van Gronigen, 2019). Understanding the choices made in the design and implementation of mindfulness programs for educators can inform innovation in mindfulness teaching practices in the field generally and in the programs tailored to specific populations like educators.

Case study methods are, of course, not without their limitations. The contribution of case study petite generalizations to wider theoretical frameworks like those herein, is moderated by the researcher’s transparency in describing the methods and data as well the researcher’s efforts to triangulate the case generalizations with the other relevant perspectives such as the participants of the case.

In terms of transparency, I describe here the bounds of the case and unit of analysis, the methods used, the limitations of the data and study, as well as my own relationship to the subject in order to “indicate what sort of a slant on things can be expected of [me]” (Stake, 1995, p. 111). Also, within the findings of the study, I have sought to provide “a substantial body of uncontestable description” in order to provide “readers with good raw material for their own generalizing” (p.102).

To validate my interpretations, I have also sought to include methods aimed at triangulating my interpretations, drawing on Cullen’s published writing and the manual for the program, as well as through “member checking” (Stakes, 1995, p. 115) in a mid-analysis interview with the instructor/program designer whose taught curriculum is the focus of this study.
Context of the Study

The video data used in this study was gathered during a mixed method, uncontrolled feasibility study of the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance program for educators. The study was conducted in a large urban school district in the western United States and teachers were recruited from K-12 schools in the district. Sixteen teachers volunteered to participate in an 11-session, 8-week, version of the program which included weekly 2.5 hour after-work session and 2 full-day Saturday retreats. As a part of the initial study, participants completed online surveys at baseline, post-program, and three-month follow-up to measure the outcomes of the program. Teachers received the training free of charge and were paid $50 as a thank you for their time completing the post-program surveys. Three participants also volunteered to give a one-hour interview and have their classrooms video-recorded before and after the program and paid an additional $50 per time period for their time. The video recordings of the session as well as the audio recordings of the home practice activities were transcribed in full.

As reviewed in Chapter 3, the findings on the impacts of this implementation made it a good fit for this case study of the instructor’s curricular and pedagogical choices as the outcomes were in line with the positive outcomes of previous successful implementations.
Focal Participant for this Study

This study focuses on the teaching of the instructor, Margaret Cullen, how she structured the curricular activities in the program, and her pedagogical approach within this implementation of MBEB. Cullen is a licensed marriage and family therapist and a certified MBSR instructor and was one of the first ten instructors to be certified by the Center for Mindfulness in Worchester, MA (Roeser, 2016). For over twenty years, she has been developing and teaching mindfulness programs in a variety of settings including in cancer support groups and obesity support groups. She has over a decade of experience contributing to curricula for researched programs including Cultivating Emotional Balance (CEB) which evolved into the program studied here which is herein referred to as MBEB, but which also has be referred to as the Stress Management and Resiliency Training (SMART) program. Cullen also helped to develop the Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT) program with the Center for Compassion at Stanford University. In addition to developing the manualized MBEB program, Cullen has developed a workbook version of the program (Cullen & Brito, 2015) and has authored articles and chapters on the purpose, teaching, and history of mindfulness and MBEB specifically (Cullen, 2019; 2013, 2011).
Unit of Analysis and the Bounds of the Case

The unit of analysis for this study is the intended and taught curricula offered by the designer and experienced teacher of the MBEB program. It is intended to focus on what the practices of mindfulness within a training come to be by describing the practices of a training as they are introduced and practiced in this implementation. To do this, it included an analysis not only of the easily identifiable gross level categories of planned activities (i.e. formal practices of body scans and silent meditation or assigned “home” practices) but also across these activities and the whole group discussion periods. These latter practices are those that come into being as they are introduced by Cullen and in the kinds of assistance she offers to participants.

Case studies are designed to be bounded systems. The bounds of the case highlight the bounds of the petite generalizations and limitations of any theoretical generalization made from them. In this case, the bounds include the curricular choices made in the creation of the intended curriculum and the pedagogical choices of one mindfulness instructor (Cullen) in a single implementation of the MBEB program delivered to educator participants in 2012.

The focus on the curricular and pedagogical choices is intended to highlight the kinds of choices that can be made in programming design and implementation but does not make claims about the learned curriculum of the participants or whether the choices herein describe the only approach that should be taken. Rather, the intention is to
describe how one skilled mindfulness teacher approached teaching in an implementation that showed positive outcomes. The decision to focus on the choices of the instructor was made in order to focus on what is within the control of the designer of the intended curriculum and the taught curriculum of the instructor. The fact that Cullen is both the designer and instructor in this case makes this case particularly valuable.

A second aspect of the bounds of this case is that it is a single implementation of MBEB, video recorded in 2012. This bound of the case is significant in that this case represents the instructor’s choices at that time. So, while Cullen’s choices may represent the kinds of choices made within the design and implementation of a mindfulness program generally, this description should not be understood to be the choices she makes now or in other implementations. As with any highly skilled teacher, Cullen’s teaching is very likely to have continued to evolve since this implementation.

Methods of Data Collection

In order to describe the practices, guided assistance, modeling, and scaffolding of transfer, (the four main variables in my analysis in this case study), I coded the video recordings of all the session by chunking the sessions into curricular activities and then coding for related themes. I then sought to triangulated these identified themes with Cullen et al.’s professional writings on the program curriculum (Cullen & Pons, 2015; Impact Foundation, 2009) and the pedagogy of the program (Cullen, 2011; Cullen et al.,
(2019) as well as through a semi-structured interview with Cullen. What follows is a description of each of these data sources.

**Video Recordings of the Sessions**

The video data was originally collected in 2012 as part of the uncontrolled pilot study of an 11-session, 35 contact hour version of MBEB as described in chapter 3. Two cameras were used in the filming of the implementation, a stationary camera directed towards the instructor and a roving camera that could capture the participants primarily when they spoke. The video data of the guided activities and whole group discussion activities were then transcribed.

**Professional writings on the MBEB and Cullen’s Pedagogy**

MBEB for educators is a manualized program (Impact Foundation, 2009). The manual offers instructors guidelines for curricular activities in each session, rationale for these choices, and pedagogical guidelines for how to teach these activities. The MBEB program was also adapted into a workbook version (Cullen & Pons, 2015) for a general audience (not strictly educators). These texts offer access to the structure of the program sessions as well as the reasoning behind these choices. In addition, Cullen has written directly about the development of MBI programs generally and some of the challenges involved (Cullen, 2011) and the development and approach of MBEB specifically.
(Cullen et al., 2019). The focus of this study is on the enactment of the curriculum within
a single implementation and so, these texts were not systematically coded. Instead, they
were used to triangulate the identified themes of practice, assistance, modeling, and
transfer coded in the video data.

As the participant in a case study, Cullen is likely not a typical or representative
case (Seawright et al., 2014) of a mindfulness instructor in that her experience as the
developer of the intended curriculum is not common among instructors. However, as an
case for describing the curricular and pedagogical choices of a highly experienced
mindfulness instructor of a mindfulness program for educators, the coupling of Cullen’s
publications and the video data of her instruction along with the mid-analysis interview
offers greater access to understanding her teaching and the reasoning for her choices. If a
different mindfulness instructor was selected, it would not be fair to assume that their
personal intended curriculum aligns completely with the intended curriculum of the
program designer. However, in this case, we can assume that the program description,
MBEB workbook, and Cullen’s other work fairly represent the intended curriculum and
inform her choices, giving insight into the reasoning for practices introduced and guided
in her taught curriculum.
**Mid-Analysis interview with the Instructor**

After the pedagogical categories were identified and described, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the instructor, Margaret Cullen. A list of the categories was provided to Cullen with illustrative examples and descriptions. Then, questions about these categories were provided to guide the interview. The purpose of this interview was two-fold. First, as an approach to triangulate my interpretations of the data through member checking. During the interview, Cullen offered clarification on the beliefs and reasoning that underpin her curricular and pedagogical choices. Secondly, the interview provided an opportunity to discuss how the instructor sees her pedagogical choices now, years later. In the end, while there was discussion of how her conceptualization of mindfulness instruction has evolved since this implementation, this did not impact the descriptions in this study as they were still consistent with her general approach.

This interview was transcribed and integrated into the analysis when appropriate in order to speak to Cullen’s reasoning for her curricular and pedagogical choices.

**Methods of Analysis**

**Process of Coding Videos for Curricular Activities:**

In order to answer the first research question, “What are the main curricular activities”, NVivo software was used to “chunk” (Bamberger and Schon 1991, as cited in
Jordan & Henderson, 1995) the eleven (11) Mindfulness-based Intervention (MBI) sessions into activity segments. In this context, “curricular activity” is a generic term for a shared social endeavor within a community of practice. It includes practices of that community intended to be practiced beyond the context of a learning experience, but also includes learning activities within a curriculum designed to introduce or support practices but which are not necessarily intended to be practice beyond that context. For example, whole group discussions in which Cullen is stewarding the group in conversation may introduce mindfulness practices or support the participants understanding of those practices but “stewarding discussion practices in an MBI” is not itself a practice the participants are learning to do themselves. These curricular activity chunks were clearly delineated by Cullen’s instructions, which consistently includes transition language indicating the next activity the community will participate in or her use of a bell to signify the end of an activity.

A distinction was also made here between two kinds of guided activities: those intended to be formal mindfulness practices to be used by participants beyond the MBI and those used within the MBI without this intention. Guided formal practice refers specifically to time spent in body scan, seated meditation, mindful movement, and Metta practice that are also included in the home practice assignments. Their inclusion in assigned home practice suggests that these represent forms of formal mindfulness practice intended for the participants to use beyond the program. Whereas, other guided
activities, such as guided visualization activities and the raisin eating activity, are not framed as specific practices to be used beyond the MBI context.

The identified program activities through the MBI sessions were then confirmed against the program manual (Impact Foundation, 2009). Identifying the curricular activities also aided in the thematic coding of pedagogical choices by allowing for identification of the choices made within and across activities (as discussed below). It also provided for an analysis of the total time spent in the identified activity types.

**Thematically Coding of Pedagogical Choices**

A thematic coding approach was used to respond to the last three research questions of: a) What are the practices that come to constitute mindfulness as introduced and developed within a mindfulness-based program for teachers? b) What are the ways that a mindfulness instructor scaffolds learning experiences and offers guided assistance as a more capable other to the teacher participants?, and c) How is transfer of mindfulness practices to the teachers’ teaching practices designed and scaffolded by the instructor throughout an implicit approach to mindfulness training for educators?

This approach began by identifying Cullen’s pedagogical choices in which she offered instruction during guided activities and during the interactions between the instructor and participants that took place during whole group discussion activities.

In all of the guided activities (both formal and otherwise), the participants remain
silent while the instructor offers assistance, making the identification of pedagogical choices clear. Each instance of the instructor speaking was coded separately with one exception. In both the body scan and the mindful movement, instances where Cullen’s speech only included directions for what part of the body participants should attend to or for what movement to perform were not included in the coding. In the body scan activities, this refers to instances where Cullen invited the participants to direct their attention to a specific part of the body without further assistance or elaboration. In the mindful movement activities, this refers to Cullen’s offering of instructions to move a part of the body, again without elaboration.

Cullen’s choices of when to speak and what assistance to offer were key to understanding how mindfulness practices are introduced and supported during these periods. Silent, independent practice also plays an important role in body scan, seated meditation and loving-kindness practice as participants have the opportunity to internalize the assistance offered through self-talk and experience. In recognition of this, silences of five seconds or longer were also coded in order to analyze if and how independent practice was scaffolded throughout the program.

During whole group discussions, pedagogical choices were coded in instructor-participant or participant-instructor turn taking segments. The structure of conversation within the whole group discussions was well-defined and upheld by the community throughout the program. This structure included a guideline of avoiding “cross-talk”
(Introduction, Session 1), meaning that exchanges were initiated by Cullen followed by a comment from a participant or initiated by a participant followed by Cullen’s choice in response. This allowed for a clear delineation of moments where Cullen chose to introduce a concept or question or in which Cullen’s choice was how to respond to a participant’s comment or question. An example of a segment of a whole group discussion from session 5 is offered in Appendix A to illustrate this identification. This example also includes the thematic codes identified and the network categories of these codes.

Thematic networks (Attride-Stirling, 2001) were created by organizing the basic themes into organizing themes falling under global themes. At the global theme level, the pedagogical choice themes were organized under categories of a) developing mindfulness practices and b) forms of assistance offered. In the case of mindfulness practices, the identified basic-level themes supported their clustering under an organizing theme structure that aligned with the four foundations of mindfulness (mindfulness of body, feeling, mind, and phenomena) with an additional organizing theme of mindfulness of emotion.
Under forms of assistance, the basic-level themes aligned under the following organizing themes:

- Invitation to defossilize habitualized thinking
- Invitation to non-judgmental curiosity
- Invitation to apply right effort
- Validating and Normalizing participant experience
- Labeling and celebrating “a-ha” moments of insight
- Invitation to accept the conditions of life
- Compassion & framing habitualized patterns as the tragic expressions of unmet needs
  - Invitation to practice self-compassion
  - Invitation to practice compassion for others

A significant number of coded choices were specifically related to relating to the suffering of one’s self or others and did not clearly fall under practices of mindfulness. These themes were coded under two organizational themes of a) compassion for one’s self and b) compassion for the suffering of others.

Finally, in response to the fourth research question, “How is transfer of mindfulness practices to the teachers’ teaching practices designed and scaffolded by the instructor throughout an implicit approach to mindfulness training for educators?”, all choices were also coded for instances where the participants’ role as educators was directly discussed. In addition to being generally coded for practices of mindfulness, or forms of assistance, these instances were also coded for how Cullen responded specifically to topics related to the participants’ professional roles as teachers. Given the stance that MBEB takes a more implicit approach to transfer, these instances were coded
for who initiated them (Cullen or a participant). They were also coded for Cullen approach to responding to school-related topic. Two organizing themes emerged of a) generalizing and b) offering advice for classroom practice.

Based on Attride-Stirling’s approach to thematic coding (2001), visualizations of these thematic networks were created and included as Appendix B. These networks show the relationship between the basic, organizing, and global themes as well as the number of coded instances.

**Focusing Exercises**

Throughout the coding and development of organizing and global themes, I relied on the approach of coding and analyzing video data of social phenomena advocated by Angelillo, Rogoff & Chavajoy (2007) which incorporates “focusing exercises” to refine the research questions towards “specific questions that are of most immediate relevance to the broader research question and to articulate the corresponding video evidence that would be required to address them”. I began with the general question of identifying the curricular activities and pedagogical choices made in each category of activity (e.g. whole group discussions, seated meditation activities, mindful movement activities) and then I sought to identify organizing themes of these choices that seemed fair within specific activity chunks separately before comparing the coding themes across activities. Ultimately, I was interested in cross-activity choices that constitute the instructor’s
approach to teaching mindfulness; however, just as I did not want to start with a priori categories from previous definitions of mindfulness that might “impose a meaning” and “twist what was going on” (Angelillo et al., 2007), I did not want to force the fit of the practices of one activity onto another. Ultimately though, after comparing the basic codes within separate activities, the organizing and global themes did resolve at a cross-activity level.

**Identifying and Transcribing Illustrative Examples**

Throughout, I conducted an analysis of the frequency of basic themes and include these counts throughout in order to “provide confirming support for the strongest patterns...and provide a cut-off for eliminating discussion of marginal patterns” (Angelillo et al., 2007, p. 197). However, it should also be noted that my approach to identifying the salient basic and organizational themes is interpretivistic (Abma & Stake, 2014; Schwandt, 1999) and so, rather than relying exclusively on frequency, I here sought to provide enough information for an audience to make their own interpretations as well. Towards this end, I selected and include here illustrative examples in the form of descriptive transcripts that include participant comments when relevant to show the context of Cullen’s pedagogical choices in response. I endeavor to provide the reader with enough access to the data to make their own judgments of my interpretations.
**Measuring Periods of Silence**

As a part of the analysis to answer the second research question of: “What are the ways that a mindfulness instructor scaffolds learning experiences and offers guided assistance as a more capable other to the teacher participants?”, the amount of silence in the formal practices of body scan, seated meditation, and metta meditation was also measured and analyzed in order to investigate if independent practice was scaffolded throughout the program. Each curricular activity of these formal practices was coded for any period of silence of 5 seconds or longer. Then, the total amount of time spent in silent opportunity for independent practice was measured against the total amount of time spent in these formal practices for each program session. This produced a percentage of time spent in silence within opportunities for formal practice by session.

**Triangulation of Themes with Publications and the Mid-Analysis Interview**

Throughout the coding and analyzing of the curricular and pedagogical choices made in this implementation, the manual for the MBEB program for educators (Impact Foundation, 2009) as well as the workbook version of MBEB program for a general audience (Cullen & Pons, 2015) were used to confirm the structure of the curricular activities and Cullen’s reasoning for her choices. Cullen’s professional writings about MBI development (Cullen, 2011) and the application of this program for educators (Cullen et al., 2019) were also referenced for this purpose. Where applicable, this are
references throughout the findings as support for the interpretations of the case.

In addition, the 1.5-hour mid-analysis interview was transcribed and integrated for this purpose. As described previously, this semi-structured interview included a review of the identified themes and focused both on their accuracy in depicting Cullen’s pedagogical approach and on her reasoning for this approach. Again, where applicable, this interview is integrated in the findings when it illuminates Cullen’s reasoning or the beliefs behind her choices.

By integrating the published writings of Cullen in the MBEB workbook and her publication on the topic of developing MBEB, conducting a semi-structured interview her, as well as by including illustrative transcript examples, I intended to be honest and forthright about my process which is both deductive in the sense that I began with a sociocultural theory of teaching and learning that is informing my research approach and coding methods, and inductive in the sense that I worked to make sense of what I found after I’d found it (Gillham, 2000)—striving to remain open to recategorization. Exposing this abductive process allows for the reader to determine whether “moderatum generalization” in which “aspects of [situation]s can be seen to be instances of a broader recognizable set of features” (May, 2002, p. 7) is warranted and if the single case of a highly experienced mindfulness teacher “exemplifies a type” (p.11) or, depending on the reader’s methodological perspective, if it offers “an example from which one’s own experience, one’s phronesis, enables one to gather insight or understand a problem”
To the latter, I know that throughout this process of research, I have stumbled upon the kind of “unexpected sparks” Thomas points to in his use of the Samuel Johnson quote “Our brightest blazes of gladness are commonly kindled by unexpected sparks” (1759 as cited in Thomas, 2010, p. 579). These sparks of “inspiration, imagination, and even dream” (p. 579) have, in my experience, often presented themselves when in close proximity to master educators such as the mindfulness instructor researched here and this study was no exception. My highest goal in this work is to draw in myself and any reader to this proximity in order to learn from an experienced instructor and to enter into the complexity that informs the choices Cullen makes in her instruction.

**Researcher Subjectivity**

Because of the nature of this study and its methodological approach, the results may not be generalizable but instead are intended to inform conversation about the types of choices made in developing and implementing mindfulness programs and develop a theoretical model for the teaching and learning of mindfulness. As a mindfulness instructor myself and as an aspiring teacher educator with an interest in integrating mindfulness within the common discourse of education and schooling, I will be direct about my positionality. I have sought to mitigate aspects of it by holding close to the data and through the mid-analysis interview. Also, more generally, I will aim to provide my
reader with enough detail of the process and data (in the form of quantitative analysis of frequency & duration, and in qualitative transcripts and narratives) to allow the reader to judge my assertions and make their own interpretations of their validity.

At times throughout this research process, I was confronted with my own a priori beliefs about what constitutes mindfulness and mindfulness instruction. For example, in analyzing the scaffolding of silence in the seated meditation activity periods, I found that I entered my analysis with an assumption that seated meditation ultimately would lead to extended periods of uninterrupted individual practice that did not bear out in the analysis. This led me to a realization that this was an assumption I had based on my own pedagogical choices and beliefs as a mindfulness instructor and my experience with those who had instructed me. This experience happened early on in my analysis and served to remind me to be humble before the challenge of staying close to the data and to challenge my own interpretations. As a novice researcher, this was a valuable lesson, but it also serves as a call for further research with other case examples to confirm, refine, or discount the findings from this study as they too, at best, can only speak to the choices made by one instructor—albeit one more experienced than myself—in one implementation of one program.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

RQ1: What are the curricular activities of the program and how is the time spent?

The first research question was assessed by chunking the taught curriculum into curricular activities and measuring the time spent in each activity category. Below are the breakdowns of activities given as percentages of the total instructional time throughout the MBEB implementation. What follows then is a description of these curricular activities and an overall description of the curricular approach of the MBEB program.

Figure 5-1: Percentage of time spent in different activities through the MBEB implementation
**Instructor Presentation Activities**

Within the program, presentations led by the instructor represented 18% of the total instructional time. These activity periods are direct instruction and include current theory from Western psychology, including the stress reaction cycle and emotional theory and the refractory period (Ekman 2003), as well as topics also used in MBSR such as the triangle of awareness and the aikido of communication. There were also instructor presentation activities on the topics of forgiveness, kindness and compassion, and working with anger and fear. These activities included slide presentations as well as experiential activities in which the participants role-played interactions. While this category was coded at the curricular activity level, distinct pedagogical choices during Cullen’s presentations (where she is lecturing) were not coded though the whole group discussions following these presentations were.

**Dyadic & Small Group Discussions and “Other” Activities**

Primarily following instructor presentations, dyadic and small-group discussions with guided and specific questions represented 10% of the total time. These discussions were distinct from the whole group discussions both because of the breaking into smaller groups and also because the topics for the discussions were directed by the instructor, largely in response to the topic of the presentation that preceded the discussion. The individual small group discussions were not separately filmed and Cullen did not
participate in any group and therefore, pedagogical choices were not coded.

The “other” category (5%), refers to transition times and logistics conversations such as planning lunch and was not coded for pedagogical choices.

**Whole Group Discussions**

The whole group discussions, representing 37% of the total time, are structured conversations held in a circle of the whole group which maintain a consistent structure of participants speaking and instructor responding. They consistently follow guided activities and begin with an open invitation for participants to respond to their experience of these activities and/or the assigned home practice. This format of guided activity followed by discussion is consistent with the curricular structure of MBSR Inquiry discussions. In session 1, Cullen offers the following for how to approach the discussion activities:

Cullen: … We can practice mindful listening and speaking. It’s hard though. It’s kind of the hardest place actually, because it’s so stimulating, and so much gets provoked in human interaction. What I would suggest when each person speaks is that you give that person your full attention. We won’t do crosstalk ... And if something comes up when someone speaks, just notice that. It provokes a feeling or thought or reaction. Just notice that and then come back. Keep coming back, bringing your attention back to the person that is speaking. And those of you who are sharing, … see if you can keep it close to the bone or close to the heart and just dispense with the story and that’s a lot of what we’ll do with mindfulness anyway is kind of move from the story…

(Introduction, Session 1)

This establishes a norm of participants speaking to their experience or raising
questions and Cullen responding. In terms of Cullen’s pedagogical choices during these activity periods, this consistent format of clear turn taking creates easily marked pedagogical choice segments in which the instructor chooses how to initiate a conversation in these discussion activities or how to respond to individual participant comments.

In total, throughout the whole group discussion activities, there were 177 coded instances of Cullen’s pedagogical choices, 57 initiated by Cullen and 120 initiated by participants where Cullen’s choice is in how she chooses to respond to the comments they offer or questions they ask. Cullen rarely asks questions leading towards a specific answer (7 coded instances) such as the following:

Cullen: Since we’re almost out of time, did you have the experience of wanting to push away the unpleasant…[Cullen pushes her arms outwards]… don’t want. Right? Does that make sense?  
(Whole Group Discussion, Session 4)

Rather, the majority of her initiating questions (33) were to open the floor of the discussion to participants to share their experience, such as after a formal seated meditation in session 5 that was guided towards awareness of the body:

Cullen: So, how are you doing with awareness of the body? How did that go?  
(Whole Group Discussion, Session 5)

As in this example, these open questions are generally directed towards responding to the previous activity or previously assigned home practice, but are open-ended and multiple participants frequently respond after these initiating prompts in
participant-instructor exchanges that are distinct from one another (without cross-talk or participant-participant exchanges).

**Guided Activities**

Guided activities accounted for the 30% of the total instructional time. These activities were led by Cullen and include mindful movement practices, body scans, seated meditation periods, metta (loving-kindness) practices, as well as a mindful eating activity (raisin eating) and visualization activities. As discussed, also included here is a distinction to note time spent in guided formal practice which is restricted to those formal mindfulness practices that participants are invited to use beyond the MBI context: mindful movement, seated meditation, body scan, and metta (loving kindness) meditation. The total guided activities include these formal practices as well as the other guided activities of raisin eating and visualization activities.

There were 33 separate guided activities throughout the training, including 24 guided formal practices. The structure of each of these guided formal practices is discussed below under “Developing Formal Mindfulness Practice”. The other nine guided practices consisted of a raisin eating activity that is commonly used as an introduction to mindfulness in MBSR training (described below as an introductory activity to formal practice), guided visualizations and intention activities, and guided activities intended to have participants recall emotional experiences.
Overall, the breakdown of time spent in these different activities suggests a blend of direct instruction, guided practice, and discussion with an emphasis on guided formal practice and whole group discussion. This curricular approach aligns well with a sociocultural perspective on teaching and learning in that there is a clear emphasis on engaging with the practices and periods of time devoted to discussions about those practices in which the instructor can offer assistance in how to understand or approach them.

**RQ2: What are the practices that come to constitute mindfulness as introduced and developed within a mindfulness-based program for teachers?**

To answer the second question on the practices that come to constitute mindfulness in this MBEB community of practice, it is important to make a distinction between two types of mindfulness practice: a) formal mindfulness practices and b) mindfulness practices that can be engaged during daily life. The formal mindfulness practices are themselves directly practiced as activities in the MBEB program and include body scan, mindful movement, seated meditation, and metta meditation. As practices, these are intended for use beyond the program and also provide scaffolded experiences for the development of mindfulness practices in daily life. Mindfulness practices in daily
life then are developed both within formal practice and as participants apply mindfulness to experiences in the rest of their life and discuss these applications in whole group discussion.

Both of these types of practice are formed by Cullen’s curricular and pedagogical choices. The guided formal practices are themselves curricular activities, but the meanings and actions of these practice come to be formed within the MBEB temporary community of practice based on Cullen’s pedagogical choices in guiding the formal practices and in the whole group discussions that follow them. Similarly, the mindfulness in daily life practices are cultivated in both the scaffolded experiences of formal practice and in whole group discussions. I begin here with a summary of the pedagogical choices Cullen makes organized by curricular activity. Then, I include a description of the opening discussion within session 1 of the program as it introduces to participants these two forms of practice and highlights Cullen’s approach to teaching both. I then continue to describe the first guided activity, a mindful eating activity, as it also serves a key role in introducing both forms.

Coded Pedagogical Choices within Whole Group Discussions and Guided Activities

In all of the guided activities (both formal and otherwise), the participants remain silent while the instructor offers instruction, making the identification of pedagogical choices clear. As described in chapter 4, each instance of the instructor speaking was
coded separately with one exception. In both the body scan and the mindful movement, instances where the instructor’s speech only included directions for what part of the body participants should attend to or for what movement to perform were not included in the coding. In the body scan activities, this refers to instances where Cullen invited the participants to direct their attention to a specific part of the body without further instruction. In the mindful movement activities, this refers to Cullen’s offering of instructions to move a part of the body.

The breakdown of coded pedagogical choice instances by activity were:

- **Whole group discussion**: 177 coded instances
- **Formal Guided Practice Activities**:
  - Body Scan: 73 coded instances
  - Mindful Movement: 39 coded instances
  - Seated Meditation: 75 coded instances
  - Metta Meditation: 19 coded instances
- **Other Guided Activities**:
  - Raising Eating: 10 coded instances
  - Visualization & Intention Activities: 12 coded instances
  - Emotional Recall Activities: 10 coded instances

*The Opening Whole Group Discussion as a Lens for MBEB’s Curricular Approach*

In Session one of the program, Cullen establishes the norms of community of practice and what participants can expect throughout their experience in MBEB. This opening whole group discussion introduces the program’s curricular approach and introduces guided formal practices as both curricular activities of MBEB used to scaffold the learning of mindfulness practices that are useful in their daily lives and as formal
mindfulness practices that participants can engage in beyond the program as they continue to develop as mindfulness practitioners.

Cullen begins by describing MBEB’s MBSR lineage and states that approximately 70% of the curriculum for MBEB comes from MBSR with the other ~30% coming from concepts of western psychology related to emotion theory with the intention to “marry the mindfulness practice with the aspects of life that often create the most challenges, to really working with [emotional] reactivity internally” (Opening discussion, Session 1). She then invites the participants to ask any questions they have in order to access their current understandings and beliefs about what mindfulness is and its application to daily life.

The structure of this discussion follows the format described above in that Cullen opens the floor to any questions and there is a pattern of participant question followed by instructor response throughout. In this specific implementation, there are participant questions that include whether the practice can be secular and non-spiritual and whether mindfulness can be practiced within the busy schedule of a teacher. The intention of this opening conversation generally though is to externalize participant’s preconceptions coming into the program (Impact Foundation, 2009). This allows the instructor to begin to offer assistance towards a shared understanding of the purpose and meaning of mindfulness. In this case, Cullen draws on Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness to offer the following on the secular nature of mindfulness:
Cullen: Yeah, for our purposes here we’re defining mindfulness as a particular way of paying attention, on purpose, intentionally, without judgment. or you might even go so far as to say with kindness. So there’s nothing religious about that or even spiritual about that, although it can be associated with moments that we might consider in that domain. Moments of awe or being in the flow or being connected, you might consider spiritual or you might not. But that’s the working definition.

Participant: Can you repeat that?

Cullen: Yeah. Paying attention on purpose, I should add in the present moment, ok, in the present moment, on purpose, without judgment, or with kindness. Ok, so from our perspective mindfulness can be a practice and we’re going to do a number of formal practices to cultivate it. Body scan, sitting, meditation, mindful movement. Cultivating it formally through intentional practice and then there’s the whole rest of life where there can be moments of mindfulness. In the classroom, taking a shower, eating dinner, driving your car. You can be mindful doing anything and the spirit of mindfulness in these contexts is more really an embodiment. A way of life.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 1)

And to the question of practicing mindfulness within the context of a busy teacher’s life:

Cullen: You were going to say…?

Participant: Well, I think it’s really hard to practice mindfulness as a third grade teacher. I don’t know what it’s like in other grades, but every moment, even if I’m engaged in teaching, there are so many distractions from people walking into the room to kids doing whatever they do. So all day long I am multi-tasking. I am not doing the mindful practice. And then even my breaks are completely unmindful. I have to go to meetings and try to eat while I’m at my meeting or prepping something. So I’ve always wanted to do more mindful practices but I think, and I think it would be beneficial and that’s partly why I’m here, but I also think it’s super hard for me because all day long I’m learning this other way.

Cullen: Right. It is hard, you’re right. It’s especially challenging in the situations that many of you are in work-wise. It’s not impossible though. And I think one way we can start is by widening the definition of mindfulness or maybe unpacking it a
little bit more. One way to think about mindfulness is as a lens of a camera. You can take a beautiful picture with any size aperture on the lens, right? You can be really telephoto or really wide angle. So what we didn’t talk about in the definition I offered was, what are you focusing on when you’re being mindful? Sometimes mindfulness is very wide angle and it includes people coming in and out and it includes the feelings that arise and pass. Kids coming and going. Mindfulness doesn’t need to be a telephoto lens focusing on one dot, right? So hopefully, that will, you know, we’re just starting, hopefully that understanding will grow and the possibility of application for you without having to change the reality of your work life will grow.

(Opening Discussion, Session 1)

In both of these exchanges, there is the introduction of both cultivating mindfulness in formal practice and applying or embodying mindfulness practice in daily life. Conceptions of what mindfulness is that may stem from participant’s previous experiences or beliefs are gently questioned or clarified in how it will be practiced in this MBI context. For example, the manual for the program suggests that clarifications can be offered that “Meditation is not about getting rid of thoughts” and “Meditation is not always pleasant or blissful” (The Impact Foundation, 2009).

At the end of the discussion, Cullen emphasizes the experiential learning focus of the training, offering the following to connect with a cohort of educators:

Cullen: You’ll get much more out of it by doing it than hearing me talk about it. Ok, so I’m sure a lot of you know that the word ‘education’ means to draw out, right? …And this is the intention here is again to draw out from you your inner wisdom, to give you access to the part of you that actually is always relaxed. Isn’t that shocking? There’s a part of you that, if we can figure out how to get in there, that can even relax in the middle of anger, in the middle of a teaching day, it’s possible. You have that potential to notice, to rest in awareness even when you can’t control all the stuff that’s happening outside of yourself. So the practices draw out that which is innate in you just as you draw out innate abilities in your
students, all the time, that’s what you’re doing in the classroom. You’re not just pouring stuff in, you’re drawing out their abilities, their potential.

(Opening Discussion, Session 1)

Here, Cullen sets up the approach towards offering assistance as participants develop their own ‘working’ definitions of mindfulness (McCown et al., p.62) based on their individual and shared experiences of the program. She emphasizes the importance of their own direct experience and “inner wisdom” in this learning process as they develop formal mindfulness practices as well as develop mindfulness practices that can be used at any time to meet any experience.

**Raising Eating Guided Practice**

After the previous opening discussion, the participants are invited into a raisin-eating practice that is also the introductory guided practice commonly used in the MBSR program. The activity itself involves experiencing a single raisin through the senses of touch, sight, smell, and hearing before then bringing intention to the act of tasting it. In the guiding of the activity, Cullen introduces three of the four foundations of mindfulness which will form the structure of mindfulness practices in the program.

As Cullen first invites participants to see and smell the raisin, they are invited to consider the embodied experience of the senses separate from any co-occurring thoughts: “Is there a physical sensation involved in seeing? Can you see without thinking?” “Where does smelling occur actually in your body? Do you know? At the tip of your nostrils?
Inside? All the way up?”. This is an introduction to the aspect of mindfulness practice of differentiating embodied sensory experience (see mindfulness of body below) from mental experience like thoughts (see mindfulness of mind below).

Mindfulness of the mind is also pointed to separately as Cullen invites them to intentionally use their imagination and notice the mind’s ability to do so:

Cullen: So as you look at the raisin and we call on the faculty of the mind, can you think about what it took to create the raisin, what elements of nature were involved. Can you imagine the sun and the rain? Can you imagine all the people that it took to get this raisin into your hand? Those who cultivate it and plowed and packed and boxed and shipped and the guy at the Berkeley Bowl who weighed them for and the checkout person at the Berkeley Bowl. With the mind, as you look at the raisin can you imagine all of the families of all of those people and their kids’ teachers and nurses and pediatricians and cousins and the world of connections that the mind can see through the raisin that can be revealed through the mind just through your own imagination, as you think about this raisin…

(Raisin Eating, Session 1)

While much of the instructions around awareness of the mind in formal practice focuses on nonjudgmentally noting thoughts and allowing them to rise and fall away (discussed further below), this visualization and imagination action is introduced here and frequently engaged during the formal practices of the body scan and metta meditation as a method for attending more closely to aspects of experience such as body sensations, or, put another way, imagination is used to heighten the facilities of the internal observer.

The third foundation of mindfulness, awareness of feeling, is also briefly introduced:
Cullen: Now I’m going to ask you to close your eyes for a moment and move your attention down to your fingertips and feel the raisin between your fingertips. How does it feel? What is feeling like? You may find it pleasant, you may find it unpleasant, you may find it neutral. No valence.  

(Raising Eating, Session 1)

Though brief, this introduces the concept of being mindful of feeling or valence, the noting of whether an experience has a quality or feeling tone of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral which will be developed further through formal practice.

Three of the four foundations of mindfulness for practicing mindfulness to meet any experience in daily life are introduced here and cultivated throughout the program. The four foundations are at the root of how mindfulness is discussed within the program and in the pedagogical approach to scaffolding during guided formal practice (discussed in detail below).

In terms of formal mindfulness practice, this introductory activity also invites the participants into the kind of experiential pacing that characterizes these formal practices. Taking nearly 10 minutes to eat a single raisin is a slow, intentional process and the raisin as an object of attention may offer little in the way of obvious stimulation. The raisin eating familiarizes participants with slowing down and bringing their attention to aspects of low stimulus experience and to cultivate their curiosity around these aspects. Within this community of practice, the structure of silently engaging in guided activities while following the guidance of the instructor is established and the executive control required is experienced for the first time.
From the beginning then, mindfulness practices are introduced as being comprised of both formal practices and mindful practices in daily life. Within this opening guided activity, we can see a four foundations perspective that ultimately formed the organizing categories for mindfulness practices in daily life described in this chapter. Though the four foundations framework is not explicitly delineated for the participants as being the definitive bounds of mindfulness, it provides a useful framework for understanding Cullen’s approach to mindfulness instruction.

What follows next is a description of the formal mindfulness practices introduced and practiced in the MBEB program.

**Developing Formal Mindfulness Practice**

Representing approximately 25% of the total MBEB program time, guided formal practice plays a central role in the structure of each session and in the assigned home practice. As mentioned previously, a distinction here is drawn between guided activities designed for solely for experiential learning during the sessions and guided formal practices that are included both in sessions and at-home practice. Participants are introduced to guided formal practices during the sessions and are then also asked to practice at home through the use of recordings, suggesting that the participants are being invited to continue these formal practices beyond the program. These formal practices include body scans, seated meditation, and loving-kindness (metta) meditations. In
addition, mindful movement is also included in this category of guided formal practice. While mindful movement was not included as a recorded at-home practice, its inclusion in 6 out of 11 sessions in combination with the common availability of mindful movement practices like those in yoga supports its inclusion as a practice that participants are being taught to consider part of formal practice they could continue to practice beyond the program.

These guided formal practices offer modelling and scaffolded opportunities for practicing mindfulness to be used during the program. Participants are also invited to continue these formal practices beyond the program. As scaffolded experience, formal mindfulness practices offer opportunities to focus in on specific aspects of experience in controlled environment with the intention that what is learned can be then applied to the less controllable experiences of the participants’ daily lives.

It also seems important to note that Cullen engages in all of the practices herself and indicates in the MBEB teaching manual that “It is always preferable if the person leading the body scan, or any other meditation, is meditating themselves and allowing the instructions to flow from their own experience and the particulars of the moment, rather than reading a script” (The Impact Foundation, 2009). This embodied approach to instruction is emphasized in the literature on the teaching of mindfulness (e.g. Brandsma, 2017, McCown et al., 2010; Crane et al., 2012) and forefronts the instructor as a more capable other modeling the practice as opposed to an instructor as one who imparts the
knowledge that a learner then demonstrates.

What follows here are descriptions of the specific formal practices developed in the MBEB program as well as identified themes of pedagogical choices made in the individual practices.

**Body Scan**

The body scan is the first formal practice introduced in session 2. It is also practiced in sessions 3, 7, and 11. As home practice, participants are also asked to practice a 15-minute body scan using a guided recording nightly for the weeks between session 2 and session 4. Generally, the body scan asks participants to be in either a seated or lying down position and to follow the guidance of the instructor as they move their attention to different parts of the body, usually starting with the feet and moving upwards through the body.

In addition to pacing the participants’ mental movement through the body, Cullen offers guidance to direct their attention from gross physical experience to more subtle aspects and then further to regions where there is little or no sensation (13 coded instances). For example, in the home practice, she offers the following:

Cullen: Notice the sensation of touch, pressure, contact. Perhaps feeling the temperature on the skin of your hands, maybe a sensation of moisture or dryness. (Body Scan, Home Practice)

Cullen’s primary pedagogical choices during body scan activities (23 coded
instances) relates to asking participants to engage their imagination to visualize parts of the body where there may be little to no physical sensation or to imagine their breath moving through their body. In the mid-analysis interview, Cullen explained that the purpose of these visualizations is to offer a way to get more in touch with parts of the body and to engage the mind more fully in the object of attention.

**Mindful Movement**

The second formal practice that is also introduced in session 2 is mindful movement. It is also practiced in sessions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10. Cullen clarifies the approach to mindful movement in the program, perhaps distinguishing it from other forms of yoga or mindful movement the participants may have experienced, stating that the intention with these mindful movement practice periods is to “focus more on tuning in closely to how your body feels and being respectful of your limits rather than on trying to achieve postures or make dramatic physical changes” (Impact Foundation, 2009). There are both lying down and standing forms of the activity used throughout the program and participants are asked to align their breath with slow intentional movements and stretches.

A dominant theme of Cullen’s pedagogical choices in these activity periods (13 coded instances) was Cullen’s consistent practice of asking participants to take a baseline reading of feelings within their bodies and then noting any changes that occur after a
specific movement or set of movements or comparing one side of the body after a stretch to the other side that has not been stretched. This focus on change and the impermanent nature of phenomena including body sensations is a continual theme throughout the program (see “The phenomena of Impermanence”).

The mindful movement practices also include frequent reminders (11 instances) to rely on bodily sensation to judge the right level of effort that should be applied rather than identifying with thoughts about what the participants should be able to do:

Cullen: And checking in with your neck and shoulders…and just get some feedback for yourself about whether this movement was too little (you don’t feel any difference), too much (oh you feel a little soreness), or just right (you feel some space, some openness).

(Mindful Movement, Session 3)

A metaphor introduced by Cullen to describe this right effort that then runs through the training is the “Goldilocks test”, referencing the story of Goldilocks and the three bears in which there is for example, a bowl of porridge that is too hot, one that is too cold, and one that is just right. This metaphor is then applied to engaging in mindfulness practices in that there is a right effort between striving too hard to do the practice correctly and relaxing too much in a way where attention wanders or the participant moves towards sleepiness. Participants are encouraged to intentionally engage with the practices but are also encouraged to do so with a “Goldilocks” or “right effort” approach that does not create suffering in the process. This is further described as a form of guided assistance below.
Seated Meditation

Formal seated meditation is introduced in session 2 with a ~10-minute practice period and extends out to ~20-minute periods in sessions 4 and 6. There are also seated meditation periods in sessions 5, 6, 8, 10, and 11. In each session, participants are asked to assume a posture “that is upright and alert, yet not stiff or rigid” (Impact Foundation, 2009). In general, participants are encouraged to practice while seated in a chair, although they are also offered the options of laying down or standing.

Practice periods consistently begin with three intentional diaphragmatic breaths before the breath is released to follow its natural rhythm. This natural rhythm of the breath then becomes an object of attention that participants can return to at any time. There is a great deal of silence as participants are given the opportunity to practice independent, so every instance where Cullen chooses to speak was coded separately, with 75 coded instances across the eight activity periods in the sessions and two home practice sessions. The predominant categories of these instances are focused on relating to thoughts that arise during practice with 20 instances related to inviting participants to label or note mental activity without reification. Thinking is both separated from the thinker and normalized as something that the mind does naturally:

Cullen: And of course, the mind has a nature, and a deeply entrenched habit to think, to manufacture thoughts, to move to whatever experience is momentarily predominant. It’s very helpful to approach these very natural tendencies of mind with patience. With an acknowledgment that they are inevitable. If it’s helpful to
you, note, “Oh, thinking… this is what’s happening now.” And experiment with ways that are gentle and kind, to bring your attention back to the breath. Soft.

(Seated Meditation, Session 4)

Labeling or noting different kinds of thoughts as “thinking” or “wandering mind” is also consistently offered as an approach to dereification:

Cullen: When you notice that you’re thinking, rather than returning the attention to the breath right away, allow thinking itself to become the object of your attention. Here again it’s particularly helpful to use a quiet label in the mind. Either a general label, “thinking, thinking,” or more specific labels, like “planning, judging, remembering, worrying.” These labels help you to remain aware of thinking, without getting pulled into the content or the story of the thought. If the thoughts vanish upon observation, simply return the attention to the breath. If physical sensations in other parts of the body, an itch or a throb pull your attention away from the breath, see if you can find the very center of that sensation, and allow your attention to go there, noting it in the same neutral way, nonjudgmental awareness, and seeing what happens to it upon observation. Does it move? Does it diminish? Does it increase? If it gives rise to a thought, notice the thought. “Ah, thinking.” If it gives rise to a feeling, notice the feeling. “Fear, anger.”

(Seated Meditation, Home Practice)

Here while the instruction includes labeling of different types of thoughts, the focus is on observation and not “getting pulled into the content or the story of the thought”. The metaphor of the wandering mind (see “Dereification as ‘the Wandering Mind’”) normalizes this mental phenomenon but also diminishes the pull of the content of the thought into a general category of thinking as an aspect of the present moment rather than the totality of reality: reified thought.

Eight instances were also identified in which the focus is on accepting what is present without judgment or the need to react:
Cullen: Bringing awareness to the state of the mind and to emotions, to the body, not with the intention of analyzing, judging, fixing, eliminating, or even examining the feelings. Just in order to acknowledge what is here. Checking in with the mind and body as a good friend would check in with you and not try to fix you or change you.

(Seated Meditation, Home Practice)

Participants are consistently encouraged to nonjudgmentally notice where their attention goes, label it, and either intentionally observe that aspect of the present moment or intentionally return their attention to an object of focus—often the breath.

Cullen: The wonderful thing about this practice we're learning together is that every experience you have can be included in the meditation. So the sound arises, pulls your attention away, you notice hearing, and there may be irritation, so you notice irritation arising. There's never a right or wrong experience or feeling; notice it and then bring your attention back to the breath...So for the next ten minutes or so let's sit silently...cultivating concentration and stability by very gently escorting the attention back to the breath, staying with the sensations of the breath, and using this gentle noting technique...

(Seated Meditation, Session 6)

Metta Meditation

Loving kindness, or metta, meditation was included in the guided formal practice category because of its inclusion in home practice and how commonly it is included within mindfulness curricula including MBSR. It is first introduced within MEBB in session 7 which has a theme of compassion and kindness and is then practiced in sessions 8, 9, as well as in the home practice. Within this implementation of the program, there is a guest instructor for one metta activity period which was coded for pedagogical choices but was not included in the total 19 choices analyzed in order to focus analysis on
Cullen’s choices.

The basic format of this meditation is the intentional cultivation of well-wishing and positive emotion towards oneself and other beings. This is accomplished through bringing specific individuals or oneself to mind and repeating a set of phrases:

Cullen: May [I/you] be happy. May [I/you] be peaceful. May [I/you] be free from suffering.

...offer these same wishes to yourself that you would wish for a loved one. May I be happy. And see if you can connect with that wish. We all want to be happy. May I come to understand the most authentic, truest sources of my own happiness. May I be peaceful. May I be free from suffering, the anguish of mental suffering. Free to express all of my gifts in this lifetime, to offer them to my students, my family, my friends, and the world. And then bringing to mind your loved ones. That inner circle of people you- you know who they are, your family, close friends. See them in your mind's eye, and then look at them through the eyes of the heart. Those you care most deeply about. And touching the part of your heart that so genuinely wishes for their happiness. And as you scan their faces, sending these very simple wishes of kindness to them: "May each of you find happiness." What would you wish for your children, your partners, your friends? "May you be peaceful. May you be free from suffering." And bringing to mind now someone you don't know, maybe a dry cleaner, or maybe a face you happen to catch today or yesterday, on the street, in your car, a neighbor, someone clearly outside this circle of warmth and intimacy in your heart... and see what it's like to bring this stranger right into your heart with your loved ones, and wish them well. This person you don't know at all. With a life as textured and complex as your own, with disappointments and dreams different than yours but just as many. What does it feel like to wish them well, a stranger? "May you be happy. May you be peaceful." Knowing that they want happiness just as we do. "May you be free from suffering." So imagining that our hearts are really like a field, that can extend wider and wider to include not only ourselves and our loved ones, to include strangers, but even to include the people who frustrate us at times. So bringing to mind the image of a person with whom you have some difficulty, not the hardest person in your life, not a huge issue if you're carrying one, but all of our relationships involve some conflict, some disagreements, so find a target who's easier. Somebody you feel a little annoyed with maybe, at the moment, which means there's probably some affection in there too. Remembering the words of Longfellow who said, "if we could read the secret history of our
enemies, we should find suffering enough to disarm all hostility." So you don't have to love this person in this moment, just see if you can find the place in your heart that wishes them well. Friendliness. Just as I want to be happy, may you too be happy. Just as I want to be peaceful, may you too be peaceful. Just as I want to be free from suffering, may you too be free from suffering.

(Metta Meditation, Session 6)

The structuring of who to imagine is intended to move from easiest to more challenging, beginning with a being that is easy to wish well and offer friendliness to and moving to more neutral or challenging people. Participants are encouraged to mentally call these people to mind during practice, consider the suffering they may be experiencing, and cultivate their desire to alleviate this suffering within themselves as well as others.

**Summary**

Together, these formal mindfulness practices offer opportunities for participants to focus in on aspects of what it means to be mindful within a structured and guided experience. The body scan and mindful movement practices generally focus on noticing body sensations and feeling tones associated with the body, while seated meditation has more of a focus on the arising and passing away of mental experience. Metta meditation is somewhat unique in these practices in that it offers an invitation to mindfully cultivate positive regard for one’s self and others. However, across all of these formal practices, there is an overarching goal to develop the ability to be present with any experience that
arises during these formal practices and in daily life beyond them.

These formal practices are a focus of the program, representing 25% of the total time within the implementation of MBEB. Their inclusion in home practice suggests that they are mindfulness practices in and of themselves; however, they also offer scaffolded experiences for developing mindfulness practices that extend beyond formal practice to meet any experience in one’s life. Formal practice scaffolds by limiting outside stimuli and social interactions, allowing the instructor to guide the participants’ attention towards specific aspects of their own experience and invite them to relate to these aspects “in a particular way” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). What this “particular way” means is introduced and practiced during formal practice, but is also developed through the whole group discussions that follow these formal practices.

What follows is an analysis of the pedagogical choices Cullen makes to develop mindfulness practices both within formal practice and as applied to any experience that occurs within the participants’ lived experiences. This analysis therefore is cross-activity, including both the guidance offered during formal practice and the pedagogical choices Cullen makes during whole group discussions.

**Developing Mindfulness in Daily Life and Formal Practice through the Four Foundations**

“There are two primary unifying themes that weave through each component in SMART
One is the integration of mindfulness into daily life. Mindfulness in this context includes the intentional focus of attention in the present moment and improved sensory clarity as well as the holding of each experience with the open-hearted qualities of kindness and compassion. Meeting experience with a greater sense of acceptance, openness and kind attention, rather than resistance, promotes freedom. Given the tendency of most people to err of the side of self-criticism it is helpful to emphasize a gentle, loving accepting attitude towards self in this process. The second theme involves shining a light on unexamined beliefs that both hinder us from living to our fullest potential and cause suffering. Challenging self-limiting perceptions related to emotions, forgiveness, intention setting, compassion and kindness can cause paradigm shifts that promote freedom, happiness and well-being for ourselves and others.”

(Impact Foundation, 2009, p. 3)

As participants develop an understanding of the formal practices, Cullen also invites them to apply what they are learning to daily life. In addition to the use of recorded guidance for formal practice, the homework in the program also includes “‘field observations’ and ‘experiments’” intended for participants to “investigate and deepen the understanding of each theme [of the sessions] in a way that is immediately relevant in daily life” (Cullen, 2019, 67). In these assignments, the participants are invited to apply their understanding that was developed through formal practice and in whole group discussion in order to mindfully attend to specific aspects of their experiences in daily life, such as noticing pleasant and unpleasant events (Session 3), considering how they can practice forgiveness (Session 5), noticing patterns of thought (Session 6), and tracking their experiences of anger (Session 8).

Here then, the participants are invited to apply mindfulness towards specific aspects of their daily lives in order to uncover patterns and potentially fossilized ways of
relating to these aspects. With the possible exception of a forgiveness assignment, there is not an emphasis on changing behavior per se, but rather attending to it nonjudgmentally—simply noticing it as it occurs. Any mechanism of change then relies on the participant’s own insights that arise from this awareness either in the moment it occurs or in retrospect afterwards when considering future intentions. These moments of applying mindfulness, both in relation to the homework assignments and as they may occur naturally throughout the program then become a common subject of discussion in the program during whole group discussions.

This focus on applying mindfulness to daily life is also a clear focus of the whole group discussions. In this implementation, out of the 120 coded instances in which the participants initiated exchange during whole group discussions and Cullen responds to their comments or questions, 79 related to their daily lives rather than questions or comments related to formal practice either at home or in the sessions. Also, of the 57 exchanges initiated by Cullen, 34 related to aspects of daily life rather than being directly focused on the participant’s experiences with the activities or formal practice specifically. This is consistent with the stated objective of the program to “enhance participants’ nonjudgmental awareness about their emotional procession, emotional patters, and reactions, and to gain insight about the relationship between emotions and related phenomena such as attention, intention, thoughts, and behavior” (Cullen, 2019, p.67). While the experiential learning of the formal practices represents a significant portion of
the curricular time (25%), inviting participants to reflect on their daily lives beyond formal practice and how mindfulness is impacting their lives, or might impact it, represents a significant portion of the whole group discussions.

There are likely common subjects raised across implementations by participants as they are primed towards certain topics such as relationships, their work lives as educators, and stress by the nature of the program. However, this curricular choice of emphasizing discussion periods with open questions means that much of content of the discussions, and by extension the curriculum, is led by the participants. This also means that while there are trends to Cullen’s choices as she responds to what participants’ share, these trends are a blend of where Cullen is drawing the joint attention of the community of practice and the topics and concepts that are seen as most relevant to the participants.

Overall though, analysis of the pedagogical choices Cullen makes during both formal practice and in whole group discussions arrived at themes for how to develop mindfulness in both formal practice and as applied to daily life. While an open coding system was used to develop the initial themes of the practices Cullen is inviting participants into, clustering the themes led to a recognizable alignment with a four foundations framework to understanding Cullen’s approach to teaching mindfulness. This framing of her approach was also confirmed in the mid-analysis interview and her professional writings (Cullen & Pons, 2015). In addition to this framework, another identified organizing theme centered on how to mindfully relate to emotions. This too
aligned with Cullen’s description of her approach within the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance program and was named explicitly to participants during session 2 when she explains that this is based on her experience and belief that emotions are often where mindfulness becomes challenging (Whole Group Discussion, Session 2).

Therefore, from the perspective of this community of practice, the practice of mindfulness is scaffolded and generally approached from a four foundations perspective with an additional focus on attending mindfully to emotions and emotional experience. What follows are descriptions of the practices introduced by Cullen and practiced by the community as organized within this four foundations framework plus mindfulness of emotion framework as summarized here:
Figure 5-2: Practices for the learning of mindfulness through the Four Foundations

- **Mindfulness of the Body**
  - Cultivating interoception
  - Developing non-judgmental awareness of embodied sensation
  - Attending to the impermanence of sensation

- **Mindfulness of Feeling**
  - Labeling feeling tones of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral
  - Attending to the impermanence of valence

- **Mindfulness of Mind**
  - Dereifying thoughts as “the wandering mind”
  - Returning attention to the breath
  - Noting types of thought
  - Noticing limiting thoughts
  - Attending to the impermanence of thought

- **Mindfulness of Dhamma (Phenomena)**
  - The phenomena of suffering
  - The phenomena of impermanence
Mindfulness of the Body

“The best place to begin the training of attention is by focusing on the sensations created by the breath in the body. In Buddhism, mindfulness of the body is the first of the “four foundations of mindfulness”—the other three being mindfulness of feelings, mind, and the dharma (the natural law of the unfolding of phenomena)”

(Cullen & Pons, 2015)

While the primary object of attention during the raisin eating exercise described before may be said to be the raisin itself, from the beginning of the MBEB program within this first guided practice, there is an emphasis on connecting with embodied sensory experience. As Cullen moves through seeing, touching, hearing, smelling, and finally tasting the raisin, there is not only an invitation to become curious about the
sensory experience, but to explore where in the body that sensory experience is taking place and become curious about what the experience of feeling is:

Cullen: And now bring the raisin to your nose and focus all your attention on smelling. So you’re noticing the raisin, what you learn about it, does it smell? Is it pleasant? And also what’s smelling like? Can you smell on the out-breath? Where does smelling occur actually in your body? Do you know? At the tip of your nostrils? Inside? All the way up?

(Raisin Eating, Session 1)

Attending to the breath, or using the breath as an object of attention, is a consistent bedrock of this foundation of mindfulness used throughout formal practice. Most formal practice periods begin with instructions to take three, diaphragmatic breaths followed by releasing the breath to its natural rhythm and thereafter, the breath serves as a place to return attention to:

Cullen: And now taking three deep diaphragmatic breaths, inhaling through the nostrils, and directing the breath down to the base of the abdomen, filling up the whole torso with the in breath, as if filling up a vessel with water from the bottom to the top. And then on the exhalation, emptying the torso of the breath completely, as if emptying the vessel of water, and repeating this for two more complete cycles of in breath and out breath. On your third exhalation, releasing the breath to its natural rhythm, allowing the belly to be soft, and allowing the breath to flow as quickly, slowly, roughly or smoothly as it does naturally without manipulation.

Letting your attention rest on the sensations of the breath, wherever you experience them the most clearly. Perhaps the rise and fall of the belly, of the chest, or the sensations around the nostrils as the breath flows in and out.

For this practice, you can allow the eyes to gently close, or keep them slightly open with a neutral, soft gaze down towards the floor… whatever is more comfortable for you. When you notice the attention has wandered, see how gentle, how easy, and patient you can be in escorting the awareness back to the breath,
back to the sensations in the body as you breathe.
   (Seated Meditation, Home Practice)

In Cullen’s implementation of body scans and mindful movement practices, the
breath is also used as a way to connect with other parts of the body or the movements of
those parts as participants are instructed to engage with the breath as a visualization or
metaphor in order to better connect with body sensations:

   Cullen: Imagine perhaps inhaling and exhaling down the legs out the soles of the
   feet…using the mind to imagine what we can’t feel. The breath moving to every
cell in this part of the body…And on your next exhalation, letting go of the legs
and slowly moving your attention into the pelvic region…
   (Mindful Movement, Session 3)

In Buddhism, mindfulness of the body is often taught in regard to four bodily
postures including walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. All of these are included
within the formal practices of the program with seated and walking meditations as well as
standing and prone mindful movement.
In terms of the way to approach mindfulness of the body and its purpose, beyond simply turning attention to a part of the body or a bodily sensation or the sensation of a movement, three prominent themes arose in analyzing Cullen pedagogical choices for how to practice mindfulness of body:

- **Cultivating interoception (85 coded instances)**
- **Developing non-judgmental awareness of embodied sensation (21 coded instances)**
- **Attending to the impermanence of sensation (14 coded instances)**

**Cultivating interoception**

Interoception most generally refers to the ability to sense what is going on inside the body (Craig, 2002). This includes the ability to feel when one is hungry, full, hot, cold, or thirsty; however, it also includes being in touch with muscle tension, sexual arousal, breathing rate, and other bodily sensations and the perceptions one has about them. These sensations then can provide signals to emotional states such as when one feels bodily tension and shortness of breath or increased heart rate while in a state of anxiety (Craig, 2008; Mehling et al., 2009). Interoception has been previously posited to be one of the primary mechanism of MBIs (Mehling et al. 2012) and mindfulness-based programs with a focus of cultivating interoception have recently been developed and tested with promising outcomes (e.g. Mehling et al., 2017).

Within this MBEB implementation, from the initial raisin eating practice and throughout the formal practices, Cullen invites participants to become curious about
frequently subtle sensations and experiences within the body or even the absence of them. For example, as introduced earlier, during the raisin practice: “Is there a physical sensation involved in seeing? Can you see without thinking?” “Where does smelling occur actually in your body? Do you know? At the tip of your nostrils? Inside? All the way up?” There is a reoccurring pattern of asking participants this style of question, inviting them to interoceptively experience parts of their body:

Cullen: Can you feel your toes without wiggling them? And begin to explore this question of how you become aware of your body when it’s not sending a really strong signal to the brain of pleasure or pain, when it’s just neutral? How do you know it’s there?

(Body Scan, Session 2)

In addition to practicing concentration, anchoring attention in the body, participants are continuously invited to notice signals from throughout the body. This is not explicitly connected to any purpose or goal but is rather the goal in and of itself, a simple invitation to be present with what is there. This intentional and simple noting is then supported with an emphasis on non-judgment.

*Developing non-judgmental awareness of embodied sensation*

In developing this foundation, there is a particular emphasis on accepting what is present in the parts of the body without attempting to judge or change the experience, suggesting that these judgments may be a tendency or habitualized way of relating to the experience without intentional instruction:
Cullen: You’re not trying to relax the body, fix it, change it, you’re not asking anything of it. Instead the intention is just to feel it as it is in this moment. Scanning with your awareness up into the lower legs as best you can. Feeling it as it is, kind of ordinary, day to day sensations of contact, pressure, movement, tightness, moisture, dryness, whatever you feel.

(Body Scan, Session 2)

Of the 73 identified pedagogical choices during body scan activity periods, 19 choices related to “greeting [parts of the body] with this friendly, nonjudgmental awareness” and “[resisting] any temptation to change or fix or relax the body”.

Similarly, in the mindful movement periods, there is consistent encouragement to notice when the mind is judging what the participants should be able to do:

Cullen: So notice if the mind has a judgment about how high the leg goes or is supposed to go and see if you can override this…and respond to the signals the body sends and just find that edge where growth is possible.

(Mindful Movement, Session 3)

This emphasis on attending to the body nonjudgmentally suggests a pedagogical belief that participants may have a habitualized pattern of judgmental thoughts that would accompany placing attention on a bodily sensation or movement and that this foundation overlaps with the third foundation in terms of noticing these thoughts and not clinging to, or reifying, them. The participants are invited to notice this potential habit pattern and relate to the experience without the accompanying thoughts or to not identify with the thoughts if they arise. The invitation then is to establish a different practice of awareness without commentary or judgment.
Within the seated meditation, after settling in to start the practice with deep diaphragmatic breaths, the instructions are to “[release the breath] to its natural rhythm” as nonjudgmentally attending to the breath becomes a focus of attention that can be returned to whenever helpful. Then, in session 5, the field of awareness is expanded to include physical sensations throughout the body:

Cullen: So how this works is when you become aware of a sensation that’s strong enough to call your attention away from the breath, let that sensation become the object of your awareness. It helps to make a commitment to sit still. If you make a commitment to sit still, invariably, sensations will arise…the urge to move, to scratch, to fidget, to shift. So see what happens if you don’t move the body, if you don’t automatically adjust to accommodate that sensation, and instead, move your full attention to that experience of itching, of tingling, of restlessness. And see what happens. Just like in the yoga, let the sensation…see if you can find the very center of it with your awareness. The very center of the itch, of the tightness, with a still body…not moving. And see what happens to it when you just simply observe it. You’re not trying to get rid of it with your awareness. You’re just curious. What happens? Does it get bigger, does it get smaller, does it move? And when it’s no longer predominant, return your attention to the breath. Itches are especially good to work with, because they’re not life threatening. They can become quite strong, so very interesting to pay attention to, because they’re so often reflexive. See if you can refrain from habitually moving…just for a few minutes, and notice what that’s like. Letting the awareness be spacious enough to hold the experience. If you find it helpful, use that noting technique…itching, itching, tingling. And then if you become really uncomfortable and you need to move, feel free to do so, but see if you can very mindfully and slowly, with awareness, so it’s not automatic unconscious movement or scratching, it’s slow and mindful. You know what you’re doing. Experimenting in a safe way, just for a few minutes, with not automatically moving the body, resisting impulses. And see what happens.

(Seated Meditation, Session 5)

These instructions invite participants to notice any tendencies towards impulsively moving in response to a sensation instead of attending to the sensation itself.
as it is. As people are generally averse to unpleasant physical sensations, the sensation of an itch and the impulse to react are easily coupled. However, this is not about needing to remain perfectly still during seated meditation. Participants are encouraged to move if needed. Cullen offers that is more about “[seeing] what happens if you don’t move the body, if you don’t automatically adjust to accommodate that sensation” and noticing the separate aspects of the sensation and the intention to move or scratch. Decoupling the physical sensation, the feeling tone of unpleasant, and the desire to react allows for being present with all of these aspects of the experience and responding mindfully—whether to move or not.

*Attending to the impermanence of sensation*

A common theme throughout all instruction is an emphasis on impermanence or how experience arises and falls away. In relation to mindfulness of the body, Cullen frequently invites participants to notice how sensations in the body change. In mindful movement practices, she frequently invites them to take a baseline experience of a part of the body and then compare sensations after a stretch in order to notice any change. She also invites them to compare one side of the body to another for a similar purpose. This could perhaps be about demonstrating the efficacy of the practice to alleviate tensions in the body; however, it also emphasizes how sensations are always changing. As in the above example in which Cullen invites participants to practice when they experience an
itch, there is an emphasis on noticing change as the itch becomes bigger or smaller or otherwise shifts.

In combination with nonjudgmental awareness, while participants are encouraged to stay with what is present in the body, they are also reminded that sensations change; they arise and fall away.

Cullen: If, on the other hand, you’re feeling restless, you can experiment with taking a few deep breaths, and you can check in and see if there is some aspect of your experience that you’re fighting with. Something that’s going on in the mind or body you don’t like. And see if you can bring some spacious awareness around that. If you’re really feeling bold and courageous, you can challenge the restlessness, and kind of throw down the gauntlet and say “okay, I’ll just sit here and die of restlessness for a moment and see what happens.”

(Seated Meditation, Session 4)

These invitations to relate to restlessness or the urge to move or end the seated practice are invitations to stay with the experience longer and challenge the thought that the restlessness requires a reaction or that it will last forever. Invitations to bring impermanence into awareness in this way run counter to implicit beliefs that accompany the thought to move or itch, beliefs that it is necessary or that the current experience will never change.
Mindfulness of Feelings

“There are two components that exist in MBSR that are approached slightly differently in SMART. The first, because of its potential for insight and freedom from suffering, is a session devoted to exploring the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feeling tones of experience. Whereas in MBSR pleasant and unpleasant events are explored through physical sensations, in SMART there is a further link to the tendencies of mind to hold on and push away experience. Exploring this aspect of experience promotes a greater understanding of the causes of suffering and shines a light on the subtle and usually subconscious tendencies of mind that drive much of our perceptions and behavior.”

(Cullen and Pons, 2015)

Buddhism holds that much of human suffering can be understood as the desire for pleasant experience or its continuation and the desire to avoid unpleasant experience or its cessation. Cullen defines mindfulness of feeling as the noting of whether the present moment feels pleasant, neutral or unpleasant. Mindfulness then is not a matter of making all experience neutral or pleasant, but rather involves accepting all three valences as they are, without impulsively following any impulse to act upon them or change them.

Two prominent themes arose on how Cullen intentionally invites participants to practice mindfulness of feeling across guided practice and whole group discussion activities:

- *Labeling pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral valence (21 coded instances)*
- *Attending to the impermanence of valence (3 coded instances)*
Labeling pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral valence

As mentioned before, this labeling practice is first introduced during the raisin eating exercise as Cullen asks participants about the feeling of the raisin between their fingertips:

Cullen: Now I’m going to ask you to close your eyes for a moment and move your attention down to your fingertips and feel the raisin between your fingertips. How does it feel? What is feeling like? You may find it pleasant, you may find it unpleasant, you may find it neutral. No valence.

(Raisin Eating, Session 1)

This noticing of feeling or valence is consistently invited throughout all forms of formal practice with an emphasis on simply noting it without analysis:

Cullen: The lower legs... the knees... the upper legs... just like the spotlight your awareness has no preference for pleasant over unpleasant or neutral sensation, it just reveals it all…

(Mindful Movement, Session 6)

Noting valance is also framed as a way to cultivate nonjudgmental awareness and notice the nature of the mind to react especially in response to unpleasant experience:

Cullen: Noticing if you have a reflexive tendency to feel irritated by sounds or thoughts, by sleepiness or restlessness. When you notice this, there’s an opportunity to choose… so with the background sounds in the hall, or any experience that seems to hijack your attention… the moment you become aware, you can choose to shift your relationship… so that distraction is not a problem, is not an irritant. It’s simply an inevitable occurrence. You can name it as “hearing”. You can notice if it’s unpleasant… and the tendency of mind to contract or push away… to condemn in some way, any experience that has that unpleasant quality. And then bring your awareness back to the breath. You don’t have to push the sounds away, or go out and find the sounds. When they’re strong enough to call
your attention away from the breath, just notice hearing.
(Mindful Movement, Session 5)

Labeling the experience of pleasant, neutral, or unpleasant valance then becomes an approach to cultivating nonreactivity and nonjudgmental awareness by interrupting habitualized patterns of reaction. Returning to the example of the itch—an example used on three occasions throughout the formal guided practices—it is a safe and relatively benign unpleasant experience that is likely accompanied by a desire to react and scratch. The invitation then is to note the valance of the experience and stay with that experience including its unpleasant quality, “letting the awareness be spacious enough to hold the experience” (Seated Meditation, Session 5), potentially creating the opportunity to experience more curiosity about the experience and how one can relate to it.

*Attending to the impermanence of valence*

Attending to the feeling tone of experience—its valence—is consistently framed as labeling that experience into one of the three categories of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral without an invitation to answer the question of “why” it feels that way. Cullen invited the participants to jointly attend to the valence of the moment in a way that does not include invitations to explain causes for this valence:

Cullen: Noticing this valence of pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, can be a way to come back to nonjudgmental awareness. It’s a subtle shift from judging, liking or disliking.

(Session 4, Seated Meditation)
This may seem counterintuitive in that “judging” the experience as pleasant or unpleasant cultivates nonjudgment. However, in this example (and consistently throughout the program), noticing is distinct from judging in that it is the simple recognition and labeling of the experience without identification or reification of thoughts that may arise along with that recognition. Rather than judging, which can lead to stories of what the experience should be and potential impulses to react, noticing is the simple attending to the rising and falling away of experience. Here, that involves noticing the feeling tone of the experience with a knowledge of the impermanent nature of it which can allow for being with even extremely unpleasant feeling tones that one knows will eventually end.

To illustrate this further, in the whole group discussion following this seated meditation, a participant expresses that they found Cullen’s guided instructions during the practice to be “distracting”:

Participant: …and so your guidance was actually more distracting than a lot of things because I would actually get really focused for some moments and then I’d be like “oh wait, the thinking thing… was I thinking?”…

Cullen: Oh okay. And when you were really focused, what were you focused on?

Participant: The sensation of the breath. Like I was actually focused more up here [gestures to neck] than I was in my belly. But I could like you know… really focus on that for a moment.

Cullen: Okay. So that… you know I think that connects a bit to what we’re going to be talking about later in the class today, which is the pleasant, unpleasant,
neutral… because it sounds like that feeling of being focused on the breath and the body was pleasant, and being pulled away from that was unpleasant. So there’s that stickiness of the pleasant, right, of the “wow! I’m getting it, and it feels good. Don’t bug me.”

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 4)

Here, Cullen is inviting the participant into noting this “stickiness” of wanting the pleasant experience to continue, just as she might do with its opposite, to note the desire for unpleasant experience to end or go away. Rather than responding to the participant’s comment on whether the guided instruction was or was not distracting, it is a call to note the habitualized tendency to identify with and hold on to the pleasant experience and to push away unpleasant experience instead of being with experience as it comes and goes with its inherent impermanence.

While this theme was only specifically identified in three instances of Cullen’s pedagogical choices, it was included because of the implicit role impermanence plays in being able to stay with experience even when it is unpleasant. Cullen’s invitation to notice and stay with unpleasant experience, like in the itch example offered under “Mindfulness of Body”, the invitation to “see what happens if you don’t move the body” (Seated Meditation, Session 5) is predicated on the idea that the experience might change. Conversely, it is also inherent in Cullen’s caution about the “stickiness” of pleasant experience in the above example. This stickiness of wanting pleasant experience to continue can only be seen as problematic in the MBEB CoP if there is a common
understanding that pleasant experience are not permanent.

**Mindfulness of Mind**

“Remember, it is not a problem for the mind to become distracted, and you don’t need to get rid of thoughts. Just notice ‘thinking,’ and escort the attention back to the body, allowing the thoughts to leave by themselves.”

(Impact Foundation, 2009)

In the beginning of the first session, Cullen establishes norms for the program, which include asking participants to avoid crosstalk. This introduces a strong community of practice norm, leading to a clear structure of instructor, participant, instructor turn-taking throughout the whole group discussions. The way that Cullen introduces this norm, however, also includes the first introduction to the third foundation of mindfulness, attending to the mind:

Cullen: We won’t do crosstalk except I get to [laughter] comment. And if something comes up when someone speaks, just notice that. It provokes a feeling or thought or reaction. Just notice that and then come back. Keep coming back, bringing your attention back to the person that’s speaking.

(Opening Discussion, Session 1)

As the example illustrates, the invitation is not simply to avoid the impulse to respond to what was said by another participant, but rather to note the impulse to respond and then attend again to the intended object of attention—in this case, the person speaking.

A common misconception of formal mindfulness practices, especially seated
meditation, is that it involves achieving the absence of thinking. Although the mind “can get quieter as you meditate” (Whole Group Discussion, Session 3), this is not presented as the goal of practice. Rather, Cullen establishes mindfulness of the mind as noticing thought or impulse to react without following through with the reaction or reifying the thought. She consistently normalizes the mind’s tendencies to think and attend to those thoughts and invites participants to simply return their attention to the object of attention when they notice they have been attending to thoughts. Rather than eliminating thoughts, “what we’re trying to do is strengthen our ability to identify with a part of us that’s aware”, to move from being “lost in thought, identified with what’s happening” to notice “the part of you that’s aware that you’re thinking, aware that you’re breathing” (Whole Group Discussion, Session 5).

Five themes were identified in Cullen’s choices related to the development of practices to cultivate mindfulness of mind:

- **Dereification as “the wandering mind”:** (21 coded instances)
- **Returning attention to the breath when lost in thought:** (19 coded instances)
- **Noticing types of thoughts:** (19 coded instances)
- **Noticing limiting thoughts:** (19 coded instances)
- **Attending to the impermanence of thought:** (4 coded instances)

*Dereifying thoughts as “the wandering mind”*

Dereification is the process or experience of shifting from the experience of attending to thoughts without the awareness that they are occurring as mental objects, to
being aware of the thought as a mental object that arises (Lutz et al., 2015). A consistent metaphor Cullen uses to scaffold dereification is that of the “wandering mind”. Thoughts of all kinds are reduced and summarized with this metaphor and the mind’s tendency to get caught up in reified thought is also normalized. Rather than “if” the mind wanders, Cullen discusses “when” the mind wanders, normalizing that it will, and inviting participants to nonjudgmentally return their attention to an object of attention such as the breath or bodily sensation.

This metaphor establishes an impersonal relationship of what, in the mid-analysis interview, Cullen referred to as “seeing into the phenomenon of thought” (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020). As discussed previously, she invites participants to question whether thoughts actually require immediate response and offers the practice of instead reducing thoughts to the label of wandering mind or simply “thinking”. Here, a kind of observer self is established, “a part of you that’s aware” (Whole Group Discussion, Session 5), bearing witness to the phenomena of thoughts without identifying with its content.
Returning attention to the breath

Cullen: And of course, the mind has a nature, and a deeply entrenched habit to think, to manufacture thoughts, to move to whatever experience is momentarily predominant. It’s very helpful to approach these very natural tendencies of mind with patience. With an acknowledgment that they are inevitable. If it’s helpful to you, note, “Oh, thinking… this is what’s happening now.” And experiment with ways that are gentle and kind, to bring your attention back to the breath. Soft. (Session 4, Seated Meditation)

From the first session, the breath is established as an object of attention that is always present and upon which attention can always be returned. When the mind wanders, participants are invited to return to the breath as a way of returning to what is present now. The process thus becomes: noticing the mind has wandered without judgment, returning again to the breath and noticing what arises next.

Familiarity with attending to the breath is cultivated throughout the formal guided practices. In mindful movement periods, Cullen frequently aligns attention to the breath with movements such as asking participants to “breath their arm over their head” (Mindful Movement, Session 3). In body scans, Cullen pairs the breath with visualization, inviting participants to imagine their breath moving through parts of the body. In addition to supporting the development of interoception by feeling the body and movement from the inside, this also familiarizes the participants with the experience of attending to the breath.

Then, as the breath becomes a familiar place to rest attention, Cullen associates the breath with the present moment and attending to the breath as a way of returning from
reified thought.

Cullen: . . . as you stabilize the mind it’s helpful to cultivate an attitude of patience, gentleness, and allowing with all these experiences that naturally pull your attention away from the breath or counting . . . and see if you can approach it all as equally valid parts of the practice . . . the distraction, the being lost for a time, the moment of waking up or remembering, and the bringing of the attention back to the breath, the awareness of the breath, and the mind slipping away . . . there’s actually no need to prefer one of these elements over another.

(Seated Meditation, Session 6)

Returning attention to the breath becomes a step of the practice. In seated meditation practices, Cullen brings their joint attention to this practice of wandering and returning repeatedly (14/75 coded instances in seated meditation) with emphasis on nonjudgment, defining this as a significant aspect of what the practice of seated meditation is.

Counting breaths or labeling the inhale and exhale periods of a single breath are also offered as tools that can be used during seated meditation, especially in the beginning of practice periods to “focus the mind . . . [by] engaging the discursive mind” (Seated Meditation, Session 4). Cullen describes these as help ways to stabilize the mind but also follows the offering of these tools with an invitation to drop them as the mind settles. Again then, attention to the breath, in this case with additional mental action, is offered as an object of the present moment that can be returned to as needed.
**Noting types of thoughts**

Cullen: I’d like to expand the instructions this afternoon to include thoughts as objects of attention just like the breath or sound…this is simple, but not easy, like a lot of meditation practice. The only difference in doing this from what you’ve been doing already is that when you become aware that you’re thinking, when you notice, when you wake up in the middle of a thought, instead of coming right back to the breath, see what happens if you turn your attention to the thought itself, the part of you that’s aware “Oh, I’m thinking. This is what’s going on here.” Here it’s very helpful to use the noting technique as a way of not getting swept up into the thoughts. So you might notice thinking, thinking, general thought, or if you find it helpful, you can try a specific label like judging, planning, worrying, remembering…rather than get involved in the content, just notice the thought, the content of it, just enough to figure out the category of thought, or sometimes we’ll say the contour of the thought…when you notice thinking, label the thought and see what happens to it when you label it…without trying to get rid of it or make it stay, again just become curious…there’s a thought. What does it do when you label it, when you notice it?...if it just vanishes or disappears come back to the breath, certainly another thought will come along…bear in mind that thoughts are seductive, very slippery, it’s very easy to get pulled into thoughts. This is not a problem again, it’s not just you, it’s just the nature of thought…so you can imagine that your awareness is like a spotlight that you shine on different objects, the breath, physical sensations, sounds, or thought.

(Session 6, Seated Meditation)

In session 6, Cullen here introduces this concept of thought as an object of attention. Instead of a single collective metaphor of noticing a wandering mind and returning to the breath, participants are now invited to become curious about the thought from the perspective of the observer. Labeling the thought as “judging, planning, worrying, remembering” is offered as a dereification practice similar to the label of “wandering mind” in that the content of the thought is decentered and summarized with the single label. However, the scaffolding is now partially removed as participants
categorize the type of thought. Cullen also uses terms describing reification such as “seductive”, “slippery”, and “[getting] pulled into thoughts” which serve to normalize “the nature of thought” and at the same time denotes the difference between reifying thought and being mindful.

Below, I discuss the scaffolding Cullen uses to develop awareness of any phenomena that arise during mindful practice, but it is worth noting here how the scaffolding becomes visible in the movement from the label of wandering mind to more specific labels for types of thinking. As participants develop the ability to rest their attention on more subtle objects both internally and externally, Cullen invites them to allow thoughts into their field of awareness while also maintaining the dereified relationship to those thoughts. These instructions are not introduced until session 6 and, as indicated in the mid-analysis interview with Cullen, this is intentional so that participants experience the dereification of relating to a wandering mind and the seductive nature of thoughts before taking on the practice of allowing thoughts more fully into their field of awareness.
**Noticing limiting thoughts**

“Habitual ways of perceiving (e.g. “He’s a difficult child,” “I can never figure this out”) can affect relationships with other people and with oneself. Maintaining rigid mental patterns makes it difficult to see alternatives, therefore maintaining the belief that something must be true. It can be very hard to shift one’s perspective, because the brain wants to keep things organized in a certain way, even if that way isn't working very well. Imagine how this might impact a teacher’s work with students or one’s own self-perception and self-judging.”

(Impact Foundation, 2009)

In the formal practice activities, the metaphor of wandering mind is frequently used to label all forms of thinking that draw attention away from the object of meditation. As the practice of seated meditation is developed however, the noting practice becomes more refined to include types of thought: planning, judging, etc. Then, the practice of making thoughts the object of meditation is included. This dereifying practice is then also extended beyond formal practice as participants are invited to apply this practice in their daily lives outside of formal practice.

One way that the limiting nature of reified thought is explicitly introduced and participants are encouraged to explore is through the nine dots activity, which, in this implementation, then became a metaphor of “nine dotting” that is used by the instructor and participants throughout the rest of the program. The nine dots activity is also included in the MBSR curriculum and involves a puzzle that includes nine dots and drawing connecting lines between them. This lateral thinking puzzle requires a creative approach to find the solution and is used to open a discussion about how “rigid mental
patterns can make it difficult to see alternatives” (Whole Group Discussion, Session 2).

The practice of dereification extends beyond seated meditation as a way of relating to experience generally and is applied to stories people hold about themselves, others, and the “should”s of their own responsibilities—in their mindfulness practice, home lives and their job as educators.

Participant: … I was realizing as I was falling into this like really sweet falling asleep like lull… like “oh I could just stay here,” …And then when you said you can stand up, I feel like I’ve had it so many times where I’ve heard that instruction, “You can stand up, it’s okay.” But it’s like, I somehow got this story in my mind that it’s actually not okay. That’s actually failing, doing the wrong thing. And then I saw that really clearly and I was like, “just stand up. Try it,” you know…It was just this moment of standing up, “now I’m awake,” sitting down, “and here I am, I’m awake”…

Cullen: Yeah. It’s really so wonderful to see those because so many ideas get embedded in there about the right and wrong way, or self-image, or how we’re supposed to do it, and they’re often somehow below the threshold of awareness but this one you caught, and then there’s just freedom. (Whole Group Discussion, Session 4)

Cullen points to how reified thoughts, accepted as accurate representations of the world, can limit the possible ways of relating to experience or what the experience actually is serves to establish a value of mindfulness. Cultivating awareness of thoughts as mental objects and being then able to become curious about them or consider other ways to interpret the situation or experience is offered as a benefit of continued practice.
Participant: Well, I was thinking…. So I have this thing I tell myself because I’m a teacher… because I’m a teacher and my life is so programmed and intense at work, almost every second seems to be either bombarded by people I have to deal with or teaching or just hardly any breaks, which I need to change. I need to have some space in there because currently it just feels very overwhelming and almost every second I’m like, doing stuff and programming. And then when I leave teaching, I just want to be outside, I want to have more free time, so I just wonder what I can tell myself, because what I really seek is complete freedom after teaching… which I don’t usually get, because usually I have other things I have to do at home or obligations for classes. But it’s just interesting how, when life gets too full at work, and there’s so many “have to”s and obligations, I feel that in my personal life… I want to have less than that.

Cullen: So what if you can have complete freedom while teaching?

Participant: Well sometimes I feel that way when I’m like in a groove and happy, teaching, and I love my students, but there just seems to be more and more pressures.

Cullen: Yeah. So one approach might be to ask yourself if you’re nine dotting. This is teaching. This is me as a teacher. This is me not as a teacher. And is there some restriction about that, that you might be able to play with a little bit? What that means and what that really looks like. And again, this is a good segue into pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, what freedom really is, what it looks like. Is freedom—we can have all sorts of free time and be miserable. You can be incredibly engaged and feel liberated. So what really is freedom and where does it reside? Is it external, internal? How dependent is it on, and I’m not asking for the answers, but just inviting you to sit with the questions more.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 5)

The invitation in this exchange is to consider how the participant is defining “freedom” and the story that they may have about the conditions for freedom or happiness. Cullen invites a move of their attention from creating conditions externally to consider if the shift can instead occur in the way they relate to the present moment while teaching or not teaching. Throughout, Cullen acknowledges the stresses and challenges of
being an educator, taking care not to minimize. However, this recognition is balanced with this invitation to consider at least the possibility that there are moments in which there may be other ways to relate to the experience.

Participant: Well, I think it’s really hard to practice mindfulness as a third grade teacher. I don’t know what it’s like in other grades, but every moment, even if I’m engaged in teaching, there are so many distractions from people walking into the room to kids doing whatever they do. So all day long I am multi-tasking. I am not doing the mindful practice. And then even my breaks are completely unmindful. I have to go to meetings and try to eat while I’m at my meeting or prepping something. So I’ve always wanted to do more mindful practices but I think—and I think it would be beneficial and that’s partly why I’m here—but I also think it’s super hard for me because all day long I’m learning this other way.

Cullen: Right. It is hard, you’re right. It’s especially challenging in the situations that many of you are in work-wise. It’s not impossible though. And I think one way we can start is by widening the definition of mindfulness or maybe unpacking it a little bit more. One way to think about mindfulness is as a lens of a camera. You can take a beautiful picture with any size aperture on the lens, right? You can be really telephoto or really wide angle. So what we didn’t talk about in the definition I offered was what are you focusing on when you’re being mindful? Sometimes mindfulness is very wide angle and it includes people coming in and out and it includes the feelings that arise and pass. Kids coming and going. Mindfulness doesn’t need to be a telephoto lens focusing on one dot, right? So hopefully, that will, you know, we’re just starting, hopefully that understanding will grow and the possibility of application for you without having to change the reality of your work life will grow.

(Opening Discussion, Session 1)

From the first session, Cullen establishes this invitation to consider even the limiting stories of what mindfulness is in order to cultivate curiosity and to notice and dereify thoughts that otherwise narrow the lens of awareness to only seeing what confirms the story.
**Attending to the Impermanence of Thought**

In the above directions for noting thoughts from Session 6 (see Noting types of thoughts), Cullen invites participants to become curious about what thoughts do, “if it just vanishes or disappears come back to the breath, certainly another thought will come along”. In the mid-analysis interview, Cullen describes a goal of the program as being that:

> Cullen: [Participants will experience] looking at the contents of the mind, mainly thought, from a radically different perspective in the third [foundation] and [see] the ephemeral nature of thought, how it comes and goes, how it is not solid, seeing into its power to shape experience without getting caught in that reactivity. Seeing into the empty nature of thought.

(Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020)

This practice of experiencing thought as being transient and impersonal, arising and falling away, is integral to how Cullen defines mindfulness of mind and how she developed the curriculum within the program. Cullen describes the goal of the program with the third foundation to be the experience of “thought as a phenomenon”, claiming the normal tendency to identify with the story of our thoughts (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020). The guided formal practices, especially that of seated meditation, is in part designed for participants to experience this quality of phenomenon directly in relation to their own thoughts. Similar to Marx and Marx’s (2012) definition of the first stage in developing mindfulness, in the mid-analysis interview, Cullen
describes this direct experience of thought as phenomenon as a worthy end goal for the program, given the program’s introductory nature and its length. She acknowledges the dropping away of the observer self as described in Marx and Marx’s second and third stage as being a valid trajectory of mindfulness practice generally, but holds that this program has the goal of participants having what may be first experiences of relating to their own thoughts as mental objects that arise and fall away.

**Mindfulness of dhamma (Phenomena)**

Cullen: I think of the fourth foundation as the governing principles that apply to all phenomena. In the previous three, we are dividing phenomena into sets of experience: body, mind, vedana [feeling]. In the fourth, we’re looking into guiding principles and the dharma is these governing principles which include more broadly impermanence, and not self, and suffering, and all of it in a sense. What governs the unfolding of experience? What is the lawfulness that governs it?

(Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020)

The first three foundations of Body, Feeling and Mind have here been described as somewhat compartmentalized in how they are introduced and integrated into the practices and discussions throughout the program. However, this may be somewhat misleading. As Cullen states, “The boxes aren’t neat at all” (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020). As described below in the way Cullen seeks to integrate mindfulness of emotion, there are overlaps and Cullen describes the distinctions between the foundations more as being helpful for learning and developing one’s approach to instruction than actual distinct aspects of experience to be compartmentalized. The
fourth foundation, mindfulness of dharma, is distinctly the least distinct in that it is
mindfulness of the “guiding principles of experience”, attending to the nature of
experience and indeed the nature of all things.

In describing how she conceptualizes this foundation, the nature of suffering and
impermanence are clearly influenced strongly by Cullen’s experiences with Buddhist
philosophy and practice. However, she also clarified that conceptualization of the mind
and experience from western psychology could also be considered ways of understanding
this foundation (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020) and are clearly
represented in the curriculum. Cullen’s presentation on triggering emotions and the
emotional refractory period are based on the work of Paul Ekman and she frames self-
compassion through a perspective informed by her work on the topic along with that of
Kristen Neff. “What distinguishes [the foundation] is that we are privileging certain ways
of looking…directing our attention to directly see certain principles of phenomena the
understanding of which will liberate the mind” (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30,
2020). Thus, for Cullen, what to emphasize or where to direct the joint attention of the
community of practice in guided formal practice and in the whole group discussions are
answered based on what fundamental aspect of human experience is at play that, when
attended to, can help people to see the nature of their own mind and suffering and that of
others.

The curricular choices of what frameworks and concepts to include in the
program and the pedagogical choices of what fundamental aspect of human experience to point towards in formal practice and discussion are both explicit (as in the case of the instructional presentation on Ekman’s emotional theory) and implicit (as in the case of how she chooses to respond to comments in whole group discussion). Cullen’s approach to inquiry in whole group discussions is discussed below under methods of assistance, but in short, she describes her process of responding to participants’ comments as a joint attention practice towards what the comment reveals about the nature of the phenomena as it relates to alleviating suffering. The objective in both the explicit curricular choices and the implicit pedagogical choices is insight about the fundamental nature of phenomena in order to develop liberating practices to alleviate this suffering.

Two themes in Cullen’s pedagogical choices were identified and organized under mindfulness of mind:

- The phenomena of Suffering (8 coded instances)
- The phenomena of Impermanence (29 coded instances)

The phenomena of suffering

Cullen describes the “spirit of this work” (Session 3, Discussion) as a practice of asking one’s self, “okay, this is what is here now, [how] do I engage with this in a way that does not create more stress or more suffering?” The implication being that there is suffering that is unavoidable and that which can be avoided through acceptance of the first type. The practice of mindfulness then is framed as a way of attending to the present
moment with this question in mind.

There are nineteen instances during whole group discussions where Cullen explicitly makes the pedagogical choice to respond to participants’ comments by pointing to the nature, causes, and ways of relating to one’s own suffering or the suffering of others. Throughout these instances, she draws a clear distinction between two types of suffering, regardless of who is experiencing it: the unavoidable suffering and the avoidable suffering. Cullen consistently acknowledges and highlights the unavoidability of experiences like “grief” (Session 1), “chronic [physical] pain” (Session 3), “anger” (Session 3), “frustration” (Session 4), as well as other unavoidable negative feelings that arise in reaction to experiences. Then, she introduces and reinforces the practice of asking this question of how to engage with the experience in a way that does not create avoidable forms of suffering. In relating to unavoidable pain or negative feeling, Cullen describes practices for approaching this question most frequently in terms of accepting/respecting, acknowledging and if possible, curiosity.

Accepting and respecting unavoidable pain is contrasted with the mind’s tendency to react against the experience. When the pain is in the body—like the itch example described above—or more mental—like anger or grief—the consistent invitation is to acknowledge the experience as it is without resistance or rejection. Cullen frequently uses the concept of the heart “meeting the suffering” (Session 1, Whole Group Discussion) as a way to point to this practice. Here, the heart seems to refer to an
acceptance that can mean the ability to be curious about what the pain feels like or an acceptance that includes the need to scratch the itch or continue the negative feeling, such as when she personifies: “The heart says, ‘no, I am still attached to the hurt, I am still—whatever it is—I am just not ready’. And there are many reasons why we cannot be ready in a moment” (Session 6, Whole Group Discussion).

In addition to this practice with unavoidable pain and the mind’s reactions to it, Cullen also introduces and reinforces practices of working with suffering created by how the mind is relating to any experience:

Cullen: So this, here I was three months, next to this loud breather and I thought, “Oh my God. I’m gonna go insane.” And I’m sitting there and I’m thinking, “No. I’m just gonna feel this, I’m gonna notice the irritation, I know what to do, I’m gonna do it.” So I felt irritation, frustration, anger, rage, fury, and then it dropped into sorrow, sadness, misery, despair. It was like, “wow, look at that!” And every time I would sit down, I’d hear this person, and I’d go through these. And I got so that I could go through them really pretty quickly and on this retreat we’d have interviews every other day and we’d have to report on the sitting very formally. So I was very proud of myself, and I came in to the teacher and I said, “you know, I sit, I hear the breathing, and I notice this feeling, and then this feeling, and this feeling, and this feeling and despair.” And she said, “Do you have any ear plugs with you?” And I said, “Yeah they’re right under my cushion.” She said, “Why don’t you use them?” So that kind of in a way also speaks a little bit to what Suzanne was suggesting about… you know, there is some wisdom about when we go there, when we don’t. It isn’t just all about “let me feel everything all the time”. There’s some balance about all of this.

(Session 9, Whole Group Discussion)

This story illustrating the concept of right effort when approaching the awareness of one’s own suffering, but also models a practice of noticing when suffering is occurring
in relation to an aspect of experience and attending to the different emotional reactions that occur. There is no unavoidable pain in the experience of listening to someone else breathe, but the unpleasant feeling and thoughts that arise create suffering which awareness and the “heart” can meet with right effort.

Returning to the stresses and suffering that come with being an educator, the implication is that there are very real causes of suffering that come with the profession, such as the experiences of overwhelm described above or in “being the messenger of painful real world consequences”:

Participant: What if I sometimes find that my invisible child is a difficult child? It’s the child who—they disappear for weeks at a time. They just disappear, and you call home and you can do all these things and it’s like, they show back up. I mean it’s this horrible, horrible thing to say and my first year of teaching it broke me, the fact that I continued to teach after my first year is either a testament to my stupidity or something else, but it’s when they show back up and I’m like, “What the hell do I do with you? You haven’t been here in three weeks. You don’t know anything that we’ve done…you’re not gonna get what we’re doing today.” So it’s this balance between—part of me makes them invisible so that I don’t hurt when I look at them, so I don’t have to feel all that pain, uncomfortableness, and so then it’s this balance between having the room be a space where I can be like, “Thank you for coming today. It was really nice to see you today,” and yet not have that kid be the kid that I sit there and tutor one-on-one for 50 minutes. And that balance is really hard. I feel like my troubled kids and smart kids—no one really disappears from algebra one class exactly. They really don’t. They somehow know they should all be very present, but it’s the ones who stop showing up, and they come back and they’re like—

Cullen: So you’re—part of the pain that’s built into your job description is being the messenger of painful real world consequences.

Participant: They’re not going to pass.

Cullen: And that’s just really painful when you have compassion, and you see that at
[your school], a lot of these kids really have very difficult circumstances at home and then you’re being the one who has to—it comes through you, the consequence of their not showing up. And there’s some self-compassion that’s needed there, for you, that’s like the emergency self-empathy in terms of those aspects of the job that hurt, especially in this setting, you’re all in the [schools] where there’s a huge range of the kids in your classroom, and some of those kids are really in trouble—already. And it’s painful. And you can’t save them. And that’s painful. And no matter how loving you are, you can’t, and even if you had all the time in the world you couldn’t.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 10)

The invitation then is to acknowledge this suffering without turning away and then have the agency to decide how to relate to it. The nature of the phenomena of being a teacher includes this suffering that comes from “being the messenger of painful real world consequences”, but there may be some choice in how to relate to that experience that do not add to that suffering.

Similarly, the suffering of others is presented as occurring in the same way as one’s own suffering. How Cullen approaches offering practices to relate to other’s suffering with kindness, forgiveness, and compassion is described below in detail, but generally this universal definition of suffering runs consistently throughout, as much applying to others as ourselves. Cullen draws on the work of Martin Buber to introduce the concept of I-thou as a way of conceptualizing this universal nature of suffering and the tendency to not recognize this for others:
Cullen: So Martin Buber wrote this wonderful book called 'I and Thou,'…where he talks about loving-kindness…He talks of the I-thou relationship is the one in which—you know this Namaste greeting, right, in Hindu? I see the soul within you - the I-Thou relationship is ‘I look at you and I see your heart and your soul.’ On the outside there is lots of stuff, many tragic expressions of unmet needs, right? Even in the kids, right? And all their acting out, and boy it's really hard to relate to. But I can look right in there and see you as a human being, as a heart and a soul; you become a Thou. Now, ‘I-You,’…you're another person.

…Then there's 'I-it." And I was shocked when I started looking at my I-it relationships, where you are a means to an end to me. You are the person who is making my sandwich, and you better do it fast, and, you're not a person, you're like a toaster. You're like a machine who's just fulfilling a need for me. And it's a very interesting awareness to bring into life, of like, “who are the ‘its’?” And if we use this experiment with this premise or this hypothesis that these qualities of kindness, compassion, are unlimited, the more you express the more you have - what happens if, God forbid, the guy in the deli is a Thou, right? Or at least a “you”. Or the guy who cut you off on the road. Or anybody. Or that kid, that really annoying kid in the class ,who drives you nuts…

Okay, so they don't have to be a Thou, but maybe a You, maybe not an it. Something that you just want to control because they're bothering you and you're trying to get this one, and they become just so reduced, and of course the extreme examples are like using somebody for sex, objectifying, you're really an it and it's heinous or whatever, but we do that in so many subtle ways, turn people, humans, into its.

Participant: When you speed up especially.

Cullen: Especially when you speed up. Especially when you speed up. (Whole Group Discussion, Session 8)

The invitation in both the cases of one’s own suffering and the suffering of others is conceptualize the unavoidable suffering that exists as a part of the human condition and try to avoid contributing more to either one’s own or others’ suffering in how we relate to it.
The phenomena of impermanence

Cullen: I'd like to say a couple of words about going home from [the daylong retreat]. A lot of you are going back to families, not everybody, but a lot of you are, and a number of you have enjoyed the silence today and kind of finding that you could rest within it, as uncomfortable as it may have felt at times. And the good news for those of you who didn't like it, is that it will change. But that's also the bad news for those of you who liked it. Is that it will change. And it will change whether or not you have kids and a partner at home. It's gonna change because all mental states change. So if you find that you go home and you're feeling really peaceful and you get completely jangled, it's not your fault. It's not your fault. It's just that things change. And the more you try to hold onto…if you try to hold onto whatever it was today, you'll suffer. Because you can't, you can't hold onto it, you can't hold onto anything really.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 6)

With each of the first three foundations, there is an emphasis on observing as aspects of experience arise and pass away and how the mind tends to create ideas of impermanence. There is a consistent invitation to be with unpleasant experiences such as an itch or restlessness and to allow thoughts to arise and pass away on their own without effort. These practices are contingent upon the idea that they will change and are impermanent. Impermanence is therefore described as essential to mindfulness as an element of being able to accept what is present and allow it to change. Cullen brings the groups attention to this phenomena of change and impermanence consistently throughout the body scan and mindful movement practices where sensations change, throughout seated meditations when aspects of experience arise and fall away in the field of awareness and in how they experience the program as a whole.
Mindfulness of Emotion

As mentioned before, in “Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance: History of Development, Curriculum and Research”, Cullen articulates the challenges of integrating mindfulness and emotions in the curriculum of MBEB. She describes the linguistic and philosophical challenge it poses in the cultural translation from Buddhist roots as “what we call emotions don’t have exact equivalences in Tibetan, Sanskrit, or Pali” (p.66, 2019). She also describes how the experience of emotions does easily fall within a single category of the four foundations of mindfulness as there are often feeling tones, physical sensations, and mental thoughts within the experience of what we call emotional states. That said, “emotional balance” and the developing the ability to practice mindfulness of and within emotional experience is an expressed goal of the MBEB program (Impact Foundation, 2009).

Cullen collaborated with Paul Ekman in the development of Cultivating Emotional Balance, a program that proceeded the development of MBEB, and draws from Ekman’s emotional theory and conception of emotional literacy as a framework for being mindful of emotions or applying mindfulness to emotional experience. In session 2, there is an instructional presentation on the topics of normalizing emotional experience, emotional scripts and triggers, and Ekman’s conception of the refractory period. These then becomes a shared language within the community of practice for referring to the physiological and mental aspects of emotional experience.
Participant: Is there a refractory period for happiness, or do we just associate it with the negative stuff because that’s what interferes with cognition?

Cullen: That’s a good point. I think that there probably are refractory periods for happiness, where you can be blind. You don’t take in information that doesn’t confirm that state of wellbeing; you’re in a peak there. We don’t tend to think about it that way, but I think it works the same way, that it can be a lens that distorts your perceptions for that period of time, and you can keep it going in a happy mood the same way you can keep an anxious mood going, or an angry mood going. But the refractory period in the way that we’re using it here is always very short lived, so that’s the real intense moment.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 6)

Given the actual prominence of emotions in human experience and the focus on this topic within the MBEB curriculum, it is not surprising that two of the themes for Cullen’s pedagogical choices made in her guidance during formal practice and in whole group discussion related directly to mindfully relating to emotion. These themes were:

- Understanding the phenomena of emotions from Ekman’s emotional theory (10 coded instances)
- Noticing bodily sensations, feelings, and thoughts that arise in emotional experience (21 coded instances)

Understanding the phenomena of emotions with emotional theory

The language of triggering emotions and the refractory period become one way to discuss aspects of experience within the program. Mindfulness is then framed as an approach that can be used to shorten the refractory period and normalize, or depersonalize, the experience of being triggered by an emotion. The practice of responding to emotion is cultivated through recognizing emotions and the thoughts that
accompany them as they arise during formal practice and daily life, accessing the body through interoception to identify where we feel emotions (such as fear and anger), and cultivating non-judgmental acceptance of the experience---even after having been emotionally triggered and while in the refractory period. This then may offer the space and opportunity to decide how to respond rather than following any compulsion to react to the emotionally triggering situation.

Participant: I, like within the last couple years, I attended a Kaiser Anger Management thing and you mentioned that this is a little bit out of date and they do things in a more circular fashion, and one of the things that they are pointing out how that stress reaction and stress response it can- they are happening almost instantaneously and that choice mechanism, one of the things they are trying to show people and those of us that have had the subjective experience of just like, ‘I was here and then suddenly I was like stark raging mad!’ And what the hell happened? And in fact there is like a thousand moments in between that and we can, our thoughts can increase, the stress can increase or this thought can undo it. And an example that I remember because it was so powerful and so universal when you get frustrated driving, was you are driving along and minding your own business and then someone does something, they cut you off, well, you could look at that as ‘that idiot!’ And those kind of thoughts are going to increase your blood pressure and might cause you to behave-well, speaking to me-stupidly. But instead you can think, ‘wow, I wonder if something is happening and they are trying to get to the hospital.’ As soon as you reframe that-what it might be-all you know is this has happened, you have no idea as to why it’s happened. And if you choose-the choice thing again-if you choose to reframe it into ‘god, I hope they are ok, they’re maybe-‘ and you just- you give yourself this benign, innocent thought that would justify the person cutting you off, it’s like go in peace [laughter]. It’s a whole different— it reframes the situation.

Cullen: It’s a great example and exactly where we are going. You can intervene with mindfulness any place you happen to wake up in this cycle and there are moments when you can catch it right there in that moment. Before you can have a choice about how to respond, you have to have awareness, you can’t have a choice without awareness— otherwise you are just in automatic pilot, you are just being driven. And the rushing, the business, is reinforcing that, like the rushing has a
life of its own, that kind of reactivity and habitual way of responding. The mindfulness can interrupt that and create the possibility of the choice of reframing in that moment. At the same time, you remember we talked about emotions, how they arise, we did that whole thing on emotions. There are certain moments when the trigger is too hot—it’s too hot—and the mindfulness, the awareness, isn’t strong enough to intervene in that moment and you just react, right? And the Dalai Lama says that he even gets mad sometimes. So people who have highly developed this quality of mindfulness and awareness, they still have some triggers that are really hot and they just react. So to bring a kind of wisdom and gentleness, it may be that the person cutting you off, there is a moment where you can just say, ‘wow, I hope you get to where you are going safely and you don’t kill anybody on the way.’” And it’s not so much of a trigger that you can create the space to reframe.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 3)

Cullen frequently stresses that her pedagogical approach includes a balancing of “honoring the tradition while keeping an open mind to find new ways to convey the depth of contemplative practices” (Cullen et al., 2019, p. 66). Her stated goal is to apply the four foundations of mindfulness, emotional theory from western psychology, and other frameworks and metaphors when they reveal something of “the richness of the present moment held gently in awareness, and the profound and authentic authority of each person’s own experience, equally held with kindness in awareness” (p. 67). The curricular goal then is not to instruct participants in a rigid way of compartmentalizing experience into the foundations from Buddhism or a specific perspective of western psychology, but rather to provide conceptual tools that aid in the practice of paying attention to all that is happening in the present moment. The four foundations have historically been used to this end and are the basis of Cullen’s definition of mindfulness as well her approach to developing curriculum and making pedagogical decisions such as
during group discussions. That said, other conceptualizations of the nature of phenomena, including emotional theory and reflections on the nature of forgiveness, compassion, are also included as aspects of phenomena that impact human suffering and liberation from suffering. What it can mean to be mindful of emotions and mindful to how one is relating to themselves or others (described below) are intentionally included in the curriculum through instructional presentations and activities based on the belief that they are common aspects of phenomena that affect one’s ability to understand and relate to the present moment: “…we are privileging certain ways of looking because we really want to understand the principles that liberate the mind” (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020).

Noticing bodily sensations, feelings, and thoughts that arise in emotional experience

In describing the history of development, curriculum, and research on MBEB generally, Cullen describes the purpose of this intentional focus around emotion. She explains the difficulty in bringing together current conceptions of emotions within Western psychology and the four foundations. Emotions, Cullen argues, are experienced in the body as well as the mind and tend to have positive or negative valence and so do not clearly fall within the foundations of body, mind, or feeling (Cullen et al., 2019).

There were 8 coded pedagogical choices in which Cullen invites participants to notice bodily sensations, the feeling tone, or thoughts that arise during experiences
described by participants as being emotionally charged. In some of these cases, it referred to recognizing these aspects of emotional experience in retrospect as participants reported about experiences they had had. However, Cullen also invited an investigation of these three foundations in the present moment as the participant recounted their experience. In the following example, a participant shares a memory that came to mind during practice, one that included emotional pain and Cullen invites this kind of noticing:

Cullen: And right now, rather than the story of what happened, would you be willing to feel what you are feeling right now in your body? Can you say what it is that you are feeling right now—where you feel it?

Participant: Physically?

Cullen: Yeah.

Participant: I am tingly all over. It was very hard to watch Suzanne…

Cullen: But now, now, do you feel the sadness somewhere in your body?

Participant: I feel an urge to…to do what I am supposed to do because I know it’s important. I wanted to be angry because I know I have to learn to be angry…right now…physically, along with the tingle, my heart is racing…

Cullen: You might be feeling some fear or anxiety along with the sadness. Uh huh. Can you locate the sadness in any part of your body?

Participant: …In the pit of my stomach

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 6)

Here, Cullen invites the participant to relate the physical sensations that arise in response to retelling the emotional experience.

Together, it was found that practices of the MBEB program found in a cross-
analysis of the curricular activities include both formal practices (body scan, mindful movement, seated meditation, and metta meditation) and mindfulness practices that can be applied to any experience in daily life. The formal practices were guided, providing opportunities for Cullen to offer assistance both to engage in those formal practices as well as to engage in the general mindfulness practices to be used in these practices and daily life. Thus, formal practice is both a practice of the community as well as a scaffolded experience in which participants are able to direct their attention to specific aspects of experience in a low stimulus environment to develop the general mindfulness practices that can be applied to any experience in daily life. These general mindfulness practices were coded across guided activities and whole group discussions and an organizing theme network (Attride-Stirling, 2001) developed that aligned with a four foundations approach to understanding mindfulness with the addition of an additional organizing theme of applying mindfulness to emotional experience. This organizational level (including mindfulness of emotion) aligns with Cullen’s intended curriculum as she described it in her professional writing (Cullen et al., 2019) and in the mid-analysis interview (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020) and the practice themes below these themes identify the practices Cullen offers that constitute aspects of this general mindfulness that can be applied to daily life. What follows next is an analysis of the themes related to how Cullen supports their learning of both types of mindfulness practice through the assistance she offers.
RQ3: What are the ways that a mindfulness instructor offers guided assistance and modeling as a more capable other to the teacher participants?

Through the MBEB training, participants are invited to engage in both formal mindfulness practices and mindfulness practices in daily life. Cullen offers assistance to participants as they come to understand how to do these practices and the value such practices can have through guided practice activities and whole group discussions. Within these whole group discussions, participants are invited to unpack their experiences with both types of practice that occurred in the guided practices activities as well as in their daily lives and in their classrooms. Analyzing of Cullen’s pedagogical choices made during guided practice activities as well as whole group discussion included coding for the types of assistance she offers to support their learning with both types of the inter-related practices. The themes related to forms of assistance also support a sociocultural understanding of learning in which an instructor is able to offer assistance as a more capable other: a) in the process of understanding how to do the practices and the meaning of the practices and b) the process of defossilizing previously learned practices of relating to experience.

The first of these processes is the learning of what it means to experience mindfulness both within formal practice and ‘in the wild’ of their own life. As
participants are introduced to these formal and daily life mindfulness practices and engage with them, they have have opportunities to internalize the guidance and directions of the more capable instructor, learning how to do the practices as they make their own meaning of them.

The second process Cullen is assisting is related to helping participants defossilize and consider their previously held ways of relating to experience. Mindfulness practices are often not practices that are entirely new to the learner. As Cullen shares in the opening conversation of the first session: “I’m not taking you any place you don’t know or any place you haven’t been, but life is such…[that] we don’t get to go there very much. A big part of what we do is carve out the time to say this is also true. And you can get a lot of nourishment here” (Session 1). As human beings, the participants have developed ways of relating to their experiences, sometimes in ways that are attending to the present moment and sometimes in ways that are less mindfully aware. This can be understood as their perezhivanie or the prism through which they relate to their experience (Vygostky, 1994). This means that in addition to inviting participants to practice mindfulness, Cullen also is inviting them to examine their previously learned, or what Tharp & Gallimore would call “fossilized”, ways of relating to their experiences (1988). The participants are not approached as tabula rosa, a blank slate, when it comes to relating to their own lives. Instead, Cullen approaches their learning with an understanding that they come with previous experiences where they felt more or less
present with what was happening; more or less aware of their own bodies and thoughts; or more or less triggered by emotions.

This second aspect of mindfulness instruction of defossilizing participants’ habitual patterns of relating to experience could both aid in learning and make it more challenging. Throughout the whole group discussions, which again is the largest segment of the curricular activities throughout the training, Cullen consistently grounds the conversation in the participant’s personal experiences, both during formal practices and in daily life. There are invitations to compassionately unpack or defossilize the habitualized patterns that participants have developed in how to relate to their own experience and there is a consistent reliance on their having insights about these habits that Cullen can support and upon which she can build.

What follows in this section are themes of Cullen’s pedagogical choices in how to assist in both aspects of the participant’s potential learning. These two process of learning are here described as being highly dependent on one another in that developing mindfulness practices in daily life requires a defossilization of any competing ways of relating to experience and defossilization does not occur unless the automatized practices are investigated for some reason (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 39).
The themes of assistance in these learning process include:

- *Mindful Inquiry in Whole Group Discussion (curricular choice of whole group discussions)*
- Invitation to defossilize habitualized thinking (26 coded instances)
- Invitation to non-judgmental curiosity (24 coded instances)
- Invitation to apply right effort (14 coded instances)
- Validating and Normalizing participant experience (38 coded instances)
- Labeling and celebrating “a-ha” moments of insight (8 coded instances)
- Invitation to accept the conditions of life (7 coded instances)
- Compassion & framing habitualized patterns as the tragic expressions of unmet needs
  - Invitation to practice self-compassion (14 coded instances)
  - Invitation to practice compassion for others (15 coded instances)

I begin with a description of Cullen’s general approach to supporting participants’ practice within the whole group discussions through a process referred to as “inquiry” in MBSR literature (e.g. Brandsma, 2017; Woods, 2013) and then describe the prominent themes of assistance identified across these discussions and in guided activities. I then highlight two forms of scaffolding that are used through the program to support participants’ learning: the scaffolding towards silent, independent practice and the scaffolding towards relating to all aspects of experience as it arises.

*Mindful Inquiry in Whole Group Discussions*

A particular challenge to taking a sociocultural approach to understanding the teaching of mindfulness is that it largely involves practices that occur within the mind of
the learner. During formal practice, Cullen offers guided assistance such as invitations to
bring awareness to different aspects of experience (see “Scaffolding the complexity of
objects of attention” below). However, how the participants are engaging with those
invitations is not visible. Similarly, if and how participants engage in practices outside of
the training are not directly accessible to an instructor. Instead, Cullen must rely on self-
report of both during discussion periods. This may in part be the reason whole group
discussions represent 37% of the total time as it allows for access to how participants are
relating to the training, practices, and their own experiences throughout.

Within MBSR, the format for these discussions is often referred to as “inquiry”
(e.g. Brandsma, 2017) and the curricular model of following formal practice with whole
group “inquiry” discussions is similar within MBEB. However, how an instructor
chooses to respond to any comment by a participant—the pedagogical choices they
make—is not easy to generalize within MBEB or MBSR.

Susan Woods, who developed the MBSR and Mindfulness-based Cognitive
Therapy (MBCT) certification programs at the Mindfulness-Based Professional Training
Institute at the University of California San Diego, describes Inquiry within MBSR as
intending to “reveal the spirit of mindfulness” (Woods, 2013, pg. 1) and as following
three layers that move from bringing awareness to experience (layer 1) to developing a
mindful perspective (layer 2) to making connection between the principles of
mindfulness to general well-being (layer 3). Cullen’s pedagogical choices do mirror
these categories; however, this case study analysis did not identify a clear scaffolding from layer 1 to layer 3 over the course of the program. Rather, the responses she offers and questions she asks seem to weave between the categories throughout.

To facilitate the whole group discussions, Cullen does propose some topics of formal practice or daily life that may open relevant discussion topics such as the following discussion that followed a seated meditation:

Cullen: So what we’re gonna be doing, week by week is expanding the field of awareness to include more and more aspects of our experience until ultimately it’s anything that can come up while you sit, can just become an object of meditation. So we start with the breath, which is the most accessible, generally. It’s always there. Not for everyone perhaps. And then last week we used sound as an object of meditation. This week added physical sensations in other parts of the body. Next week it will be thoughts as objects of meditation. Thoughts. So there’s a building here to aspects of experience that are more and more, in a sense, subtle, and harder to use as objects of meditation. So there’s a building.

So how are you doing with awareness of the body? How did that go?

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 5)

However, given that a majority of topics are raised by participants (122/170 coded instances), Cullen relies heavily on making pedagogical choices in response to whatever topics the participants offer in the discussions.

Cullen describes her approach in the mid-analysis interview this way:

Cullen: Sometimes inquiry is what does that bring up for you now so we are making it more of a real-time experience and sometimes inquiry has a goal of pointing out instruction in some ways where we are using a report that seems to be way over here in left field and finding a piece of it to bring us back to this whole theme of loving kindness for a neutral person or whatever it is we are talking about. This kind of listening behind the language or between the words to bring what they are
saying and find what is beneath the story to find the universal or looking at the fourth foundation in a way. What is that revealing about what we are exploring so often those reports involve asking questions. Can you tell me more about this? And those follow-up questions are pretty pointed however they are not rhetorical because there is a sincere curiosity to try and understand. Are you saying this or that? Am I hearing this right?

She describes looking for connections to the themes of the program or aspects of phenomena that reveal the nature of the mind, mindfulness, and/or suffering. This reliance on socially processing the mindfulness practices through whole group discussion affords Cullen access to how participants are making sense of the practices and forming connections between mindfulness and their lives. It also creates opportunities to jointly attend to participants’ habitualized patterns of relating to their lived experiences and cultivate non-judgmental curiosity around whether these patterns are helpful.

**Invitation to Defossilize Habitual Thinking**

Given that mindfulness practices are, in a way, an alternative to other ways of relating to experience that may have been fossilized as habit, Cullen encourage participants to notice their habitual ways of relating to their own experience. Even as she normalizes these habituated patterns of relating to experience, she invites the participants to attend to them and become curious about them. This then can establish a community practice of naming these previously held ways of relating to experience and reflecting on what it might mean if the participant related to the experience differently, in a more
mindful way.

There were 26 coded instances of Cullen’s pedagogical choices in which she responds to participant comments during whole group discussions with an invitation to notice and becoming curious about patterns they may have in how they tend to relate to lived experiences. The participants’ comments that led to these choices were often in the form of reified stories participants have about the way things are or who they are and Cullen’s response is to offer an invitation to see these stories as mental objects and habitualized patterns that may or may not serve the participants and to suggest that there may be other ways of relating to the experience in question.

An example:

Participant: So I think I have a cycle of beating myself up about food and eating, but what I am noticing now is I just kind of postpone it. So say I want to have chocolate, I notice there is a desire to have chocolate and I just sort of breathe there “ah there it goes that desire to have chocolate.” Maybe I will get some later and then somehow it will go away. So there is that response. And then there is the response ‘well I am going to get up and get some chocolate right now’. And then there is the eating of the chocolate which isn’t usually mindful and then there is the “Oh I feel yucky and I did it again” and the whole line of bad thoughts. But at least, like, then I am aware I am having those bad thoughts and it is like well, I will try it again next time. But at least I am starting to be aware of the self-battering of thoughts-it is like a big snowball so it goes down this hill and there is so much snow that keeps attaching itself. So for me it’s like better to breath and postpone and I am also trying to be aware of what feeling am I having right now. Perhaps I am feeling lonely or maybe I am just tired. So just so usually the longing for food, that is sugar, is desire, some other feeling really.

Cullen: Well it’s a fantastic awareness of the whole process. And it really relates to the stress reaction cycle-remember-and we talked about bringing mindfulness in at different points in the cycle. So you have had the experience of bringing it in at all these different stages and report that it’s useful wherever you import it. So at
some moments you can bring it right in the beginning and actually not respond to
the desire and postpone it. And just watch the desire rise and pass without the
action. You can also bring the awareness when you are eating it or afterwards and
feeling bad and all of this kind of informs you about the need, the underlying
emotion. It breaks the cycle-the pattern of guilt, you know the snowballing
pattern, as you said, of piling self-blame on top of the behavior. So wherever you
become aware-and you have brought it in at all these different places-it has a
value.

(Session 6, Whole Group Discussion)

Here the participant recounts an experience in which they were tracking both their
habitualized ways of relating to experience before, during, and after eating chocolate and
the self-assistance they were offering to themselves throughout the process. Cullen
affirms the participant’s approach and highlights for the group how it demonstrates the
ability to cultivate awareness before, during, or after an experience in order to “break the
cycle”, defossilizing the habitual patterns in order to see and potentially change this way
of relating to a given experience.

In another example, the participant recounts a feeling of intensity around
becoming aware in a moment:

Participant: So if you feel hurt, does that mean you are still struggling with
forgiveness? I am not sure where the hurt/forgiveness fault line is. Because I feel
like…I actually struggled with this and I avoided it because the first time I did it I
was like, ‘okay I am going to do forgiveness’ and I went [makes a gasping sound
and laughs] and I was like, ‘oh my god, I am a wreck!’ and it really impacted me
in ways that I did not expect it to, so I was totally taken by surprise.

So the next two days, I was like ‘that is not coming into my world right now’. But
I think that when I did come back to it, I was really, totally in possession of my
hurt. So that to me, it felt like ‘I am not ready to forgive’. That was a very strong
sign to me that like ‘whoa!’ You know? And I just wanted to question you on that
because I do feel like ‘how do you know?’
I think you do a really lovely job of some days your heart is more juicy and more willing and sometimes your heart is dry and desiccated and I was like ‘Oh my god! I’m in the dry, desiccated zone!’ [Laughter]

So I just felt very like I wanted to feel like I was making progress but it just- all I became aware of is just a really strong awareness of the hurt.

Cullen: ...I would suggest when you work with a practice like this there are going to be-- always be situations that you aren’t ready to forgive yet, not always, but there may be. So try something else, just put that aside. Don’t white knuckle through, remember the side that you can’t force. You can’t force yourself, you can’t force anyone else. You are ready when you are ready. So the practice is one of just looking inside and seeing. Is there a shift that is possible? Not today. Okay, fine, I will come back another day and then see was there something that doesn’t feel as big and important to me that I can work on? Because often times there are a lot of little transgressions that happen. Maybe a kid was rude in the classroom. I don’t know what the situation is that you are working with, but usually we have our share of day-to-day stuff and with all of these heart practices generally the suggestion is work with what you feel ready to work with? And then you can kind of check back in and say how am I doing with that at another time? Do I feel ready to look at that? And the heart says nope. Okay, you have to respect that. Rather than pushing through, you know. The heart says no, I am still attached to the hurt, I am still- whatever it is, I am just not ready. And there are many reasons why we can not be ready in a moment. So it is one of kind of checking in to see am I holding on just because of some belief that may not even be true about myself or the other person or life? In which case, I don’t want to suffer any longer, I am just going to put it down… Does that help? Would you be willing to go back and work with it on just the kind of more mundane?

Participant: I really want, I mean, I think last week’s lecture made me feel very strongly aware that this is the first time I have framed it as self-hurt as opposed to ‘you have done me wrong’.

It’s like I am doing myself wrong so I actually felt like I was pretty primed to be like okay! And it just turned out it wasn’t that way and so when you are really aware of that hurt piece then I kind of feel like that is a signal to yourself that for whatever reason, you know whether I am nine dotting myself --I am starting to use that as a verb, by the way. I was like “Oh my god are you nine-dotting yourself?” And my friend was like “What are you talking about?” So I might be nine-dotting
myself on that, right? That I think I am not ready when I may in fact be ready. But I just know that it was very emotional for me and that piece was a little unsettling just because I was about to walk into my classroom. So that-- it really made itself—its presence known to me, not just intellectually. Because I am really aware of what is intellectually aware to me, but I am not-- like having that sort of eruption of the heart come on you so strong. It was definitely different.

Cullen: So now that I hear that, I would say again that in this upside-down world of meditation, that is a really good sign [participant laughter].

That actually, that you know this program is really about transformation and that occurs by digging deep. I mean that is what it is all about. It’s not going to happen by just staying on the surface calm, relaxed…that is not where—that’s not how transformation occurs. So… the fact that, you know—and again, this came up as you may remember in the PowerPoint around forgiveness—really true forgiveness, the reason why it is not forgetting or condoning, is that it actually requires we touch the hurt and feel it. We have to move through that feeling that sometimes can be suppressed by just running around with a story. In a weird way, we can stay angry, let’s say, and not access the hurt and it sounds like you really accessed the hurt that oftentimes is underneath the kind of more reflexive, habitual, or anger response might be and that’s really a profound step towards freedom.

So I think there is another way of looking at what you experienced. Now, it caught you off guard, it wasn’t a good moment, you couldn’t stay with it and work with it but, I would say that that’s a lot of progress because often times in fact things stay stuck because we don’t want to really go there, because it hurts, right? So we stay stuck in these kind of adversarial positions— that people can continue throughout a lifetime and even it can be inherited by the next generation rather than having people go in and actually feel the hurt and pain as you did…This takes a lot of courage. It’s not a small thing to decide to sit down and let the mind settle and be willing to face and feel what’s there. It’s like a big deal. And we’ve constructed our lives in such a way to avoid it.

(Session 6, Whole Group Discussion)

In this example, the participant first describes not being “ready to forgive” and then appears to be clarifying as she describes offering self-assistance that the participant
names as an internalized practice from the training, “nine dotting” (discussed above under “Noticing limiting thoughts”). In this particular instance, the participant felt the experience was “emotional” and “unsettling” as she was “about to walk into [her] classroom”.

Cullen’s pedagogical choice in response to the first participant statement normalizes the experience of not feeling ready to relate differently to experience. She personifies the heart and offers a practice of asking it “Is there a shift that is possible?” and respecting the heart’s response in that moment while remaining open to the possibility of a future shift. After the participant clarifies her experience as being one in which it was more about the timing of the defossilization and its intensity, Cullen affirms that “true forgiveness…requires we touch the hurt and feel it” instead of “[suppressing] by just running around with a story”, that this is “no small thing”, and that it is ok to not reflect further in a moment because it may not always be “a good moment”.

Cullen’s two pedagogical choices in this exchange both focus on honoring the “heart”, or approaching unsettling or intense experiences with self-compassion and an acceptance of the lived experience of the participant who is either not ready to forgive because of intense emotion or not able to attend to forgive because of the situational context of going into class. They also affirm that cultivating mindfulness can include defossilizing the “story” or way of previously relating to experience and the reflective experience of exploring potential alternatives. Finally, she normalizes that this process of
defossilizing habitual patterns can be unsettling or intense at times.

Both the chocolate and forgiveness examples here offer examples of how Cullen consistently invites participants to both engage in this self-reflection and respect any resistance or emotion that arises in that process. This balance of asking “Is there a shift that is possible?” and honoring the answer if it is ‘no’ is described further under “Right Effort and the ‘Goldilocks’ test” below.

**Invitation to Nonjudgmental Curiosity**

In describing mindfulness and how it is practiced, Kabat-Zinn (1990) describes seven foundational attitudes that “constitute the major pillars of mindfulness practice” (p.32): Non-judging, Patience, Beginner’s Mind, Trust, Non-Striving, Acceptance, and Letting go. These same attitudinal foundations are also, at times, used to describe the characteristics of an MBSR instructor (e.g. Woods, 2013) or as one approach to defining what it means for an instructor to embody mindfulness in their instruction (Crane et al., 2013). In this case study, Cullen’s pedagogical choices were not coded for these descriptions as an a priori coding scheme. However, there are two aspects of Cullen’s choices that aligned very closely with these attitudinal foundations. The first of these is in her consistent modeling of and invitations to relate to experience with non-judgmental curiosity and the second (described below) is her invitation and direct instruction on non-striving through right effort.
In 24 coded instances of pedagogical choices during whole group discussions, Cullen responds to comments from participants by inviting them to notice any self-judgments they are making and to approach their interpretations of experiences with curiosity.

In this example, the participant is reporting out from a small group conversation about completing the assigned home practices of a body scan:

Participant: A few of us felt that we were kind of beating ourselves up about [not finding time for the home Body Scan Practice], so then there was that other level of when you’re not doing it and you feel bad about it. And then say one person in the group is really successful, seeing them doing the body scan, and she does it in the morning, in the bed, and sneaks it from her family, they don’t realize that she’s even doing something for herself. But we talked about how we have lists of all these things that are sort of disciplines that we need to do… and it’s hard to do the lists like maybe eating healthy, going to bed, getting up early, exercising, all these things… and now that’s on the list too…

Cullen: And that’s kind of the kiss of death, you know (laughs). If it gets on that list.

Participant: But you do some of it maybe, you feel good about some things, and so we talked about just discipline practices also, but it’s tricky.

Cullen: It’s tricky, and so, the invitation again is to see—experiment with different ways—see if you can move it off the to do list, and what that would be like. Because one sure-fire way to create resistance is put “should” there. Right? That’s kind of, for most of us, inevitable. If it becomes a “should,” then it’s like, the last thing you want to do. So play with that a little bit, in your own ways. I can tell you that as a practice… quite a number of years ago, as a practice, I decided not to write lists anymore. I just decided that the lists were driving me, and I was so focused on crossing things off the list. And then there were all the things I’d carry from list to list to list… that invisible backpack of stuff I’d never do that just—clean out the garage, whatever it was that just—week after week after week, month after month. And I thought, “no lists—I just want to see what happens. Can I trust myself to get through my day, will I not feel so driven? Will I be in the process of what I’m doing rather than this kind of momentary pleasure—we’re
going to talk about that—of crossing it off the list?” I don’t want to spend my whole day just so I can have one moment of pleasure that I’m—crossing it off. I want to reclaim the doing of the things on the list. So I dropped the lists and it was really interesting. So I’m not saying you need to do that, but you might find your own ways of experimenting. So how can you approach this, or what are other things in your life you enjoy that aren’t “shoulds,” and how does that work? And can this be approached that way? So again, however you play it, if you can bring a more curious, playful, experimental approach to it, might work better. And sometimes too, there needs to be empathy before you can kind of—there is the discipline element that [participant] talked about, and there’s no way around that; it is a discipline. So before you’re willing to do that, you might need some empathy for how busy you are and how hard that is. You know, just like we tend not to jump over that part, and in fact instead of the empathy, there’s self-criticism. Yeah, you’re busy but oh, you’re also lazy, and you’re whatever. So experiment with pausing for a moment and just really giving yourself some empathy for how challenging it is to be an educator and a parent, and a wife, and a husband, and a partner, and a whatever, all the different things you do in your life. And then a little space might then open up. You know, it’s like our kids, whether they’re in the classroom or our own children—if they get that moment of empathy, then they’re much more willing and able and ready to engage with whatever it is we’re asking of them. That can go a long way, and you can give it to yourself. And then also, without the empathy, the resistance to adding on another, yet another thing on top of the millions of things you’re doing, gets stronger, because it’s like this, ‘well how can I possibly—’ the empathy can break that in a moment and just like, ‘yeah, this is really challenging.’

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 4)

In this story of how Cullen related to her own creating of to-do lists and invitation for participants to first take a moment of empathy before considering what they feel needs to be done, Cullen offers a model from her own experience and invites participants to notice self-judgments like “you’re also lazy” that may arise. She describes her own fossilized way of relating to having things to do by not creating lists and how she defossilized her habit of “to-do” lists by becoming curious and experimenting with
alternative approaches to the phenomena of being busy (not making lists).

Within the pedagogical choices coded for this theme, Cullen describes practicing nonjudgment as less about not having judgments and more about not reifying judgments and seeing the judgments themselves as another mental object that can be attended to and met with empathy and curiosity. The participants are also consistently invited to “try” and “play” and “experiment” with how they are relating to their own experience, especially when they notice these self-judgments, to become curious about whether they could relate differently or with more kindness. This supports the participants’ defossilization of habitualized ways of relating to experience by inviting them to see their habitualized patterns as being a choice and to investigate other potential choices with non-judgmental curiosity.

Invitation to Apply Right Effort and the “Goldilocks” Test

A second consistent pattern of pedagogical choice that aligns with the foundational attitude of non-striving is Cullen’s metaphor of the “Goldilocks” test (32 coded pedagogical choices). This references the story of Goldilocks and the three bears in which there is, for example, a bowl of porridge that is too hot, one that is too cold, and one that is just right. The metaphor is introduced in the second session during the guided formal practice of mindful movement:

Cullen: And then inhaling the arms up overhead once again, exhaling them back down to your sides, feeling them touch the mat, and pausing for a moment to
notice how this feels in the body… what you just did. I call it the three bears test. Was it too little? I don’t feel any difference at all. Was it too much? Ooh, I feel a little twinge, I feel a little sore. Or was it just right? Ah, a little space opened up. So part of the feedback loop is checking in after the movement. Was that too much, too little, or just right?

(Mindful Movement, Session 2)

Participants are encouraged to intentionally engage with the practices but are also encouraged to do so with a “Goldilocks” or “right effort” approach that does not create suffering in the process. Extending beyond not physically straining too far during movement practices, there is a consistent invitation to consider what the right amount of effort is:

Cullen: One of things we’re going to be looking at as we learn these practices is how much effort is too much effort? And that’s a big learning curve and really critical, so it’s a very good point that especially when you’re learning a practice like this often there’s a kind of striving and an effort where we get tight and it gets tiring so there’s this interesting tension or balance between relaxation and alertness…A lot of people say ‘I don’t get that at all. How can you can be wide awake bright alert and totally relaxed?’ and that’s meditation. It’s like a different gear. So it’s neither tense. You know, it doesn’t have the tension that we typically associate with focus like you’re talking about, nor does it have the fuzziness that we might associate with calm. So it’s almost like a different mode. It’s neither. Often times we’re used to being on or off, switched on or off. So this is on a different continuum.

(Opening Discussion, Session 1)

Cullen: I’m going to suggest to you that you approach the whole day like practice, kind of seamless, no breaks, so not in an efforting, striving sense, but that you can relax into a day of practice… in one of the groups about right effort, of surrendering to the process and relaxing into it but not to the point of just being dull and falling asleep. So there's some effort involved but not effort, as you talked about at one point, that makes you tired.

(Opening Discussion, Session 6)
During seated meditation practice periods, 14 out of 75 coded instances include invitations to right effort, such as invitations to stay with restlessness but shifting the body if needed (Sessions 4+5) and invitations to gently return attention when the mind wanders (session 6). It also extends into whole group discussions when participants describe struggling to find time for home practice or when they describe moments they felt emotionally triggered or felt they should be relating to their own experience differently. In the following example, Cullen responds to a participant who is experiencing resistance to taking up what they refer to as a “discipline” of practicing seated meditation at home:

Cullen: Most of us import resistance into any kind of discipline because of the ways that it’s been inculcated over our lives, over our lifetimes. So resistance is really natural and there’s a way to kind of step back and look at that process too. So that can become a process kind of practice as well as actually doing the meditation, and what I mean by that, and you’re nodding your head so you probably understand already, but, ”Wow resistance… this is really interesting,” you know, begin to deconstruct and unpack it a little bit. So that, this can be an opportunity to just be aware of that, and that alone has a lot of richness, so it’s like, forget, whether or not you ever do the meditation, you can play around with the resistance, and that can be quite juicy. Just to kind of look there in an open curious way.

(Whole Group Discussion, session 4)

This “open curious way” Cullen is point to for how the participant could relate to her own experience of resistance when it arises during practice, unpacking it “a little bit”, offers both a challenge to question the nature of the resistance as a thought and an
invitation to approach that challenge without striving or self-criticism. This call for participants to decide for themselves where the sweet spot is, the Goldilock’s test of what constitutes right effort, relies on the participants to connect with their own experience and intentions to make their own determination and also cautions them to be mindful of the thoughts that arise and investigate how their thoughts are making sense of the situation.

**Validating and Normalizing Participant Experience**

Throughout the whole group discussion periods, out of the 177 coded instances of pedagogical choices, there were 38 instances in which Cullen makes a clear pedagogical choice to normalize a participant’s experience. As participants apply mindfulness practices, both formal and in their daily lives, their comments in discussions often include questions that may suggest self-judgments about their own practice or how they relate to their own lived experiences. Cullen often begins responses by offering validation that comes in the form of praising their insights (discussed below) and awareness and normalizing the experiences they are having:

Participant: I think for some reason there is resistance for that piece for me. I don’t know why, but I get through the forgiveness [guided home practice] and I feel like my heart is really open to that, but then the loving kindness, I feel like my heart is tight and I don’t know why it’s harder for me.

Cullen: Well that’s really common. I think that these practices bring up a lot of resistance for people because so often they in some way insist that we go to places in the heart where there’s discomfort. It’s interesting though that the forgiveness is accessible to you…

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 9)
This particular method of normalization in which Cullen speaks to the commonality of a participant’s experience specifically occurs in ten different whole group discussion instances. During these exchanges, participants, or Cullen herself, introduce aspects of practicing mindfulness or relating to experiences that may be perceived as unwanted or not matching an expectation for what should be happening. Cullen then makes a point in these exchanges to normalize and models acceptance of the phenomenon in question as being real as well as tendencies that may be present in how the participant is then relating to the phenomenon.

A perhaps mundane example—that is actually very frequent in this and likely all programs including formal seated practice—is sleepiness. In addition to offering methods of working with sleepiness, such as standing up during seated meditation (Session 2), Cullen normalizes the experience of being sleepy during seated meditation and offers a story of St. Francis telling a monk to allow a brother monk to sleep if he does so in prayer (Session 1, Whole Group Discussion). This coupling of inviting ways to relate to the experience with normalizing it is an effort to avoid creating self-judgmental thoughts.

In Cullen’s own description of her curricular and pedagogical approach, she places emphasis on the “profound and authentic authority of each person’s own experience [held] with kindness in awareness” (Cullen et al., 2019). When introducing
mindful practices and in so doing defossilizing ways participants have previously related to their own experience, this consistent pedagogical choice to normalize that experience even while also inviting participants to consider or reconsider how they relate to that experience seems to support in part how this “kindness” is operationalized.

**Labeling and Celebrating “A-Ha” Moments of Insight**

Cullen: I think you guys have actually covered everything that I want to talk about [in the discussion]. You know, I didn’t mention it, but a lot of you had the a-ha moment when you saw the old woman and so again, that a-ha moment, where insight occurs, a kind of freedom occurs, you break out of the nine dots or the habitual pattern—this becomes possible through different kinds of mindfulness practices where you focus on awareness rather than habitual thinking, where there’s a whole lot of room to relate differently, to have insights or a-has.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 2)

The activity referenced in the above quotation is common in MBSR and involves looking at an image of a woman and realizing that there are actually two different depictions of two women’s faces. The “a-ha moment” then is when the participants were able to see both of these faces. In this quotation, Cullen’s final point in this activity is to introduce a form of assistance she offers that will be common within the program and, hopefully, the participants’ lives: noticing a-ha moments of insight that arise from awareness. In whole group discussions, participants frequently describe moments in their daily lives when they noticed habitual thinking or the urge to react to a situation and the experience of being aware of these mental objects. In response, Cullen praises these a-ha
moments and identifies them as moments of insight and even progress (8 coded pedagogical choices).

Participant: So one thing that I've been thinking a lot about, and I think it came from your comment on Sunday about attachment, and how the minute you think you have something is the minute you've lost it, right? And that's sort of been a theme that you're returned to, I think, over the course of the studies that we've been doing with you and I'm really finding myself realizing, like, as a control freak, which I think a lot of teachers can be highly controlling, that there's like this nexus between control and attachment. It's really, you know, I find when I'm losing my temper, when I'm losing my patience, it's because you're not doing something I need you to be doing, and I'm really attached to that outcome, right? So control and attached seem like they're super, super entwined, and when I was telling my husband about our day, and he said 'you didn't talk for five minutes? You?' and I said 'I know,' and I said, 'I wonder if I can get dis-attached from myself as a talker,' and he was like, 'no. I don't think so.' [laughing] And it was just, like, really funny because I had been thinking of it in these really serious philosophical terms, and he was just like, 'but that's who you are!' and I was like, 'oh, interesting. Is it who I am?' So, anyway, it was, like, from the frivolous to the more, like—I just notice in my own sphere, control and attachment are huge for me. And I'm trying to figure out how to…I think certain things need to be under control [laughing]. You need labels and you need concepts, but this, you know, anarchy's not so fun for me, you know? But I realized there's a lot of thorniness with that too.

Cullen: Another wonderful insight, I think they are really connected, and one thing that is interesting to notice in the practice, especially for those of us who enjoy being in control— Anybody not enjoy being in control? [laughing] Just curious, anybody in here? Ok, just checking [laughter]. How many planning thoughts you have in your mind, so, just noticing planning, planning, planning, because, really, what's driving what they have in common—control, attachment, planning, is anxiety. You know, what's fueling them is some kind of anxiety, some fear of needing to control circumstances so it'll be okay. So I'll be okay, so things will be okay. And then when you see the anxiety, rather than the judgment around being controlling or whatever, a softening can sometimes come, of just appreciating the vulnerability of that need, that often goes back pretty far for most of us, to feel safe or whatever. To feel okay. And most of our threats as adults are—they have to do with ego and rejection and success and failure, and being loved and
approved and okay, and so much of the controlling and attachment to outcome goes there. And that's where the real threats are, that most people experience. This practice that you're learning, this mindfulness practice, is also called the practice of insight. It's actually specifically designed to promote insight, on all these different levels: personal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, and kind of transcendent insight, phenomenological insight into how things are.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 8)

In addition to responding to the participant’s self-judgment by normalizing the desire for control, Cullen here labels and praises the insight the participant experienced of noticing a habitual pattern of how she responds when people do not do what she wants them to do. There is not a clear offering of an alternative habit that the participant should do in the future in relation to other people, but rather an invitation and suggestion that noticing and being aware of the moment, the anxiety and urge to react can itself be valuable and enough.

This becomes a shared practice of the program community as participants identify and label their own moments of insight and share with the group. Some of these are moments when participants felt they were mindfully tracking their experience, noticing urges to act or judgments as mental objects without needing to react to them. Others were more retrospective—moments when the participant felt they acted out of habitualized thinking and only realized it after the fact. As in the above example, in these later cases, Cullen consistently normalizes habitualized thinking, especially in response to participant comments that suggest self-judgement or self-criticism.
Invitation to Accept the Conditions of Life

Another theme of Cullen’s responses occurs when participants discuss the challenging conditions of their lives or work. As educators in a program described in part as stress reducing, they often share the challenging conditions of their work such as standardized testing, busy schedules, and the challenges of working in a school that is part of a larger social context where societal issues impact classroom experiences. They also share the conditions of other parts of their lives like finding time to do home practices amidst their family obligations. From the first session, participants raise concerns about finding time to integrate formal practice into their lives and frequently describe sources of stress and the conditions of life that make being mindful or other positive states challenging.

Participant: One of the things that I talked about was feeling replenished through interactions [in my teaching], being comfortable and replenished. I mean, sometimes I feel like there is such a drain and I get to this defensive place which is a bombardment of a whole bunch of different things. It seems like in my earlier years, my work in education was replenishing and I don’t know if things have changed so much that it is not that way, but…

Cullen: Well that’s really an important to recognize and begin to unpack for yourself. Where does the nourishment come from? What creates the drain? And are there any possible shifts that you can make? And I hope that this class will support you in really examining that and seeing where you might be able to make a choice. The testing, there are things you can’t. But there may be other places, even internally, where a choice is possible so that you can find that source of nourishment.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 2)
In response to these comments, Cullen often begins by acknowledge and validate these challenges (7 coded pedagogical choices). In response to conditions of the classroom or being an educator, she frequently admits her own lack of direct experience in that area as a way of honoring that her knowledge as an experienced mindfulness teacher is not the same as the teacher participants’ knowledge and experience in their own educational contexts. These consistent acknowledgments are then followed by an invitation to also acknowledge “any possible shifts” and “seeing where [they] might be able to make a choice”. Together then, Cullen offers an invitation to accept the conditions of life—even when they are unpleasant—while also practicing mindful awareness of the ways in which they are relating to those conditions. The consistency of her starting by validating their experience and her use of invitational language that the participants “might try” suggests a concern that participants may experience this invitation as a dismissal of their suffering or a denial that the conditions are real. However, throughout this implementation, Cullen maintains the invitation to accept the conditions as real, practice self-compassion for one’s own suffering, and seek to avoid the secondary suffering that can come from habitual lies thinking.

Compassion & Framing Habitualized Patterns as the Tragic Expressions of Unmet Needs

Two themes in Cullen’s pedagogical choices were organized under engaging in mindfulness practices with compassion for self (14 coded pedagogical choices) and with
compassion and forgiveness for others (15 coded pedagogical choices). Participants occasionally describe themselves with self-critical language, especially when describing their own habitualized ways of responding to emotions, stress, and relationships. In response to these moments and in moments of discussion about how to relate to the actions of other people, Cullen frequent invites participants to consider the purpose behind these habitualized strategies as a way to relate to both with compassion.

In session 6, Cullen included an “Aikido of Communication” activity in which participants try on different strategies for responding to conflict with roleplays of being a “doormat”, avoiding the conflict, responding with anger and then responding by “entering and blending” (Aikido of Communication, Session 6) with the person in conflict. When practicing the last strategy, Cullen includes an embodied element to this activity by having participants physically move from direct confrontation to a side-by-side position as they turn the energy of the conflict towards a mutual solution. While there is a clear and stated goal of introducing and valuing this last strategy of an aikido response, in discussing these other strategies and how the participants have their own tendencies and see tendencies in others, Cullen asks questions about the purpose and value of the other strategies:

Participant: Two things: for me, it isn’t a way that I communicate very often and until you started things like walk down the hallway-things like that, so the thought that came to me when I chose to avoid, it felt powerful and so I think sometimes we do want to avoid, but when I want to avoid and I haven’t consciously chosen it, it feels yucky whereas if I choose to avoid it’s a totally different shift.
Cullen: Yes, there you go. So, as the angry person [in the roleplay], what happened to your anger when the person avoided you? Did you escalate?...Did you feel like you’re being pulled by a string? The avoidant person has you by a string and they are just leading you around.

Participant: The teenager one-[tells a story about a teenager in her life]…She wants independence and she wants power and it’s disequilibrium where the adult has power and yet you want to get that power.

Cullen: Exactly

Participant: So the avoidance is a way of being—of getting the power which is not being granted to you.

Cullen: You are redressing a power imbalance—it makes you very powerful and it’s pretty easy to feel even though it’s a role play and it’s dramatized, but you can feel your anger and it’s like “ahhh” [angrily]! You know? It gets higher and higher and so the avoidant person is accomplishing something by avoiding you—does anything get resolved?

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 6)

While habitualized patterns of reacting to conflict or one’s own emotions or stress may be problematic or not lead to a positive resolution, Cullen also stresses that the patterns themselves developed with a purpose, drawing on the work of Marshall Rosenberg (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015) to frame patterns that are problematic in some way as strategies to fulfill some unmet need. Mindfulness is then offered as a way of being in touch with the emotions around this unmet need and noticing the pattern (whether in the moment or in retrospect). This is also offered as a way of understanding the needs and habitualized patterns of others. Rather than offering how participants should respond or what pattern they should adopt, the implication is that this awareness
can lead to individual insight and personal growth.

Cullen: So would most of us agree that of these three options [Avoidance, Anger, Doormat], [Anger] is the best we’ve got so far, of the three?

Participant: I think it depends. Some of those crazy parents that come and scream at you—there is actually no engagement with you, they scream and then they leave, or they just keep screaming. And so, I have not found it possible—I actually find that when I argue with them, it just makes it worse for them and they are never listening to m. So in that moment, it will never work, in that… So I think it depends on how angry and who you are dealing with.

Cullen: Context, So that’s a very good point—

Participant: --and I think there is expectations around professionals. You can hash it out with your partner in a certain way, but I think when it is a parent, it is very much a position of power and I don’t have it.

Cullen: So that’s a really important point. Context is really important, really, really important, and part of what I am hearing—and I believe is also true—You know, when we get really mad at people, in a backwards way it is also an expression of trust and intimacy that we can afford to do that with the people we love. It is safe enough to do that with the people we love that we are not risking what we are risking in a different professional situation and it is kind of the stuff of intimate relationships that there is going to be conflict and moments of disagreement and discharge of energy—strong energy. Sometimes with people we are really close to. So let’s just say that the intention here is not to say that you should never fight back, or you should never be a doormat, or you should never avoid, it is more to just look at these as ways of responding to conflict, get a sense of what you tend to do, see how it is working for you, and see if you would like to try different ways or even recognize when someone is doing it to you.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 6)

Cultivating self-compassion and dereifing self-judgmental thoughts

“…kindness and compassion can be understood as just kind of basic qualities of the heart we all have. They’re just part of how it is to be human. We have that capacity to care, to care for one another. Kindness in this context, in our context here in the class, can be understood as a kind of wish that others be happy, and in a sense, recognizing other
people's [ability to love], other people's goodness, and wishing them well, just kind of basic friendliness. Compassion is very similar, really the main difference—you know in the heart there are no lines, just like there are no lines between countries, there's no real line between kindness and compassion in the heart—really the difference is more the context. Compassion doesn't arise without suffering. Compassion is the word that we use for the response that we have when someone is suffering and we care about them and we respond with this quality of openheartedness… We could be the one suffering or somebody else, when we respond in this openhearted way, we call that compassion. So it's a kind of recognition of others' suffering…and a wish that the other person not suffer. Even though we may not be able to do anything about it, the wish is there that they not suffer.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 8)

Sessions 5, 6, and 7 have the explicit curricular goal of exploring what it means to relate to others with specific instruction and activities related to forgiveness, working with conflict, and compassion and kindness respectively (Impact Foundation, 2009). As with the direct instruction and integration of emotion theory, Cullen considers these important aspects of phenomena that impact mindfully relating to experience. Cullen defines mindfulness in part as “...the holding of each experience with the open-hearted qualities of kindness and compassion” and as such, “challenging self-limiting perceptions related to emotions, forgiveness, intention setting, compassion and kindness can cause paradigm shifts that promote freedom, happiness and well being for ourselves and others” (Impact Foundation, 2009, p. 3). As such, Cullen provides direct instruction and role-play activities to reflect on relating to the self and others so that these can then become aspects of phenomena that are “privileged” (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020) within the community of practice with an emphasis placed on them in Cullen’s
pedagogical choices and a shared language to discuss them.

In addition to self-compassion being a part of the formal guided metta practice and direct instruction in session 7, the intentional cultivation of self-compassion is emphasized throughout in Cullen’s pedagogical choices (14 coded instances). Participants are encouraged to bring awareness to self-judgments when they occur as well as bring awareness to their own suffering (both physical and emotional) and to cultivate self-acceptance and self-compassion as a response.

Participant: I was really- I could hear my judgmental voice coming into thing when you said ok now use your mind to go beyond the raisin and so I was like ‘ok, yeah, build a grape and then build a tree’ [laughter]. So all that thing about like ok rather than being in the moment with the raisin, that actually really felt for me like a task and I was either succeeding or failing [laughs]. And then I found that as I was getting better at that visualization of the things beyond the grape that that actually took me away from the raisin so I had this moment where I was like ‘oh you know I’ve got those seedlings that we planted today. Oh my god I forgot o water them, oh no.” you know? So I experienced anxiety around the task and then I totally got distracted, I was like ‘this is counter-productive.’ But anyway I just- I was really struck by the fact that when you brought up back to the raisin I was like ‘ok, good, I’m back.’

Cullen: Boy, you know, that’s so much self-awareness though. That’s tremendous amount- I mean you’re tracking so accurately your experience and I think one of the biggest misconceptions that people bring invariably into mindfulness programs that I teach, is this idea that the mind is supposed to never wander. Wrong. Good luck with that. You know, I’ve yet to meet a person whose mind doesn’t wander, ever, no matter how much meditation they’ve done. So it’s not about the mind wandering it’s about noticing it and coming back, exactly what you did. And I also am very touched by your insight that I think is also really universal that the judgment comes up so quickly, you know, the self-judgment. And I think self-awareness of that is huge, is a really big part of it and part of what we’re doing in the mindfulness practice is working on softening that and bringing kindness even to the judgments as they arise.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 1)
In addition to noticing self-judgments or self-critical thoughts, participants are encouraged to actively apply self-compassion as a response, recognizing their own suffering such as in the example given under relating to suffering. In that example, as the participant describes having to fail students who do not attend class regularly, Cullen responds by encouraging them to recognize their own suffering in “being the messenger of painful real-world consequences” (Whole group discussion, Session 10) and attend to that suffering in addition to considering how to relate to the student involved. She continues by offering a metaphor of an arrow:

Cullen: …For me, staying open and letting the pain penetrate and move through is better. So instead of trying to let it bounce off, or pushing it down in some ways, so the arrow gets stuck inside of me, I think of it like an arrow that just goes through me, it doesn’t get caught. But you have to be pierced, if you’re not gonna close down all the way, and in a way it’s part of the bittersweet beauty of it. Cause some of these kids break your heart, right? They break your heart.

Participant: It’s the not taking it home anymore. It’s the fact that I can tell you the stories, I can tell you how horrible they are, but I don’t take it back home with me, I don’t have to tell my husband every single detail of my day.

Cullen: Right. And that’s part of letting it move through. It just comes through and it keeps going, and there’s a way that it’s really possible to live that way, and for me it’s a better way to live, but it’s just a thing to experiment with. Because it’s part of the beauty of the work too…

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 10)

Applying self-compassion then is presented as contingent upon being able to be mindful of one’s own suffering, accepting it and allowing it to “move through” without
rejection or self-judgment.

Cullen consistently invites noticing and dereifying self-judgmental thoughts in particular throughout both formal practice and in discussions. Self-blame and self-judgment are described as fueling the refractory period of triggered emotions (Whole group Discussion, Session 3) and Cullen draws attention to the possibility of self-judgment in comments:

Participant: [She] has been a little bit remiss on her homework, but I’m the most extreme.

Participant: … I share with the whole group, that I had been a little remiss [with home practice]…“Why am I not doing this?” And I’ve made some sort of fitful starts, but they’ve been fitful, and they truly are only starts.

Cullen: Yeah. I just wanna respond a little further to that resistance and suggest that most of the time, for most people, it may not be true for you… there’s a lot of self-judgment that’s happening around that. And, you know, that’s another place to pay attention, you know, that this can be interesting…

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 5)

These invitations both point to a general response to thoughts, labeling and letting them go, as well as a specific way in which self-judgments contribute to one’s own suffering. The practice of dereifying the self-judgments then becomes the general process of noticing the wandering mind and returning and an opportunity to intentional cultivate self-compassion and self-care.
Cultivating forgiveness and compassion for others

Cullen: Noticing the physical sensations and feelings or emotions you might encounter as you focus your attention here. And meeting whatever you find with the soothing balm of nonjudgmental awareness…So we're going to be engaging in a kindness practice right now. I'd like to begin with a very short self-forgiveness. So if you're comfortable with it, see if you can bring to mind anything you might be carrying that's weighing your heart, weighing heavily on your heart, about yourself. Not feeling good enough. Continuing to beat yourself up about losing your temper or not doing something perfectly in the classroom. About not doing the homework this week, or whatever, anything that you might be carrying that in some way is blocking or closing the doors of your heart towards yourself. And as you replay these transgressions in your mind, the things you did that you wish you hadn't, or didn't do that you wish you had, see if you can name, recognize, appreciate how these were expressions, tragic expressions of unmet needs. You were needing something, really wanting something but didn't know how to do it in that moment. And how you share these disappointments in yourself with millions of other people who are hard on themselves, who beat themselves up. You're not alone. If a very dear friend came to you and said "I can't believe I did this," how would you respond? What would you wish for them? And can you extend that to yourself just for this moment?

(Metta Meditation, Session 6)

Cullen introduces and extends Marshall Rosenberg’s concept of violence as “the tragic expression of unmet needs” (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015) both as a way of understanding one’s own unskillful actions and the actions of others that one may judge or have a hard time forgiving. Unskillful action then is described as ways to pursue happiness or alleviate suffering that fail to achieve the goal and can in fact contribute to further suffering for oneself or others. Compassion and forgiveness then are framed as not only having the potential to alleviate the suffering of others but also one’s own:
Cullen: The Dalai Lama also said, and I don't know if this is verbatim, but basically he said, 'if you want to be happy, practice compassion. If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.' That practicing these heart practices - forgiveness, kindness, compassion - all are really the ground for our own happiness actually, right? We talked about that with the forgiveness a lot. It seems like you're doing it for someone else, but the true beneficiary is you.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 8)

The role of mindfulness in relating to others is then introduced as being able to see them through an I-thou lens in which their own experience, bodies, and minds are subject to the same rules of phenomena. Cullen invites the participants to consider that others also experience suffer and seek to avoid it, and asks them to both practice forgiveness and attend to what arises as they practice it, with a focus on what resistance or thoughts arise.

Here then, Cullen assists participants in applying mindfulness as a part of a practice to extend compassion to others for their benefit as well as the participant’s own. In attending to the other’s words or actions, the participants are instructed to also attend to their own impulses to react, emotions, and thoughts. She cautions that they may be in a refractory period and unable to practice compassion in a moment or may experience resistance to the idea of forgiveness. Self-care is emphasized throughout as Cullen invites them to apply mindfulness to guide when they are ready:

Cullen: …Maybe a kid was rude in the classroom. I don’t know what the situation is that you are working with, but usually we have our share of day-to-day stuff and with all of these heart practices generally the suggestion is work with what you feel ready to work with and then you can kind of check back in and say how am I doing with that at another time? Do I feel ready to look at that? And the heart
says, ‘nope’. Okay, you have to respect that. Rather than pushing through, you know. The heart says, ‘no, I am still attached to the hurt, I am still—whatever it is, I am just not ready’. And there are many reasons why we can not be ready in a moment. So, it is one of kind of checking in to see ‘Am I holding on just because of some belief that may not even be true about myself or the other person or life? In which case, I don’t want to suffer any longer, I am just going to put it down’.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 6)

In Sessions 9 and 10, this is brought directly to their roles as educators. The participants are asked to specifically consider the ways they relate to “difficult” (Session 9 Homework) and “neutral” (Session 4 Homework) students as a practice of bringing a mindful attention to others and notice with non-judgmental awareness what happens. They are also encouraged to practice the phrases of the metta meditation with these student, e.g. ‘May you be happy’. It should be noted here that this represents a significant turn in Cullen’s curricular choices to not relate the topics of the previous session to their roles as educators. While the participants frequently discuss their professions as a part of their lives, until Session 9, the homework as been general instead of specifically relating to this part of who they are. This larger curricular choice to delay bringing the practices into the context of their educator lives is described further in the next section.

*Emphasizing that Learning Mindfulness is a Process and to Trust in that Process*

As participants first start engaging in the formal practices, they often comment during the discussion periods following that they found the practice difficult or felt as
though they may have done the practice incorrectly. One common approach Cullen uses (10 coded instances in whole group discussions) is to emphasize that learning mindfulness practices is a process and that the participants can trust in that process as they engage in the practices.

Participant: I wanted to say something positive is that I really did feel like my core relaxed because I don’t slow down enough at all, and even when I’m playing guitar, anything else I’m doing, I’m usually doing, so this is sort of an act of just paying attention to my body in an extremely slow way and I guess I tried to couple it with breathing just because learning how to breathe and just breathe, just breathing and breathing is really a good thing for me. So I think I augment it with my own, whatever I need.

Cullen: Yes, and be aware however I think there’s a way that ties in a little bit to what Sara and, tell me your name again? Amanda. were saying that there is a way that the mind seeks entertainment and distraction and is used to- gets bored easily by the sameness, the repetitive, the slowness, the lack of excitement, the body scan is not exciting at all, and in a way that’s part of the process, is- that’s part of how the mind settles, is by not pursuing every distraction, by not needing to leave when there’s boredom, by not needing to get more stimulation when you feel like you’re not being productive or whatever, to see what happens with that.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 3)

There is a clear pattern of trusting that as the participants engage with the guided formal practice and home practice, they will have experiences and insights about those experiences that they will share within the whole group discussions. This may in part be a result of the cohort of participants in this implementation that are all educators who consistently come ready to share their experiences and who were not mandated to be there. However, the curricular choice to have frequent whole group discussions throughout the training is based on a valuing of these shared inquiry spaces and a trust
that topics will arise whether from participants’ experiences in formal practice periods or from the connections they are making between the program and their daily lives.

Ultimately then, there is the curricular choice to trust that the process will unfold throughout the program and the pedagogical choice to consistently reaffirm that the process and practice itself is the goal. As in the example above under “Right Effort and the ‘Goldilocks’ test” in which Cullen discusses working with resistance, she offers consistent support for participants to meet their current experience with acceptance rather than with a judgment that it is or is not “mindful” or what “should” be happening.

**Scaffolding**

Scaffolding refers to a specific form of assistance in which a teacher simplifies the learner’s role “by means of graduated assistance” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). It is a process of removing assistance over time as the learner is able to perform a given practice independently. In the early stages of learning, the instructor, or more capable other, models the practice and offers assistance so that the learner can perform with their support. However, from this sociocultural perspective, the role of the instructor is to pull back this assistance as the learner internalizes the actions and meanings of the practice.

Two forms of scaffolding were identified in Cullen’s teaching: a) scaffolding silence and b) scaffolding the complexity of objects of attention.
Scaffolding Silence

Cullen: …one of the tricky parts is figuring out how much to say, when to say it. There was a lot of talking and instruction. There will be, hopefully less and less as we go. More in the beginning and less and less as we go, and it can be too much for some people and too little for other people, and that is how it goes.

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 4)

In order to investigate the former, video segments of the raising eating activity as well as all body scan and seated meditation practice activities were coded for silences lasting longer than 5 seconds between Cullen’s pedagogical choice to offer assistance during the practice. The results demonstrate an increase in periods of independent, silent practice over the course the sessions.

![Figure 5-4: Scaffolding of Silence over the Course of the Program](image)

This analysis confirmed the findings of the initial case study on this
implementation (Roeser, 2016) that Cullen increases the frequency of silent periods over
the course of the program, allowing for more time for independent practice.

For Cullen, this choice is based on the working theory that “as [participants]
develop some stability of mind they can pay attention longer and longer…it is in between
the notes that the music happens” (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020).
Without any data other than the participants’ self-reported sharing in whole group
discussions, it would be speculation to assume the participants have internalized the
instructions and are practicing independently more over the course of the training.
However, this does support that Cullen provides more opportunity for this independent
practice over time. In addition to having this extended opportunity, in the interview,
Cullen shared her reasoning that the participants’ minds tend to wander more in the
beginning and instructions can serve to invite a return of their attention to mindful
awareness.

Cullen also attributed her approach to seated meditation as being more in line
with a Tibetan Buddhist approach than a Theravadin vipassana one, involving more
guided assistance and visualization during practice periods than may occur in vipassana
traditions. This suggests an intentional approach that Cullen sees as situated between the
various mindfulness and meditation communities she has experienced.
**Scaffolding the Complexity of Objects of Attention**

As described early under “Dereification as ‘the wandering mind’”, the concept of the wandering mind is used throughout the training as a collective metaphor for all of the thoughts that are not attended to with mindful awareness. However, in session 6, Cullen invited bringing mindful awareness to thoughts that arise:

> Cullen: We’re going to start with the sitting practice and just to let you know today I’ll be widening the field of awareness to include awareness of thoughts in the instructions. This is a very interesting one I think. A really important piece an important skill in meditation practice in working with thought and again that’s quite different than getting rid of thoughts, which is really hard to do so hopefully you’ll find this easier although it’s a little bit slippery and that why instruction is helpful in working with thoughts.

(Seated Meditation, Session 6)

The invitation in session 6 is a movement from redirect attention from “wandering mind” back to the breath to mindfully labeling thoughts as they rising and falling away. Ultimately, throughout the program, mindfulness is defined as not excluding any aspect of experience but is rather a way of attending to whatever arises. However, Cullen scaffolds the instruction in guided formal practice to move from phenomena like the breath, sounds, and bodily sensations to aspects of experience that may be more challenging including thoughts and emotions.

> Cullen: I’d like to expand the instructions this afternoon to include thoughts as objects of attention just like the breath or sound…this is simple, but not easy, like a lot of meditation practice. The only difference in doing this from what you’ve been doing already is that when you become aware that you’re thinking, when you notice, when you wake up in the middle of a thought, instead of coming right back to the breath, see what happens if you turn your attention to the thought...
itself, the part of you that’s aware “Oh, I’m thinking. This is what’s going on here.” Here it’s very helpful to use the noting technique as a way of not getting swept up into the thoughts. So you might notice thinking, thinking, general thought, or if you find it helpful, you can try a specific label like judging, planning, worrying, remembering…rather than get involved in the content, just notice the thought, the content of it, just enough to figure out the category of thought, or sometimes we’ll say the contour of the thought…when you notice thinking, label the thought and see what happens to it when you label it…without trying to get rid of it or make it stay, again just become curious…there’s a thought. What does it do when you label it, when you notice it?…if it just vanishes or disappears come back to the breath, certainly another thought will come along…bear in mind that thoughts are seductive, very slippery, it’s very easy to get pulled into thoughts. This is not a problem again, it’s not just you, it’s just the nature of thought…so you can imagine that your awareness is like a spotlight that you shine on different objects, the breath, physical sensations, sounds, or thoughts…if you find yourself feeling restless try taking a few deep breaths and challenging yourself to settle into stillness and see what happens…you might notice hearing and immediately have a thought about it and notice thinking…remember even in the last minute of the meditation you can begin again, with one in-breath, one out-breath, and each time you do this, you’re training your mind.

(Seated Meditation, Session 6)

While relating to one’s own breath or bodily sensation as objects that can be attended to is structurally framed in the MBEB program as being easier to achieve and maintain (given their early placement in the curriculum), the reification of thoughts are more challenging to relate to in this way. In the above instructions, Cullen cautions the participants to avoid “getting swept up into the thoughts” as they can be “seductive” and “very slippery”.

Then, in Session 8, Cullen brings in an intentional focus on how to bring mindful awareness to emotions:
Cullen: You’ve been given instructions for working with the breath, sounds, physical sensations, and thoughts as objects of attention. And today, I’d like to expand this field of possible objects for awareness to include emotions and mental states. And not that they haven’t come up already in the practice, they certainly did for many people on Sunday. So here are some suggestions for how to work intentionally with emotions during the formal practice, and beyond. We’ve saved this aspect of experience for last in the instructions, because emotions and mental states can be both very strong and challenging to sit with because of their intensity, or very subtle, and challenging to become aware of.

(Seated Meditation, Session 8)

Here again there is an intentional scaffolding to what Cullen considers more challenging. Returning to a stages model for learning mindfulness such as that proposed by Marx and Marx (2012) in which the first stage is described as experiencing an I-me awareness through an observer self that is able to bear witness to what arises and falls away within one’s experience, Cullen’s approach is an intention breaking down of that first stage into smaller steps:

Figure 5-5: Scaffolding the Complexity of Objects of Attention

It would not be accurate to imply that these steps are rigidly held and that, for example, thoughts and emotion are not discussed earlier. However, there is a clear
curricular choice to intentional direct the joint attention of the community in this order throughout the training. This pattern in the data was confirmed in the mid-analysis interview in which Cullen described the move from attending to more gross or coarse objects such as the breath to more “elusive” objects such as thoughts (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020). In discussing potential later stages of mindfulness (Marx & Marx, 2012) in which the “I” in the I-me may drop away, Cullen expressed a belief that this a directional trajectory for mindfulness but that in a short program such as MBEB, it is not a direct objective:

Cullen: I don’t think we really at all get to awareness of awareness or dropping the observer. I would say that is a valid trajectory in mindfulness practice and a lot of contemplative practice. I think in our course, more realistically, where we get is from noticing the mind is wandering and coming back, labeling and beginning to notice categories of thought, and then I think what happens more commonly is seeing into the phenomenon of thought… how it comes and goes, how it is not solid, seeing into its power to shape experience without getting caught in that reactivity, seeing into the empty nature of thought.  

(Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020)

By scaffolding participants’ practice through the use of formal practice, increasing opportunities to independently practice in silence, and expanding the aspects of experience that participants are invited to attend to, Cullen shapes the learning experiences that allow participants to internalize mindfulness practices. Cullen’s forms of assistance also shape how to approach these practices, such as with nonjudgmental curiosity and right effort and by inviting participants to jointly attend to the benefits of
practice by highlighting the insights participants come to as they practice.

**RQ4: How is transfer of mindfulness practices to the teachers’ teaching practices designed and scaffolded by the instructor throughout an implicit approach to mindfulness training for educators?**

As a program designed for educators, Cullen makes curricular and pedagogical choices largely in favor of an implicit approach to transfer of the content in the program rather than explicitly offering what it means to be a “mindful teacher” of any subject or offering specific practices for the classroom. From the first session, Cullen makes this clear:

Cullen: Because I live here… I’ve come to really care about teachers and I wanted to offer this program here where I live. And I want you to know that I am the front of the line of a whole lot of people that care about teachers. And I know from the work I’ve done with different teacher groups that this isn’t often communicated to teachers. It’s not communicated through your salaries or your administrators necessarily. You don’t always get that from the parents, hopefully you do sometime.

I’d like you to know…That all the people that have contact with this program have said “we want to support teachers in whatever way we can”. I’m the one talking to you but there are a lot of people behind me who do really value you and the work that you do and this is an expression of that. It is offered to you. We don’t have a secret agenda that we are going to get you to do something with your kids in your classroom. You know, that maybe if you do this, then you’ll—In fact, we really discourage you from bringing any of these practices into your classroom. At the end, and you’ll see in your resources, there are different resources for mindfulness [for students]… This program is for you. It is really for your well-being and to the extent that others benefit around you, your family, your kids in the classroom, wonderful, that’s great. But that benefit will be derived from your self-care, taking care of yourselves.

(Opening remarks, Session 1)
As described early, Cullen bases this approach in part on a concern that tailoring a mindfulness program to a homogenous group can imply a need to fixed rather than “‘to gain access to that part of us which is never broken’” (Cullen, 2011, pg. 190). In the mid-analysis interview, she described her reasoning thus:

Cullen: …a lot of what I am trying to get people out of is an instrumental approach to everything, everything just being a way to get better at this or that. So, the whole project of mindfulness is really stepping out of that instrumentality and striving in general. So that is kind of the broadest level. And then, teachers in particular tend to focus a lot on others and have a bit of a false dichotomy or false binary view around caring for others and caring for themselves, so we are mitigating against that—ideas about being a good person and a compassionate person and a good teacher. So the focus is always out there…by working on yourself, you are helping others so mitigating against that false dichotomy that way.

To see that, to do this work inside, you are helping others and it is a benefit to everyone you relate to. You don’t have to choose to take care of them or take care of you…Letting it organically come out of their own insight rather than some conceptual technique that they have learned to pass on to their kids in classrooms.

(Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020)

This said, it should be noted that as the program progresses, there are activities and questions raised by Cullen that directly address the participants’ lives as educators. As discussed previously, the homework for sessions 4 and 10 includes attending to a difficult and neutral student. Cullen also references their interactions with colleagues, students, and parents throughout. In addition, the participants, as seen through the illustrative examples offered throughout, frequently share and ask about experiences
related to the classroom.

Throughout the entire program, there are 44 coded pedagogical choices related to school-related topics. 31 instances were initiated by participants and Cullen’s choice was in response, and 13 instances were initiated by Cullen. Of those initiated by Cullen, outside of having participants identify and attending to a neutral student and an instance of inviting participants to share connections they might be making to their classrooms in small groups, there are not instances before Session 8. This suggests an intentional focus on developing an experience of mindfulness generally before any narrowing of the focus to mindfulness in teaching life.

Of the 31 instances of school-related topics being introduced by participants, an organizing theme of generalizing from the context of the participant being educator to a wider lens of human experience emerged (18 coded instances). In these instances, while the participant shares an experience at work or otherwise related to teaching, Cullen’s response is to draw their attention to the universal aspect of phenomena involved.

An example:

Participant: I think it struck a nerve with me when you used the word ‘resentful’ because there are some things in my job that I’m very resentful of and one of the really big sources of stress for me is staff meetings because they’re so long and I feel like we’re not efficient. A lot of the stuff doesn’t relate to me and my job and as a result, I dread Wednesdays, like I cannot wait for Wednesdays to be over. And I just talked to one of my friends about this who works at a different school and he was like ‘I love Wednesdays, we get early dismissal,’ and I hate Wednesdays. And a lot of it has to do with the stress I feel around being resentful about not having my own time. So, just a personal goal for myself is just to be able to calm myself in that particularly—which I find—stressful environment. So it
just struck a nerve with me when you used that word and also thinking about how even though I have very few responsibilities at staff meeting, it’s a very upsetting time for me and I find myself getting more and more worked up the longer I’m there. So it’s just something that, at least for me, I really started to think about, how I can calm myself in these situations that I really dread?

Cullen: So I think that when you notice resentment, that’s an interesting kind of red flag to think about choice. Is there a way that I can trace back and see if I can choose differently, do I want to choose differently? Do I choose to be here? Am I choosing to be here as a teacher and this is part of the landscape? And the more you can connect with your sense of volition and agency, the better you’ll feel.

Participant: Yeah, and I think part of it too is we have some challenging people on staff who—and I get very upset with the way that they talk to each other and even though it doesn’t even involve me, just the tone of the conversation really upsets me sometimes, and so recognizing that in myself too, that I’m very, very sensitive to what I perceive as aggression or disrespect. Sorry we got a little off-track, but just thinking about that, it’s interesting for me about how I need to kind of calm my own—

Cullen: Well, there’s stressors, and we’re going to talk about that…we’re going to talk about mindfulness and stress and we’re going to, I hope, tie in that kind of experience to the conversation, a staff meeting or wherever you experience stress during the day, and we’re going to circle back as we look at stressful communication, forgiveness, anger, you know. We’re going to unpack it and look at it from different angles, that I hope all relate. And we’ll give you different strategies for bringing in the stuff that we’re doing into those places where the rubber meets the road, sitting in staff meeting and feeling yourself [in a distressed tone] “ugh.”

(Whole Group Discussion, Session 3)

Here, Cullen’s response to the participant’s story of relating to teacher staff meetings becomes about how anyone can relate to their sense of volition and feelings of resentment and relating to challenging teacher colleagues becomes about relating to stressful conversations generally. There is a consistent move from the specific realm of
the job of an educator to the universal element of human experience. It implies that, while the context of being an educator is important and may include particular sources of stress or suffering, the practice of mindfulness in that context, as with any other, remains the same. Thus, the purpose of the MBEB program is to cultivate aspects of the fourth domain of teacher knowledge, but the integration of this knowledge into the teacher participants’ own professional lives is a process led by the participants themselves rather than the mindfulness instructor.

As with all of the experiences that participants shared from their lives, Cullen intentionally validates the experiences they raise that come from the classroom and invites them to accept the conditions beyond their control as well as the suffering those conditions cause to themselves and their students alike. She labels and celebrates the “a-ha” moments they have about their experiences and their habitualized patterns of relating to them without offering general advice about how to approach future interactions in the school context.

While the following cannot be taken as representative of the participants’ experience with the program as a whole, this participant’s final comments reinforce that Cullen’s choice to not separate teaching from life within the program is clear and visible:

Participant: When I came here I thought I was coming to learn about how to be calm around one particular student [laughter] and how to regroup and recover and then lo and behold that first day, you actually went out of your way to say ‘I don’t want this to be immediately applied to your classroom. I want this to be for you.’ And I didn’t realize it, but I kind of came in with a suit of armor around what I believe and how I am and how I project myself, and from that day on, I just felt
like there was a continual invitation—not always one I wanted to take up—but there was always a continual invitation to unpack, unburden, and reconsider. And I don’t think I can speak the way that some people have about the manifestations in my classroom yet because I think that I have been really closely monitoring this classroom [points to herself] and me and myself. And that’s been huge because I think that part of how I have been able to be disarmed is that I didn’t see that coming, you know?

And if I had seen it coming I might have had more armor [laughter] so you know you are sneaky [laughter]. So ideas that have really sort of rocked my world in the last nine weeks is shame versus remorse, reaction versus responding, feeling versus fleeing, and I think a lot of people said this but the idea that, not just ‘tomorrow is a new day’, but the very next breath, the very next thing is new, right? I think that is on some of the tapes—that just came as such a huge relief to me. I wondered why that was so relieving and then I realized because my stakes are super high and maybe if the stakes could be lower, then nothing has to be as scary you know? or as overwhelming?

And so I am really fearful in this moment because I have adored this class and this class has done so much for me in my personal journey but I am also aware, like you said, that we can take small steps forward and I am really hoping to stay in touch with some of you and just keep plowing at it. Thank you very much.

(Final Circle, Session 11)

Overall then, the approach to transfer is the same for transfer to school and classroom practice as it is to transfer to any context. The emphasis is on paying attention to aspects of experiences with non-judgment, curiosity, and compassion for self and others when it is possible to do so (right effort). The participants’ questions and comments related to their teaching indicate that how to integrate mindfulness into teaching practices is part of the curriculum of the program. However, Cullen’s pedagogical approach in response suggests that the participants, as professional teachers in their own subjects areas, lead the conversations about this integration.
Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the types of curricular and pedagogical choices that the developer and instructor of the course, Margaret Cullen, made in creating the MBEB program and within this particular implementation. In order to categorize her choices, I described the curricular structure of the program and categorized the pedagogical choices made throughout the implementation. Through this analysis and the mid-analysis interview with Cullen, many beliefs and sources that informed her choices were made visible. They show the consistency and intentionality of an experienced instructor. In the next chapter, I highlight the significance of these findings to the field of teaching mindfulness and researching the impact of programs like MBEB within the field of education and within other contexts. I make recommendations for future approaches to research as well as future studies to continue this line of inquiry.
CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

This case study describes the curricular and pedagogical choices made by an experienced mindfulness instructor within an implementation of a mindfulness-based program for educators. By analyzing Margaret Cullen’s choices in designing the program and in its implementation, the purpose was to identify the practices of mindfulness being introduced and supported within a mindfulness program for educators, as well as how the instructor provides assistance to the participants as they practice. While this single case does not capture all of the possible permutations for programs or pedagogical choices that can be made in teaching mindfulness, it can inform our understanding of how mindfulness is taught. This has benefits to mindfulness teacher preparation and future program development and refinement. It also has implications for teaching of mindfulness in an MBI for educators specifically. This study is part of a larger research agenda to understand the fourth domain of teacher knowledge (Taylor et al., 2019) and how MBI programs can support the development of this domain. Working from this same premise of four domains of teacher knowledge, an understanding of how Cullen’s choices shape the curriculum and pedagogy of this MBEB implementation and the beliefs that inform those choices allows for the beginning of constructing a model of the four domains of mindfulness teacher knowledge. Also, patterns emerged that informed a
theoretical framework for understanding a process of learning mindfulness practices as well as learning how to apply these practices to develop awareness of habitualized ways of relating to participants’ lived experience. Finally, an analysis of how transfer was approached within the more implicit approach of MBEB suggests a focus on developing the fourth domain of mindfulness and allowing the experienced teachers to form the connections to the other three domains: “Knowledge of subject matter and curriculum goals, knowledge of learners & their development in social contexts, and knowledge of teaching” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

In this chapter, I summarize the findings of analyzing the video recordings of an implementation of the Mindfulness-Based Emotional Balance (MBEB) program that was offered under the name Stress-Management and Relaxation Training (SMART) and was taught by Margaret Cullen. Then, the implications of those findings to the teaching of mindfulness within an MBI generally is considered. Finally, these findings and the implications for programs are contextualized in the subfield of mindfulness in educational settings.

**Summary of Findings**

This analysis of Margaret Cullen’s curricular and pedagogical choices in an implementation of the MBEB program for educators describes a social process through which a more capable other models and offers assistance to participants as they make
sense of practicing mindfulness through guided formal practices then unpack these formal practices and mindfulness practices that can be used throughout daily life in whole group discussions.

The structure of activities across the program has an experiential and social focus with 30% of the program time being devoted to guided activities and 47% to whole group, dyadic, and small group discussion. The guided formal practices of seated meditation, body scan, mindful movement, and metta meditation, representing 25% of the total curricular time, are common to Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and MBSR-based programs, but this study extends beyond this curricular level of activities to the pedagogical choices Cullen makes in how they are introduced, guided, and discussed in order to better understand these formal practices and the more general practices of mindfulness that can be applied to meet any experience.

Towards an Understanding of the Four Domains of Teaching Mindfulness

Conceptualizing mindfulness as part of a fourth domain of teacher knowledge is an effort to bridge the work on the impacts of MBIs for educators with established frameworks for understanding teacher preparation and development. This approach also aligns with the history of how the first three domains were developed. In response to early conceptions of teacher knowledge being primarily or exclusively related to knowledge of subject matter or content, Shulman (1986) argued that teacher knowledge
also includes pedagogical knowledge, both general and specific to the content area (Cochran et al., 1993). This recognition of the complexities involved in teaching was then further refined into the three domains illustrated in Darling-Hammon & Bransford (2005):

Figure 6-1: Based on “A Framework for Understanding Teaching and Learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005)

This current study is part of a research agenda that posits a fourth domain (Taylor, 2016; Taylor et al., 2019) of teacher knowledge related to the “contemplative, social, and
emotional aspects of teaching, learning, and learning to teach” (Hulburt et al., 2020). This fourth domain highlights the inner and inter-personal knowledge that allows a teacher of any subject to access the other three domains within the social and often complex experiences of learning:

![Figure 6-2: A framework of the four domains of mindful teaching](image)

Just as Shulman’s model of teaching (1986) drew attention to the complexities of teacher by identifying forms of knowledge beyond subject content, this framework of mindful teaching contributes to a deeper understanding of teacher knowledge and expertise by highlights and elevates the role that being present and responsive within
one’s teaching plays in order to access the other three domains when making curricular and pedagogical decisions.

If this is an accurate and useful framework for understanding teaching generally, then it is also applicable to teaching mindfulness. Concepts like “classroom management” may be understood in other ways such as stewardship (McCown et al., 2010), but the overall domains of a) knowledge of pedagogy, b) knowledge of subject matter and curriculum goals, c) knowledge of learners & their development in social contexts, and d) the fourth domain is a relevant framework for understanding teaching in this and any subject.

This study focused primarily on Cullen’s knowledge of the subject matter of mindfulness and her pedagogical knowledge that inform her curricular and pedagogical choices. However, in describing the forms of assistance Cullen offers these learners as they develop these practices, a sociocultural approach to learning also becomes visible in Cullen’s teaching (discussed below). Also, as Cullen practices alongside the participants and engages with them in discussion, she offers a model of what being calm, clear, and kind can look like.

In terms of pedagogical and subject matter knowledge, Cullen takes a four foundations approach to what mindfulness is and how it is taught: mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feeling, mindfulness of mind, and mindfulness of dharma (phenomena). The practice of mindfulness includes both formal practices (body scan,
mindful movement, seated meditation, and metta meditation) and practices applied to any moment of daily life. This conceptualization of mindfulness informs her approach to teaching mindfulness in how she structures the activities within the program and scaffolds the participant’s learning (curricular choices) as well as in how she delivers the curriculum (pedagogical choices). While the four foundations are not explicitly identified for participants in the program, they are consistently pointed to as aspects of experience for the participants to attend to in Cullen’s guidance during formal practice and in her responses to participant comments in discussion. Participants are invited to attend to these aspects of their experience non-judgmentally and with an awareness of the impermanence of experience.

The four foundations of mindfulness represent the traditional approach to understanding and teaching mindfulness in Buddhism. However, there is variance in descriptions about the nature of the foundations (Cullen et al., 2019) and analysis of Cullen’s professional writings, coupled with interview data and her pedagogical choice indicate her knowledge of these different views and intentional choices on her part. For example, mindfulness of feeling can be understood to be “mindfulness of feelings”—as in emotion (e.g. Kornfield, 2013; as cited in Cullen et al., 2019)—or restricted to the valence of pleasant, unpleasant or neutral (e.g. Goldstein, 2002; as cited in Cullen et al., 2019). For Cullen, her interpretation is the latter and is visible in her consistent guidance for participants to attend to valance in this way. In recognition that emotions are a
particularly challenging experience to relate to with mindfulness however, the program includes a complimentary focus on mindfulness of emotions.

In addition, Cullen’s approach to the fourth foundation of mindfulness, mindfulness of dharma or phenomena, includes intentional choices of what guiding principles of experience she emphasizes. While these choices were strongly impacted by the kinds of experiences raised by participants in the whole group discussion and the insights to which those experiences seem to point, the phenomena of impermanence and the nature of suffering are examples of principles emphasized in this implementation. These two themes do not represent the totality of the fourth foundation as presented in the implementation but are rather offered here as examples of two reoccurring principles pointed to in Cullen’s pedagogical choices.

In exploring the participants’ experiences in formal practice, Cullen draws their attention to the arising and passing away of sensation and thought without the need for reaction and so, the phenomena of impermanence is centralized in how to accept what arises and allow it to be and then not be as it falls away. When noticing an unpleasant experience, like an itch for example, participants are invited to become curious and see if the experience changes. Acceptance and nonjudgment of what arises in mindfulness practice is therefore linked to the concept of impermanence through watching the arising and passing away without requiring effort to create change or force that passing.

The nature of suffering then is also an emphasized principle. that there are two
kinds of suffering: the unavoidable such as physical pain or the arising of an unpleasant emotion, and the avoidable suffering that can occur in reaction to the avoidable. For example, as the educator participants share unpleasant conditions of their teacher roles, Cullen invites them to honor the unavoidable suffering of these conditions—the stress or sadness or frustration for example—applying self-compassion that recognizes the pain of that suffering. This is then followed by a further invitation to consider how the participants are relating to the experience of the suffering and whether there might be avoidable suffering. This same principle of the nature of suffering is then also applied to relating to others whose unskillful actions may be the tragic expression of unmet needs. Cullen does not invite participants to imagine the motives of people who have caused the participants harm, but does invite them to, when possible, meet the harm caused by others with compassion and to explore if the participants are themselves creating more suffering, such as by not practicing forgiveness as letting go of resentment.

Cullen’s approach to the fourth foundation is also shaped by her expertise in western psychology which she draws upon most prominently in how she approaches the phenomena of emotions. Paul Ekman’s theory of emotional triggers and the refractory period become common language in the community of practice and used as a way to consider the nature of emotions. This shapes how the community discusses the experience of strong emotion and how the mind-body may react to these emotions. This emotional theory becomes a shared language in the community to discuss the phenomena
of emotional experience.

As mentioned, the four foundations of mindfulness are central to how mindfulness is described and taught in Buddhist traditions, especially Theravadin, as described in the Satipatthana Sutta (MN10, in Nanamoli and Bodhi 2009, 145–155). As a guiding approach to conceptualizing mindfulness, it is also a clear influence on the curriculum of MBSR (e.g. Husgavel, 2018) which likely informed Cullen’s approach. However, in both the MBSR curriculum (Santorielli et al., 2017) and the MBEB curriculum, it is not explicitly described but rather informs the aspects of experience pointed towards by an instructor while offering assistance to learners. While the first three foundations of body, feeling and mind can be considered to translate rather directly from their Buddhist roots to secular practice given their tangible and verifiable nature, the conception of the fourth foundation within Buddhism includes the dharma of Buddhist teachings which can extend beyond the secular context, such as in regard to the nature of anatta or non-self, and relationship between interdependence and rebirth. Kabat-Zinn’s Collapsing the foundations into “in a particular way” in the definition of “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (1994, p.4) sidesteps what principles of Buddhist dharma are within MBSR’s conception of universal dharma; however, this research indicates that there are important choices in what principles of phenomena are include and how they are introduced and pointed to throughout a mindfulness program.
Together then, while the formal practices are visible in curricular descriptions, this study describes aspects of Cullen’s teacher knowledge on how to approach these practices and how to apply mindfulness more generally to daily life. This gives access to aspects of her considerable knowledge of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge.

Knowledge of Learning: A Vygotskian Approach to Understanding the Teaching of Mindfulness

A Vygotskian approach to understanding the process of teaching mindfulness proved a good fit for describing Cullen’s approach to teaching and learning. The experiential learning activities of guided practices followed by whole group discussions that represent 77% of the total program time align with a community of practice view in which a more capable other—the instructor Margaret Cullen—draws the community’s attention jointly to specific ways of understanding and relating to the practices and the application of those practices to the participants’ lived experience. Cullen offers specific methods of assistance both through the guidance offered and in responding to participant offerings during the discussion that shape the learning experience and can expand the participants’ ZPDs as they learn how to practice and the value of practice.

This sociocultural frame for understanding the teaching and learning of mindfulness is not intended to diminish any direct learning or physiological changes that occurs when participants simply engage in the formal practices as they attend to aspects of their own experience. Rather, it is intended to highlight that they do not engage in
these practices strictly on their own. The guidance offered throughout these practice periods, through the recordings for home practice, and in discussion periods is intended to shape their understanding of what to do during these periods—such as attending to the breath, dereifying thought, and connecting with bodily sensation and its absence—and also how to relate to their experience—such as by accepting without self-judgment and by finding their own “Goldilocks” point of right effort. The actions and meanings of the formal practices—body scans, mindful movement, metta, and seated meditation—are broken down through Cullen’s guidance in order to guide the participants towards a shared understanding within this community. Cullen also includes scaffolding of the complexity of objects of attention and by increasing periods of silent, independent practice in seated meditation. The former involves moving from gross to more subtle or more challenging aspects of experience, starting from the breath and moving to dereifying thoughts and emotional experiences. The latter then, involves increasing the space between utterances in seated meditation for participants to self-assist in their application of the four foundations of mindfulness. Ultimately, all aspects of experience in daily life can be met with mindfulness, but Cullen scaffolds in this way to expand the participants’ zone of proximal development with the practices, inviting them to independently practice as they sequentially expand what they relate to and better internalize what it means to mindfully do so.

As participants engage in these guided practices, they have the opportunity to
internalize Cullen’s guidance in the form of self-talk as they practice noticing the valence of the moment or noticing when their mind has wandered and returning to the breath. The intent then is that they move to applying these actions independently as they internalize the instructions and make their own meaning of them.

As periods of silence are intentionally extended throughout the program, the goal is to move from Stage I of Tharp and Gallimore’s four stages of learning, in which the participant is engaging in the practice with assistance, to Stage II in which participants are internalizing this guidance and applying it independently with self-assistance in the form of self-talk. In Stage II, the participant has an experiential understanding of a decentered, I-me, relationship to their own experience and the “I” observer self is a personal voice of self-talk offering assistance to one’s own practice. Cullen’s invitational language of curiosity, play, and right effort in part shape this self-assistance to be self-compassionate and kind without self-judgment or force.

Stage III of this learning process, in which the self-assistance drops away, aligns with what Marx & Marx (2012) refer to as their second stage of learning mindfulness and would take place as the assistance becomes automatized. In the context of mindfulness, automatization may sound contradictory, but this would involve, for example, noticing and dereifying thought without internal self-talk cues rather than automatic reactions that would stem from reified thoughts in an unmindful way. To note however, as Cullen states in the mid-analysis interview and Marx & Marx suggest, this stage of mindfulness
without the experience of an observer “I-me” relationship likely extends beyond the scope of the MBEB program, requiring continued practice.

Within Stage IV of Tharp & Gallimore’s teaching and learning model, the learner defossilizes their automatized learning when confronted with new scenarios or experiences in which the learned approach does not lead to the desired result. Within the teaching of mindfulness, this process of the defossilization of habitual patterns is enacted intentionally and can be seen as a complementary process that Cullen directly assists participants in practicing. Learning to defossilize habitual ways of relating to experience that have developed throughout their lives, patterns that may or may not lead to desired results of alleviating suffering or being happy, is itself a practice being learned throughout the program.

Relating to one’s own experience is inherent to the human condition and therefore participants enter the program with fossilized or habitualized ways of doing so. This is captured in Vygotsky’s concept of perezhivanie, the “prism of [each person’s subjective] emotional experience” (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 336 as cited in Brennan, 2014). The participants’ perezhivanie, the way they relate to the practices in the program as well as to their daily lives forms much of the curriculum within the MBEB program. The first session of the course begins with unpacking their experiences and questions about the concept of mindfulness, and the whole group discussions throughout, create spaces for participants to share thoughts and emotions that arise in response to practices and
experiences applying mindfulness to their daily lives. Cullen offers consistent invitations to become curious about how participants relate to their own experience, the scripts they carry about relating to emotions for example, or the stories they hold that in Martin Buber’s language, “I-it” other people. These are invitations to defossilize their perezhivanie in order to see it as the refracting prism shaping how they are relating to their experience and to notice where it does and does not support their pursuits to be happy and for others to be happy. By inviting participants to pay attention to what arises in their own experience without self-judgement and with curiosity, Cullen prioritizes noticing thoughts about the experience, reactions, and impulses to react. Where Vygotsky’s conception of perezhivanie may leave off then, mindfulness picks up with ways to relate directly to it.

In “Problem of the Environment” (1994), Vygotsky offer the example of three children of an alcoholic single mother. He uses the three children to illustrate how, while many external factors are the same, the way they experience and develop through being a child in the family is shaped by how they experience those factors which is both external in part (ages of the children) and internal (how they made sense of their experiences over time). This culminating prism of perspective, their perezhivanie, then impacts future experiences by shaping how they make sense of them and react or respond. The question this raises from a mindfulness perspective is how to help the child to see this perezhivanie in order to increase their agency in relating to it and as they relate to future
relevant experiences. While Bakhurst (Bakhurst, 2019) makes the argument to collapse perezhivanie by translating it as “experience” in order to avoid “the cultish implication that only the Russian [word] will do” (p. 5), the practices of mindfulness highlight the value of distinguishing the experience from the stories we hold of it (whether we use the Russian term or not aside). It is precisely this collapse of experience and story, reifying the interpretations of a refracting prism, that mindfulness seeks to unpack so that the prism can be seen and related to directly through embodied awareness.

Cullen’s pedagogical choices indicate her experience and knowledge that noticing one’s perezhivanie is a goal in and of itself, albeit one that can lead to self-critical thought and frustration. She offers guided assistance to normalize their fossilized habitual patterns of responding to experiences and prioritize the simple noticing of it first while encouraging them to trust in the process of accepting what arises. Then, if possible, Cullen consistently invites them to apply right effort of meeting it with self-compassion, kindness, and curiosity as it is defossilized and reflected upon.

As described, the whole group discussions create opportunities for participants to ask clarifying questions about practicing mindfulness in the context of formal practice and in applying mindfulness to their daily lives. In the other direction though, the discussions also create opportunities to share and unpack their previously fossilized ways of relating to experience. These periods thus afford Cullen opportunities to access the participant’s understandings and wonderings in both directions and to support the
participants in both processes of internalizing mindfulness self-assistance and defossilizing their habitualized patterns.

Figure 6-3: Theoretical Model of Progression through the ZPD in a Mindfulness Program

In the above theoretical model, Stage 1 of the learning process includes assistance provided by the mindfulness instructor for both understanding the actions and meanings of mindfulness practices as well as to noticing, and therefore defossilizing, habitual patterns of relating to experience with a quality of self-compassion and non-judgment.
By validating and normalizing participants’ experiences in formal practice and in making sense of their lived experiences, as well as inviting self-compassion to both processes, the instructor not only introduces the actions of these practices but also the quality of how to approach these actions. Stage 2 illustrates the self-assistance step in which participants may engage in self-talk or mentally recreate the voice of the instructor as they practice mindfulness and notice habitualized patterns. With the latter, these patterns may be noticed before acting on them, such as can be seen in the example offered of the participant noticing a desire for chocolate (p.119), during an action, or in reflection such as recalling during whole group discussions. Often, during whole group discussions, Cullen’s responses to participants’ reflections are simply to celebrate the insights to which the participant is arriving in their own comments and the act of sharing the experience becomes the space in which the participant is self-assisting to defossilize their own habitualized patterns. Stage 3 then depicts the internalization of both processes in which moments of mindfulness take place and are recognized without assistance or self-talk. In this case of habitual patterns, this might be illustrated by experiencing the desire for chocolate at the sight of it as a thought of desire accompanied by a sense of freedom in deciding whether or not to act on the impulse to eat it.

The recursive loops depicted here represent the return to self-assistance during both processes. While engaging in formal practice, participants in this implementation were encouraged to return to counting breaths or labeling thoughts when they notice the
mind wandering. Cullen also normalizes that sometimes formal practice will feel effortless or less effortful, while at other times it will not. This returning to self-talk in practice and in defossilizing habitualized patterns then represents the intentional reengagement of present moment awareness and relating mindfully to experience.

When considering the relationship between this learning model and the research to date related to the outcomes of the MBEB program, this model may shed light on what is occurring within the program to arrive at these outcomes. For example, the most recently research (Braun et al., 2020a; Braun et al., 2020b) on the MBEB program found increased efficacy to forgive students and colleagues and visible increases in emotional support on the CLASS observation measure (LaParo and Pianta, 2003). This work highlighted the program’s curricular focus on compassion and forgiveness in support for how the program leads to these forgiveness-related outcomes. In addition to the direct instruction and activities related to forgiveness Braun et al. rightly highlights, this study suggests that compassion for one’s self and others can be a consistent form of assistance offered by the instructor for how to approach any of the program mindfulness practices. In addition, this study supports the study’s description that the program involves inviting teachers to “explore, through lecture and group discussion, the concepts of forgiveness and unforgiveness, major misconceptions that impede the process of forgiveness, and their own personal experiences with harm and forgiveness” (p.1981). This exploration can be seen as an illustration of the defossilization process in which the participants
unpack previously held habitual patterns of relating to their experiences around forgiveness and consider these patterns with self-compassion and curiosity. This defossilization process then allows for choice in how to relate to future experiences. In response to the questions of how confident the teachers felt in their ability to forgive colleagues and their students, the findings of the study then suggest that the participants felt more able, suggesting not only forgiveness efficacy but also an awareness of the choice to defossilize and become curious around forgiveness.

**MBEB along a Continuum of Transfer to the Life of an Educator**

In designing the MBEB program for educators, Cullen makes intentional choices to avoid an instrumental approach to mindfulness and how it can affect the participants’ lives as educators. Instead, she focuses on their development of the fourth domain of teacher knowledge and allows the K-12 teachers integrate the ideas into their professional lives. Throughout the program, participants share experiences from the classroom and describe their relationship to their professions; however, Cullen makes a point of emphasizing from the first session that the program is for the participants themselves, as people, rather than for them as teachers or to improve their teaching. Any outcomes in the classroom are framed as resulting from their own self-care and taking care of themselves. This study suggests that while participants’ self-care is a clear focus within the program, applying mindfulness to the classroom was also a clear focus with 44 coded
instances in which either the participants raised topics related to their professional lives and Cullen made pedagogical choices in how to respond (31 coded instances) or Cullen initiated these exchanges (13 coded instances). There are also curricular activities related to teaching, including homework to intentionally attend to a “neutral” student that the participants do not have strong feelings about.

A coding of Cullen’s pedagogical choices in how to respond to topics related to teaching indicates that she consistently generalizes experiences from the classroom to a wider lens of human experience. In this move from the specific to the general, Cullen acknowledges the complex and oftentimes stressful context of classrooms and then moves to normalize the given experience and invite the participants to consider the how and why of bringing mindfulness and compassion to the general type of that experience.

Returning to the four domains of mindful teaching then, Cullen consistently focuses on the participants’ development of the fourth domain of teacher knowledge. The integration of this knowledge into the professional context of being a K-12 educator is then primarily led by the K-12 educators themselves. As introduced previously in this chapter, the development of the original three domains of teacher knowledge was a call to recognize the complexities involved in developing teachers’ “adaptive expertise”. This adaptive expertise includes having internalized effective teaching routines and also developing the ability to constantly adapt (defossilize) routines and one’s pedagogical approach in response to the social interactions taking place in the moment (Darling-
Hammond & Bransford, p. 49-50). Together, all four domains of teacher knowledge would need to come together in order to constitute what it means to mindfully teach. However, mindfully teaching in the K-12 context is not Cullen’s expertise, mindfully teaching mindfulness is. Her teaching offers a model of what mindful teaching can look like in an adult education context related to the teaching of mindfulness-based subject matter. This modeling can support teacher participants in their own integration of the fourth domain concepts to their own teaching practice. However, this integration involves the full complexity of the other three domains within each teacher participants’ own subject and developmental level areas.

**Implications to the Teaching of Mindfulness**

The number of peer-reviewed studies on the benefits of mindfulness practices and programs continues to grow generally (Roeser, 2014) and within the field of education for educators and students specifically. This valuable work needs to be paired with continuing research on the curriculum and pedagogy involved in the teaching and learning within these programs in order to refine and generate programs (Dimidjian & Segal, 2015) and to better understand what occurs within the “‘black box’ of these interventions in order to understand how the skills and dispositions of mindfulness are taught and learned” (Roeser, 2016, p.167). To the former, as the field of contemplative science develops more robust descriptions of program curricula and instructors’
pedagogical approaches, cross-program analysis becomes more nuanced and the impacts of differences between programs can be measured. And to the latter, a better understanding of the social processes that occur within these programs can help to better prepare future mindfulness teachers and to better describe and understand the kinds of choices that are made at the curricular and pedagogical levels within programs.

Much of the professional writing by mindfulness teachers and teacher educators describe a sociocultural approach to the teaching and learning of mindfulness (e.g. McCown et al., 2010; Brandsma, 2017). This study offers evidence and a theoretical learning model that describes this approach and offers illustrative examples from an experience mindfulness teacher of what it can look like. It also highlights the role of teacher assistance and scaffolding can play within the curriculum and pedagogy of teaching mindfulness.

The Complexity of Teaching Mindfulness and Taking a “Choice” Approach

By examining the curricular choices that go into a mindfulness-based program like MBEB and the pedagogical choices within an implementation by a highly experienced mindfulness teacher, a deeper appreciation for the complexity of these choices can be developed in training mindfulness teachers to move from their experiences as learners of mindfulness to making these choices themselves.

Lorte’s apprenticeship of observation problem in K-12 teacher preparation posits
that, as a result of being a student, people develop beliefs and working narratives about what it means to teach and be a teacher based upon their experiences as students. However, in their experience as students, they have only seen “the teacher frontstage and center like an audience viewing a play” (1975) and do not see the backstage elements of the ‘performance’. Within the field of curriculum and supervision, this highlights the issue that many preservice teachers have working narratives when they enter their preparation program, but lack the knowledge to fully understand what they witnessed as students of their teachers’ work. As a result, their conceptions of teaching are often “fraught with unrecognized assumptions, potentially leading to misguided interpretations of classroom processes if left unexamined” (Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010).

Within the teaching of mindfulness, this apprenticeship of observation is useful in considering the preparation of mindfulness teachers as they move from practitioner to mindfulness teacher.

Many mindfulness-based teacher training programs require prospective teachers to have sat mindfulness retreats or otherwise have had extensive practice experience, such as with MBSR training which requires having participated in an MBSR program as a participant and at least one mindfulness retreat (Oasis Institute, 2020). This required experience is, of course, logical in that prospective teachers will have experience with the practices they are to be trained to model and offer assistance on. However, the apprenticeship of observation problem still stands in that they enter the training program
with working narratives about the practices and the teaching of those practices that will need to be defossilized and explored as they learn how to teach mindfulness from “backstage” where they come to understand the curricular and pedagogical choices to be made and the possible reasonings behind them.

This case study was not intended to prove the appropriateness or correctness of Cullen’s choices as it does not analyze outcome measures; however, the data does indicate an expert level of intentionality behind these choices. Cullen’s pedagogy is highly consistent and her professional writings as well as the mid-analysis interview indicate and give access to a depth of experience and consideration that inform her choices. In discussing how she approaches her pedagogical choices during seated meditation for example, Cullen identified her approach as leaning towards more Tibetan Buddhism-based methods of including visualizations and more guidance rather than a vipassana-based one that might privilege longer periods of silence (Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020). This speaks to her experience with multiple traditions of contemplative practices that she is drawing on to inform her choices. Similarly, in the whole group discussion activities, Cullen’s approach to inquiry often includes drawing connections to her own meditation experiences, experience as a psychologist, as well as poetry, jokes and stories. These provide her with a curated collection of options that she can draw upon when they are relevant to what is offered by participants in order to illustrate themes and draw connections. They do not appear to be canned or loaded ahead
of time, but rather seem to be well considered connections to illustrate ideas or highlight insights. This curated collection and the wisdom of knowing when a connection seems valuable to share is the kind of adaptive expertise that can likely only come from years of teaching experience.

From the perspective of MBI development and creating a research agenda to investigate the outcomes of these programs, concepts like program fidelity and instructor competency are logical and valuable as multi-site studies and studies to replicate previous results require evidence of comparability. However, from the perspective of teacher development in the field of mindfulness that stresses creating authentic social experiences and following the learner’s lead in discussion, identifying the kinds of choices that can be made and the reasoning behind a more capable instructors’ choices may be a more appropriate approach.

Even working within the curricular framework of the MBEB program, other choices could be made. The topic of how Cullen approaches when to offer assistance during guided seated meditation came up in the interview based on my own vipassana experiences and my having to re-see her choice in offering more guidance than I would have expected based on my own personal experience. To be transparent, my initial reaction, based on learning from other highly experienced mindfulness teachers, included judgmental thoughts about her approach. However, as we discussed the basis of her choice to offer guidance more frequently generally and her scaffolding to reduce that
frequency over time, I came to see that this was more a matter of my own apprenticeship of observation problem. I was locked into one way of seeing mindfulness instruction. Beyond the research-as-learning this provided me, it also again points to the complexities involved in enacting curricular activities and supports taking a “choice” approach to talking about the teaching of mindfulness. By elucidating the kinds of curricular choices made in the program design and the kinds of pedagogical choices a mindfulness teacher makes while teaching, current and future mindfulness teachers can make sense of their own beliefs and working narratives about the practices and instruction. In addition, the concept of “choices” keeps the door open to other possibilities these choices represent in a field that seeks to humbly recognize the complexity of being responsive to the “authentic authority of each person’s own experience” (Kabat-Zinn, 2011, as cited in Cullen et al., 2019).

*It is in the Words We Say, the Stories We Tell, and When We Choose to Say Them*

Bhikkhus, the teaching is merely a vehicle to describe the truth. Don’t mistake it for the truth itself. A finger pointing at the moon is not the moon. The finger is needed to know where to look for the moon, but if you mistake the finger for the moon itself, you will never know the real moon. The teaching is like a raft that carries you to the other shore. The raft is needed, but the raft is not the other shore. An intelligent person would not carry the raft around on his head after making it across to the other shore. Bhikkhus, my teaching is the raft which can help you cross to the other shore beyond birth and death. Use the raft to cross to the other shore, but don’t hang onto it as your property. Do not become caught in the teaching. You must be able to let it go.

(Hanh, T.N., 1987)
While actions may speak louder at times than words, this case study also highlights that the words matter as one learns the actions of practicing mindfulness and their meanings. Cullen’s intentional use of invitational language as she suggests how participants could “try” or “play with” ways of relating to their experiences is consistent and supports her encouragement for participants to decide for themselves what right effort means. She labels moments of participants’ reflections as “insights”, bringing their personal experiences out to a general and universal level for the entire group to notice.

Metaphors like the “wandering mind” and “nine dotting” are introduced and used by the community to short-hand complex phenomena. Together, these offer examples of a set of intentional language, some that is also used throughout the field of teaching mindfulness and some that is more idiosyncratic to Cullen’s approach. In the mid-analysis interview, Cullen described her intentionality around language choice in mindfulness instruction as “an obsession”:

Cullen: I love language I think language is critical and very important and I am very sensitive to language and the language people use. The word, the metaphor, invitational versus demand, the gerund form, a lot of this has been unpacked in the MBSR tradition by Donald McCown and people like that. I am very interested in how words land and finding the right word. I think language is critical and language is… We have embodiment, but language is the main way that we are communicating and teaching. One word can shut people down so it is really important.

(Cullen, mid-analysis interview, June 30, 2020)

Participants can’t see what Cullen is doing when she closes her eyes in seated
meditation. It is only by the words she uses to describe the process and the feedback she offers in whole group discussions that they make sense of the actions and meanings of the practices. In the above quotation, Thich Nhat Hanh shares two metaphors from older teachings, one of the finger pointing at the moon and a second of the raft. In both cases, the story highlights the utility of the tool and the goal of moving on after the tool is no longer useful. How the language Cullen uses lands for participants, the meaning they make of it, is only accessible in what they choose to share and talk about during the program and so, Cullen frequently describes the same aspect of practice in multiple ways in an effort to better “point to the moon”. This suggests that there is not a single right way to guide practice or engage in inquiry during whole group discussions and that the skill set of a mindfulness teacher to offer multiple ways of approaching and making sense of mindfulness is valuable for reaching a variety of participants. Cullen’s “obsession” with attending to the language she uses seems an important aspect of her personal development as a mindfulness teacher and suggests that it is a valuable part of the training of mindfulness teachers generally. This is also supported by other related work that involves a focus on language in mindfulness instruction such as considerations of what constitutes trauma-sensitive language in that instruction (e.g. Treleaven, 2018).

As mindfulness is introduced and practiced within different communities, cultures and age groups, attending to the language used in guided assistance may help members of those communities to make sense of the practices and discuss their experiences. A
mindfulness teacher’s embodying mindfulness, a concept frequently used to describe how a teacher models the practices and relating to them (e.g. Crane et al., 2013; McCown et al., 2010), is itself experienced through the perezhivanie of participants which is socially and culturally constructed. As a result, what it looks, sounds, and feels like, including the words used in guided practices and whole group discussions as well as the curricular activities included in programs, should not be taken as monolithic in nature. As programs are designed for different populations, diversity in instructional approaches and in mindfulness teachers are important to developing the right rafts for getting to the other shore.

Implications to the Teaching Of Mindfulness within the Context of K-12 Education

As mindfulness continues to make inroads in education, with programs designed for students, teachers, administrators and staff, there is also developing a crossover between the field of educational research and fields of research that have represented the majority of work related to mindfulness to date, including psychology, neuroscience, and medicine. The findings of that work are promising, have helped to build inroads to school communities, and are leading to the cultivation of a subfield of contemplative science focused on mindfulness in education. As this new subfield develops, it interacts with educational research in ways that raise new kinds of questions related to the integration of contemplative practices within school-wide reform (e.g. Meiklejohn et al., 2012) such as:
what the research on historical school reform initiatives offer for implementation (e.g. Mann, 1978; McDermott, 2000, George et al., 2007) and how best to negotiate the complexities of defining concepts like “teacher quality” and “competence” of mindfulness instruction within the milieu of a neoliberal accountability movement that has shaped how these terms are used and understood in school contexts.

The field of mindfulness in education also can inform, and be informed by, bodies of research on curriculum and instruction. As described above, drawing upon educational theory such as the Vygotskian approach presented here can raise new lines of inquiry on what is happening and can happen within mindfulness programs for educators and the experiences within mindfulness communities of practice. Also, considering the apprenticeship of observation problem and how K-12 teacher preparation and supervision have sought to address it could contribute to improving mindful teacher preparation.

Looking the other way in the relationship, the full relationship between the fourth domain and the on-going professional development of teachers as adaptive experts working within school communities is still largely unexplored. Taylor et al.’s argument that there is a fourth domain of teacher knowledge (2019)—a domain of social and emotional awareness and competence as well as knowledge of self and compassion for the experience and suffering of others—represents a call for intentionally investigating the affective experiences of the people in educational settings. In order to support the social and emotional development of students, teachers can benefit from an
understanding of educational psychology, the nature of emotion, and other conceptual frameworks describing the affective and embodied experiences that exist in their classrooms. However, to model this social and emotional competency and effectively support its development in their students requires internal work in addition to cognitive comprehension of these concepts. Cullen’s approach to teaching is marked by normalizing participant experience, fostering curiosity about that experience, and encouraging a compassionate response for the self and others. These also are characteristics of a socially and emotionally competent K-12 educator. In modeling these within this MBEB implementation, Cullen is modeling aspects of embodying mindfulness and the fourth domain of teacher knowledge within the context of her field of teaching mindfulness. Participants can then consider how this model relates to their own teaching context.

Contemplative science can also offer ways of understanding the perezhivanie of members of school communities of practices such as teachers and students in K-12 schools. Models of the Zone of Proximal Development, including the model described in this study by Tharp & Gallimore, often neglect to include perezhivanie entirely. This risks creating a mechanized view of learning that fails to capture the affective and embodied experiences of learners and instructors. Or, like Vygotsky, perezhivanie is described as a prism that refracts without describing clear processes for relating to that prism directly. Mindfulness, as a way of being with one’s own experience and with how
one is experiencing, offers a way to describe seeing perezhivanie as it is and to potentially make different choices in how to relate to it and the experience itself.

**Limitations of the Study**

As a case study of one implementation of the MBEB program, taught by an experienced instructor and the program designer, we cannot generalize the curricular and pedagogical choices made. However, the types of choices made within this program may be representative of the kinds of choices made in the teaching of mindfulness and can inform program design, implementation, and teacher development in the field. Also, Cullen’s choices, viewed through a Vygotskian lens, supported the development of a framework for understanding Progression through the ZPD in a Mindfulness Program. Further research is needed to test both in other contexts and programs.

Within the study itself, a further limitation was the perspective of the researcher. As a mindfulness practitioner and instructor myself, I came to these data with my own apprenticeship of observation problem and a priori beliefs about mindfulness practice. I sought to ground my interpretations in the data and through member checking in the mid-analysis interview; however, this remains an interpretation of the data from my perspective. My hope is that, in providing illustrative examples and measures of frequency when relevant, I have offered the reader enough to make their own interpretations.
A third limitation is that the participants of the programs were volunteers and not mandated in any way to attend. Cullen’s curricular and pedagogical choices were likely impacted by this and would have likely appeared differently if she faced more resistance to practices or challenges to the value of the training. Participants in this implementation did ask challenging questions and shared negative feedback about the practices at times; however overall, the volunteer nature of this training impacted the experience.

Finally, as I have sought to emphasize throughout, the findings of this study are limited to the intended and taught curriculum as visible in the instructor’s choices and writings and make no claims about the learned curriculum or other outcomes. While the participants of this implementation did show increased mindfulness as indicated by the FFMQ (Roeser, 2016), the construct of mindfulness on that measure is not aligned with how mindfulness is described here in terms of the four foundations and internalization of the methods of assistance Cullen offered. To effectively measure whether participants internalized or were practicing self-talk as presented here would mean developing a comprehensive research agenda that traced the choices of the instructor through to participant interviews which was not done in this study.

**Conclusion**

At the 2018 wisdom 2.0 conference, Jon Kabat-Zinn gave a presentation entitled, “The Art of Teaching Mindfulness”. He starts by saying with humor that the title was not
his choosing and then continues by saying:

“The first thing to say is that none of us are really capable of teaching mindfulness… It’s a very high bar. Whatever we’re calling this collective engagement of mindfulness or heartfulness or compassion or wisdom…there is a paradox associated with it and that is that it is infinitely available and close right now and also simply the hardest work in the world for us human beings to get in touch with…because we are so in the habit of getting in our own way…When it comes to teaching… Really none of us are competent. It is the hardest work in the world at the same time as it is no problem at all… We need to go from a place where we are in our thinking and trying to download a curriculum into other people that we have pre-thought and prefabricated…‘doing it on people’…where it becomes a performance of a certain kind…

“…We have to [teach] with a huge degree of humility and a huge degree of understanding that what we are really inviting is a kind of realization, a making real, in our own moment to moment existence unfolding, that we are already okay, that we are already whole…We are already complete and probably none of us think that most of the time. The bar is so high to actually live what we are teaching as opposed to having it come out of [our heads].

“…Trying to teach mindfulness is very different than actually embodying it in your own life and then letting your life do the teaching. Then, the guidance will come out of your direct experience and it won’t be imitative, and it won’t be prescriptive, and it won’t be trying to teach people to get into some kind of mindful state. There is no mindful state. It’s not about attaining a particular something, it’s about not getting caught in how much we are thinking all the time and then creating a reality based on thoughts.”

This introduction by the founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction on the topic of teaching mindfulness accurately captures the challenges of describing how an experienced mindfulness instructor goes about teaching a mindfulness training for teachers. If no one is fully competent enough to teach mindfulness, then it stands to reason that no one is competent enough to fully describe the pedagogical choices of a
mindfulness instructor or what is going on in a mindfulness training for educators. If we, as educators, are honest with ourselves, it’s equally impossible to fully describe what is going on in any classroom. There is often what Parker Palmer (2017) refers to as the paradox of profound truths in which “truth is found not by splitting the world into either-or but by embracing it as both-and” (pg.65). So, while I believe there is great value in the intentionality of research to better understand what is happening in places of learning, I also believe we must do so humbly in the face of the full complexity of human experience.

In terms of mindfulness, Kabat Zinn flatly started his talk on teaching mindfulness with the bold statement that “none of us are really capable of teaching mindfulness” in the sense that none of us have accomplished a complete mindfulness state of being from which we can transmit and transfer this state to others. Instead, he argues that the best we can do is live our mindfulness practice and let our “life do the teaching”, including all of the places where what we know is that we don’t know.

If we accept this premise, it stands to reason that there is also no fully objective position from which to research or identify the pedagogical choices that define what mindfulness is within a mindfulness training. And yet, just as there is value in the shared inquiry in the practices of mindfulness, there is value in a shared inquiry into what constitutes the practices of mindfulness as they come to be defined through how they are taught. It is just that this work must be done with the humility and awareness that, while
describing what an instructor is doing and saying can be rather straightforward at times, describing the \textit{full} experiences of members of a mindfulness training community of practice is likely not even possible.

Through close analysis of Cullen’s curricular choices and pedagogical choices coupled with her professional writings and publications as well as interview data, I have sought to describe her approach to teaching mindfulness and what informs her choices. While many of the curricular choices in this program appear the same across different mindfulness programs for educators or other populations, Cullen’s personal reasoning informs the pedagogical choices that she makes in this implementation and are significant to understanding what is happening in the program. While it may not be feasible to conduct or provide in-depth analyses of instructors for all programs being researched in the field, this does at least highlight the complexity involved in seeking to generalize claims across programs or across mindfulness teachers within the same program. This is not intended as a criticism or critique of the research to date but is instead a call for continued work to understand what is happening in mindfulness-based programs from the perspective of the experiences of all participants including instructors. This can allow for better iterative processes of program development and mindfulness teacher training. At the very least, it suggests the importance of robust program descriptions in research in order to compare their content.

As mindfulness enters schools and continues to make inroads in programs
designed for K-12 teachers, descriptions of the social processes of these programs will be valuable for understanding the how outcomes of such programs are achieved and preparing mindfulness instructors. This work also can lead to further refinement of how mindfulness can support the development of the fourth domain of teacher knowledge and the process of integrating this knowledge with the other three domains into a construct that could be called mindful teaching.

This case study highlights the complexities of the teaching of mindfulness and suggests a method for describing the choices made at the curricular and pedagogical level. Jon Kabat-Zinn’s umbrella definition for mindfulness as “Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (1994, p. 4) describes what mindfulness is while maintaining a certain openness to the full complexity, a humility in the face of practices that are 2,000 years old and stem from a Buddhist enterprise aimed at complete freedom from suffering. I hope that in describing the curricular and pedagogical choices of an experienced mindfulness teacher, I have contributed to what a vision of defining “a particular way” is while also maintaining that humility before the full complexities of all it can and does mean.
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APPENDIX A

Thematic Coding Example

Below is an example of a segment from a whole group discussion in session 5 that followed a guided, seated meditation practice. Included here is the coding for pedagogical choices and the corresponding thematic coding:

Cullen: So before we break up into small groups, I’d like to check in with you about the meditation instructions just now for working with physical sensations.

So what we’re going to be doing, week by week is expanding the field of awareness to include more and more aspects of our experience until ultimately it’s anything that can come up while you sit, can just become an object of meditation. So we start with the breath, which is the most accessible, generally. It’s always there. Not for everyone perhaps. And then last week we used sound as an object of meditation. This week added physical sensations in other parts of the body. Next week it will be thoughts as objects of meditation. Thoughts. So there’s a building here to aspects of experience that are more and more, in a sense, subtle, and harder to use as objects of meditation. So there’s a building.

Pedagogical Choice:

- Assistance: scaffolding of objects of attention
- Cullen Initiated
So how are you doing with awareness of the body? How did that go?

Participant 1: Um. I didn’t feel any itching until you started talking about it. But actually, I felt an itch and then she started talking about it and I thought, oh my goodness.

Cullen: Yeah. And so how did it go when you, how did you work with the itch that you felt?

Participant 1: It was a little torturous. You know, I would feel a little thing here, a little thing there. I thought about them and they did become a little less irritating when I kind of analyzed them and I looked at them. I used to do that at the dentist, actually… when I was a teenager.

Cullen: Yeah. Yeah. So, what do you mean you analyzed them?

Participant 1: I mean I really thought about them. I thought about the little sensation, the little itch by my ear… I sort of thought about it, just what it really felt like. How big it was…

Pedagogical Choice:
• Mindfulness of Body: Cultivating interoception
• Cullen Initiated
Cullen: So when you say you thought about it, you were really feeling the sensation and inquiring into the experience of the sensation.

Participant 1: Uh huh.

Cullen: Yeah. Okay. Um, and so when you did that, what happened to the sensation?

Participant 1: It became less irritating.

Cullen: So when you say less irritating, does that mean the sensation diminished, or you were less bothered by it?

Participant 1: (inaudible)

Cullen: It did diminish? So even without scratching it?

Participant: Right.

Cullen: Yeah. Yeah. That was a revelation to me when I first noticed that. My God! Itches can go away on their own without scratching them.

Pedagogical Choice:

- Mindfulness of Body: Attending to the impermanence of sensation
- Cullen Initiated
Participant 1: I had this fear of needles when I was a teenager, and I didn’t like them putting anesthesia in my gums, so I would just let them work on my teeth without any and I would just feel the sensation and it’s kind of bizarre.

Cullen: Wow. So you had this… Jon Kabat Zinn does that. He told me. He doesn’t get, he never gets Novocain and, you know, you had this natural, innate mindfulness practice that let you… you didn’t even distract yourself. You just went in there and felt the sensation even though it was painful.

Participant 1: I don’t know if I could do it now.

Cullen: Yeah. Yeah. Well good to know you did. I mean, teenagers are often more sensitive and reactive in that way, so the talent is in there… to do that. To work with discomfort in the body. And of course, most sensations, when you sit, that you become aware of, tend to be more on the discomfort side, right?

Anybody notice pleasant sensations in the body? Yeah.

P: (Inaudible)

M: Oh okay. Felt good, okay, great. So, and as you noticed the warmth, did it shift or change or…

P: No it was just pleasant. Just a pleasant sensation.

M: Pleasant sensation. So you just noticed that and then went back to the breath?

P: Yeah.
M: Yeah. Okay. What else… yeah?

Participant 2: I noticed that a lot of… I didn’t have sensation a lot, but it just sort of melted away. And that happens a lot when I am relaxing. Parts of me just sort of melt into the floor, and I can’t…I mean I had to really…I had to move a slight bit to recognize that it’s a part of my body again.

Cullen: Uh uh. And is that pleasant?

Participant 2: It is. It’s very relaxing.

Cullen: Yeah. It’s not uncommon in meditation, I mean I think it typically happens for people more in deeper meditation, that, the sense of the body dissolving, and it’s often very, very pleasant because the sense of constriction in this separate, in this bag of skin and bones, kind of melts away, and there’s a, you know, it’s quite blissful actually.

Participant 2: I only get it in parts of my body, like my feet or my hands. I don’t get in the center.

Cullen: Yeah. Well that can be very lovely. And then the trick is to not get too attached to it, because anything pleasant like that, you can start setting up an expectation where you want it to happen, and that’s often a sure-fire way to stop it from happening. Yeah, going after it. You were gonna say, [participant 3]?

Pedagogical Choice:
- Mindfulness of Feeling: labeling feeling tones of pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral
- Participant Initiated

Pedagogical Choice:
- Assistance: Validating and normalizing
- Participant Initiated

Pedagogical Choice:
- Mindfulness of Feeling: Attending to the impermanence of valence
- Participant Initiated
Participant 3: Oh, um, just the pleasant feeling of like, my body falling asleep. It’s always so interesting you know? I felt like I was telling myself to stay awake, where I was hearing you…. It was that dull, so sweet… but then I notice it does, it somewhere along the line, turns unpleasant, even though there’s not a lot of recognition of that, but, I’d wake up or come to with the sense of unpleasant.

Cullen: Uh huh. And do you think that has to do with a judgment in the mind about it, or just the startle of shifting from the pleasure of the sinking into sleep to… do you have any idea about that?

Participant 3: I think it’s being woken up.

Cullen: Yeah. Having it disrupted. So there’s something about that feeling of being thwarted. The body wants to sleep…. The sound of my voice or whatever is thwarting that in some way. Yeah.

Participant 3: I think judgment creeped into it for me because at one point I heard you say something about, um, you can stop counting now, and I was like, ‘I was supposed to be counting? Oh crap.’ Right? Because I thought I was with you, and then I realized, ‘oh no, I’m definitely sleepy’, so when you invited us to open our eyes, I did. And then I thought, even though you said there is no judgment in it, I thought I should stand up, and I didn’t. And then it was immediately into resisting physical movement, so that I did find myself being like, ‘wait, am I supposed to stand up because I need to wake myself up, or am I supposed to be still because we’re practicing that?’ So, I did have a lot of interior dialogue going on today, and that was unpleasant for me, because I definitely felt like I was behind the eight
ball the whole time.

Cullen: Okay. Well, that is a little confusing. You’re right, and those instructions were a little bit cross purposes.

At the same time, when you notice that there is a lot of struggle, you know, whether it be because I’m confusing you or you’re misinterpreting… I mean in this case you weren’t, but it could be that way, that’s another possibility….I think it’s helpful to just come back to the breath. So rather than fuel that mind state that is involved in, so that you get more tense and frustrated… to not worry and just come back to the breath. So that’s always there, that’s always an anchor no matter what the instructions are, no matter how cross purposes. You can just simplify, because in a way, ultimately what you’re practicing…. I mean I am giving you instructions, you have them on the CDs, you won’t just hear them in class you know. You’ll have a lot of passes at them. So what you’re practicing internally is a kind of wisdom of choosing not to create certain mind states that get reactive or tense. Does that make sense? And sometimes that means, okay, just come back to the breath… I don’t know what she means. She says sit still, she says stand up… make up your mind… what does she mean? Forget it. Just focus on the breath.

But I do think that, whatever the instructions are, in this case we were experimenting with stillness, just to feel the physical sensations more intensely, that was the point… feel free to stand up if you’re feeling really sleepy. That’s the other thing, you can override the instructions if you want to wake up and the body’s just… just stand up. It’s fine. It’s fine to do that.

Pedagogical Choice:

- Mindfulness of Mind:
  - Returning attention to the breath

- Cullen Initiated

Pedagogical Choice:

- Assistance: Right effort

- Cullen Initiated
Noticing bodily sensations, feelings, and thoughts that arise in emotional experience (8 coded instances)

Mindfulness & Emotions

Understanding the phenomena of emotions with Emotional Theory (10 coded instances)
VITA
Kevin J. Hulburt

EDUCATION

Ph. D   2021   Curriculum and Instruction, Curriculum and Supervision
            The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

M.Ed.   2003   Curriculum and Instruction
            The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

B.S    2000   English
            The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2019-Present   Lecturer of Rhetoric and Composition
            The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA

2014-2020    Vice President of Development
            Hulburt Hotels, State College, PA

2005-2014    Language Arts Teacher
            State College Area High School, State College, PA

2004-2005    Language Arts Teacher
            C.D. Hylton High School, Woodbridge, VA

CONVENTION PRESENTATIONS/PUBLICATIONS

Contemplative Educational Approach to Teacher Professional Identity Development.”
In Explorations of self: Expanding teaching, teacher education and practitioner research from and toward within.

Presentation at the National Professional Development School Conference. New Orleans, LA.