

## Chapter One

### Mapping the Territory, Finding Your Place on the Path

The process of becoming a teacher of MBI's is one like no other. As has already been discussed, it is a complex interplay of deep inner experience, fairly extensive education, rigorous experiential training and supported practice that blends to guide the teacher into the realm of competence. Needless to say, this is not a linear pathway by any means, and perhaps even referring to it as a path is problematic because of the linearity implied by that term. It is an exploration that begins within and radiates out into a range of domains and can be pursued in a myriad of ways, each potentially valid and useful if pursued with reflection, clear intention and a willingness to be flexible and open.

And in the end, it is indeed a journey. Often a meandering one, and one with unexpected twists and turns along the way, but a journey just the same. Like any journey that one may embark upon with a sense of purpose or desire, one must know clearly where one stands before striking out in search of something. And then it helps tremendously to have a map that describes the terrain, the interesting highlights and the dangerous territory, and provides a guide for how and where to proceed to arrive at the desired destination. And finally it can be invaluable to know the way in which a person intends to travel. A purposeful and focused way of traveling is much different from a wandering and curious stance and each has its advantages. Purposefully selecting a way to travel can significantly impact the experience, just as a set of hiking boots versus a high-powered sports car can make for a much different trip.

This chapter is dedicated to supporting you, the prospective teacher of MBI's, in preparing for this journey and beginning to map a tentative course that fits your needs and intentions. Just as the overall journey is not a linear one, this self-reflective, self-assessing process is also best thought of as an evolving practice that can be returned to periodically to re-assess and make course corrections of various sorts. Just as the

mariner periodically checks his sextant to assure a steady passage, you may want to revisit this reflective self-assessment periodically to see where you stand and consider your options for how to proceed from there.

*A Note About How Best to Engage in Reflective Self-Assessment:* Allow this to be a gentle and self-compassionate exercise in reflection. The intention for doing this is not to engage in a fearless and searching inventory of flaws, obstacles and weaknesses. It is intended to encourage an honest but kind consideration of areas of comfort, confidence and competence, as well as one's "edges" in those domains. This process of exploring one's own edges does require a willingness to be courageous and intrepid at times. Like the ancient explorers who perused maps that had dire warnings scrawled upon their edges reading "Beyond There Be Dragons", so to will you be invited to sail out to uncharted and perhaps somewhat uncomfortable places to know those areas where you may need to grow and develop as a teacher (and as a person). This exploratory work can be unusually fruitful when we are willing to do it with an open heart, just as it has been for explorers of all sorts over the centuries.

At the same time it is important to spend some time inside those comfort zones getting to know yourself and that terrain as well. Becoming intimately familiar and conversant with one's areas of strength and ease can create a solid base for learning and growing beyond that base. Take the time to feel what it feels like to savor and appreciate your good qualities, your gifts and areas of talent and proficiency. You might even pause to feel some gratitude toward the people and circumstances that allowed you to grow and develop in these ways, and to feel their supportive and encouraging presence on your journey.

## **Reflective Self-Assessment**

Rebecca Crane and her colleagues (Crane, Eames et al. 2013) in the United Kingdom have dedicated a tremendous amount of time and thought toward the subject

of competence in teaching MBI's. That work has been a tremendous contribution to the field in many ways and their continued efforts promise to further the establishment of "industry standards" and widespread agreement on what it takes to become a skilled and proficient teacher of MBI's. The most tangible product of Crane et al's efforts to date has been the Mindfulness-Based Intervention Teaching Assessment Criteria (MBI-TAC) that provides an effective tool for assessing the progress of teachers-in-training toward competence in their work. Thoughtfully and efficiently laid out, the MBI-TAC articulates and behaviorally defines levels of teaching competence (ranging from "Incompetent" to "Advanced") as well as outlining and describing the various domains of teaching MBI's. A tremendous tool for facilitating and supporting teacher training and development, the MBI-TAC has great value for researchers seeking to assure fidelity and adherence in studies of MBI's.

While the MBI-TAC is primarily intended to assess and guide the development of teachers already leading MBI's, the general domains of competence it describes can help to guide prospective teachers in getting a sense of just where they *already stand* in regard to the requisite abilities to lead MBI's. The six domains of the MBI-TAC, outlined below, capture virtually all aspects of teaching MBI's in an elegant and interrelated way. Even the rankest beginner to MBI's is likely to possess certain areas of comfort or facility in some of the domains, in the same way that first-year medical students may have basic skills that apply to highly technical neurosurgery (e.g. an analytical mind, a steady hand, grace under pressure, etc.). Taking the time to take stock of where one stands on these domains can be potentially fruitful and informative for development as a teacher.

### **Beginning the Reflection**

Find a quiet comfortable location where you can take the time to settle, reflect and write about your experience of this process. This meditative practice is best explored with a single block of time of at least an hour and preferably two or three. Take your time and allow the prompts to linger and roll around in your mind and heart before responding, trusting your first responses but also making room for what may be below or behind a response that might be deeper and closer to the truth for you at this time. Considering the fact that you are contemplating a long-term commitment to teaching mindfulness, a couple hours is a small investment that could pay off in many ways over the course of many years, so making the effort to find an uninterrupted block of time is definitely worth the effort.

Assembling a journal or pad of paper, writing instrument and a cup of tea or glass of water can complete the preparations and create an atmosphere of comfort, reflection and exploration.

Take a moment to just sit in silence with this important gift that you have just given yourself: time, space and materials to drop the automaticity and unrelenting forward movement of our busy lives to simply be with yourself in a kind and gentle way. This is no small feat to begin with, and exactly the kind of thing that you seek to encourage in the students who attend your programs. Savor and get to know this place. It will be your platform for practice and contemplation.

### **Contemplative Prompt Number One: Why Am I Here?**

While this sounds like a deep philosophical question, and in some ways it is, for our present purpose this is a bit more mundane. Take some time to consider why you are sitting here, reading these words in this book and contemplating what it might take to become a teacher of MBI's (or become a *better* teacher of MBI's). What experience have you had, what calling do you hear, what moves you to change what you do to include the teaching of mindfulness?

Remember that all “answers” are equally valid and worthy of consideration. None will disqualify you or be “wrong” in any way. Set aside any judgments you may form about what comes up when you ask this question. Perhaps the idea of teaching mindfulness appeared to be a passing whim without particular substance. See if you can allow yourself to write this down and set aside any thoughts of this not being substantial or important enough. Perhaps you deeply desire to relieve your own suffering through teaching others but feel some embarrassment over this possibility. Put it down and see where it leads. Give each emerging thought the attention it deserves and don’t let your inner critic censor or limit you. In fact, that inner critic, if you look a bit more closely at it, is actually simply trying to take care of you and protect you from emotional harm by keeping you inside your comfort zone, away from taking chances and, by all means, away from the very “edges” that may be where you long to explore. If you have any sense of being in a rut or dissatisfied with life as it is, it may be because you have succumbed to the “overprotective parenting” of the critic and the time has arrived to listen more deeply to your desires and wishes and break free of old habits and limiting fears. Thank the critic for its now misguided efforts and listen beyond what it has to say to you.

*Why are you here?* Let it be a whole list of causes and conditions that have led you here. Let go of it needing to be coherent or nicely wrapped in a single phrase or conclusion, but be open to hearing what rings true to you. Give yourself permission to write on this topic for as long as you need to. Let long pauses be what inspires you to go deeper, rather than a sign that you should stop. Don’t worry. You’ll know when you have done enough.

### **Contemplative Prompt Number Two: Where Is Here?**

Another apparently philosophical question, but also worth exploring at the start of any journey. Unless one can locate oneself on the map, it is fruitless (and pointless) to

set off in a particular direction. In the end, you are reading this book because you are contemplating change of some sort. Either a wholesale shift of career and focus into teaching mindfulness, or perhaps just an advancement to another stage of proficiency in teaching. Take the time to sort out where you stand because the implications, in terms of what's next, can be substantial.

Consider your life as it is right now, what you do professionally, how you conduct yourself personally, what you “bring to the table” in terms of teaching mindfulness, what you feel you know for sure and what you don't, what you feel you lack, what you desire to acquire.

Also consider just exactly how ready you are for change. Prochaska and DiClemente (ref) have written and researched extensively on the topic of behavior change, especially in regard to problematic behaviors (like smoking or substance abuse) but their transtheoretical model of behavior change is worthwhile to consider here. In regard to one's relationship with making change, Prochaska and DiClemente posit that one can be in one of five stages: Pre-contemplation (not ready to change), Contemplation (getting ready to change), Preparation (ready to change), Action (making change), and Maintenance. Knowing and acknowledging that you are at the contemplation stage rather than the action stage can be tremendously helpful and allow you to choose a pace and direction that suits you rather than forcing yourself into a process that doesn't align with where you are.

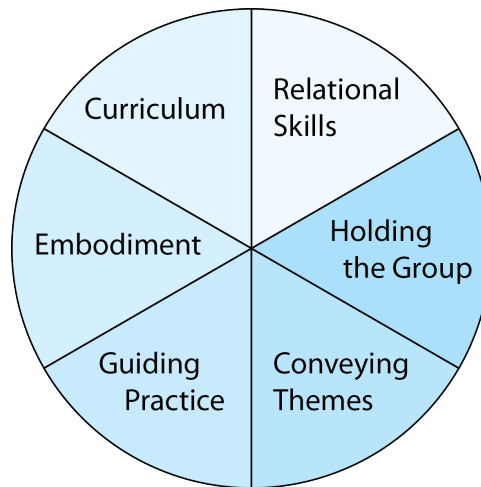
Again, writing for as long as you need to, see if you can describe, through a series of related points and observations, where you stand. What are you ready for and what needs to wait? This might include practical considerations like other work or family commitments, financial limitations or opportunities, and educational obligations (finishing a degree, for example). These considerations should be considered just that: things to take into account and consider. Few of these are likely to be true barriers to your development as a teacher of MBI's, but they may seem so at first glance. Describe

what appears to hinder your progress toward teaching proficiency and see if it is *truly* a barrier, or just an obstacle that can be worked with in some way. For example, if your financial situation precludes you from attending formal teacher training, could you attend to less expensive options like deepening your personal practice of mindfulness or studying some important subjects that could inform your teaching?

It might also be fruitful to consider what supports and resources you have available to you. Is there someone in your life (a spouse, partner, supervisor or family member) who is encouraging you to explore this area of endeavor or supportive of you more generally? Do you have a community of friends or colleagues doing this work who can help you along the way? Is there a particular opportunity arising for you to take the time to pursue this (a sabbatical, a relocation, a recent change in job status, etc.)?

Once you have written and run out of things to write, take the time consider what you have written. Perhaps you would find it worthwhile to now take this series of observations and reconfigure them into a single paragraph that describes where you are. Or maybe just reading through them and reflecting on them is enough.

The following six prompts correspond to Crane et al's (Crane, Eames et al. 2013) six domains of teaching MBI's: Coverage, Pacing and Organization of Session Curricula; Relational Skills; Embodiment of Mindfulness; Guiding Mindfulness Practices; Conveying Course Themes Through Interactive Inquiry and Didactic Teaching; and Holding the Group Learning Environment. As you follow the next six prompts, consider the broad topic (e.g. "relational skills") as it applies more generally in your life, how it may relate to your professional work, and to whatever degree is possible, consider how it manifests in regard to MBI's specifically. For example, in regard to relational skills, reflecting on your general way of relating to others is one aspect of the reflection, considering how you relate to clients, patients or colleagues is another, and how that style might play out in an MBI classroom is a third. Each is related, and all are relevant because they are all present in the room when you teach.



### **Contemplative Prompt Number Three: How Do You Relate to Others?**

Perhaps obviously, we bring ourselves into the MBI classroom, so that who we are in relation to others (in our lives, in our work and in the classroom) is crucial to consider. As Crane and her colleagues note, “mindfulness-based teaching is highly relational – mindfulness practice engages us in a process of developing a new relationship both with ourselves and our experience. The qualities that the teacher brings to participants and the teaching process mirror the qualities that participants are learning to bring to themselves during the MBI programme.”

Take some time to contemplate what your interpersonal style might be in your daily life. How do the people who know you, describe you? Are you seen as gentle, warm and encouraging? Are you gregarious and outgoing (an extrovert), or are you more interpersonally cautious and reserved (an introvert)? Do you tend to like to make suggestions or give advice to friends, or do you tend to be the one who is a “shoulder to cry on” and someone who is known as a good listener?

In your professional endeavors do you incline toward the role of teacher or professor, or are you more egalitarian and a consensus-builder? Are you, in general, a



leader or a follower? Would your colleagues be more likely to say that they respect you or like you? Again, all responses are equally valid and none would preclude you from being a teacher of MBI's if you can recognize your own patterns and tendencies and work with them mindfully. Becoming a teacher of mindfulness requires a deep awareness of oneself and one's tendencies so that they can be recognized and worked with in the context of the classroom.

If you have taken a mindfulness course of some sort, it might be helpful to consider your relational style relative to the teacher or teachers you had. If you found them to be effective, what made them effective in your mind and how similar or different are you from them?

Given what you may know of how mindfulness is taught (again, perhaps based on your experience of taking a course or courses) what will likely be your "edges" in teaching? Do you have a tendency to rely on intellect and ideas when you are caught off guard or are feeling uncertain? Are you an emotionally expressive person who might be swept up in a story of suffering or struggle? Are you particularly enthusiastic to the point of potentially being impatient for group members to "get it" in short order? These and other "edges" are important to note and speak to the ongoing "work" of becoming a teacher and working with our habitual patterns.

Take the time to reflect on what you have written. Can you develop a "felt sense" of what is assembled there? Notice what reactions you might have to reading what you have written. Perhaps it would be worthwhile at some point to seek out the perspective of others, not because others will be more "right" than you, but to see how you come across relative to how you see yourself. Sometimes resolving the apparent discrepancies in how we see ourselves and how others see us can yield powerful and important insights.

### **Contemplative Prompt Number Four: How Do You Work With Groups?**

Perhaps a subset of how we show up interpersonally in general is how we show up and function in groups. Some of us retain the same patterns and tendencies when we are in a gathering of other people, and some of us seem to transform in interesting and unexpected ways.

The contemplation here begins with consideration of what comes up for you when you envision being in a group of people, particularly in a group where you are the primary focus (as a teacher). Speaking in public is the most widespread fear that people seem to share. Even more than the fear of death. This finding led comedian Jerry Seinfeld to remark that “for most people, if they are at a funeral, they would rather be *in* the casket than giving the eulogy!” What emotions arise when you picture yourself leading a group? Are you excited? Curious? Anxious? Fearful? What does the prospect of a group conjure up for you?

Then, thinking back to various groups of which you have been a part, what has been your typical role? I know that I tend to sit back and take in the activity of the group and then, when the time seems right, to chime in cautiously and succinctly. The challenge for me is that sometimes I need to be “invited” into the conversation and that requires that there be someone else in the group who seems to be tending to the needs of group members to assure that everyone has a voice. Maybe THAT’s the person that you tend to be. Or maybe you’re the natural leader. Looking back on these experiences, you will likely identify a recurring theme to your role and seeing if you can acknowledge that theme (and how it manifests in you) can be highly beneficial.

Looking specifically at the qualities of a good MBI teacher, it is worthwhile to think of some specific features or skills that are needed, as identified by Crane et al. These include the ability to maintain the safe and inviting “learning container” of the classroom; a knowledge and ability to work with the development of the group over time; a facility with connecting the individual experience to the universal learning that

takes place; and an effective leadership style that holds the group but allows for individual experience.

Taking these qualities as a starting place, what is your experience with creating a safe, supportive environment for groups? What do you know about how groups form and grow over time? Are you able to “hear between the lines” when someone in a group expresses herself and recognize the thread of the larger topic that is embedded within it? Do you find that when you are in a position of responsibility in a group, that you are able to facilitate action and progress from the group, or do you struggle?

There are talented teachers of MBI’s with all manner of ways of being in a group, so there is no particular requirement for one to be a certain way, except to say that the intention of the leader must be clear and kind and reflective of the practice of mindfulness itself. The list above is extensive, and it may seem overwhelming if taken as a whole, but instead of focusing on where you may still have things to learn, ask yourself an even more important question: “When I am in a group, where do I shine?” Feel some gratitude and appreciation for this quality that you bring to a group and allow yourself to begin to see how this shining quality might help you develop in the areas where you need more work. For example, I think I bring a great deal of humor to my teaching, and sometimes when someone in an early class sheepishly “admits” that her mind wandered during meditation, I will say something (with a smile on my face) like: “well, I’m sure you’re the only one!” I’m not comfortable delivering didactic material, like the universality of the wandering mind, but I am able to make the same point with my humorous comment and “get the job done” nonetheless.

Figure out where you shine, and where your shadows are around being in groups. Take the time to embrace all of it and consider what’s next for you in this arena.

## Contemplative Prompt Number Five: How Do You Embody the Practice of Mindfulness?

“Do you have a practice of mindfulness?”

This was the first bump on my road to teaching mindfulness, when I called up an authority in the field to inquire about how I could become a teacher of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). This was when I first learned that, in order to teach mindfulness one needs to practice it in one’s own life. This idea is explored in some depth in Chapter Three, but the implications of this are worthy of contemplation here.

If we operate on the assumption that one needs a solid, established personal mindfulness practice in order to teach mindfulness, then the question becomes “How does that practice actually manifest while teaching?” In other words, does our very being and presence as a teacher actually reflect the fruits of our personal practice of mindfulness? That is, do we actually *embody* the qualities of mindfulness that we hope our students will develop? When people are in our presence, do they experience us as present-focused, responsive, attuned, alert and steady?

Embodiment should not be confused with understanding what mindfulness is or even “modeling” mindfulness. One can understand mindfulness from an intellectual standpoint, and speak about it with great authority and ease, but that is not teaching mindfulness, it is teaching *about* mindfulness. Similarly, one can *act* mindfully to show others “how to do it” but without the authenticity of hours and hours of mindfulness practice, this modeling of mindfulness comes across as hollow and insincere. You wouldn’t take swimming lessons from someone who was well read on swimming, but would flail around and sink to the bottom of the pool like a stone if they fell in!

It can be fruitful to consider not how you carry yourself most of the time, although that is one form of embodiment, but how you deal with the unexpected, the difficult and the overwhelming. Not just what your emotional reaction to these situations might be,

but how you relate to those feelings and how you work with them. It's perfectly reasonable to feel disgust when confronted with a disgusting situation, but the true test of embodiment is how we maintain our equanimity or how we work with that disgust when it arises. Can we maintain a larger perspective or do we get overcome by the feeling? Can we actually name the feeling of disgust arising or locate an associated sensation in the body, or do we find ourselves resisting and distracting away from the feelings?

A helpful metaphor would be that of a reservoir built to gather ground water and yield drinking water. The size (surface area) of the reservoir can be seen to reflect the breadth of training and experience in mindfulness a person may have, and the depth of that reservoir is a function of the depth of actual personal practice. A very broad but shallow reservoir can certainly seem to be effective, but without the depth all the muddy and unclean water that flows into it (the difficult and challenging emotions that may arise) just flows right on out again at the dam (in the form of unreflective, potentially harmful and reflexive emotional expression). A very deep and long mindfulness practice might create a very deep reservoir, but without the sheer "acreage" of surface area, it will miss a great deal of what is present because of the very narrowness of its existence. Only a broad and deep reservoir, cultivated through deep mindfulness practice and broad study and understanding, can truly comprise a mindful presence by the teacher.

So perhaps you can ask yourself: how broad is your understanding and experience with mindfulness and the spiritual and philosophical underpinnings that inform it (the size of your reservoir) and how deep is your own personal practice of mindfulness (the depth of your reservoir). As MBI teachers, we are all "reservoirs under construction" in many ways, and we each have our own strengths and areas for development, but first we need to know the nature of our own personal reservoir so we know what work is left to build an effective one.

A truly embodied teacher of MBI's is someone who can remain acutely emotionally attuned to the arising of emotions (in himself/herself as well as in group participants) moment by moment, and maintain the equanimity required to meet that arising with an embodied presence that reflects exactly how we would like our participants to meet their own experiences. Thus the embodied teacher needs to have sufficient breadth to hold all that arises, and sufficient depth to let the difficult and messy emotions settle to the bottom and allow clarity and ease to flow through.

Get to know your reservoir and perhaps through this book you will find ways to develop yours more fully to best meet the participants in your groups with ease and equanimity, thereby teaching what you seek to teach. Can you describe the nature of your own personal reservoir for the purposes of self-reflection and assessment? What are the features that stand out, both positive and negative, that make your reservoir truly your own? What do you aspire to in regard to building your own reservoir of embodiment? How do you see yourself working on these areas in the course of the coming weeks and months?

### **Contemplative Prompt Number Six: How Do You Guide Practice?**

Your response to this prompt may very well be, "I don't." In which case, you know pretty clearly where you stand in regard to this area of competency, but you might still consider how you *feel* about guiding mindfulness practices (sitting, walking, yoga, etc.) and what your level of comfort may be about this aspect of teaching mindfulness. The tone, form, pacing and content are all crucial aspects of meditation guidance and this area will be explored further elsewhere in the book, but for now, what comes up when you contemplate leading a meditation? Excitement? Anxiety? Trepidation? Notice what arises and make a mental note. This feeling may be your companion on the path toward teaching and it's best that you get to know your traveling companions early if you are embarking on a long journey!

If, on the other hand, you have guided meditation or other mindfulness practices in the past, it is worthwhile taking the time to carefully consider this prompt. If you are doing this currently, you might try an experiment and arrange to record yourself at the next opportunity. Most smartphones these days have an easy voice-recording feature, so you can collect a snippet of your guidance and listen to it carefully and reflectively at another time when you can really HEAR what you have to say, how you say it and what your reaction may be. Ask yourself how the guidance makes you feel, what you find yourself lingering over (both positive and negative) and what seems to flow smoothly. Do you find your guidance to be clear, precise and accurate in its content? Perhaps you could play the recording for a trusted friend or colleague and hear what their reaction may be. Not an evaluation of your guidance, but their impressions of how it feels to be led by you or how your voice, tone and pacing come across.

This may seem like a trivial consideration in the overall scheme of things, but a tremendous amount of embodiment is expressed in the teacher's guidance of practice and the process of becoming a teacher is often a journey toward finding one's own voice, letting go of trying to sound like some admired teacher or the "ideal meditation teacher" and instead letting the words and tone flow from one's own practice that proceeds in parallel with the practice of those we are guiding. Teachers of MBI's should be teaching out of their own practice meaning that, to whatever extent is possible, we are engaged in *doing* the practice that we are guiding. Thus the instructions, the gentle cautions, the fleeting observations that may be a part of the words spoken by the teacher are actually arising in the teacher's experience *of* the practice they are doing. Consequently a noise in the hallway is an opportunity for the teacher to notice how they receive that noise and perhaps provide guidance like "noticing the arising of sound in the environment and feeling it reverberate through your body and mind, and notice that reverberation fading over time . . ." If the teacher notices boredom arising, it is likely that

some participants will be feeling the same and noting the possibility of boredom in the guidance can be tremendously helpful as a result.

The guidance of practice is a blend of learning the basics and the language, and tapping into one's own practice and experience to offer guidance that supports the teaching and learning of mindfulness. This delicate balance and blending of knowledge, skill, oral expression and practice develops over time and most of the steps on the path toward competence feed in to one's ability to guide practice. Knowing where we stand and making a record of it (with recording) can be a powerful means of assessing where we are and providing a benchmark to use as we progress on the path that can help us see our development over time as teachers.

Once you have reflected on this aspect of yourself as a current or future teacher of MBI's, make some notes to yourself about what you appreciate about your guidance (or the potential of guidance if you haven't guided practice before) and also where you see room for improvement. Being willing to see ourselves as a constant work in progress and fully human with all the flaws and foibles that we possess, allows us to embrace where we are and who we are at the moment, and truly grow as teachers.

**Contemplative Prompt Number Seven: What is your familiarity and facility with the content and process involved in the leading of your MBI of interest?**

This prompt captures what is most obviously associated with any particular MBI: the material being conveyed, as well as its structure, organization and pacing. At its most basic level, the prompt urges you to consider whether you know the various parts, exercises, practices and assignments included in your particular MBI of interest. This knowledge typically begins from having taken the course itself in some form or read books or articles detailing the curriculum itself.

But, as you will learn in this book (if you haven't already) the content is really only the beginning. Each MBI has a structure that has been very carefully assembled with



very clear intentions and meticulous attention to placement of components and themes to support those intentions. Add in the less predictable aspect of an MBI, the participants themselves, who will arrive and participate with their own particular needs, concerns and issues, and orchestrating a coherent and effective class session can begin to take on aspects of a stage production!

This meeting of intention, course content, the fluctuating needs of the group and the person of the teacher can often be the “juiciest” part of teaching and learning mindfulness in this context, but also obviously requires a lot from us as teachers. It is at this crossroads that the novice may begin to see the contributions of the various aspects of becoming a teacher, including personal practice, knowledge of the material, formal training, guidance and supervision, and just plain experience teaching the program. All of this can be developed and deepened over time, so again this is not intended to intimidate the soon-to-be teacher of MBIs, but to map the terrain so you develop an appreciation of how you fit into it and what you will need to seek out and develop on this journey.

For this particular aspect of self-reflection on the path to teaching, it is good to perhaps note what formal education and training you have had about mindfulness, MBI's, principles of the dharma, and how to teach. What experience have you had in teaching and guiding others into new and unfamiliar territory in any domain? Whether you've been a tour guide, a professor, a human resources professional or a psychotherapist, you have developed some of the roots of this aspect of teaching MBI's and it's good to reflect on this as your base from which to grow.

And then it's worth considering “the places that scare you” (also the name of a wonderful book by Buddhist teacher Pema Chodron worth reading if you have the opportunity). In this case it may simply be the areas of the material with which you are least comfortable (if you have learned something about a particular MBI), but it might also be a reflection on what aspects of teaching in general might foster a bit of unease

when you have been put in that position. Knowing that teaching mindfulness is often quite different from teaching traditionally didactic subjects, you may actually come to discover that things you never liked about teaching in other settings, set you up to be an amazing teacher in the mindfulness realm. For example if you have felt uncomfortable with the authoritative role of teacher in which you present materials to the subservient students who should listen carefully and take in the material (picture here a mother bird at the nest, dropping pre-chewed worm into eager open mouths), you will likely thrive teaching MBIs! None of that is called for in MBI classroom. So for now, get to know yourself as a teacher and what your edges are, both in regard to this particular material and teaching in general.

You might also consider those who have taught *you* in some way. Think about the best teachers you have had throughout your life and maybe make note of the qualities that made them so good. And then consider any teachers of mindfulness that you have encountered and what has really stood out for you, both in terms of what you really liked and admired, but also what didn't work well for you (we are all works in progress after all!). You might also take note of what was curious or unusual about how that person taught, because you may have tapped into some of the key aspects of teaching mindfulness that differ from most other forms of teaching.

And finally reflect on how and when and where you *really* learned mindfulness itself. Not when you learned *about* mindfulness, but when you learned the thing itself. Was there a moment or an experience, or perhaps a series of them, when you feel you really, truly experienced what mindfulness is and something of its profound potential to heal, change and transform. How did you come to that place or those places, and who around you facilitated that introduction? It may have been someone you wouldn't have considered a teacher per se, but nonetheless somehow their way of being themselves facilitated your deep learning process. While you will likely never re-create that exact sort of situation for someone else, there is something to be gained from considering the entire experience.

For example, one of my moments of deep learning, perhaps one of the first where mindfulness manifested in me as a deeply felt experience and not just an idea, occurred while I was attending a 7-day introduction to MBSR with Jon Kabat-Zinn and Saki Santorelli in February 2000. It was my first sustained experience of mindfulness practice and I found that I really learned and experienced a lot, but my most telling and penetrating moment was not facilitated by either of the wise and wonderful teachers. It was enabled and activated by my, then, four-year-old son Ben.

This was one of the longest times I had been away from Ben since he was born and about three days into the retreat, I was really looking forward to calling home and speaking with my wife and with Ben. I was feeling excited about what I was learning and eager to see where it would all lead. After speaking with my wife, who graciously tolerated a fair amount of my bubbling enthusiasm about what appeared to her at the time to be essentially a whole lot of sitting and doing nothing, I asked to speak to Ben. I can still recall his little voice on the phone as I stood at a payphone and excitedly inquired as to what was happening in his life: “Hey Ben! What are you doing?”, meaning “What have you been doing? What do you have planned?”

There was quite a long pause as he considered this question and then replied, “Well Dad, I’m talking to YOU on the phone!”

In an instant I felt the full force of not only how beneficial mindfulness can be, but also how we often discover it on the cusp of discovering that, at that particular moment, we *weren’t* mindful. And then we’re back, as T.S. Eliot says in *Little Giddings*: “the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”

So my son was one of many of my teachers over the years, and his gentle naiveté and budding wry sense of humor taught me a little something about teaching. Who have been your teachers and what have they taught you about teaching?

**Contemplative Prompt Number Eight: What is your familiarity and facility with conveying course themes through the two primary modes of teaching in MBI's: mindful interactive inquiry and didactic teaching?**

There are two primary ways in which participants in MBI's come to gain something from their participation. Through learning *about* mindfulness and from learning mindfulness *itself* (Note: some MBI's have other qualities, like compassion, self-compassion or gratitude that they cultivate and the same is true of these qualities). The "about" portion is conveyed through didactic presentation of material, discussions, readings, and exercises, and the ability of the teacher to be clear and comfortable with this process is very important. The learning of mindfulness itself happens, of course, primarily through the formal practice of it, but often the most crucial and powerful moments of learning arise in the process of inquiry in the MBI classroom. This topic will be explored at some length elsewhere in this book but the means of conducting or practicing inquiry requires a certain approach to facilitation of experiential learning that is absolutely crucial to effective teaching in MBIs.

In a nutshell, mindful inquiry is the process that unfolds between teacher and student in the MBI classroom following a practice or exercise. After engaging in the specific activity, the participant is invited by the teacher to articulate his or her experience of the practice in a very particular way that is experience-focused and mirrors the actual internal process of mindfulness practice. That is, the teacher is embodying the exact qualities that the program is intending to foster in the participant, including curiosity, willingness, patience and compassion. Thus when a teacher asks the open-ended question at the conclusion of a practice, "What did you notice?", the participants are encouraged to report on exactly that: what they noticed. That response may contain observations of unfolding experience (e.g. "I noticed that I was able to keep my attention on my breath for awhile but then I noticed this pain in my lower back and I started to worry that I was hurting myself sitting like this.") but also elaboration of

"stories" or fears or ideas that arose as well. The teacher, inquiring mindfully, would let the elaboration go and perhaps respond with something like "So when you noticed that your mind had wandered from your breath to these thoughts about the pain, *then* what happened?", anchoring attention in the moment-to-moment unfolding of experience.

There is a great deal more to mindful inquiry, but for the purposes of determining where we stand in regard to teaching through this means, it becomes important to consider how we prefer to teach and, especially, how much *trust* we feel we can place in the twin processes of experiential learning and didactic education, and how comfortable we are in navigating and balancing these two aspects of MBI teaching.

So a logical next question is "How do you prefer to teach?" When put in the position of conveying something new to another person, do you lean toward explaining or demonstrating? Are you equally comfortable with both ways of teaching, or do you tend to default toward one or the other? As has been the case with other reflective questions in this chapter, consider the situations where you feel tested, stressed or uncertain. To borrow a question from Saki Santorelli, "What do you do when you don't know what to do?" Consider your tendencies, your comfort zones, your "edges" when it comes to being in the teaching role.

Often, when we are invited to teach something to someone else, our beliefs and convictions toward the material itself are put to the test and our insecurities or uncertainties manifest in the form and flow of our teaching. So then the fundamental question emerges here as to how deeply connected and resonant do you feel with the practice of mindfulness for yourself? How do you know, really *know*, mindfulness within yourself and how confident are you in your ability to teach it to others? Where might you be tested or stretched in an MBI classroom? Again, you don't need to feel you have "mastered" mindfulness by any means (in fact if you think you have, you're already in trouble!) but knowing your growing edges will guide your journey toward competence and be a major factor in your determination of when you begin to feel ready to teach.

Teaching mindfulness, as noted above, involves both the teaching of it and the teaching about it, and it's worth considering where you stand on each of these modes. Do you feel adequately educated about mindfulness, the specifics of the MBI you hope to teach and how those specifics are conveyed in exercises, didactic material and discussion? What do you feel is lacking in your knowledge base and your ability to convey it clearly, comfortably and convincingly? How comfortable are you with allowing an overarching theme to guide you in your teaching, to inform how you respond to questions or observations, and to be flexible with how that theme ends up being conveyed in any given classroom situation?

At the same time, how confident are you in your ability to facilitate mindful inquiry: to draw out the experience of participants in an open-ended and encouraging fashion, to hone in on direct unfolding of experience, to embody mindfulness in that encounter and provide a model for mindfulness practice by the way in which you engage with the participant? One way to ask this question is to consider another one: How much do you trust the process of mindful inquiry? What do you know about this process of inquiry and how comfortable are you engaging in it? (If you're not familiar with inquiry it might be worthwhile to briefly skim the section of Chapter Two dedicated to mindful inquiry to get a sense of this crucial art and practice before reflecting further.)

### **Concluding Contemplative Prompt: Why am I here?**

And so we come full circle to the question that we started with. But perhaps now something has changed or shifted in some way in regards to the question "Why am I here?" Consider what you have learned or discovered in this process of reflection and consideration. Have you surprised yourself in some way? Was something uncovered that wasn't immediately obvious when you embarked on this journey of reflection?

In the Mindful Self-Compassion program, Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff have included an opening reflective exercise that has come to be referred to as "The

Well Meditation”, and is found in many MBI’s in various forms. This simple practice encourages participants to consider the question “Why am I here?” and then uses the metaphor of dropping a stone into a deep well, inviting people to “drop” the answer to that question into the well of their mindful attention and to see, as it drops deeper and deeper into their hearts, if there might be something underneath the original answer. And as the question drops still deeper, is there an answer even deeper than *that* answer? “Why am I here?” becomes “Why am I really here?” which then becomes “Why am I really *really* here?”

Take the time to engage in this practice (perhaps putting aside writing implements) and see what emerges. Against the backdrop of what you have done in response to the previous contemplative prompts, see what bubbles up spontaneously for you. What is that has endured through this process, and what has evolved, changed or simply dropped away? What are you left with that feels genuine, important or seminal for you?

Write it down and get to know why you are really, really here. Maybe even consider coming back to this word, or phrase or paragraph periodically and see if gives you a sense of purpose, direction or focus for your progression toward becoming a teacher of MBIs. Let it be like a talisman that reminds you of your intention in doing this work, making it easily accessible and visible (on the refrigerator door or on a scrap of paper used as a bookmark for your reading in the field) and seeing if it helps you get re-oriented when you feel you’ve lost your way or gotten off track in some way.

### **What else you might do with what you’ve done, and where to go next**

As you’ve traversed this territory of teaching MBI’s, you have probably identified some areas of real strength and passion for yourself. Things that bring you confidence and commitment to continuing on the journey. At the same time, you have probably

identified some “edges” or gaps that will need filling or growing if you are to be effective at teaching mindfulness in whatever form you seek to teach it in. On balance, how do you feel about what you’ve found? As has been true throughout this exploration, it’s not about having to achieve a certain level of expertise or experience or knowledge at this point, but to know what you have to work with. Perhaps it would be helpful to go back to what you have written and see if you can start to put together two lists: one of the areas of strength and confidence that you have identified and one of the areas that seem to need attention, growth, education or experience. Within the latter list, what seems to need the most work? Is there anything in the former list that could help you with the latter? Can you find ways to leverage your strengths to address your weaknesses? When you put it all together, is there a sense of direction or purpose that guides you toward your next steps in becoming a teacher? For example, you might have a strong familiarity with the curriculum of a particular MBI that interests you, but your personal practice of mindfulness is a bit nascent and it’s hard for you to fully connect how your practice could support your teaching. This particular combination might suggest that taking the time to steep yourself more fully in practice, perhaps by going on retreat, would help you gain the perspective you might need. Or, if you have only read about an MBI you could seek out an experiential teacher training that is grounded in mindfulness practice (a retreat-style training) and engage in it with the intention of setting aside conceptual learning so you can really get a direct felt sense of the relationships between practice and implementation.

There is no one way to engage in this process of weighing the different areas of expertise and competence, but seeing them as integrated parts of a larger whole may provide some clues about what your pathway forward may be. As you continue through this book, you may find yourself drawn to different chapters in an order other than the way they are presented here. That’s perfectly fine. While they build on each other in some ways, they are also meant to be standalone in other ways so that someone seeking specific knowledge and perspective on one aspect of teaching can go right to



the information of interest. And of course, going in order is a nice choice if you don't have any clear reason for doing otherwise. Becoming a teacher of MBI's cannot be accomplished with a checklist "shopping list" approach, but only by a personal journey and exploration that, in the end, will have made its way through all the areas explored in this book. You are now well-prepared to embark on this journey, having done the self-reflective preparation, and this book will be with you as travel forth. Shall we embark?