LEARNING MINDFULNESS: DIALOGUE AND INQUIRY FROM AN ACTION-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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Abstract

The processes of learning mindfulness were explored in this case study by analyzing the transcripts of teacher-student interactions in the Dialogue and Inquiry periods of a Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course. The following research questions guided the inquiry: What is the process of learning mindfulness through Dialogue and Inquiry of an MBSR course? How does the social learning of mindfulness in Dialogue and Inquiry construct the experience of mindfulness? The qualitative “action-project method” was used to collect and analyse the data which were comprised of class dialogues, self-confrontation interviews (video process-recall interviews) and weekly logs gathered over nine weekly sessions. The analysis of these multi-perspectival data offered a comprehensive insight into the mindfulness-teacher and students’ internal cognitive, emotional and somatic processes in learning (and teaching) mindfulness, their individual and joint goals concerning mindfulness, behavioural manifestations of mindfulness, and lastly, the social meanings of mindfulness. The action processes identified and described in the findings of this study suggest that, while the mindfulness project was the super ordinate class joint project, it was embedded in and constituted by a concurrent relationship project made up of teacher-student, student-student, and self connections. The mindfulness curriculum was to a large part embodied by the teacher, who initiated many of the actions in the dialogue in a teacher-led inquiry, drawing the students into joint sub-ordinate projects of noticing (attention), describing (language) and understanding (insight). Further, the joint projects of helping (compassion) and relating (connection), often implicit and spontaneous, informed both the mindfulness and relationship projects. The findings offered theoretical, pedagogical and clinical implications for the teaching and learning of mindfulness. The study also shifted the gaze from mindfulness as an individual cognitive phenomenon to a dynamic relational process.
Preface

The research reported in this study was approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board according to certificate number H08-02364.
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>Acceptance and commitment therapy</td>
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<td>DBT</td>
<td>Dialectical behavior therapy</td>
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<td>D &amp; I</td>
<td>Dialogue and inquiry</td>
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<td>FFMQ</td>
<td>Five-factor mindfulness questionnaire</td>
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<td>MAAS</td>
<td>Mindful attention awareness scale</td>
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<td>MBCT</td>
<td>Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy</td>
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<td>Mindfulness-based intervention</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the 2000-year old Buddhist scripture, the *Pali Canon*, the following story is told:

Ananda said to Buddha, “This is half of the spiritual life: having admirable people as friends, companions and colleagues.” Buddha answered, “Not so, Ananda. Not so. Having admirable people as friends, companions and colleagues is actually the whole of the spiritual life.” (*Upaddha Sutta* SN 45.2)

This story may challenge our image of the Buddhist meditator as a solitary figure removed from the distractions of social interaction. Buddha goes on to explain how this community of friends will support the individual in the “noble eightfold path” of the spiritual life, “right mindfulness” -- clear seeing -- being one of the eight components. The view of mindfulness as it has been held in Western psychology since the early 1970s is quite different. It has been regarded and researched as an individual attentional skill -- “the non-judgmental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise” (Baer, 2003, p. 125) -- rather than a process embedded in a social context and bearing social meanings. Despite its historical roots in Buddhist notions of inter-subjectivity (Wallace, 2001), mindfulness has been only very recently viewed by a handful of Western researchers as a part of an interpersonal process. This nascent shift in conceptualization has implications for the construct of mindfulness itself, how it is learned, and its mechanisms of change in physical, mental and spiritual health.

My curiosity in this topic was ignited by the interpersonal process of the question and answer period of a mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) workshop I attended several years ago. At that time, what I noticed was the kind but dispassionate attitude of the facilitator, who appeared uninterested in the conceptual questions and opinions of the participant, asking instead about the participant’s direct and present experience. Also noticeable was the initial look of confusion on the face of the participant in the midst of that interaction. Eventually, after a few minutes of dialogue, something seemed to shift, as if a knot of some kind was gently loosened,
and both parties appeared to settle down into a more attuned state. I wondered what their internal experience was in those moments, and I was intrigued by what might be happening in the space between them, and what that might have to do with mindfulness.

**Background: Understanding Mindfulness**

It can be said that all scientific inquiry is about systematically observing and understanding a phenomenon in some way, whether the focus is on definition, measurement, explanation, analysis, description, interpretation of lived experience, and so on. There has been a longstanding interest by Western health clinicians and researchers in understanding mindfulness and its applications to physical and mental health treatment. We can find an interest in Buddhist psychology by Western psychologists as early as William James (1890), but the specific focus on the use of mindfulness in psychotherapy does not appear in the research literature until the 1970s. Since then the primary way of understanding mindfulness has been through attempts to define and measure it and its health outcomes.

The definitions of mindfulness are various and under ongoing revision (e.g. Shapiro, Carlson, Astin & Freedman, 2006; Mikulas, 2011), and there are to date at least eight self-report measures, also subject to critique and ongoing revision (e.g. Grossman, 2008). Most of the research on mindfulness in the past three decades has been outcome research showing the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and MBCT in helping to alleviate a variety of physical and mental health problems such as stress, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, chronic pain, and borderline personality disorder. This outcome research has been summarized in several reviews and meta-analyses (Baer, 2003; Bishop, 2002; Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007; Coelho, Canter & Ernst, 2007; Grossman, Nieman, Schmidt & Walach, 2004; Hofman, Sawyer, Witt & Oh, 2010). Despite various
research concerns over the decades with poor control groups and small sample sizes, moderate to good effect sizes have been reported in the meta-analyses (e.g. Hofman et al, 2010, report a moderate effect size of Hedges g = .63 for the overall sample based on 39 studies of mindfulness-based interventions and a robust effect size of Hedges g = .97 for patients with anxiety disorders). A considerable part of the initial efforts in understanding mindfulness has been demonstrating satisfactorily that the MBIs are indeed efficacious in mental and physical health treatment.

However, there are questions about how the MBIs exert these positive effects, both in terms of mechanisms of change, and regarding the role of the various components of the multi-faceted programs. There is mounting evidence that mindfulness increases as a result of the MBIs, and that the formal meditation practice itself contributes to both the increase in mindfulness and the outcomes. For example, Carmody and Baer (2008) found that the total number of minutes reportedly spent alone in home meditation practice was significantly related to the extent of change in mindfulness, symptoms and well-being. Kabat-Zinn and colleagues (1998) found that a brief mindfulness meditation intervention guided by audiotape (e.g. without teacher or group support) during ultraviolet light therapy increased the rate of resolution of psoriatic lesions in patients with psoriasis. Certainly the formal meditation practice itself appears to bring benefits, but we are still not sure how, and how or even if the other components of the MBIs have contributing or particular effects. Recent correlational and process research has highlighted the complexity of our growing understanding of mindfulness and how it works, for example, through mediators of self-compassion, or emotion-regulation (e.g. Baer, 2010).

Lastly, most recently, the role of context has been acknowledged as a potential way to extend our scientific inquiry into the phenomenon of mindfulness. Some researchers have
returned to Buddhist sources to reference the rich Buddhist psychological context in which mindfulness can be understood (Grabovac, Lau & Willett, 2011; Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). Further, Shaver, Lavy, Saron and Mikulincer (2007) spoke of the Buddhist concept of the social embeddedness of mindfulness. They remind the reader that mindfulness techniques were historically taught in conjunction with the “four immeasurables” – compassion, loving-kindness, empathy and equanimity, and express concern that “American psychologists have lifted mindfulness out of this rich context … and applied it in a more individualistic, less socially connected and more ethically neutral way” (p. 266). This latter suggestion has started to run through the current literature as a subtle but repeated call for expanding our ways of both conceptualizing and researching mindfulness by positioning it within a social, historical and/or religious context.

Gaps in Our Understanding of Mindfulness

Thus, while researchers continue to investigate mindfulness through increasingly sophisticated outcome, measurement, and correlational designs, it may be, as is implied by Buddha's response to his disciple Ananda, as important to seek an understanding of mindfulness as a socially embedded process. Traditionally, mindfulness as a Buddhist meditation practice has been taught in a social-relational context, the so-called “sangha” (community), by a spiritual teacher, with the goals of self-liberation, compassion and wisdom¹. In the modern evidence-based psychological interventions, MBSR or MBCT, mindfulness is taught in a group setting by a psychologist or health practitioner, with goals such as stress-reduction or depression relapse prevention. It seems somewhat paradoxical that something as apparently individual and private as an intrapsychic state of consciousness has been taught through deeply relational means in

¹ It should be pointed out that while foundational principles may be similar across the various schools of Buddhism, there are many different doctrinal points and styles of practice. One core similarity that unites all of the Buddhist schools is the reference to the crucial importance of the sangha.
group settings. Dimidjian and Linehan (2003), noticing the historic precedence of group meditation practice, suggested that it may be important for future research “to address whether the group format is an essential quality of teaching mindfulness in the clinical context” (p. 169). The social and relational aspects of the experience of mindfulness in the group format of MBSR have been overlooked.

More specifically, there has been almost no formal research on how mindfulness is actually taught and learned, although of course its teaching methods have evolved over thousands of years within the Buddhist contexts, and more than thirty years within the highly self-reflective and professional MBSR/CT community. The most obvious feature of the MBSR curriculum is the formal meditation practice itself and it has been assumed that this formal practice is the key vehicle for learning. Yet there is the assumption throughout the literature that mindfulness is also learned through social interactions with the mindful teacher². For example, Segal, Williams and Teasdale (2002) proposed that “participants in MBSR programs learn about mindfulness in two ways: through their own practice and when the instructor is able to embody it in the way issues are dealt with in the class” (p. 56). Similarly, Dimidjian and Linehan (2003) said “it may be important to conceptualize and account for the possible role of therapist modeling in addition to and independent of any direct skill acquisition that mindfulness training may produce” (p. 169). The potential importance of mindfulness as a teacher or therapist characteristic can be understood within the rich research done in counselling psychology on therapist characteristics and common factors. It has been demonstrated that qualities of the counsellor such as warmth, acceptance and empathy, are potent predictors of positive counselling outcomes (e.g. Imel & Wampold, 2008; Lambert & Barley, 2002). That mindfulness may be

² The term “teacher” rather than therapist is used in this dissertation, even though MBSR is often delivered by psychologists, psychotherapists and social workers. The word teacher is used by Kabat-Zinn and Santorelli, and conveys the nature of the teaching and learning of skills undertaken in MBSR.
another one of these so-called “common factors” has been made by a host of other researchers and clinicians (Crane, Kuyken, Hastings, Rothwell & Williams, 2010; Kabat-Zinn 1990, 2003, 2005; Leary & Tate, 2007; McCown, Reibel & Micozzi, 2010; Rosch, 2007) but to date has been empirically investigated in only a few studies (e.g. Grepmair et al., 2007). Investigating the experience of the interactions between a mindful teacher and the students with a view to understanding the role of teacher mindfulness in the learning process will have implications not only for pedagogical, but also counselling, contexts.

Further, it is not only the influence of the mindful teacher that is of interest: what do the students bring to this venture? We actually do not have a full understanding of what exactly is learned in the manualized 8-week MBSR or MBCT group, how it is learned, and how participants integrate this learning in the context of their relationships and lives. Surprisingly little has been documented about group participants’ lived experience of the individual, social and spiritual meanings of mindfulness as it is learned and experienced in the MBSR/CT groups. There have been only a few qualitative studies undertaken to investigate students’ experience, and these have been focused on self-reported outcomes/benefits (e.g. Smith, Graham & Senthinathan, 2007) rather than process, or on the individual, rather than relational or social, experience (e.g. Mason & Hargreaves, 2001; Santorelli, 1992).

Finally, rather than a uni-directional banking model of education, where a mindful teacher “deposits” mindfulness into the empty vessels of students, or even “models” a particular attitude which students then attempt to copy, it may be useful to inquire into the jointness of the teacher-student interaction and how mindfulness may be learned dynamically through this interaction. It may be generative to investigate the subjective experience of mindfulness as it is taught by the teacher, learned and experienced by the student, and potentially enacted in the
“space between” teacher and student. This investigative focus on the jointness of the teacher-student interaction in learning mindfulness may have direct implications for practice for teachers of MBSR. Further, such an investigation may bear theory and practice implications for counselling psychology, with its long history of research attention to the importance of the therapeutic relationship and the working alliance as strong predictors of counselling outcomes (Gelso & Carter, 1985, 1994; Horvath & Bedi, 2002).

One unique arena of the enactment of mindfulness interpersonally in the MBSR/CT group context is the extended question-answer period, or what is called dialogue and inquiry (D & I), between teacher and student. This is not a conceptual or content-based discussion period and neither is it a Socratic questioning of beliefs as in cognitive-behavioural therapy. Surprisingly little has been documented about this component of the MBSR and MBCT programs. McCown and Reibel (2009) claimed “much of the transformative effect of MBSR may be potentiated by dialogic encounters in the classroom … this activity is an extremely important and dynamic element in participants’ experiences of MBSR that has not been adequately addressed as part of the process in MBSR research” (p. 324). We do not know much about the teacher and the participants’ lived experience of this social interaction, the role of the relationship between the teacher and the students in the dialogue, and how the relationship relates to the learning and experience of mindfulness. Neither do we know if the dialogue and inquiry is simply talking “about” mindfulness, or is another way to experience mindfulness. How mindfulness, which is often construed as a non-conceptual state of being, is experienced and constructed through the language of the dialogue and inquiry, has not been investigated.
**Purpose of this Study**

This dissertation sought to investigate, describe and understand the processes (cognitive, affective and behavioural) and meanings (purposes) of mindfulness as constituted through teacher-student dialogue in an MBSR course. By doing so, the nature of mindfulness as a social phenomenon was illuminated, in particular, how mindfulness is constructed, learned and experienced interpersonally both in the teacher-student dyads and among group members. The two main research questions guiding the inquiry were: What is the process of learning mindfulness through the dialogue and inquiry (D & I) period of the MBSR course? How does the social learning of mindfulness in the D & I period construct the experience of mindfulness?

**Research Design**

In choosing a method and research design for this investigation, I sought a method of inquiry that would be resonant with my own moderate constructivist (more specifically, social constructivist) epistemology, one which would acknowledge humans as both “constructed” and “constructing” beings, as Martin and Sugarman (1997, 2000) have described. That is, within this constructivist epistemology and ontology, humans are seen as potently constructed by language and social context but at the same time as able to construct meaning and take agentic action through their embodied intentionality. One could of course investigate the learning of mindfulness by self-report questionnaires or retrospective interviews, yet these methods seemed limited in their capacity to access the more dynamic, contextualized and intersubjective dimensions of the phenomenon of learning mindfulness. Hick (2009) expressed his doubts that conventional research methodologies could indeed capture such an experiential and elusive phenomenon. He went on to say:

Perhaps mindfulness can be researched, but I imagine that it would have to make use of methods that are quite different from those commonly used in the social sciences. Such a
research initiative would need to proceed from an embodied, open-ended, reflective mode. Embodied mode refers to reflection that brings mind and body together. Open-ended reflection denotes a reflection in which one is aware that the reflection itself is a form of experience that can be done mindfully. (p. 16)

This study used contextual action theory (Valach, Young, & Lynam, 2002) as its theoretical lens and the qualitative action-project method (Young, Valach, & Domene, 2005) as its method of inquiry, in an attempt to investigate mindfulness within a constructivist theory and through a method which is itself embodied and reflective. This theory and method is also resonant with the leading-edge research interest in addressing context in the investigation of mindfulness.

In extant literature, it is rare to view mindfulness in its simplest terms as an action. Hayes and Shenk (2004) come closest to this as behaviourists, in their suggestion that mindfulness is a “psychological act of the whole organism, interacting in and with a context considered both historically and situationally” (p. 251). Also, from a phenomenological approach, Depraz, Varela and Vermersch (2000) referred to the gesture of mindfulness. Yet to see mindfulness as an action is both clarifying and generative. Viewed from an action theory paradigm, the action of mindfulness can be construed as being goal-directed and intentional, and as having three perspectives of manifest behaviour, internal processes and social meaning. Within action theory, mindfulness can be viewed as enacted, not as something to be pinned down, measured or defined, but as a goal-directed process which occurs and changes over time, and is both intrapsychic and interpersonal, bearing social meaning.

A single case-study approach was chosen (Stake, 1995), with the case identified as a group; specifically, a group gathered to learn mindfulness. Case study research seeks to explore phenomena related to what people actually do in their day-to-day lives, with the objective to develop as full an understanding of the particular case as possible, or as Stake put it, “catch [its] particularity and complexity” (1995, p. xi). The hermeneutic movements of action project
method, applied to case study design, involve both a rich, meaning-focused interpretation of the case, and also the use of empathy in understanding and representing the emotional and interpersonal worlds and context of the participants of the case. Although patterns were interpretatively sought, at the same time, effort was made to represent the richness of the details of the particular lived experience of the individuals within the case of the group.

To answer the two main research questions, a sub-question more specific to action-theory was articulated: What actions, projects, and careers\(^3\) do the teacher and students engage in during the D & I period over the 8-week course period, and how do these relate to the learning of mindfulness? How mindfulness is learned relationally was investigated by videotaping an 8-week MBSR course and analysing the transcripts of the teacher-student interactions during the D & I periods using video-based interviews with teacher and students to inform the analysis. Using action-project method to investigate a mindfulness-based group experience was a window into student and teacher’s internal cognitive and emotional processes in learning (and teaching) mindfulness, their individual and joint goals concerning mindfulness, behavioural manifestations of mindfulness, and lastly, the social meanings of mindfulness.

In conclusion, although it has seemed important in the last several years of research to isolate the essential and nonessential components of mindfulness, attempting to put aside what Olendzki called its “cultural elaborations” (2005, p. 241) and pin down in a more or less static way its core essence, this “denaturing” of mindfulness (Grossman, 2010) has taken us only so far in our understanding. Current approaches of using self-report to understand mindfulness have been limited to viewing mindfulness as an intrapsychic experience. Yet beyond this, mindfulness as it is taught in MBSR is embedded in a rich social context, and, as an action, is dynamically

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\(^3\) These terms are specific to action theory and will be defined in Chapters 2 and 3, but it is important to note that the term “career” within this theory does not necessarily involve an occupational meaning, but rather, refers to long-term, even life-long, goal-directed projects.
constructed in the moment, over time, in individual and joint projects and careers. Qualitative methodology such as the action-project method is an appropriate way to access people's lived experience of the learning and practice of mindfulness, and may indeed be what is needed to coax the elusive phenomenon of mindfulness into a research forum where it can be understood and appreciated in its complexity. Such a lens may challenge and develop some of the current assumptions about the nature of mindfulness and how it works. It also potentially shifts the gaze from mindfulness as an individual cognitive mechanism to a dynamic, transactional, relational process. A greater understanding of the interpersonal and socially constructed nature of mindfulness may improve the way it is taught in educational, medical, and psychotherapeutic contexts. It also adds to the recent research on the possible role of therapist mindfulness as a common factor in psychotherapy (e.g. Grepmaier et al., 2007), contributing to the growing literature on the importance of the therapeutic relationship (Fulton, 2005; Lambert & Barley, 2002).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The current literature and understanding of the role of Dialogue and Inquiry (D & I) in the learning of mindfulness in MBSR is extremely limited. This chapter attempts to situate the small existent body of knowledge within a broad review of the literature on mindfulness relevant to the study of the social and relational aspects of the experience and learning of mindfulness. In order to build a rationale for my study, I have had to draw upon bodies of literature which are only indirectly related to the focus of my study. Hence for each subheading, I have tried to clarify the reasons for including what may seem only tangentially related. The difficulty of this undertaking only serves to underscore how overlooked the social and relational aspects of the experience of mindfulness has been, and how this study addresses an important gap in the literature.

First, theoretical approaches to the construct of mindfulness itself are reviewed, including its definitions and its posited components. The construct of mindfulness has been heavily investigated but the learning of mindfulness has not. Indeed, these two things – mindfulness and the learning of mindfulness – are not unrelated if one learns mindfulness only by experiencing it. Since the construct is much-debated, the question inevitably arises as to which construct the teacher is presenting, and how this is being understood by the participants. In a sense, the history of the debate about “what mindfulness is” – as it has been constructed in religious, medical, psychological and even popular discourses such as the media – informs the context of the learning experience of the participants in the study. None of them arrives on the first day of the course without pre-understandings of what mindfulness is. Thus a brief review of the construct is important in situating not only the reader’s but the participants’ potential understanding of what mindfulness might be from a conceptual point of view.
Second, putative mechanisms of change in the mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) such as MBSR are described, based on several key empirical studies which attempt to address how the MBIs might achieve their positive health outcomes. These studies look at what appears to change as a result of the MBIs, and the association of these changes with the measured health outcomes. Delineating the posited change mechanisms of the MBIs helps to set the complex context for the learning of mindfulness, which the writer suggests is not a discrete and finite action but rather, a pervasive and multi-faceted process which is possibly associated with the proposed mechanisms in ways we do not yet understand (e.g. overlapping with, antecedent to, or perhaps even consequential to them). Third, viewing the experience of mindfulness from the learner/client’s perspective, various models and theories of how mindfulness is learned are presented. Next, viewing mindfulness from the teacher/therapist’s perspective is reviewed, how mindfulness is taught explicitly and implicitly, based on both psychological and educational/pedagogical theories and research. Finally, contextual action theory is presented as the theoretical framework for this investigation. The major constructs of action theory are outlined, and the rationale for positioning mindfulness as an action and a joint project is explained.

**Conceptualizing Mindfulness**

**Definitions.** The English word “mindfulness” was not commonly used in psychology until after the publication of Nyanoponika Thera's *The heart of Buddhist meditation* in 1962 which offered for the first time a popular English translation of Pali\(^4\) scriptures about the training of mindfulness. While similar meditative practices can be found in the contemplative traditions of all world religions, mindfulness meditation as it has been incorporated in current Western

\(^4\) Pali is a Middle Indo-Aryan dialect used as the literary and liturgical language in which the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism were written down in Sri Lanka in the 1\(^{st}\) century BCE. It is not spoken today other than in some of the liturgical chants.
psychological interventions has its roots in a 2500-year old tradition of Buddhist spiritual practice. The English word mindfulness has been used as a translation for at least two quite different concepts in Buddhist psychology: most commonly to refer to the Pali word *sati*, which connotes awareness, attention, and remembering (Bodhi, 2011; Seigel, Germer & Olendzki, 2009), and less commonly, to refer to the Pali word, *vipassana*, which literally means clear seeing or insight. It is these Pali concepts and the school of Theravada Buddhism from which they arise, which form the general Buddhist frameworks of MBSR and MBCT. Kabat-Zinn (2011) explained that he decided to omit specific Buddhist terminology in his development of the MBSR program and instead present the meditation practice itself in a secular fashion, in a way that would make psychological sense to Western clients, and be accepted by the Western medical community. It is interesting to note that there are examples of indigenous Asian psychotherapies, such as Morita therapy in Japan (Ishiyama, 2002; Kora & Sato, 1958), which incorporate Buddhist beliefs and terminology (such as the Japanese Zen concept of *arugamama*, “as-is experiencing and embracing reality” which appears to approximate the Theravadin notion of *sati*, bare attention) with no need to either secularize the content or translate its meaning, as in Western contexts. The translation of mindfulness, in language, theory, and practice, to Western psychological contexts, has resulted in a rich but sometimes bewildering range of interpretation of what it is.

Western researchers have primarily viewed mindfulness to be an individual, intrapsychic skill or ability but have disagreed about whether it is behavioural, cognitive, perceptual or affective. According to a behaviourist view, mindfulness is an act which cannot be understood independent of contextual events (Hayes & Shenk, 2004). Others described mindfulness as a cognitive or metacognitive stance (Bishop et al., 2004; Teasdale, Segal & Williams, 1995).
Sternberg (2000) saw mindfulness as a cognitive style; part state and part trait. Within the cognitive conceptualization, mindfulness is seen as an attentional skill or process. In a seminal outcome study by Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth and Burney (1985) on the use of mindfulness in chronic pain management, mindfulness was defined as a “highly developed, coherent, systematic and multimodal utilization of attention” (p. 165). Brown and Ryan (2004), on the other hand, cautioned that the fact that mindfulness “can be brought to bear on thought, emotions, and other contents of consciousness means that it cannot be reduced to them,” and that, “simply put, if mindfulness involves observing thought, including thoughts about thoughts, it cannot be thought” (p. 243). According to them, the mode of operation of mindfulness is perceptual rather than cognitive.

More recently, with the burgeoning interest in emotion demonstrated across psychology and other disciplines, there has been a shift from the conceptualization of mindfulness as a cognitive skill or ability to examining the impact of meditation on emotional processes, such that Goldin and Gross (2010) declared that “an emotion regulation framework may help clarify the processes that underlie MBSR … as distinct from those implicated in … cognitive-behavioural therapy” (p. 83). In other words, there is a shift to seeing mindfulness within an affective-cognitive psychological model, and as an emotion-regulation tool rather than a cognitive skill per se. Indeed, mindfulness is viewed in Buddhism as a foundation for cultivating affective balance (Wallace & Shapiro, 2006).

**Components of mindfulness.** A much-discussed issue around the construct of mindfulness is how to differentiate implicit components of the construct from likely outcomes of having learned mindfulness. For example, is acceptance an intrinsic part of mindfulness or a result of practicing mindfulness? Brown and colleagues (2007) critiqued the available measures
of mindfulness on their failure to “de-confound mindfulness from both its antecedents and consequences” (p. 215.) Yet other researchers (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) emphasize the need to include the attitudinal components of mindfulness (such as friendliness or compassion) as well as attentional ones, in the construct and accompanying measures.

**Attention.** All definitions and current measures of mindfulness include an attentional component. Several studies have investigated the mechanisms of mindfulness through the objective measurement of attention. An example is the work of Jha, Krompinger and Baime (2007), who theorized that the two stages of mindfulness meditation (concentration – paying selective attention to breath, and receptive – whole field of awareness is open to present experience) correspond to Posner's model of dorsal and ventral systems of attention (e.g. Posner & Rothbart, 1992). They then looked at differences in attentional processing, as measured by Fan, McCandliss, Sommer, Raz and Posner's (2002) Attention Network Test (ANT), between 3 groups: a control (n = 17), a beginner’s mindfulness group (n = 17) and a group of adept meditators (n = 17). The beginners participated in an 8-week (3 hours a week) MBSR course (which would train mainly in concentration) while the adepts participated in an intensive full-time one month retreat (which would train mainly in receptive awareness). All participants took the ANT and their response times were measured before the start and shortly after completion of the meditation program. The hypothesis that the first stage of mindfulness training, concentration practice, would utilize the dorsal system of attention, and be reflected in higher scores in that portion of the ANT was confirmed, as was the hypothesis that the more advanced stage of mindfulness training, receptive awareness, would utilize the ventral system of attention and be reflected appropriately in the ANT scores measuring that aspect of attention. The beginner's group (MBSR participants) improved in orienting (concentration) scores relative to the control
participants, as predicted, the adept group (retreat participants) differed significantly in their alerting (receptive) performance compared to the control and the MBSR participants, and also the magnitude of their scores at Time 2 was significantly higher than at Time 1.

Chiesa, Calati and Serretti (2011) reviewed 23 studies on the effects of mindfulness practice on objective measures of cognitive functions such as attention, memory and executive functions. Overall, these studies observed similar results as Jha and colleagues (2007): early phases of mindfulness training are associated with significant improvements in selective attention, whereas later phases are associated with improved unfocused sustained attention. The significant correlations between mindfulness meditation and increased attentional skills are supported by neuro-imaging brain studies which show activation in pre-frontal cortical areas of the brain during and after mindfulness practice (Cahn & Polich, 2006; Ivanovsky & Malhi, 2007); and significant thickening in particular cortical regions in long-term meditation practitioners (Lazar et al., 2005), suggesting that attention, intention, and sensory perception may be implicated.

Acceptance. Almost all definitions of mindfulness also include acceptance as a component. Kabat-Zinn’s seminal working definition (1994) referred to paying attention “in a particular way,” which he has variously specified as nonjudgmental, accepting, curious, and compassionate. Brown and Ryan (2004) contested Bishop and colleagues’ (2004) operational definition of mindfulness which has two factors, attention and acceptance. Based on their earlier validity research on a self-report measure of dispositional or trait mindfulness, the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan 2003), they conceptualized mindfulness as “the presence or absence of attention to, and awareness of, what is occurring in the present moment” (p. 824). Their fundamental conception of mindfulness differs significantly from that
of Bishop et al.’s, in that they construed mindfulness as a trait rather than a state. Their instrument, the MAAS, assesses trait mindfulness in everyday life. An exploratory factor analysis was done on MAAS scores from a sample of 313 undergraduates. They initially found two factors of presence and acceptance, but in further validity research across several large samples, found that the acceptance factor provided no explanatory advantage over that shown by the presence factor alone. They concluded that acceptance is functionally redundant as a distinct component of mindfulness. Thus they conceptualized mindfulness as a one-dimensional construct based on attention. Interestingly, Coffey et al. (2010) found that, when investigating what mediates mindfulness and mental health outcomes in individuals with no formal mindfulness training (e.g. by measuring mindfulness as a dispositional difference), acceptance had much stronger effects on other mediating constructs such as emotion-regulation than did attention. Thus, the role of acceptance in the construct and measurement of mindfulness continues to be discussed.

**Social or interpersonal mindfulness.** In a critical review of the limitations of current mindfulness scales, Grossman (2008) concluded that self-assessment of mindfulness using currently available instruments is problematic. He suggested that we need to return to assessing mindfulness through qualitative inquiry, both in order to develop better objective measures, and also simply in order to understand the construct itself in a more holistic, multidimensional way. In particular, he noted that the current psychological conceptualizations of mindfulness appeared to privilege cognition and attention while overlooking social or interpersonal factors:

“Qualitative analysis . . . may elucidate how cognitive aspects of attention are intrinsically linked to ethical and social behaviour in Buddhist thought, a notion rather alien to Western cognitive science” (p. 407). It is this linking between individual and social aspects of mindfulness that the
present study endeavors to investigate. Given the lack of agreement about the construct, its definition and its measurement, it may be illuminating to look at mindfulness from a wider perspective than its individual, intrapsychic dimensions.

The relatively recent idea of social or interpersonal mindfulness draws on literature from developmental psychology, attachment theory and relational dynamic therapies. Daniel Siegel (2007) is the leader in this approach, combining humanistic and developmental assumptions with new findings in neuroscience about the power of preconscious, emergent emotional states, mindfulness and the human ability to connect with others. Siegel hypothesized that mindfulness, as a self-regulatory process of focused attention, is at the same time a form of inter-personal attunement. Within the framework of attachment theory, he proposes that mindfulness and secure attachment are overlapping or even mutually constitutive processes:

When we view mindful awareness as a way of cultivating the mind's awareness of itself, it seems likely that it is harnessing aspects of the original neural mechanisms for being aware of other minds. As we become aware of our own intentions and attentional focus, we may be utilizing the very circuits of the brain that first created maps of the intention and attention of others . . . We can propose that the interpersonal attunement of secure attachment between parent and child is paralleled by an intrapersonal form of attunement in mindful awareness (p. 26).

This theory is supported by more traditional research into the role of attentional processes in normal development and socialization. For example, Rueda and Posner (2004) reviewed research that shows that children's ability to maintain attention, control distress and to mentalize – the so-called executive functioning of the prefrontal cortex – is a feature of healthy attachment and normal socialization. Mindfulness, as an intrapsychic attentional process thus may be implicated, as Siegel suggests, in healthy social development.

This complication of the separation of intra and inter-personal processes finds familiar ground in Buddhist philosophy. Wallace (2001), in his discussion of intersubjectivity in Indo-
Tibetan Buddhism, explained that according to the Buddhist worldview, each person does exist as an individual, but the self does not exist as an independent ego, but rather as a “matrix of dependently related events” (p. 209). The ways in which we perceive ourselves and others are not private, but rather, public and consensual, “inextricably related to the community of language-users and thinkers with whom I share a common conceptual framework” (p. 210). Similarly, Rosch (1997) commented that “inner and outer worlds can be experienced as an interdependent co-defining whole. The self (or nonself) discovered by mindfulness meditation is not private . . . but exposed, interconnected and known” (p. 197). From this point of view, mindfulness itself, whether it is seen as a state, trait, attitude or process, is also inevitably public, consensual, and related to context.

In summary, the construct of mindfulness as it has been referred to in Western psychology since the 1970s is theorized most commonly as an individual, intrapsychic cognitive or metacognitive skill. It is agreed that its main component is attention. Several researchers have added that another important component of mindfulness is an accepting, nonjudgmental attitude. Yet the construct of mindfulness is still not agreed upon. Further, there is recent interest in re-positioning mindfulness as a socially embedded phenomenon (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011; Shaver, Lavy, Saron & Mikulincer, 2007), as it appears to be understood within Buddhist psychology. It is interesting to reflect on the complexity of the task of teaching mindfulness, considering the lack of agreement about what it is. To complicate these already complex understandings of the construct of mindfulness, once we turn to the way mindfulness is most often taught (and indeed, researched) in Western psychological contexts -- through the multi-faceted mindfulness-based group interventions -- we can see how challenging it is to understand the nature of mindfulness as a singular phenomenon experienced individually.
Mechanisms of Change in Mindfulness-Based Interventions

To consider the mechanisms of change in the complex MBIs is surely different than in mindfulness per se. One of the most interesting yet challenging problems of researching mindfulness as it is taught and learned through these group interventions is that so many other helpful things are also being potentially taught and learned simultaneously and interpersonally. Indeed, it is possible that the excellent outcomes of these interventions rely on the synergy among the complex components, not solely on the mindfulness learned through the formal meditation exercises. Understanding how mindfulness may be learned relationally through an MBI might indeed involve an awareness of this complex synergy and what is known about it to date in terms of the hypothesized mechanisms of change.

The importance of Kabat-Zinn's work cannot be overestimated in terms of bringing mindfulness into the scientific arena, and introducing a working definition of mindfulness which is still often used today. By manualizing mindfulness in his 8-week “Mindfulness-based stress reduction” program (MBSR), Kabat-Zinn made it possible to carry out controlled and replicable outcome studies. His definition of mindfulness guided the research in the 90s: “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally” (1994, p. 4). The four main mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) that have developed – mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1990), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT; Segal et al., 2002), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999), and dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993) – are all integrated, multi-modal therapies in which mindfulness is explicitly taught as a central therapeutic ingredient, but which include other cognitive, behavioural, psychoeducational and social/relational elements.
With the development of several self-report measures of mindfulness in the last decade, it has been possible to begin to look at how the MBIs work, the actual mechanisms through which the interventions may exert their curative effects. The following are some key studies on the mechanisms of change in the MBIs. These studies are explanatory or process research which explore the change processes in the MBIs, that is, what changes as a result of the MBI intervention, and if these potential mediators are correlated with the reported outcomes of reduced symptoms, and enhanced well-being. Recently even more fundamental questions have been posed, like if participants become more mindful or more accepting.

Generally, the research suggests that learning mindfulness (defined as attention plus acceptance) leads to increases in decentering, emotion regulation, self-compassion, enhanced working memory, etc., which then mediate the positive health outcomes (Baer, 2010). That is, these skills (states, processes, etc., depending on the measure) are posited as consequences of mindfulness. What is of interest in this study is that it has been assumed that the mindfulness is learned in the formal mindfulness meditation exercises of the MBI, and the D & I has been overlooked in its potential influential role. The possibility arises that some of these proposed mediators may be promoted in the D & I, contributing to mindfulness, or even independent of mindfulness, or perhaps as mechanisms in learning mindfulness. For example, perhaps participants become more emotionally-regulated through the relational actions of the D & I, and then are able to learn mindfulness more easily, and/or be more mindful. The main mechanisms of change posited in recent research on the MBIs are described below, with the aim of providing a context of the complexity of how participants change in the MBIs. Learning mindfulness during D & I may or may not involve some of these mechanisms.
Mindfulness. An obvious question of whether or not mindfulness increases as a result of participating in an MBI has only been possible to answer with the development of the measures in the last decade. In a non-randomized, cohort-controlled design (Shapiro, Brown & Biegel, 2007), students were enrolled in one of three graduate courses, stress and stress management, psychological theory, and research methods. The MBSR intervention was offered as part of the Stress course (n=22), and the other two were control groups (n = 54). Pre and post-course measures included mindfulness (Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, MAAS), and six other measures of emotional well-being. Participants in the MBSR class showed significant improvement on all 7 outcomes, relative to participants in the control groups. In order to test whether pre to post change in mindfulness predicted change in any of the outcomes for the MBSR group, simple regression models were constructed. Across the seven distress and well-being outcomes, significant relations between change in mindfulness and change in outcome were found in four models (drop in rumination, trait anxiety, and perceived stress, and increase in self-compassion). There have been other studies which showed that mindfulness increased as a result of participating in an MBSR program: Carmody and Baer (2008) found mindfulness scores increased significantly pre- to post, in the sample of 121 MBSR participants, based on the FFMQ mindfulness scale, and Dobkin and Zhao (2011) found a significant increase in mindfulness in their sample of 83 MBSR participants, using the MAAS scale.

Acceptance. Although acceptance is considered by most researchers as a part of the construct of mindfulness itself, rather than a consequence, there has been some research attempting to measure acceptance discretely as a potential mediator of change in the ACT intervention. In ACT, “psychological flexibility” implies the attitude of acceptance and is used to describe the willingness to experience unpleasant stimuli while choosing behaviours in the
service of desired goals and values. Hayes, Luoma, Bond, Masuda and Lillis (2006) found that increases in psychological flexibility (as measured by the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire, AAQ; Bond et al., 2009) are important mediators of the therapeutic change in ACT. While the two constructs, mindfulness and acceptance, have been separately defined and researched, there is much overlap not only in the conceptualizations, but in the methods that attempt to facilitate them.

**Decentering.** The concept of decentering is not a new one. The term was used by Hollon and Beck (1979) in the early days of cognitive therapy to describe the way of relating to thoughts as transitory phenomena which do not necessarily reflect reality or self-worth. Deikman’s (1982) eloquent description of the “observing self” is a psychological and spiritual expression of this position. Teasdale and colleagues (2002) referred to decentering as “metacognitive awareness,” which they see as being at the heart of the MBCT course. It appears to be synonymous with the term reperceiving which was introduced by Shapiro, Carlson, Astin and Freedman (2006), who posited it as the primary mechanism of change in MBIs. Within their triaxiomatic model that defines mindfulness as a state that involves *intention, attention,* and *attitude,* the mechanism of reperceiving allows an experience of “what is” instead of a commentary or story about what is, facilitating “a deep, penetrative *non-conceptual* seeing into the nature of mind and world” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p.146). They postulated that reperceiving may foster additional mechanisms, such as self-regulation, values clarification, and exposure that subsequently influence the outcomes of mindfulness practice.

Recently, Fresco and colleagues (2007) have made it possible to study the process of decentering through their adaptation of Teasdale’s Experiences Questionnaire (EQ, unpublished). Carmody, Baer, Lykins, and Olendzki (2009) measured mindfulness and
decentering in a group of 309 participants in MBSR, using the FFMQ and the EQ, pre and post intervention and found that both variables increased significantly while various measured symptoms such as anxiety significantly reduced. They found that mindfulness and decentering, as measured by the FFMQ and EQ, were very highly correlated both before and after MBSR, raising questions about how distinct these constructs are, and whether they develop simultaneously or sequentially over the 8-week period of mindfulness practice.

Recent functional neuroimaging studies of MBSR have provided evidence of neural markers of decentering. For example, Farb and colleagues (2007) found reduced narrative-conceptual self-focus, and increased experiential-sensory self-focus, at post MBSR. Medial prefrontal cortical (mPFC) processes have been characterized as supporting narrative self-referencing of identity over time, whereas viscerosomatic areas such as the insula, secondary somatosensory cortex and inferior parietal lobule appear to be involved in an experiential, present-moment self-reference. In this study, participants (in a pre-MBSR waitlist group and a post-MBSR group) were asked to respond while in the scanner to reading trait-related adjectives by first reflecting on what the adjective meant about them as a person (narrative focus) and then by monitoring their moment to moment experience in response to the adjective (experiential focus). The post MBSR participants had reduced activity in the mPFC and increased recruitment of the right lateralized cortical network during the second task, and were significantly better than the untrained participants in “uncoupling” the right insula and mPFC in order to resist the automatic tendency of the narrative-generating mind. It was hypothesized that in the so-called experiential mode of self-referencing, one’s experiences are treated as transient mental events that can be simply observed rather than integral to the self. Williams (2010) emphasized that this decentering is not the same as dissociation, but rather, is “seeing something as it is, without
further elaboration, for example seeing thoughts as mental events … rather than seeing them as having meaning for the integrity of the self” (p. 4).

Further investigating the role of meta-awareness in mindfulness, Hargus, Crane, Barnhofer and Williams (2010) examined whether mindfulness training made a difference in the way depressed participants described a previous crisis involving suicidal thoughts and plans. They defined meta-awareness as “the ability to decenter” (p. 39). Before and after treatment in a randomized controlled trial of MBCT (vs. treatment as usual), they assessed the specificity and meta-awareness of severely depressed participant’s verbal descriptions of their thoughts, feelings and body sensations during the time prior to their crisis. Specificity was measured by a “relapse signature specificity measure” devised by the principal researcher and rated by both him and two independent raters. The meta-awareness was measured using an adapted version of the Measure of Awareness and Coping in Autobiographical Memory (MACAM; Teasdale et al., 2002). They found that specificity decreased in the group that did not have treatment but was maintained in the treatment group, and that the MBCT group showed significantly greater meta-awareness in descriptions of crises, post-intervention, compared to the control group. To strengthen these findings, a comparable active treatment group should be used. Also, a dismantling study would be helpful since we cannot assume that the greater metawareness shown in discursive description is due solely or even at all to the formal mindfulness meditation per se. It may be an outcome of other components in the treatment, for example, the D & I component in which participants speak about their experience.

**Emotion-regulation.** The construct of emotion regulation is under debate, but one approach emphasizes awareness and acceptance of emotion as it arises rather than controlling or reducing negative emotions (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Thompson, 1994). This conceptualization
overlaps with the construct of mindfulness in its emphasis on observing and describing emotions without judgment. It is obviously related to the posited mechanism of acceptance, but particular to the acceptance of emotion. MBIs appear to promote emotion regulation. Gratz and Tull (2010) suggested that through the process of observing and describing one’s emotions in the MBIs, clients will increase contact with emotions, increase their emotional awareness, gain a greater ability to identify, label and differentiate between emotional states, and increase their willingness to experience emotions rather than avoid them. They posited that mindfulness training may also promote the decoupling of emotions and behaviours, promoting behavioural control.

By developing a measure based on an acceptance-based conceptualization of emotion regulation (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004), it has been possible to examine the potential mediating role of emotion regulation in MBIs. Although few studies to date have looked at changes in emotion regulation in MBIs, there are some preliminary studies. For example, Leahey, Crowther & Irwin (2008) found improved emotion regulation as measured by the DERS in their pre-post treatment for binge eating with a ten-week mindfulness-based cognitive behavioural group. It is important to continue to examine the conceptual overlap between mindfulness, acceptance and emotion regulation. Coffey and colleagues (2010) explored the construct of mindfulness and its association with the construct of emotion regulation by doing exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses on mindfulness and emotion regulation data measured by the FFMQ and DERS in a non-clinical sample of undergraduate students. They found that the constructs to be overlapping and pointed out that the FFMQ (Baer et al., 2006) which has five-factors, and the DERS (Gratz and Roemer, 2004) which has six factors, draw upon the same theoretical model of mindfulness and emotion (Linehan,1993). For example, both constructs had factors of acceptance and awareness. They went on to query that some of the
factors identified in the FFMQ might be sequelae of mindfulness rather than mindfulness per se. For example, the ability to identify and label emotional experience may be consequences of present-centered attention and acceptance of one’s experience, which as they point out is Bishop and colleagues’ (2004) definition for mindfulness, and perhaps a maximally parsimonious definition for the construct.

**Self-compassion.** Self-compassion appears to be closely related to mindfulness; both are fundamental concepts in Buddhist psychology. The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS, Neff, 2003) measures three components of self-compassion: treating oneself kindly (self-kindness), recognizing that suffering is part of the common human experience (common humanity), and maintaining awareness of pain rather than avoiding it (mindfulness). Neff posited that these three components of self-compassion are mutually constitutive and facilitative. Kabat-Zinn (2003) pointed out that the word for mind and heart is the same in Asian languages and that mindful attention “includes an affectionate, compassionate quality within the attending, a sense of openhearted friendly presence and interest” (p. 145). He would presumably include compassion/self-compassion within the construct of mindfulness. However, other researchers find it important to separate the central elements of mindfulness from what they perceive as the consequences of practicing mindfulness, and the potential mediators of the MBSR health outcomes (Bishop et al., 2004, Brown et al., 2007).

There is evidence that MBSR training leads to increases in self-compassion (Shapiro, Astin, Bishop & Cordova 2005, Shapiro et al., 2007). These are preliminary studies and more rigorous mediation analyses need to be conducted to identify if self-compassion is a mediator of change in MBIs, and whether mindfulness and self-compassion make independent contributions
to better psychological outcomes such as reduced symptoms of anxiety or depression, or if they are too heavily overlapping to make this claim.

**Working memory.** In research which takes a new (and ironically, ancient) angle on mindfulness, Jha, Stanley and Baime (2010), remind us that one of the Buddhist meanings of mindfulness, as *sati*, involved not only a present-moment focus but a “nonforgetfulness of the mind”: “It is striking that the historical framing of mindfulness, as the mental mode of remembering to attend to information most relevant to present-moment experience while remaining undistracted, is akin to the cognitive neuroscience construct of working memory” (p. 208). They posited that working memory capacity may be a useful functional marker of mindfulness, and argued that future research should include a focus on the relationship between mindfulness and working memory in terms of understanding the mechanisms of change in the MBIs.

Most recently, Jha, Stanley, Kiyonaga, Wong and Gelfand (2010) compared the influence of an 8-week mindfulness-based course on working memory between two military cohorts, one control group (N = 17) and one experimental group (N = 31) during the four month, high-stress period of pre-deployment military training. Within the experimental group, those who reported low mindfulness practice time had working memory performance degradation (as measured on the operation span working memory task; (OSPAN; Unsworth, Heitz, Schrock & Engle, 2005) while those who reported high practice time had improvements in working memory performance over time. In addition, only minimal fluctuations in affect were observed in the group reporting high practice time. The researchers concluded that “nonforgetfulness” (e.g. working memory) may be an aspect of mindfulness itself, or something that mediates mindfulness and the MBSR
outcomes. As is very common with outcome studies of mindfulness, there was unfortunately not an active comparison group to control for group/social effects.

The complexity of processes of change in the MBIs can be observed from this brief survey. A general critique of most of these correlational studies is the reliance on self-report measures of mindfulness and the accompanying issue of demand characteristics. People may respond positively to questionnaire items because they become aware of the expected benefits through the MBSR course. It is also possible that there is a particular “mindfulness discourse” (e.g. of acceptance or compassion) which is inculcated through the course, which then is more linguistically/ conceptually understandable to participants by the end of the course as they take the post-measure. Most problematic perhaps are the disparate working definitions of mindfulness informing the test construction. Another common limitation in mediation analyses include the problem of causal sequence: it is possible, for example, that improved well-being leads to increased mindfulness rather than vice versa, or that improved emotion-regulation resulting from specific aspects of the D & I, or non-specific group effects, may lead to increased mindfulness, rather than vice versa. Lastly, a question remains concerning the highly overlapping definitions of several of these mechanisms. For example, the constructs of mindfulness, decentering, and emotion regulation all include nonjudgmental observation of experience. Most pertinent to this study are the questions remaining about whether some of these posited mediators, rather than consequences of mindfulness, are actually part of the construct of mindfulness or important as antecedent conditions for the learning of mindfulness. This is not known.

Even the question about whether formal meditation practice (usually considered the crux of the MBSR program) is correlated with increased mindfulness has not been answered definitively. Dobkin and Zhao (2011) comment that “even though the literature is clear about the
importance of being mindful, it is not yet forthcoming with regard to what contributes to becoming more mindful in people who take the MBSR program” (p. 26). Shapiro and colleagues (2008) found that while reported amounts of sitting meditation did not predict changes in mindfulness as measured by the MAAS, participating in the MBSR program did. On the other hand, Carmody and Baer (2008), using the FFMQ, found that the total number of minutes reportedly spent in home practice was significantly related to the extent of change in mindfulness, various mental health symptoms, and well-being, supporting the assumption that individual mindfulness practice in itself (apart from group effects) has salutary effects. It may be that mindfulness is learned in a variety of ways (formally, informally, individually, socially) and in different ways by different people.

When we consider the processes of teaching and learning mindfulness, these posited mechanisms of change may be involved. That is, perhaps students learn to be mindful by learning to be more self-compassionate, learning to de-center, or learning to regulate their emotions. Thus, the mediation literature has been reviewed with the aim of building a background of what is currently posited as the processes by which change occurs when people get together in a group to learn mindfulness, as in MBSR or MBCT. Which components of the multi-modal MBIs – bodyscan, sitting meditation, mindful yoga, didactic psycho-education, the D & I -- are more or less responsible for these changes remains to be investigated. The role of the D & I in supporting or enhancing these mechanisms is unknown. While greater refinement in mediation analyses, and the future use of dismantling studies, will help answer these questions, it is the purpose of this qualitative inquiry to investigate how the teacher and students’ lived experience of these, and/or other processes operating in the D & I, may illuminate our understanding of how mindfulness is learned relationally in MBSR. In this section, the processes
of learning mindfulness were indirectly explored through what appears to change during and as a result of the MBSR intervention. In the subsequent section, the small literature which addresses the learning of mindfulness more directly is reviewed.

**How Mindfulness is Learned**

In comparison to the wealth of outcome research and the growing body of process (correlational) research, there is relatively sparse literature specific to how mindfulness is learned. Grossman (2011) pointed out that the learning of mindfulness is understood from the earliest Buddhist discourses as an “extremely gradual developmental process” (p. 233). He went even further to say that mindfulness “is really not a construct as we traditionally understand it in Western psychology, but at depth, a way of being” (p. 234). If we define mindfulness as a process rather than a property or state (Mikulas, 2011), it may be somewhat artificial to differentiate between mindfulness and the learning of mindfulness. It is learned as it is experienced and practiced.

There have been a few qualitative studies, described below, which attempted to explore the experience of mindfulness from the learner-practitioners’ point of view. These studies tended to conceptualize the learning process as phasic but non-linear and as involving a shift in self-concept. The question of group effects has come up many times in the literature but there is only one study to date that attempts to explore the role of group effects, particularly group cohesion, both in the learning of mindfulness and more generally in the positive health outcomes of the MBIs. Lastly, a recent theoretical interest in mindfulness and how it is learned comes from developmental psychology and attachment theory.

**Stage models.** Kornfield (1979) sought to analyse the “range and patterns of experience commonly noted by beginning meditators” in order to familiarize Western psychologists with
normal meditation experiences. Data was collected through questionnaires and the meditation teacher’s records of student-teacher interviews. There were three groups of students: one group practiced mindfulness for only two weeks (n = 100), the second group for three months (n = 63) and the third group was a control group who were non-retreat students who attended weekly Buddhism classes (n = 21). Follow-up questionnaires were sent to the students after their completion of the retreat to collect data on how they perceived themselves as being changed or unchanged by the retreat. Finally, the data was compared to descriptions of progress in meditation found in traditional Buddhist texts. Although Kornfield called his research “a phenomenological study,” unfortunately there is no reference to any formal phenomenological method, so that in terms of current standards of assessing the trustworthiness of the findings (e.g. Morrow, 2005), the design has methodological limitations. However, taking into consideration the early time period and the seminal nature of his investigation, the study has merit.

It is not stated how the very substantial body of data were transcribed and analysed, but Kornfield reported that 22 categories of experience were generated. He said “for simplicity, these were divided into basic categories according to sense modality” (p. 44) and then subcategories were generated. Using sense modalities as the basic categories from the beginning seems to be an obvious example of how the researcher's preconceptions about mindfulness meditation were leading the analysis (rather than letting the categories emerge from the data). There is no evidence of reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Each of the categories is supported by ample quotations from the participants’ questionnaires and interviews, providing relatively rich description for a short article.

Kornfield's conclusions convey several interesting points despite the significant methodological limitations. He noted, for example, that the outcomes of mindfulness were much
more than simple relaxation (e.g. as attributed by Benson, 1975) but instead included alertness and enhanced perception, and that there was a non-linear learning process over the period of three months which included periods of regression and restructuring. Most traditional Buddhist accounts are based on experienced meditators rather than beginners, so in this way, Kornfield's study offers important findings which pertain to the learning of mindfulness. During the three months, a growing equanimity and calmness in the face of extreme bodily and mental changes was self-reported and the follow-up reports included reports of long-lasting changes in openness and equanimity. These subjective reports of increased equanimity have been subsequently validated in neurological research which shows a significant “left-hemisphere shift” as a short-term outcome of mindfulness meditation, indicating a more open “approach” response (rather than avoidance) of unpleasant stimuli (Davidson et al, 2003). Thus this early qualitative study with its in-depth reporting deserves recognition for eliciting significant data and suggesting underlying mechanisms which have been subsequently validated by more sophisticated research designs. Possibly because of the assumptions of the researcher, there is no mention of participant reports of awareness of interpersonal or social aspects of their learning process, even though the three-month retreat included regular private interviews with the teacher.

There have been a few qualitative explorations of the MBSR/MBCT group process. The first one was done in 1992 by the current director of Center for Mindfulness, University of Massachusetts Medical School, Saki Santorelli, as his doctoral dissertation. He did an individual and cross-case analysis of the experience of 8 adults learning mindfulness meditation in an MBSR course. Eight participants were interviewed at the end of week 1, week 5, and week 8 (final week) and then eight weeks after completion about three topics: their subjective experience of learning meditation, the application of meditation in daily life, and the effects of MBSR on
their perception of self. The study examined the experience of participation within the theoretical framework of “self knowledge development theory” (Alschuler, Evans, Tamashiro, & Weinstein, 1975) to understand how people at differing stages of self-knowledge experienced and used mindfulness training. The participants were administered the Experience Recall Test (ERT), a measure of self development, before the course. These were coded by an independent expert coder who determined each participant's stage of self-knowledge. The data consisted of the ERT scores, the interview transcripts, the researcher-participant's observations of participant behaviours during the class (field notes) and his personal log.

Santorelli (1992) found that participants had particular experiences and struggles with the MBSR course according to their level of self-knowledge. He also found that both the formal meditation (skill development) and informal meditation (daily life) formed an interactive learning cycle which appeared important in the creation of change. He described the process as a phasic nonlinear cycle of learning involving stages of regression, restructuring and reintegration. The merits of this study include a thorough and even elegant conceptual framework and literature review. The attempt to understand the experiences of learning mindfulness through a particular theory, self knowledge development theory, was generative of a new perspective on mindfulness training. The data base was rich and the representation of participants' experiences was well supported with quotations in the individual and the cross-case analyses. Santorelli meticulously documented his methodology, describing interviewing (semi-structured), data coding, individual and cross analysis, and an assessment of trustworthiness of findings. Researcher reflexivity was accomplished through his self-reflective personal log, peer debriefing and participant feedback. How much of the findings emerged from the participants' experience and how much was driven by Santorelli's theoretical basis is debatable. The ontological assumptions of the self as separate,
and the privileging of individual experience, for example, guide Santorelli’s conclusions about MBSR as a self-education model. The influence of the teacher and the group is not addressed. However, it must be said that it is one of the most rigorous of the qualitative studies done on mindfulness, and yielded interesting findings.

A small grounded theory study of MBCT was undertaken (Mason & Hargreaves, 2001) to explore the “process by which MBCT may bring therapeutic benefits.” In particular, Mason and Hargreaves were interested if Teasdale's theoretical cognitive framework (Interacting Cognitive Subsystems, Teasdale & Barnard 1993), which Teasdale suggested could explain the effects of MBCT, would be borne out by participants' reports of their lived experience. The authors report their steps in data collection and analysis, following the protocols of grounded theory research of Strauss and Corbin (1990). Seven participants were interviewed in two phases. Following grounded theory analysis of the first round of interviews, the themes and questions that emerged were used to guide a second round of interviews. The codes, categories and subcategories were supported by in depth quotations from participant's interviews. The authors attempted to bracket their own cognitive orientation in psychotherapy to allow the categories to emerge into the grounded theory.

In the resulting theory, the category “coming to terms” was placed at the heart of the therapeutic process of MBCT. This category involved internalizing the course skills that were taught, and applying it to their daily lives. It also involved an experience which the authors called “discovery/surprise” which they hypothesize is akin to Teasdale's notion of “meta-cognitive insight” whereby practitioners of mindfulness have the lived experience of thoughts as events rather than reality. In terms of what these findings tell us about the learning of mindfulness, it appears that for these participants, an experience of meaning-making, or “insight,” related to a
de-centering shift in identity, was an important aspect of their experience of the program. Further, the application of the meditation skills to daily life was an aspect of the participant’s learning process, which was also found by Santorelli (1992) to be important in his participants’ reported experience (described above). The authors point out as a critique of their own model that they did not incorporate the role of group support and interpersonal process adequately since they had an implicitly individualist orientation. Each of the seven participants had described group support as being important.

**Participant goals for learning.** A qualitative study on MBCT (Smith, Graham & Senthinathan, 2007) suggested its perceived usefulness for prevention of recurring depression in older people (aged over 65) and raised questions about the goals of learning mindfulness. In this study, 30 participants in three MBCT groups were interviewed at assessment, post-course and one-year follow up. Participants were asked about their expectations and then about their actual experiences following the course. A content analysis was undertaken, identifying several themes which appear to be the various outcomes of the course, such as more acceptance, calmness, feeling more energetic, and changes in identity. The authors claimed to have used grounded theory but in fact do not describe a grounded theory design (e.g. did not aim for saturation in data, did not report using reflexivity in the analysis, do not create a theory based on the data analysis). Despite these methodological weaknesses, the data were rich and indicated significant self-reported improvements.

Pertinent to the questions of the current study, Smith and colleagues (2007) noted that despite the rich information from the semi-structured interviews, there was not much light shed on *how* mindfulness training helps. The authors speculated that this is partly due to the inherent difficulty of conceptualizing and describing mindfulness, since, from their view, it is designed in
part to circumvent the verbal dominance of consciousness. Participants often said that “it was difficult to explain.” This reported difficulty may point to the limitations of retrospective self-reports in understanding the process of mindfulness, and contributes to the rationale of choosing action-project method as the method of inquiry for the current study since action-project method attempts to access the phenomenon (learning mindfulness) in a more immediate and less retrospective way. Another interesting finding of Smith and colleagues was that several participants said post-course that they had not really understood the aims of the MBCT course beforehand. The issue of the goals of mindfulness is an area that has not been addressed in research; for example, what are the hopes and goals of participants before they undertake mindfulness training, how do these compare to the goals of the teacher/therapist, and how are these negotiated over time. This collaboration may be an important part of the learning process, and was addressed in the current study.

**Group effects.** Surprisingly there has been almost no research examining the group’s influence on MBSR process and outcomes despite several calls in the literature to do so. McCown, Reibel and Micozzi’s (2010) “practical guide for clinicians and educators” of MBIs presents a theoretical model of teaching mindfulness based on the experience of the authors’ own reflective practice as MBSR teachers. They touched upon both well-established tenets of MBSR teaching and more contemporary concepts such as the potential roles of intersubjectivity, emotional resonance, and group effects in the learning process, pointing out that the “group format dominates the MBIs, yet we know very little about the importance of that format” (p. 28). They wondered if the dynamics of a mindfulness class are quite different from those of either a group therapy or adult education model and posit that the difference may lie in the teacher’s embodiment of mindfulness which contributes to creating a “group mindfulness” based on the
human capacity to resonate/attune to self and others (drawing from Siegel, 2007). They suggested that, as individual participants self-regulate through mindfulness practice, there may be a simultaneous group regulation. As people in the group experience intrasubjective resonance, others may be soothed through intersubjective resonance, posited as occurring, for example, physiologically and unconsciously through the social engagement subsystem described by Porges (2001) involving the polyvagal reaction to perceived safety. They further hypothesized that the group relationship involves attachment processes of “rift and repair” (p. 111), which when held within the group container, contribute to both intra and inter-subjective regulation.

Also proposed in their pedagogy is a relational construction of mindfulness:

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 ... 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)

Many of the observations that McCown and colleagues offer as experienced MBSR teachers are what we might see as professional “common sense” hypotheses, informed by their self-reflective classroom practice and retrospective participant feedback. Their book is rich with observations that might generate future research, including their claim that teacher-student, and student-student, relational processes are important in the learning of mindfulness.

Imel, Baldwin, Bonus and Maccoon’s (2008) study on group effects in MBSR was the first empirical study exploring how the group format of the teaching of mindfulness may be important. After controlling for pretreatment severity, they examined change in symptom scores (in such things as anxiety and depression) from pre- to post-intervention, for 606 adults in 59 MBSR groups. All participants in the data set were taught by one of seven instructors with similar MBSR training. Multilevel models were used to examine the extent to which the groups
differed in the amount of self-reported change. They found that group accounted for 7% of the variability in the General Symptom Index. The results revealed no evidence of a significant teacher effect (probably due to the rigorous training required of all teachers). They concluded that it is possible that “something about the group” impacts the ability of the individual to learn and practice specific mindfulness techniques and also influences outcome through nonmindfulness pathways, e.g. expectation of change or group cohesion. The authors concluded, “MBSR does not appear to be simply an individual intervention delivered in a group setting, but rather its methods and effects occur at the individual and group levels … Group variables are not merely a statistical nuisance to be controlled in the hopes of detecting the direct effects of meditation techniques, but important treatment variables worthy of clinical attention and empirical investigation” (p. 742). Indeed, it is this “something about the group” and its relationship to the learning of mindfulness that is the focus of the qualitative inquiry of this study.

A small study by Moore (2008) was innovative from the point of view of how mindfulness may or may not be learned in a group without a teacher. Moore looked at the effects on a group of first year clinical psychology students of the practice of brief mindfulness exercises, undertaken without a teacher, on three variables: perceived stress (measured by Perceived Stress Scale, (PSS14: Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983), mindfulness (measured by the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Scale (KIMS; Baer et al., 2004), and self-compassion measured by the Neff Compassion Scale (NCS, Neff, 2003). Ten participants met for fourteen short sessions (10 minutes) but there was no teacher facilitating the group and no group discussion. Rather, a mindfulness script was read aloud by a volunteer group member. Significant increases were reported in some but not all of the subscales of the measures: in the
Observe subscale of the KIMS (but not Describing, Acting with awareness or Accepting without judgment), in the self-kindness subscale of the SCS (but not on subscales of self-judgment, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness or over-identification with thoughts), and none in the measures of perceived stress. These studies are quite inconclusive, particularly because of the small sample size. Based on this small study, it appeared that mindfulness as taught and experienced briefly through a written script did not effect changes typical of the other MBIs.

Allen, Bromley, Kuyken and Sonnenberg (2009) used a thematic analysis to investigate 20 participants’ subjective experience of what was helpful, meaningful and difficult about the MBCT program. They did this in order to come to a better understanding of the psychological mechanisms by which MBCT works, based on reports by participants 12 months after the end of the program. Their procedures of analysis were described thoroughly, contributing to the trustworthiness of the findings. As well, a multi-perspectival coherence check was undertaken at various stages of the analysis, which included researchers, therapists, and participants. Four overarching themes were identified: control, acceptance, relationships and struggle. Relevant to the current study was the reported importance of group support within the “acceptance” theme.

Participants commented that other people in the group were like a “mirror” or “echo” (p. 420) and mentioned that they were encouraged by favourable comparisons made between themselves and others in the group. The authors observed that in the participant accounts, “the development of awareness, acceptance and behavioural change has a basis in both specific MBCT techniques, i.e. the mindfulness practice, and non-specific factors, i.e. group processes” (p. 424). They wondered if these are mutually reinforcing elements in the learning process, and recommended more research into “how these specific and non-specific factors interact in complex group interventions like MBCT” (p. 424). The inquiry into the relational processes of the dialogue
component of MBSR that is undertaken in the current study develops these suggestions made by Allen and colleagues.

**Proposed attachment processes in learning mindfulness.** There is a growing interest in the possible connection between mindfulness and attachment processes. Dan Siegel, in *The Mindful Brain* (2007), has been most influential in building a theoretical case for this relationship. Attachment, as defined and described by Bowlby (1969/1982) and Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978), is the biologically based and evolutionary system which motivates an infant to seek proximity to its caregivers and to maintain communication with them. The safety and nurturing provided to the infant goes beyond physical needs, since at the level of mind, attachment “establishes an interpersonal relationship that helps the immature brain use the mature functions of the parent’s brain to organize its own processes” (Siegel, 1999, p. 67). Siegel (2007) posited that the intrapersonal form of attunement in mindfulness (attuning to oneself) is paralleled by the interpersonal attunement of secure attachment, and that the same neural circuitry is involved.

Siegel pointed out that the nine basic prefrontal cortical functions believed to be involved in secure attachment between parent and child (e.g. self-regulation, attuning to others, empathy, modulating fear, responding flexibly) are also involved in mindfulness processes. Also, the capacity to "mentalize" is theorized to be fundamental in secure attachment, and Siegel suggested that the same capacity (and its neural pathways) is utilized in mindfulness (cultivating the mind's awareness of itself) and in interpersonal attachment (cultivating the mind’s awareness of other minds). These hypotheses are indirectly supported by magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) research done by Lazar et al (2005) which showed an association between mindfulness meditation experience and increased cortical thickness in brain regions associated with attention.
and the integration of emotion and cognition (right anterior insula and PFC/ BA 9/10) when comparing advanced meditation participants with matched controls.

Siegel proposed that secure attachment may promote mindfulness traits and called for research into these associations. For example, he wondered if secure attachment as measured by the Adult Attachment Interview could be viewed as an aspect of the internal attunement of mindfulness (2007, p. 206). Although he did not suggest that the inverse may be true, his hypothesis begs the question about the effect of mindfulness training on attachment style.

Published around the same time was David Wallin’s book Attachment in Psychotherapy (2007), which aimed to link attachment theory to relational psychotherapy processes, and the psychology of mindfulness. Similar to Siegel, Wallin argued that the systematic practice of mindfulness – to focus nonjudgmental attention on present experience – strengthens the “reassuring sense of an internalized secure base” (p. 159). In mindfulness practice, one attempts to focus on one’s own inner experience “repeatedly losing and regaining this focus” (p. 161) with compassion, mimicking the actions of an attentive loving parent to child, or therapist to patient.

Saron and Shaver (2006) investigated this relationship between mindfulness and attachment in their longitudinal study of 60 adults randomly assigned to one of two 3-month, full-time meditation retreats in Colorado (one wait-list control group). This is part of large study called the Shamatha Project, and the results of the pre-retreat assessment battery and analysis are summarized in Shaver and colleagues (2007). Correlations were done between the scores on the FFMQ (Five-facet measure of mindfulness; Baer et al., 2006) and an attachment insecurity and avoidance scale (Experiences in Close Relationships scale, ECR; Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998) along with regression analyses in which each of the mindfulness subscale scores was regressed on attachment anxiety and avoidance. All five facets of mindfulness were significantly
predicted by the two attachment dimensions. Attachment anxiety was significantly associated with lower scores on three of the five mindfulness facets: nonreactivity to inner experience, acting with awareness, and nonjudging of experience. Avoidant attachment was significantly associated with all five mindfulness facets (the three mentioned plus attending to perceptions/thoughts/feelings and describing with words). The two attachment dimensions accounted for 42% of the variance in the total mindfulness score. That is, the more attachment-anxious participants were less capable of taking a nonreactive, nonjudgmental stance towards their experience. The more avoidant participants were less mindful in general.

As a correlational study, these findings did not reveal the direction of the association between attachment security and mindfulness, but the findings are important in that they represent the current trend in the conceptualization of mindfulness, as an interpersonal as well as an intrapsychic phenomenon. A more recent publication of some of the Shamatha Project findings adds more support to the attachment-mindfulness link. Sahdra and colleagues (2011) examined the impact of meditation-training-induced improvements in self-regulation, operationalized in terms of response inhibition, on self-reported adaptive socio-emotional functioning in the Shamatha Project participants. Adaptive functioning (AF) was operationalized as a single latent factor underlying several self-report measures including one of anxious and avoidant attachment (Experiences in Close Relationships scale, ECR; Brennan et al., 1998). Their findings supported their hypothesis that meditation practice would benefit socioemotional functioning by enhancing executive control, but they commented that other features of the meditation training environment such as social support from the group and the ongoing relationship with the teacher may also have contributed to the positive outcomes. This may particularly be the case in the self-reported attachment scores.
If it is true that attachment and mindfulness are related, pertinent to this study on how mindfulness is learned and experienced relationally is the question of how attachment is learned and experienced, and how this process has been investigated empirically. This question is an area of research too vast to do justice to here, but a brief summary of the literature may help to further position the research questions guiding this study. At the most basic level, attachment occurs through a caregiver’s responses to the infant’s signals, and the infant’s adaptation to the caregiver’s responses. It can be said that secure attachment is “learned” through the child’s experience of having its needs and feelings noticed and responded to consistently, resonant with the child’s state of mind, and in a manner that is comfortable (not ignoring, intruding or punishing). If these interactions are repeated enough, they become, according to Bowlby (1988), encoded as an internal working model, an internal “secure base” from which to go out into the world to explore and relate with others.

Schore (1994) expanded on the role of affect attunement in secure attachment: a contingent communication which is more than just perceiving the verbal and nonverbal signals of the other, but also the ability to allow one’s state of mind to be influenced by that of the other, so that the infant “feels felt” by the caregiver. He suggests that this attunement is a psychobiological state and that the alignment of states is contingent, co-influential and constantly changing with alternating moment of engagement and distance. Siegel spelled this out in his observation that “an attuned other knows when to “back off” and stop the alignment process” (1999, p. 71). He says at the most basic level, secure attachment is established by the two individuals sharing a nonverbal attunement (alignment of states of mind/affect through communication with facial expression, vocalizations, body gestures and eye contact) in a
mutually co-regulating dance of engagement and disengagement, and a verbal communication which indicates acknowledgement of the other’s state of mind (p. 89).

Of interest to this study is McCluskey’s (2005) interest in attachment as “goal-corrected empathic attunement” which she analysed by viewing simultaneous images of caregiver and client with particular attention to facial expression and posture. She pointed out that Carl Rogers (1953) and the Chicago group, while making significant contributions to psychotherapy process research, focused on the individual behaviour and personal characteristics of the therapist and not the counselling interaction per se. She, conversely, views psychotherapy as a careseeking/caregiving process which activates the dynamics of attachment, and places her attention on the words, non-verbals, posture and vitality affects captured on video as the careseeker and caregiver respond to each other. The goal-corrected empathic attunement is an interactive process of continual rupture and repair.

There have been several ways of studying and evaluating attachment processes: 1) between infants and their caregiver through the Ainsworth or Infant Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al., 1978) which codes infant response to the mother’s return after separation, 2) in adults through the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI, George, Kaplan & Main, 1996) which assesses an adult’s current “state of mind with respect to attachment” (Main 1995, p. 437), and 3) in infant-caregiver (Murray & Trevarthen, 1986; Stern, 1985) and client-therapist (McCluskey, 2005) dyadic interactions through still-frame/simultaneous video. When considering how mindfulness might be learned through similar or even overlapping processes as attachment, it may be possible to use similar measures. For example, the Adult Attachment Interview protocol could be seen as approximating the Measure of Awareness and Coping in

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5 By vitality affect, McCluskey means a person’s “sense of liveliness and involvement … often accompanied by a change of colour and muscle tone of the face” (p. 10).
Autobiographical Memory (MACAM; Moore et al, 1996) used by Hargus and colleagues (2010) to evaluate the capacity of depressed adults to take a decentered and mindful stance when speaking about their past experience. The goal-corrected empathic attunement in psychotherapy tracked and posited by McCluskey (2005) as creating earned attachment security in adult clients, might be likewise viewed from the lens of mindful therapeutic interactions, as posited and observed in recent conceptualizations of mindfulness in the therapeutic relationship (e.g. Hick & Bien, 2008). Fine process research using behavioural ratings of dyadic interactions such as that done by McCluskey on attachment in therapy has not been attempted in the investigation of relational mindfulness in psychotherapy.

The Pedagogy of Mindfulness: How Mindfulness is Taught

Apart from the professional training resource manual on MBSR (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2001/2007), there had been little published on the pedagogy of mindfulness until 2009/2010 when a few articles and books appeared on the topic (Crane, 2009; Crane, Kuyken, Hastings, Rothwell & Williams, 2010; McCown et al., 2010; Woods, 2009). Despite the lack of formal research on the learning and teaching of mindfulness, there is a depth of reflective practice and informal classroom research which underlies the course delivery. The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School has been training health care professionals in MBSR since 1981 with intensive residential training retreats and supervised internships. A connected and parallel commitment to professional training in MBI delivery can be observed in the U.K., where there has been endorsement of the use of MBCT for depression-relapse prevention by the National Health Service, and currently three UK universities offering post-graduate training in delivering MBSR and MBCT. There are curriculum guidelines for both MBSR and MBCT in terms of what is
taught, and an agreement across the MBIs that the personal characteristics of the teacher are paramount. In the most current writing cited above, an interest is expressed in the relational processes of teaching and learning mindfulness, and an agreement that the D & I component of MBSR and MBCT may be important in this regard.

**Early notions of teaching mindfulness.** Deatherage (1975) was among the first to mention the use of mindfulness as a psychotherapeutic technique. He used a case study approach to investigate the impact of teaching mindfulness to five psychiatric patients. He defined mindfulness as a self-regulatory cognitive mechanism and saw it as an individual skill that the client could master: “While the psychotherapist … can point the way for the client, only the client can carry out the psychotherapeutic process. Therefore, this [mindfulness] technique is virtually a self-treatment regimen” (p. 134). Deatherage taught a simplified form of mindfulness meditation in the session itself, for example, asking the clients to sit quietly and observe their breath, for some minutes. Then clients were asked to undertake various homework assignments such as watching the second hand of a clock and noticing when and how one's concentration was lost and naming the interruption. He reported five cases in his article, describing the intervention, the clients' self-reported effects and his observations. He concluded that “thought and emotion contemplation” can aid clients in self-regulation by interrupting their own cognitive and/or emotional habitual negative processes, inspiring insight into the link between intention and action, identifying a fuller range of present-moment emotions, and resourcing a calm, peaceful center which can exist simultaneously with anxious or depressed thoughts. Although this is a case study design and therefore the results are not generalizable, Deatherage's suggestions of the possible mechanisms of change of mindfulness are forerunners to those made in later, more sophisticated studies. Also noteworthy is that despite Deatherage's own personal mindfulness
practice, he did not address the potential impact of his own mindfulness on the client, instead describing the use of mindfulness as a “self-treatment regimen” rather than a potentially relational one. This seminal study represents a conceptualization of the teaching and learning of mindfulness as the didactic verbal instruction of a self-regulation technique.

**What is taught in MBIs.** Mindfulness has been traditionally taught in Buddhist contexts through the practice of *vipassana* sitting meditation. In this formal practice, the practitioner takes an upright sitting posture and attempts to maintain attention on a particular object, which for beginners is usually the somatic sensation of breathing. Each time attention drifts away from the breath to thoughts, feelings and sensations, the practitioner notices this nonjudgmentally and brings his or her attention back to the breath. As the ability for attentional focus develops, the practitioner is instructed into the heart of *vipassana* practice, choiceless awareness, which is simply noticing whatever thoughts, feelings or sensations arise, watching these with curiosity and detachment, without elaboration or action. In this way, thoughts, feelings and sensations are not suppressed, but rather, experienced and observed impartially. The “ultimate purpose” of the systematic cultivation of mindfulness, as the “heart of Buddhist meditation” (Thera 1965, p. 44), is insight (*vipassana*). According to Buddhist scriptures, insight is the direct realization of certain truths of existence, such as the impermanence of all phenomena. Rather than an intellectual or conceptual understanding, it is said to be an embodied knowing which arises naturally from mindfulness practice, and which leads to liberation from suffering.

In the didactic instruction of the MBIs, the verbal instructions given by the teacher for the various mindfulness exercises (sitting meditation, mindful walking, mindful yoga, and a bodyscan which involves systematically scanning the body for sensation) invite focus of

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6 There is a rich diversity of styles of meditation practice, both within and across the various schools of Buddhism. The practice described here, used in MBSR, is derived from the Theravada Buddhist context, and its evolution as “Insight Meditation” in the West.
attention on particular present-moment experience such as sensations, breathing, or sounds in the environment. When thoughts, emotions, urges, discomfort, or other experiences arise, participants are encouraged to observe these with curiosity (or gentle kindness, acceptance, nonjudgment). Brief mental labeling is suggested, such as silently saying “boredom” “itchy” as one observes their inner or outer experience. Teaching mindfulness inherently involves some kind of conceptualization of what mindfulness is. Mindfulness appears, across the various MBIs, to be viewed as a process that includes paying attention to present moment experience, and bringing an attitude of acceptance, kindness and curiosity.

**Mindfulness as a teacher/therapist characteristic.** There have been many remarks in the literature that mindfulness can only be learned from a teacher who is mindful. A unique emphasis on teacher characteristics has been made explicitly from the early beginnings of MBSR. Along with a more traditional content-based curriculum outline is this caveat by Kabat-Zinn in the MBSR training manual:

> In order for a class or for the program as a whole to have any meaning or vitality, the person who is delivering it must make every effort to embody the practice in his or her own life and teach out of personal experience and his or her own wisdom, not just in a cookbook fashion out of theory and out of thinking mind. Otherwise, the instruction becomes a mechanical didactic exercise at best and the true virtues of the mindfulness approach will be lost. We never ask anything of our patients that we are not asking of ourselves to a greater degree, moment to moment and day by day (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2001/2007, Curriculum outline, para.4).

There are accompanying guidelines for assessing the readiness of a teacher which, along with the extensive formal training at the Center for Mindfulness, include a daily meditation practice, a minimum of three years of consistent meditation practice, two silent 10 day retreats, as examples of the sort of embodied practice expected of teachers. In a section entitled Standards of Practice, Kabat-Zinn went on to describe the required “attitudinal qualities” of the teacher: non-judging, patience, a beginner’s mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go. He said these
qualities “lend themselves to the cultivation of mindfulness” and are “central to the pedagogical approach of MBSR.” He explained that “the gradual process of embodying such qualities relies on the intention of the instructor and on his/her commitment to life-long learning. In turn, such a personal commitment on the part of the instructor becomes the basis for the awakening of these attitudes in the minds and hearts of the class participants” (Program Standard 6d). Thus the personal characteristics of the MBSR teacher are deemed crucial to the teaching of mindfulness itself.

This assertion has been picked up by various subsequent researchers. For example, Segal and colleagues (2002), when first developing the MBCT intervention, spent time observing sessions of MBSR at University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness and noted “the remarkable ways [the MBSR instructors] were able to embody a different relationship to the most intense distress and emotion in their patients. [They went] further in their work with negative affect than we had been able to do in the group context by staying within our therapist roles” (p. 56). They concluded that “a vital part of what the MBSR instructor conveyed was his or her own embodiment of mindfulness in interactions with the class . . . Participants in the MBSR program learn about mindfulness in two ways: through their own practice and when the instructor him-or herself is able to embody it in the way issues are dealt with in the class” (p. 56) and “the MBCT instructor’s own basic understanding and orientation will be one of the most powerful influences affecting this process. Whether the instructor realizes it or not, this understanding colors the way each practice is presented, each interaction handled” (p. 65). That one needs to teach mindfulness from one’s own meditation experience has indeed become a widely-held assumption within the mindfulness community. Woods (2009) echoed that while some aspects of mindfulness can be taught through the intellectual transmission of concepts,
“there is a large part of mindfulness that can only be truly discovered and communicated when the clinician/instructor embodies this approach whole-heartedly” (p. 463). There is a growing body of research which investigates the characteristics and influences of the mindful teacher/therapist, although this is an area of research which still holds many questions.

The interest in mindfulness and the therapeutic relationship was expressed as early as 1970, when Lesh published a study in the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* on the relationship between empathy in counsellors and Zen meditation practice involving mindfulness of breathing. Using three groups (meditators, n = 16; nonmeditators favorable to meditation, n = 12; nonmeditators opposed to meditation, n = 11) and a variety of psychological tests (e.g. empathy, degree of openness to experience), Lesh found that the group that practiced meditation over a four-week period improved significantly in their empathy ability as measured on the Affective Sensitivity Scale (Kagan, Krathwohl & Farguhar, 1965). This scale involves the participant watching a videotape of a counsellor-client interaction, and marking on an answer sheet the feeling that is being expressed by the client. The study is unique in its use of observer behavioural rating rather than self-report to measure empathy.

This relationship between therapist mindfulness and empathy has been supported qualitatively by more recent interview-based studies of therapists who are also long-time meditation practitioners (e.g. Aiken, 2006; Alvarez, 2008). These first-person accounts describe how mindfulness practice had enhanced qualities such as empathy, compassion, and nonjudgment, that the participants deemed necessary in their therapeutic work. Both studies (Aiken, 2006; Alvarez, 2008) revealed a complex interaction between therapists’ mindfulness practice and their therapeutic practice. Indeed, participants regarded their therapeutic practice as an inherent part of their spiritual practice of mindfulness. Similarly, Bruce and Davies (2005), in
their qualitative study of the experience of hospice caregivers with a Zen meditation practice, found that their participants reported mindful presence was not an instrumental therapeutic tool, something embodied in one's individual self to be “applied” to interpersonal encounters, but rather was interdependent and co-constructed. In this way, “meditation practice served caregiving, whereas caregiving served meditation in a doubling or mutuality” (p. 1336).

There have been a few quantitative studies on the impact of mindful therapists on client outcomes, each with very different outcomes and conclusions. Stanley and colleagues (2006) investigated the relation between therapist mindfulness as measured on MAAS and client treatment outcome in a university clinic utilizing manualized, empirically supported treatments (mostly CBASP, a form of cognitive therapy, with a few interpersonal and DBT). Twenty-three trainee psychologists and 144 clients were included. The MAAS was used to assess therapists' mindfulness, and Clinical Global Impressions (CGI) and Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) were used to assess clients' pre and post symptom severity and/or general functioning. Surprisingly, there was a significant negative correlation between mindfulness scores and the GAF scores, indicating the clients of therapists with low mindfulness scores show greater global functioning at termination. The explanation offered is that awareness of internal and external cues perhaps distracts the therapist from the agenda of adherence to the manual-based therapies. As a correlational design, this study was well done and prompted generative findings. However, one limitation is that the measure of mindfulness used, the MAAS, measures “everyday mindfulness” (e.g. dispositional or trait mindfulness) as a one-faceted construct (moment to moment attentional awareness). This may in fact be measuring a different construct than what ensues from formal mindfulness training as taught through MBSR or MBCT.
Stratton (2006) also examined the relationship between therapist mindfulness and client outcomes in an unpublished doctoral dissertation. His correlational study used 24 therapists and their client outcome data over 2 years, measuring therapist mindfulness with the MAAS. He did not find any correlations. He concluded that the lack of correlation might be due to the imprecise construct of mindfulness and its measurement. He suggested that future research might require a qualitative investigation of the interpersonal transactions occurring between therapist and client, and attempt to identify therapist behaviours that may evidence mindfulness. He postulated that the mindfulness state of the therapist while delivering therapy may be different from mindfulness as a trait outside of therapy as measured by the MAAS.

The study by Grepmair and colleagues (2007) yielded very different conclusions. They used a randomized, double-blind controlled study to examine the relationship between mindfulness in psychotherapists in training and treatment results of their patients, at a German training institute for depth-psychology-based psychotherapy. The treatment results of 124 inpatients, treated for 9 weeks by 18 therapists, were compared. The therapists were randomly assigned to 1 or 2 groups, those practicing Zen meditation (MED; n= 9), or a control group (noMED, n = 9) which was waitlisted for the daily morning meditation practice at another point in their training. Both the patients and the therapists\(^7\) were blinded to these conditions. A Japanese Zen master who was likewise unaware of the reasons for introducing meditation at that time led the group meditation, which took place daily before the workday began. The in-patient, integrative psychiatric-psychotherapeutic plan included individual psychotherapy, group gestalt

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\(^7\) The therapists were “blinded” in the sense that they were not aware that client outcomes were going to be measured in association with whether or not their therapist had attended the meditation, and both groups of therapists participated in meditation, the control group later on in the schedule. The meditation was considered part of the training of the therapists. Since it was a teaching and research site, all therapists-in-training were there with the agreement that they were also part of a multi-faceted research project. The objective of the data collection was revealed to the therapists and patients after completion.
therapy, group psychodynamic therapy, progressive muscle relaxation training, sports, and nutritional counselling. The results of treatment were examined using the Session Questionnaire for General and Differential Individual Psychotherapy (STEP), the Questionnaire of Changes in Experience and Behaviour (VEV) and the Symptom Checklist (SCL-90-R). Compared to the noMed group (n = 61), the patients of therapists from the MED group (n = 63) had significantly higher evaluations for individual therapy 2 STEP scales, clarification and problem-solving perspectives. Their total cores were also significantly higher for the VEV. Furthermore, the MED group showed greater symptom reduction than the noMED group on the Global Severity Index and 8 SCL-90-R scales.

The Grepmair study is one of the most convincing studies on the positive effects of mindfulness in therapists on client outcomes. The double-blinding prevented the common issue of demand characteristics influencing the data. The sample size (n = 124) is larger than most mindfulness studies. The research venue itself (a psychiatric hospital/training clinic) provided important controls (e.g. daily group meditation practice for the treatment group of therapists) that are difficult to achieve in less structured settings. However, the lack of an active comparison group which would control for the potential group effects is an obvious weakness in the design. By sitting together each morning, meditation techniques aside, the therapists in the experimental group may have benefited in unidentified ways (inter-subjective emotion regulation, group cohesion, time for self-reflection on client cases). This study, despite its excellent design in other respects, is one of many examples of how the lack of an active comparison group in meditation research limits the conclusiveness of findings.

In a dissertation study, Wexler (2006) examined the relationship between therapist mindfulness and the quality of the therapeutic alliance. Therapist mindfulness was measured
with the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003) and the therapeutic alliance by dyadic ratings from the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI; Horvath and Greenberg, 1989). Nineteen therapist-client dyads were used. Significant positive correlations were found between both client and therapist perception of the alliance and therapist mindfulness, both in and out of therapy.

Bruce (2006) used a larger sample size in his dissertation which was a similar design, and received much different results. He examined the correlations between therapist mindfulness (measured by the MAAS and the Five Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire, FFMQ, Baer et al 2006), and therapeutic alliance (measured by the Working Alliance Inventory) and therapeutic outcome (measured by various scales such as Hamilton Depression Rating Scale, Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV). It was hypothesized that mindfulness enhances treatment outcome through the therapeutic alliance, and that mindfulness is linked with the alliance through therapist qualities such as empathy, attention, or affect regulation. Thirty-five therapists and 183 clients participated. To the researcher's surprise, the results were non-significant. While he conceded that it is possible that mindfulness has no positive effects on therapeutic alliance or outcomes, he argued that the findings may reflect the limitations of the self-report measures of mindfulness. Bruce pointed out that in particular, the measures do not tap into the "heart" qualities of mindfulness such as friendliness, warmth, curiosity and openness that may be especially helpful to therapists. These aspects of mindfulness are referred to as the attitudinal components of mindfulness (Shapiro et al., 2006). Bruce also pointed out an interesting paradox that may affect the measurement of mindfulness, which is that more mindful individuals might score lower on self-report measures of mindfulness because they are more aware of how much of the time they are not mindful. He suggested that fine-grained process research is necessary,
where videotapes of counselling sessions are coded to examine what happens in “mindful” therapy.

In summary, attempts at clarifying the relationship between therapist mindfulness and the therapeutic alliance, and client outcomes, have been generative of more questions than answers. There are conflicting results from similar studies. In some cases, it appears that mindfulness and therapeutic alliance are positively correlated and in other studies, not. Similar discrepancies appear in the fledgling research on the association between therapist mindfulness and client outcomes. A common conclusion by researchers is that we still do not know how to measure mindfulness in therapists. Existing measures focus on the attentional aspects of mindfulness rather than the attitudes of friendliness, compassion, and equanimity which are suggested by Buddhist conceptualizations. It is recommended by more than a few researchers that qualitative designs, including process research involving not only self report but videotaped behavioural observations, might shed light on what happens in therapy done by mindfulness practitioners. Further, there has been no study which attempts to find associations between therapist and client mindfulness by measuring mindfulness in both the therapist and the client, before and after the intervention. Indeed, how mindfulness in the teacher/therapist is related to student/client mindfulness is not understood.

The role of dialogue and inquiry in mindfulness-based stress reduction. We can note that in all these studies, the attention is on teacher/therapist characteristics, rather than what the student brings to the learning of mindfulness. If we concede that all learning is intrinsically relational, we might turn our attention to the relational space in MBSR, particularly the interactions between teacher and students, and also among students in the group. Rather than viewing the teaching as a uni-directional movement from mindful teacher to unmindful student,
we might instead wonder about how mindfulness is jointly constructed. The MBSR curriculum includes individual mindfulness meditation practice, didactic psycho-education, and D & I. It is the D & I that presents the most explicit opportunity for relational learning of mindfulness.

In the MBSR Standards of Practice, Kabat-Zinn, commenting on the role of the D & I, says, “It is essential that a significant amount of time in each class be dedicated to an exploration of the participants’ firsthand experience of the formal and informal mindfulness practices … This requires the instructor to sharpen her/his ability to listen closely, allow space, refrain from the impulse to give advice, and instead, to inquire directly into the actuality of the participant’s experience” (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2001/2007, Program Standard 6c). Kabat-Zinn implies that the D & I is a pivotal part of the MBSR curriculum, yet research thus far has focused almost exclusively on the practice of mindfulness as it is enacted privately by the participants in the formal meditation exercises.

It has been noted that the D & I offers an opportunity for the instructor, who is ideally embodying mindfulness, to serve as a model for the participants. According to Woods (2009), “it is only through the instructor’s own experience with mindfulness practice that she/he improves the possibilities of representing these qualities of acceptance, nonjudgment, kindness … in their fullness” (469). One wonders, however, if the embodiment serves more than a representation, a demonstration or model. Crane and colleagues (2010) used the term embodiment in a different way. They said that mindfulness is communicated by the teacher in the process of teaching: “the teachers themselves are in the mode that participants are being invited to experiment with” such that “the whole teaching process becomes an “in vivo” experience of mindfulness” (p. 78).
It is of note that the pedagogical models based on reflective practice that are presented in Crane and colleagues (2010) and McCown and colleagues (2010) stress the importance of the D & I component, but this has not been taken up in the research. McCown and colleagues (2010) claimed, “Much of the transformative effect of the MBIs may be potentiated by dialogic encounters with participants in the group... This is an extremely important and dynamic element in participants’ experiences in the MBIs that has not been adequately addressed part of the process in empirical research” (p. 127). They distilled an interrelated set of teaching intentions for MBSR (experiencing new possibilities, discovering embodiment, cultivating observation, moving towards acceptance, and growing compassion) and hypothesized that the teaching intentions of “cultivating observation” and “moving towards acceptance” are most exercised in the D & I component. Further, they mused that considerable learning may be happening in the students who are silently observing the dyadic exchanges between teacher and other students:

Although direct inquiry with the teacher is the most perceptible form of exploration in each session, it would be unwise to privilege it as the main vehicle for moving towards acceptance. Given the environment of intersubjective and intrasubjective resonance participants who seem to be simply watching the inquiry into another’s experience may actually be doing deeper work. They may be working along and accepting and changing in ways they may never report... This unseen activity is a part of the co-created curriculum too, whether or not it ever receives outward expression or acknowledgement (p. 180-181).

They concluded that the D & I is “an invitation to the innate wisdom of the other to show itself, to be known in experience and language” (p. 130) and the value is not only insight but in “loosening the grip of habits of thought” which is pivotal in the teaching intention of “cultivating observation.”

Not all researchers have acknowledged the D & I to be of particular or unique importance in the learning of mindfulness, or worthy of research interest. In fact, it is often brushed over. For example, Imel and colleagues (2008) in their investigation of potential group effects in MBSR
referred to it as a “review of homework with a discussion of any related difficulties.” And Wizer (1995) even said that from his observation of the seven MBSR courses he investigated for his research, there is very little social or relational activity. He denied the possibility of group effects for that reason:

An initial criticism of the published literature about [MBSR] was in regards to the implicit assumption that it was the activity of mindfulness meditation which was responsible for the positive therapeutic change that were reported and not other factors. The MBSR is a group intervention and therefore should partake of the same therapeutic factors which are associated with group process. The results of this study contradict this initial criticism. … Participant talk takes up only 30% of total class time, far less than one would find in a psychotherapy or support group. .. Undirected sharing, very common in psychotherapy groups, made up less that 1% of the total class time… In the MBSR there was little encouragement of interpersonal process during a whole class period and some instructors even discouraged this. In some of the classes it was extremely rare for a participant to speak to another participant …The [MBSR] is not psychotherapy or support group but instead a skill development group and as such is a form of psychoeducational intervention… Like other psychoeducational skill development groups, such as assertiveness and communication groups, it is pedagogical in format with an emphasis on the practical application of what is learned. (p. 80)

While it is possible that the D & I component of the MBSR curriculum was not as saliently developed in 1994 when Wizer did his study, it is also possible that he underestimated its relational potency. Undirected sharing and member-member talk (cross-talk) is indeed not part of the D & I, and MBSR is not a psychotherapy or support group, but this does not mean that there is no interpersonal process.

The D & I, which has been overlooked in research, and only now is being specifically acknowledged by clinician/teachers as an important part of the learning process in MBSR, has a unique interpersonal process which is neither typically psychotherapeutic nor simply didactic skills-oriented. The question remains, What is the process of learning mindfulness through the D & I period of the MBSR course?
Contextual Action Theory

In the exploration of how mindfulness is constructed and experienced interpersonally both in the teacher-student dyads and among group members during the D & I period of MBSR, this study used contextual action theory (Valach et al., 2002) as its theoretical lens. This final section of the literature review begins with a brief summary of contextual action theory. Then mindfulness is situated in contextual action theory, first by assessing the place of intentionality in mindfulness, and then by proposing mindfulness as an action, a project and a career. Young and colleagues’ action-project method (2005) then is presented as a unique qualitative methodology for investigating the lived experience of the action of mindfulness, and answering the research questions of this study.

Contextual action theory is a highly integrative conceptual framework for understanding human experience. The underlying philosophical approach in contextual action theory is a moderate constructivist one in which knowledge is viewed as constructed rather than discovered, and constructed through action. Action is the core construct of the theory and is seen as comprised of three perspectives: behaviour, thoughts and emotions which steer the behaviour, and social meaning. Social meaning refers to the fact that behaviour is always “about something” (Valach & Young, 2004) and this intentionality is not derived in a vacuum but is socially negotiated and consensual. Social meaning “embeds action within a contextualized view of human experience so that society’s meaning is made real in the action of its members” (Penner, 2011, p. 63). This means that most behaviours (apart from basic reflexes and responses of the autonomic nervous system) are not only steered by the actor’s internal world (thoughts and emotions) but arise from (and contribute to) their social context. In this way, context is not
separate from action as a structural setting or environment, but rather, is constituted in and through it.

Contextual action theory also offers a framework for understanding human experience over time. First, action and joint action refer to intentional goal-directed behaviour. When several actions occur over a mid-length period of time around a common goal, they form a project or joint project. Finally, when projects coalesce into a longer-term goal-directed process, sometimes even a life-long one, we refer to career. Career in this sense does not necessarily carry an occupational meaning. Examples of careers might be long-term life-projects of dealing with illness, or parenting, or spirituality.

Viewed from this paradigm of contextual action theory, the action of mindfulness can be construed as being goal-directed and intentional, and as having three perspectives of manifest behaviour, internal processes and social meaning. A factor that seems to bridge the various definitions of mindfulness is that of intentionality. Indeed, intentionality appears explicitly or implicitly in all of the proposed definitions of mindfulness. For example, Bishop and colleagues (2004) expanded on their operational definition of mindfulness, explaining that the first component, attention, is “an intentional effort to observe and gain a greater understanding of the nature of thoughts and feelings” and the second component, acceptance, involves “a conscious decision to abandon one's agenda to have a different experience” (p. 236). Similarly, Germer (2005a) said that mindfulness always includes an intention to direct attention somewhere. He describes the advanced practice of mindfulness, choiceless awareness, in which attention moves without attachment among the changing elements of experience: “Even choiceless awareness includes intention, in this case, the intention not to choose, but to stay aware of where our attention resides” (p. 16). In a compelling model of the mechanisms of mindfulness, Shapiro and
colleagues (2006) posited intention as one of three main components. It may be useful to compare the place of intention in Buddhist and Western philosophy in order to investigate the possibility of mindfulness as, first and foremost, a phenomenon of intentionality.

**Buddhist concepts of intentionality.** Olendzki (2005), a scholar of the early Buddhist tradition and Executive Director of the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies, contended that in order to understand mindfulness, one needs to understand the historical setting of mindfulness and its philosophical underpinnings in Buddhist psychology. He outlined the Buddhist understanding of the most elemental unit of human experience as comprised of five interdependent factors: contact between a sense organ and a sense object, the awareness of that object (consciousness), perception, feeling and intention.

In Buddhist psychology, Olendzki explains, intention has a precise meaning: “Intention has to do with the attitude taken towards what is happening in experience” (p. 247). It is associated with doing rather than knowing. When one makes a choice to move or speak, for example, intention manifests as action. Intention thus includes the notion of choice or volition, but, paradoxically, is often initiated habitually or even sometimes unconsciously. “A disposition to respond, mentally or behaviourally, to circumstances in a characteristic or patterned way is an expression of a subtle, passive influence of intention.” This is because of the Buddhist notion of karma, which is the understanding that a person is continually shaped by his or her previous actions. “It is from the background of accumulated patterns that intentions, perceptions and feelings in the next moment are shaped. Every action is thus conditioned by all former actions and every action also has an effect on all subsequent action” (p. 248). Thus our volitional actions spring from habituated dispositions and learned behaviours. Even so, intention is an “active and
creative function that has a great impact on how the moment’s experience is organized and presented by the mind” (p. 247).

From this brief overview of how a moment of experience is constructed through the five factors mentioned above, including intention, we can see that from the point of view of Buddhist psychology, a “person” is regarded as a process of continually changing responses and revisions of meaning. The Buddhist tradition thus views self-identity as an “elaborate construction project” (p. 244) involving the accumulation of millions of moments of experience as described above. As we develop, our conditioned reflexes ignore new details in incoming phenomena as we attend to ongoing projects at the macro-level of construction: “In simpler terms, we are so invested in the larger picture of goals, strategies, and the validation of assumptions and belief systems that we are in the habit of relating to sensory and cognitive detail as means toward an end” (p. 253). The Buddha construed that human suffering is constructed in each moment in these reflexive and unconscious ways, and offered mindfulness meditation (vipassana) as a cure. By bringing intentional attention to the stream of phenomena, we “reverse our tendency to lean ahead into the next moment, to rush forward to the level of macro-construction … By observing the move from arising phenomena to thought creation, we begin to reveal the highly constructed nature of [our] experience … A range of options for learning and growing becomes accessible” (p. 253). One could go as far as to say, from this Buddhist perspective, everyday human functioning has become deadened by unaware habitual responding, and the practice of mindfulness, as an act of intentionality, recovers it as a crucial element in human mental health. In summary, intentionality within Buddhism is tied to action, which can be more or less mindful or habitual.

**Western concepts of intentionality.** A major influence on our current understanding of intentionality is the perspective of the conceptual work of the German phenomenologist, Husserl
and his student Brentano. According to Husserl, consciousness is intentional, which does not mean deliberate or willful, “but sheerly a directedness towards the external object and an openness to the world” (Depraz, 2001, p. 170). Richardson (2002) went on to explain the notion of intentionality as being necessarily tied to socio-cultural meaning: “intentions … are associated with the construction of meaning in that they are understood in relation to the interpretive and symbolic systems provided by culture” (p. 487). She drew from cultural psychology (Ratner, 1997) in her view of intention and action as one unit, with intention referring to the state of consciousness comprising directedness towards the world, and action comprising what a person might actually do (p. 488). This echoes the Buddhist notion of intention as an attitude taken towards experience, associated with doing rather than knowing.

It is interesting to note that intention may be at least partly if not wholly implicit. Libet (1999) found that people become aware of the intention to act 350 milliseconds after the brain has readied itself to act, and 200 milliseconds before motor activity. In other words humans can veto an action but one's intention to act is formulated in the brain before one become aware of it. This could be construed as more evidence for the extreme social constructionist stance that intentions are never freely chosen but are reflective of social forces acting on the individual. This is not unlike the Buddhist notion of karma, whereby individual intention and action in each moment is not free, but rather, dependent on the myriad of contextual influences of the moments before. However, Richardson drew from the literature on the relational, emergent and embodied nature of human action (e.g. Chodorow, 1999; Polkinghorne, 2000) to challenge this epistemological conclusion of limited personal agency. Somewhat similarly, within Buddhist psychology, despite being influenced by karma, human intentionality is present in every moment of thought, always new, and creatively shaping our experience. While Richardson emphasized
the relational aspect of human experience as bringing about a potential for new, joint
intentionality, mindfulness practice, an embodied training in breaking conceptual and perceptual
habits, also provides the space for new intentions that Richardson is requesting, as it trains
individuals to control and choose behaviours by interrupting habitual thought and affect streams
and by increasing awareness of brain activity. Indeed Richardson's rendering of the emergence of
new intentions in subjective experience sounds remarkably like mindfulness practice itself:

The emphasis here on the emergence of new intentions … is quite different from the
emphasis on goal-directed behaviour . . . While some new intentions might, in fact, lead
to future goals, the point here is to shed light on the significance of a process in which the
generation and identification of new intentions is related to an open-minded and adaptive
orientation to external and internal realities. (p. 489).

In order to posit mindfulness as an intentional action which promotes the emergence of new
intentions, we need to locate it in the paradigm of action theory.

**Action theory.** Buddhist psychology and the mindfulness tradition assume that our
suffering has its origins in our basic human drives, for the most part unconscious and beyond our
control. Desire is the compulsion to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Mindfulness teaches us to
uncover these insatiable desires, and sit with pleasure and pain without being run by them.
Choiceless awareness means that rather than pursuing and avoiding, we are able to experience all
of life more fully and with less suffering. Baer (2003) noted that mindfulness is associated with
non-striving. This seems at odds with action theory with its emphasis on agency, goals, and
movement over time.

However, action theory and Buddhist psychology have commonalities in their
contextualist world view. Germer (2005a) described how the paradigm for mindfulness is
contextualism, as defined by Stephan Pepper (1942). The contextual worldview assumes that
action and change are fundamental conditions of life, which overlaps with the notion of
impermanence in Buddhist psychology; all reality including the self is constructed within a particular context, which is similar to the Buddhist concept of no-self; change is continuous and events are multidetermined, which can be seen as roughly approximating the Buddhist term of “dependent co-origination” (Germer, 2005a, p. 26).

Richardson's (2002) description of action without new intention as being a “tendency to repeat and carry forward old story lines to which one has become habituated” (p. 489) echoes the definitions of karma given earlier. Likewise, Dannefer (1999) rather cynically observed that “the reality of intentional human action is that it is largely hyper-habituated, unreflective, and routinized, and that it reproduces existing structures, both personal and social” (p. 105). Yet the recognition of intention, action, goals, projects and careers in even such habituated and destructive processes as drug addiction (Valach & Badertscher, 1996) carries fundamentally optimistic implications for human capacity for agency and creativity. And within Buddhism, although karmic action is conditioned by previous actions, every moment of experience contains both habituated responses and the creative and active factor of intentionality.

**Mindfulness as an action.** In action theory, action is seen as “goal-directed, intentional behaviour” (Young, Valach & Collin, 1996, p. 213). The goals of action rather than their causes are emphasized. Mindfulness as an action is probably best understood as one of Germer’s “moments of mindfulness” which he described as involving awareness which is nonconceptual, present-centered, nonjudgmental, *intentional* [my italics], participatory, nonverbal, exploratory, and liberating (2005a, p. 9). As discussed above, intention is considered in Buddhist psychology as one of the five components of a moment of conscious experience, and while most Western models of mindfulness are attentional models (e.g. Bishop et al., 2004; Teasdale et al., 1995), they include an explicit or implicit acknowledgement of intention as a fundamental aspect of
mindfulness. In terms of mindfulness being goal-directed, this is somewhat paradoxical. Bishop and colleagues (2004) say that “much cognition occurs in the service of goals” (p. 236) and that our thoughts and behaviours function in a goal-oriented way to reduce the discrepancy between what is and what is desired. According to them, mindfulness, on the other hand, “teaches us to disengage from goals” (p. 236). However, there is surely the overreaching goal of paying attention to present experience. Further, Shapiro and colleagues (2006) spoke of the superordinate goals in Buddhism of enlightenment and compassion for all beings, and Shapiro (1992) found that meditation practitioners had goals of self-regulation, self-exploration and self-liberation. Clients of mindfulness-based clinical interventions may be advised to let go of their goals of feeling better or more relaxed (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 148), but paradoxically, must commit to the goal of dropping these goals and instead attending to their present-moment experience. Kabat-Zinn referred to this emphasis on nonattachment to outcome “a radical departure from most clinical interventions” (p. 148). Yet while mindfulness embodies nonattachment to outcome, it still is initiated intentionally and with the goal of present awareness.

In action theory, action is conceptualized as being cognitively and socially regulated and steered (Young et al., 2005). In reference to mindfulness as an action, as discussed earlier, current researchers simply do not agree about whether it is steered by cognitive, meta-cognitive, perceptual, or some other undefined mechanism in consciousness itself. It is one of the purposes of this study to explore the ways it may be socially steered. Although it may appear to be the private experience of an individual while he or she is meditating or engaged in a mindfulness exercise, as it is practiced in relationship, it becomes a richly social enterprise. In this case, relational connection becomes the object of mindfulness (Surrey, 2005). There are other possible
social meanings for actions of mindfulness, depending on the practitioner and his or her context. For example, achieving therapeutic goals involve socially sanctioned views of mental health, while aspiring to spiritual goals also involves socially negotiated “ideal” or spiritual qualities such as compassion, wisdom, or empathy.

**Mindfulness as a project.** Mindfulness is not a one-time action. In spiritual circles, it is referred to as a practice, which involves formal daily sitting but also an intention to be mindful in daily life activities. The action of mindfulness, then, is repeated each time -- hundreds or thousands of times -- attention is returned to the object of awareness. This action of noticing when we are escaping (e.g. through daydreaming or auto-pilot behaviours) and returning with full attention to the present moment is performed without judging the pleasant or unpleasant qualities of the object of awareness (e.g. the thought, the feeling, or the sensation). As an action performed over time, it can be seen as a project. According to Young and colleagues (2005), a project “represents a series of actions, constructed as having common goals, over a midterm period of time” (p. 217). A mindfulness project could include such things as daily sitting practice, the intention to be mindful in daily activities, weekend or 10 day retreats. Mindfulness could also be seen as a part of other life projects, for example, stress-reduction or self-care projects, spiritual-growth projects, compassion-building projects, or enlightenment projects.

**Mindfulness as a joint action and project.** Joint action refers to the intentional behaviour of a dyad or group of people attempting to realize a common goal or engage in a common process (Young et al., 1997). Mindfulness can be construed as a joint action in its traditional context of students practicing mindfulness meditation within a close relationship with a spiritual teacher and a community. This is congruent with the conceptualization outlined above of the social/relational meanings of mindfulness. Another way in which mindfulness could form
a joint action or project is in therapy. Surrey (2005) posited “relational mindfulness” as part of the therapeutic alliance, whereby “both the therapist and patient are working with the intention to deepen awareness of the present relational experience, with acceptance” (p. 92). She described a mindful therapist as gradually and organically inviting the client into mindfulness, without explicit meditation instruction:

While the therapist's focus remains on the experience of the patient, both patient and therapist are engaging in a collaborative process of mutual attentiveness and mindfulness in and through relational joining . . . This view of therapy as co-meditation offers new possibilities for the therapeutic enterprise. Through the relationship, the therapist offers the patient the possibility of staying emotionally present with the therapist, perhaps staying with difficult feelings for “one more moment” . . . Psychotherapy becomes mindfulness practice, and mindfulness becomes a collaborative process … (p. 95).

Ryback (2006) suggested that the intentionality and the jointness of mindful human connection set mindfulness in the historical context of humanistic psychology.

**Mindfulness as a career.** Career, in action theory terms, represents “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). If an individual's mindful actions and mindfulness projects, taken for spiritual, personal or therapeutic reasons, can be seen over the long-term to inform a life purpose, we might describe this as a mindfulness career. Kabat-Zinn's poignant description of mindfulness as a career demonstrates his reluctance to have mindfulness meditation represented simply as a method or technique:

Mindfulness meditation is not simply a method . . . It is both the work of a lifetime, and paradoxically, the work of no time at all – because its field is always this present moment in its fullness. This paradox can be understood and embodied only through sustained personal practice over days, weeks, months, and years (2003, p. 149).

Viewing mindfulness, then, as an intentional goal-directed action which can form a project, a joint project or a career, helps to set this phenomenon within a dynamic context over time and invites the exploration of its potentially social aspects.
Conclusion

This chapter has sought to position the action-theoretical exploration of the relational processes of learning mindfulness within the wider literature on mindfulness, its construct and posited mechanisms of change, and what is known currently about how mindfulness is learned and taught, particularly through the multi-faceted mindfulness-based interventions such as MBSR or MBCT. Several questions and gaps in the research were identified in the process of review, including the construct of mindfulness itself, whether or not the identified mechanisms of change in the MBIs are distinct or part of the construct of mindfulness, which components of the MBIs are responsible for which aspects of learning mindfulness, and what significant conditions does the group format (as opposed to individual or dyadic format) of the MBIs cultivate for the learning of mindfulness. Most pertinent to the research questions of this study are the identified gaps in our understanding of the social interactions between teacher and student (and between student and student) as they engage in learning mindfulness. Although the importance of the explicitly relational component of MBSR, the D & I, has been alluded to several times in the last two years in theoretical and pedagogical models of mindfulness, there has been no empirical investigation to date of the role of the D & I in the learning of mindfulness.

Finally, this chapter gave an overview of contextual action theory and how it is an appropriate theoretical framework from which to investigate the actions, projects and joint projects of learning mindfulness. Almost all research on mindfulness to date has been conducted using self-report retrospective interviews, self-report measures, and neurological instruments such as f-MRI, and much of this research has been conducted with the focus on the individual, and mindfulness as experienced internally. Action theory and action-project method provides a
different way of extending and enriching our understanding of what mindfulness is and how it is experienced not only as an internal, individual cognitive or metacognitive technique, state or trait, but as an interpersonal phenomena with goals, behavioural (verbal and non verbal) elements, and social meanings. It seems important to re-construe “participants” as including the teachers/therapists as well as the students/clients. There is a dearth of research on the lived experience of the providers of the MBSR program. If we conceive mindfulness as a co-constructed phenomenon between student-teacher, it is illuminating to attempt to understand the experience of the students and the teacher, their goals, emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, as they participate in the learning of mindfulness. The next chapter will expand on action theory in more detail, and provide a summary of the principles of action-project method and how it was carried out in this study.
Chapter 3: Method

This research was undertaken using the qualitative action-project method embedded within action theory (von Cranach & Valach, 1983; Young et al., 2005) in order to answer two main research questions: What is the process of learning mindfulness through the dialogue and inquiry period of the MBSR course? How does the social learning of mindfulness in the D & I period construct the experience of mindfulness? To answer these questions, the individual and joint actions, projects and careers of the MBSR teacher and participants during the dialogue and inquiry (D & I) period were observed and analysed over the 2-month period of an MBSR course. These questions guided my inquiry into the contextualized, relational nature of mindfulness as it is learned and practiced through D & I in MBSR.

This chapter offers first a rationale for the research method and design used to explore the research questions. Second, it explains how participants were recruited and describes the teacher and students who chose to participate in this case study. Data collection and the process of coding and analysis are described. Finally, issues of researcher subjectivity, and standards of trustworthiness and rigor are addressed.

Rationale for Research Method

Contextual action theory (Valach et al., 2002) views human experience as based on intentional action which is informed and energized by cognitions and emotions, and which has social meaning. Humans enact their intentions through body language and verbal language. A phenomenon such as mindfulness, which has been variously posited as an intra-psychic cognitive skill, an attitude, an attentional skill, a perceptual ability, or a personality trait, can also be understood as an intentional action. Further, when mindfulness is enacted behaviourally (verbally and nonverbally) and jointly, as in the dialogue segments in the MBSR group, it can be
observed and analysed, through the action-project method (Young et al., 2005) in order to illuminate aspects which may have, until now, eluded more conventional research methods. Action-project method has been useful in researching the individual and relational meanings of everyday activities such as parenting (Young et al, 1997), and friendships (Haber, 2005), and less ordinary behaviours such as attempted suicide (Valach & Badertscher, 1997). It has been used in the analysis of conversations in dyads such as adolescent-peer, parent-child, and counsellor-client to identify joint actions and projects concerning issues such as career and identity formation which are mutually constructed within the dyad. It offers a way of investigating the actions of the mindful teacher\(^8\) and student as they undertake a dialogue "about" mindfulness in the effort to learn mindfulness. It also provides a theoretically consistent framework for observing the process of learning and practicing mindfulness over time, that is, over the 2-month period of the MBSR course.

There are, of course, different available methods to study conversations, for example, symbolic interactionism, and the related language and social interaction (LSI). Neither of these methods includes in their theoretical framework the role of intention, joint intention, or motivation. The assumption of these methods is that intention and motivation are private individual processes that require speculation to be studied (e.g. Goffman, 1959), so instead, they give primacy to language as a visible performance which can be objectively evaluated. On the other hand, contextual action theory posits that both individual and joint intention are constituted in the action of language itself, and thereby are observable components of the self (and its attributes such as mindfulness) as it is constructed relationally through conversation. Other

\(^8\) Note the assumption that the teacher is mindful. "Mindful teacher" here really means a teacher with a personal mindfulness practice. In the MBSR Professional Training manual (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2001/2007), it is recommended that MBSR teachers are "committed to ongoing growth and learning that includes a consistent, daily mindfulness practice, continued engagement in extended mindfulness meditation retreats, and active participation in continuing professional education, training and development."
qualitative methods, such as phenomenology and narrative, share with action project method the social-meaning perspective. However, those qualitative methods are retrospective, not accessing the action of the phenomenon as it occurs. Retrospective interviews can tend to be summative, subject to “narrative smoothing,” and in some cases, interviewees have reported that in fact, they find it difficult to put their subjective and perhaps pre-conceptual/pre-verbal experiences of mindfulness into words (e.g. Smith et al., 2007). Further, although social meaning and context may be addressed in those qualitative methods, the phenomenon under study is often assumed to be an individual rather than social or relational one, and context a structural "container" rather than an integral part of the action itself. Action method aims to access the action under investigation – in this case, the learning of mindfulness – as it occurs, both through videotaping the class dialogue, and then interviewing participants as soon after the dialogue as possible (directly after the class). It addresses social meaning and context by investigating not only individual, but joint, actions in terms of intentionality and goals – what the behavior is “about.”

Action-project method has been used to research dyadic joint action processes across time. The notion of group action is conceptualized within contextual action theory (Valach et al., 2002, von Cranach, Ochsenbein & Valach, 1986) as not simply providing a context for the individual, but as comprising a network of goals, action steps and projects which is constantly co-constructed by the group members. Although group joint action is theoretically positioned within contextual action theory, it has not been empirically investigated to date with action-project method. This study thus breaks new ground in its attempt to apply action-project method to a group process.

Using action-project method to investigate a mindfulness-based group experience provided a window into teacher and students’ internal cognitive and emotional processes in
learning (and teaching) mindfulness, their individual and joint goals concerning mindfulness, behavioural manifestations of mindfulness, and lastly, the social meanings of the mindfulness project. The process of learning mindfulness over time from a qualitative perspective has received little attention in the research literature. Action-project method provided a way to monitor a joint mindfulness project over a two month period.

**Rationale for Research Design**

The study was undertaken as an instrumental single case-study approach (Stake, 2000), choosing the group (including the teacher) as the case under investigation. This is in an effort to bridge the gap in the mindfulness research of the social and contextual meanings of mindfulness, since almost all extant research has chosen the individual as the case or focus of study, and has viewed the development of mindfulness as an individual process. The case of the MBSR group was observed and explored by looking at the dialogues of six teacher-student dyads in depth and supplementing this data with multiple sources of related data – the whole class dialogue involving ten students and the teacher (occurring during the D & I), self-confrontation interviews with six “target” students and the teacher (held following each weekly class), post-session questionnaires, and weekly logs kept by all ten student-participants.

The purpose of the case study approach is not generalization, but rather, an in-depth investigation of particular cases of the target phenomenon. In an instrumental case study, the actual case, although inherently valuable, is of interest to the degree that it facilitates our understanding of the phenomenon, in this case, the learning and practice of mindfulness as a joint project. That is to say, the particular persons selected as dyads, and the particular group selected as the case, are not considered representative of the entire population, as in requirements for generalization in quantitative research. Each case will offer rich information which may be
transferable to other contexts. In this study, the case was the group itself, and the individual dyads (teacher-student) represented in-depth aspects of the case. An instrumental case study approach was compatible with the purpose of action-project method which is to describe, rather than explain, a phenomenon. Further, the thick description required in case study research was provided by action-project method, with its multiple sources of data.

Participants

Recruitment. All MBSR teachers in the community (as listed on the www.mbsrbc.ca website) were initially contacted by email and asked if they might potentially be interested in a volunteer research project involving the relational learning of mindfulness. The ones who replied were then contacted by phone and asked first of all about their level of training and experience teaching MBSR, and then engaged in discussion about various possible study designs that would be workable for the teacher, and potentially benefit the students, while serving the research questions. It was desirable to have a teacher who had, at the minimum, completed the 7-day basic training offered through the University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness, and who had taught the course at least three times. These criteria were deemed important in terms of maximizing the likelihood that the course would be offered in a way that was consistent with the course curriculum as suggested by the Center for Mindfulness. Of these teachers, one volunteered to run the entire 8-week MBSR group for free. Her training and experience exceeded the minimum criteria for inclusion as a teacher-participant. This teacher had in fact completed the highest possible level of training for MBSR teaching (8-week internship, Advanced Teacher Trainer Program, Supervised Training Program, all at University of Massachusetts Medical Center for Mindfulness) and had taught the MBSR course many times over the previous ten-year
period. It was decided that, in accordance with purposive sampling\textsuperscript{9}, this volunteer teacher would likely provide the type of learning experience that the study was aiming to investigate. A small stipend was paid in recognition of her significant contribution.

Twelve volunteer participants were then recruited with a posted notice displayed in several locations such as graduate counselling psychology programs, community centers, libraries, and counselling agencies in the Vancouver area (Appendix A). Typically the MBSR group is between 15 and 30 students (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2001/2007, MBSR Standards of Practice: Key Characteristics), although the teacher said that she had taught the program to a class as small as eight. There were a few elements to consider in choosing the group size of twelve: approximating a size that is typical for MBSR, having enough participants to make up a core in the event of absences or drop-outs, and also working with the pragmatics of the available classroom space and taping equipment.

Brief screening telephone interviews with the interested participants were undertaken to explain the nature of the study and discuss inclusion and exclusion criteria (Appendix B). One inclusion criterion was that they would need to be willing, if asked, to participate in the capacity of a “target student” and be interviewed after each class. That is, while all twelve participants were volunteers, some of them contributed extra time beyond that of attending the course, by staying after the class for interviews. They were told of the considerable time commitment for participation in the study, as well as the potential risks and benefits. Informed consent of both the teacher and all students was obtained before data collection began (Appendix C). Volunteer “target students” were solicited before the first class for the duration of the course. Six of the 12 participants volunteered for this extra commitment of time, four were designated as the main

\textsuperscript{9} That is, rather than randomly choosing the teacher, I sought to choose one who would most likely teach an MBSR course which illustrated the process in which I was interested, as Denzin and Lincoln put it, a group where “the processes being studied are most likely to occur” (2000, p. 370).
target students, with two as back-up in case of absence or fatigue of the others. A brief demographics questionnaire was completed by all participants before the beginning of the first class (Appendix D) in order to be able to assess the diversity of the group in certain typical dimensions such as race and socio-economic class.

**Description of participants.** Participants included teacher and students. The teacher was not concerned with maintaining anonymity in this report, but efforts have been made to disguise the identity of both her and the student-participants. Fictitious names have been given to all. The teacher had a background in the helping professions, and clinical research. The first twelve participants to reply, and meet the screening criteria, were invited to participate in the study. The male participant was over 60 years old, and the mean age of the female participants was 37 years old (ranging from 25 to 51). All of the initial twelve participants had earned undergraduate college or university degrees, and five participants had earned, or were currently working on, a graduate degree. Occupations included accountancy, success coach, business consultant, author, school counsellor, artist, and student. Two were unemployed. In terms of cultural or ethnic background, four of the twelve were born outside of Canada, and described their background as Persian, Russian or Anglo-Saxon. The remaining eight were born in Canada and described their background as “Canadian” or Anglo-Saxon. Thus the group had a considerable age spread, but was not diverse in gender, educational level or ethnicity. The course started with twelve participants, but Paula and Jan dropped out in session 4, and Barbara in session 6. Paula and Jan were not target students but their contributions to the D & I for the first three sessions were included in the analysis (since it is a group analysis). As a designated target-student, Barbara agreed to allow her data from sessions and self-confrontation interviews to be used in the analysis. Her contribution and the fact that she dropped out were considered significant,
particularly in regard to the relationship project. Including Barbara, the ten participants had an average attendance rate of 89%.

**Data Collection**

Following the ethical approval of the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board, the data collection for the study included audio and video-taped class dialogues, interviews, questionnaires, and personal logs (Figure 1). The data

![Diagram](image.png)

Figure 1. Data collection from the three perspectives on the action of learning mindfulness. Adapted from “Perspectives on action and corresponding data collection sources in the action-project method” by R.A. Young, L. Valach and J.F. Domene (2005). The action-project method in counselling psychology. *Journal of Counselling Psychology (52)*, p. 219. Copyright 2005 by the American Psychological Association. Reproduced with permission from APA.
were collected by the doctoral student and by three paid research assistants. One of these had considerable experience with the action-project method due to being previously employed as research assistant on an action project research team. I trained the other two in a single-workshop prior to beginning the study. They were given a printed copy of procedures (taping and self-confrontation interview guidelines) (Appendix E). I listened to each self-confrontation interview after each class, in order to ensure the interviewing protocol was being followed adequately. The MBSR course was run in a conference room on the campus of the University of British Columbia, and the interviews were conducted in research rooms in the same building.

**Dialogue from MBSR course.** One 8-week MBSR group (Appendix F) was offered free of charge February - April 2009. This course was run according to the curriculum guidelines given by the University of Massachusetts Center of Mindfulness, except that each class was 2-hours rather than 2 ½ hours in length. This was at the teacher’s request, due to her schedule. The D & I period of each class, which is the most obviously "social" or interpersonal segment, was the focus of this study's exploration of mindfulness. Based on the researcher’s prior experience of MBSR, it was estimated that the D & I would last for approximately 40 minutes as a relatively discrete component of each 2 hour class. However, the teacher of this course infused dialogue and inquiry throughout each class. Even the psycho-educational parts of the class often included brief exchanges between teacher and students regarding their personal experience of mindfulness. The category “dialogue and inquiry” was then re-defined as a verbal exchange between teacher and a participant, lasting for the minimum of a minute, which was about their lived experience of mindfulness practice. Consequently, as is typical with emergent qualitative design, a change in the initial plan was made and it was decided to tape (video and audio) and transcribe the entire class from beginning to end to ensure that no potentially valuable data was
missed. However, in terms of coding, any segments of the class which were purely psycho-educational and/or experiential (e.g. guided meditation) were not coded.

The video cameras were turned off during the periods of time that participants were engaged in experiential mindfulness exercises which involved no direct verbal exchange. Videotaping those meditation periods was not only unnecessary, but also might have felt intrusive to the participants. Three digital camcorders were positioned in the classroom, one focused on the teacher, and the other two focused on four of the target students. The target students were asked at the beginning of each class to sit in seats designated for optimal videotaping. One researcher was responsible for managing the camera focused on the teacher, and the other two research assistants were responsible for taping two student participants each (a total of four target students each class). As they ran the cameras, researchers were also expected to keep track of the starting and ending time of D & I interchanges between teacher and target students.

The main researcher decided at the end of each class which minutes of dialogue would be used for the self-confrontation interviews. In this naturalistic design, the dyadic exchanges could not be predicted or controlled and were often fleeting in nature. The choice of exchanges was thus decided based on the length of the exchange (the longer, the better, in terms of data coding and analysis) and the attempt to represent all four target students.

**Self-confrontation interviews.** Six students and the teacher were tracked in-depth over the period of the 8-week course. Four of the target students were the main focus, and two were considered back-ups in case of absence or fatigue. Naturally occurring videotaped exchanges between the teacher and four of the six target students during the D & I periods were used in self-confrontation interviews following each weekly class. These exchanges between the teacher
and a particular student typically lasted anywhere between one and ten minutes, but usually two to three minutes, and for the purposes of self-confrontation, a five-minute segment was chosen. Longer than that was deemed too onerous for the students since five minutes of exchange necessitates 15-20 minutes of interview. Following each class, the students and teacher engaged in self-confrontation interviews (lasting approximately 15 minutes for each student, and 30 minutes for the teacher) based on these brief exchanges. Participants were split up (one interviewer with the teacher, one with each student) and taken into different rooms where they watched the video recording of their conversation from the D & I period. Using the self-confrontation method, the researchers played the video recording and stopped it at approximately one-minute intervals. Each interviewer was provided with a list of possible questions to ask during the interview (Appendix E). At each 1-minute interval, the following question(s) were asked: “What were you thinking or feeling at this point in the conversation?” “What was happening for you during that minute?” This self-confrontation interview was audio-recorded and transcribed.

The purpose of the self-confrontation interviews is to access participants’ internal processes (thoughts and emotions) during the observed joint action of the dialogue. As the participants watch the video of themselves in dialogue, they, in a lay or naïve way, interpret their own, and the other’s, action. From their comments, we can understand what the observed action meant to them, that is, their perception of the joint intentionality of the action.

Altogether, there were nine self-confrontation interviews of approximately 30 minutes each with the teacher, and 36 self-confrontation interviews with students of approximately 15 minutes each (approximately fifteen hours in total of self-confrontation interviewing). It proved impossible to count on accessing a full five-minute round of D & I between teacher and each
target participant. Sometimes the exchange lasted only a minute or two. In these cases, students were interviewed on a five minute segment of the D & I, even if for part of that five minutes, they were silent and listening to another dyad working. This proved to yield interesting findings in terms of the internal processes of students when they were not directly engaging with Ruth. Ethical care and respect for the participants’ well-being (including the teacher) was taken and sometimes the length of the interviews was limited due to fatigue of participants.

A unique feature of this study was the ecological validity achieved by recording and analysing a construction of mindfulness through dialogue as it naturally occurred in the MBSR group. As is typical in an emergent and naturalistic design, decisions were made along the way, in consultation with the doctoral supervisor, for appropriate adaptation within the procedures of data collection in action-project method. Investigating the dialogue process through initial in-vivo videotaping and subsequent self-confrontation interview yielded rich data of the inner (and manifest) experiences of both teacher and students.

**Supplementary data.** All students were asked to complete a brief questionnaire after each class (Appendix G) and to keep a log book (Appendix H) recording their experience of practicing mindfulness during the week. The post-class questionnaires served to provide a window into all students’ internal processes (not only the target students), albeit a small window. The weekly logs contributed an element of context for the D & I, and a better sense of the life-projects of each participant and how they were making sense of what they learned in class. The logs also afforded a context for students to voice their sometimes-negative experiences of learning mindfulness, which they did not voice in class. Thus there was not only the sub-text of the self-confrontations to add to the narrative of the class dialogue, but also the subtext of the
weekly logs. Much of the information from these supplementary data sources turned out to be somewhat redundant, but additive information was integrated into the Findings.

Recording and transcription. The entire class was video and audio-taped and the D & I periods were transcribed verbatim by the author, primarily from the audio-recording but with constant references to the video-recording. As many nonverbals as were discernable on videotape (smiles, nods, frowns, pauses) were noted. However, due to the cramped quarters of the classroom and the limitations of the video-taping equipment, it was not possible to capture all of these. Self-confrontation interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the author. To prepare for the action-method style of coding, transcripts of the D & I were broken down into 1-minute segments, to correspond to the self-confrontation interviews which pertained to that minute.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study employed a method for analyzing joint actions that was initially proposed by von Cranach and colleagues (1982) and has been refined over several research studies (e.g. Young, Valach, Dillabough, Dover & Matthes, 1994; Young et al., 1997, Young et al., 2008) and explicaded as action-project method (Young et al., 2005). Data was analysed with a coding system based on individual goals of both teacher and students in the process of learning and practicing mindfulness, joint goals, and the means used to reach these goals. Data from three main sources was accessed (whole group dialogue data, teacher-target student dialogue data, and self-confrontation interview data), along with a supplementary data source of post-class questionnaires and weekly logs which were used to build the context for the D & I. Data was analysed within the three dimensions of action as conceptualized in action theory and action-project method. These three dimensions are: action systems, levels of action and perspectives on action (Young et al., 2005).
Action systems refer to individual action, joint action, and projects. Individual actions incorporate goals, functional steps and elements. When these actions occur between people, they are called "joint actions" and are similarly comprised of joint goals, functional steps and elements. When a series of actions are linked over time by common goals, they are referred to as a project, or a joint project. Projects are made up of intentional actions over a time period, and have an end point (when the goals are achieved). According to contextual action theory, most projects that humans undertake are social in nature, involving more than one individual (Valach et al., 2002). If goal-oriented actions in the form of projects are more long-term they can be called careers in the non-occupational sense.

The second dimension of action is the hierarchy of levels. There are three levels within an action or a project: the goal, the functional steps and the elements. The highest level is the goal of an action, which is its meaning and is based on the overall intention of the people involved in the action. The next level is made of the functional steps which are a sequence of verbal and nonverbal behaviours with a common function. These functional steps move people towards their goal. Lastly, at the lowest level of action are the conscious and unconscious verbal and nonverbal elements involved in a behaviour (eg asking a question, moving closer or backing away).

The third dimension of action is the perspectives of manifest behaviour (e.g. language), inner processes (cognition, emotion) and social meaning (e.g. what it means to the student and teacher to engage in the action). These perspectives are non-hierarchical. Manifest behaviour of an action is often language but can also be non-verbal. The inner processes involve the cognitions and emotions that steer, regulate and energize the behaviour. The social meaning involves the goals and intentionality of the individual in her social context.
The D & I and self-confrontation interview transcripts for each dyad provided the joint project findings, the functional steps and the elements used to enact them. These data were analysed according to the action-project method as described in Young and colleagues (2005). Joint and individual participant goals, the action steps (functions) engaged within the conversation in order to achieve the goals, and the action elements (specific behaviours such as language) employed to move through the functional steps were identified. All data were transcribed and coded top down (identifying the overall goal of the sequence of action) and from bottom up (coding of specific elements and steps that make up the action).

**Steps in data analysis.** These were the steps in the analysis process:

1. **Top-down preliminary analysis (preliminary identification of goals).** Working session by session, and dyad by dyad (6 possible dyads), the researcher first identified each dyad’s (teacher-student) overall joint goal for the action (particular minutes of dialogue of a particular session). This was done by reading the transcript of the dialogue while watching the video recording, in order to get a holistic understanding of the conversation. The largest goal of segments of the dialogue was noted, by asking "What are the teacher and student trying to do together in this dialogue?" "What is this conversation about?" This initial approach to the data is a top down step, by first looking at the overall conversation and positing a general goal based on the conversation itself. This was done on hard-copy print-outs of the D & I transcript, with each dyad’s exchange blocked out in pen.

2. **Further identification of preliminary goals and projects.** Next, the self-confrontation interview data were referred to. Still using the hard-copy print-out of the D & I dialogue, the dialogue was read again, but this time minute-by-minute, referring to the
corresponding self-confrontation interview data. An overall intentional framework for the joint actions of each dyad was posited, with preliminary individual goals and joint goals. This preliminary analysis was conducted by the researcher and then revised in consultation with the supervisor.

3. **Member-check of preliminary goals and projects.** Typically in action-project method, a brief meeting between the researcher and participants is held midway in the data collection to confirm what the researcher has observed as joint goals and projects. At this time, the participants will have the chance to provide feedback, correction or elaboration. In order not to interrupt the learning process of the participants, this step was left to the end of the course, when each target student and the teacher was emailed a one-page summary of the preliminary, top-down individual and joint goals and projects identified thus far through the D & I and self confrontation interviews (Appendix I). These projects were identified pre-coding (due to the logistics of the time required for the coding and analysis) by reading the transcribed dialogues and self-confrontation interviews and identifying goals and joint goals for each dyad, top-down. Target students and teacher replied saying that the summaries accurately reflected what they were aware of doing during the D & I. In the case of the joint actions of Jackie and Ruth, which involved the suggestion of an implicit attachment project (later called the joint connection project), both Jackie and Ruth each replied saying that although they had not been aware of this operating as a project for them, the description “resonated” and made sense to them, and was “interesting.” This preliminary stage of the analysis was done concurrently with the data collection for the 8-week MBSR course. Since all transcription was also necessarily done within this time framework, it was a very tight turn-around time in order to have the
preliminary summaries of goals and projects ready for participants by the end of the 8-week course.

4. *Coding-step one.* Then the data from the dialogue was coded and analysed minute-by-minute from the bottom up, using the qualitative analysis software, HyperResearch (version 2.8, 2007) to organize and store the coded data. This level of analysis, which was undertaken on the minutes of the D & I dialogue which had related self-confrontation interviews, was undertaken by the doctoral student and a research assistant who was highly experienced\(^\text{10}\) in action-project method coding and analysis. Each phrase (from the session dialogue) of each speaker was coded according to a list of microelements. This code list was derived from a pre-existing code list from another action-theory research project and was adapted slightly to better fit the conversational pattern of mindfulness dialogue. Eight codes were added to the existing list of 65, including such codes as “asks for body sensation” “describes body sensation” (Appendix J). These codes represent behavioural (language) elements that best described what the participant was doing in each segment. For the first few sessions, the coding of elements (first step of the coding procedure) was done individually by the main researcher and the research assistant and then checked to establish agreement at this level of coding. Once the segments were coded at the element level, the second step of the analysis began.

5. *Coding and analysis - step two.* In this second, interpretative step, it was determined collaboratively what the dyad was doing together and individually within the segment, by asking the question, “Why might he or she have used these elements?” to posit a functional step, minute by minute. Next, continuing to work collaboratively, in order to

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\(^{10}\) The RA had developed expertise in action-project method by serving on the primary investigator’s research team for three years.
access the participants’ internal processes and get a better understanding of functional steps and goals, the self-confrontation interview transcripts were referred to for each participant for the particular minutes of the conversation being analysed. The questions, “Why did they use that functional step?” and “What are they doing together?” guided the collaborative identification of the goals and joint goal. Joint goals were thus systematically identified through dialogue analysis informed by the unspoken dimension of thoughts and feelings as contributed through the self-confrontation interviews. Coding and analysis for this stage was done after the data collection for the whole MBSR course was complete, and took several months.

6. **Coding of all D & I transcripts.** Minutes of the D & I which did not have accompanying self-confrontation interviews were also coded to the level of functional step (goals were not identified without the self-confrontation data) by two other research assistants hired to complete this step.

7. **Writing of narratives.** Once all coding was completed and the functional steps and goals and joint goals identified, a narrative was written for each session which attempted to describe the joint actions and projects enacted in the D & I for that session. This was a moment-by-moment interpretive analysis of the process of learning mindfulness from both the teacher’s and the students’ perspectives. In a hermeneutic process, the author moved between the bottom-up collaborative coding (organized in HyperResearch), the transcripts of the in-session dialogues, the self confrontation data about their internal processes, the supplementary data from questionnaires or weekly logs, and finally, the theoretical framework of action theory. Each of the nine narratives was approximately 20 pages long. An attempt was made to capture not only the dyadic joint goals and projects
(teacher-student) in the particular session, but the group joint goals and projects. This was possible because there was considerable overlap in the minutes used for self-confrontation, such that two or more participants and the teacher often commented on the same minute.

8. Identification of group (joint) projects. In the writing of these session narratives, the longer-term aspects of joint projects and career became apparent, as goals and joint goals were pervasive or repeated over sessions. It was observed that although the content topics and type of meditation practice varied from session to session, the same joint goals were engaged in the D & I over time. Thus it was not difficult to identify five subordinate joint projects directly from the bottom-up coding, since these five projects were present from the beginning to the end of the 8-week course. What was more subtle was the expression of the participants’ individual “life-projects,” their personal histories that became part of the intentional framework of the course. Since personal stories were discouraged in the dialogues, these individual projects were less observable, yet became salient enough by the end of the course. The member-check summary of individual goals and projects that was given to participants near the end of the course included the top-down identification of these more personal projects, articulated prior to formal coding and analysis, but the life-projects became more identifiable in later stages of analysis when all data sources were included and actions and projects were viewed over time.

Purpose of member-checks and collaborative coding. Within the interpretive/constructivist paradigm of this application of action-project method, a few points should be noted. The primary purpose of the member-checks of the preliminary analysis (at the end of the data collection but before the in-depth coding process) was not to confirm the researcher’s
accurate understanding of the participants’ experience (as in a post-positivist approach). Rather, more in line with philosophical hermeneutics, the member-checks acted as an opportunity to deepen and broaden the researcher’s and participants’ understanding by entering into an active co-constructed process (Haverkamp & Young, 2005). While the participants actually did not offer different or new understandings to those presented in the preliminary one-page summary, in the case of the teacher and one participant, their comments that they were not aware of the implicit attachment project but that it made sense to them and was “interesting,” involved the deepening of participants’ understanding of their process. An example of how the researcher’s understanding of participant process was deepened was in the unexpected member-check with the participant who decided to leave the project early (described on page 191). Thus there was a dialectical understanding of the phenomenon in question.

A similar hermeneutic process is eventually followed in the collaborative coding. Action-project method is unusual in that, while in the broadest sense it is a constructivist (and even social-constructionist, depending on the application) method, it does contain some post-positivist aspects. The initial bottom-up coding of the elements (the first stage of coding) is one of these. Language is initially coded in meaning units according to what Valach and colleagues (2002) describe as “structural” linguistic elements (p. 61) which are not context dependent. An example of a code is “asks a question.” The primary researcher and RAs did this level of coding separately, then checked it for agreement. After a few rounds of element-coding, the agreement between raters is typically very high. This stage is concerned with accuracy and serves a double purpose of “slowing” down the researchers’ interpretive questions and understandings, anchoring them in the data.
It is after this initial step of coding that the hermeneutic loop of collaborative interpretation and understanding begins. Moving between the coded elements of the language units, the larger over-all meaning of the dialogue, and the meanings expressed in the SC interview, the researchers work together, in an interpretive discussion, in deciding the goals and joint goals of the minute of dialogue. This is done collaboratively, not with the purpose of “accurately” ascertaining the goals, but instead, in engaging in a deepening process of understanding the goals. Because the goals and joint goals are based in social meaning, which is (from the interpretive/constructivist approach) always constructed rather than essential, we construct our understanding of the social meaning from the sources available to us: both the participants’ naïve understandings of their own intentionality as they watch their own actions on videotape in the SC interviews, and our naïve understandings of the same. Thus the collaborative analysis, in the end, does not seek accuracy through consensus or validation, but rather, seeks the rich, deep understanding that results from the collaboration of musing, discussing, and moving from part-to-whole, and whole-to-part in the data in an interpretive fashion.

**Researcher's Subjectivity**

It is acknowledged that the data was analysed by the writer, who has knowledge of mindfulness theory and practice. As a long-time practitioner of mindfulness meditation, and a counsellor trained in mindfulness-based therapies, I have assumptions about the nature of mindfulness and the process of learning mindfulness. Indeed, it is because of my lay observations and experiences of the mindful interactions between teacher and student (and therapist and client) in the past, that I was inspired to investigate these interactions more systematically in a research forum. While my own understanding of mindfulness no doubt informed my interpretation of the data, I aimed for researcher reflexivity in staying aware of how
my preconceptions may influence my conclusions. In particular, the issue of demand characteristics has often dogged researchers of meditation and spirituality. If teachers, students, and researchers are invested in the protection of certain spiritual beliefs and practices, or in appearing like a "good meditator," these motivations inevitably colour their reports of the researched phenomenon. On the other hand, it is this very subjectivity that is included in the "social meaning" of action-project method, and is an important part of the action of mindfulness that I am attempting to investigate. That is, perhaps trying to appear like a good meditator is part of learning mindfulness in an MBSR group. Thus, what may be negatively perceived in another research design as demand characteristics in participants, or bias in researcher, is included in the social context of the phenomenon under investigation in action-project method. What is important that the researcher is aware of how her biases and pre-understandings are being enfolded into the interpretation.

I kept a journal during the data collection about my observations, reactions, questions and experience. I became aware of a rather romanticized view I held of the “spiritual teacher.” I tried to hold this view lightly and allow the emergent findings to inform my own subjective pre-conceptions and conclusions. An example of an expectation I held initially was that the teacher would be aware of and refer to her own emotions of “loving-kindness.” Instead, when asked in SC interviews about how she was feeling, the teacher sometimes referred to those emotions, but more often said that she was not “feeling” as much as being present, as in Session 3, when she says “It’s not emotional. It’s more noticing, attending, wondering, staying open” (RuthSC29). Becoming aware of how the teacher’s experience was different from my assumptions was

11 Loving kindness is one of the “Four Immeasurables” (brahma-vihara), the Buddhist virtues or attitudes which are cultivated through meditation: Loving kindness, compassion, empathy and equanimity (Thera, 1965, p. 76).
important in trying to understand the role of the attitudinal and/or emotional aspects of mindfulness (e.g. acceptance, nonjudgement, loving kindness, etc) in this particular case.

Another important part of the process of reflexivity was the collaborative nature of the data collection and analysis. I was not attempting to pin down, in an objective or essentialist manner, the phenomenon but rather, was interested in how it was constructed in the group by the participants, and even how the research assistants, by virtue of being there in the hermeneutic circle as it were, understood it. The RAs who assisted in the data collection (taping, interviewing and coding) had many observations and questions about the process which I noted and reflected on. Their common questions to me were “what is mindfulness, exactly?” and “what’s the point of mindfulness?” Their curiosity informed their attentiveness in interviewing, as we all engaged in investigating what the group was doing, and what their actions were “about,” that is, what the meanings of mindfulness were for this group in particular.

The RA who worked closely with me to collaboratively code and analyse was an essential part of the hermeneutic. She did not participate in the data collection and was relatively unfamiliar with mindfulness theory and practice, and at the same time was very experienced in the coding and analysis procedures of action-project method. She provided an important “outsider” perspective and, for example, would sometimes refer us back to the basic bottom-up coding of the elements, and the self-confrontation data, if we strayed too far interpretively in her opinion. So while “accuracy” was not our goal, the process of interpretation was not without parameters. We aimed to stay grounded in the data and returned again and again to view particular moments of the video, or re-read the transcripts, to stay close to the participants’ recorded experience.
Issues of Representation

Following the action theory framework as previously described, the findings are represented as the joint projects that were identified almost as themes are identified in conventional content analysis. Within each project, the particular functional steps and the elements employed by the teacher and students are described. Specific behaviours, language (verbal and non-verbal) and internal processes (thoughts and feelings) and personal meaning (goals) are reported. Quotations from transcripts are provided as illustration. Also, attention was paid to changes that occurred in the projects over time, and how the project of interest is situated in the life of the participants (e.g., is it central or peripheral, how does it relate to other projects in which the individual is also engaged?). These descriptions demonstrate how mindfulness is learned, taught, practiced and/or otherwise experienced in the teacher-student, and group relationships.

Since the group was the case, it was considered initially to not refer to individuals by pseudonyms but rather more anonymously (e.g. Student 1, etc.). However, since the study was about learning mindfulness as a social and relational process, it was decided to give participants pseudonyms and attempt to capture to some extent the colourful mix of personalities and relationships that emerged over the 2-month period. This seemed the most appropriate way to represent the learning process, particularly when a relationship project was identified as one of the main super-ordinate joint projects. Participants did not learn mindfulness in an anonymous setting with nameless people. By using pseudonyms and removing personal indicators of identity, confidentiality was preserved as much as possible while still attempting to capture the personal flavour of the process.
Ethical Considerations

Approval from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board, UBC, was obtained. The three ethical issues that appeared most important were confidentiality, limiting intrusion in the participant's learning process during their participation in the MBSR program, and limiting undue cognitive and physiological demands of an intensive process. Confidentiality was protected by using pseudonyms and changing identifying markers. I brought an ethical awareness and concern to the representation of participant stories, seeking to minimize potential discomfort, for instance by disguising the rare examples of so-called “negative” reactions to other participants. It is the researcher's opinion that participants' learning processes was not curtailed by the study but rather enhanced, since the processes of action-project method required a level of mindfulness and thus provided "extra practice" in learning mindfulness. I attempted to be flexible in my demands of the participants during the process, sometimes cutting the interviews short when fatigue was observed, providing refreshments each session, and always giving target participants the option of declining interviews at the end of each class.

Criteria for Evaluating the Worth of the Study

Qualitative research has various possible standards of establishing the worth or merit of a study (Morrow, 2005; Sandelowski, 1986). Generally, for the action-project method, rigorous findings result from rigor in the application of the method itself, and rigor in the way the current research project offers defensible reasoning in the interpretations offered (Young et al., 2005).

Trustworthiness was assessed in a few ways. The first step was by the member-check which occurred just before the end of the course, during which participants (including the teacher) had the opportunity to question, change or add to the preliminary findings of the researcher. The ongoing questionnaires and weekly log also offered participants the opportunity
to give ongoing feedback on the process of the project. Second, accessing multiple data perspectives (the dialogue itself, the self-confrontation interview data, and the log books) contributed richness, breadth and depth to the data. This method includes a detailed audit trail of the research process that can be consulted if necessary. Third, the coding and much of the analysis was conducted by two or more researchers at any one time, providing an ongoing check against systematic distortion due to individual bias while at the same time not aiming for “accuracy” per se, but rather, a rich interpretative co-construction of meaning. At the later stages of analysis, researcher interpretative conclusions were presented several times to the doctoral supervisor and revised after questioning and discussion about alternative ways to understand the data.

Another criterion of worth is coherence, the way different parts of the interpretation create a complete and meaningful picture. Internal coherence was assessed through the member-checks, and through collaborative consultation and analysis with research assistants and the supervisor. Further, action-project method is situated within a theoretical framework which encourages an ongoing hermeneutic movement between research findings and action theory. External coherence, how the interpretation fits against existing research, will be assessed by the academic community in the dissertation defense. Lastly, the criterion of pragmatic usefulness, whether or not the conclusions are useful for teachers and counsellors and in what ways, was addressed in the discussion of the findings in Chapter 5.
Chapter 4: Findings

The first research question that was explored in this study is, “What is the process of learning mindfulness through the dialogue and inquiry period of the MBSR course?” To answer this question, I observed the individual and joint projects that the teacher and students engaged in during the dialogue and inquiry (D & I) of MBSR. The observation and analysis of these projects illuminated the overt and covert goals of the teacher-student mindfulness experience over the 8-week period, particularly the joint goals which underlie the social action of learning mindfulness through dialogue and inquiry. Answering this question also illuminated how the teacher-student relationship contributed to the learning of mindfulness. The second, related question is, “How does the social learning of mindfulness in the D & I period construct the experience of mindfulness?” In answering this question, I sought to describe and understand how mindfulness was constructed in the D & I through the joint actions and projects of teacher and students. Although the purpose of the study was not to ascertain if mindfulness was learned relationally (the joint or relational construction of action is an ontological assumption within action theory), the findings demonstrate a richness of relational processes.

Indeed, while the mindfulness project was the super ordinate class joint goal – all participants joined the group course in order to learn mindfulness – it was embedded in and constituted by a concurrent relationship project. Perhaps the most interesting finding is that the very process of mindfulness which participants endeavoured to learn and practice in the “individual” formal meditation exercises of, for example, the body scan or the sitting meditation, was replicated, amplified and embodied in the subsequent dialogues with the teacher, through the sub-ordinate joint projects of attention, language, insight, compassion and connection. The D &
I component can thus be seen as a relational way of practicing mindfulness which yielded experiences and embodied insights which may in fact be difficult to access alone.

Figure 2. Dialogue and Inquiry in MBSR: Joint super- and sub-ordinate projects

The findings of this study are described within the hierarchical model of contextual action theory (Figure 2). At the widest and most general level of career\textsuperscript{12}, each participant entered the MBSR course with individual goals connected to ongoing life projects which contributed to a context for the group’s experience of learning mindfulness. These life projects, shared in the form of stories and personal examples, often formed the curriculum of the class, as the teacher responded to whatever was offered in the moment by the participants to execute the

\textsuperscript{12} The reader is reminded that within contextual action theory, “career” refers to an ongoing life project, not necessarily related to occupation. Examples of careers may be an illness career, a parenting career, a spirituality career. For the purposes of this study, I will use the term “life-project” rather than career.
dialogue and inquiry. Whether the D & I was about the immediate experience of a mindfulness exercise just completed in class, or about homework experiences of practicing mindfulness, the participants’ individuality flavored their contribution. However, it is of interest that although each participant brought his or her unique history and goals to the mindfulness project, their individual story was not important in the same way as it might be in a psychotherapeutic process or support group. Instead, these stories were used by Ruth and the group as means to an end, as ways to learn and practice mindfulness. Ruth often asked the participants to notice what is “underneath” the story – thoughts, emotions and body sensations. Nonetheless, these individual stories – familiar human narratives of pain, suffering, and stress – created an ongoing context for the group’s actions, and in fact an extemporaneous curriculum. There were some commonalities in these individual life-projects across the participants, which will be described in the first section.

At the second level of organization of action, the learning of mindfulness by the teacher-student dyads and the group in the Dialogue and Inquiry component was enacted through two super-ordinate joint projects: the mindfulness project and the relationship project. While a salient project in its own right (with some actions and sub-projects not explicitly oriented to learning mindfulness), the relationship project was inextricably intertwined with the mindfulness project and indeed was the vehicle for learning mindfulness in the D & I.

Finally, within these two super-ordinate projects we find several other class joint subordinate projects, which operated as functional steps to achieve the goal of learning mindfulness. The subordinate projects most explicitly supporting the mindfulness project were attention (noticing with gentle kindness), language (describing), and insight (understanding). The subordinate projects most explicitly supporting the relationship project were compassion
(helping) and connection (connecting or relating). The personal stories (connected to the longer-term life-projects) of the participants were retold through these subordinate joint projects. That is, participants learned and experienced mindfulness in the context of their life issues and concerns (life-projects), through the relationship project formed dyadically between the teacher and each participant and also across the group, and most specifically, through the subordinate joint projects. It will be important to keep in mind that the division into levels and types of projects is only a heuristic for representing and understanding the complex processes involved: in fact these processes were highly overlapping, mutually constituted and dynamic, and should not be reified into any essentialist, separate or static building blocks.

The Context: Life Projects of Students and Teacher

In contextual action theory, context is viewed not as a “thing” to be separated out and controlled, but rather, the field in which action takes place (Valach et al., 2002). The action processes of learning mindfulness are understandable in relation to other actions and projects within which they are taking place. We might conceptualize this field in an MBSR course as made up of a number of contributing influences: the historical and religious background of Buddhism, for example, or the pedagogical zeitgeist at the time of the creation of MBSR in 1979, or the philosophical assumptions behind mind-body medicine. Of particular relevance to this study’s research questions was the contribution of the participants’ life-projects -- their wider goals for participating in the course -- to the group context for the mindfulness project.

Each participant entered the MBSR group not to learn mindfulness for its own sake but with wider reasons which were connected to their own particular history. These reasons, ranging from reducing pain to finding peace, were stated explicitly in the first meeting when Ruth asked them directly why they had joined the group. As the weeks went by, and participants brought
examples of attempts to practice mindfulness in their daily life to the D & I, it became clearer what each participant was seeking through their participation in the mindfulness project. Indeed, based on the nine session dialogues, the self-confrontation interviews, and the supplementary data of questionnaires and weekly logs, it would be possible to write quite detailed “case studies” of each target participant, including the teacher. However, since the focus of this study is not individual but rather joint processes of learning mindfulness in a single-case study of the group, attention was instead placed on commonalities across the participants in terms of the life-projects which brought them to the group, and also how these participant life projects joined with the teacher’s life-projects and intentions. This is important in understanding and describing the particular context for the action of learning mindfulness in this case.

In different guises and stories, all participants sought to get rid of something unpleasant: physical aches and pains, insomnia, chronic pain, sadness, self-criticism, and the stress of daily life. At the same time, they all hoped that mindfulness-training would bring them a sense of peace. This pushing-away of pain, and longing for peace, formed part of the context for the learning of mindfulness from the students’ perspectives. Other common participant life-projects included self-improvement, and relationship enhancement. Exactly how these participant life-goals were met by Ruth and one other, and transformed through the process of mindfulness in the D & I, is elaborated in detail later in this chapter. But in brief, participants were paradoxically invited to include what they were trying to get rid of, and to stop seeking peace.

**Ruth’s life-projects.** What life-projects did Ruth bring to the group context? We learn that she had a background in education and the helping professions and had many years of interest and training in mind-body alternative treatments. Her own mindfulness practice was a life-project, and she self-disclosed a few times to the group about her daily life struggles with
practicing mindfulness in midst of automatic stress patterns of overwork or overeating. She mentioned a few times in SC (self-confrontation interview) that the course was not as much a content for her to deliver to students as an experience for her to facilitate, from a position of her own mindful practice:

RuthSC\textsuperscript{13} 15: ... This is only about practice. It is only about practice. And there’s no difference between teaching or facilitating and participating. There are all one and the same. So it’s a shared ... it’s a definitely shared experience. It’s not something that you could ever pretend if it didn’t happen for you ... It has to be recognized as a shared experience . . . . as part of the human condition. (Session 4)

She was intentional during the sessions about being as mindful as possible as she led the D & I. For example, in the first session’s SC, she said, “I was trying to be with my breath and my body and in touch with my feet and in the body, present” (Ruth4). Yet for Ruth, mindfulness is not just valuable for its own sake, but ultimately for the insight and liberation it potentially offers. She emphasized to the class several times that the purpose of the cultivation of mindfulness is liberation from automatic patterns of suffering:

Ruth210: It is unconscious. It’s my pattern, just below the level of awareness that drags me to do this. And so the fact that we’re noticing what we’re doing that’s dragging us to do this -- If we can back up a little bit and see what that sensation starts like, then we could make a decision around it. (Session 5)

In her SCs, she sometimes expressed her wider intentions – that is, not just to teach mindfulness, but why she wanted to teach mindfulness. The desire to help others motivated her. In her SC, she often mentioned feelings of compassion for participants. For example, as she noticed Paula’s harsh self-punitive attitudes, she had “a feeling of how hard and sad it is that we’re so hard on ourselves, and a recognition that I can be as hard on myself as anyone. So I really felt an openheartedness, feeling an empathy and a basic human compassion for this kind of behaviour” (RuthSC6, Session 1).

\textsuperscript{13} There are two data sources of quotations used in this study: self confrontation interviews, and D & I. Quotations from the self-confrontation interviews will be noted by the letters SC and then the line number from the transcript.
appeared to be powerful life-projects for Ruth. The person of the teacher was an undeniable part of the context of this MBSR group. The manualized\textsuperscript{14} curriculum of the MBSR course was not “delivered” separately from these life-projects and goals of the teacher (or the participants) but rather, inextricably embedded in them, and enacted through them.

**Participants’ life-projects of “getting rid of pain”.** All participants expressed their desire to get rid of various unpleasant issues in their lives, and discomfort or unwanted thoughts during the mindfulness practice. For example, Maria’s presenting goal for learning mindfulness was to reduce work stress. As the course went on, we come to see how stressful it was for Maria, an up-beat, high-energy person, to acknowledge so-called “negative” feelings, particularly sadness. For example, near the end of the course, she was faced with strong feelings of sadness after the all-day retreat:

Maria23: Yeah, sad.
Ruth24: Sad
Maria25: I woke up in the morning totally sad, I didn’t know if I’d had a dream that was sad or what. I was just incredibly sad this morning.
Ruth26: This morning.

Ruth began very tentatively by just repeating words as minimal encouragers, with the goal of getting Maria to stay with the feeling. She said in her SC that she was trying “to get her to look within and see what it is and just sit with it, just sit with it, be present with it” (RuthSC9). Maria, on the other hand, reported in her SC that she felt “shy” “out of her comfort zone” and “a little bit not wanting to share” (MariaSC5). This intensified a few minutes later when she exclaimed in her SC that she “hated” these moments of interaction with Ruth and found them almost unbearably painful (MariaSC23). Of the group, she was the most enthusiastic member over the 2-month course, explicitly trying to help Ruth and others, and yet also seemed the slowest to

\textsuperscript{14} McCown et al (2010) refer to the MBSR curriculum as a “template program” rather than manualized, based on an outline which is, in Kabat-Zinn’s words, not a “cookbook” manual (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2001/2007, Curriculum Outline Introduction).
embrace the invitation to include strong unwanted emotions. She commented she was surprised how these sad feelings surfaced at the end of the course, and we are left wondering how her “positive thinking” life-project might incorporate them after the course. Getting rid of, rather than feeling, sadness appeared to be her goal.

Gerald had a salient “pain story” which he alluded to often. He wished to reduce his chronic pain and explained in Session 4 that the way he had tried to do this, with limited success, was by ignoring it: “I’ve trained myself to focus on other things ... just won’t go there” (Gerald34). What ensued was Ruth gently and kindly drawing Gerald into a joint mindful exploration of his pain. The complex joint actions involving mindfulness and Gerald’s pain story will be demonstrated in detail in later sections of this chapter.

Perhaps the most intriguing and sometimes humorous example of a participant’s goal of getting rid of pain was Gail who hoped that mindfulness-training would offer a way to eradicate insomnia, fear, stress, yawning, and other discomforts. This goal was enacted in each week’s session when Gail fidgeted, wept and yawned throughout each mindfulness exercise, and then in the D & I tenaciously demanded from Ruth a solution for her embodied distress. Ruth instead, each time, offered the mindful alternative of allowing and observing it. This difference between their intentions produced a kind of tug-of-war between them over the whole 8-week course. Ruth poignantly asked her in session 5, “what would happen if you didn’t fight?” This question encapsulates the action of mindfulness and was particularly salient for someone like Gail whose bodymind seemed to hold the residue of the “fight” response. It often appeared that Gail misunderstood the course curriculum, driven by her desire to get rid of discomfort. This gave Ruth a chance to embody, time and time again, the patient, consistent, repetitive offering of curiosity and nonjudgmental attention to Gail that she was inviting all the participants to give to
themselves. There were many humorous moments in the push-pull between Ruth and Gail:

Gail423: All my thoughts were about “how do I stop yawning?”
Evryone424: Laughter
Ruth425: How do I stop yawning, ok.
Gail426: And the deeper I was breathing, the more I was yawning and the more I was tearing.
Ruth427: Could you stop trying?
Gail428: Well, I guess. But I would just continue yawning then.
Ruth429: Well maybe that’s ok.
Gail432: I just don’t know why nobody else does it! Like what’s wrong? Me and my yawning.
Ruth433: It just is.
Gail434: Ok.
Ruth435: Would that be ok?
Gail436: I was hoping that somebody would just yawn once.
Ruth437: Well I broke into a hot flash, does that count?
Evryone438: Laughter
Gail439: (laughs) Yes it does.
Ruth440: Ok. That’s how my body handles energy.
Gail441: Ok
Ruth442: Everyone has their own unique way. Just be gentle and notice.

Seeking peace and well-being. Participants also framed their goals in terms of wanting peace. In Session One, Gail stated “I hope this course can help me find peace with myself more.” In her SCs, she often made note of and celebrated moments of “calmness” and relaxation which, as is described in later sections, both Ruth and other participants helped to co-construct with her. Jackie also sought well-being and peace. She explained in the initial introductions of the first session that she was taking the MBSR course to learn how to “appreciate what I do have and be in the moment and take time out for myself” because “I am always on the go, doing all these things at the same time and [trying] to get me to where I want to go.” Although she did not state explicitly that she wanted to become more aware of and connected to her body, this quickly became the salient way that Ruth and Jackie work together to achieve Jackie’s goals. Maria similarly wanted a sense of ease. In session 2, she commented on her preference for “nice” “pretty” moments:
Maria184...I found it easier to be mindful when I saw something pretty or like um, it was just a nice day and the sun was shining. And it was easier to be in that moment. On the rainier days when I didn’t really want to be outside (laugh) it was harder to be mindful. Ruth187: Ok. Did you notice anything about those days? When you were not happy with that moment?

Ruth said in her SC that in this moment, she deliberately chose to “direct her attention to the unpleasant,” “to explore that moment”; this is a good example of how two individual goals meet and become joint (or not).

Paula sought relaxation. She reported struggling with the bodyscan, moving and fidgeting in an attempt to find a comfortable position:

Paula132: So if I’m not feeling comfortable on my back, is it ok to be on my side?
Ruth135: So there’s one thing that you’re saying there about not being able to relax. Remember how we said last week that the purpose of this is not to relax. It’s nice if it happens as a by-product but it’s not to relax. It’s not to relax; it’s to notice feeling states that come up in your everyday life.
Paula136: Do you really, do you really ... I missed that part completely.
Ruth137: Laughs
Evryone138: Laughter
Tasha139: I missed that part too.

We do not know the reason that Paula dropped out of the course after Session 3, but it is possible that she did not see how her goal of relaxation was going to be met by this paradoxical approach of mindfulness. On the contrary, Gerald appeared to embrace the paradox. He aimed to “get back to the centre I used to have” (Gerald28, Session 1) and waxed eloquent by mid-course about his having “found a path” (GeraldSC22, Session4). He appeared to have a larger life-project of spirituality. Barbara stated a similar goal in the first session, “I just want something to centre myself in my daily life” (Barbara14). Over the weekly sessions, she described her very busy professional and family life. Her goal of becoming more centred through the MBSR course apparently was not achieved: she dropped out after Session 6, explaining to the researcher that she did not “connect” with the teacher or the MBSR curriculum. In particular, she reported with
disappointment that she did not find the classes “soothing or peaceful.” Her weekly logs described a constant level of exhaustion and stress in her daily life and the questions “am I doing this right? Is this helping?” were asked several times in her weekly written reflections on mindfulness practice.

**Doing it right (self-improvement).** Several participants described the MBSR course as a part of a self-improvement life-project. The desire to be competent in their lives showed up in the way they tried to learn mindfulness. For example, in Session 2, Jackie told Ruth that she worried she wasn’t doing the homework right:

Ruth201: When it wasn’t so good, you thought it wasn’t right? Can you say a little bit about how that felt? When you thought it wasn’t the right thing.
Jackie202: I just felt like there was a lot of like pressure and like feeling guilty about it and one day I had this huge assignment to finish for a class and I was trying to eat at the same time and be mindful and transcribing – it doesn’t work. It’s too much like multi-tasking. I was aware of all the things that came up, like “I committed to this, I have a responsibility” and “I should be able to do it” or “Just do it” but then “No I don’t have time!”
Ruth203: Ok. And those mind states – see if they are familiar. Are they familiar?
Jackie204: Yeah.
Ruth205: Do you know them?
Jackie206: Yeah.
Ruth207: Next time, if you could look in the body. Look in the body-mind and see what goes on there too, in response to those mind states. Just notice. What’s going on there? But with a gentle kindness.

Jackie commented in her SC that she found this exchange was helpful in increasing her awareness of her habitual patterns:

JackieSC4: Yeah, it was really meaningful. It made me more aware of that dialogue that I have with myself and the expectations that I have. And then what happened at the end was really interesting. When Ruth asked me, Are those feelings familiar, is that familiar to you? And it’s incredibly familiar, like that’s how I go through my life, like have high expectations and commit to things and then get them done...

Lindsay’s self-improvement goals became salient as the weeks went by. She was gripped by a perfectionism and self-critical attitude that seemed to be made worse at times by “trying” to be
more self-compassionate. She was especially frustrated by not “understanding” mindfulness to her satisfaction. In session 7, when Ruth asked her how it felt not to be perfect, Lindsay turned scarlet and bowed her head in apparent shame. In her self-confrontation she explained, “I hate the fact that I can’t be perfect” (LindsaySC41). Thus Lindsay’s life-project of perfectionism was involved even in her learning of mindfulness.

**Enhancing relationships.** Although none of the participants said outright that enhancing their relationships was their goal in taking the MBSR course, all participants brought examples to the D & I from their interpersonal lives outside the class, sharing how they were or were not able to be mindful in communication with others. This was an explicit homework assignment only one week, but participants consistently tried to apply what they were learning in class to their relational world. Each participant appeared to have a life-project of maintaining or improving relationships. This is strikingly apparent in the weekly logs. Gerald pondered in his log for Week 3, “While chatting with my best friend, I was wondering if all good relationships are based on mindfulness. It seems to me that this would be true 90% of the time.” He described in detail the process and results of his intention to be mindful in conversations with his colleagues, wife, son, friends. For him, mindful communication consisted largely of mindful listening. Other participants remarked how they practiced speaking while trying to stay aware of their inner experience: “I was aware of tightness in my stomach and chest, I was trying to feel my feet and stay present in my body. By paying attention to what was going on for me, I was able to say in a calm manner that I needed to walk away for a few minutes” (Paula, weekly log 2). An exception to this was Laurie, who found herself less inclined as the weeks went on to engage in conversations at all. She became curious about the role of language and communication in mindfulness and said in her weekly log for week 7, “I’m curious as to how the
life would function without verbal interaction... I am often finding myself without words to talk to anybody, and a surfacing of emotions that I have never dealt with.” It is clear that all participants, even Laurie who seemed to be conflicted about how to be with others, were relationally motivated, and looked for ways to apply mindfulness interpersonally. Thus, the context for the mindfulness project is laid and dynamically created over time by the individual life-projects brought by participants and teacher.

**The Mindfulness Project**

The teacher and all 10 participants gathered together in order to learn mindfulness – the mindfulness project. As explained in the previous section, this joint project was not an end in itself, but was informed by wider life-projects of both teacher and participants. Somewhat paradoxically, the life-projects provided a way to learn mindfulness, that is, something to be mindful of. The students’ individual goals for learning mindfulness, which were expressed in their personal stories and examples that make up the content of the D & I, contributed to the context of the mindfulness project. As these personal stories were brought forward in the D & I, Ruth invited participants to tell a somewhat different story, what we might call a mindfulness narrative. General, opinionated thoughts, memories and stories were de-constructed into a descriptive, particularized and embodied discourse. The D & I of this MBSR class appeared not to be a simple class discussion period. Mindfulness was enacted through dialogue, specifically through the sub-ordinate joint projects of attention, language and insight.

**The sub-ordinate joint attention project (noticing with gentle kindness).** Paying attention without judgment is the basis of the mindfulness practices themselves (bodyscan, sitting meditation, walking meditation, mindful yoga). But it is not only in these formal exercises that participants learned to pay attention nonjudgmentally. In the D & I which followed these
exercises, the teacher worked with participants to help them become more aware of their inner experience of body sensations, thoughts and emotions. The key phrase which was repeated dozens of times was “just notice with gentle kindness.” Ruth invited them to report on what they noticed, helping them to access retrospectively what they may have overlooked, ignored, forgotten, or pushed away, and to do so with friendly curiosity. The repetitive phrase “with gentle kindness” was picked up and used often by students themselves, and they commented on its salience in their self-confrontation interviews. For example, at the end of the course, Jackie says in her final SC interview that “gentle kindness” are “a couple of key words that I’ve really remembered from [what] Ruth has said” (Jackie SC 12, Session 9).

Betty commented in her post-class questionnaire in session 9, “Noticing the details of my experience makes my life more real.” This project most specifically and repetitively involved noticing cognitions, body sensations and emotions without judgment. It also involved, as the course proceeded, noticing the habits of their mind, the impermanence of their experience, and the embodied nature of experience, and so was connected to the insight project as participants came to an embodied and experiential understanding of how they construct their experiences. The attention project was also inextricably interwoven with the language project since it was through describing their experience, in the D & I component, that the participants noticed and accessed their experience. It should come as no surprise that “attention” was one of the subordinate projects, occurring at the functional level, of learning mindfulness: paying attention has been seen as an essential part of the construct of mindfulness in several models (e.g. Baer, 2004, Lau et al., 2006, Linehan, 1993). In this sense, it might be said that the attention project is somewhat of a found construct. What is of interest is how an apparently private and individual cognitive capacity such as attention is enacted as a joint action.
**Noticing what was unnoticed.** The first extended D & I of Session 1 was focused on the perceived difficulty of the bodyscan, with participants reporting their difficulties with the apparent hope that Ruth will tell them how to make it easier next time. Ruth met each participant’s description of their body sensations, thoughts and feelings with curiosity and non-judgment, using the language elements of repeating, paraphrasing, asking for clarification, and suggesting:

Barbara206: My attention got stuck in my chest.
Ruth207: In your chest?
Barbara208: And I couldn’t get out of that. And then I also felt my mind started racing.
Ruth209: Ok. And did you notice where your mind was going to?
Barbara210: Everywhere.
Ruth211: Everywhere? Every which way?
Barbara212: Everywhere. It was speeding.
Ruth213: Ok. . . What we’re trying to do is notice where it goes. Just notice where it goes. It doesn’t matter where; it could go anywhere, just notice.

Ruth initiated the nonjudgmental attention project with “just notice …it doesn’t matter where.”

In her SC, we learn how intentional her response is:

RuthSC1: Um I’m conscious of trying to make sure that I am able to explore their experience fully without judging … . It’s really important to allow people to explore and so I was consciously trying to be present with her experience and trying to draw it out …

In this first interaction with Ruth, Barbara seemed most concerned simply about expressing herself (linking to the language project), but this is an example of how, in the midst of the intention to put experience into language, participants noticed what was previously unnoticed – the attention project. Barbara was surprised to realize that she did not know what, or more specifically, “where” her thoughts were.

BarbaraSC1 Um. I thought her exchange was helpful because um I was telling her that my mind was racing and she was asking me, “where were you going?” and I had to think about that and realize I had no idea, it was just all over the place. So her telling me to try and think of where it is, where my mind was going, was helpful to me.
Together, their joint goal was to help Barbara notice her experience without judgment, and to articulate it.

An individual participant goal that became apparent in this initial class was looking for outcomes, to feel better as a result of mindfulness practice. Maria reported that after the bodyscan, her body tension dissolved (Maria220) and Lindsay noted that the bodyscan “had a lot of benefits” (Lindsay218):

Lindsay218: For me, I started today with a pretty bad headache so it was really hard for me to concentrate because all I could feel was the pounding in my head but as we went through, I started noticing that that was becoming less and less and less so by the time we actually got to the head, I could still feel the tension of the headache, but it’s not anywhere like it was when we started so even though I couldn’t completely follow that, it had a lot of benefits (laughs).
Ruth219: Ok, ok. So you noticed some relief.... Anyone notice tension in the body that they were not aware of?

Ruth simply reflected these “positive outcome” observations back to them without evaluation and directed them to what they may be overlooking (for example, tension). In her SC, she noted that “it’s better to try and draw things out with gentle curiosity” (RuthSC2). She also noted that in this segment she was trying to stay present: “I was trying to be in my breath and my body and in touch with my feet and in the body, present” (RuthSC4). So while the joint goal was to explore the participants’ experience of the bodyscan mindfully, there were somewhat opposing individual goals; the students were drawn to looking for positive outcomes, while Ruth attempted to stay present with whatever they describe, with curiosity and nonjudgment, and to invite them to include what is unpleasant, what they would prefer not to notice.

In session 5, Gerald described his feelings of “expansiveness” during the sitting meditation:

Gerald138: Everything was expanding.
Ruth139: Uuhu
Gerald: And yet the breath was smaller . . . I heard somebody walking on the sidewalk. As well as some car going by. And the rain. And then the elevator click. So I could hear more
Ruth: Uhuh
Gerald: but it didn’t bother me. But it was like the breath was very small and easy. The thoughts were still tumbling. They would sort of tumble and I’d just let it go.
Ruth: Uhuh, uhuh. So would you say it was an expansiveness?
Gerald: Yeah. Feeling kind of ... noticing more.
Ruth: Spaciousness?
Gerald: Yeah.

Gail did not know what to make of this. In her SC, she wondered at the difference between her experience and what Gerald was describing:

Gail: I was thinking because he was saying that he was listening to the car driving, the people walking, and I thought, “oh my god, I didn’t hear any of this”. I didn’t hear any of it, I was so tuned out, and my brain was turned off so how could he hear this, and I was surprised actually with myself. Like, was I so much in trance or?
RA: Uhuh, surprised that you didn’t hear ... and that another person had a different experience
GailSC: Yeah. So I felt, I don’t know, it wasn’t irritation. I felt kind of different with myself, like what, not disappointed, I don’t know how to describe the feeling. Like, “how come I didn’t hear that?”

In this minute, Ruth was helping Gerald recall what he noticed and to label the quality of his ineffable experience. Gail’s goal was to evaluate herself by comparing to others, probably to see if she was doing it right. It is also an example of the jointness of the attention project even outside the immediate teacher-participant dyad. By comparing her experience with what Gerald reports – “how come I didn’t hear that?” -- Gail noticed what was unnoticed.

In session 6, Ruth entered into dialogue with Barbara who shared her experience of being able to manage her performance anxiety through breathing and acceptance.

Ruth: So you made some space (nodding) around it?
Barbara: Yeah
Ruth: That’s neat. And how did you do that?
Barbara: Just breathing. Being aware that this wasn’t the end of the world. There were different options to look at, to try to get it going
Ruth: Uhuh, uhuh (nodding)
Barbara89: And if not, it was still a piece that I was passionate about and I could perform without it.
Ruth90: Well, good for you. How did it feel when you were able to do that?

Ruth reported feeling satisfied, and having a “heartfelt kind of pleasure” (RuthSC5) hearing about Barbara’s “joy in finding control over her situation” (RuthSC2). With her phrases “that’s neat” and “good for you,” she departed from her more usual non-evaluative attitude, presumably caught up in the pleasure of sharing Barbara’s positive story. In an earlier SC, she commented on this kind of “lapse” in non-judgment by saying, “I’m conscious of trying to make sure that I am able to explore their experience fully without judging and without labelling it which I did there, I called it “normal” which was not appropriate” (LinSC1, Session1). In this SC, however, she focused on how intentional her interaction was in terms of helping Barbara notice how she was able to cope with an anxious situation:

RuthSC6: Yeah, I was trying to get at how she made a space around it. If she used her breath. Because I think it basically all boils down to the breath and that’s about all there is to it. It’s just taking some space and time and using breath to make distance. To put it in a nutshell. That was what I was trying to draw that out of her.
RA7: To make sure that she was aware of the steps that she took?
Ruth7: U huh. That she was aware of it and that others would um realize that this was how it was done.
RA8: Ok, that’s right.
Ruth8: It’s not just for her; it’s for the whole class.

Barbara, on the other hand, reported being less intentional. She said that at the time of experiencing and managing the anxiety, she was “not being mindful of the mindfulness” (BarbaraSC5):

RA2: ... What do you recall about what Ruth was sharing?
BarbaraSC1: Well it made me remember what happened ... Because up to that point, I hadn’t really thought about it. I hadn’t looked at it that way.

This is an interesting comment in terms of the difference between the original experience and the retrospective account in the D & I. In this case, Barbara admitted that she did not intentionally
use mindfulness for self-regulation in her anxious performance. Ruth’s goals were to help Barbara notice how she “created the gap” (e.g. how she interrupted a chain of reactive anxiety). In other words, Barbara appeared to become more mindful of the experience, more aware of what was previously unnoticed, in retrospect. The capacity for intentionality is expanded through the attention and language projects. Jointly, they explored her experience and taught the class through Barbara’s example.

**Noticing thoughts and stories.** In the D & I of the first session participants shared their experiences with the bodyscan, which were largely “difficulties,” for example, feeling distracted by noise, or the room temperature. Ruth asked if anyone had made up any stories about the environmental noise which occurred during the bodyscan meditation:

Maria294: Yup.
Ruth295: What was your story? Would you share with us?
Maria296: Yeah, I was just kind of wondering who they were and what they were doing here and are they studying or are they the janitor, or are they robbing the place?
Evryone297: Laughter
Ruth298: Ok. Ok. So the story that comes up. So that’s another thing I’d ask you to notice, is this commentary of the mind. The mind commentary. Is it a story about something? What is it going on about?

While they were exploring their experience of the bodyscan, Ruth had a goal of teaching inclusion of present moment experience and helping the participants pay attention to their automatic mind commentary. She did this by making use of what is happening in the class situation, in this case, hallway noise. In her SC, Maria noted,

MariaSC1: ... So it was interesting to have somebody ... to kind of hear what you’re saying and be able to form some kind of, not an opinion, but just you know “notice it” instead of offering any sort of advice or changing it ...

She went on,

MariaSC6: ... And then I was at first embarrassed about relating my story because I felt kind of bad about like I was not focused, I was totally listening to the people and I was reminded of the story about breaking into the place. I did this whole kind of story going
on. When she said, “Ok notice this story, and sort of think about that internally”, it made a lot of sense, it made me feel a lot less guilty about being unfocused.

Then Ruth moved on to speak with Lindsay:

Ruth310: . . . So if you can, get in touch with both the sensation and the story. But with ... I want to say it again, with a gentle kindness. Just a gentle kindness. Kind of like an impartial observer, just simply notice, there’s not right, there’s not wrong, just notice. Just a bare awareness.

Even as Maria listened silently to Ruth and Lindsay, she was actively receiving Ruth’s instructions and also relating to what others were sharing. Maria noted in her SC,

MariaSC12: Um, it feels different because it’s not directly to me but the teacher has a way of actually making everything seem that it’s to everyone. So that kind of input is great, like introspectively thinking about ok, you know, “notice everything” um yeah. Listening to the other people talking and again trying to relate that back to my experience, making it more helpful.

Separating thoughts and feeling states. In session 3, they turned to a theme in the MBSR curriculum of “pleasant experiences.” By reporting on their homework exercise, which was to notice pleasant experiences and fill out a log noting body sensations, thoughts and emotions, the students engaged in a joint exploration with Ruth of what a “pleasant” experience meant to them, or in other words, how “pleasant” is constructed experientially. Ruth repeatedly asked them to de-construct “pleasant” into underlying thoughts (beliefs), emotions, and body sensations. While doing this, students often became aware of what they were NOT aware of at the time; in other words, the experience of “mindfulness” was sometimes constructed in contrast to the more familiar “mindlessness.” Participants reported various experiences including finding it difficult to notice body sensations attached to pleasant experiences. For example, Betty commented, “The question of “how were you feeling in your body at that moment?” was very difficult for me. It’s more in my head than in my body” (Betty 102). Ruth’s attention turned to Tasha’s comment:

Tasha166: I had one thought, um, my feelings were kind of the same, the sort of pleasantness, but I sort of wondered, is that what we’re supposed ... is that sort of our
natural state we’re supposed to be, that sort of peaceful state … but then all these other negative thoughts crowd in and get you away from the peacefulness. It’s sort of like the absence of the negativity you’re left with the peacefulness?

Ruth167: uhuh
Tasha168: (Pause). I don’t know, I just wondered.
Ruth169: What do you think?
Tasha170: Um, um, it could be. Could be.
Ruth171: (nods) U huh. Check and see for yourself what it is. What prevents those pleasant feelings from being there more often.

The joint goal between Ruth and Tasha was to help Tasha explore her experience, particularly to notice how pleasant feelings may be interrupted by negative thoughts. Ruth said in her self-confrontation that she was wondering how to re-direct her:

RuthSC7: I was thinking that was a lovely thought, a lovely description. But I’m also aware that she’s sort of asking me for some kind of answer, some kind of spiritual teaching. And I don’t want to give that. It’s not my role. So I’m thinking of how to give that back to her.

One emotion steering this exchange was enjoyment. They began smiling and laughing, and Ruth reported, “I am enjoying her description. It’s such a human tendency she’s talking about” (SC11). Another emotion was curiosity. Tasha used the phrase “I wondered” twice. Meanwhile, what was happening in the group mind? We have SC for Gerald, whose goal for this minute as he silently listened to Tasha was to “track” her feelings:

GeraldSC7: “[I am feeling] curiosity. Really curious about more than what she's saying, kind of wanting to know, thinking about deeper than what she's saying, watching her body language, watching the way that she was there herself.”

At this moment, he appeared not to be following content as much as the nonverbal process. We note that he was engaged in the attention project, this time directing his attention to another participant. Later in his SC, Gerald noted his enjoyment of the spaciousness of the interaction in D & I, and how this supported his ability to pay attention:

Gerald20-22: Yeah, yeah, it's, what I'm finding in the course and what, one of the things I like about Ruth is that she creates enough space for me to kind of not only hear what she's saying but give me enough processing time to actually catch up with myself.
Because although I'm a very fast thinker, my feelings are sometimes slower than my thoughts, but she gives me enough time to notice both. So I get to notice both mental process and feelings.

Gerald’s description underlines the fact that the D & I is a process of noticing – as he said, he “gets to notice both mental process and feelings” during his interactions with Ruth.

**Noticing the body.** In session 1, Paula interacted with Ruth to get reassurance and relief from the guilt that she has for taking time out from her busy schedule:

Paula224: I couldn’t get over the guilt that I was taking time out
Ruth225: ah!
Paula226: Taking all this time to do it, like I should be doing something else
Ruth227: Ok... So that will be something interesting for you to look at. Yeah. Did you notice what that felt like in the body? Where guilt was?
Paula230: Mmm. Just thoughts.
Ruth231: Thoughts?
Paula232: Yeah, just thoughts.
Ruth233: See if you can notice where in your body that was. Because there’s a feeling that goes with that. (smiling, nodding).

While their joint goal was to explore the emotional and physical experience of the bodyscan, here again, we can see competing individual goals: Paula expecting reassurance or relief from the guilt and Ruth directing Paula’s attention to the body sensation underlying the feeling of guilt. Ruth spoke at length in her SC about this moment, saying that she was noticing Paula’s “rigidly structured formatting”:

RuthSC6: ... I was thinking that just from what she was saying, how hard she probably was on herself. And I was thinking, I hope she’s able to discover this for herself, I hope she’s able to find it and I hope that it will come through her self-discovery ... [I had] a feeling of how hard and sad it is that we’re so hard on ourselves ...

As Ruth and Paula worked jointly to access Paula’s inner experience – her thoughts and her unnoticed body sensations – Ruth’s action was steered by a compassionate curiosity which is the attitude that she is inviting Paula to have towards herself.
The joint attention project was enacted by Jackie and Ruth with particular emphasis on Jackie’s awareness of body sensations. This appeared to involve nonverbal implicit processes as well as verbal. She and Ruth developed a nonverbal rapport which had a somewhat different nuance than in the other dyads. There was significant eye contact, smiling and nodding between them during the exchanges and from the observers’ point of view, a harmonious rapport. Jackie had difficulty at first following the directions for tracking body sensations and labelling them. In two sessions in particular, her dialogue with Ruth involved Ruth cueing Jackie with questions about body sensation, Jackie reporting, Ruth affirming, validating, mirroring, asking follow-up questions in a nonjudgmental manner and Jackie reporting further. Jackie eventually reported a feeling of excitement and insight when she became more able to access and label body sensations such as heartbeat, breathing, and tenseness. In session 3, Jackie explained to Ruth that it had been difficult to notice and describe how “pleasant” feels like in her body:

    Jackie239: Um, yeah, I think it was easy to pinpoint the pleasant moments, but I think it was difficult to really say where I was feeling it in my body. And I’ve noticed that before, even before this class, when people ask me questions related to my body like what does it feel like, I have no idea.

Ruth responded by directing her to body sensations:

    Ruth240: Uuhh. Ok. Can you try to go in there and just check and see? (audibly breathes). If you use the breath, it is often helpful to bring you into the body. Take a minute taking a breath in, and coming into your body just for a second, and just feeling you know, your heartbeat, what’s going on with your heartbeat, or any kind of tightness in the body ... Just keep looking, keep looking. It’s often fairly elusive. And it’s often not that significant really. It’s just a very tiny shift, just tiny, but just a tiny shift that will, once you notice it, it’s huge. But it’s just that we often just discount it because it’s not so huge.

Their joint goal was to explore Jackie’s awareness of body sensations such as breathing, heartbeat, and muscle tension associated with “pleasant”. Ruth explained in her SC that she is
aware of Jackie’s difficulty, and she wondered if Jackie is looking for a more “dramatic” sense of her body:

RuthSC26: I was noticing how difficult this is for her. She hasn’t spoken tonight. I wonder if she is able to access her body sensations much and I wonder if she is frustrated. She’s young, and maybe she’s looking for something more dramatic. I get the sense that she is used to feeling things more dramatically and looking for something more dramatic. Maybe it’s hard for her to feel the small stuff. You know, a lot of what we talk about is pretty boring!

Jackie confirmed this frustration in her SC:

JackieSC15: I was almost a little bit frustrated because I don’t know how to describe things with my body in regards to those exercises. And even in the workbook, I left half the questions about the body blank with a question mark because honestly didn’t know. And then it was really interesting I thought like as soon as Ruth started talking about you know, your heart beating and say like your breathing and simple things like that and ... if someone tells me what to focus on, I feel like I can focus on it.

In this minute Ruth turned her attention to the whole group, and invited them to pay attention to small sensory details of their experience:

Ruth 242: ... Anyone notice that, that pleasant was just little? (some murmurs of assent). Just really little. You know, when I go to pet my cat, sometimes I can just feel my heart open, and I can just feel the warmth come, and when I do that, even just for a second, just to appreciate her for a second. Just a very gentle shift, just gentle, just feel your heart open. It’s like that. Just feel this kind of shift. Not huge. But it is a huge feeling really when you pay attention to it, it’s a lovely feeling just to see an animal, or see a child.

Jackie commented in her SC how helpful Ruth’s instruction was:

JackieSC32: At the beginning when she was talking about how it’s very gentle feelings and I was thinking about that with my mind and I just thought well that makes sense they can be really specific full on signals in your body but it could be something as simple as what she was describing and I think that’s really good to know because sometimes I feel like it has to be this like really big intense feeling. But it sounds like there’s just little things I could start paying attention to um that are still reactions in terms of your body. Um so I thought that was really good to hear that, that’s it’s just the little things sometimes. And then as Ruth was describing um petting her cat, and what that felt like, and it took her some time to describe that, and I thought about um our family dog, our parent’s dog and just kind of like picturing him and petting him as well and kind of what that feels like um so that was definitely something I could relate to.
She seemed to understand conceptually Ruth’s point that “it’s just the little things sometimes” and then even vicariously experienced, through Ruth’s description, the sensory pleasure of petting her dog. Then Ruth moved into leading a brief heart-focused meditation:

Ruth244: Yeah (nods, smiles). Actually, so, let’s just do that a second, let’s just try an exercise. And I’m going to get you to uncross your legs and take a deep breath and sink down into your body-mind and for a second feel your heart beat, feel your heart in your chest. Keeping the breath deep and slow and even. In your mind’s eye bringing awareness to a person or a pet that you love unconditionally, no strings attached, you just love this person or pet unconditionally. In your mind’s eye, just see their eyes and allow that feeling to grow in your body (pause). And then just open your eyes. Anyone feel anything?
Betty245: I noticed myself smiling (laughs).
Ruth246: Smiling?
Betty247: Yeah.
Karen249: I feel a warmth
Ruth250: A warmth
Karen251: Yeah, like building ...
Ruth252: Like your heart is almost ... opening? Yeah? So a warmth
Lindsay253: I started to feel teary.
Ruth254: Teary? Yeah?
Paula255: Shivers in the body.
Ruth256: Yeah. Ok.
Betty257: A fullness.
Ruth258: Did you feel anything, Jackie?
Jackie259: Smiling
Ruth260: Smiling, ok, so a lightness and a smiling, and opening. Ok. So that’s “pleasant”, just an opening. So all “pleasant” in our life, that tiny little feeling associated with all of the pleasant, if we notice, just attending to it, the shivers, the warmth, the heart opening, it’s all there.

In her SC, she revealed she chose this exercise intentionally to help Jackie experience positive affect and accompanying body sensations:

RuthSC28: Oh yes, I chose it really for her. Knowing that it would be helpful for everyone. But for her especially.

Jackie reported in her SC that through the heart meditation, she was able to understand conceptually and experientially the small body sensations of pleasure:
JackieSC39: I think at first I was trying to get really grounded, uncross my legs, and then just focusing on my heartbeat and so there wasn’t really much going on, I was trying to stay focused in the moment, focusing on what she was saying, and then um we talked about this just before, how then we were prompted to think of something that we love unconditionally and I thought of our dog right away and it was really easy to picture, and I remember I was just smiling ... it’s just a positive feeling good. I wasn’t distracted by anything else at all, any thoughts, automatic feeling of happiness and wanting him there... I felt pretty relaxed and feet grounded and just focus[ing] on one thing.

In Jackie’s post-class questionnaire, she commented that this interaction with Ruth was helpful in regards to her goal of learning mindfulness. She wrote, “I learn by interacting with others . . . [The interaction] grounded me since it made me focus on myself, my thoughts, my emotions and my body.” When Ruth was asked about her own feeling state during this exchange, she said that she was in a state that is neither emotional nor cognitive:

RA23: And as you’re listening to her and noticing how she is struggling, how do you feel emotionally? Any heart feelings, compassion, or?
RuthSC29: Hmm. Not exactly. When I’m teaching, it’s more ... not really cognitive, but more conceptual somehow, I’m paying careful careful attention, I’m staying present with each person and each comment, at the same time somehow deciding what the best way to respond is. But it isn’t really a decision, it just comes ... like from some other place. It’s not emotional. It’s more ... noticing, attending, wondering, staying open. There is a curriculum I am following, of course. The curriculum and content I learned in Massachusetts so I’m following that. But otherwise, responding in the moment to whatever comes up.

In the next session, Jackie arrived eager to share her breakthroughs regarding tracking her body sensations during the week. She said in her SC, “this whole body connection vs. disconnect was pretty enlightening, so I wanted to share that” (JackieSC2). Here Ruth and Jackie engaged in typical mindfulness dialogue, with Ruth guiding Jackie into a report of body sensations:

Ruth15: Ok. What kinds of things did you notice in the body?
Jackie16: (sighs) Well my heart racing and my breath like changing or being shorter or even the way that I talk, it was high-pitched...
Ruth17: Uuhh
Jackie18: All kinds of changes.
Ruth19: Hmm. Where was your breath?
Jackie in her SC explained that she found it difficult to “put words” on her experience but indicated that she was sensitive to Ruth’s nonverbals as encouragement to continue:

Jackie6: Um I think I was just really trying to explain what those physical sensations felt like ... it was still a struggle to put words on it as I started to remember things ... And I also could sort of tell that, I mean, I felt like I was kind of making sense of it, because Ruth was kind of nodding and just like even though it’s not really agreement it was like “ok, I get what you are trying to say”. So that was to me a little bit of encouragement to keep digging and to keep trying to remember and explain ...

We can see here how the attention and language projects are intertwined. Jackie reported it was “a struggle to put words on it” as she “started to remember things,” underlining the iterative and joint process of remembering, noticing, and languaging.

The attention project was quite intensely jointly constructed, as the teacher and participants work hard in the D & I to access the participants’ lived experience. There were some conflicting teacher-student goals. The attention project was led by Ruth, and participants join it because of their commitment to the larger mindfulness project. Particularly at the beginning of the course, participants were attached to their individual goals of solving the problems they brought to the class, with the hope that mindfulness meditation will make these unpleasant or difficult experience go away. They do not particularly want to pay attention to unpleasant things. In contrast, Ruth’s approach, repeated over and over, was to include everything, even the so-called problem. She repeatedly invited them to “just notice” their unwanted thoughts, emotions, or body sensations: stress, insomnia, sleepiness, mind commentary, noise, annoyance because of the noise, racing mind, tension, guilt, yawning, irritation, stories. In the first session, Ruth invited them to “notice” 48 times, and added “with gentle kindness” 12 times. Thoughts, commentaries, stories, body sensations and emotions which were ignored or pushed away were brought to remembrance with Ruth’s patient insistence.
In other words, Ruth helped the students to notice. While “on the cushion” (that is, during formal meditation), they were individually attempting to pay attention to each sensation or thought as it arose in their private inner experience. While “off the cushion,” in the D & I, Ruth encouraged and reminded and coached them to pay attention with gentle kindness to their inner experience, while simultaneously paying friendly compassionate attention herself to their every response. Not only her guidance but the dialogue, language itself, supported their growing ability to notice.

Along with learning to pay attention to their experience through the dialogue with the teacher, participants also practiced by listening with kind attention to each other’s reports on inner experiences. That is to say, participants practiced observing the contents of each other’s mind in the same way that they practiced observing their own minds. Karen reported in the post-class questionnaire for Week 2, “I noticed how much I was comparing my experience to others as they spoke, and judging myself rather than just noticing with gentle kindness.” In the self-confrontation interviews, participants reported many times that moment after moment, as they were sitting silently, they were trying to “be present” “to pay attention” “to listen” “to notice” what their classmates are reporting.

This intention to pay attention appeared to be amplified a hundred-fold by Ruth, who was aiming to attend to each participant’s report with kind, curious, nonjudgmental attention. Laurie commented in the post-class questionnaire for Week 1, “I noticed the nonjudgment of the instructor when I myself felt judgmental.” Ruth not only modelled but embodied the attention that they were invited to inculcate during formal mindfulness practice. She said in SC that she was “just noticing in a curious open way” (RuthSC5, Session3), and not only paying attention to the participant, but also to her own inner experience: “I’m just noticing this sense I have of
something not being quite authentic” (RuthSC4). So participants noticed their own body, thoughts and emotions; they noticed each other, they noticed Ruth, and they were noticed by Ruth. This “noticing” was done with an attitude of kind acceptance. As each experience was met by kindness and curiosity, we can wonder how this relational crucible of attention may have fostered individual and group mindfulness.

**The sub-ordinate joint language project (describing).** It is obvious that the D & I depends on language. It is dialogue after all. But what does the joint action of describing have to do with mindfulness? Just as participants internally notice and label their thoughts and feelings as part of their “private” mindfulness practice, so they externally noticed and labelled in dialogue with Ruth. It is through the joint action of describing the participants’ inner experience – finding words for it – that their ability to access and notice with nonjudgment was exercised and potentially enhanced. For some participants, this movement from right-brain experiencing to left-brain languaging was unpleasant, yet Ruth patiently invited them again and again to find words for their experience. In the post-class questionnaire for Week 5, Lindsay wrote that she “shared in order to become more aware.” It is important to note that language is being used not only for the purpose of communication between teacher and student, but also, as a tool for the student to notice what he or she is and is not noticing.

**Creating a new story: Shifting narratives.** There is a marked contrast between how the participants tended to speak generally, conceptually, and sometimes melodramatically, and Ruth’s specific, descriptive, body-centered, speech. She appeared curious about the ordinary sensory details of their experience and at the same time, generally maintained a neutral tone. She facilitated a different type of narrative: participants presented a general “story” and then she helped them “re-present” this in a bottom-up, body-focused narrative. That is to say, one way
Ruth achieved her goal of teaching mindfulness through dialogue was through a two-part process of first giving space for participants to speak and then leading them more deeply through questions into their embodied experience. The first part involved giving non-evaluative space for people to report their experience, which was reflected in her large number of action elements of acknowledges, repeat, and paraphrases. The second part involved a repetition of elements such as “asks for body sensation” “asks for cognition” “asks for emotion” “asks for clarification.” These two steps (presenting their story, and re-presenting it) were almost invisible as they occurred, but because Ruth repeated this dozens of times in the session, it stood out saliently in all session transcripts. Through these action elements, Ruth responded to the participants’ experience with a nonjudgmental present-moment curiosity about their thoughts, feelings and sensations. When they described their experience, she typically first mirrored it back to them in a neutral “noting” fashion, just as they learn to do eventually in their own mindful relationship with themselves. The mirroring was done with nods, eye gaze and smiles (unfortunately I was not able to always consistently transcribe these due to limitations in recording equipment), paraverbals, or simple repetition of words and phrases. With step two, the questioning (e.g. “asks for body sensation”), a kind of scaffolding communication, began, with Ruth leading the participant into verbalizing their embodied experience. A poignant example of step two was Ruth and Gerald’s joint exploration of his chronic pain:

Gerald34: Whereas I try to focus on all the things that are working but it actually stirred it up, stirred up the feeling of being really, um, old and feeling like a victim and focusing on the pain. So I got really frustrated with it. But frustrated with myself too that I couldn’t manage it. ... Because I’ve trained myself to, not to ignore it so much but to focus on other things.
Ruth35: Now it sounds like that might have been a bit of story about it, right?
Gerald36: Yeah.
Ruth37: Getting old and
Gerald38: Yeah, it was.
Ruth39: So is that the story?
Gerald 40: Um, the story’s been about, um, “is it going to get worse?”

We see Ruth taking a nonjudgmental curious approach to Gerald’s experience as she guided him to separate body sensation from emotion from cognition (story):

   Ruth 47 ... Just the sensation, just the bare sensation. What’s going on there, without the story, just the sensation of it.
   Gerald48: Um, helplessness.
   Ruth49: Ok. But isn’t that the story as well?
   Gerald50: Yeah.
   Ruth51: Ok. The actual feeling, the actual sensation in the body. What is it?
   Gerald52: (pause) Apprehension, anxiety.
   Ruth53: Ok. apprehension and anxiety, those are the emotions that are coming. Good. But that’s still not ... I’m guessing that’s still not the actual feeling. The actual feeling that stirs it up. What pushes that button?
   Gerald54: Pain.

Here Ruth drew Gerald into approaching his pain, noticing it with gentle kindness (attention project). He had stated a few minutes prior that he had dropped the homework of looking at painful experience – “nope, not going to do it” (Gerald34) but in this moment, he and Ruth jointly approached the pain:

   Ruth55: Ok. So the pain. Can ... it’s really a hard thing to ask you to do, but it really is an important thing, is to be with the pain. (Gerald sighs). Be with the pain and notice that it arises in the body. And just notice that. Notice that and it’s really good that you’re noticing the story as well. So keep a tab on that too. But see if you can separate the one from the other. Just see if you can look at the one without the story. (Gerald sighs). Just, do you notice what happens to the sensation when the story starts?
   Gerald56: Yes.
   Ruth57: What happens?
   Gerald58: It gets worse.
   Ruth59: Ok. Ok.
   Gerald60: gets worse.
   Ruth61: Ok. So when you ended up in the wheelchair
   Gerald62: laughs
   Ruth63: Where is that, where is that, in terms of past, present, and future?
   Gerald64: That’s in the future.
   Ruth65: Ok. So we’ve left the moment and we’ve gone to
   Gerald66: to the future.
   Ruth67: Gone to the future. And so it’s excellent that you’re noticing that... Pain is one of the more difficult things to work with. But if you look at it really, really closely, you
might notice that there’s um almost a wall. Is there a sensation around it like pushing it away?
Gerald68: Yup, yup.
Ruth69: Ok.
Gerald70: Yeah, and pushing up against it too.
Ruth71: Ok. Pushing up against it. Ok, and if you can soften those walls a little bit and almost open to it.

Jackie reported in her SC that she was intrigued by this exchange and was able to apply what
Ruth was teaching Gerald to her own life:

JackieSC14: . . . I found it really interesting what we started talking about and how I guess people ... somehow try to make sense of what they are going through and come up with these stories that Ruth was referring to and um like with every example he was giving, and with all the feedback that she was giving, it just made a lot of sense of what she was trying to say, it was almost a step-by-step analysis of like, “ok this is how you feel but that’s part of the story”, and then ask him another question and he’d say something else and then again she said “well that’s still part of the story” and it made me think ... I’m sure I have stories like that too. Um around certain emotions and sensations.

**Language project and paying attention.** The language project appeared to support participants in paying attention. The intertwining of the language and attention projects was demonstrated in session 2, when Maria engaged with Ruth in the joint action of describing her uncomfortable experience of the bodyscan. She struggled to find the words to do so. Their joint goal was to describe Maria’s feelings of discomfort in the bodyscan:

Maria116: It doesn’t seem to work for me, I still focus on the part that was being held.
Ruth117: Ok. What does it feel like when it feels uncomfortable?
Maria118: Um, I don’t know that it’s uncomfortable, it’s just that I feel frustrated with not being able to shift that focus until there’s a new point to shift the focus to. Does that make sense?
Ruth119: (nodding.) Uuhh. What does frustrated feel like? Can you say?
Maria120: Um, Yeah, I kind of feel like you (nodding towards another student), like a fleeting tightness, like ooooh, and then it’s over
Ruth121: (nods and smiles) Ok. Can you see if you can slow that down a little bit and just observe it intensely. And feel the feeling come up and then see what that looks like for you. Whatever it is.
Here we note that Maria not only reportedly had trouble in the bodyscan itself, with moving her attention from sensation to sensation, but again in the subsequent D & I, finding the words to describe this. In her SC, Maria reports that she was striving to describe her experience “clearly:”

MariaSC1 Um I know I was trying to be very particular about relating my experience, not the right way, I wasn’t concerned about that, but about making sure that I kind of got it all out.

At the same time, Ruth was aware of her difficulty and, through language, was trying to help her get closer to the actual feeling of discomfort by directing her to body sensation:

RuthSC4: This feeling of angst that was arising and being unable to let go of it, needing to go to another place first. So I was hoping to help her come in touch with this feeling of discomfort or whatever it was.

In fact, Maria found it difficult to find the words:

MariaSC4 ...It was frustrating when I was asked to explain frustration because I couldn’t find words to do that. It was more of a feeling but then the question was “how are you feeling” and it was “aaaaarrgh”. That was how I was going to explain frustration. So it was interesting.

What Ruth implies when she invited Maria to “slow it down a little bit and just observe it intensely” is that the difficulty in subsequently putting words on her experience may reflect a initial lack of attention during the exercise. This is one way language can act as a flag or tool in facilitating awareness, or more exactly, meta-awareness.

Language project and amplification of affect. In session 3, another aspect of the joint language project was demonstrated, that of not only describing but possibly amplifying affect.

Ruth typically drew out their reports by her action elements of acknowledges, reflects body sensation, repeats:

Tasha114: I noticed a lot of my pleasant feelings in my body just felt the same, every time except for once, the feeling was just sort of like peaceful, relaxed, light, spacious each time, each day. Except for one day, one day my son played his first song on the guitar and I just felt so, sort of full and warm and proud. And that was the only one that was a different pleasant feeling. All the others were just sort of relaxed.
Ruth115: Uhuh. So you felt full, and warm
Tasha116: Uhuh and tingly
Ruth117: Ok.
Tasha118: Yeah, Sort of bursting, that’s how I felt, I guess I was proud.
Ruth119: Ok. And the others were light
Tasha120: Yeah
Ruth121: Light, spacious you said.
Tasha122: Relaxed, warm. And um, sort of peaceful. Sort of peaceful and content.

Words describe and sometimes amplify the original experience.

*Language as support for approaching experience.* Yet another version of how the joint project of “describing” might facilitate mindfulness is as an anchor in helping participants approach rather than avoid unpleasant experience. In Session 4, after a brief meditation, Ruth asked the group how their week went, and Betty started the D & I by saying that the “unpleasant experiences” homework was difficult since she would normally “just let go” of negative feelings and felt frustrated by having to log them. Ruth gently directed Betty’s attention from evaluation to description of body sensation:

Betty4: I found that little things that I would normally just let go
Ruth5: uhuh
Betty6: the fact of having to “oh yes I have to remember that”... And then writing it gave much more focus than I would usually give it, so I found that really difficult.
Ruth7: Ok. Ok. What did you notice in your body?

This habitual avoidance of unpleasant feelings appears to be made more conscious when it is interrupted by the language project. The engagement of this project sometimes led to a transformation of affect, as is Gail’s case in Session 2:

GailSC16: ... She asks me to talk about how I felt. I talk about fear. And uh the more I was talking about it, the less I felt it. My body was more relaxed.

By not describing unpleasantness, participants are presumably trying not to notice (feel, experience) the unpleasantness. The converse – describing and simultaneously noticing through describing – appeared to have a salutary effect at least in some cases.
Language project and present-moment experience. Sometimes the language project appeared to interrupt or impede present-moment experience. Session 5 provided an interesting example of a portion of D & I between Lindsay and Ruth in which the joint projects of attention and language did not unfold as usual. Ruth entered into dialogue with Lindsay who described her experience of “sitting through” unpleasant sensations in the meditation. Ruth began in her usual fashion by using elements of “acknowledges” to give Lindsay space to describe her experience:

Lindsay88: At times, um for the most part I could stay still, but at times I really felt my body wanting to respond somehow physically, particularly I kept wanting, having the sensation that I needed to clear my throat.
Ruth89: Ok
Lindsay90: and at one point it just happened and I went oops and before I was even aware, I had done it. And so for the rest of the time, I was able to feel the sensation, I was able to say, no don’t, don’t. Let it go.
Ruth91: Ok

The inquiry deepened. Ruth became more active, using “asks for body sensation” “provides information” “states a plan,” trying to help Lindsay process her experience by focusing on the body and by explaining why it is important to do so.

Ruth95: Ok. When you could feel this feeling in your throat, did you feel it? Did you actually see it from the inside out?
Lindsay96: Um, I sort of visualized the throat, the larynx, is that the larynx? My anatomy was many years ago ... I could sort of see fluid on the back of it and that’s what I wanted to clear was that fluid I could see on the back.
Ruth97: It’s not so much that you’re not allowed to move. If you really have to, of course you can. It’s just to notice this feeling that pulls you and drags you into an automatic response.

Her goal was to help Lindsay make sense of her experience and to understand what mindfulness is and its purpose. On the other hand, Lindsay’s goal in this minute was to describe her experience as accurately as possible, in a kind of performance for the group. She used an abundance of elements (expresses curiosity, elaborates, describes body sensation, expresses
uncertainty, asks for information), and says in her SC that she was seeking to find the right words out of a “need to be perfect and correct all the time” (LindsaySC15):

LindsaySC11: Um the part where I was struggling to where I was talking about the throat I was trying to I remember at the time I was “is it called the larynx, is it not called the larynx?” and I was concerned with being correct. So I was hesitating in what I was saying because I didn’t know whether I was correct in calling it the larynx or not and then I did and kind of made that joke afterwards cause I use humour to hide my insecurities so it’s an automatic response for me and yet I know that I kind of do it because I was insecure about whether that was the correct word or not.

In the next minute, Ruth used Lindsay’s example to teach the concept of impermanence. She did this by helping Lindsay focus on the process of the body sensation arising and subsiding, through direct instruction and giving Lindsay space to share.

Lindsay108: Or you know, those types of things came up periodically as well, again, I just sort of went, “oops, there it is, don’t do it, don’t do it, don’t do it” (laughs) and then eventually it wasn’t there anymore.
Ruth109: Eventually it passed, right?
Lindsay110: Yeah.
Ruth111: It arises and falls away.
Lindsay112: Yeah.

In her SC as she watched the video of these minutes, Lindsay said she did not remember anything about her thoughts, feelings or body sensations at that time. Her goal in session appeared to be to maintain her image of being correct and perfect. It is interesting that Lindsay did not remember what was happening for her in these minutes, perhaps because she was focused on providing the description and did not really hear what Ruth was saying. The relational sequence of “notice-describe-understand” was not followed through: Lindsay seemed to fixate on describing and did not (based on her report in the SC) receive Ruth’s contingent communications, particularly those inviting her to insight (in this case, the principle of impermanence).
This exchange between Ruth and Lindsay led into an interesting comment by Laurie on language and mindfulness, as she described her frustration with the emphasis in MBSR to describe one’s experience (in this case, through homework).

Laurie: It is really interesting to try to write about this. I’ve been resisting (laughs). And even to talk about it sometimes. It’s a really strange sensation. Because even the language that we use is really cognitive and really ... I mean even if I write a feeling, like “I’m angry”, “I’m ...” Well, I’m not angry, I don’t know what angry is, I could tell you what’s kind of going on within my body or I don’t know, it’s just been interesting to try to afterwards go in and try to describe it.

She then described her frustration at a recent family reunion with all the storytelling:

Laurie: ... And all the stories, right, and just to hear all the stories that were going on like on a group level and on a group level people were playing into these things and then that desire to leave the room and you can sense that if everyone leaves the room the story’s going to continue that we’ve been telling about our family for ages and ages and ages and then to have at that moment. Is this useful? All this talking?

Of course, one of the observations in the findings of this study is the difference between reporting body sensations (concrete, sensory, present moment focused) and telling family stories (much more retrospective, global, thematic), but one might wonder if there was a covert message here from Laurie to Ruth about the role of the D & I – “Is this useful? All this talking?”

Ironically, Laurie showed a propensity for lengthy storytelling herself in class. This is the paradox of using dialogue & inquiry to learn mindfulness: participants are asked to shift from experiencing to reporting/languaging, a shift from right to left brain, which Laurie (and later, Barbara) found frustrating, and yet which appears to be part of the mindfulness project, at least as it is constituted in this particular MBSR group.

Laurie went into much more detail about her frustration with the language project, in her weekly logs. In Week 5, she wrote:

I find sometimes that even explaining it in class I get quickly into ego and playing with judgments and feelings of superiority/inferiority. I also find that the prospect of putting labels on our experiences that we call feelings is often a substitute for having the
experience itself. The most important thing about the group has been the actual experience of meditating together. The Dialogue is often related to ego. That is part of the group experience I find frustrating. I enjoy the experience of meditation but the reflecting on the meditation I find can be a distraction from the experience itself.

Then in week 8, she commented:

I believe that in explaining the events after they happen we are doing basically the same thing as when you notice yourself paying attention to your breath and at that point you are no longer paying attention to your breath.

Laurie’s reflections point to the larger philosophical question about consciousness and whether language is necessary for self-awareness, and also the role of language in mindfulness. Interestingly, this begs the question of how mindfulness is experienced and constructed relationally through language. Laurie wrote in her Week 1 log, “I’m aware that when I’m on my own, I’m much more mindful than when I am in conversation,” and in Week 6, “I’m curious as to how life would function without verbal interaction.” Although since Laurie was not a target student, we did not have SC data on her interactions, her weekly logs and questionnaires were revealing and provided disconfirming evidence as to the helpfulness of D & I for learning mindfulness. Laurie not only appeared to prefer the “private” meditation experience to the relational D & I, but did not consider the D & I to involve mindfulness per se. However, at the same time, she admitted that after a few minutes of private meditation experience, she became restless and often gave up in her at-home practice. In Week 8 log, she wrote, “During sitting meditation, I have many thoughts like ‘how long will this last?’ This is definitely mirrored in other areas of my life. I like to finish things. As much as I say I’m about process, I find it hard to stay with the process.” So in fact it appeared that Laurie was struggling with the larger mindfulness project, not simply the language project, and both the intrapsychic and interpersonal (joint) aspects of these projects. The high level of self-reflection in Laurie’s logs
indicated that she was grappling with the meanings of mindfulness, including the role of language, for her own life.

**Using language to re-present a day of joint mindful silence.** Session 8 was a 7-hour silent “all-day” meditation retreat, with about an hour at the end of the day of D & I. This particular D & I was qualitatively different than the ones in previous sessions. It followed 6 hours of silent mindful experience and the group appeared more quiet and meditative than usual when Ruth opened up the dialogue by asking, “How is everybody?” The hour of D & I in this session involved the attention and language projects without as much time spent on insight. In the first 30 minutes of D & I, Ruth and the participants jointly created a re-presentation of their experience through simple description of sensory details. There were several features of the discourse itself that were observable to the researcher and RA while watching the videotape later: a hushed tone, more pauses, and a slower tempo of speaking. Some participants referred to these features in their SCs. On a linguistic level, Ruth’s responses, particularly at the beginning, were short, simple, and repetitive, and from the researcher’s perspective, some of the use of language by both teacher and students was poetic in nature.

Ruth’s responses to participants in this D & I involved a lot of mirroring and acknowledging. She did this by repeating words and phrases in a strikingly repetitive way:

Ruth8: How was it being quiet all day?  
Maria9: It was easier than I thought it would be.  
Ruth10: Was it easier?  
Maria11: Yeah. I built it up to be scarier than it was. Actually it wasn’t so bad.  
Ruth12: Yeah, ok. It wasn’t so bad?  
Karen13: I had a hard time on my walk. I always look at people when I pass them and say hi. It was a struggle to not do that today. I felt quite rude.  
Ruth14: Did you?  
Karen15: Yeah.  
Ruth16: Yeah. Ok.
She also engaged in simple questions about mundane aspects of the day, for example, their lunch:

Ruth26: Did you find out anything interesting about your food?
Karen27: Lots of different flavours.
Jackie28: My sandwich was frozen.
Evryone29: laughter
Ruth30: Oh dear.
Jackie31: I was like, “Ok”. It just meant I had more time to eat.
Betty32: I noticed my lunch was noisy
Evryone33: laughter
Betty34: Noisy?
Betty35: I had lots of crunchy things. In the silence, it was really odd
Evryone36: laughter.
Ruth37: What did you have?
Betty38: Carrots and cucumber and a snack bar. All noisy.

This initial interaction set the tone for the next 30 minutes. There was a sense of wonder over mundane things, beginning with describing their lunch. Ruth asked simple questions about what they noticed, and responded with apparent curiosity, interest and sometimes excitement. Her goal was to help the participants describe their lunch experience mindfully. The group worked together at reconstructing their lunch experience through the five senses. Then Ruth’s goal shifted to invite participants to reflect mindfully on their experience of the walk. She started an exchange with Lindsay with the question “What did you find out there?” Lindsay responded with a description of watching baseball, focusing on the sense of sound:

Lindsay50: Um, well I went to the little park over behind the golf course and there were people playing baseball and I love baseball and so even though I was just standing watching the game, just hearing the bat, hearing the ball in the glove, those are all sounds that have pleasurable moments for me, so, just hearing the sounds and as I walked around the park and got closer to the diamond where they were playing, it just got louder and louder.

Their joint goal was to recreate Lindsay’s experience in the golf course. However, in her SC, Lindsay recalled that as she interacted with Ruth and described her experience, she began to feel strong emotions of nostalgia. She reported that in the baseball park experience itself, she was in a
detached observer perspective, but when recalling it in the D & I, and telling a story about it, feelings of passion, envy and nostalgia come up:

LindsaySC7 ... I felt the passion more when I was talking about it. It was stronger when I was talking about it. Because when I was watching them or listening to the sound, I was trying to stay somewhat detached but at the same time it was interesting that that was what my ear kept hearing. Didn’t hear the birds, it was hearing the baseball. Then when I was talking about it, it was like yeah, that’s when I really felt the passion just sort of start to come up through me. Like, where did that go? Those sounds were just so fantastic ... I think when I was out there and I saw them, I registered that I saw them, but I didn’t actually connect to any feeling when I saw them. It was just like I saw them, they were playing baseball, isn’t that great. The stronger feeling came when I was talking about it.

This poses interesting questions about the differences between the mindfulness experienced during the immediate experience compared to that experienced during dialogue. It also raises a question about whether some participants are able to engage in the jointness of the D & I more than others. At least in this instance, it seemed that Lindsay was not very present with Ruth, but mostly attending to her own inner experience and her memory of the ballgame.

A simple exchange ensued among participants and Ruth. Her goal was to invite participants to reflect mindfully on their walk, and she achieved this by being curious about the mundane details of the walk:

Karen52: Lots of birds, I could really hear the birds, especially when I got off [the main street]. It was beautiful.
Tasha53: It was really peaceful. The trees and everything was there and just growing.
Ruth54: Everything was there, just growing by itself.
Tasha55: Yeah, the world was just carrying on no matter what we were doing.
Gail56: I saw two ducks.
Ruth57: Two ducks!
Gail58: So beautiful. I never realized how beautiful ... one was so bright and colourful, with a beautiful green silver head, I guess that was the male. Female was not as bright. I was watching them; I sat down and watched them.
Ruth expressed keen interest – “two ducks!” she exclaimed in response to Gail’s sharing. Lindsay seemed to enjoy this moment even as she sat silently. She observed, with humour, in her SC, that she had also seen two ducks:

LindsaySC11  [I was] sort of wondering, “Oh are those the two same ducks that I saw?” So I guess you would call that a curiosity as to whether there was that shared experience even though I didn’t see her at all. Were those ducks still sitting in the same spot? (laughs)

The “observing self” appeared to have been engaged both in their original experiences and in their re-tellings. Lindsay delighted in watching the ball game, Gail in watching the ducks. Tasha observed “the trees and everything was there and just growing,” and Ruth paraphrased, “Everything was there, just growing by itself.” Gail continued, using language in a poetic way: “[The tree] was huge, I closed my eyes, the breeze on my face, I heard birds. I felt like I was a child” (Gail62). Ruth responded simply with acknowledging, first giving Gail space to recall and recreate the park experience. She then commented, “That’s neat. That’s how children are all the time. They’re that present. It’s play. And we stop playing as we get older” (Ruth65). As Lindsay listened, she resonated with Gail’s description of the park, saying in her SC, “And so it was like a “yes” kind of sigh, in full agreement with her so there was that emotional attachment to the city, and the fact that ‘aren’t we fortunate that we live in this place’, that kind of a feeling” (LindsaySC15). She goes on to say that Ruth’s reference to childlike play also was of interest to her, since she recognized it as an important current life project: “Yup. When the concept of play was being discussed, in my mind, I was running another story in my head, because that’s a topic, play, is a topic that I’ve been trying to um incorporate that into my life as an adult, and I’ve been struggling to do it.” (LindsaySC18). Karen shared her wonder at a magnolia tree:

15 Probably coincidentally, Tasha’s description and Linda’s paraphrase are reminiscent of the famous Zen poem: *Sitting silently, Doing nothing, The spring comes, And the grass grows by itself.*
16 By poetic is meant such stylistic features as short phrases, repetition, references to nature, iambic rhythm, all presumably unconscious on the part of this speaker.
Karen: There was one tree I went by, it was a magnolia tree, the flowers on it were just about as big as my head. I just stopped and stared at it. It drew me in, it was so beautiful. Bright pink. That was a surprise.

Karen: That big, yeah. Like I love those trees, always admired them, but this one –

In the space of a few minutes, adjectives with positive valence such as “lovely, beautiful, peaceful, colorful, love, admired” were used, resulting in what appeared to be a joyful celebration, through shared description, of the beauty of nature. Then the group shifted to a celebration of the most unexpected observation, the vibration of Karen’s eardrums:

Ruth: ... How was the listening meditation?
Karen: It felt weird.
Ruth: weird?
Karen: I don’t know if it was the air conditioning or something but I actually felt my eardrums vibrate.
Ruth: Aaah!
Karen: It was the weirdest sensation.
Ruth: You could feel your eardrums vibrate
Karen: Yeah!
Ruth: And your eardrums are vibrating all the time.
Karen: And I’ve never been aware of it.
Ruth: Isn’t it something?
Karen: Yeah.
Ruth: I always find that with the raisin exercise. I can actually feel the raisin when I swallow it and it seems like a huge thing. Same with the eardrums, they are always vibrating. So neat!

Here we see Ruth listening actively and even going so far as to gently celebrate Karen’s description, with the elements of “expresses curiosity” and “expresses joy” (“aaah”, “isn’t it something?”, “so neat”). In her SC, she waxed even more celebratory of the “miracle” of the eardrums, as she said, a “tiny moment” but “a huge, huge thing”:

RuthSC: Just how neat it is that these things happen all day long for all of us and we never notice the subtle nuances of what’s going on.
RA29: So you thought that was neat.
RuthSC: Yeah, that she was able to find that. Yeah, there’s a few moments that when you’re mindfully present that you just never forget. Just these tiny moments. They are so miraculous and they are few and far between that you have such a vivid recollection of
your discovery of what is happening. I thought it was lovely that she was able to feel her eardrums vibrating. It’s a huge huge thing.

In Maria’s SC, she says that she was “just listening, interested in Karen’s story about her eardrums and how they were vibrating, just intently listening, not focused on anything else. Just present” (MariaSC1). She also noticed how quiet the group is:

MariaSC36 It seemed everyone was sort of in the same boat as me, nobody was being all that talkative . . . A different level today, just a lot mellower.

Maria also commented on the shift from silence to speech. She noted that speaking was more of a cognitive or “intellectual” process, and that putting words on her experience was challenging:

MariaSC39 ... It was definitely a lot more intellectual when we were coming back to speech, and during the silence I found it to be more emotional and introspective. So it was an interesting gear shift to do the circle at the end . . . I feel that I had to pull the focus away from that in order to outwardly express. So the silence was definitely more conducive to looking inside. And then having to switch gears and put something out there was definitely a different feeling.

In the cycle of these overlapping joint projects – noticing, describing, and understanding – the language project, “switching gears and putting something out there,” appeared a key part of the learning of mindfulness in the D & I.

The sub-ordinate joint insight project (understanding). There are many examples in this MBSR group of teacher and participants seeking understanding, and experiencing small and profound realizations. Some of these were self-understandings, related to participants’ unique histories; others were more universal observations of the nature of the thinking mind, for example. While these insights were at one level experienced individually, on another level they were jointly constructed, as Ruth pointed out, “It’s not just me working with [each participant], it’s everyone working with everyone else” (Session 4, RuthSC122). Indeed one of these insights, the concept of Buddhist anatta, translated as no-self or interconnectedness, was experienced and
commented on in various ways by participants as the course evolved. The joint project of insight appeared to be an important functional step of the mindfulness project.

**Understanding what mindfulness is.** One aspect of the insight project as it operated as a functional step to achieve the super-ordinate goal of learning mindfulness, was to begin to understand what mindfulness is. This was not as straightforward as one might think. Ruth gave a fair bit of conceptual explanation in the first session, directly referring to Kabat-Zinn’s definition of mindfulness as “paying attention on purpose in the present moment without judgment.” However, a more complete conceptual and embodied understanding of mindfulness unfolded and was co-constructed across the two month course, through the mindfulness exercises themselves, through engaging in D & I about their experiences, and through observation of and comparison to other’s reported experiences.

An exchange between Paula and Ruth in Session 2 demonstrated the common misunderstanding of what mindfulness is, and the moment of understanding it in context of one’s lived experience. Paula was complaining how hard it was to be mindful when she was physically uncomfortable, and Ruth pointed out that paradoxically this is in itself mindfulness:

Paula124: . . . at home I can’t find a comfortable space, on my side, on my back, so really not finding a place that’s comfortable and I’m curious about what that’s about then um, it’s hard to be mindful.
Ruth125: (Nodding) But the very fact that you’re noticing that is being mindful.

Paula appeared not to have heard or understood despite Ruth’s goal of “providing Paula the right cues for her to find insight” (RuthSC18), as she carried on in a self-critical fashion to describe her mind wandering. Ruth in her SC revealed that she is noticing Paula’s self-judgment:

RuthSC14: I still have a sense that Paula is very hard on herself and um just a very strong sense that she’s very punitive with herself and so I was kind of wanting to reach out and somehow help her gain insight which you can’t do, you have to allow people to come to their own place with it.
Their joint goal was to explore her experience of the bodyscan, but Ruth had the more specific intention to help Paula come to a deeper self-insight:

RuthSC31-33: And I was thinking when she was describing her state of complete discomfort that if she could come to the realization, and I’m guessing, is that that’s how she feels a lot of the time is complete discomfort, I was trying to cue her to come that realization for herself, to see if she’s familiar with that state of discomfort.

They continued to explore her experience. Ruth’s goal was to help Paula find out if her mental state is familiar, in order to bring insight, and she did this by guiding Paula in identifying her thinking process. Paula wanted feedback from Ruth about whether she was “doing it right” and she achieved this goal by describing her cognitive experience of the bodyscan which involved her mind wandering:

Paula126: I drift away from the bodyscan with those thoughts and they take me somewhere else and I try to come back and I’m like “wait a minute! I thought we were on my knee!” Really paying attention to how fast my mind can lift away from what I’m actually doing
Ruth127: (nods) But that’s the nature of mind again, Thinking mind. That’s what it’s groomed to do. That’s what you’re doing in school, right, is thinking, using it to ....So you said some important things and I want to just follow up on a little bit. You were saying that at home you have this general state of discomfort?
Paula128: (Sigh). I’m on the floor and I notice that I’m more comfortable when I’m on my side than when I’m on my back.

In the subsequent minute, Paula had an important realization about mindfulness. The joint goal was to explore what mindfulness is, with Ruth trying to reinforce that noticing discomfort is part of the practice of mindfulness. When Ruth finally said, “Remember how we said last week that the purpose of this is not to relax ... it’s to notice feeling states that come up in your everyday life” (Ruth135), Paula was surprised. In her SC, Ruth commented that Paula was revealing a common misperception about mindfulness, that it “is some kind of tranquil state where you’re completely removed from all of your troubles” (RuthSC71), whereas it is really about “be gentle with oneself ... just notice whatever is” (RuthSC73). She added that as she saw
something seem to click for Paula, she felt happy: “I feel just open. My heart just feels really warm. It feels like a really warm-hearted openness” (RuthSC62).

This understanding of mindfulness – that it is about noticing, not about fixing – may be either conceptually difficult or emotionally unpalatable judging by the length of time it takes participants to embrace it. In Session 3, participants continued to struggle with it. Lindsay reported to the class on her confusion about what mindfulness really is, and her frustration about trying to do it right:

Lindsay388: . . . But throughout the week I had a number of very challenging things happen to me and I was trying to figure out how to use mindfulness while these challenging things were going on and I was actually getting very frustrated and agitated, because I thought, “well darn it I’m taking this class, why can’t I figure how to do it, and what is it, and when do you use it, and how does it look, and if I’m being mindful does that mean that I’m not feeling angry” All of those types of things. So I was really quite agitated through most of the week, trying to figure out what exactly this was and what it looks like and how I practice it”

Ruth explored this with Lindsay, inviting her to simply notice her experience:

Ruth396: And so, what you were really doing was the practice of mindfulness. Lindsay397: By allowing myself to feel agitated and frustrated and all of that? Yeah. Ok. Ruth398: What did you notice in your body when you were agitated? Lindsay399: Um . . . there was definitely some anxiety and worry that showed up as tightness in my stomach.

Here we can see that understanding the meaning of mindfulness being negotiated as a joint goal, which becomes a joint project over the 2-month period of the class. Lindsay approached mindfulness in an instrumental way, trying to figure out “how to do it” in order to get rid of unpleasant feelings:

Lindsay415: . . . I don’t really know what to do with it [feeling of agitation] yet, how to apply mindfulness to it, because before whenever I would feel it, I would just try to push it away and ignore it. Ruth416: Ok Lindsay417: So now I’m trying to figure out how to live with it, deal with it, work with it.
Ruth418: And so what we are going to practice is just looking at it, just looking at it, just allowing it to be and noticing. That’s the first step for anything, is noticing. And then we will try a few techniques to work with it. But mostly using the breath. And just noticing. That’s pretty much all there is to it. The whole thing is noticing, bringing awareness to our experience, with a gentle kindness. The gentle kindness is always tough.

In Lindsay’s post-class questionnaire, she commented on finding this interaction with Ruth helpful: “Her response did help me understand that even though I was frustrated, being aware of it was part of being mindful.”

By Session 8, some participants reported a growing ability to sit still and “let the thoughts come and go.” Betty said, “It’s actually just this week that I’m finally getting the gently letting the thoughts come and go. I used to notice them and think, ‘oh no! I’m off track.’ That kind of reaction, and now it’s just ‘oh! a thought.’ I’m finally just now getting that” (Betty78). She went on to describe this realization as “a relief” (Betty80). With Ruth’s response, “That’s neat!” she celebrated Betty’s awareness. Gail listened silently, and in her SC, expressed some envy of Betty’s realization:

GailSC1 I remember when Betty was talking about being gentle with herself, about her thoughts, that when she had to actually bring herself back to the moment, she was getting more and more gentle with herself, she was practicing being gentle. I was thinking about my experience. I’m still not as gentle as I want to be. When my thoughts fly away and when I’m not where I’m supposed to be ... [I felt] a little bit disappointed with myself. I was happy for Betty, good for her; she must have worked really hard to get there.

Here we can see Gail in a nutshell: ironically judging herself for being judgmental (“I’m not as gentle as I want to be”) and outcome-focused, with an admiration for the hard work of Betty. Her goal seems to be to compare herself with Betty and measure her own progress. Although her attitude was apparently self-critical, at the same time, she was clarifying what mindfulness is and perhaps benefiting from Betty’s insights.
In the all-day retreat, the D & I at the end of the day was not focused much on the insight project, but rather, attention and language. However, Lindsay continued to struggle with the meaning and purpose of mindfulness.

Ruth101: ... Did anyone just hate this day? Just hate it? No? No one just hated it? No violent reactions to it?
Lindsay102: I caught myself a few times saying “What’s the purpose?”
Ruth103: Ah, ok.
Lindsay104: Trying to figure out what I’m supposed to be getting out of it. Is there supposed to be an aha moment out of it?
Ruth105: uhuh
Lindsay106: And then having to just let go of that expectation and say, “it is what it is”.
Ruth107: Uuhh

Ruth used the elements of “acknowledges,” which is her way (functional step) of giving space to participants to describe their experience. We can surmise that Lindsay was indirectly asking Ruth to tell her what the purpose of the day is, or perhaps even more generally, the purpose of mindfulness. Ruth appeared unfazed in the session, yet in her SC, she reported that in fact she was quite surprised by Lindsay’s question, “I was taken aback that she didn’t see the purpose for it. I was thinking, hmm. I was kind of taken aback” (RuthSC20). Ruth resisted any temptation to provide an answer for Lindsay, saying in her SC, “that was surprising to me at this stage, but you know, the penny doesn’t drop until it drops and then maybe I think a lot of things become clearer. I’ll be interested to see what she has to say tomorrow” (RuthSC21). They continued in dialogue for 2 minutes, with a joint goal of exploring Lindsay’s experience of confusion, without coming to any conclusion. Ruth added in her SC, “”I think there would be no sense for me answering that, so I want to see what comes up for her. Maybe when I first started this, I would have wondered what the purpose was” (RuthSC23).

Understanding the mind of another. It is not only the participants who strive to understand: one of Ruth’s most commonly expressed intentions was to understand the
participants’ experiences. In the first session, for example, Laurie described her experience of the bodyscan in a dramatic way, to get Ruth’s feedback. In her SC, Ruth says that she was trying to understand how “Laurie’s mind works”:

RuthSC15: Um, I think more I was uh was interested in ... I wasn’t really quite getting what [Laurie] was trying to say about the releasing that was happening. She had an interesting way of describing what was going on for her and I was more interested in understanding that a bit more fully. She seems to have um . . . Sometimes when I talk to people I get what they’re saying and sometimes you don’t quite get it and so I was trying to explore it a little bit more with her as I still wasn’t quite understanding what she was saying.

Their joint goal was to explore the experience of the bodyscan, with Ruth’s goal as “really truly getting what she’s telling me” (Ruth SC19). Similarly, in session 3, Ruth and Gerald engaged in D & I to understand how Gerald’s mind works in business communication from the perspective of mindfulness. Ruth’s emotion was curiosity:

RuthSC18: I was so curious listening to his description of his mind states. I was wondering if he was really present with the client or if there was part of him that was present and part of him that was more on autopilot or outcome focused or something. Yet he was aware of it all, and that intrigued me. I was just listening there, trying to understand his particular mind-state and his own understanding of how his mind works.

She asked specific questions to help Gerald clarify his experience, evidenced by her use of the elements paraphrases, asks for hypothetical scenario and invited him to contrast his report of his mindful conversation with one that is not. In his SC, Gerald reported trying to be very truthful:

RA42: . . . Ok, how did it feel talking about that in this moment? You mentioned that you were trying to be very truthful.
GeraldSC40: Um, revealing, very revealing, just kind of dropping any, being without barriers, in a sense, not trying to look good but saying this is how I do it.

They continued to dialogue, examining the issue of whether it’s possible to be “in the moment” in business negotiations as opposed to strategizing:

Gerald202: ... Being a consultant, so often part of my brain is in strategy
Ruth203: (nods) ok
Gerald204: And that strategy and analysis of what the client is saying becomes very important when I come back to the offering. So part of my brain is not there....
Ruth213: Ok. Is there any way you could maintain contact and strategize later? Is that possible?
Gerald214: (Pause) I don’t know.

From Ruth’s SC, it is clear that she was again curious, “wondering”:

RuthSC19: Again, I’m wondering if there’s a way that he can work more mindfully, or if there is some kind of experiment he might do, just to change things up a bit. But I’m getting the sense that he is very aware of how his mind is working, even if it is splitting somewhat.

Gerald reported in his SC that he is also wondering:

GeraldSC46: ... at the end of the minute, I was curious, very curious, thinking, ok could I do this?

Gail and Maria listened silently, but reported in their SCs that they were very engaged through comparison of Gerald’s experience to their own. They silently joined Ruth and Gerald in the investigation of how our human mind works in situations involving negotiation and anticipating outcome. There was a sense of curiosity and enjoyment among these four during these minutes.

**Insight from the body.** In Session 2, Ruth provided a rationale for paying attention to body sensation, saying that small feelings of discomfort often make up an unconscious pattern which “forces us to do what we normally do... And so if we can get really intimately familiar with that, then we can start to notice, ‘what does it make me do?’ It’s like a gentle observation” (Ruth121). Maria listened carefully (she reports she was “very intensely focused” MariaSC8), and added, “That was valuable advice. It was like, yeah, I should think about not just ‘that’s uncomfortable’ but ‘why’…. ” (MariaSC6). This was a concept that appeared hard to grasp at least for some participants. For example, it is not until Session 4, and after a long struggle in D & I with Ruth, that Gail appeared to somewhat understand the significance of paying attention to the body. Their D & I exchange continued for several minutes, with Gail giving opinions and
judgments about a situation at work, and Ruth asking her again and again to notice her body sensations. Gail commented that she is aware that Ruth may have been a little irritated:

   Gail21: Yes I think she was trying to direct me and I even felt her irritation with my excessive attention with my cognitive part versus feelings because she kept bringing me back and I kept going away. Maybe it’s me, maybe I’m just taking it personally, but because she was sitting close to me, I was picking up her energy that she was a little irritated... I was just thinking, “I have to stay more in my body, I have to pay more attention” and I didn’t take it too personally but it was a good reminder for me.

Ruth gave some direct teaching in this minute, giving a rationale for setting aside the story content and looking for associated habitual body responses.

   Ruth183: Ok. So what I wanted to say was that the story, the stories will vary but what comes up in the body will be the same. Ok? And this is the way we are. The stories will change. It’s kind of like all the stories are a laboratory for your life and that’s what we’re trying to do in this course is really get familiar with how we react, not in response to any particular story but just notice what comes up for you in terms of how you handle things and how your body responds.

This resonated with participants. Gail reported she has an “aha moment”:

   GailSC124: ...That’s when I had an aha moment when she said, “ I want you to see a pattern in how your body feels so that you can recognize it next time” she said, “because our body does the same thing”. I was listening to her. Uh, it’s very consistent, if you learn how to listen to the signals, you will ... so what’s she’s trying to tell us, for us to get connected to our body language and what is that signal and uh that was very valuable information and I was very focused on her. I was listening to what she was saying.

Barbara also used the term “aha moment”:

   BarbaraSC25: ... I really related to what she was saying, that how the stories will all be different but the way we react is the same and to take notice of that so I thought that was a really important thing. Almost like Aha! An aha moment.

One wonders if the very difficulty of the interaction between Gail and Ruth bears the fruit of insight for not only Gail and Barbara but for the others who are listening. Even though Gail reported that she felt anger, confusion, and disappointment in these moments, she made an effort to respond to Ruth’s questions. On the one hand, she wanted to tell her story of perceived success and get validation, and on the other hand she wanted to learn mindfulness. In terms of a
joint goal, Ruth was trying to give Gail the guidance about mindfulness that she is seeking, and at the same time Gail wanted to continue to tell her story. There appeared to be a power struggle of sorts, but Gail was open to receiving (in a contingent back-and-forth loop) what Ruth is offering, and in the end reports a “valuable” understanding, as does Barbara who was participating silently as she observed.

We see Ruth session after session patiently directing all the participants back to the body, and away from positive outcomes, nourishing the opportunities for insight. Again in Session 6, Ruth wanted to get Gail to “look within to see what is forcing her to move” (RuthSC40). They engaged for several minutes, apparently fruitlessly. Ruth asked, “What would happen if you didn’t wipe your tears?” (Ruth 360). At the end, Gail reluctantly agreed to “experiment” with not moving during the meditation, but in her SC she said, “I said “yes” but ... I wasn’t very confident about a positive outcome. I’m going to give it a try but you know just to see how it’s going but I knew that it was going to be very hard” (GailSC9). How interesting it is to turn to Gail’s SC for the next few minutes, when Ruth referred to the phrase, “wherever you go, there you are.”

Ruth explained, “There’s this tendency to think that, for example, if it’s not good here, change jobs or change cities. Has anyone done that ever?” (Ruth395). This led into a brief discussion, involving mainly Gerald, about the pointlessness of constantly changing environments to seek pleasure, relief, happiness. Ironically, this relates directly to how Ruth conceptualized Gail’s constant fidgeting. In Gail’s SC, it was revealed that although she has not made this connection herself between her embodied experience of discomfort and what Ruth is teaching, she still related, in a more literal way, to the issue Ruth is addressing:

GailSC25: Yeah, wherever you go, there you are. And I thought, oh my god, wherever you go ... I take myself with me. That was so ... a lot of thoughts came to my mind when she was saying that. Especially my relation with me. . . I was focused on why I was

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running. Because other areas of my life are pretty taken care of. I have a good job and
good relationships and career and I do what I love but my personal life is unresolved.
And I was trying to see in my mind ... I have to make this city my home.

She went on to explain that listening to Ruth and making these connections internally, brought
her a sense of realization and relief:

GailSC28: After she read the story, there was a big realization.
RA32: Ok, ok. Any feelings associated with that?
Gail29: Um, I would say feeling of relief that I’m in control now. I’m in control of my
life, I don’t have to travel, I don’t have to trust external voices to solve my problems.
RA33: So it was a relief.
Gail30: Yes I felt relief. I can stay here. This is me, this is my life.
RA34: Wonderful. Anything else you want to add?
Gail31: No. It was a good session. I was really tired. I was sick, I was in bed. I didn’t
want to let Ruth down. I’m glad I came.

This is a poignant “inside view” of Gail’s experience of the class. Even though it was
apparently still not making sense to her on many levels, and she was feeling physically ill and
tired, she was putting forward her best effort. It is interesting that Gail partially grasped the
concept of the pointlessness of constantly moving to seek relief, but not as it applies to her
struggle with her own body. And despite not “getting” some of the main points of the
curriculum, she was actively drawing conclusions and making meaning from what was being
offered her. We can see again that while there were differing individual goals operating, for
example, between Ruth and Gail, the super-ordinate goals, or projects, to be exact, of
relationship, and learning mindfulness, engaged them and carried them forward jointly.

**Jointness of the insight project.** A dramatic example of the jointness of the insight
project occurred in Session 5 following a sitting meditation. In this D & I, we can observe Gail
struggling with her embodied lack of peace, Lindsay’s frustration with Gail’s persistent struggle,
and how Ruth uses Gail’s difficulties to teach mindfulness to the whole class. This excerpt
demonstrates how the insight project was enacted among the class as a joint project, not just
individually and also not just dyadically between teacher and participant. Gail described her bodily discomfort of yawning and tearing through the sitting meditation, bodily reactions which she had mentioned in each and every session. Rather humorously, in her SC, Lindsay commented that she is tired of hearing about Gail’s yawning:

LindsaySC32: Um at the beginning of that, um, there was some impatience and frustration. Because we hear about her yawning every week and so part of me was going “ok here we go again”. So I was a little impatient with that, what she was sharing, because it was nothing new.

Ruth listened patiently for a few rounds, helping Gail describe her experience, and then used the element “asks for speculation” – “what would happen if you didn’t fight it” – in a sense, inviting Gail to approach rather than avoid the unpleasant sensations:

Gail130: And I was fighting my yawning as always. And I was holding it, and then eventually it would come up as a huge yawn. So I couldn’t force it anymore, I mean I couldn’t hold it anymore,
Ruth131: Ok
Gail132: And I just let it ... I was ... I had the same experience at home, my nose was running, my tears, lots of, I cry everyday for forty five minutes.
Ruth133: What would happen if you didn’t fight it? If you didn’t fight with the yawning?
Gail134: It’s just very distracting, I’m trying to sit and not think.

By this point of the course, Gail (and presumably at least some of the others) was still not really getting conceptually or experientially what Ruth is presenting as mindfulness. It seems from Gail’s ongoing SCs that there were moments of understanding, but in the sessions, she tended to lapse into very similar attitudes (outcome-driven, positive thinking, and avoidance) and stories (usually either about discomfort or about success). With Gail’s words, “I’m trying to sit and not think”, Ruth leaned forward, using her hands for emphasis along with her “no’s”. She speaks for 2 minutes, very unusual for her:

Ruth135: No. No. We’re not trying to not think. That’s not what we’re trying to do. That’s really important to clear that up. We are not trying to not think. We’re just letting the thoughts come as they come and bringing awareness to them. It’s the awareness to the thought. So the thought comes, and it might feel like it’s almost automatic. But just notice
the content, notice the content and return to the breath. And so the purpose isn’t to clear
the mind at all. It’s simply to notice whatever is, whatever is, including feelings, if your
foot is cramping, as opposed to taking the cramp away, simply if you can bring
awareness to the cramp, as it arises, as it tightens and as it fades away. So really just a
gentle observing, not to force it to be different than it is. Not to force it. Not to force the
yawn not to come if it wants to come, and has to come, just simply notice the feeling that
makes that yawn want to come. Staying with the breath. But just shining a flashlight in
there and then by doing that, we can get a glimpse of what drags us all over the place, just
getting a glimpse of what drags us.

Here we can see Ruth highlighting several key aspects of the mindfulness project: noticing
(attention), gentleness (acceptance) and “getting a glimpse of what drags us” (insight). In Gail’s
SC, she reported that she actually enjoyed this part of the session, and that she felt relieved by
what she saw as Ruth’s permission to yawn:

GailSC6: ... There was a realization that I shouldn’t have forced it or stopped it, I should
have allowed, just don’t ... if the yawn is coming, yawn if you want, let it be.

The RA commented to Gail that in the video, Gail appears to relax in this moment, settling back
in her chair, and Gail agreed that she felt more relaxed, hearing that she does not need to fight
against the yawning. The joint goal was to explore what mindfulness is, with an accent on the
“awareness and acceptance.” As Lindsay observed the interaction between Ruth and Gail, she
was busy drawing insight from it:

LindsaySC32 ... Um but then when Ruth sort of said, “no we’re not trying to stop the
thoughts” ... Ruth has said that in different weeks but for some reason it was just sort of
sitting with me a little bit more this week, that it was like, “right, it’s ok if we have the
thoughts, we’re supposed to have the thoughts, we’re not supposed to get to an empty
mind state, that’s not what this is about”. So it was just kind of sitting with me a little bit
more strongly. I was just sort of getting ahold of that a little bit more, saying “oh right!”
And every week she’s been saying it and every week it’s sort of been becoming stronger
and stronger and stronger, my understanding of that. .. At the beginning of this whole
process I had the impression that mindfulness meant especially when we were meditating
that mindfulness was emptying our mind and just being focused on breathing all the time
and these thoughts that we had going through our brains, that those were things that we
were supposed to stop, that we weren’t supposed to have those and I wasn’t quite
grasping the concept that “no no no no, we let those thoughts come in ...”
It is interesting to note how Gail’s lack of understanding at this point in the session was actually helpful in the larger joint insight project, judging by the benefits Lindsay reportedly received. What started as a “oh no, here we go again, with Gail’s yawning” turned into a significant moment of understanding for Lindsay. In fact at the end of that SC minute, she commented she had a sense of relaxation, of contentment, in this moment, “a sense of, I don’t know if validation is the right word but it’s sort of a sense of contentment, like ‘ok I’m on the right track’” (Lindsay SC37). At least Lindsay and Gail moved from frustration to relaxation, and we might speculate that the whole group had been engaged in this movement to relaxation. Lindsay had been saliently involved since Session 3 in the question of what mindfulness is, and this exchange between Gail and Ruth appears to enrich her efforts:

LindsaySC34: It’s ok to have the [thoughts]. The goal is not to stop them. So that’s been something that’s been growing for me, that the thoughts themselves are fine, that the goal is to not continue on the path with the thoughts. And so you know that’s, that’s again, it’s not new what Ruth was saying but every time she says it, I think it reinforced for me what mindfulness is and what it isn’t.

We can say that Ruth’s goal was to teach Gail how to be mindful, what mindfulness is. She did this by giving Gail space to describe her experience, and inviting her to look at her experience from a different perspective. Gail’s goal was to get some relief from her embodied distress. By letting the yawning “be ok”, she was able to find some peace. In her SC, she said, “I felt better when I actually shared with her and when she said to me that I didn’t have to hold my yawning” (GailSC3). Lindsay’s goal appeared to be more specifically to understand mindfulness as it applies to her own life. The joint goal among them was to process Gail’s experience of discomfort from a mindfulness perspective, and to better understand what mindfulness is. We can see how Ruth teaches the whole class through the interaction with one participant, Gail, and how at least Lindsay, if not everyone, was able to participate and benefit from Gail’s frustrated
pursuit of embodied peace. Later, in the same session, Gail asked Ruth if “mindfulness” can be learned once and for all:

Gail211: Is there any way to develop this habit as a permanent habit? Or is it a lifelong ..
Ruth212: It’s lifelong. It’s not a quick fix, this work. Not a quick fix.
Gail213: Too bad
Ruth214: I know (laughs).
Gerald215: Does it come in a pill form?
Evryone216: Laughter
Ruth217: It doesn’t come in a pill form (laughs). It’s exactly this: it’s looking within at these fleeting little things that pull us.

Listening to Gail and Ruth’s exchange sparked off in Gerald a profound realization, “a little sad” accompanied by “a kind of relief” about mindfulness not being a permanent solution to trouble, but rather, an ongoing way of life, “like brushing your teeth”:

GeraldSC22 ... But it was kind of a recognition, it was a little sad and just recognition, “ok, so this is it, it’s kind of like this, it’s like brushing your teeth, you have to do it.” I guess I thought the work had been done, but it’s never done. It was kind of, “ok”. ..In a way the acceptance is a kind of relief. I feel like I’ve discovered a place out of the places I’ve been in. In other words, I’ve found a path. So it feels really good that I’ve found a path.

Again we can see how insight (in this case, acceptance of impermanence) was facilitated jointly among the group, this time via Gail’s yearning for a permanent solution to her restlessness and discomfort.

**Understanding the nature of the mind.** At the end of Session 3, the D & I continued after the sitting meditation to explore the nature of the mind, how “the seductive thinking mind” operates, how it is necessary and functional, and how it can also be unhelpful. Tasha noticed that during the meditation, her mind was busy with thoughts that were not helpful. Ruth normalized this cognitive pattern as “the nature of mind”:

Tasha304: It just seems pretty useless, all the thoughts I was having. They weren’t productive.
Ruth305: Were they kind of going in a circle?
Tasha306: Yeah. They were just like random things that really wouldn’t solve anything or ... just there.
Ruth307: But it’s the nature of mind, right? The nature of mind is to think.

Ruth went on to ask an ontological question about the reality of these thoughts:

Ruth295: . . . The thinking mind, do you get a sense of just how frenetic these thoughts are? They are so busy and there are so many of them. How real do you think they are?
Lindsay296: How real are our thoughts?
Ruth297: Uuhh. (long silence)
Maria298: I kind of notice that they are not real at all next to some white space, like when you actually have that moment when you are focusing on your breath. You kind of realize that all that junk that’s kind of floating through your head just is ... junk.
Ruth299: Uuhh.
Maria300: But usually it seems very important.
Ruth301: Uuhh. So just a glimpse of white space.

At the end of Session 3, the D & I focused on the joint group goal of identifying and understanding the “nature of mind.” There was a growing sense of “the human mind” as opposed to “my mind.” Gerald made an observation right after the sitting meditation about the parallels between Ruth’s instructions and his inner experience. Ruth drew this out to illustrate the universality of cognitive processes:

Ruth263: So how was the quality of the mind?
Gerald264: It was like you timed “go back to your breath” synchronized with when I was thinking
Everyone265: Laughter
Gerald266: That was weird! (laughs)
Everyone267: Laughter
Ruth268: (laughs). How do you think I would know that?
Everyone69: Laughter
Gerald270: Well you’ve had a little experience.
Ruth271: Because my mind is gone too (laughter). You can only teach it from your mind. And that’s the state of mind, in two seconds and it’s gone. Where all did it go?

Here Ruth emphasized that she was able to synchronize her words with their thoughts, not because of some expertise or psychic ability, but because her mind was also wandering, and that is its nature.
Understanding our stories. In session 6, Gerald responded to Ruth’s invitation to share their weekly homework experience of “making a gap”. He described a frightening experience he had with a driver who expressed “road rage” and recounted how he had attempted to respond calmly rather than reacting impulsively. He told the dramatic story for a few minutes with Ruth using only elements of “acknowledges.” In his SC Gerald stated that his intention in telling the story was to “to find out, yeah, did I do it [leave a mindful gap] the right way? I guess I was looking to see if I did it the right way.” He quickly shifted next in session to a more obvious “positive outcome” twist to the tale, in which he described the situation of going to a scheduled doctor’s appointment right after the frightening road rage incident, being told his blood pressure was dangerously high, and being able to reduce his blood pressure through mindful breathing. Gerald explained in his SC that he wanted to demonstrate how helpful mindfulness had been for him:

I’m also at that point trying to ... I’m actually talking about how much benefit I’m getting out of this course... in telling it to Ruth, I was really saying, “Look, this stuff is really working for me, this has been really good. (GeraldSC15)

This is an excellent example of how Ruth often would accentuate an aspect of the story that the participant was not addressing (e.g. avoiding). She brought Gerald away from the positive outcome, and back to the negative event:

Gerald18: I pulled it right down by meditating.
Ruth19: You were able to do that. Wow.
Gerald20: I said I’m going to lower this blood pressure. Right down.
Ruth21: Amazing. How did you feel while that man was yelling at you? Did you notice?
Gerald22: Um, well I didn’t like it. I did feel afraid.
Ruth23: Yeah.
Gerald24: At the same time, I could feel, I was starting to feel aggressive.
Ruth25: Uuhh.

On a certain level, their goals were at cross-purposes here: Gerald wanted to demonstrate how useful mindfulness is, and how successfully he exercised his ability to be mindful through
lowering his blood pressure, while Ruth wanted to redirect his attention back to the road rage incident and identify the connection between the two stories. As usual, she was not as interested in apparent “positive outcomes” as in the participant’s awareness and insight:

RuthSC35: Yeah, because I’m thinking that um he was actually holding that stress within for the whole time. So I was trying to get back to that incident to see if he could make those links. How he was holding that tension and pressure within during those times. ... I’m not sure if he actually went back far enough and was able to put that all together.

However, on a more general level, their joint goal was to process Gerald’s experience more deeply and in this, they appear to be successful, based on Gerald’s SC:

RA26: Ok. And so in this interaction you were saying that what she’s offering you is some clarification. So her first set of questions were taking you right back to the feeling at the moment of the high intensity. Were you able to go right back to that feeling? What was it like for her to ask you to go back to that feeling? Do you recall any reaction to that question?

GeraldSC23: Um. I was less emotionally “in” so I wasn’t experiencing the emotion. I had a bit more understanding or maybe because I’d talked about it and then she brings it back up, it wasn’t quite as emotional.

Ruth continued to give Gerald space to describe his experience, with a few questions:

Ruth39: It could have been quite dangerous.
Gerald40: Yeah.
Ruth41: Well. Do you think it would have been different if you had responded how you normally would have?
Gerald42: I don’t think I would have remained as calm and collected.
Gerald43: Uuhh. How did you do that? Did you breathe?
Gerald44: Yup.

In his SC for these minutes, Gerald reported that Ruth’s questions helped him “clarify what I’m experiencing”. We can see how putting words on experience is an important part of both awareness and insight:

GeraldSC22: Hmm. From a ... well I felt really heard and understood by her. She really got connection with where I was and where I was feeling it. That’s what I felt anyway. And um I find when she kind of interacts with me with those kinds of questions it helps me …even what I’m experiencing because some parts of it I don’t know what I’m experiencing… Gives me a way of understanding what I’m experiencing and um that gives me more trust to continue doing it and um I really enjoy it. And the ... because I did
have both the feeling quite afraid in the car but also at the same time right on the edge of getting really angry but wanting to manage that because it was, it felt dangerous and it felt difficult. And I was using the breath to kind of keep the space there.

He went on to pinpoint what he appreciates so much about Ruth’s teaching style:

GeraldSC25: I really pay attention to her interactions not just with me but with everyone. How she facilitates, or if you want, teaches the group by asking questions for clarification, deeper understanding, and I know that when I’m on the other end of it, I learn more of where I am in the process and what it takes to do this work, in the sense of “here it is, I’m in this and I don’t know what it is” and I’m noticing all these differences and I want to understand what the differences are and so she asks questions and I get a point of reference back to myself. She kind of reflects it back to me and that helps me sort it out. And I watch her do that with other people. In the way that she gives no answers but she asks questions but typically the questions for most people seems to create answers for other people. So she helps create answers for people without giving answers. Although I’ve noticed that some people, early on particularly, wanted actually a direct answer. So I try to engage to get the response not to get the answer. To get the question that I need.

Much of the D & I appears to be about participants “getting the question that they need,” rather than the answer, to facilitate their abilities to pay attention, find words for their experience, and understand their experience.

Something that became more and more saliently observed by the researcher as the session dialogues were transcribed and analysed was the relatively systematic sequence of the three actions of notice, describe and understand. The temporal order of these actions makes sense, as they are somewhat contingent on each other. And of course, as has been pointed out, sometimes in the process of describing, for example, more noticing was possible, and the actions become quite intertwined rather than sequential or linear. However, there was a noticeably repetitious and even formulaic sequence that unfolded in the dialogues. It would start off with Ruth asking what they noticed (in meditation) and the participants describing this (usually at first in quite global, opinionated, or judgmental ways). A second loop was then begun, with Ruth asking certain types of questions to help them notice and describe more specifically, less judgmentally,
and more focused on sensory details. The final step, which became more frequent in later sessions, was Ruth asking the question, “And what do you think that was about?” or “Do you notice that pattern happening in your everyday life?”, in other words, questions which facilitated understanding. For example, in Session 2, after engaging with Maria in the joint actions of noticing and describing, Ruth turned her attention to the class and commented that avoiding discomfort can lead to an unconscious pattern which then leads to unhelpful behaviours, and “if we can get really intimately familiar with that, then we can start to notice, ‘what does it make me do?’” (Session 2, Ruth 121). In this moment, Maria, though silent, was moved towards insight, reporting in her SC that she was struck that “I should think about not just ‘that’s uncomfortable’ but ‘why’” (Maria SC6). The three sub-ordinate joint projects most saliently associated with the mindfulness project appeared relatively systematically engaged, as opposed to free or spontaneous conversation or discussion.

**Relationship Project**

Even though the relationships among teacher and participants were temporary and to a large extent, a means to an end as a way to learn mindfulness, a relationship project developed as a highly overlapping but distinct joint super-ordinate project. That is to say, relationship was more than a context for the mindfulness project. Sitting together with the joint goal of learning mindfulness, participants began to care about each other, to experience spontaneous feelings of compassion, for example, as they listened to each other’s struggles, or feelings of irritation as they listen for the umpteenth time to someone’s repetitive narrative. In her SCs, Ruth expressed feelings of curiosity and caring for the participants that goes beyond teaching them to be mindful. Likewise, participants early on were interested in Ruth as a person, and became engaged in trying to get her approval, feedback or attention. Gail said in Session 6, “I was sick
[but] I didn’t want to let Ruth down” (Gail31). On the other hand, one participant, Barbara, decided to leave the mindfulness project because she experiences a failure of the relationship project. It could be said that the relationship project is important in ways common to all psycho-educational and therapeutic groups: the feelings of universality, for example, identified as a therapeutic factor by Yalom (1985) in his work on group psychotherapy. However, there are certain elements of the relationship project that served to underline and embody specific principles and phenomena that appear important in the learning of mindfulness, such as self-compassion, universality of certain cognitive habits/patterns, interdependence, and emotional regulation. These will be described in this section under two headings, the subordinate joint compassion project, and connection project.

**The sub-ordinate joint compassion project (helping).** Although the compassion project operated as a sub-ordinate joint project of the wider relationship project, it simultaneously supported and informed the mindfulness project. There are many ways this project operated. First, the aim of self-compassion was jointly enacted every time Ruth engages participants to notice and describe “with gentle kindness.” Participants sought and practiced self-compassion in the dyadic and group relational context. Secondly, in the form of action taken explicitly to help others, the compassion project was enacted with enthusiasm by members who were socially-motivated to contribute to the MBSR group process. We can surmise that most or even all the group members participated at times out of the motivation to support each other. Based on the self-confrontation data, we have several examples of Maria and Lindsay, in particular, acting with the overt motivation of helping Ruth and the group in the mindfulness project. Thirdly, the compassion project appeared to be enacted implicitly at times to help others. From self-confrontation data, we know that compassion arose spontaneously in teacher and in participants,
in the form of a warm openhearted longing for the other’s relief from suffering. In this latter category, compassion may be described, in action-theoretical terms, as an emotion which energizes or motivates action. Lastly, another way the compassion project was engaged implicitly is when the group appeared to move towards regulating an individual participant in distress.

**Self-compassion as a joint goal.** In the first session, Ruth finishes explaining the homework by advising, “And if the mind wanders away, the important thing is to notice where the mind goes. Not so much that we need to do anything with it but just notice gently where it goes to” (Ruth186). In her SC, Jackie commented that she was “drawn” to Ruth’s “permission” to approach her experience with gentleness, drawn, as it were, into the compassion project:

JackieSC 24 ... when she was talking, when she was saying ... “just notice and don’t judge and let things be as they are” ... I’m so drawn to phrases like that because I feel it’s so difficult for me actually do them and carry them out, so for somebody who actually almost give permission ... to say, “it’s ok, it’s as it is and just let it be and just listen to it” um that was like really nice to hear. It is simple as that and it is ok.

In Session 2, Ruth repeated an invitation for gentle kindness to another member, Paula:

Ruth207 . . . With a gentle kindness, almost like you would the puppy that you’re walking. You wouldn’t yell at the puppy, right?

Jackie reflected on how important this exchange was for her because it linked into a life-project of trying to be more accepting and self-compassionate, and how hearing these words also made her feel “more calm”:

JackieSC10  ... It started with Ruth saying that you need to accept it, be gentle and kind towards yourself and I think to me that has a lot of meaning because that’s where I know I need to work towards and that’s where I think the last couple of years I really tried to look at that and try to incorporate it into my life but I know that it’s such a big challenge because I think I focus so much on achievement and other people and doing things the right way that it’s hard to give myself permission to you know just be as I am, like as she said, like just being gentle towards yourself, so I loved hearing that, I find it so validating, and it’s ok to do that, um... and not only that realization but also like really just it was like
it made me in a way like more calm. Because there was somebody in her position saying it’s ok, just be gentle, giving me permission.

Ruth noted how intentional her invitation was in this moment, in response to both Jackie’s earlier sharing and Paula’s self-critical comments: “A reminder. Because both these young women were really beating themselves up about not getting it right, so I thought it was important to re-emphasize that point” (RuthSC144). In Jackie’s final SC interview in the Session 9, she commented that Ruth’s invitation to self-compassion has been salient for her over the course:

JackieSC12: So she started with gentle kindness, those words. I think there are a couple of key words that I’ve really remembered from the things that Ruth has said. Gentle kindness, I don’t hear other people say that and I think it’s such a nice way of thinking of things. ... The fact that she continues to remind us to don’t question, just be gentle towards yourself and accept it, have a look at what’s going on but don’t be harsh. For me, that means a lot, to not judge and question myself or others. So something so little that she said in that minute, it just makes a lot of sense.

Jackie is not the only one who responded to Ruth’s invitation to self-compassion. Lindsay often referred to it as a salient goal and indeed project in her life. For example in Session 2, she described washing her face mindfully and gently and realizing “that is a metaphor for other areas in my life and how I treat myself … to be more gentle with myself, more loving, more caring.” (Lindsay 243). Laurie also found the compassion project to be important:

Laurie150 ... And I’m still curious about all the moments that I’m still beating myself up and not noticing it. Like I’m always curious to find other ones where I’m like, “oh yeah, in that place too, I can have gentle kindness”. It’s almost nice to notice the painful moments in a sense and have that brought to consciousness. (Session 4)

In this description, Laurie highlighted the attention project (noticing) which is accompanied by the intention to have compassion for what she notices, and Ruth commented in her SC for this minute that she was appreciating Laurie’s sharing, “I thought she was saying it beautifully and if other members were hearing her that would be very valuable teaching” (RuthSC30). Likewise,
Maria listened to Laurie’s sharing with curiosity and feelings of connection, saying, “I was thinking about how that plays out in my own life, what extent do I do that?” (MariaSC5).

There is an exchange between Ruth and Lindsay in Session 7 which demonstrated how the project of self-compassion was worked on jointly, intertwined with the language project, and how for both Ruth and Lindsay it became strained. This D & I was a little different than usual, in that it was less sensation-focused and more an inquiry into behavioural and mental patterns. The topic was the notion of “choice.” Lindsay first rejected and then accepted an invitation to examine the role of choice in eating patterns:

Ruth288: Well, there’s a balance really, in many respects. What about the food?
Lindsay289: Don’t look at me
Everyone290: Laughter.
Ruth291: Oh? Ok.
Lindsay292: No, food’s my bad.... well that’s a challenging area for me.
Ruth293: Ok. Well, are you aware of what comes in?

Ruth’s goal was to begin exploring the topic of food with Lindsay in a non-judgmental way, and Lindsay’s goal initially was to recover from the sense of shame:

LindsaySC28: Um, the beginning part of it, um, where I said, Don’t look at me, don’t talk to me, I forget exactly what I said but when I initially went “whoa,” um, there was definitely almost a bit of embarrassment, a little bit of guilt, because um I really, I really do struggle with food issues and I can’t seem to get control of it and and I feel bad about myself that I can’t get control of it.

Ruth reported in her SC that from the beginning of this exchange, her attention was alerted to Lindsay’s self-judgment, with a desire to temper that:

RuthSC11: I’m aware that she labelled the choices “bad” and I was trying to get to the end of her story so I could think of some way to change the way in which she was viewing it.

Ruth attempted to understand Lindsay’s perspective and to lead her into a more self-accepting perspective. She did this by listening actively to Lindsay’s sharing while trying to think of a “way to diffuse it so it wasn’t self-punitive” (RuthSC10).
Lindsay296: Um, I make a lot of bad food choices for myself, not necessarily bad choices in terms of nutrition but because of some food sensitivities that I have to pretty common food items, like wheat and gluten and dairy, to be the best my body can be, I should be avoiding all of those completely. But in society, that’s very hard to find foods where I can avoid those major food groups completely.

Ruth297: Hmm

Lindsay298: So I often make the easy choice because it’s good, it’s satisfying but in the long term it’s not doing my body very much good.

Ruth299: Who says that? Is that how you feel?

Ruth offered in her SC that she was focused on finding a way to work with this in a non-judgmental and helpful way. She was hoping that if she could make this less personal, that Lindsay would be able to get some distance from it:

RuthSC7: Um, yeah. A little bit although I felt that I kind of got off track in the conversation because I usually try to avoid people divulging their personal information and it was kind of, the way she was relating the story was leading her to kind of place of beating herself up. And so I was trying to think of a way to diffuse it and make it not personal.

At the same time, Lindsay was aware of trying to be less self-critical in the language she chooses:

LindsaySC28: . . . During the session, I caught myself starting to refer to it one way and then I rephrased it. So I was being cautious about how I was trying to describe the food issues because I have been viewing them as, I’ve been viewing myself as a victim, to these food issues, so I’m trying to rephrase it so I’m less of a victim. So I caught myself rephrasing during the session.

They were both working on moving Lindsay towards a less self-critical perspective. Ruth wondered if Lindsay’s self-criticism is based on personal comparison, external opinion, or a real evaluation of her body’s response to food:

RuthSC14: Why is she calling it bad? What’s the reason behind the “bad” and is this something she read or somebody told her she should or is there something from her body that says it’s not right for her?

RA15: Do you have any recollection of how you were feeling as she was talking about this topic that was so uncomfortable for her?

Ruth15: Um, a little bit that we were getting into too much of a personal story because it’s not so much the personal story but more ... I was trying to get what happens in the body in response to the food as opposed to [a confession].
Likewise, Lindsay reported in her SC that she was more comfortable moving away from the personal story,

LindsaySC31 . . . And I started off being very judgmental with myself too. And then I lessened. It became more clinical as opposed to personal. The initial reaction was very personal and then as I went on, I became more clinical and detached from it.

She described the movement towards detachment came from her being mindful “about the words I use and about how I deal with food.” She did not seem aware that Ruth was also working to draw her towards that stance of the observing self. In the next moment, Lindsay had another personal reaction. Ruth had attempted to bring Lindsay’s attention to her self-punitive attitude, with the hope that she could be kinder to herself. She said in her SC: “Um, I was hoping that was enough to kind of diffuse the self-punitive aspect of it and yelling at herself for not being perfect with this diet and so I was hoping to draw it out by pointing out that most of us aren’t either” (RuthSC18). However, Ruth’s intended effects did not materialize:

Lindsay302: But also, if I’m really paying attention and am able to keep these foods out of my diet for a period of time, I do feel the physical difference as well. But it’s very challenging to keep some of those major food groups out of my diet.
Ruth303: It’s challenging to be perfect?
Lindsay304: (grimaces, blushes and squirms). Yes.

In session, Lindsay turned red, bowed her head and appeared ashamed. In her SC, she related:

When Ruth said something about “you mean you’re not perfect,” then it was sort of this sense of “no I’m not.” So there was ... I was judging myself. I was feeling really ... it wasn’t that she said anything to make me feel bad, it was just internally, I went “no I’m not perfect”. I can’t get this under control. So I was disappointed in myself. And that’s why ... I didn’t know I’d done it at the time, but as I’m watching this, when she said, I see that I looked away from her. I put my head down. I broke eye contact with her. So again, I wasn’t conscious of having done that physical stuff in the class but at that moment, “Yeah I’m not perfect” so having to acknowledge that. I think the last time you interviewed me I talked about perfection and how that ... it’s an impossible thing and yet I’m always striving for it. So this is sort of that pattern. (LindsaySC37).

Lindsay seemed to have a small “shame-attack” in response to Ruth’s well-intentioned comment. She added, in her SC, “I hate the fact that I can’t be perfect” (LindsaySC41).
Here we can see the complex dance involved in relational mindfulness. Ruth’s goal was to diffuse Lindsay’s self-criticism, which she attempted to do through normalizing Lindsay’s experience as human imperfection. Lindsay in fact had had, for a few minutes, a goal of tempering her own self-criticism through deliberate word-choice. Yet she eventually regressed to shame, despite both of their best efforts in their joint goal of working with Lindsay’s negative self-talk. The group balanced this vulnerable and painful moment with humour, as Gerald, Tasha and Karen quickly chime in with light comments and laughter. Humour may be used as an explicit or implicit functional step in the compassion project, to help soothe a fellow participant. Ruth’s SC for this moment is particularly poignant. She and Lindsay had worked hard together for minutes on the project of self-compassion and being more comfortable with inevitable imperfection. In a moment of vulnerability herself, she relates in SC how exhausted she is in this session, feeling a bit daunted by the participants’ apparent fatigue and quiet responses. When asked how she was feeling at this moment in the session, she reported:

Ruth20: “I’m really not on top of my game today” (laughs) ... That was the general theme of it. I mean part of it was mis-timing, cause I saw the clock in the hallway and it’s 10 minutes faster than my own clock is and so I called the meditation shorter than I [intended].

In an interesting parallel process, Ruth’s self-compassion could also have been potentially challenged at this point, but while she expressed in the SC an awareness of her inevitable limitations as a teacher, she did not engage in self-criticism.

**Compassion as expressed in helping actions.** Maria and Lindsay seem particularly motivated to be good group participants and helped Ruth and the others through their participation. They reported in their self-confrontation interviews that many of their decisions to speak up in the D & I were driven by their desire to support Ruth and the other members. In session 4, we can see Maria and Ruth working together to help the group. In minute 17, Maria
shared her experience with the homework and Ruth guided her deeper into her experience by an empathic paraphrase:

Ruth137: Ok. So you double beat yourself up.
Maria138: Absolutely!
Evryone139: Laughter.
Maria140: But I noticed that I was beating myself up, which I think was a little bit different about this exercise.
Ruth141: Ok. Ok. What happened when you beat yourself up?
Maria142: Nothing productive (laughs).

Ruth’s goal was to help Maria process her experience while using this as an example for the class of the universality of self-criticism. She works with participants with the assumption that they are also teaching each other. In her SC she says,

RuthSC14: I was just thinking what a lovely experience she was able to describe and how everyone can relate to that because that’s what we tend to do is rehash it and go over it and I think actually that hearing it again, it should have been drawn out a bit more because that really is a universal experience of reliving it, rehashing and getting into the story of it all.

She intentionally used Maria’s experience as the foundation for her teaching points on mindfulness. Meanwhile, Maria’s goal was quite complementary in her wish to assist Ruth and the class in their project of learning mindfulness. She is aware that the mindfulness project is enacted through participation:

MariaSC4: Um I think that it was that Ruth was really reaching out to people “Any more, any more?” like um, yeah. It seemed like it is definitely more useful for people to speak in the class than not speak because it causes ... her to be able to give us more information when she’s relating to something we’re saying, I like to be the one to speak up (laughs).

So their joint goal was to make use of Maria’s experience for the class’s benefit. Maria commented that to share was not only altruistic; it was also helpful for her own insight:

MariaSC1: Um, at the beginning, I was hesistant to bring up my story a little bit because there was some really intense things going on for other people around pain and that was all very intense for me and my story seemed a little bit more trivial but um when she was asking a couple of times ... it was a big kind of changing thing for me, this moment . . .
Just interacting with her and having her ask me questions like “What was productive about it?” got the answers that were on the tip of my tongue, “Nothing productive.” Um it was neat to say that out loud.

Maria was particularly sensitive to monitoring her own level of participation for the greater good of the group. In some cases, she decided it would be helpful to others if she volunteers. In other situations, she decided to be silent and give the space to others:

MeSC19: Um, I kind of have that problem, in that I will just talk, I was thinking about “Am I talking too much?” because there’s definitely people in the class who are very quiet and I hesitate to kind of be a bully like that, I don’t mean to, but that was one thought that was going on in my mind, “Am I interacting too much?” “Am I taking up too much of this person’s time? It’s not all about me” situation when there’s a whole group like that, so that was something else that was going on at the back, yeah.

In another moment, she revealed in her SC that she was also monitoring the content of what she said and whether or not it will be helpful to others:

MariaSC5: I was just still telling the story and wondering how much of it would be relevant and how much of it would not be relevant to the class um and trying to answer Ruth’s question about what I did differently.

Since we know from Ruth’s SC that she often responded to participants with the goal of using their remarks as the curriculum for the class, it is noteworthy that at least Maria, if not everyone, was also intentionally working with Ruth to help that happen.

Describing a somewhat different intention for participation, Lindsay remarked in her SC from Session 5 that she had responded to Ruth’s invitation out of an intention to help Ruth and the other participants feel more comfortable:

LindsaySC3: ... I can tend to be really an active participant and I’m aware of that so I try to really hold back sometimes to make certain that everybody has a chance to participate. Yet as somebody who has been a facilitator and who leads groups I also know that those silences can be incredibly awkward and so I don’t like the instructor to be sitting in silence
RA5: Uuhh. Would it be more like wanting to make Ruth feel a little bit more comfortable?
Lindsay4: Both other people and her. Yeah.
In these moments, Ruth and Lindsay’s joint goal was to teach the class through Lindsay’s sharing of her experience. In the next session, it was interesting to hear Ruth in her SC uncharacteristically describing a sense of difficulty and frustration with trying to get people to speak up and share their experiences. She comments that she was “thankful when [Lindsay] was speaking” (RuthSC5). Since Lindsay has earlier spoken about her sense of responsibility in helping the teacher by participating, we can see that they had a joint goal here of facilitating the group discussion, and elaborating on Ruth’s teaching point at the time.

**Compassion as a spontaneous emotion.** Ruth often referred to feelings of compassion for participants. For example, in her SC for Session 2, she noticed Paula’s self-judgment: “I really felt an openheartedness, feeling um an empathy, just a basic human compassion for this kind of behaviour (RuthSC6). Jackie also was aware of feelings of compassion for other participants, in particular, Gerald, who spoke often of his physical pain: “And then when he started talking about his pain, there was more like compassion towards him and I was wondering what kind of pain is it” (Session 2, JackieSC17) and again in Session 4: “trying to get a better understanding of what that might feel like with the pain, feeling compassion” (JackieSC11). The other side of the coin is feelings of irritation, such as what Lindsay experienced in Session 5, when Gail continued speaking about her yawning. Both feelings point to an emotional experience of one another, supporting the relationship project.

**Group regulation of participant distress.** There were moments in the sessions where it appeared that an individual distressed participant was soothed by the group. Unfortunately we do not have SC data for these fleeting moments to substantiate the notion that some members may have been intentionally attempting to help a fellow classmate who is suffering, through such gestures as laughing, paraverbals or changing the topic. In session 8 (the all-day), there was an
example of a situation in which the soothing appears so powerful as to probably not be coincidental, but rather, arising from an inter-subjective and unconscious movement. During that day of mindfulness practice, Gail appeared to reach a peak of embodied distress, sighing and tearing and fidgeting so much that Ruth asked her about it in the D & I at the end of the day. They worked together for several minutes and Ruth decided to pull back from inquiry as she began to conceptualize Gail’s distress as possibly having its origins in a trauma history. In her SC, Gail described her painful feelings:

GailSC21 I felt that I have this in my heart still. I felt like I had to either throw up or do something to kind of ... it was like having a rock in your heart, it was so tensed. So that’s what I felt. And I was looking for a solution, like really pragmatic, like ok what do I do? Why not? I want to get it out of me, to release my pain.

At this moment in session, Ruth shifted her attention from Gail to the group as if to marshal the group to act as a container for Gail’s painful emotions. We can imagine the whole group, as they listened to Gail’s story, feeling contagious distress and also possibly compassion. In this minute in the group dialogue, Ruth continued to normalize the experience of flashback memories or sensations appearing, “sometimes after silence, these things will bubble up. Sometimes surprising things that you thought were long gone, poof, there they are” (Ruth95).

Seemingly out of turn, Tasha offered her experience of the day which is different from the painful one that Gail just shared:

Tasha96: The last week I’ve been really busy, a lot of things on the go. Sort of antsy, Go go go, do do do. Now I don’t feel at all that way. I feel like I just let the air out.
Ruth97: Just released it.
Tasha98: Yes, all that nervous energy, it’s sort of gone.
Tasha100: It feels so much nicer, slower.

We do not know if Tasha was deliberately trying to provide a calming statement in order to reduce her group mate, Gail’s distress. If not deliberate, we might wonder if it was an
unconscious attempt at intersubjective soothing, since Gail reported in SC having a strong and positive response to Tasha’s words.

GailSC22 I really liked what she said, everything slows down. And also she said before something like life goes on. We have our small worries but the trees are standing there, growing, the flowers are growing. Life carries on; it’s not within our power. There’s something more than us. And I thought, she’s so right.

RA23 And what was that like for you? What feelings went along with those thoughts?
Gail23 A relief in a sense. It was like “yes”. I’m so worried about my life, not having a partner, about my ex husband but it’s so small in comparison with the rest of the world. It was actually freeing.

RA24 So a shift from the previous minute.
Gail24 Yes, it was a shift. She took it from the small problem to a bigger purpose, to humankind.

So it was not only Ruth who shifted attention from the individual to the group, from small to large, but group members were also involved in what seems to be a collective regulation. Gail in fact was referring back to earlier in the D & I, minute 10, when Tasha and Ruth had spoken poetically about nature continuing despite our worries. Here we have emotion regulation occurring in an apparently complex and systemic manner: perhaps by Tasha’s unconscious impulse to soothe Gail, and also at the same time, by Gail implicitly using the group for soothing by attributing reassuring meaning to Tasha’s comments, and also by recalling a calming moment from 10 minutes earlier in the class.

Another example of subtle group soothing occurred in Session 9, when we see Maria reluctantly engaging with Ruth on the topic of her feelings of sadness.

Ruth60 ... So fatigue and tiredness and a little bit of anger and resentment. About “What good is this?”?
Maria61: No, more like, these people who are all around me have no idea! Nobody even noticed that I was sad.
Ruth62: Oh no.
Everyone63: oh, murmers, mmm
Maria64: I was kind of just going, “you guys don’t get it.”
Ruth65: Ok. Ok.
Maria66: Yeah. That’s where the resentment came in I think.
Ruth67: Did you tell them that you were sad?
Maria68: No I didn’t know then. I figured that out later today.
Ruth69: Ok, so do you have any idea of what the sadness is from?
Maria70: Not really. Not specifically.
Ruth71: Ok. Well give it a bit more time and see what bubbles up.

Maria’s SC was somewhat unexpected. She had a very strong reaction during the SC which is not discernible in the session itself. She said she “hated” the exchange with Ruth, and “wanted it to stop, just wanted it to go away” (MariaSC23). She added she “didn’t really want to answer completely what was bothering” her since it was a “sensitive point” (MariaSC21). She also commented that while she hated it, it was “useful”:

Marisc20.... But I really didn’t realize until today what the resentment was about, I knew I felt it yesterday but I didn’t have the ability to express it to people, so to be asked that question by somebody [Ruth] who doesn’t even know me was very insightful. Like she even knows me better than I think!

The vulnerability and feeling exposed was quite acute:

Marisc27: Well I do remember her, you can see in the film she looks at me for a little while after I’m done talking and I just remember thinking, “don’t look at me, don’t look at me” because I thought there were more questions coming. And that felt a lot longer than it actually is in the video. It’s not very long in the video at all.

She went on to say, “But it is good to pushed like that, it is useful, I will definitely take it away and think about it but at the time it was just like, “ok, enough!” (MariaSC29). Here Ruth encouraged Maria to go deeper with the issue of sadness, whereas Maria resisted to an extent. She wanted to get insight into her situation while at the same time disliking the process. Their joint goal was to get insight into her feelings of sadness. It was a poignant minute since the group also rallied around Maria on an emotional level, murmuring sympathetic sounds, while Ruth said sympathetically, “Oh no” (Ruth 62). So we might say the joint (group) goal here was to support Maria as she inquired into her own painful experience. In this instance, it was only partially successful.
The sub-ordinate joint connection project (relating and connecting). Participants revealed in their self-confrontation interviews that they were often seeking (and sometimes finding, sometimes not finding) connection with other group participants. The post-class questionnaires and weekly logs also offer a rich source of data about the connection project: this is in fact the most saliently acknowledged joint project in the supplementary data set. As they sat and listened to each other’s sharing, they silently compared their own experiences with others. They reported in their SC interviews and in the logs that they were surprised, comforted and intrigued by the common thoughts and feelings expressed by the group, and sometimes annoyed also by their fellow classmates’ behaviours. This dovetailed with Ruth’s goal of accentuating the universal patterns of the human mind, particularly the way we all grasp and push away certain experiences. In fact, she did not speak of “my” or “your” mind, but rather, “the mind,” reinforcing the universal habits of mind. As the course continued, the relationship project consolidated and one gets a sense of the group as a highly inter-connected system of co-influential participants. Even though there was almost no “cross-talk” among group members, there was a powerful web of connection happening across the group while the dyadic dialogues went on. In fact, Ruth pointed to this when she explained in her SC (session 4) that participants were teaching each other:

RuthSC112- 120: It’s kind of a delicate dance, I think, allowing people time to explore for themselves ... And sometimes what I find it’s not necessarily what I say. It might be what someone else says in the room. People hear different people at different times. And they hear the same message from different people in different ways and so it will just depend on what arrives at her ears. It’s not something that’s a guarantee that if you say this, that will happen. It’s very much a journey, an exploration, and it takes time, and then all of a sudden there’s an “aha” moment, or not. And so I think it’s just the time, the time, to have it be discovered.

She added that when she is working with Maria, she was also working with the group:
RuthSC122: It’s not just Maria. And it’s not just me working with her; it’s everyone working with everyone else.

In her Session 4 SC, Ruth elaborated on her own internal process during Maria’s description of “beating herself up.” In the session she smiled and chuckled while Maria was speaking, and commented in SC that she was enjoying the universality of the description.

RuthSC15: I think it’s the sharedness . . . This is only about practice. It is only about practice. And there’s no difference between teaching or facilitating and participating. They are all one and the same. So it’s a shared . . . it’s a definitely shared experience. It’s not something that you could ever pretend that didn’t happen for you because that would be completely not true. It has to be recognized as a shared experience . . . . . . this is part of the human condition.

The connection project appeared to be a web which united teacher and participants in verbal and nonverbal, explicit and implicit processes.

**Seeking connection through common experience.** Simply put, members found comfort in shared experience and the realization that they were not alone. Early in the first session, Tasha stated that she had problems sleeping at night and as a result was sleepy during the bodyscan. As Gail listened, she compared her own experience to Tasha’s:

GailSC 40: Because she was talking about she doesn’t sleep at night and I have the same problem. But I was thinking about Barbara who sits right next to me. Because Barbara was, she started snoring actually because she was, she fell asleep too. And I was, I was “hmmm”, so, so the lady next to me fell asleep, this lady fell asleep, and I thought, there are a lot of women who have problems with sleeping, they are so relaxed they can’t help it but fall asleep. But I have the same problem so I felt good, not because she has a problem but I felt good that I heard people who had the same problems.

Gail’s goal was to make use of the class to deal with solving life’s challenges such as insomnia, and she did that in this moment by making connections between herself and other participants. In session 2, Maria put this in a nutshell. In her self-confrontation, she reflected that as she sat and listened to the interactions between participants and Ruth, she was busy with the connection project: “Again, it was just that relating thing. Can I relate, can I not relate, how do I relate?”
(MariaSC16). Later in Session 3, Maria remarked in her SC on the salient commonality she felt with Ruth while Ruth was describing an experience of mindless communication. She said, “[It] was like, um, I don’t know how to put that, it was almost like a little ... it was like she was narrating my day (laughs). Yeah.” (SC11). In Session 4, Maria reports she was listening to Laurie speak about self-compassion with a neutral yet curious attitude, “more exploratory, curious just interested” (MariaSC8). As Laurie proceeded with her sharing, Maria felt more and more connected.

MariaSC10: ... At the end where she was talking about beating yourself up, I’ve been really focusing on that all week so it was interesting to hear somebody else say that. I noticed it writing out some of my negative thoughts that I definitely beat myself up on both ends of it and to what avail, really? So it was interesting to hear somebody else say that yeah they were sort of considering the same thing.

Her feelings of connection culminated in Minute 20, when Laurie said that she found herself lacking compassion at times for others as well as herself:

MariaSC12: I was super excited that she said it out loud because I was speaking it in my head. I totally hold people to the same standards I hold myself to. ... It was interesting to have that reflection, somebody saying stuff that I was thinking, it was positive. [I felt] connected, a little elated, a little bit “oh good I’m not the only one that’s judging.”

Then Maria went on to marvel at the commonality of the experience, and to wonder if everyone in the group was thinking the same thing:

MariaSC14: And yeah I was actually thinking a lot about how, if it was stuff that Ruth was saying that was making us all kind of think this? Was everyone in the class relating to this? Is this kind of the moment we’re at in our curriculum, or is this just two similar coincidences with different people sort of happening along the path, so I was sort of just wondering that too.

In the final session, Maria, unaccustomed to feeling sad, was reassured that Karen reported a similar reaction to the all-day. In her SC, she says it was “a little bit of a relief hearing someone else say that it happened to them” (MariaSC4).
Another way participants realized their commonality was the inquiry into the “nature of the mind.” In session 2, Ruth helped Paula identify her thinking process and discover if her mental states are familiar; Paula wants feedback from Ruth about whether or not she’s “doing it right”:

Paula126: I drift away from the bodyscan with those thoughts and they take me somewhere else and I try to come back and I’m like “wait a minute! I thought we were on my knee!” Really paying attention to how fast my mind can lift away from what I’m actually doing.
Ruth127: (nods) But that’s the nature of mind again, thinking mind. That’s what it’s groomed to do. That’s what you’re doing in school, right, is thinking, using the mind to think.

Ruth smiled as she listened to Paula’s description. She said in her SC that she is thinking about the universality of the mind wandering:

RuthSC39: Just that it’s just the way mind is. It’s just such a universal experience and we don’t realize that other people’s minds are similar.

She comments that she is happy that Paula has emphasized this since it is the theme of this week’s class, the nature of the mind, the fact that everyone’s mind has similar habits.

Finding connection after losing it: Rupture and repair. Sometimes there was a loss of connection among group members, which became apparent only through the self-confrontations (and questionnaires/weekly logs) since there was very little cross-talk in the D & I itself. In Session 3, Gail gave a humorous example of someone else, a businessman, demonstrating mindlessness in communication. Ruth didn’t say anything in this section and in her SC, said that she was trying to think of a way of re-directing Gail to her own experience:

RuthSC23: It's the same thing, Gail is telling stories about other people. Other people doing this or that, her clients. It's a pattern she has. I'm noticing that and wondering if there's a particular question I could ask that would shift her attention somewhat. But I don't think of anything in that minute.
Gail’s goal was to participate and provide a “good example” of mindless communication, but she said in her SC that she felt guilty in mocking the person: “I didn’t feel great ... I felt like I was kind of judging him” (GailSC14). If Gail’s goal was to impress the others, she was not particularly successful. At least some members found it difficult to stay connected with her. Jackie said that in that moment she was struggling to “stay focused with her and understand what she was trying to say ... to give her my full attention” (JackieSC3). Maria reflects that she “was actually listening to her story, putting visuals to it ... but not really relating to what she was saying ... not really feeling, just kind of a thinking pattern” (MariaSC15). Together their goal was to listen to and understand Gail but there was a shared sense (even by Gail herself) that she was off-track somehow. At this moment, Betty entered the dialogue, and a sense of connection was renewed. She offered an example of how she was not mindful in personal communication (Betty235). Jackie and Maria in their SCs comment about how they felt connected to her “I actually felt I could connect to her … it was kind of like, “yeah I know what you’re talking about, I feel exactly the same way” (JackieSC10), and “I totally related to [her] .. because I do that a lot too” (MariaSC21). The subtle ebb and flow of member-to-member connection is represented in these brief moments. Connections in this case appeared restored when the “stories about other people” that Gail was telling were interrupted by Betty’s authentic and vulnerable sharing of her own imperfections. This may have been an unconscious and systemic regulation.

There was also a loss of connection between Ruth and members at times. In Session 4, Barbara, who was a participant of few words, shared feelings of vulnerability:

Barbara160: I found too that in realizing that I was beating myself up in the moment, I felt kind of a sadness that I wasn’t as far along as I thought I was.
Evryone161: Laughter
Barbara162: And then just sitting with that sadness rather than running away from it which I tend to be really good at. Just to be there.
Ruth163: Just to be with the sadness, yes. (pause, turns to the group) Any other sensations or feelings?

Ruth did not stay with this dialogue with Barbara but turned the attention to the class. We do not have SC for Ruth so we do not know her reasons, but Barbara’s SC revealed that she noticed the movement and wondered about it:

BarbaraSC9: Well I recall, coming to the end I was speaking with her, she was nodding her head and saying “Anybody else?” So it was just like, ok, “we’ve wrapped this up, we’re moving on.” Um, there wasn’t any, a lot of feedback from her about what I had to say so maybe it was just ... maybe it didn’t need feedback, so um. But it was one of the times that I was aware of her, of feeling like she wanted to move on to somebody else or something else.

Although Ruth did not stay with Barbara’s issue, Maria said in her SC that she was interested in it, and related to what Barbara had shared in terms of the self evaluation and judgment of one’s own process:

MariaSC22: I remember I was ... interested in what Barbara was saying there which was about not feeling that she was as far along as she was because I did have moments throughout the week where I was feeling really good about it and really bad about it in terms of being able to practice mindfulness.

So Barbara felt “passed over” by Ruth, while at the same time, Maria was silently attending with interest to Barbara’s sharing.

The moment passed and Gail entered into the dialogue with a perspective quite different from Barbara’s vulnerable one. Gail wanted to share a positive story to encourage the class and demonstrate how powerful mindfulness is:

Gail164: This week was very interesting for me, it was a big shift in terms of trusting myself. I’ve made three major decisions last week in several areas of my life. And one was about changing my program because I usually go to fortune tellers, I would call my friends and ask several people what they think but this time I listened to myself.

In her SC, she observed that she was feeling proud and relaxed and “in a hurry to share” what she perceived as “a perfect example of being mindful” (GailSC1). However, in the session, as
Gail spoke rapidly about her success, Ruth leaned forward and looked as if she wanted to say something. Gail was oblivious. As Gail watched the video for SC, she was surprised to see

Ruth’s body language which was an attempt to stop Gail:

GailSC4: I was focused. I don’t know ... now that I’m watching this video I see that she wanted to stop me several times because I was going off the topic. But then I was not noticing this. I was looking at other people and I wanted to see if they get it, that actually there could be different results but now that I look at her I can see that she made some, her body language, she wanted to stop me. I was talking, I was so busy in my own thoughts (laughs).

There was no back-and-forth contingent communication between Ruth and Gail; Gail herself says she was busy in her own thoughts rather than present with Ruth. Ruth rather forcefully interrupted Gail:

Gail164: I was actually holding on to this thought. I was actually listening to myself . . . I was sitting there and I made phone calls about the program and things I was sitting there and I made phone calls about the program and things were happening very smoothly --

Ruth165: I’m going to get you to stop for a second. I’m going to ask you something. What was going on in your body?

Here we see a complicated joint goal: While Ruth was trying to teach Gail mindfulness, Gail was trying to teach the class by sharing what she understood to be mindfulness. They were both focused on exploring mindfulness as a joint goal but from different perspectives. As Barbara observed silently, she was interested in the process:

BarbaraSC17: Well I was also wondering how long she was going to let her talk. Because it sounded like it could have been a long story. And um so I thought it was interesting when she brought her back to, refocusing on how she was feeling rather than the actual story. So she was trying to take us out of the story and focus on the feelings so I thought that that was a good place to be doing it.

Gail went on to say that as she watched the video in SC she realized how forceful Ruth had to be to stop her storytelling:

GailSC9 . . . Instead of commenting, sometimes people say, “Well I understand how you went through this ...” But this is not a counselling process, you know, “Oh, I know how you feel”. ...She had to stop me because I do get too carried away with my mind. My
mind does it, so, actually she had to, like abruptly stop me, like “Stop now, and I want to know about your body.”

Ruth and Gail continued to struggle at cross purposes for a few more minutes, and Ruth used the opportunity to explain again “that the story, the stories will vary but what comes up in the body will be the same. Ok? And this is the way we are. ... that’s what we’re trying to do in this course is really get familiar with how we react” (Ruth183). The penny finally drops, not only for Gail in this rather tense moment, but also for Barbara, who had a few minutes ago been passed over by Ruth. In their SCs for this moment, both Gail and Barbara reported “aha moments” (described in the Insight section) regarding their understanding of the relevance of becoming more aware of their body sensations and how they construct their stories. In her SC, Barbara revealed that she is paying attention to the meta-process of what Ruth is doing:

BarbaraSC22: I think she was doing here was what she was doing in a lot of the evening which I thought was really good which was reminding us, and she was doing it with Gail, to try to focus on what it felt like rather than the story. What were you experiencing, what did it feel like, where was it. And I think she kept reinforcing it because I think that’s a huge part of what we’re doing is becoming aware of that... The whole evening because of that felt good because that’s part of my goal is to be more aware of those things so to have it reinforced, to remind me to be more aware of those things, it’s a good thing.

Further, Barbara revealed in her SC that she got a lot out of this class. She reported that she came in feeling anxious because she had missed the previous week. She said by the end of the class her “mind was at ease” and she “felt I’m where I need to be” (BarbaraSC31). She added that the class content connected to what she was working on outside of the class and also brought her a feeling of interconnection with others:

BarbaraSC29: I thought it was ... I really related to a lot of what was being said. Um, so I thought it was a good session. I thought it fit into everything I’m doing personally. I was interested in how other people found their experiences during the week. Almost surprising. It surprised me that other people felt that. Because you never think that other people feel the way you do. So I think that was a good thing to see that.
So in these moments of Session 4, we see a break in connection between Ruth and Barbara, and Ruth and Gail, what might be conceptualized as temporary “ruptures.” Ruth missed Barbara’s attempt to connect, and she worked for a while at cross purposes with Gail. Yet by the end of the class, the relationship project at the level of group contained the dyadic rupture between Ruth and Barbara, as Barbara felt “at ease” because of feeling connected with the group. Rather differently, it appears that the relationship project at the dyadic level, possibly the growing trust and care in the teacher-student relationship, contained the temporary disconnection between Ruth and Gail.

**Getting connected in D & I: From distress to calm.** A few participants reported moving from distress to calm during the D & I. Gail in particular gradually responded in a calmer and more emotionally regulated way to both Ruth and the group. In fact, in her case, it seemed to be a goal to gain support and soothing from others. An early example of this is in Session 2, when Gail described the difficulties she had during the week concerning dog sitting an old, anxious dog:

Gail268: ... And I never had a dog, so every time I eat, he’s in my face because she feeds him all the time so it’s his space and I’m trying to be mindful and I had to train him first to sit there. We had a power battle a little bit (laughter).

Her goal in this minute was to feel better by sharing with the group: “That’s why I wanted to bring it up, to get it off my chest and get the energy from other people you know, comforting me” (GailSC4) “I needed to get it off my chest, although it had nothing to do with mindfulness” (GailSC5). She changed the topic to a more positive one, and explained in her SC that she wanted to change the topic from a negative to a positive one, to relieve her tense feelings:

GailSC1 I recall when I was talking about the dog, I was tense, like in my stomach, I felt I have a tension here, and because I have no solution for it, I still have tension. I’m dreading ...even when I talk about it this emotion comes back to me. And I guess I didn’t
finish my conversation about dog, my topic, I switched to positive thing because I didn’t want to stay in that negative feeling.

However, Ruth brought her back to the dog story:

Gail284: ... I said, “Go lie down” and there was a lot of irritation and I actually had to ... and then he comes again. So I, um, I ended up eating breakfast in my room. I had to shut the door. So it wasn’t nice because I was irritated... “stupid dog, stupid dog”
Evryone285: Laughter.
Ruth286: So just say a little bit about what the irritated felt like in the body.
Gail287: Um, I actually have fear.

Gail reported in her SC that this was an important moment, because of Ruth’s “indirect counselling” and the group normalization of her feelings:

GailSC13-14 I was having these emotions. At the beginning it was negative emotions, I remembered how this dog didn’t allow me, and as I was describing it I remembered how I made breakfast for myself, and I lay the table and then when I was telling this story, irritation came back to me because I remember how he irritated me, and then, and then, because I was talking about it and I remembered, everybody started laughing and I saw humour in my situation. What I thought in that moment was “yeah, this dog is afraid of me and I’m afraid of this dog, it’s like, we are all so afraid creatures” ... And then I said “this stupid dog” and everybody laughed and I thought exactly, like it is innocent, it was funny, it was funny it was actually irritating but it could be a funny experience. It’s how you look at it, because I was talking about it with humour and everybody laughed and I thought it’s actually not such a bad experience. When you look at it with just a bit of humour. So I felt light when I was talking about it. I’m glad she asked me to talk more about it because it actually helped me. She counselled me indirectly.

Gail appeared to gain support through the connection project as the group laughed and normalized the human experience of fear and powerlessness. She was also engaging in the attention project – noticing with kindness -- with Ruth, noticing that the more she talked about the unwanted feelings (the language project), the better she felt: “She asks me to talk about how I felt. I talk about fear. And uh the more I was talking about it, the less I felt it. My body was more relaxed” (GailSC16). Very similarly, in Session 4, Gail began the class upset, engaged in D & I with a focus on awareness of body sensation, and became reportedly more relaxed. In her SC for that session, she made note of the calming influence of both the group and Ruth, that “the energy around the class was good. Everybody was more present. Maybe because I was more present, I
felt more connected to people. There’s not resistance or anything.” (GailSC29). She added that she found Ruth to be warm, nonjudgmental and “calming”:

GailSC30: I think that she was very very warm. She’s very nonjudgmental and I like that. She feels comfortable. She feels kind of there for you. Although she stops you not to say things. But there’s a ... she has a very nice presence, very calming. I enjoy her a lot.

In Session 5, Ruth asked if anyone had been able to get a sense of what was behind their automatic impulses. Gerald responded and they had a dialogue about his observation that his impulses and thoughts are about control. Their joint goal was to explore Gerald’s experience, and to use it to teach the group. In Ruth’s SC, she reported that she was noticing how “incredibly insightful” Gerald was being with the course, and that “I was just feeling that if he could describe a bit about what was going on for him, the other people would hear that” (RuthSC1). She mentioned that in particular, she was hoping that Gail would pay attention to Gerald’s example and be able to use it for insight into her own unconscious patterns (RuthSC7). However, Gerald became embarrassed in this exchange and started to blush. In his SC, he said, “It was suddenly I was revealed and that was not ok, and I actually felt embarrassed” (GeraldSC5). At this moment, Ruth used her own self-disclosure in an attempt to broaden Gerald’s example into a teaching point for everyone’s benefit, but also possibly to help to ease Gerald’s embarrassment, through connection:

Ruth210: ...Whatever our pattern is, mine is usually eating. ... This feeling of unease and just running to the refrigerator and just hauling out everything and eating without any realization what this fleeting sensation is. Just “oh here it is”... It’s my pattern, just below the level of awareness that drags me to do this. And so the fact that you’re noticing what you’re doing that’s dragging you to do this, if we can back up a little bit and see what that sensation starts like, then we could make a decision around it.

Gerald in his SC reported at the beginning of her intervention still being caught in the experience of embarrassment and not really attending to what she was saying, “reliving it, really judging myself” (GeraldSC13). However, as she continued, he tuned in and calmed down. In session, his
calming and re-attunement were tangible as he looked up and began to nod. In his SC, he reported,

I’m nodding, because I recognize this whole pattern ... as I’m listening to Ruth describe how thoughts pull us in directions and um I’m actually tracking how that kind of went you know, kind of, feeling overwhelmed, too many projects, too much stuff to do, not enough time, and then bang, I go into control. . . so there is deep recognition of “oh yeah, I know what she’s talking about” so her description of it was really useful for me.

(GeraldSC15)

Ruth reported that she was hoping that by using her own example, she could emphasize the universality of this human predicament of unconscious destructive patterns and the power of awareness to work with them, the “human condition”:

RuthSC14: ... it’s important that everyone knows that you’re human, that you’re going through exactly the same thing, maybe just having looked at it in a different way and so I often, well I do try to share as much as I can.

A final and impressive example of the movement from distress to calm is from the all-day, in the dialogue around Gail’s distressing flashbacks during some of the meditations that day. Ruth made a decision at this moment to turn from Gail to the class, using the group to help Gail “contain” the triggered feelings. She did this by instructing the class (not only Gail) to hold everything with gentle kindness:

Ruth87: Uuh. Uuh. So with gentle kindness, just gentle kindness, just hold it and allow it to be as it is. Things do get dislodged during this process and sometimes people when they get home, maybe tears come. If tears come, just be gentle with yourself, just let them come. Have a quiet evening tonight. Gentle, kind, resting, holding yourself.

Ruth reported in her SC that she was aware of the potential release of traumatic memory that may have happened for Gail, and was being very intentional in her interventions. For example, she decided to speak to the issue of release by normalizing it and shifting the attention from Gail to the group, “very consciously so because it’s not therapy. It’s totally not counselling” (RuthSC10), while making a note to herself to follow up individually with Gail later. She said
she deliberately did not ask questions, because that may re-traumatize. Instead, we see her normalizing by addressing the group and inviting everyone to acknowledge and accept any uncomfortable sensations or memories that might have come up, inviting each participant to self-regulate with acceptance, and indirectly inducing a group regulation process which is simultaneously holding Gail’s distress. In her SC for this moment, Gail explained that she had conflicting goals, to continue the exchange with Ruth but at the same time to contain or even block her feelings:

GailSC6: It was very hard. I actually had to discontinue sooner than later, because I thought if she asked me to talk about [him], I would probably start crying. I could feel my emotions coming up . . . I experienced that I didn’t want this to happen. I didn’t want to cry because it’s painful and I was kind of trying to push them back and so I was actually glad that we didn’t talk about it, that she didn’t ask me more questions. I was afraid of it.

Although Ruth says her intention is not counselling, we can see a process being negotiated here which is known as titration in trauma therapy. That is, to allow painful memories to surface a little, and then contain them, back and forth, negotiating safety and release. Ruth wanted to help Gail feel safe in the group, and to limit her possible re-traumatisation by not asking questions, and Gail wanted to share her powerful experience with the group but without crying. Ruth shows her consummate skill as a group leader in this regard, toggling between individual and group, as a means of containment. This proved very effective, which Gail remarks on in her SC:

GailSC11 I recall that ... I still didn’t want to show any emotions and I was actually amazed by Ruth and her perception. And how, she said to the group, “Even if you have tears just go with it and be gentle”. And I felt that she was talking to me. Although she was talking to everybody. Because I felt like crying, her words really spoke to me. So I thought, she’s so sensitive, she probably sensed ... or maybe it was just a coincidence but it was amazing that she could tap into my feelings.

The implicit connection between Ruth and Gail was felt and used by Gail for self-regulation in several instances. She also was receptive to soothing that the group offered her. In the final session, she was visibly distracted, mopping her face with a handkerchief. She said in the SC that
she was “putting [herself] together”, wiping away the makeup that had smeared because of her “tearing” during the body scan. She reported in the SC that she “wasn’t really listening at that time” because she “wanted to look good on the last session [for the camera].” By the end of the session, she reported feeling calm and supported by the group. Gail also mentioned in this minute feeling support from the group:

GailSC10: I saw eye contact from people and they were actually supporting me in my intention to write a letter to [him]. I could feel that. I didn’t feel judged, I felt safe at that moment. Although I didn’t plan to share that, it was ok.

**Spontaneous feelings of connection.** Jackie described feeling very connected to Ruth and also to Gerald in the early part of session 5. The session began with 2 minutes of mindful sitting. Ruth ended the brief sitting by inviting the class to bridge the sitting to the sharing, by “opening your eyes and refocusing on the group the best you can, staying completely present in the space where you are, if you can, speaking from this space” (Ruth1). Jackie had a lot to say in the SC although she spoke only a few sentences in the session. She was feeling tired but happy, and she described a tender moment of nonverbal meeting with Ruth:

JackieSC1: ... And so I think just as soon as I kind of opened my eyes I just looked over and I saw Ruth. I looked at her and she looked at me and we kind of like didn’t look away and that’s when I started smiling and then it was just kind like an invitation to say something ... I guess like welcomed, there was a welcoming ... It was encouraging.

Ruth and Gerald began a dialogue about pain. In her SC, Jackie commented on Ruth’s presence:

JackieSC12: . . . Ruth really fully, fully listens and in that moment that’s the person she’s going to pay attention to and it doesn’t matter if it’s a minute or like 7 minutes of a class, because that experience itself is so valuable and I think she has does a really good job of that of being so in tune with that one person even though it’s with all these other people in the room... She takes a step further, it’s almost like, I feel like I can ... it’s hard to describe, it’s like, it’s so personal for Gerald. It’s this amazing insight into that and I find that so valuable because that’s how I learn is from hearing other people’s experiences and getting that inside view of things.
Jackie was feeling connected with Ruth and with Gerald, and noting the connection between Ruth and Gerald. In this moment, it was as if it was not important to Jackie whether Ruth is interacting with her or with Gerald. She explained that she felt “inside” Gerald’s experience even though she was a silent observer of their interaction.

**Internalizing the connection with Ruth.** Participants commented often in their weekly logs about the connection they felt with Ruth. Jackie, for example, commented in Week 1 that she decided to share in order “to get warm energy from Ruth,” and several participants reported in the logs that they share in order to “be listened to by” “feel connected to” “be heard by” Ruth. Karen reported in her weekly log for Week 3, “By my sharing in the D & I, the teacher can meet me where I am.” To greater or lesser extents, participants enjoyed Ruth’s attention and aimed to receive it. There was one striking example of how this mindful attention that they wanted so much from the external teacher was internalized for Jackie. In the all-day D & I, Jackie got a bit lost in a story as she interacted with Ruth. She shared a lot of detail, and Ruth did not engage in dialogue with her, instead leaving Jackie and widening to the group, as if preparing for closure:

Jackie145: ... Whereas with the second person, there was so much sadness and hurt, and I started to get into the story. [long silence]
Ruth146: Ok. Yeah. [turning to group] So I think you all need some time to digest this. I am reluctant to make you speak when you look like you’re not feeling like speaking. Does anybody else have anything to say?

In her SC, Ruth said that at that moment, she was debating about engaging in dialogue with Jackie or leaving the discussion until the final class. In Jackie’s SC, she did not indicate feeling disappointed or hurt that Ruth did not continue with the dialogue. In fact, she reported that while she was speaking to Ruth, she actually remembered a significant teaching point of Ruth’s from previous sessions, that of getting distance from one’s story:

JackieSC5: I was just explaining about how different issues came up and um yeah then I just all of a sudden remembered that Ruth like a lot of times when we share something in
class, she said that’s your story, right? Like you’re not necessarily mindful of all the facts but you’re putting in so much detail from what happened in the past ... and I think that’s what made it really different for me, though, with these two different people I thought of was that, with one of them as I said it was very matter of fact, factual, I didn’t have a whole lot to say whereas the other one all these other things came up and all the stories.

Through this comment in her SC, it appears that even though Ruth was not actively engaging in dialogue with Jackie in this moment, Jackie had internalized the teachings to such an extent that the teacher was not necessary. She was able, without Ruth’s prompting, to get distance from her “story” – in other words, to take the position of the observing self. There was a poignant silence between Jackie and Ruth’s speech. Jackie noted the silence, and said in her SC that she was expecting Ruth to speak:

JackieSC7  Um and there was also a little, there was a period of like, where I was done talking and she hadn’t yet said anything and it was maybe like 10 seconds but it felt like an eternity because it was just like silence and I’m looking at her and she’s looking at me and it was just kind of like I feel so much was said even though nothing was really said in that moment.

There appeared to be a meaningful attunement in this silence that is enough for Jackie.

An example of a failure of the relationship project: The first time there was an obvious break in connection between Ruth and Barbara is in Session 4, when Barbara shared feelings of sadness and Ruth did not engage her in dialogue but rather turned to the class. In that session, the rupture appeared to be at least partially repaired in two ways: Barbara’s excitement at a significant insight she gained (through Gail’s work) a few minutes later, and generally, her feelings of connection and commonality with group members in that session. She was absent in Session 5, and then in Session 6, reported a different variation on her relationship with Ruth, complaining that Ruth was paying her too much attention. From an observer’s point of view, the exchange looked like a typical moment in D & I:

Ruth370: ... Can anyone describe anything that arose for them in that meditation? Barbara371: I found it was actually physically painful.
Ruth372: (nods). Ok.
Barbara373: I noticed how tired I was trying to stay awake. Everything felt like it was tightening up and it felt painful.
Ruth374: Ok. Was it a solid feeling or did it have little subtle nuances?
Barbara375: It was pretty solid. Chest and arms. It actually hurt.
Ruth376: So it got tight.
Barbara377: Yeah
Ruth378: Did it change at all?
Barbara379: Um. When you ended it.
Evryone380: (laughter)
Ruth381: (laughs) Sometimes it’s like that. Anyone else?

Barbara actually cut this one off before Ruth could when she answered somewhat sardonically, “when you ended it.” She said in her SC that she was feeling uncomfortable:

Barbara15: Where last time I didn’t feel that she was very focused but this time I felt she was almost over focused. It was making a little uncomfortable at times (laughs). I thought “Oh ok, you can go on to someone else now”. I felt that it wasn’t something that needed as much focus. Which is totally opposite of how I felt last time.

Barbara did not attend after this session. She contacted the researcher and explained in a brief telephone interview that she had decided to drop out although she still wished to be included in the data set. She said that she had a “hard time connecting with Ruth” which was the “biggest part of the problem.” Feeling brushed over quickly and then over-attended to, she said, made her feel uncomfortable. Further, she found Ruth’s quality of voice to be irritating, “not soothing or peaceful.” She also appeared to find the meta-processes distracting: She said that speaking about her experiences in the D & I, and then in SC, took her away from being in the moment. This is very similar to the frustration Laurie expressed with the D & I. In other words, it is the relational aspects of the mindfulness project as it was constructed in this MBSR course that she did not enjoy or find helpful. For Barbara, the failed relationship project took precedence over the mindfulness project. The failure to negotiate the relationship project resulted in a premature end to the mindfulness project for at least one participant.
In conclusion, the participants of this case-study attempted to learn mindfulness through the Dialogue and Inquiry component of the MBSR course in a process that combined individual and joint (relational) experience, and embodied and conceptual knowing. This learning process was undertaken in the context of their personal life issues (life-projects), through the relationship project formed dyadically between the teacher and each participant and also across the group, and most specifically, through the five sub-ordinate joint projects: attention, language, insight, compassion and connection. The mindfulness project and the relationship project served as super-ordinate, overlapping goal-directed action processes over time. The five sub-ordinate joint projects constituted the wider projects as functional steps, that is, these joint processes of noticing, describing, understanding, helping and connecting were *how* the mindfulness and relationship projects were enacted. The teacher-led joint actions of notice-describe-understand were taken in a repetitive and relatively systematic way throughout the D & I, forming salient projects over the time-period of the two-month program. Although all participants described many moments of the D & I which they perceived as helpful and often illuminating, two of the ten participants struggled consistently with the relational and linguistic aspects of the D & I in an apparent conflict between their understanding of mindfulness as a nonconceptual state and the action processes of dialogue. In sum, the D & I was observed to be a rich and dynamic part of this MBSR course.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This dissertation sought to describe and understand the processes and meanings of mindfulness as it was enacted through teacher-student dialogue in an MBSR course. The experience of learning mindfulness was observed as a joint action both in teacher-student dyads and across the group. This discussion relates the findings described in the previous chapter to the relevant extant literature on change processes in MBSR, learning mindfulness, and attachment processes. Beginning with a review of the rationale for this study, the contributions to the research literature will be offered. Next, the theoretical and clinical implications of the findings will be considered. In conclusion, the chapter will acknowledge the limitations of this study and suggest areas of future research.

Situating the Study

Mindfulness has not been adequately investigated as a part of a social/relational process, the vast proportion of the research being focused on measuring its effects, or attempting to define and measure it as an individual internal phenomenon, state or trait. This is despite the fact that mindfulness as a health intervention has been most often taught, and researched, via the social context of the group courses, MBSR and MBCT, and is commonly regarded by meditation practitioners as a process over time (e.g. Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Thus the approach so far to understanding the construct itself has been somewhat narrowly construed, and perhaps limiting. Further, there is little formal research investigating how mindfulness is learned, which, if it is indeed “the work of a lifetime” rather than a discrete skill which can be definitively mastered, also begs the question of how mindfulness is experienced and practiced as it is “learned.” There is little in the literature about the lived experience of the teacher and the participants during the Dialogue and Inquiry (D & I) component of the MBSR course. There are unanswered questions
about the role of the mindful teacher, the significance of the group format, and more specifically, the meaning and importance of the interactive, relational D & I component of MBSR in the learning of mindfulness. Indeed, the D & I has been largely overlooked in our understanding of the processes of learning mindfulness in MBSR.

**Summary of the Findings**

The action processes identified and described in this study of learning mindfulness through the Dialogue and Inquiry component of an MBSR course suggest that, while the mindfulness project is the super-ordinate class joint project, it is embedded in and constituted by a concurrent relationship project. The mindfulness project was taken up initially by participants as a perceived means to achieving their other important life projects, which can be generally described as efforts to get rid of unpleasant physical and mental health symptoms. Individual projects of fighting against and getting rid of suffering were challenged and sometimes transformed when met by the mindfulness curriculum presented during the D & I. The mindfulness curriculum was to a large part embodied by the teacher, who initiated many of the actions in the D & I in a teacher-led inquiry, drawing the students into joint processes of noticing (attention), describing (language) and understanding (insight). The relationship project, which was enacted with the goal of being there for one another, was heavily overlapping with, but distinct from, the mindfulness project. Further, the joint processes of helping (compassion) and relating (connection), often implicit and spontaneous, appeared to inform both the super-ordinate projects. In sum, the mindfulness project was enacted through a reciprocal and contingent relationship project, made up of teacher-student, student-student, and self connections conducted within a context of non-judgment.
Contributions to the Literature

The current study contributed to the field of mindfulness research in four main ways. First, the findings and the theoretical backdrop of the study make a novel contribution to our understanding of mindfulness and how it is learned by conceptualizing it as part of a relational process rather than viewing it solely as an intra-psychic individual mechanism of attention. More specifically, the D & I was observed to often follow a relatively systematic movement through three joint actions, which approximated meditation practice. Second, the study advances mindfulness research methodology. Third, the findings support empirically and develop the two recent pedagogical models of mindfulness (Crane, 2009; McCown et al., 2010). Finally, the detailed findings of this study illustrate several processes that were important in the lived experience of teacher and students as they attempted to learn mindfulness through the D & I of the MBSR group. These are understood as goal-directed and joint processes and have not been previously linked to the D & I.

Repositioning mindfulness. The first contribution to the literature is the contextualized nature of the investigation, and the suggestion that the D & I may serve as a relational enactment of mindfulness. Just as mindfulness can be seen as being constructed phenomenologically by individual participants as they engage in training their minds through formal meditation practices (Olendzki, 2011), so can it be viewed as co-constructed over time in the joint projects of teacher and student in D & I. Surrey (2005) posited relational mindfulness as part of the psychotherapeutic alliance, whereby “both the therapist and patient are working with the intention to deepen awareness of the present relational experience, with acceptance” (p.92). Although MBSR is not psychotherapy, the D & I can be seen in a way that is similar to what Surrey described, except that the purpose is not psychotherapeutic change but rather the learning
of mindfulness. Furthermore, because it is part of an educational training of mindfulness rather than therapeutic dialogue, the finding that the D & I was enacted through a relatively systematic and even formulaic sequence of actions is not surprising. As described in Chapter 4, the joint actions of “notice with gentle kindness, describe and understand” were engaged again and again, and in a regular sequence, led by the teacher. What is perhaps obvious, but nonetheless has not been observed in the literature, is that these dialogical movements parallel the “private” or intrapsychic actions of mindfulness meditation, as it is normally understood in individual formal meditation practice (e.g. as described by Thera, 1962). The sequence in the systematic, private cultivation of mindfulness in formal meditation practice is typically, first, shamatha (concentration), which involves paying sustained nonjudgmental attention to one’s inner experience (usually beginning with the breath) and then using silent labeling to support one’s ability to sustain focus, and second, vipassana (insight) which involves observing one’s experience of the arising and passing away of internal “events” as the gateway to understanding important truths about human existence. Indeed, the dialogical sequence of notice-describe-understand was remarkably systematic throughout the D & I, marking the discourse as something other than spontaneous conversation, free sharing, reviewing homework, or academic discussion. It is suggested by this writer to be a relational way of practicing mindfulness, shamatha-vipassana turned inside out, as it were.

**Methodological contributions.** The second main contribution of this study was its novel use of the qualitative action-project method to investigate mindfulness. The study’s main purpose required a method different from the more typical self-report approaches (correlational research based on measures of different kinds, and retrospective qualitative interviews) or outcome studies which have been so prevalent in mindfulness research. To understand the social
and relational meanings of mindfulness as learned in MBSR necessitated not only a first-person perspective (as would be typical in more conventional qualitative interviews), but a way to capture the intersubjective learning processes. The action-project method’s data collection accessed both the recorded teacher-student dialogue and their individual subjectivities, moment-by-moment, thus making it possible to construct an understanding of the jointness of the mindfulness project. What they were able to report in the self-confrontation interviews was their awareness of their experience of themselves and of each other. The subsequent analysis integrated a systematic functional coding of language elements (the class dialogues) with participants’ understanding of how they were influencing and being influenced by each other in the process of learning mindfulness.

This methodology thus provides a complex triple view of the phenomenon in question – the individual’s experience of learning mindfulness (subjective), his or her experience of each other (e.g. teacher, or students) in that process (inter-subjective), and the researchers’ observations and analysis (ostensibly objective but including subjective and inter-subjective). This combination of first-, second- and third-person perspectives in the data collection is unusual. Varela, Rosch and Thompson (1991) highlighted the need for second-person perspectives in consciousness research (see also Thompson, 2001; Varela & Shear, 1999), yet most research methodologies do not accommodate this. Most specifically, Varela recommended the inclusion of a “second-person perspective” in consciousness research which would be, for example, a meditation teacher, someone who “takes a position of one who has been there to some degree and thus provides hints” (p. 8) on the first-person lived experience of meditation. A more general understanding of second-person perspective in research, that encompassing the “I-You” intersubjective relationship, has been promoted by Wilber (2000) in his model of
consciousness. The multi-perspectival understanding of the processes of learning mindfulness, accessed through action-project method, is a unique contribution of this study.

Also, since a good deal of the self-confrontation was based on minutes in which the participants were not actively speaking or interacting directly with Ruth, the method provided a rich window into the “silent” participants’ experiences of learning mindfulness. This made it possible to better understand the group joint goals and projects, not just particular dyads’. The application of the action-project method to investigating a group learning experience was at times challenging due to the complexity of the data set, but served as a novel example of how the method can be utilized to research the joint subjective processes of a group.

In terms of the use of action-method to investigate a mindful process, an intense meta-awareness experience was observed during the data-collection, in that the participants were first involved in a meta-cognitive training experience in mindfulness in the D & I, and then asked in self-confrontation interviews to take yet another level of “observing self” perspective, watch themselves on video, and recall their inner experience. In fact, three levels of “meta” awareness were constructed. During SC, participants were asked what their thoughts and feelings were in that moment – similar to the observation of thoughts and feelings during formal mindfulness practice, and again during the D & I. In this sense, self-confrontation interviews were a parallel process of noticing, describing, and reflecting which required, and possibly developed, mindfulness. Since there was no measurement of mindfulness in the study, the use of SC did not create any confounds, but rather, simply inadvertently added another way for participants to practice mindfulness. A drawback of the potential “extra mindfulness practice” of SC was the possible cognitive and physiological load on the target participants, since they were required to pay attention for such an extended period of time, both during the class time and the interviews.
For one participant, who disliked the verbal and relational aspects of the D & I because in her opinion they distracted her from the “experience” of mindfulness, the self-confrontation interviews also proved irritating and unhelpful. The other participants reported enjoying the interviews and finding them to add to their self-awareness.

**Support for emerging pedagogical models of mindfulness.** At the same time as the data collection and analysis of this study were conducted, models of teaching MBSR (McCown et al., 2010) and MBCT (Crane, 2009) were published. The third main contribution of the findings of this study was to illustrate empirically, and develop, several of their hypotheses, and suggestions.

**McCown, Reibel and Micozzi (2010).** From their clinical perspectives, McCown and colleagues suggested the apparent importance of inter-subjective processes of compassion, empathy, acceptance and connection in the MBSR group which they supposed facilitates the learning of mindfulness. They also suggested that the group can be a powerful regulator of individual affect and they noted that processes of emotion regulation are salient in the D & I. These suggestions were born out by the findings of this study.

More specifically, their model claimed that the D & I is important for two “teaching intentions” – “cultivating observation” and “moving towards acceptance.” Certainly there was evidence of both of these in the findings of this study, enacted as the attention project (noticing with gentle kindness). Perhaps the most important commonality between their model and this study is the importance they give to teacher characteristics and the embodiment of mindfulness by the teacher. Thus this study illustrates their theoretical model empirically. There are three general findings from this case study which are not only supportive but additive to McCown and colleagues’ model.
First, the interpersonal actions among teacher and students in the D & I of this study appeared to mirror the intrapsychic movements of mindfulness meditation as it is undertaken privately in formal meditation. The actions of notice, describe and understand, identified as jointly enacted among teacher and students in the D & I, are similar to the meditation sequence attempted privately: paying attention to one’s inner experience, labeling, and seeking insight. In this way, the D & I served not only as an important relational container for the work, and also not only an important vehicle for learning acceptance and observation, but another embodied form (a relational form) of mindfulness meditation.

Secondly, the attachment processes alluded to by McCown and colleagues were more specifically enacted in this study’s D & I than they have laid out, particularly the developmental sequences of mentalizing. It appears that the participants of this study, while engaged in the attention and language projects, were at the same time developing a theory of mind, “feeling felt” by the teacher and the other students, and simultaneously contacting and understanding each other’s minds.

Lastly, whereas McCown and colleagues observed that a series of “rifts” and “repairs” occur in the inter-subjective space of the group, and that the teacher is responsible for helping participants manage these, they do not address the inevitable ruptures that might occur between teacher and student, nor the potential influence of the teacher’s own attachment history and style on the way the D & I is conducted with particular students. Students in this study were acutely aware of the back-and-forth movement between themselves and the teacher, noticed how the teacher interacted with others, and also were sensitive to the amount and quality of attention that was paid to them by the teacher. The intersubjective dance of attunement and misattunement between teacher and students appeared to be an important aspect of the learning process.
Crane (2009, 2010). Crane (2009) maintained that the dialogue between the participants and the teacher is an interactive expression of the investigation into the nature of mind. Crane gave a figure of the inquiry process which shows three concentric circles: noticing at the core (direct experience), next, dialogue (exploring how this relates to personal patterns), and lastly linking (finding new ways and change) (p. 145). She identified “notice and describe” and “linking experience to life” as the prime elements in the D & I process. These are quite similar to the three subordinate projects identified in this study, attention (noticing), language (describing) and insight (understanding), and thus the findings are consistent with her theoretical model. However, the third concentric circle “linking experience to life” (finding new ways and change) in Crane’s model is more specific than the broad insight project identified in this study. Sometimes participants of this study came to insight by linking their meditation experience to their lives, as Crane suggests, but other times, their insight appeared to be related to general conceptual understanding or embodied recognition.

One way this study’s findings adds another dimension to Crane’s model was in the observation of how these three projects were jointly enacted. For example, the impressive ability of the teacher to facilitate “noticing,” an apparently private action, through her skilful use of language was salient, and the possibility of joint attentional processing was observed. The interrelatedness of the notice and describe projects was noteworthy – that in the process of describing, more was noticed. Crane’s figure does not capture the impressive way that the internal action of mindfulness (noticing with nonjudgment) was externally enacted in the D & I through the joint projects.

It might be construed as somewhat presumptuous to imply that this single case study based on a participant sample of ten participants and one teacher might carry weight and even
provide additive findings to the models of McCown and colleagues (2010) and Crane (2009), both of which appear to be constructed based on many years of reflective professional practice, dealing with hundreds or perhaps even thousands of students. Indeed, the findings of this study illustrate and support rather than replace these models. What is perhaps helpful to reflect upon is Stake’s (2010) claim that qualitative research is “disciplined common sense.” What this single case-study offers is a systematic description and analysis of both the dialogues and the reported perspectives of teacher and students, thus aiming for a level of rigor and trustworthiness of conclusions that is the purview of qualitative research.

**Illustration of key processes in learning mindfulness.** The fourth main contribution of the study is the illustration of several key processes in learning mindfulness through D & I. These processes were identified and described as joint projects in the findings. In this discussion, these findings of joint projects are located and understood within a wider network of psychological knowledge in relation to previous research and theory. As no measures of mindfulness were taken, we cannot claim that mindfulness was or was not learned. It might be more accurate to say there were several key joint processes observed in this study as part of the participants’ attempts to learn mindfulness through the D & I. Some of these have been already identified in the recent pedagogical models of mindfulness (Crane, 2010; McCown et al, 2010), and also in the mediation literature as posited mechanisms of change in the MBIs, while others have not been acknowledged as important. The observed and reported significance of these processes for the participants of this study enriches our understanding of their lived experience of learning mindfulness through D & I.

**Acceptance-based change.** This is one of the least surprising joint processes identified in the D & I, observed as part of the attention project (notice with gentle kindness). Acceptance has
been posited as a mechanism of change in the MBIs (e.g. Baer, 2010; Hayes et al, 2006) and is part of most definitions of mindfulness, although it has been debated whether it is really part of the construct itself or rather, an attitude or context for the cultivation of mindfulness (e.g. Brown et al., 2007). What is of interest is to note both how important acceptance was to the participants and at the same time, how difficult. The paradoxical attention project involved noticing with gentle kindness not only the painful sensations of sitting meditation, but also the discomfort of their various life-projects.

It still may be possible that Brown and Ryan (2004) were accurate in their findings that acceptance was redundant as an explanatory factor in their measure of mindfulness, especially if it is not possible to pay sustained attention without this accepting attitude, as Grossman (2010) proposed. But even if the measure of mindfulness does not need to contain a discrete factor of acceptance, it appears to have been an important part of learning mindfulness for the participants of this case and perhaps is an essential teaching objective. Of course, it may be not only the teacher’s words “with gentle kindness” that facilitated the attitude of acceptance in participants, but the consistent embodiment of that in Ruth’s responses to their comments and behaviours. Further, it is possible that the member-to-member witnessing of each other’s struggles and difficulties may also have contributed to an implicit empathy and willingness to extend kindness to self and others. At the same time, it was difficult. The struggle with acceptance that the participants reported was also reported by Allen and colleagues (2009) as a significant part of the lived experience of participating in MBCT. It seems important for facilitators of MBSR/CT to be cognizant of not only the importance, but the difficulty of this aspect of paying attention.

**Self-compassion.** Neff (2003) has posited the construct of self-compassion, along with a scale to measure it. Some studies have shown an increase in self-compassion as a result of
MBSR (e.g. Shapiro et al., 2007). Some have questioned its considerable overlap with that of the construct of mindfulness (e.g. Brown et al., 2007). What is interesting are the parallels between Neff’s construct of self-compassion (mindful awareness, self-kindness, an awareness of our common humanity) and two of the subordinate joint projects in this study: attention and connection. Ruth’s most oft-repeated refrain was “notice with gentle kindness,” which appeared to engender a self-compassionate response among participants. She often pointed out examples of the “universal mind” habits, and participants often marveled in their SCs about their perceived commonalities. As Ruth responded with kind attention to participants’ reported experiences, she modelled the compassionate relationship she was simultaneously inviting them to have for themselves. Self-compassion was identified as a salient aspect of the larger compassion project.

**Emotion-regulation.** If we define the construct of emotion regulation as “awareness and acceptance of emotion as it arises” (Gratz & Roemer, 2004), certainly there are many examples from this study of teacher and participants intentionally trying to do so, since the action of mindfulness includes paying attention to emotion as well as thoughts and sensations. A more general definition of emotion-regulation is the conscious or unconscious recovery of certain physiological systems after the offset of an elicitor of negative emotion (Davidson, 2010). In their self-confrontation interviews, participants of this study often reported the experience of feeling anxious or distressed when beginning dialogue with Ruth, and calmer and more relaxed by the end. Indeed, as was mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, mindfulness is now being re-considered as an emotion-regulation tool rather than a purely cognitive one, but it has been assumed that the regulation is a result of the formal mindfulness meditations.

In such a complex activity as D & I, there are many possible ways of explaining the calming that appeared to happen as dialogue was engaged. For example, as the joint projects of
attention and language took place, there was possibly an inter-subjective regulation between teacher and student. Ruth embodied calmness, patience, and nonjudgment, and participants reportedly were aware of, and appreciated, these qualities. Further, an inter-subjective regulation appeared to occur across the group in the connection project, which in fact was observed several times as members report in their SC interviews that they felt aware of, connected to and supported by the presence of other members. The Buddhist concept of the interdependence of reality, anatta, was not only highlighted explicitly by Ruth, but reportedly experienced many times by participants, and we know from group research literature how calming and validating the feelings of universality can be (Yalom, 1985). The actions of compassion and self compassion may also be regulating. Finally, the joint language project itself may promote emotional regulation, for example, through mechanisms of exposure, and the resultant understanding or insight may also contribute to enhanced positive affect reportedly experienced by members at various times during D & I. In sum, each and every one of the identified joint projects may have contributed to emotion regulation, and the data contain many examples of participants’ reports of moving from distress (confusion, discomfort) to calm (relaxation, clarity, relief, peace) during the D & I.

Although emotion-regulation has been posited as a mechanism of change in the MBIs (e.g. Leahey, Crowther & Irwin, 2008), it has not been linked in particular to the D & I, but rather, assumed to be a consequence of the formal mindfulness training. For the participants of this case study, learning mindfulness through the various sub-ordinate projects of the D & I appeared to be emotionally regulating.

**Narrative.** It is noteworthy to observe how mindfulness was constructed in the D & I, not only reportedly in the body or even in the thought processes, but through social means via
language. This finding is a novel contribution of the study. The teacher, while giving space to participants to express their experience, and while consistently giving, as Gerald observed, questions rather than answers, was persistent in her efforts to guide participants into a particular discourse, what we might call a mindfulness discourse. It was enacted through two projects, attention and language.

A bodily-experienced story was constructed through the D & I and reinforced by the teacher, while a conceptual, opinionated or judgmental story was discouraged. These two types of narrative are often seen through a lens of “real” (the body) versus “constructed” (language) but of course language was used to identify and report body sensations, so that what we can observe emerging is actually not just dropping one story, but telling a new and different type of story: experiential, sensory, present-focused, nonjudgmental. This can be understood through the mechanisms of re-perceiving or decentering.

Shapiro and colleagues (2006) said that through reperceiving in mindfulness, “we experience what is instead of a commentary or story about what is” (p. 379). Likewise, Williams (2010) said that decentering was “seeing something as it is, without further elaboration” (p. 4). Indeed, in the current study, the teacher also referred to the ontological separation between “reality” or experience, and “story,” for example when she asked Gerald to describe his pain, “what’s going on there, without the story, just the sensation of it” (Session4, Ruth 47).

Interestingly, discrete neural correlates have been identified for present-centered, sensory self-focus versus narrative, conceptual self-focus (Farb et al, 2007). Decades of cognitive research, as well as thousands of years of Buddhist psychological inquiry, indicate that the global, interpretative, and opinionated stories we tell ourselves can amplify suffering, often creating more distress than the initial experience itself. What is of interest here is that there was a
particular discourse that the teacher inculcated through the D & I, a way of experiencing and speaking about experiencing which is different than usual conversation. Paradoxically, the only way to ask participants to put aside the story and access direct experience is through language, and through the invitation to tell a different kind of story.

Thus, from a constructivist perspective, the action of the D & I seemed not so much to uncover “what is” as to create it, or more accurately, co-create it. Ruth, as an influential teacher, led the movement, in a student-centered fashion rather akin to Rogerian client-centered therapy. Many would agree that what may have appeared as Rogers “following” the client, was in fact a sophisticated and highly influential social process in which Rogers subtly led the client into certain ways of being (e.g. self-acceptance.). Similarly, Ruth, though apparently throwing responsibility back to the students, was inculcating a very particular “mindful” way of being and speaking: attentive, curious, nonjudgmental, self-compassionate, and body-centered. We might add “humorous” to this list of qualities, perhaps related to her ability to be nonjudgmental: a striking feature of her attitude is her humour which was expressed in smiles, chuckles and laughter, often in moments where she or participants were expressing a universally difficult human experience or condition. Participants wanted something to make their suffering go away; Ruth paradoxically coaxed them into noticing, describing, and understanding their suffering.

The mindfulness discourse that is indirectly “taught” is one which spurns concepts, opinions and retrospective stories, and privileges present-moment, embodied experience. Ruth did this by her choice of questions and selective attention. For example, she often ignored or interrupted retrospective stories and “positive outcome” evaluations, and focused on unpleasant and avoided body sensations. She asked many more questions about body sensations than thoughts or emotions. The subordinate joint projects, particularly attention, language and insight,
were led by the teacher, and students followed more or less willingly because of their commitment to the super-ordinate joint mindfulness and relationship projects. Thus “mindfulness” in the D & I of this case study was a co-constructed and narrative experience which was heavily influenced by a skilful teacher. It may be that decentering, posited as a primary mechanism of change in the MBIs (Carmody et al, 2009; Teasdale et al, 2002), was learned through the D & I through the joint projects of attention and language.

**Conceptual understanding.** Conceptual understanding has not been featured in research on mindfulness. Instead, much is made of the importance of non-conceptual, embodied formal practice of mindfulness in the experiential learning of mindfulness. However, there was a noticeable conceptual process of understanding that took place during D & I, through the insight project. In fact, we might say that one of the main goals for the group participants in this study was to conceptually “get” mindfulness. Participants put a lot of effort into conceptually grasping what Ruth was trying to present experientially, and actually avoiding the experience of mindfully observing and describing unpleasant body sensations. This is ironic since it is embodied insight that is the hallmark of *vipassana*:

> Whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, gross or subtle, every sensation shares the same characteristic: it arises and passes away, arises and passes away. It is this arising and passing that we have to experience through practice, not just accept as truth because Buddha said so, not just accept because intellectually it seems logical enough to us. We must experience sensation’s nature, understand its flux, and learn not to react to it. (Goenka, 2002, para 6).

From the beginning to the end of the course, the meaning of mindfulness was questioned again and again. The teacher led explicitly with the definition of Kabat-Zinn’s\(^\text{18}\), yet it was not easily grasped by students, conceptually or experientially, which may speak to the difficulty reported in the measurement literature of defining the construct (e.g. Brown et al., 2007;  

\(^{18}\)“Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p., 4).
Grossman, 2008). Indeed, Block-Lerner and colleagues (2005) said that due to the “elusive” nature of mindfulness, operationalizing the construct “remains a daunting, though important task” (p. 74). This appears to be daunting and important not only for researchers trying to create measures of mindfulness, but for students trying to learn it. The struggle appeared to be in part fuelled by a reluctance or inability on the part of the students to embrace acceptance and self-kindness, which became salient as they attempted without success to use mindfulness to achieve their individual goals of getting rid of certain symptoms. Coming to a “meaning” of mindfulness that was satisfying for them was a joint project (insight project) and usually entailed both a conceptual realization, and an embodiment of that conceptual understanding. Participants reported these recognitions as happening during their interaction with Ruth (engaging most explicitly the joint projects of attention, language and insight), or when witnessing another dyadic interaction involving their classmates (engaging most explicitly the joint projects of compassion and connection).

Although the conceptual striving for understanding does not seem to be a traditional aspect of mindfulness training, or part of what Kabat-Zinn (1990, 2011) intended for the learning of mindfulness through MBSR, it did play a noticeable role in the group participants of this study’s learning process. It can be speculated that there may be some therapeutic and regulatory value to conceptual or cognitive understanding. A dismantling study of MBCT is currently being undertaken by Williams and colleagues (2010), in which an active control group has been designed which contains a conceptual presentation of a mindful attitude towards one’s experience, and how to use this to combat depression relapse, but which does not include any experiential component such as sitting meditation. The results of the study are not yet known,
but dismantling research of this kind may yield answers to these questions of the relative
importance of different components of the multi-modal MBIs.

It is noteworthy that although the role of understanding in mindfulness has been
neglected in the psychological research, it was part of one of the earlier proposed definitions of
mindfulness, that of Bishop and colleagues (2004). Although their construct is regularly cited as
a two-factor model of attention and acceptance, they did in fact also refer to understanding,
explaining that the first component, attention, is “an intentional effort to observe and gain a
greater understanding of the nature of thoughts and feelings” (p. 232). They were probably
referring more specifically to the role of “insight” in vipassana, which involves an embodied
recognition of the so-called three characteristics of existence rather than a conceptual or
intellectual understanding. In a theoretical article, Grabovac, Lau and Willett (2011) addressed
the role of embodied insight in what they term the “Buddhist psychological model” and
recommended that it be more explicitly emphasized in the delivery of MBIs, with the proviso
that clinicians may require extended training to reduce the risk of harm in the potentially
destabilizing stages of insight practice. Suffice it to say, the role of both conceptual
understanding and Buddhist insight has been noticeably overlooked in the extant
conceptualizations and research into mindfulness, which have tended to focus on mindfulness as
an attentional phenomenon, and yet “understanding” appears to have been a salient part of the
participant’s experience of the D & I, identified in the joint insight project.

Attachment processes. Generally speaking, the findings of this study support Siegel’s
(2007) notion of the intrapsychic actions of mindfulness being potentially paralleled by
interpersonal actions which we find in secure attachment. In fact, the salience of the internal
mindfulness practice turned “inside out” in D & I was impressive, as mentioned above. For
example, attention, a process usually considered to be private and internal was externalized in a joint action (project) of “noticing with gentle kindness.” The jointness of the noticing and describing often resulted in what could be called an attuned dyadic movement, contingent and reciprocal. There are two main attachment processes we might see in the D & I: attunement and mentalizing.

Attunement. Schore (1994) described attunement as contingent communication, and a psychobiological state of nonverbal alignment between two people through such modalities as eye gaze and facial expression. Jackie and Ruth’s many moments of nonverbal connection (smiling, gazing, nodding) were the most salient example of this in the data. Also, interestingly, participants reported feeling strongly connected to Ruth even when she was not working directly with them. The contingency of communication appeared to be important in the participant’s experience of learning. What was observed was the teacher moving in and backing off in her dialogues with students, much like what is described by Siegel (1999) and McCluskey (2005) as what the “good-enough” parent does. Participants were often aware of this and commented in their self-confrontations that they felt seen and understood in some cases (with contact), and relieved in others (with space). There were also reports by one participant who felt not enough, and then too much, attention from Ruth. According to the attachment literature, this ability of the therapist (parent) to respond contingently to nonverbal bids for contact and space is what results in attunement, and secure attachment, and Siegel suggests it requires a high level of mindfulness. It may also be considered as the building of a safe container for mindfulness to be learned.

Mentalizing. Mentalizing -- holding the other in mind, and finding oneself in the other’s mind -- appeared to be enacted through all five joint projects. Mentalization is the ability to think in terms of the mental world that drives behaviours and is within the self and the other (Fonagy
& Target, 1997). It is the “process by which we realize that having a mind mediates our experience of the world” (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist & Target, 2002, p. 3). Theory of mind is the term used in developmental psychology which connotes the view that a child has a theory that others have an internal subjective life like the self (Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982). Speaking of parent-child attachment, Siegel and Shahmoon-Shanok (2010) say that mentalizing abilities are central to secure attachment and are revealed in how parents are able to reflect on their own or their child’s internal world of mental experience. They explain that parents teach children how emotions shape thinking, perceptions and actions, by communicating to them that they know there is a mental life behind the child’s behaviours. The capacity for mentalizing is developed when two people “regularly cultivate their shared attention … by asking questions about motives, emotions, intentions, actions and more” (p. 12). They define the mind as “an embodied and relational process” (p. 12) and say that “the regulatory aspect of the mind dwells in both the nervous system of each person and in the connections between one another” (p. 12).

There is much evidence of mentalizing in the D & I; in fact, it might even be described as a mentalization experience. Ruth reported, and was observed, paying close attention to each participant’s utterances, to try to grasp how the individual student’s mind works. At the same time, students were providing a similar attention to her, and to each other. They reported feeling understanding and compassion for others’ difficulties. Ruth’s repetition of the notion of “the mind” and “the universal mind” may have reinforced participants’ ability to find their experience in others. They not only held each other in mind, but increasingly became part of the “one mind” of the group.

Of course, it can be said that these expressions of interconnection reflect the intrapersonal and interpersonal attunement that occurs in any cohesive group. Yalom's (1985)
therapeutic group factors, derived from extensive self-report research with users of group therapy, highlight universality and cohesiveness. He pointed out that the recognition of shared experiences and feelings among group members and the knowledge that these may be widespread or universal human concerns, serves to remove a group member's sense of isolation, validate their experiences, and raise self-esteem. And any group that involves sharing in dialogue may inherently involve mentalizing processes.

However, the process of mentalizing appeared to be particularly salient in this group which had an explicit focus on mindfulness. To realize oneself as part as an interdependent part of a living process moment by moment is, in Buddhist psychology, to see how things are, as opposed to the illusion of separateness. Further, the content and quality of shared experience was quite different from that of an adult therapy or support group. The sharing of embodied, present-moment tracking of sensation, thoughts and feelings rather than concepts, opinions or personal histories, carried a developmental flavour of something quite primary and foundational. Participants reported on their inner experiences in a body-focused concrete way that, since it was not conceptual, appeared childlike at times, and Ruth responded with the kind, curious attention of an attuned caregiver.

*Language.* Connected to mentalizing is the use of language. Mindfulness has been referred to as non-conceptual and non- or pre-verbal (e.g. Germer 2005a; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Yet Buddhist scholar, Maria Heim, commented that she was “skeptical of the idea of non-conceptual as being part of anything but the most advanced meditative experiences. The Abhidhamma texts say that “conception” (*sanna*, often translated as perception) always involves concepts and labeling of the world and is a part of every conscious moment” (personal communication, July 22, 2011). In traditional Buddhist *vipassana* instruction, one technique of developing a focused
attention to our ever-changing inner experience is that of labelling. As we sit on the meditation cushion, we can find a word to silently label our fleeting experience – for example, “itching” “planning” “hot, sharp tightness” -- as nonjudgmentally and accurately as possible. Analayo, a translator and commentator on the Buddhist text of the Sattipatthana Sutta commented:

The skilful use of labelling during satipatthana [mindful] contemplation can help strengthen clear recognition and understanding. At the same time, labelling introduces a healthy degree of inner detachment, since the act of apostrophizing one’s moods and emotions diminishes one’s identification with them. (2006, p. 113)

This aspect of the learning and practice of mindfulness demonstrates how language can play an explicit role in strengthening our capacity to observe our experience dispassionately. Indeed, we find this acknowledgement of the role of language in mindfulness in a few of the contemporary understandings of the construct of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006; Linehan, 1993).

Further, there is neuroscientific research that supports including the role of language in our understanding of mindfulness and how it works. Creswell, Way, Eisenberger and Lieberman (2007) found that dispositional mindfulness (as measured on the MAAS) was associated with greater prefrontal cortical activation and reduced amygdala activity during affect labeling. They suggested labeling of negative affect as a potential neurocognitive mechanism for understanding how mindfulness meditation interventions reduce negative affect. Despite the recognition of the importance of language in mindfulness in both the Buddhist texts and in recent neuroscientific research, there has been no research to date about the potential role of the D & I, a language-based component of MBSR, in either increasing mindfulness and/or contributing to the outcomes of the MBIs, such as reduced negative affect.

The joint language project in the D & I of this study was observed to involve more than the traditional meditation practice of labeling, however. It was enacted, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, through a particular form of verbal communication which did not promote the usual
narrative coherence of retrospective “stories.” Instead, Ruth asked participants to recall their experiences of mindfulness from the week’s homework or from the formal mindfulness exercise just completed, and then engaged in what could be called a mindful “remembering” of their experience which could be described as bottom-up and descriptive rather than top-down or interpretative. It is of interest that the Pali word which has been translated as mindfulness, sati, connotes not only awareness and attention, but also remembering. Jha and colleagues (2010) investigated the role of working memory in mindfulness, but the D & I of this study appeared to engage another form of discursive memory, somewhat reminiscent of what Siegel (1999) described as “memory talk” in his description of attachment-promoting verbal communication. He said that this joint construction of the child’s perceptions, thoughts, feelings, intentions and beliefs enhances the mental processes of memory and self-reflection (p. 89). He went on to suggest that in adult relationships such as psychotherapy, a state of “interhemispheric resonance” (p. 299) can occur via the right brain-to-right brain and left-to-left attunements emerging from the nonverbal and verbal communication between client and therapist during so-called memory talk. Wallin (2007) referred to Fonagy’s ideas on mentalizing when he described the repair of “reflective function” possible in psychotherapy. The processes he described in mentalizing repair in psychotherapy -- “accessing, articulating and reflecting upon dissociated and unverbalized feelings, thoughts and impulses” (p. 3) -- are remarkably parallel to the joint projects of the D & I, noticing, describing and understanding.

Developmental psychologist Vygotsky (1934/1986) emphasized the pivotal role of language in the growing abilities to self-regulate; as the child internalizes her parent’s voice and develops inner speech, her capacity to self-soothe and for meaning-making is developed. He spoke of the zone of proximal development in the learning process, whereby the parent or
teacher supports the learning of the child/student in a process he called “scaffolding.”

Vygotsky’s idea that the mind originates in relationship resonates with the ideas of Siegel (1999) and Trevarthen (1979, 1992) who described the infant as engaging in a dialogical relationship with others from the very beginning of life -- Meltzhoff’s (1983) work on imitation showed infants as young as 42 minutes imitate their caregiver’s facial expressions. The joint projects of attention and language can be seen from this developmental perspective: Ruth was observed drawing the students into a particular discourse of self-awareness, self-acceptance and embodiment. It was open-ended but she subtly influenced them, through a scaffolding process, into a discourse of mindfulness, by asking questions -- How did you do that? Did you breathe? Where was the breath? Language was an essential part of this process.

It is of interest that two participants reported disliking the language project, Laurie claiming that language “is a distraction from the experience itself” (Laurie, weekly log, Week 5) and Barbara saying that speaking “took me away from being in the moment” (post-course communication, April 2009). The larger philosophical question of whether language is necessary for self-awareness, and indeed if it is possibly for conscious experience to be language and/or concept free, is a tractable one, then, not only for Buddhist scholars such as Heim, referenced above, but even lay- or novice-practitioners of mindfulness. How the nonconceptual, pre or non-verbal mindfulness alluded to by Kabat-Zinn and Germer relates to the mindfulness which is constructed and co-constructed through language-based dialogical experiences of self and relationship is an area for both philosophical discussion and future empirical research.\(^{19}\)

\(^{19}\) For a historical assessment of the thorny issue of the role of language and conceptual thought in mindfulness, see Bodhi (2011).
Theoretical Implications

Since mindfulness has been almost exclusively researched as an individual and intra-psychic cognitive skill, this research breaks ground in repositioning it within contextual action theory as a joint, relational process. Action-project method provided both the theoretical context and a rigorous method which yielded findings that are pertinent to the leading-edge exploration of social processes in mindfulness.

One category of social processes which appeared to be supported by all five joint projects was that of a developmental learning or re-training, potentially involving attunement and mentalization. MBSR, and in particular, the D & I, has not been viewed in these terms before. Grossman (2010) did posit that mindfulness training, rather than an acquisition of a skill, may be part of a larger developmental re-education of consciousness. He took the perspective of a neuro-physiologically based developmental and evolutionary model of consciousness described by two neurobiologists (Edelman & Tononi, 2000). Grossman compared the stages of mindfulness meditation practice (training in mindful awareness on body, affect, thoughts, and qualities of experience) to what Edelman and Tononi theorized as humankind’s evolution of consciousness (body awareness, adaptive emotional awareness, language-based awareness of self, past and future). Grossman wondered if the systematic development of mindfulness is a way of re-learning these natural abilities of consciousness but in a more functional way, with the dispassionate, discerning and nonevaluative attitudes of mindful awareness. It could be that the D & I component of the group learning of mindfulness is a pivotal part of this developmental re-learning. This broadens the theoretical scope of mindfulness from being a discrete cognitive or affective-cognitive skill, to being part of a relational process within a wider developmental framework of mental health.
This wider developmental framework may include overlapping or mutually constitutive attachment and mindfulness processes. Several researchers have pointed out that the psychological and neurological correlates of mindfulness and attachment security are similar, suggesting that future research needs to investigate the common underlying processes (Ryan, Brown & Creswell, 2007; Shaver, Lavy, Saron & Mikulincer, 2007; Siegel, 2007; Wallin, 2007). This study illustrated how processes of attunement and mentalization may be operating during the D & I, understood in this study as being most saliently part of the identified connection and compassion projects. However, beyond that, the systematic movement through the D & I of notice-describe-understand (the attention, language and insight projects) was enacted jointly and within an apparently attuned, nonjudgmental relationship. Shaver and colleagues (2007) suggested that the most frequently spoken Buddhist prayer – “I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha”\(^{20}\) – bears remarkable similarity to Bowlby and Ainworth’s notion of using an attachment figure as a safe haven and secure base for exploration. In the case of this group, the secure base may be the teacher and the group itself, and simultaneously, the felt security of a growing internal self-connection.

Associated with this is the role of the subordinate attention project in the super-ordinate mindfulness project. The joint project of attention in some ways was the crux of the other projects. Without paying attention with gentle kindness, the other projects (language, insight, connection, compassion), would not be possible. Basically, the teacher and the student paid kind curious attention to the student’s reported inner experience, and at the same time the other class members attempted to do the same. Through scaffolded questions and paraverbal/nonverbal prompts, the teacher assisted the student in noticing. This process is reminiscent of the

\(^{20}\) The Buddha as a loving, compassionate, and wise teacher; the Buddha’s teachings; and the community of fellow meditators.
phenomenon known as joint attention in social and developmental psychology. The term joint attention usually refers to the capacity of an infant/toddler, around 9 months of age, to keep attention on the parent and on an object at the same time. This is considered a visible expression of a cognitive understanding of the intentions of others, and an important precursor to the development of a theory of mind (Leavens, Hopkins, William & Bard, 2008). Based on the findings of this study, the mindful, attuned teacher and her students worked together to cultivate this capacity.

Clinical Implications

There are implications for practice in both counselling and contemplative education.

Implications for counselling. MBSR is not intended to be a counselling process but there are some general clinical implications for counselling. First, what was apparent in the D & I of this study was that mindfulness was not only a discrete “technique” that the teacher didactically taught the students, but a way of relating to one’s experience that was largely modelled and embodied by the teacher, and jointly enacted between teacher and student. It did appear particularly easy to “learn” this new way of being, particularly when it came to observation and acceptance of unpleasant sensations rather than a more typical problem-solving approach. Yet the participants could not fail to notice the teacher embodiment of what the teacher was inviting them to do, and they reported on the salience of this for them. This resonates with what we know about the importance of therapist characteristics, and the therapeutic relationship in counselling outcomes (Beutler et al., 2004; Lambert & Barley, 2002). In fact, therapist mindfulness has been posited as a common factor by some researchers (Grepmaier, 2007; Martin, 1997).
Second, each of the processes posited above in the Contributions section as key processes operating in the D & I as participants attempted to learn mindfulness (acceptance-based change, self-compassion, emotion-regulation, narrative, conceptual understanding, and attachment processes), is familiar in a variety of counselling orientations and interventions. An obvious implication for counselling is that these constructs and processes were proposed in this study to occur relationally, through dialogue, specifically through joint, goal-directed projects over a 2-month period. For example, the teacher did not simply tell the participants to be more self-compassionate. They worked together, in a goal-directed and joint process, to illuminate the sensory, emotional and cognitive lived inner experience of self-compassion, and the linguistic expressions (manifest behaviour) of self-compassion. Furthermore, the teacher embodied and modelled compassion and self-compassion. Counselling dialogue offers a similar context for the enactment of these processes. It may be helpful for counsellors to conceptualize therapeutic work as involving joint projects, some of them similar to those identified in the D & I of this study.

Third, this case study of an MBSR intervention demonstrated the power of group learning and healing processes (Yalom, 1985) in the promotion of health in a non-clinical population. Although the group was not a psychotherapeutic one, neither was it a typical psycho-educational format. Although Wizer (1995) observed that in the seven MBSR courses he investigated, there was little interpersonal process, this case study demonstrated a rich interpersonal process enacted in the D & I. The students did not simply receive information “about” stress reduction, but instead participated in a change process which was deeply relational. Although there was little member-to-member dialogue, there appeared to be significant member-to-member learning, as reported in the self-confrontations, and a meaningful teacher-student relationship. It was fascinating to observe how the teacher handled process and also participant privacy. She often
commented in her SC that she intentionally contained participant sharing because “this is not counselling” (RuthSC10, Session 8). However, participants regularly attributed important realizations and tangible positive differences in their behaviours outside of class to the course, and specifically to what they had learned through the relational D & I. The course appeared to be appropriate for a non-clinical population of so-called “normal” participants who are not seeking conventional counselling, but who desire greater well-being.

Fourth, mindfulness practice in counsellors may be a good way to train in important therapeutic relationship skills. This has been suggested by a few studies mentioned in Chapter 2 (e.g. Aiken, 2006; Lesh 1970) and was also promoted by Bien (2006), and Shapiro and Carlson (2009). Ogden (1997) suggested that the therapist needs to be able to pay close attention to his own internal process, “to recognize, understand and verbally symbolize ...the apparently self-absorbed ramblings of his mind [and] bodily sensations that seemingly have nothing do with the [patient] (p. 94). We can note that Ogden’s “recognize, understand and verbally symbolize” parallel the three joint projects of the dialogue section in the current case, “notice, understand, and describe.” In their theoretical article based on classroom research, Paré, Richardson and Tarragona (2009) explored the potential relationship between mindfulness and counsellor-trainee inner dialogue. Certainly, the teacher of this study appeared very able to sustain kind attention to complex relational tasks, and also demonstrated a high level of self-awareness in the self-confrontation interviews. Of course, we do not know that these abilities are due to her mindfulness training, but it is a possibility.

Further, the facilitation of the capacity to mentalize has been deemed useful for clinicians, as Fulton (2005) pointed out, “to become more acute in our ability to see their [client’s] minds. This makes us better therapists” (p. 67). This self- and other-awareness through
mindfulness also may be regulating. Cozolino (2002) emphasized the importance of the therapist’s own affect-regulation in promoting attunement with the client: “As affect is repeatedly brought into the therapeutic relationship and managed through a variety of stabilizing mechanisms, the client gradually internalizes these skills” (p. 33). This is also Siegel’s hypothesis, that intrapersonal attunement over time results in changes in interpersonal attunement. The affect regulation that appears to be part of, or perhaps the consequence of, mindfulness, is as important for therapist as for client. Thus mindfulness training may be a useful way to train particular requisite counselling skills, behaviours and attitudes, rather than merely a technique to offer to clients.

Lastly, the use of self-confrontation interviews from action-project method has applications in counselling. It may be useful in counsellor-training and supervision as a way of actually enhancing levels of mindfulness, as counsellors view themselves on tape and attempt to recall their inner experience at those moments. Another novel use of self-confrontation interview would be to show short clips of recorded sessions to clients and to enquire into their internal processes. It was illuminating to observe the awareness of some participants in this study of the reactions and responses of the teacher. Participants sometimes reported being aware, for example, of wanting more or less “space” from the teacher, and then either receiving that (presumably when the teacher was attuned), or not (presumably marking a moment of misattunement). This kind of process information may be valuable to counsellors in terms of deepening their awareness and understanding of attachment dynamics.

**Implications for teaching mindfulness.** Dimidjian and Linehan (2003) recommended that it would be valuable for future research to operationalize the qualities and behaviours emitted by a mindful clinician and empirically assess the relation between these factors and
outcomes (p. 169). A newly developed Mindfulness-Based Interventions Teacher Rating Scale (Crane, Soulsby, Kuyken, Eanes & Williams, in press) highlights six teacher competencies: coverage of curriculum, relational skills, guided mindfulness meditation, conveying course themes through interactive teaching, embodiment of mindfulness, and management of group process. There are some recommendations related to these competencies based on the findings of this study.

Related to the embodiment of mindfulness, it might be useful for teachers to consider the D & I itself as an embodied enactment of mindfulness, that the teachers are not only modelling (as in demonstrating) mindfulness but co-constructing it with the students, using the student’s reported inner experience as the “object” of attention. In this regard, and relating to the competency of “relational skills,” teachers should be able to pay mindful attention to student responses, so that the exchange is appropriately contingent. It appeared important in this group that Ruth was able to “approach and retreat” appropriately, connecting and disconnecting in a way that promoted safety in the circle. The self-confrontation interviews can be very useful in supervision for awareness training of these kinds of dynamics.

In regards to the management of group process, the teacher in this study appeared adept at using potential intersubjective group regulation of affect when an individual member was distressed. This is an art and skill and could be presented as part of MBSR/CT training. It may be that in order to learn mindfulness as an intrapsychic skill/practice, there needs to be a safe holding environment. In fact, some researchers have recently claimed that emotion regulation is not necessarily an outcome of mindfulness but instead is required before mindfulness can be experienced. This may be the case in individuals with trauma backgrounds, for example (van der Kolk, 2011). A powerfully regulating group might offer necessary safety cues for such
individuals to facilitate the learning of mindfulness. Teachers can not only attend to safety-building in the group process, but also become skilled at using the group for emotion regulation.

Lastly, related to the teacher’s ability to use the group process to promote emotion regulation, the D & I may be an important component in the MBSR course for the ethical delivery of the intervention. It is important to note the potentially destabilizing effects of the formal practice of mindfulness meditation, and the potential ways the teacher can use the D & I to both track, and contain, these effects. Kabat-Zinn himself said, “It can be stressful to take the Stress Reduction Program” (1990, p. 2). More than stressful, it can have unpleasant side effects particularly in the later stages of insight, as pointed out by Grabovac and colleagues (2011). One participant in this case study reported to experience spontaneous and unpleasant memories during the sitting meditation. van der Kolk (2011) warned about the use of mindfulness training for clients with trauma histories, saying that, in his clinical opinion, this population may be re-traumatized by the experience. This serves as a caution to teachers and a rationale for viewing MBSR as something distinct from psycho-education, and as an intervention that requires significant training for its ethical delivery. The teacher of this study used the D & I as a way to check in with participants and keep an eye on any potentially troubling reactions that may need more specialized and/or therapeutic care outside of the course. At the same time, the group processes in the D & I appeared to promote safety and containment.

Limitations of Study

The findings of this single-case study are particular rather than generalizable. We might assume that the delivery of the MBSR curriculum was relatively standardized since the teacher was highly trained through the University of Massachusetts Center of Mindfulness, but it is also part of the mandate of that Center that the person of the teacher is important and unique. Thus
the learning of mindfulness identified and observed in this study is that constructed by this teacher and these 10 participants. However, though not generalizable, many of the relevant findings are transferable to other teaching and clinical contexts with the caveat that teachers and students in different cultures, developmental stages and with different issues may learn mindfulness through dialogue in somewhat different ways. There was a lack of diversity in the research sample which was mostly white females with at least an undergraduate university degree. It might be that participants of different ethnicities, educational levels, SEC, or intellectual capacities would respond to the D & I more or less enthusiastically.

Also there was the issue of demand characteristics, as the participants generally tried hard to be “good” research subjects and were aware of being videotaped. An example of this is one participant who fretted about her makeup and how she would appear for the camera. The teacher observed that the “negative” emotions of anger and sadness, characteristically present midway in the course, were not expressed in the D & I until the end of this course. In fact, some of this negative emotion was expressed in the weekly logs, such as the dramatic input from one participant’s log in Week 5, in which she comments, “I was ready to throttle [her], an experience that I have been sitting with. I am aware of trying to breathe and allow for space. I desire compassion but I really want an all-out brawl. I want to fight. I become angry, tight in my chest. My breathing is deep but I want to give voice to something, to yell. When is anger appropriate?”

It appeared that certain characteristic processes were perhaps slow in manifesting or covered over. However, the teacher also remarked that, from her perspective, to a great extent, the course ran “as usual” despite the cameras and the interviews. Further, the self-confrontation interviews and supplementary data (questionnaires, logs) are helpful in this regard, since participants appeared to feel freer to express their honest frustrations in that context than in the group.
Despite the inevitable influence of the act of research on what was being researched, significant and rich data were collected. However, it is possible that the potential emotional processing by participants was curtailed to some extent by virtue of being a research participant.

It must be said that the data collection and analysis was much more complex than was expected, and than was typical in previous applications of action-project method. This is because the method has been traditionally used for investigating joint dyadic actions (e.g. parent-child) based on a discrete time-limited videotaped conversation between two people. Trying to capture the joint actions, goals and projects of eleven people (ten students and one teacher) interacting simultaneously in a group process was challenging. Due to limited researcher/assistant resources, it was not possible to interview each participant about each minute of dialogue, and due to limited personal resources of energy and time, it was not feasible to interview the already-tired teacher about each minute of dialogue. Therefore, a kind of jigsaw puzzle was constructed of some minutes of some participants’ dialogues with the teacher. As this was repeated over nine sessions, and since repetitive actions and projects were identified, this was not seen as limiting the trustworthiness of the findings. However, the method itself was a time and labour-intensive one and required high levels of not only organizational, but integrative and synthesizing, abilities in the researchers.

Finally, it could be said that we do not know that mindfulness was indeed learned in this course since no measurements were taken, and similarly do not know if the other observed processes such as emotion regulation, self-compassion, and decentering were influential in the learning of mindfulness. Since this is a qualitative investigation of the lived experience of learning mindfulness, these are not considered limitations as it was not the purpose of the study to measure or compare constructs. Of interest were the first and second-person perspectives on
the experience of the D & I – that is, the lived experience of teacher and students as they engaged in a joint project of learning mindfulness, and their perceptions of each other and their learning process. While the resulting description offers a rich multi-layered perspective of learning mindfulness in this particular case-study, the methodological approach does not allow for making definitive statements about the best way to teach mindfulness.

**Future Research**

It is clear from the findings of this study that the D & I component of MBSR was more than a review of homework. The findings suggest that processes potentially important to the experiential learning and practice of mindfulness were engaged. Indeed, it may be helpful to view the D & I as a meditation exercise in relational mindfulness which amplifies the learning in individual meditation practice. However, before we can claim this, more research is required in several specific ways.

Dismantling studies using active control groups which can serve as a proper experimental comparison to MBSR will be illuminating in terms of clarifying which parts of the intervention account for which treatment effects. Posited mechanisms of change such as decentering, emotion regulation, self-compassion, acceptance, and attention may be particularly enhanced through the D & I rather than solely the result of the formal meditation practice itself. For example, the findings of Hargus and colleagues (2010), who found that the specificity and meta-awareness of severely depressed participant’s verbal descriptions of their thoughts, feelings and sensations increased following an MBCT intervention, may be at least partially a result of learning a particular “mindful” discourse through D & I. Similarly, the D & I may be an important component of the MBSR for the cultivation of self-compassion. It may be possible to
cultivate self-compassion as a solitary endeavour through formal mindfulness practice, but this case study, at least, demonstrates how this goal is worked on jointly in relationship.

Now that we have measures of mindfulness, we have studies that show that mindfulness improves with MBSR/CT training (Buchheld et al., 2002; Lau et al., 2006). Carmody and Baer (2008) also found that the total number of minutes reportedly spent in home practice was significantly related to the extent of change in mindfulness, symptoms and well-being, supporting the assumption that individual mindfulness practice in itself (apart from group effects) has salutary effects. However, it is not yet clear whether increases in self-reported mindfulness are due only to the mindfulness meditation itself or also to other variables such as dyadic and/or group attunement, the particular question and answer format, and/or other processes enacted through the D & I component.

We need to continue to test the claim that the treatment providers of MBSR and MBCT must have their own mindfulness practice since this is a novel requirement and limits the potential number of competent providers. There was qualitative support in the findings of this study that mindfulness in the teacher was noted by the students. Shapiro and Carlson (2009) recommended a multidimensional measure of mindfulness be developed that could assess teacher mindfulness through combining teacher self-report, student reports, and behavioral observations. There has not yet been much serious attempt to investigate quantitatively the associations between teacher mindfulness, teacher training, teacher years of meditation practice, and client outcomes. There is, at the time of writing this document, a working paper on standards in mindfulness teachers (Kabat-Zinn & Santorelli, 2011) which appears to be written out of both philosophical allegiance to the concept of the importance of teacher characteristics,
and also compelling reflective professional practice. Yet more research is needed on the requirement of the clinician to be personally experienced with meditation, and to be mindful.

Connected to this, more research on the role of the teacher/therapist in the MBIs is needed. While the findings of the present study indicated an influential contribution by the teacher, this was not quantified or compared to other possible situations. The role of the therapist in common factors continues to be debated, with some subscribing to the medical model which alleges “that the specific ingredients of the treatment are what are important in therapy, not who delivers the ingredients” and others insisting on the importance of therapist characteristics and the relationship (Blow, Sprenkle, & Davis, 2007). If the person of the teacher/therapist is not very important, then there are alternate ways of delivering mindfulness interventions; for example, MBSR delivered via videoconferencing (Garner-Nix, Backman, Barbati, & Grummitt, 2008) or compassion-training via internet (Brefczynski-Lewis, 2011) may be inexpensive and accessible vehicles. Lau and Yu (2009) suggested that offering mindfulness-based treatments in other formats than group or in-vivo could improve access to mindfulness treatments to certain populations (e.g. socially anxious, or those in rural centres).

Cordon, Brown, and Gibson (2009) investigated whether the benefits of participating in an MBSR program were moderated by adult attachment styles (secure vs. insecure). Interestingly, the insecure group was twice as likely as the secure group to drop out of the treatment; it is possible that this resulted from the stress of participating in a group. Participants who struggle with group treatment may benefit more from treatment offered in an individual format. However, if we see the MBSR group, particularly the D & I, as a developmentally supportive intervention which addresses processes of attachment and mentalization, it may be more useful to wonder how to keep the insecurely attached participants in the group program.
More research into attachment processes and repair related to mindfulness meditation and MBSR/CT group interventions might yield findings of interest to both mindfulness and attachment researchers. Does the practice of mindfulness meditation per se improve attachment security, perhaps via the pathway of improved executive control, as suggested by the preliminary findings of Sahdra and colleagues (2011)? If there are increases in attachment security scores, are these mediated by the relationship with the teacher and/or the group? Are these improvements of similar magnitude as those gained from other psychotherapeutic or psychoeducational group interventions? The contingent, co-regulating movements between counsellor and client identified as necessary for attachment repair (e.g. Siegel, 1999; McCluskey, 2005) may require high levels of mindfulness in the MBSR teacher. This is a rich area for future research.

Lastly, the findings of this study highlighted the importance of language and communication in the learning of mindfulness, and suggested that a specific “mindfulness discourse” was inculcated by the teacher and her students. The researcher of this study was intrigued by the use of language in the D & I, yet a more in-depth analysis was beyond the scope of the study. Particularly striking was the use of language during the D & I at the end of the all-day retreat (Session 8). Based on observation rather than systematic stylistic analysis, that period of dialogue appeared to the researchers (and also to some participants as they reported in SC) as much slower than usual, with shorter sentences and more silences, and sometimes even poetic. Kabat-Zinn (2004) has written about the use of language in MBSR from his point of view as a clinician, but there has been no research on it to date. A study which positioned this lived-experience of mindful communication in the D & I, within the dominant spiritual, medical and psychological discourses of mindfulness through a critical narrative or discourse analysis, would
be interesting philosophically and have pragmatic usefulness for teachers and clinicians involved in mindfulness training.

Conclusions

In their suggestions for future directions in meditation research, Shapiro and Walsh (2003) pointed to the necessity to "expand the paradigm from which meditation research is conducted, from a predominantly reductionist, biomedical model to one which includes subjective and transpersonal domains and an integral perspective" (p. 86). Among their ten recommendations for future research is that more qualitative data is required to capture the "subtlety and depth of meditation experiences" (p. 106). This study breaks new ground in its use of the action-project method to explore and describe the “subtlety and depth” of the experience of learning mindfulness as a group process. The mindfulness project, embedded in a relationship project, was enacted individually and jointly through the dynamic social actions of Dialogue and Inquiry in this single-case study of an 8-week course of MBSR.

In closing, in the context of the findings of this study, we might begin to understand what Francisco Varela (2000) meant by such mysterious words as “this mind is that mind” and “consciousness is a public affair” (p. 85). In Buddhist tradition, the “sangha” (the community of meditation practitioners) is acknowledged as being as or even more important than the teachings (the “dharma”) themselves. This is what renowned Vietnamese Buddhist teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh (2008), says about the importance of the community in spiritual development:

Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are three precious jewels in Buddhism, and the most important of these is Sangha. The Sangha contains the Buddha and the Dharma . . . You cannot achieve enlightenment by locking yourself in your room. Transformation is possible only when you are in touch (p.111).

Being “in touch” was indeed important in the experience and learning of mindfulness for the teacher and students of this study. Although not psychotherapy or counselling, the process of
learning mindfulness through MBSR was a change process and perhaps even transformational for some participants. One participant describes learning mindfulness as a journey of self-connection which is paradoxically made via relationship: “Speaking with Ruth in the D & I takes me outside of myself and then back into myself in a different way” (Maria, Post-class questionnaire, Week 1). Another participant sought and found social meaning in the midst of the attentive faces of the group as she accesses and describes her fear, “What I thought in that moment was ‘yeah, this dog is afraid of me and I’m afraid of this dog, it’s like, we are all such afraid creatures’ … And then I said ‘this stupid dog’ and everybody laughed and I thought exactly, like it is innocent, it is funny” (Session4, GailSC12-14). The suffering and unpleasantness of the human condition -- what participants sought to get rid of by learning mindfulness -- was often met and transformed in the Dialogue and Inquiry by the human capacity for innocence, kind attention, and humour, perhaps, as Thich Nhat Hanh claims, “possible only when you are in touch.”
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Appendix A: Advertisement for Participants

Volunteers Needed

For Research on Mindfulness

If you are:

- 25 years old or older
- Highly motivated to learn mindfulness meditation as a way to decrease stress and increase well-being
- New to mindfulness training (never learned it)

then we need **YOUR HELP** to investigate how people learn and experience mindfulness interpersonally through the MBSR course (mindfulness-based stress reduction). Involvement will include giving permission to have the classes videotaped, 9 video-taped interviews (20 minutes extra, additional to MBSR course time), completion of a written log book (weekly) and a telephone monitoring period.

To find out more about how you can get involved, please contact Brenda Dyer at (xxxx), leaving your name, phone number, and a message telling us that you are interested in the “Mindfulness Project.” Or email at (xxxxx)

Conducted by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dr Richard Young</th>
<th>Brenda Dyer, MA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational &amp; Counselling Psych.</td>
<td>Educational &amp; Counselling Psych.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
<td>University of British Columbia</td>
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Appendix B: Telephone Screening

Date of screening call:

Name/contact info:

Introduce myself & explain that I am returning his or her call re: mindfulness project

Thank-you for your interest in this study. Can I ask how or where you discovered this study? The purpose of this call is to explain the study to you and to determine whether your experience fits with the purpose of the project. There is potential for this phone call to take up to 20 minutes. Is it alright to proceed or would another time be more suitable?

For you to be included in this study I first need to ask you a series of questions about your past and current mental and physical health. If you don’t meet the criteria, the information you have provided will be destroyed. Is it alright to proceed?

Semi-structured questions:

1. Could you please tell me about current physical and mental health. Do you have any health issues such as chronic pain, depression or anxiety? Are you under psychiatric care and what is the diagnosis? Do you have any health issues that might impact your participation in a 2-month meditation course?
2. The MBSR course is quite demanding. Tell me a bit about your daily and weekly time commitments (e.g. work).
3. Do you have any meditation experience? Please tell me about any workshops or retreats that you have participated in.

(At this point, the determination is made to either proceed with the intake interview or to respectfully thank the potential participant and close the conversation).

To conclude this intake interview I would like to explain to you what is involved in this study, your rights as a participant, how we compensate participants and the limits of confidentiality to which I must abide. Proceed to summarize the MBSR course, the time requirements of the self-confrontation interviews, the monitoring period, compensation, rights to withdraw at any time, and the limits of confidentiality.
You meet the criteria for the study and I would like to invite you to participate. Please think over the time commitment carefully and then contact me within one week (by email or phone) to let me know that you are definitely willing to participate. The class will be held at [xxxx], starting approximately [mid to late January], and if you decide to participate, I will contact closer to the time to let you know the details.

Are there any final questions you would like to ask?
Appendix C: Letter of Consent for Participants
Interpersonal Mindfulness: An Action-Project Perspective

Principal Researcher: Dr. Richard Young, Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia

Co-investigator: Brenda Dyer, MA, Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia

Contact info: If you have any questions about the research project itself, you may contact Brenda Dyer by phone at (xxx) or by email at xxxxx

If you have any questions about ethical issues involved in this project, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at xxxxx

Dear participants,

Thank-you for your interest in this study, which is designed to explore how people learn and experience mindfulness in the MBSR course. This research project is being conducted at the University of British Columbia in the Department of Education and Counselling Psychology and Special Education. This study is being conducted to fulfil the dissertation requirement for a PhD degree for Brenda Dyer under the direction of Dr Richard Young.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in 8 classes (approximately 2 hours each) and a one-day meditation retreat. These classes will be audio- and video-recorded. As well, you will be asked to keep a weekly log book in which you reflect on your experience of learning mindfulness, both in the class and outside of the class. Also, you may be required to be one of four "target" students who will contribute more time than the other students. If you are asked to be a target student, after four classes, you will participate in a video-recall process interview lasting about 20 minutes. These interviews will be audio- and video-recorded, and will involve reflecting on your experience of the class. If you are a target student, you will also be phoned twice by the researcher or research assistant to have a brief telephone check-in about your experience of the class (approximately 15 minutes). In order to participate in this free MBSR course, you must be willing to be a target student if asked.

In terms of your time commitment, the MBSR course is in itself a substantial commitment. It not only entails the 8, 2-hour classes, 1-day meditation retreat, but importantly, regular daily practice which will take between 30 and 60 minutes. On top of this is the 4, 20-minute video recall interviews if you are selected to be a "target" student. If you are interested in the results of the study, you will be given the opportunity to leave your contact information so that we can send you a summary, once we have finished with everyone.

The potential risks of participating in this study are minimal. It is not intended as a therapeutic group. It is a psychoeducational group teaching a self-regulation tool of mindfulness in order to reduce stress and enhance well being. The only potential drawback of participating is...
the considerable time commitment. While we believe that the benefits of the MBSR course, and in participating in extra reflection on your process through the video process interviews, will be substantial, we ask that you consider the time commitment carefully before giving consent to participate. In the unlikely event that you experience undue distress as a result of this course, you will be assisted by the teacher and co-investigator to access appropriate support. You can also call the principal investigator, Dr Richard Young (xxxx) or the co-investigator, Brenda Dyer (xxxxx) if you have concerns about the course.

Your participation in this study will help us to find out how people learn and experience mindfulness in a social setting and through the relationship with the teacher. Most of the previous research on mindfulness interventions have ignored the fact that even though mindfulness may appear to be a private, solitary event, we learn it within relationships. Mindfulness training has been shown to have many mental and physical health benefits, but we still do not understand exactly how it works and what the best way to teach it is.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. It is understood that your compensation for participation is free tuition (the MBSR course in offered in the community for approximately $300).

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Specifically, we will store all information and recordings in locked filing cabinets and password protected computer hard-drives; only the investigators and research assistants will have access to the information. Transcripts (with names and other identifying information removed), and coded data will also be securely stored for potential future analysis. Two Counselling Psychology students will be assisting Brenda Dyer with the interviews. After five years all data (paper transcripts, audio and videotapes) will be destroyed. Confidentiality outside the group, however, cannot be guaranteed since we cannot control participants’ communications.

Your signatures below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records, and that you consent to participate in this study and that your responses may be put in anonymous form and kept for further use after the completion of this study.

_____________________________  ________________________
Signature                                 Date

___________________________________________________________________
Name (please print)

___________________________________________________________________
Witness                                 Date
☐ Check this box if you both give us permission to retain your video-recordings for future data analysis, after the completion of this study.

☐ Check this box if you both give us permission to retain and show your video-recordings when presenting the results of our study at future conferences and other academic venues.
Appendix C: Letter of Consent for Participants (MBSR teacher)

Interpersonal Mindfulness: An Action-Project Perspective

Principal Researcher: Dr. Richard Young, Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia

Co-investigator: Brenda Dyer, MA, Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia

Contact info: If you have any questions about the research project itself, you may contact Brenda Dyer by phone at (xxxxx) or by email at xxxxxxx

If you have any questions about ethical issues involved in this project, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at xxxxxxx

Dear MBSR teacher,

Thank-you for your interest in this study, which is designed to explore how people learn and experience mindfulness in the MBSR course. This research project is being conducted at the University of British Columbia in the Department of Education and Counselling Psychology and Special Education. This study is being conducted to fulfil the dissertation requirement for a PhD degree for Brenda Dyer under the direction of Dr Richard Young.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to teach the MBSR course as usual (8 classes plus one all-day meditation). These classes will be audio- and video-recorded. As well, you will be involved in video process interviews. After each class, you will participate in a video-recall process interview lasting about 20 minutes. That will entail seven interviews over 2 months. These interviews will be audio- and video-recorded. These interviews will involve reflecting on what you were doing in the videotaped conversation with the student. You will also be invited to keep a written record of any thoughts you have between the weekly meetings, about your experience of leading the question and answer period of the class.

The potential risks of participating in this study are minimal. The only potential drawback of participating is the considerable time commitment. While we believe that participating in extra reflection on your process through the video process interviews, will be beneficial for your own teaching and mindfulness practice, we ask that you consider the time commitment carefully before giving consent to participate. You can call the principal investigator, Dr Richard Young (xxxxx) or the co-investigator, Brenda Dyer (xxxxxx) if you have any concerns during the course.

Your participation in this study will help us to find out how people learn and experience mindfulness in a social setting and through the relationship with the teacher. Most of the previous research on mindfulness interventions have ignored the fact that even though mindfulness may appear to be a private, solitary event, we learn it within relationships. Mindfulness training has been shown to have a myriad of mental and physical health benefits, but we still do not understand exactly how it works and what the best way to teach it is.
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. In order to defray the costs of transportation and inconvenience, you will receive an honorarium in the amount of $600.00.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Specifically, we will store all information and recordings in locked filing cabinets and password protected computer hard-drives; only the investigators and research assistants will have access to the information. Transcripts (with names and other identifying information removed), and coded data will also be securely stored for potential future analysis. Two additional Counselling Psychology students will be assisting Brenda Dyer with the interviews. After five years all data (paper transcripts, audio and videotapes) will be destroyed.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records, and that you consent to participate in this study and that your responses may be put in anonymous form and kept for further use after the completion of this study.

___________________________________________ _______________________
Signature                              Date

___________________________________________ _______________________
Name (please print)                    Date

___________________________________________ _______________________
Witness                                Date

☐ Check this box if you both give us permission to retain your video-recordings for future data analysis, after the completion of this study.

☐ Check this box if you both give us permission to retain and show your video-recordings when presenting the results of our study at future conferences and other academic venues.
Appendix D: Demographic Form

The Mindfulness Project: Background Information

First name only: _________________________________

Gender: MALE / FEMALE

Date of Birth: _________________________________

Current education / work situation (check only one option):
  ___ Full-time work only
  ___ Full-time education only
  ___ Part-time work only
  ___ Part-time education only
  ___ Part-time work AND part-time education
  ___ Full-time work AND part-time education
  ___ Part-time work AND full-time education
  ___ Full-time work AND full-time education
  ___ Not currently working OR attending college/university/ other education

If working (full or part time), what work or occupation(s) are you currently in:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Approximate yearly income (check only one option):
  ___ Less than $5000
  ___ $5,000 to $14,999
  ___ $15,000 to $29,999
  ___ $30,000 to $44,999
  ___ $45,000 to $59,999
  ___ $60,000 to $74,999
  ___ $75,000 to $99,999
  ___ $100,000 to $249,999
$25,000 or higher

What is the highest completed level of education that you have finished (e.g., welding ticket; grade 10; 2 years of university; PhD)? Do not count your current year of study:


Were you born in Canada? YES / NO

If NO, what country were you born in: _________________

How many years have you lived in Canada: _________________

How would you describe your cultural or ethnic background (e.g., Welsh; Taiwanese; French-Canadian; Sikh; Latino):


What language do you usually speak at your home (e.g., English): _________________
Appendix E: Procedures for Taping and Interviewing

Procedure for Mindfulness Study

Dyad Identification #: __ / __ Date: ____________
Participant number / week number)

Research Assistant Name:
Segment of the class used for the self-confrontation __________minute to ____________
minute.

At 5:30 pm Monday evening:
- Both RA's arrive at 5:30
- Set up room 278 – take down tables, put at back, put chairs in circle.
- Pick up equipment and materials from locked cabinet in Room 273E.
  - Cameras X 3
  - 2 Tripods (Y. will pick up extra tripod, extension cords and 2 Olympus audio
    recorders from CMS)
  - 1 Olympus digital voice recorder
- Set up equipment in Room 278
  - Set up cameras on tripods
  - Plug cameras into a power source with extension cords.
  - Test cameras
  - Place Digital voice recorder (Olympus) on the window sill. Turn it on and if the
    sound isn’t working, replace the AA batteries.
- Set up respective self-confrontation rooms
  - Place one TV monitor in each room for the self-confrontation interview. Connect
    the cables to each of the TV monitors.
  - Place Olympus Digital audio-recorder and back-up recorder appropriately in
    room. Test them. If the sound isn’t working replace the AA batteries.
  - Be sure doors are locked when you've finished setting up (ask Y. to lock them)

At 5:50:
One RA goes down for "door duty" (door must remain locked for security reasons: this building
has had break-ins, so we have to be very careful about security)

At 6 pm:
- Doublecheck Audiorecorder is on.
- Each RA sits behind her camera with paper and pen ready to record the start and end
  time of her 2 target participants' interactions.
Whenever teacher indicates that it is time to push back the chairs (eg to do yoga), pause/stop the cameras and put them safely at the side.

After the class is over (around 8 pm):

- Be sure each participant has a session questionnaire to fill out
- Offer refreshments.
- During the 10 minute break time, RA’s set up their SC rooms
  - Doublecheck with Y. about the appropriate minute start point for your participants
  - Take your camera out of main room and connect it to the TV monitor.
- Before you bring your participant into your SC room, make sure that all other group members have left the building.

Self-confrontation Interview

- Invite the participant into your SC room. Start both audio-recorders
- Introduce the interview process. Say something like this:

  “So now we are going to review the dialogue that you had in today's class, to help me get a better understanding of your perspective- what you were thinking and what you were feeling in each segment of the conversation. In other words, I am interested in your inner experience as you were speaking with the teacher. Your teacher will not have direct access to what we discuss in this room together, but your comments will be reported anonymously in the final research.

  I’m going to stop the tape at 1-minute intervals to ask you what you were thinking and feeling during that particular segment of the session. If you want, you may also stop the tape at any time to report what you were thinking or feeling at that moment.

  Do you understand what we will be doing? Are you ready to begin?”

**** Say "this is minute x" before starting to play tape. Stop at approximately 1 minute intervals and begins asking the SC questions. If you feel something significant happens/shifts in a shorter period, eg 30 seconds, feel free to stop the tape. After you finish the questions for each minute, say "this is minute y" and continue playing the next minute. Etc.

Possible open-ended questions for the Self-Confrontation Interview (don’t ask all of these):
What were you thinking and feeling in that 1 minute segment of your conversation with the teacher?
What was going on for you inside while she was saying that?
What were you thinking during that portion of the conversation?
What were you hoping for in that part of the conversation?
What do you think [the teacher] was trying to do in that part of the conversation?
Were you aware of any of [the teacher’s] nonverbals there? Do you remember how you felt?
Is there anything else you want to add about that minute?
If the participant begins to tell you how she is feeling now, gently probe to return to the moment captured in the video. For example, "When she said _____ or you said _____, what were you perhaps not saying?"

*Make sure you get their EMOTIONAL reaction, not just their cognitions*

At end of segment:

So overall, what were your thoughts about the conversation you just had?

- Typical vs. not typical; helpful vs nonhelpful (if helpful, how?)
- Feelings about conversation
- Overall, what were your goals; what were you trying to accomplish in this conversation?

Is there anything else that I should know, about that conversation?

☐ After the self-confrontation interviewing has finished, end the interview with something like..... “That brings this interview to a close. Thank you for your additional input. I look forward to meeting with you again next week. Do you have any questions about what happened this evening?”

☐ Stop the audio-recordings for both recorders.

☐ Thank the participant for coming.

After the interviewing:

☐ Retrieve all equipment (cameras, tripods, audiorecorders, extension cords and TVs)
☐ Transfer digital audio recording from Olympus recorders onto Y's laptop.
☐ Erase files from Olympus recorders
☐ Return to lab: 3 cameras, 2 tripods, 2 back up audiorecorders (Y. will transfer data later)
☐ Return to lab2: 2 Olympus recorders, 3 extension cords, 1 tripod.
Appendix F: Summary of MBSR Course Design

The Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course was developed in a behavioural medicine setting for populations with chronic pain and stress-related disorders. It is a manualized 8 week course (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2001/2007) for groups of 10 – 30 participants who meet weekly for 2 hours for instruction and practice in mindfulness meditation, together with psycho-education about stress, coping, and chronic pain. All all-day (7-8 hour) intensive mindfulness session is usually held around the sixth week. Over the 8 week program, mindfulness is taught in several ways – sitting, walking, lying down (body scan), yoga, eating, etc. For example, the body scan is a 45 minute exercise in which attention is directed (according to the instructions by the teacher) to areas of the body while the participants are lying down with eyes closed. In sitting meditation, participants are taught to sit in a relaxed but alert posture with eyes closed and to direct attention to the sensations of breathing, to the body as a whole, to sound, and finally, to thoughts. Before the participants begin the course, they are advised that the daily homework requirement is at least one hour and that it is an essential part of the course. Homework involves daily sitting, body scan, mindful yoga, various thought or mood logs, etc. Audiotapes are provided for each participant to aid them in the mindfulness sitting meditation, body scan and yoga.

A 2-hour class typically consists of an embodied practice of sitting, body scan, yoga or mindful walking. It usually also includes approximately 45 minutes of "dialogue and inquiry." There is a short description in the manual on the important role of the class dialogue and inquiry. According to the manual, a "significant amount of time in each class should be dedicated to an exploration of the participants' firsthand experience of the mindfulness practices" (Santorelli & Kabat-Zinn, 2001/2007). Instructors are advised to listen closely, allow space, refrain from giving advice, and to inquire directly into the participant's experience.
Appendix G: Weekly Questionnaire (Post-class)

Name: ______________________________
Date: ______________________________

Mindfulness Project Monday-night Questionnaire

Immediately after every weekly class, please take a few minutes to answer the following questions about your experience of the Dialogue and Inquiry period. Sometimes the D & I is a discrete period of the class, or sometimes it may be mixed in with other activities, but basically try to recall any time tonight that you were interacting with the teacher about your own experience.

1. If you spoke during the D & I period, what was your goal of the interaction? (E.g. asking a question about x, sharing your experience about x, etc.). If you initiated contact with the teacher more than once, choose the most significant interaction to describe here.

2. What were you thinking and feeling during that particular exchange with the teacher?

3. How did this interaction with the teacher relate to your own goals for taking this class? (e.g. how did it help you make progress in learning mindfulness, how did it interfere with learning mindfulness, how did it help you learn about stress reduction, etc.)

4. In the time of the D & I period when you were not in direct dialogue with the teacher, what were you doing? (E.g. listening to teacher, listening to other students, daydreaming, thinking about your own experience, noticing sensations in your body, etc.)
5. What thoughts, feelings and/or sensations were you aware of as you sat silently in the D & I period?

6. Was there anything surprising about what happened in the D & I (either between you and the teacher or between other students and the teacher)? Anything happen that was of particular interest to you? Anything disappointing?

7. How did the D & I period relate to your mindfulness project: how did it help/interfere with you making progress in learning mindfulness?
Appendix H: Template for Participant Logbooks

Name: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________

Mindfulness Project Participant Logbook

(I will email a copy of this if you prefer to do it electronically. Please email me your weekly log by Sunday or bring a filled-in hard copy to next Monday's class. Complete the log at least once during the week, Tuesday-Sunday)

During the week, when you have an activity or conversation that is part of your project of learning mindfulness, please complete the following questions. You can choose to describe your homework practice and/or another time during the day in which you are aware of practicing mindfulness (not scheduled, but in daily life).

Date: _______________    Time of day that you did the activity: ________________________________

Approximately how long did it last: ________________________________

1. What was the activity? (scheduled homework, or spontaneous practice like a mindful conversation). You can describe both if you like.

2. Was this done alone or with another? Was the other person a: close friend/work colleague/family member/acquaintance/stranger/other?

3. What were you thinking during the activity / conversation?

4. What were you feeling?
5. What were you trying to do/ what were your goals in this activity/conversation?

6. What, if anything, prevented you from reaching your goals?

7. Optional: Describe any personal reflections, questions, struggles, realizations, etc connected to today’s practice of mindfulness.
Appendix I: Example of Member-check Summary of Joint Actions and Projects

1. Individual goals during the Q/A period over the 8-week course include: to find commonalities between herself and the other students, to understand mindfulness conceptually and experientially, to gain awareness of her own feelings and sensations, to remember to be gentle with herself, to learn how to access and describe her body sensations, to understand the classmates’ experiences, to participate in the class by sharing her experience, to communicate her experience so that Ruth understands it, to monitor her proximity and eye gaze so that she feels comfortable and also ensure that Ruth and nearby classmates are comfortable, to apply classmates’ examples to her own life, to respond to Ruth’s nonverbal and verbal invitations to share, to share a “good” example of mindful communication from her week, to figure out the steps involved in that communication, to experience mindfulness by becoming more aware of process, to make sense of her situations, to get questions from Ruth to help her understand her situations better, to feel connected to the group, to integrate previous learning from the class with the current class topic.

2. Joint goals (with Ruth): To explore what “unpleasant” means in terms of thoughts, feelings and body sensations, to use Jackie’s experience to teach the rest of the class, to practice mindfulness as “noticing with kindness,” to explore Jackie’s subtle inner body sensations, to share the common human experience of “pleasant” or positive emotion, to access and verbalize Jackie’s inner experience of “unpleasant” including heart rate and breathing, to develop Jackie’s ability to notice and label these sensations nonjudgmentally, to get Jackie speaking, to articulate the step by step process Jackie used in mindful communication exercise, to explore the element of choice in mindful action, to increase Jackie’s awareness of her own actions.

3. Projects: Jackie is a young adult busy juggling work, school and social demands. She was often tired for class because of her busy lifestyle. She diligently completed the homework (written and practice) but found it challenging to make the time for it. “Doing the homework” appeared to expand over the 8-week course to “how to bring mindfulness into daily activities”. This could be seen as a larger project for Jackie. She reported wanting to learn mindfulness to help her find time for herself amidst a busy schedule.
Another project was a social one; she was interested in using mindfulness in communication.

4. Joint Projects:
   i) To use the class as a laboratory for one’s life. This is what Ruth overtly suggested to the class, and there are many examples of Jackie doing exactly that. Jackie spoke of her busy schedule and her important relationships with her family and friends. In every class, she described trying to apply the experience of mindfulness to ways of living and making meaning of the situations and relationships outside of the classroom. In dialogue with Ruth and the class, she made connections between the class experience and her larger life issues. Because the classmates’ experiences so often validated, mirrored, or amplified her own, the metaphor of the class as a laboratory for one’s life was apt.
   ii) Another interesting but more subtle joint project involved Jackie’s learning of mindfulness relationally. This appeared to involve nonverbal implicit processes as well as verbal. Jackie usually sat beside Ruth in the circle and reported being aware of monitoring her physical proximity and eye contact so that she, Ruth and nearby classmates felt comfortable. Jackie was sensitive to what we might call “social mindfulness.” She and Ruth developed a nonverbal rapport which had a somewhat different nuance than with others. There was significant eye contact, smiling and nodding between them during the exchanges and from the observer’s point of view, a harmonious attunement or rapport. Jackie had difficulty at first following the directions for tracking body sensations and labelling them. In two sessions in particular, her dialogue with Ruth involved Ruth cueing Jackie with questions about body sensation, Jackie reporting, Ruth affirming, validating, mirroring, asking follow-up questions in a nonjudgmental manner and Jackie reporting further. Jackie reported a kind of “aha experience” when she became more able to access and label (verbally) body sensations such as heart beat, breathing, tenseness, etc. This joint project can be seen in the context of attachment processes/theory of mind, where the “caregiver” through attunement is part of an intersubjective process of the other becoming more aware of herself as being seen or held in the mind of the caregiver, and consequently more able to develop an “observing self” (self-observing). According to Dan Siegel (2007), mindfulness is about learning to relate to one’s own mind-body in the cherishing, attentive manner that a good parent relates to
her infant. This process appeared to be enacted through the dialogue between Ruth and Jackie and can be seen as a significant joint project although it presumably was largely implicit/unconscious.
### Appendix J: Master List of Codes for Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledges</th>
<th>Describes possibility or hypothetical situation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advises</td>
<td>Describes self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrees</td>
<td>Describes situation or event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambiguous response</td>
<td>Disagrees (denies)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answers question</td>
<td>Disapprove Dismissive or diminishing statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apologizes</td>
<td>Elaborates</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approves</td>
<td>Encourages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asks for body sensation</td>
<td>Evaluative or judging statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asks for cognition</td>
<td>Expresses anger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asks for clarification</td>
<td>Expresses belief or disbelief</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asks for confirmation</td>
<td>Expresses curiosity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asks for emotions</td>
<td>Expresses desire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asks for information</td>
<td>Expresses disgust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asks for justification or reasons</td>
<td>Expresses dissatisfaction (frustration)</td>
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<td>Asks for opinion or belief</td>
<td>Expresses doubt</td>
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<td>Asks for speculation or hypothetical scenario</td>
<td>Expresses fear</td>
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<td>Clarifies</td>
<td>Expresses gratitude</td>
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<td>Complains</td>
<td>Expresses humour</td>
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<td>Confirms</td>
<td>Expresses joy</td>
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<td>Continues other’s statement</td>
<td>Expresses love</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demands</td>
<td>Expresses perception or opinion or hunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Describes body sensation</td>
<td>Expresses realization</td>
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<td>Describes cognition</td>
<td>Expresses realization</td>
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<td>Describes future</td>
<td>Expresses realization</td>
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<td>Describes other</td>
<td>Expresses realization</td>
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<td>Describes past</td>
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<td>Expresses understanding</td>
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<td>Incomplete statement</td>
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<td>Interrupts</td>
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<td>Laughs</td>
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<td>Invites or elicits a response</td>
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<td>Paraphrasing</td>
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<td>Partial agreement</td>
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<td>Pause</td>
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<td>Praises</td>
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<td>Provides information</td>
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<td>Reflects affect</td>
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<td>Reflects body sensation</td>
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<td>Repeats</td>
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<td>Suggests</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Unintelligible response</td>
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