MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS: TEACHING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

(MBI:TAC)

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In-depth version

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of these assessment criteria is to enable the teaching of Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) to be assessed for adherence and competence.

The MBI:TAC was developed from 2008 in the context of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) programmes in the UK and, in this context, MBIs refers to these programmes. The development of the tool was led by Bangor University in collaboration with colleagues at the mindfulness centres at Exeter and Oxford Universities. The MBI:TAC is now being used, however, to review competence and adherence of other MBIs and, in some cases, the descriptors have been tailored to the adapted programme.

This 2021 version was created from a review with an eye towards trauma-sensitivity to more explicitly address trauma symptoms that may arise in response to meditation practice. Additionally, as MBI trainings make their way around the world, issues of diversity and global awareness require a broader perspective on how to assess competence and adherence across cultures, ethnicities, and a wide variety of populations.

What is intervention integrity?

Intervention integrity is the term used to describe the degree to which an intervention is implemented as intended. Broadly, the concept has three dimensions: adherence, differentiation, and competence:

1. **'Adherence'** refers to the extent to which the teacher/therapist both applies the appropriate 'ingredients' at the appropriate time points, while also refraining from introducing methods and curriculum elements that are not recognised as part of the approach.

2. **'Differentiation'** refers to the degree to which the approach can be distinguished from other approaches.

3. **'Competence'** is a more complex dimension, and refers to the teacher's skill in delivering the intervention.

Why is it important to look carefully at mindfulness-based teaching integrity? Verification of the integrity of an approach is important for a number of reasons:

1. In research trials, delivering the teaching (as intended and to a sufficiently high quality) is a key variable in interpreting the results, and may well influence outcome for participants. In order to be sure of this, research trial governance needs to include systems to assess levels of adherence, differentiation and competence.

2. These issues are not confined to research trial contexts. In training contexts, clarity is needed regarding the particular skills that are developed, and systems should be in place to ensure that the training achieves its aims.

3. In the context of university-validated postgraduate teacher training programmes (such as those offered at the UK universities of Bangor, Oxford and Exeter), formal assessment of teaching practice is required for the award of academic credits. For this purpose, assessment criteria and the assessment process must be entirely clear and transparent.

4. Systems to check teaching integrity are also an important ingredient in successful intervention implementation. MBIs are increasingly commissioned and implemented in the UK National Health Service and other settings. In the drive to implement a promising approach, however, there is a risk that the very factors that give rise to its promise are lost through a dilution of its integrity as it is rolled out. Internationally agreed benchmarks and governance assessing readiness to teach can help ensure that slippage from the core model does not take place during the transition from research to practice (Crane & Kuyken, 2012, Rycroft-Malone et al., 2014 & 2017).

The field of MBIs is developing at a fast pace. Training programmes need to respond to good practice issues to build integrity into these developments. The authors were all involved in the three Master's programmes offering mindfulness-based teacher training in the UK (Bangor, Exeter and Oxford Universities). These programmes include assessment of teaching competence within their trainings. It was clear that a robust methodology was required to enable consistency and reliability both within the training team and nationally, and to establish a level of expected competence that represents readiness to practice in the UK context.

When making assessments of competence prior to the development of the criteria, our experience was that we had a surprising degree of consistency of judgement within core teams. However, a number of challenges existed. In particular, the criteria on which assessments were made were not clearly stated, leading to a lack of transparency to trainees and making the basis on which final grades were decided difficult to defend. A more in-depth description of the development of the MBI:TAC can be found in the research paper (Crane et al., 2013) and in MBCT for people at risk of suicide (Williams et al., 2017).

Discriminations about competence will always have an element of subjectivity to them. Our intention is to create a system that both supports the process of forming these judgments and also brings some consistency and transparency to the process. As mentioned before, slippage from the core model can occur during the transition from the early vision of an approach (or from research on it) to its mainstream application. This can dilute the model's potency. A key part of our intention is to provide the discipline of a structure, which offers a reminder of what is considered core to skilful mindfulness-based teaching. As we evolve our understanding of this territory, we are keen to collaborate across cultures and geography to build understanding of how this process can be sensitive and responsive to trauma and culture.

Research on the MBI:TAC

The MBI:TAC is the first tool that has been developed to assess mindfulness-based teaching integrity. Preliminary findings on its psychometric properties are encouraging (for a detailed report, see Crane et al., 2013).

The reliability of the tool was evaluated during routine assessment practice in the three Master's programmes at Bangor, Exeter and Oxford Universities where a proportion of students' teaching practice was independently assessed by two trainers. The overall intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC), which measures inter-rater reliability, indicated a good level of agreement (r = .81, p<.01). Even when assessors disagreed on one domain, the reliability of averaged ratings was excellent. Equally, the evaluations of validity that were possible at this early stage in the tool's development were encouraging.

Further research in a range of contexts is needed however, to clarify the MBI:TAC's reliability and validity, including a deeper understanding of cultural differences as the reach of MBI trainings expands globally. Research is also needed: on the relationship between teaching integrity and participant outcome; on the relationship between competence and outcome; and on the effectiveness of methods used in training programmes to develop core skills.

The remarkable expansion of research on mindfulness over the last 15 years has predominantly focused on evaluating the outcome of mindfulness-based courses. There has been little research though, on the teaching/learning process through which these outcomes are achieved. Given that these processes are multi-dimensional, complex and subtle, this is perhaps not surprising. However, developing greater understanding of how positive outcomes are brought about would be of great value in guiding future developments.

The structure of the Teaching Assessment Criteria

The six domains of competence within the MBI:TAC:

Domain 1:   Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum

Domain 2:   Relational skills

Domain 3:   Embodying mindfulness

Domain 4:   Guiding mindfulness practices

Domain 5:   Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching

Domain 6:   Holding the group learning environment

Each domain comprises a number of 'key features' that describe its main aspects. These important features must be considered when scoring each domain. When assessing each domain, first identify whether the key features are present; then consider the competence level of the teaching. If the teacher includes most of the key features and uses them appropriately (i.e., misses few relevant opportunities to use them), the teacher should be assessed highly.

The tables of 'Examples' in the MBI:TAC summary within each domain give some guidance on what teaching looks like at each of the competence levels within each domain. These should be regarded as guidance rather than comprehensive exemplars.

This manual offers more detailed narrative guidance on each key feature within each domain, and is intended to accompany the use of the Summary MBI:TAC.

Some of what we don't know about mindfulness-based teacher competence

In developing the domains, it was clear that all the competences represented by each domain are absolutely crucial to the overall process.

If any were not present, the teaching would have significant flaws and gaps. Also, each domain represents a distinct aspect of the teaching process. Some domains are, of course, more substantial/multi-faceted and have more key features describing them. However, it is less clear whether certain domains are more important than others. At this stage in the development of our understanding about teaching processes, it is not known which particular competences best predict participant outcome. The decision was consequently made to give each domain equal priority in the profile and summary score.

It is possible for two teachers to be both adherent and competent while also being quite different in style and emphasis. Given that it is not yet clear how particular emphases within the teaching process or styles of teaching relate to outcomes for participants, the criteria do allow some variation. It is important, therefore, that assessors bring an open mind to the process of viewing and judging the teaching of others, and to recognise and set aside personal bias and preference. It is also helpful if the assessor is fluent in the language of the teacher and familiar with the culture/context of the class. This familiarity with language and culture offers a more refined sense of what is being conveyed—and received—in the teaching. We set out a proposed way of rating teaching practice (below) that supports assessors to use both intuitive and evidence-based reasoning to form judgments about a piece of teaching.

Some limitations of the competence criteria

It is important to remember that these assessment criteria are a tool that can support consistent assessment of teacher competence. However, given that the assessor does not have access to the entire picture, the MBI:TAC does not offer a complete picture of the teacher's capacity and competence.

The assessor can only base assessments on observations of the teacher and their behaviours. It is, therefore, helpful and important to use the criteria in conjunction with other assessment methodologies such as reflective assignments in which the teacher tracks their awareness of inner process, and theoretical assignments that ask the teacher to demonstrate understanding of underpinning principles.

Notably, there are some key areas that cannot be assessed via direct observation of teaching – that of good practice that happens around the teaching. A prior requisite of the assessment process involves ensuring that a basis of good practice for mindfulness-based teaching is in place. Guidance for good practice has been drawn up and agreed to by the British Association for Mindfulness-Based Approaches (BAMBA; https://bamba.org.uk/), and by the International Mindfulness Integrity Network (http://iminetwork.org/).

Another challenge that can arise when discerning and labelling the component parts of a complex process, is a sense of rigidity can be introduced, despite the fact that a significant component part is evidence of flexibility, responsiveness and sensitivity of the teacher to present moment experience. To guard against an overly rigid interpretation, we encourage the assessor to shift attention regularly from close-up observation of detail to a more wide-angle perspective to get a better sense of the process. We also encourage a fine-tuned awareness of

personal reactivity and preference etc., which might bias an assessment in a certain direction. In the early stages of using the MBI:TAC to assess others, it is helpful for an assessor to work with an experienced user of the criteria to support recognition of personal bias. In the universities where the MBI:TAC is used to grade students for academic awards, an internal moderator and an external assessor act as a check in the system to ensure the criteria are being applied accurately and fairly.

For newer teachers, the experience of having competence assessed can have the effect of bringing attention to the component parts of the teaching in ways that encourage 'thinking about' rather than 'being with' the process. There is some inevitability to this natural way of learning about and integrating new skills. As new learning is assimilated, the process seems initially like a bag of techniques and methods, which then gradually become integrated into the person as a natural way of being. It can help teachers to watch recordings of their own teaching. They can use this time as an opportunity to reflect on the elements that make up the whole, and then while teaching to prioritise attending to the immediacy of the moment.

It is important to bear in mind that when teaching is assessed at the higher end of the competence criteria, this is taken to mean that the teacher has the capacity to teach at this level – even though there will be inevitable variations in competence. Conversely, when teaching is assessed at the lower end, this is taken to mean that at the moment of assessment competence was not demonstrated. To take into account this variability, the training courses represented by the authors require submission of a recording of the teaching of a whole eight-session course to enable sampling of the teacher's breadth of practice.

Principles to bear in mind when using the assessment criteria

While assessing competence using these criteria, assessors should keep several principles in mind:

- The scaling assumes that competences develop over time, and that greater competence develops with training, practice, and feedback.

- Assessors should agree beforehand (i) which domains are being assessed and (ii) what is the unit of assessment (e.g., leading a particular practice and inquiry; a curriculum element within the eight-week course; a whole session; or the entire eight-week course). Not all domains of competence, or key features within domains, would be expected to be observable if the unit of assessment is a component of the eight-week course.

- Observable data should be used as evidence to make assessments. If there are contextual reasons that have compromised the demonstration of competence, the assessor must be informed so that these reasons can be taken into account while assessing, if appropriate to do so (e.g., the session was co-taught by two teachers, or a participant asked that their contributions to the session be edited out of the video recording, or the group had some particularly vulnerable members which influenced teacher choices).

- If certain behaviours are expected, but are absent, then this can be used to assess the domain. Again, a narrative note can indicate what was expected but missing. There may be contextual reasons for the absence, so it is important that the assessor does not rush to judgement.

- Competence in one domain does not necessarily imply competence in another domain.

- The descriptors of competency within a domain are progressive, i.e., higher-level skills include skills already described in previous bandings.

- The domains are not ranked in any order of importance, but some are more substantial than others, i.e., there are a greater number of features to take into account.

- Likewise, key features are given equal weighting, i.e., none are presumed to be more important than others.

- The domains describe processes that are at play throughout the teaching. At any one moment, several domains will be in action. For example, during the teacher-led dialogue that follows a mindfulness practice, Domain 1 will be relevant (appropriateness of the contents of the themes that are being drawn out, pacing of the session); Domain 2 will be relevant (the relational aspect of the conversations); Domain 3 will be relevant (the embodying mindfulness during the inquiry process); Domain 5 will be relevant (the quality of the teaching process inherent within the dialogue); and Domain 6 will be relevant (the quality of awareness and responsiveness to the group process during the dialogue).

- The skills and processes represented by the domains are all highly interconnected, making it challenging to discriminate what aspect of the teaching to assess within each domain. As far as possible, it is important that the assessor fully knows in which domains the various elements of the teaching process they are assessing. The assessor should refer to the key features when making these discriminations. Additional guidance for discriminating is given as 'N.B.s' under the features within each domain. Confusion in this area can lead to a highly experienced mindfulness-based teacher making unreliable assessments. Experience is needed also in aligning to the form of this tool.

- Regarding co-teaching, if assessment of a teacher is taking place while they are working with a co-teacher, the quality of this relationship is folded into Domain 2. See guidance on this on page 24.

Embodying Mindfulness

Mindfulness is an internal process, a particular way of relating to one's experience. To communicate this successfully to participants, teachers need to embody this process themselves.

The term 'embodiment' essentially describes how this interior work of mindfulness practice is implicitly reflected in the teacher's presence and behaviour, which in turn influences the atmosphere of the classroom. In other words, embodiment reflects the extent to which teachers are mindfully connected with their experience and the interface between this, the group, individual participants and the teaching process.

In the preliminary research on the MBI:TAC, the embodiment domain was the one with the least agreement between assessors (see results and discussion sections of Crane et al., 2013). While developing the criteria, it was the embodiment domain that we found most challenging to capture through specific descriptors. We needed to find ways to describe what it 'looks, sounds, and feels like' when teachers do the inner work of connecting mindfully to experience and how this inner work is reflected in their verbal and non-verbal behaviour. This domain is perhaps the most sensitive to assess because it reflects the 'personhood', natural presence and authenticity of the teacher. We therefore encourage assessors to be particularly sensitive in approaching this domain. There is no single way to look embodied, which makes it difficult to reach accuracy with descriptors. However, the descriptors aim to point towards the qualities that will be visible when this particular internal process is happening.

Importantly, embodiment is not an idealised state to be achieved: it may well be demonstrated by the teacher holding moments of personal instability, shakiness and exposure with spaciousness and presence.

Levels of competence

The Dreyfus Scale of Competence (Dreyfus, 1986) underpins the competence descriptions (see Table 1). There were five levels in the original Dreyfus scale, but the following changes were made: the additional level of 'incompetence' has been added; the term 'novice' is replaced by 'beginner;' and the term 'expert' is replaced by 'advanced' as outlined below, with an equivalent numerical band to the right of the table. The assessment criteria also draw on work evaluating the competence of psychological practitioners by Sharpless & Barber (2009).

The levels within the assessment criteria represent the range of teaching competence that is realistically expected in mindfulness-based teaching. Each level represents a developmental stage. It is natural for teachers to move through the stages over time as skills and understanding develop, and if the appropriate training and good practice processes such as supervision are in place. 'Beginner' and 'advanced beginner' are appropriate levels for teachers in the early stages of training; 'competent' is an appropriate level for a student teacher graduating from a full teacher training programme/supervised pathway with some early teaching experience in the field; 'proficient' is an appropriate level for a teacher who has taught a significant number of classes and is now deeply familiar with and at home within the teaching process; and the 'advanced'

level is likely to be a teacher with considerable depth and length of experience and with a maturity in their teaching practice. In practice, though, any one teacher is unlikely to demonstrate consistent levels of competence and some variability between adjacent levels is normal.

Making a determination regarding which level the teaching falls into within each domain is the most challenging aspect of this process and requires practice in using the assessment criteria and comparing results against benchmarked assessments (see section on training below). The tables of examples given in each domain are intended to support these discriminations. Within a university master's programme setting, each competence level is further divided into high, middle and low.

Becoming reliable in using the criteria (i.e., applying them in ways that are consistent with benchmarked criteria) takes time and practice. It requires an awareness of personal patterns and tendencies. In a workshop on the MBI:TAC, for example, several participants noticed that their tendency towards giving low ratings mirrored the ways in which they tended to review their own teaching process!

Using the tool to support reflective practice

Although the MBI:TAC was initially developed as an assessment tool, a strong driver for its use in practice has been its value as a tool to support reflective practice for the individual teacher, in peer contexts, and in supervision and training contexts.

The tool offers a 'map of the territory' of mindfulness-based teaching skills and so offers a language that supports reflection (see Evans et al., 2021, and Griffiths et al., 2021 for guidance on how to use the tool in these ways).

To support the use of the tool in this way Gemma Griffith has led the development of a version of the tool that is tailor-made for enabling reflective practice – the Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Teaching and Learning Companion - or the TLC for short. (see Griffith et al., 2021).

LEVELS OF COMPETENCE AND ADHERENCE IN MBI:TAC

(adapted from the Dreyfus Scale of Competence, 1986)

Competence band	Generic definition of overall competence level	Band
Incompetent The teaching demonstrates an absence of key features, highly inappropriate performance, or behaviour that is harmful.	Key features are not demonstrated. The teacher makes consistent errors and displays poor and unacceptable teaching, leading to likely or actual negative therapeutic consequences. There is no real evidence that the teacher has grasped the fundamentals of the MBI teaching process.	**1**
Beginner The teaching demonstrates basic building blocks of MBI competence in at least one feature.	At least one key feature in each domain is evident at competent level, but there are significant levels of inconsistency across all other key features. Across other key features, there is substantive scope for development, overall lack of consistency and many areas that require development to be considered adequate teaching. The teacher is beginning to develop some basic building blocks of MBI competence.	**2**
Advanced Beginner The teaching demonstrates evidence of competence in two key features in each domain. The participant's emotional and physical safety is well taken care of.	At least two key features are evident at a competent level in each domain, but there are one or more major problems in others. The teaching has scope for greater levels of consistency in competence across key features and domains. The teaching at a very basic level would be considered 'fit for practice.'	**3**
Competent Teaching is competent, with some problems and/or inconsistencies	All key features are mostly present in all domains at a competent level with possibly some good features, but some inconsistencies are present. The teacher demonstrates a workable level of competence and they are clearly 'fit for practice.'	**4**
Proficient Sustained competence demonstrated with few or minor problems and/or inconsistencies.	All key features are present in all domains, with very few and very minor inconsistencies, and there is evidence of good ability and skill. The teacher is able consistently to apply these skills over the range of aspects to MBI teaching.	**5**
Advanced Excellent teaching practice, or very good even in the face of participant difficulties.	All key features are present with evidence of considerable ability. The teaching is particularly inspirational, fluent and excellent. The teacher no longer uses rules, guidelines, or maxims. They have deep tacit understanding of the issues and are able to work in an original and flexible manner. The skills are demonstrated even in the face of difficulties (e.g., challenges from the group).	**6**

How to use the MBI:TAC to make assessments of competence

The criteria extend over six bands from 'incompetent,' where the teacher did not adhere to that aspect of the programme nor demonstrate competence, to 'advanced' where there is adherence and very high skill. Thus the MBI:TAC assesses both adherence to programme method and the skill of the teacher. Using the summary sheet (see end of document), mark with an 'X' in the appropriate column/row, the level to which you think the teacher has fulfilled the core function in each of the domains being assessed.

It is recommended that the following process is used while making competence assessments when watching video recordings:

1. Watch the entirety of the piece of teaching that is being assessed. Bring mindful attention to your experience while engaging in 'experiencing the teaching' by placing yourself in the position of participant, including participating in mindfulness practices.

2. During this first viewing, have the scoring sheet near to hand to remind you of the domains and key features. If it is helpful, make notes under relevant sections to make a record of the demonstration of key features at various levels of competence. In this way, a profile will build up that is anchored to the key features within each domain. Keep engaging and connecting with the teaching on a participatory experiential level. Put more emphasis on what is present in the teaching experience than on what might be perceived as absent. Put more emphasis also on participating in the teaching than on assessing it.

3. At the end of the teaching, take a mindful pause, settling into your direct experience. From this place, make a global assessment of the teacher's competence level using the table on the previous page as a guide.

4. Now take time to consider each individual domain and the key features within it, discerning how the teacher's skills were demonstrated within these. Take the time to ensure all the teaching that was evidenced is taken into account when making your rating and make an assessment accordingly. This stage involves the development of 'hypotheses' that can be tested against further evidence of the teaching practice on the recording (e.g., a hypothesis might develop that 'this teacher has a tendency to move quickly from exploring immediacy of experience into making a teaching point'). If this has been seen just once, the assessor would need to look at other examples of the teacher during inquiry to see if it is a pattern or a one-off before using it as a basis to make an assessment.

5. Place an X in the appropriate level. Written feedback (under the headings 'Teaching strengths' and 'Learning needs') can be given on the following sheet where evidence of strengths and emerging strengths are noted, and what is required to advance further is indicated. Aim for the length of text within each side to be similar to guard against the tendency to say more about development needs than strengths.

6. Finally, step back from the detail and review the overall profile of competence across the domains, considering how these relate to your initial global assessment. If there is a discrepancy between the detailed assessments and the first global assessment, pause and reflect. Both have value in informing competence levels. Return to the teaching recording to gather direct evidence that challenges or supports your global or detailed assessments before arriving at a final decision. At this point, it can be very helpful to collaborate with a colleague to make the assessments.

The assessments yield a multi-dimensional profile of scores (i.e., assessments may well vary across different domains, particularly earlier in a teacher's development). When using the assessment criteria to support teacher development (i.e., as part of a supervision process), this profile will offer what is needed. For the purpose of a summative assessment (i.e., to assess a teacher's readiness to teach in a research trial or pass an assessed module), the profile can be summed into an overall score. In such contexts, it may be reasonable to expect that all domains be assessed at least at the advanced beginner or the competent level depending on the nature/level of the assessment context. Local versions of the summary assessment sheet can be developed that integrate appropriate marking grades for academic contexts and allow for an overall average score to be realised.

Where inconsistency of competence is demonstrated within a domain (e.g., proficient level might be demonstrated during guiding a practice in early part of session, whilst beginner level might be demonstrated at end of session), take the average of these for the overall score and include a narrative note explaining this.

Using the assessment criteria in the presence of challenges and difficulties

For all domains, focus on the skill of the teacher while taking into account challenges and difficulties that arise in the session.

In instances where the group or individuals are presenting unusually challenging difficulties, the assessor needs to assess the teacher's skills in applying the methods within the context of the difficulties. A central theme of MBIs is learning to be with and to work with difficulty. Credit should be given, therefore, for demonstrations of appropriate skilful interventions and interactions when working with challenge and difficulty.
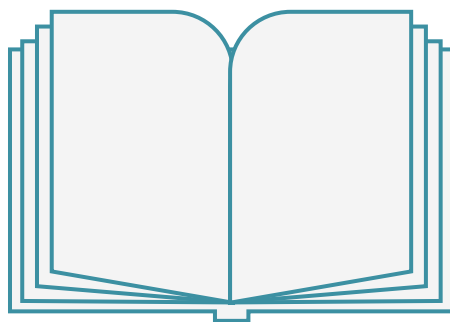
Training to use the MBI:TAC

One cannot expose oneself to the rigour of being assessed for competence without experiencing some vulnerability, so this work requires deep sensitivity and respect from all involved.

In all contexts, nurturing the development of trainees and established teachers is the core issue of concern. We strongly hope that assessments are carried out not only with sensitive awareness of the process, but are also with skilfully framed qualitative feedback and supportive developmental guidance. The criteria were developed with an awareness of both the potential and the risks of applying such methods to the assessment of something as complex and multidimensional as teaching MBIs. It is important that users of the criteria also bring these understandings to the process.

Many teachers are now using the MBI-TAC criteria in an informal way to support reflective practice, training, and supervision. In order to use the tool in an assessment context, and, as a pre-requisite for Level 3 training, assessors should themselves be assessed at the level of 'proficient' or 'advanced' on the MBI:TAC.

Before using the tool to assess others, it is critically important that that users receive training in the use of these assessment criteria. It takes time to become familiar with the contents, structure and process of the MBI:TAC, to reach a benchmark understanding of what the domains mean, and to discern the competence level of the teaching. The reliability of assessments increases as the assessor becomes familiar and more experienced with the criteria and with the process of using it to assess competence. It has been found to be very helpful for new users to co-assess with more experienced assessors, discussing the process and reaching a consensus. It is also clear that the assessor must be deeply familiar (from the perspective of being a teacher) with the particular mindfulness-based programme that they are assessing.

TRAINING PATHWAY TO LEARN TO USE THE MBI:TAC

The details of the training pathway (delivered online) can be viewed here:
http://mbitac.bangor.ac.uk/training.php.en.

Below is a summary of the three stages of training:

1 **Supporting the inner teacher with the MBI-TAC: Cultivating reflection, embodiment and competence**

- ▶ Identifying, describing and distinguishing the MBI:TAC domains as they show up throughout the curriculum

- ▶ learning to use the tool to support reflective development

- ▶ Building the foundation for using the tool in training, supervision and as an assessment tool

2 **Supporting others with the MBI-TAC: Cultivating competence in supervision, assessment and training**

- ▶ Learning to use the MBI:TAC to assess mindfulness-based teaching

- ▶ Developing skills for using it in training and supervision

- ▶ Developing skills in giving skilful feedback on teaching

3 **Supporting Integrity with the MBI-TAC: Cultivating reliability in the assessment process**

- ▶ Ensuring reliability for using the MBI:TAC in assessment

DOMAIN 1:

COVERAGE, PACING AND ORGANISATION OF SESSION CURRICULUM

This domain examines how well the teacher adequately addresses and covers the curriculum content of the session.

This involves creating a skilful balance between the needs of the individual, the group and the requirements of teaching the course. In addition, the teacher is well organised with relevant course materials, has teaching aids readily available and the room has been appropriately prepared for the group. The session is both well 'time managed' in relation to the curriculum and paced well with a sense of spaciousness, steadiness and lack of time pressure. Digressions are steered back into the session curriculum with tact and ease.

Key features to be considered when assessing this domain:

1 **Adherence** – The teacher adheres to the form of the programme, and covers the themes and curriculum content.

2 **Responsiveness and flexibility** – in adhering to the session curriculum.

3 **Appropriateness** – Appropriateness of the themes and content (taking into account the stage of the programme and experience of the participants).

4 **Organisation** – Level of organisation of the teacher, room and materials.

5 **Session flow** – The degree to which the session flows and is appropriately paced.

Please note

i Assessors must themselves have considerable direct teaching experience of the particular programme that is under review.

ii Assessor requires a written guide to the particular course curriculum that is being followed. If any adaptations to the curriculum have been made, the rationale for these must be clear to the assessor.

Incompetent

Session curriculum not covered or highly inappropriate.
No attempt was made to structure session time.
Session seemed aimless, overly rigid, or harmful.

Beginner

At least one of the five key features is present at a level that would be desirable for adequate MBI teaching, but significant levels of inconsistency exist across all key features.

Examples include: adequate coverage of the session theme, but to support participants' learning, the teaching needs to be more responsive to what is happening in the class, matched to the group/level and paced to be effective; curriculum has some relevant content, but there are significant omissions or inappropriate additions; sessions consistently rigid or very unstructured; themes consistently inappropriate for stage in course; teacher disorganised; and/or has significant problems with pacing or time management needs improvement (e.g., too slowly paced, too rapidly paced, time boundaries not adhered to).

Advanced Beginner

At least two of the five key features are present at a competent level, but difficulty and/or inconsistency is clearly evident in others.

Examples include: some skill is evidenced in maintaining the form of the programme or covering the curriculum shown, but significant curriculum elements are missing or a curriculum element which is not part of session is introduced without clear rationale; at times rigid or overly unstructured; content and curriculum themes mostly appropriate but with some problems (i.e., teacher at times introducing an appropriate theme but at a suboptimum stage in the course); teacher sometimes disorganised; problems with pacing or time management at times (e.g., too slowly paced, too rapidly paced, time boundaries not adhered to).

Competent

All key features present to a good level of skill with some minor inconsistencies.

Examples include: appropriate curriculum reasonably well covered; teacher used time effectively by tactfully limiting peripheral and unproductive discussion and/or by pacing the session appropriately for the group; content of curriculum themes largely appropriate; and teacher mostly well organised.

Proficient

All key features consistently present.

Examples include: appropriate curriculum and form of programme clearly evidenced, well covered and adhered to with ease and spaciousness; evidence of balanced allocation of time; teacher maintained appropriate control over flow of dialogue and pacing of session; content and themes highly appropriate; appropriate level of flexibility in making curriculum choices; good level of organisation.

Advanced

All key features present to a high skill level.

Examples include: excellent coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum; particularly high degree of flexibility, responsiveness, spaciousness and appropriate pacing while at the same time thoroughly addressing the key curriculum themes for the session. Difficult for reviewer to feed back any 'learning needs.'

Detailed explanation of the five key features of Domain 1

Key feature 1: Adherence to the form of the programme and coverage of themes and curriculum content

This feature assesses the presence or absence of appropriate curriculum content and themes, as well as the adherence to the overall form of the programme/ session.

There are some curriculum elements to each session that are 'non-negotiable' and need always to be in place:

- at least 30 minutes of mindfulness practice; each session other than session 1 begins with practice;

- practice and home practice review/inquiry; discussion of home practice for forthcoming week;

- final mindfulness practice/mindful pause to close session, or some approach that ensures sessions end with a mindful awareness of ending and transition;

- the session themes need to be conveyed both through the process and content of the teaching session.

The intention and aims of curriculum elements that the teacher uses within the session need to be clearly aligned with the kind of course (e.g., MBSR or MBCT; see Santorelli et al., 2017, and Segal et al., 2013 in the reference list), with the client/participant group, with the context for the teaching and with the overarching programme intentions of the session. The assessor requires contextual information and rationales for curriculum content that departs from the usual MBSR or MBCT curriculum form.

Questions to ask when assessing this feature:
Did the teacher adhere to the expected curriculum for the session? Was the content of the dialogue appropriate to the stage of the course? Were curriculum elements introduced that do not belong to the usual MBSR/MBCT form?

Key feature 2: Responsiveness and flexibility in adhering to session curriculum

During mindfulness-based teaching, time must be given to exploring important issues with sensitivity, and also used simultaneously in an intentional and focused way.

Effective coverage and pacing of the session curriculum offers an opportunity for a teacher to embody the possibility of balancing working responsively with the present moment, while holding an awareness of overarching intention. Skilful teaching, therefore, requires a dynamic balance between staying with the core intention for the session and responding to the spontaneity of the moment. Generally, the teacher will have a session plan to work to with approximate times allotted to each part of the session curriculum. A key skill is to hold this plan flexibly and lightly, and to enable appropriate responsiveness to the moment. This is particularly emphasised in teaching MBSR, where content is transferable both between and within sessions. The main requirement is that the session themes are conveyed. A teacher may appropriately decide to drop a particular planned exercise should the material be naturally arising through other aspects.

It is important that the teacher conveys a strong sense of intention so that it is clear to the participants that the choice of focus for the time together has been carefully planned. Within this, it is important to honour the contributions of participants. For example, at times it can be fruitful to use seemingly unproductive digressions to build cohesion in the group and to weave them in as examples of the kinds of mind patterns highlighted by mindfulness-based teaching processes (e.g., recognising rumination in action; seeing the pressure to have rationales for what we do and to search for outcomes).

Key feature 3: Appropriateness of the themes and content (to stage of programme and to the participants)

This feature assesses the teacher's ability both to adhere to the themes as laid out in the standard programme form, and to recognise participants' needs so that the session can be adapted accordingly.

It is important to bear in mind the building blocks that are needed to enable participants to apply new mindfulness skills in the face of difficulty. For example, it may be inappropriate at an early stage in the programme to encourage participants to deliberately 'turn towards' difficult experience.

Questions to ask when assessing this feature:
Is the teacher staying close/or straying away from the core themes and content that this session is intended to highlight?

Key feature 4: Level of organisation of teacher, room and materials

Questions to ask when assessing this feature:
What was the level of organisation of the teacher, the room and the materials; has the teacher pre-arranged the room with the required number of chairs; have all the required materials for the particular session such as CDs and handouts been prepared; and are appropriate teaching aids available and used?

N.B. The skill with which teaching aids are used is assessed in Domain 5 (Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching).

Key feature 5: The degree to which the session flows and is appropriately paced

Questions to ask when assessing this feature:
was there any time during the session when the session moved too slowly or quickly; did the session flow well overall; did the teacher appear rushed or unhelpfully slow; and did the teacher give the participants sufficient space and time to sense, feel and think?

The teacher may unwittingly belabour a point after the participant has already grasped the message, or may spend time gathering much more direct 'noticing' than is necessary. In these cases, the sessions can seem painfully slow and inefficient. On the other hand, the teacher may intervene before having gathered enough direct 'noticing' to draw out the learning themes. In summary, if the session is conducted too slowly or too quickly, the learning process may be impeded and this could de-motivate the participant. The pacing of the material should always be tailored to the participant's needs and speed of learning. For example, when there is evidence of difficulties (e.g., emotional or cognitive difficulties), more time and attention may need to be given. In such circumstances, the agenda items may be shuffled or adapted accordingly. In some extreme circumstances (e.g., participant expressing distress), the structure and pacing of the session will need to be changed drastically in accordance with the needs of the situation.

Was the teacher able to work skilfully with digressions? The teacher may appropriately and politely interrupt peripheral discussion and then direct participants back to the agenda. The session should move through discrete phases that are clearly connected. It is important that the teacher maintains an overview of the session to allow correct pacing throughout without seeming preoccupied with 'time pressure.'

Was the pacing of the session adapted well to the needs of the participants? Was there sufficient time allocated to each element of the session (e.g., was there sufficient time left for the home practice assignment)? A well-paced session should address the intentions of the session without needing to exceed the time allocated.

The teacher may be observed using phrases similar to the following to build effective pacing into the session:

- 'We may have strayed off our focus a little, let's get back and focus on the key exploration for this session?'

- 'Let's pause here – the point you've just raised is important and will be addressed in…

- 'Do you mind stopping a moment, you've given me lots of information already. Just to make sure I have understood completely, let's look together at what you are describing here.'

- 'Please summarise your experience in a few words or a short sentence.'
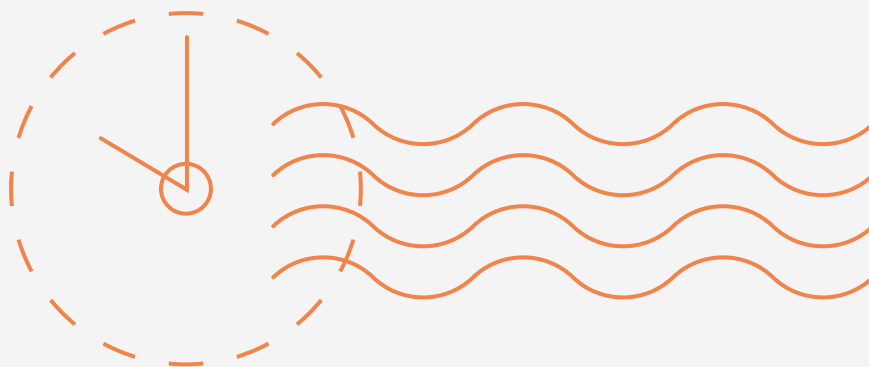
DOMAIN 2:
RELATIONAL SKILLS

Mindfulness-based teaching is highly relational in that the practices themselves help us develop a new relationship both with ourselves and our experience.

The qualities that the teacher brings to participants and the teaching process mirror the qualities that participants are learning to bring to themselves. Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention to experience in a particular way: on purpose (the teacher is deliberate and focused when relating to participants in the sessions); in the present moment (the teacher has the intention to be whole heartedly present with participants); and non-judgmentally (the teacher brings a spirit of interest, deep respect and acceptance to participants) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Key features to be considered when assessing this domain:

1   **Authenticity and potency** – Relating in a way which seems genuine, honest and confident.

2   **Connection and acceptance** – Actively attending to and connecting with participants and their present moment experience and conveying back an accurate and empathic understanding of this.

3   **Compassion and warmth** – Conveying a deep awareness, sensitivity, appreciation and openness to participants' experience.

4   **Curiosity and respect** – Conveying genuine interest in each participant and their experience while respecting each participant's vulnerabilities, boundaries and need for privacy.

5   **Mutuality** – Engaging with the participants in a mutual and collaborative working relationship.

Please note

i   The relational aspect to mindfulness teaching is particularly related to **Domain 3** (Embodying mindfulness).

ii   The intention in **Domain 2** is to encompass those parts of the process that rely on the interpersonal connection between individual participants and teacher.

Incompetent

Teacher has poor relational and interpersonal skills.

Examples include: consistently 'missing the point' of what participants are communicating; aspects of the interpersonal process are destructive.

Beginner

At least one of the five key features is present at a level desirable for adequate MBI teaching, but there are significant levels of inconsistency across all key features. At times, the relational process is unsafe or harmful for participants.

Examples include: acceptance of participants not demonstrated; lack of attuned attention; lack of sensitivity to participant vulnerability; teacher putting themselves outside the process.

Advanced Beginner

At least two of the five key features are present at a competent level, but difficulty and/or inconsistency is clearly evident in others. Participants' safety is not compromised and there are no aspects of the relational process that are destructive to participants.

Example includes: teacher's style at times impedes their ability to establish a relationship that enables engaged exploration (i.e., lack of connection, responsiveness, curiosity not conveyed, hesitant style, intellectualisation, and judgemental tone).

Competent

All key features are present to a good level of skill with some minor inconsistencies.

Examples include: effective working relationships are generally formed with participants; teacher's relational style mostly facilitates participants to feel at ease, accepted and appreciated; teacher is confidently attentive to and interested in participants; teacher appropriately brings themselves into the learning process (mutuality).

Proficient

All key features are consistently present with few minor inconsistencies.

Examples include: teacher demonstrates very good relational skills and is strongly attuned to participants; the interactions are sensitive, responsive and respectful; excellent collaborative, mutual working relationships are formed; participants' boundaries and vulnerabilities are sensitively respected; teacher creates a relational process that allows participants to engage deeply with their learning.

Advanced

All key features present to a high skill level.

Examples include: teacher demonstrates excellent relational effectiveness with a keen grasp of the participants' world; teacher consistently shows good levels of collaboration, compassion, openness, warmth, acceptance and responsiveness to participants. Difficult for reviewer to feed back any 'learning needs'.

Detailed explanation of the five key features of Domain 2

Key feature 1: Authenticity and potency –
relating in a way that seems genuine, honest and confident

The teacher is honest and open in their relationships with participants. They relate in a way that is naturally aligned with how they are as a person. Facial expressions are congruent with the felt emotions and verbal expression in the room.

Instead of being caught into habitual, automatic reactions, the teacher's words are conscious responses based firmly on an awareness of what is internally perceived and sensed, so conveying authenticity and congruence to participants.

There is a sense of ease, naturalness and presence (i.e., how the teacher presents within the teaching feels like the person they are). There is a sense of honesty about who they are, so there isn't much to 'figure out' about them as a person.

N.B. This overlaps with embodying. This key feature pertains to how authenticity is expressed in the moments of relating to participants.

Key feature 2: Connection and acceptance –
actively attending to, attuning to and connecting with participants and their present moment experience, and conveying back an accurate and empathic understanding of this

This feature refers to the ability of the teacher to 'tune' into or empathise with what the participant is conveying. This skill relates to how well the teacher can step into the participant's world, see and experience life the way the participant does, and convey this understanding back to the participant.

Active listening skills are essential to empathic listening and responding and will include the appropriate use of open questions. Empathy is conveyed by the teacher's ability to make the participant aware that their difficulties are recognised and understood. The teacher accurately paraphrases both the content of what participants express and the emotional tone. The teacher demonstrates genuine interest in the participant's 'internal reality' and communicates (through appropriate verbal and non-verbal responses) enough understanding to help the participant feel understood. The teacher is completely willing to 'meet' each individual where they are in this moment, to respond in an attuned way to this and to explore and honour their experience just as it is. There is a clear movement from connecting with the individual, to attending to a participant's experience, and being responsive to it.

During conversations with participants in the class, the teacher will check in with them to gauge the accuracy of their understanding (e.g., 'So let me check that I am hearing you correctly...'; and 'So you noticed…') The teacher will demonstrate attentive body language (e.g., eye contact, encouraging gestures, positive facial expressions and nodding, etc.).

The respect inherent within this feature includes working sensitively with the possibility of trauma, cultural diversity, and respecting difference.
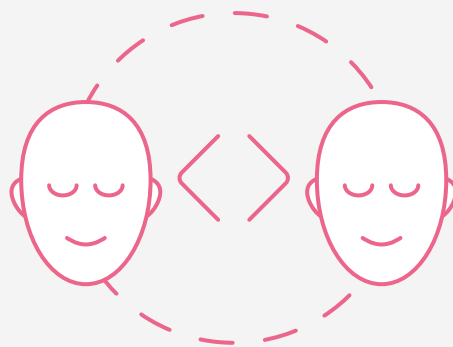
Key feature 3: Compassion and warmth – conveying a deep awareness, sensitivity, appreciation and openness to participants' experience

The teacher displays an authentically warm and friendly affect, listens with full attention, thanks participants for their contributions and is encouraging and supportive.

Whereas empathy is the sense of 'feeling with' another being, compassion is the movement of mind that seeks to 'feel with' suffering. In the moment of relational contact, there is a sense that this individual who is here with me really matters. For compassion to be authentic, it must recognise and appreciate individual sovereignty. Unlike sympathy or pity, it boosts the other's self-esteem and cultivates human dignity. There is, consequently, the recognition of the human-ness of experience, of knowing that in another moment it could be my turn to be 'in the fire' of painful experience. Compassion is thus accompanied by humility and recognition of interconnectedness (i.e., my ability to be compassionate and giving does not make me better than the recipient). Compassion strengthens our ability to remain human and be open to the experiences of others. Compassion particularly finds expression when painful experience is present. Warmth is an aspect of compassion, for a warm person conveys to others a sense of feeling appreciated, respected and accepted.

Key feature 4: Curiosity and respect – conveying genuine interest in each participant and their experience, while respecting each participant's vulnerabilities, boundaries and need for privacy

The relational style of the teacher engages participants in an active exploration of their own experience rather than relying on the expertise of the teacher. In addition, the teacher brings a gentle but alive curiosity to the explorations that unfold in the session.

The teacher has a strong degree of responsibility not only to create the particular conditions for this learning to take place, but also to ensure that participants take responsibility for their own learning process. The intention is to empower participants to come to know that they are their own experts and that they already have a 'fund of relevant experience and skills' (Segal et al., 2013). This is conveyed in a range of ways including a strong invitation to take care of themselves within the learning process, and only to follow the guidance and participate as much as feels appropriate and right to them. There is an absence of agenda in the sense that the teacher is not endeavouring to create change, but is rather offering a space within which participants can engage in exploration in this moment. The teacher will invite participants to explore their experience, to move towards painful experience and to bring curiosity to all this. This will be done with deep sensitivity to and respect of participants' boundaries and vulnerabilities as they are in this moment.

In practice, the teacher will ask permission of participants while engaged in exploration together (e.g., 'Is that enough or shall we go on a little further?' or 'would you mind if we explore this together for a bit?'). The teacher demonstrates awareness of and respect for participants' individual vulnerabilities and need for privacy (e.g., the teacher will move on if participant chooses not to share), and the particular boundaries and requirements of the participant population being taught.

Key feature 5: Mutuality – engaging with the participants in a mutual collaborative working relationship

A key characteristic of the relational style between participants and teacher is the sense of mutuality and shared exploration. The processes of mind that are under investigation fall into a continuum of experience that everyone can relate to.

It is impossible for teachers to separate themselves from the process of investigation. In the spirit of adventure that is core to this learning style, the process of exploration within the sessions becomes a collaborative venture between all those engaged in it – there is a feeling of 'co-journeying' and of a highly participatory learning process involving participants and teacher alike.

Appropriate use of humour can help to promote engagement, a willingness and openness to engage in learning and exploration, and to establish and maintain an effective collaborative relationship.

Co-Teaching

If a teacher is being assessed while working with a co-teacher, the quality of the relationship between the teachers will have a strong influence on the quality of the teaching process for the participants. Each key feature in Domain 2 is as relevant to the co-teaching relationship as it is to the teacher-participant relationship.

If an assessment is happening in a co-teaching context, we recommend that the recording must show the relevant teacher teaching whole practices and doing all the inquiry for the practices they teach (i.e., not share teaching such as inquiries or didactic sessions with the co-teacher).

We recommend the following guidelines for assessing one teacher in a co-teaching context:

- The relevant teacher needs to be recorded teaching at least one of each of the main practices and teaching elements (i.e., raisin meditation; minimum of one body scan; minimum of one mindful movement session; minimum of two main sitting meditation practices in different sessions of the course; minimum of two didactic sessions/exercises (e.g., a session 2 exercise such as 'walking down the street'; a session 4/5 exercise on depression or stress); and a minimum of two different breathing spaces or other short practices.

- The relevant teacher needs to be teaching the group a minimum of 50% of the time, and if possible more, so that the assessors have the opportunity to see each element more than once.

- The relevant teacher needs to teach at least two whole sessions on their own. It is fine to have the co-teacher there in the session to respond to distressed participants etc. It is helpful to explain to the group what is happening around the recording, when agreement is sought, and during the course if appropriate.
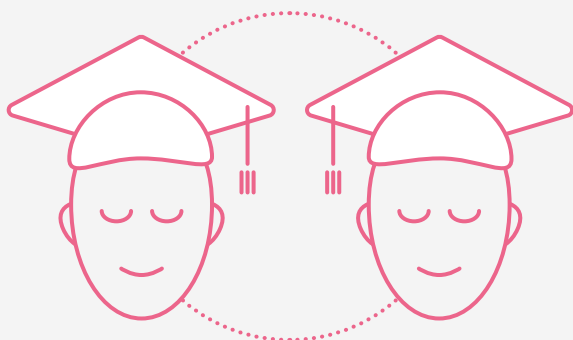
DOMAIN 3:
EMBODYING MINDFULNESS
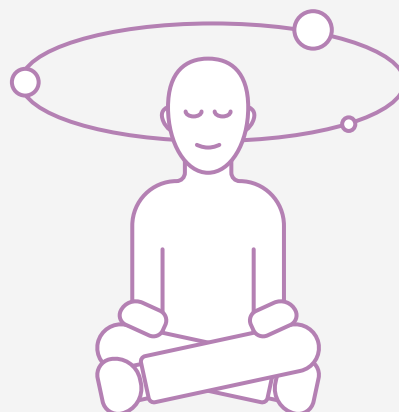
The teacher inhabits the practice of mindfulness. This is particularly conveyed through the teacher's body in terms of their physical and non-verbal expression.

Embodying mindfulness involves the teacher sustaining connection and responsiveness to moment-by-moment arising (within self, within individuals and within the group), and bringing the core attitudinal foundations of mindfulness practice to all of this. These attitudes are non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go, generosity and gratitude.

Key features to be considered when assessing this domain:

1 **Focus** – Present moment focus expressed through behaviour and non-verbal communication.

2 **Responsiveness** – Present moment responsiveness, working with the emergent moment with spaciousness and ease.

3 **Steadiness and vitality** – the teacher simultaneously conveys calm, ease, non-reactivity and alertness.

4 **Allowing** – the teacher brings forth qualities of non-judging, patience, trusting, accepting and non-striving.

5 **Natural presence** – the teacher's behaviour is natural and authentic to their own intrinsic mode of operating.

Please note

i Assessment of present moment awareness of and responsiveness to coverage and pacing of **the teaching process** is assessed in **Domain 1** (Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum), and **the group process** is assessed in **Domain 6** (Holding the group learning environment).

ii The qualities of mindfulness are conveyed throughout the whole teaching process. This domain intends to capture how these qualities are conveyed 'implicitly' through the teachers' non-verbal presence and how they hold themselves within the teaching process.

Incompetent

Embodiment of mindfulness is not conveyed.

Examples include: absence of present moment focus/responsiveness. Attitudinal qualities of mindfulness are not in evidence and those that are conveyed have the potential for harm.

Beginner

At least one of the five key features is present at a level that would be desirable for adequate MBI teaching, but significant levels of inconsistency exist across all key features.

Examples include: lack of consistent present moment focus/responsiveness; teacher not calm, at ease and alert; attitudinal qualities often not clearly in evidence; teacher's manner conveys restlessness and unease; teacher does not seem 'at home' in themselves or in the space.

Advanced Beginner

At least two of the five key features are present at a competent level, but difficulty and/or inconsistency is clearly evident in others; participants' safety is not compromised; no aspects of the embodied process is destructive to participants.

Examples include: teacher evidences embodiment of several principles of mindfulness practice within the teaching process, but there is a lack of consistency (i.e., teacher demonstrates some skilful present moment internal and external connectedness but this is not sustained throughout); the teacher might seem 'steady' but there is a lack of vitality in the space or vice versa; teacher's bodily expression at times conveys qualities that are different from mindfulness (e.g., a sense of hurry, agitation and/or striving).

Competent

All key features present to a good level of skill with some minor inconsistencies.

Examples include: teacher generally demonstrates an ability to communicate the attitudinal qualities of mindfulness practice through their bodily presence and is mostly present moment focused/responsive; teacher mostly seems natural and at ease.

Proficient

All key features consistently present with a good level of skill.

Examples include: sustained levels of present moment focus through the teaching and demonstration of the range of attitudinal qualities of mindfulness throughout with very minor inconsistencies; the bodily expression of the teacher implicitly conveys the qualities of mindfulness; teacher is natural and at ease; teacher is authentic both to themselves and to the qualities of mindfulness.

Advanced

All key features present to a high-skill level.

Examples include: teacher demonstrates exceptionally high levels of awareness of and responsiveness to the present moment throughout the teaching process; teacher has high levels of internal and external connectedness; teacher has attitudinal qualities of mindfulness present in a particularly inspiring way; teacher is highly authentic both to themselves and to the qualities of mindfulness. Difficult for reviewer to find further 'learning needs' to feedback.

Overarching domain guidance

The domain 'Embodying' aims to capture the way in which the teacher communicates authenticity as a teacher of mindfulness, through bringing their own sustained commitment to the practice of mindfulness into the classroom, to the curriculum and to their relationship with programme participants. It is the way through which the practice of mindfulness is tangibly sensed in the classroom. Participants might 'catch' mindfulness rather than be systematically taught it if embodying is evident in the teaching space.

Authenticity refers to both authenticity to mindfulness and authenticity to self. Embodied mindfulness is not a contrived 'add-on,' but is part of the personhood of the teacher and expressed in a way that is aligned with that person's natural personality style. This will also necessarily and naturally take identity, culture, and language into account.

A teacher who is embodying mindfulness connects with and relates to experience through accepting present moment awareness. When embodying mindfulness, the teacher is: deeply present with participants and their difficulties without moving in to fix things; willing to teach through a felt knowing of their own vulnerability; to bring gentleness and compassion to themselves and participants; to have enough familiarity with this process of being and learning to be able to trust in the unfolding of it; to inspire confidence in using mindfulness processes to turn towards difficulties through their own experience of doing this; and to be able to articulate the subtlety of experience in a way that resonates meaningfully for the participants in the group.

As this process develops, the teacher becomes able to operate within this being mode of mind, non-judgmental, present-centred awareness, even in the sometimes charged and intense environment of the mindfulness-based class. The teacher's actions are thus arising from an openness to the moment in its fullness and uncertainty, and from a willingness to not know the answer, and to hold the space of not knowing for the group. This is a radically different approach to the usual ways we meet uncertainty or challenge—especially in a teaching context where we often shift to helping or fixing mode, call upon professional expertise, or otherwise seek to hide vulnerabilities.

Embodiment is a natural outcome of the inner work of mindfulness practice that the teacher has engaged in. It is not a striving for a particular state. It does not look a certain way and indeed will present itself differently in different cultures and from individual to individual. It is clear that the teacher 'knows' what they are teaching from deep personal experience.

Detailed explanation of the five key features of Domain 3

Key feature 1: Expression of present moment focus through behaviour, verbal and non-verbal communication

The teacher offers a demonstration of present moment focus so that these are observable through the teacher's behaviour and their verbal and non-verbal communication. The expression of embodiment can be particularly sensed through the teacher's body – i.e., steady posture, physical connectedness and grounded-ness, physical sense of ease, calm and alertness, steadiness, rhythm, and pitch of voice tone, etc. The teacher is 'at home' with themselves.

Kabat-Zinn (2013) describes the energy and motivation that is brought to mindfulness practice as 'commitment, self-discipline and intentionality' (i.e., the development of perseverance and resolve to stay with the process of investigation of personal experience). Focused intentionality is a key area that the teacher is embodying within the teaching process. To set the stage for this particular form of experiential learning, a certain sort of intention and purpose needs to be cultivated. The skilled teacher conveys this through seamless cultivation of mindful awareness within the session. The combination of working in non-striving ways while also being focused, clear and directional forms a paradox that is central and inherent to skilful teaching.

The practice of mindfulness, therefore, encourages us to pay attention to the intention and motivation that we bring to both formal and informal practice, in the class, at home and in all the domains of our lives. The teacher is helping participants relate the practice to a 'personally valued vision' (Segal et al., 2013). This is quite subtle and is conveyed through careful use of language, e.g., the phrase 'try to keep your attention on your breath' has quite a different effect from 'as best you can returning the attention to the breath each time it slips away'. The teacher balances the tension between 'non-striving' alongside 'firm intention'.

From a participant perspective there is a clear message conveyed through the teacher's physical expression of the qualities of mindfulness – i.e., 'even if the teacher is talking in a language I don't understand I would pick up a sense of mindfulness in the teaching space.'

The teacher's bodily expression is offered in service to teaching – i.e., gestures/facial expressions are congruent with words; generosity is conveyed by the manner of listening with the whole body – i.e., responding with body direction, posture, gestures.

Key feature 2: Responsiveness to the uniqueness of the present moment – the teacher works with the emergent moment

Key feature 2 addresses the teacher's relational connection and responsiveness to their own personal internal/external experience during teaching, rather than their wider relationships to the group and the teaching process.

The following points indicate which domains these areas belong:

- **The teacher's relationship to the individuals within the group** – evidenced by appropriate responsiveness to interpersonal issues arising on an individual level is assessed in **Domain 2** Relational skills.

- **The teacher's relationship to the group as a whole** – evidenced by appropriate responsiveness to issues arising within the process on a group level is assessed in **Domain 6** Holding the group learning environment.

- **The teacher's relationship to the teaching process** – evidenced by appropriate responsiveness to curriculum choices is assessed in **Domain 1** Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum, and in **Domain 5** Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching).

Formal mindfulness practices offer the opportunity to develop a finely tuned ability to 'read the internal weather' of one's being, which can then be brought to the experience of being in relation with another. For teachers, incorporating mindful awareness of their internal and external experience while teaching offers a way to bring a present moment awareness of themselves (thoughts, emotions, sensations, and actions) so that they become an embodied example of what is being taught. In particular, this allows the possibility of attending closely to the ever-shifting 'feeling tone' within the body and of using this invaluable source of information - as a barometer - to check in with and inform responses to participants. The teacher's present moment focus is grounded through their connection with this personal direct experience. Their responses to individuals, to the group and to the teaching process are informed and supported by this sense of connectedness to personal direct experience, which allows for truly authentic responsiveness. When guiding, the teacher uses rich language that offers an expression on the uniqueness of the moment in which the guiding is happening.

In practice, this process is evidenced by a relaxed calmness, alertness, aliveness, and vitality shown though language, bodily expression and behaviour. The teacher's sensitivity to personal direct experience influences their choices within the group (e.g., through the use of anchoring practices (MBSR), breathing spaces (MBCT), appropriate mindful movement or other brief mindfulness practice to support participants' capacity to meet difficulty arising within the group, and to stay grounded). The teacher embodies a sense of 'surrender' to the moment and to what is needed now. There is a demonstration to the group of 'mindfulness in action' – a lived example of the essence of mindfulness practice and principles. The teacher operates predominantly in a 'being' rather than 'doing' mode of mind. The teacher is immersed in the process.

The teacher will use their attentional skills in both a wide and narrow angle way at different moments within the teaching. At times the teacher will guide the focus very clearly to one particular aspect of experience, and at others widen it, to encourage participants' minds to open to new learning and possibilities.

The attitudinal quality of 'beginner's mind' is part of this key feature (e.g., the teacher communicates a willingness to 'suspend' judgement and approaches experience with a fresh interest and curiosity). So rather than seeing things through a fog of preconceptions, the possibility arises of bringing clarity and vitality to experience. The teacher supports participants to develop a perspective on their experience that is not based on their history, assumptions, or prior conditioning.

The attitudinal quality of 'letting be' is also part of this key feature (i.e., the inquiry process nurtures the development of an ability to stay present and acknowledge the arising and passing of experience such as thoughts and emotions without becoming tangled in its content). The mindfulness-based teaching process puts a particular emphasis on coming to know our conditioned tendency to hold onto the pleasant, ignore the neutral, and reject the unpleasant, and to see the ways in which this perpetuates our difficulties. The teacher works with letting go of expectations and of needing to guide the process towards a particular outcome, having no agenda other than exploring and understanding the actuality of participants' experience in each moment.

Within all this there is a clear sense of firm intentional mindful directionality.

Key feature 3: Simultaneously conveying steadiness, calm, ease, non-reactivity, alertness and vitality

Mindfulness training develops the capacity to have a steady mind that is simultaneously alert and vital. In this way, there is a greater chance that the inevitable inner reactivity that emerges in the form of constellations of thoughts, emotions and body sensations are seen as they arise.

A teacher who has trained these skills through mindfulness practice will bring this spirit into the teaching process. Thus, even within the sometimes charged and fluid atmosphere of a mindfulness-based class, there is evidence of the teacher bringing steadiness and calm along with an enlivened vitality and alert responsiveness to the moment.

All teachers will have many moments in class that don't feel relaxed and calm, as well as moments when they do not know how to skilfully be with and respond. The embodied teacher is able to fully feel their discomfort/anxiety etc., and to teach from that discomfort. Rather than trying to get rid of it or cover it up, the embodied teacher knows how to be stable within the discomfort, to allow themselves to feel it, to ground themselves, and to breathe and relate to the discomfort in a steady, stable way. The teacher may explicitly articulate this process or may just enact it. Either way, it is communicated to participants. Allowing the vulnerability of the teacher to be skilfully visible in the process can empower participants to know that they too can do this – they don't have to be 'perfect.'

Key feature 4: Allowing – the teacher's behaviour is non-judging, patient, accepting and non-striving

Non-judging

The teacher supports participants to become aware of their inner and outer experience just as it is. There is an invitation to be non-judging of experience – including the tendency to judge! The teacher and participant are developing a stance of 'impartial witness' to experience. The teacher brings an intention not to judge their own personal experience or the participant's expressed experience, but instead to cultivate an attitude of friendly interest to it.

Patience

The teaching process simply works with experience as it is right now and allows an understanding that things can only emerge in their own time. The teacher allows periods of silence to occur within dialogue (e.g., the teacher allows for some periods of silence after questions giving participants time to sense, feel and think).

Trust

This involves conveying confidence in the process of bringing mindful attention to experience. The teacher communicates a confidence in the validity of thoughts, emotions, sensations, and the perceptions/intuitions arising out of connection with these. The teacher conveys a sense of trust in the participants' expertise in relation to their own experience. The practice followed by inquiry offers a structure and a process for enabling us to witness personal experience and an encouragement to rely on the validity of this evidence. Teacher conveys a sense of trust in mindfulness (without being defensive) even in the face of doubt, scepticism, or resistance from the group.

Curiosity

The teacher conveys aliveness, brightness and engagement –balanced with steadiness. Linked to this lightness, playfulness and humour are in the space where appropriate.

Non-striving

The teacher embodies an attitude of willingness to allow the present to be the way it is and for each participant to be the way they are. The process is explicitly not trying to fix problems or attain specific goals, but rather is intending to uncover an awareness of the actuality of experience, and a willingness to let it be/work with it as it is. The process of mindfulness offers the opportunity to step aside from the habitual process of endeavouring to 'improve ourselves' and 'trying' to reach a new place. The paradox of the learning process is that although there are clear reasons for us all being engaged in an exploration of how we deal with the pain of our lives, there is nothing to be achieved here that is not already present in this moment. This is conveyed through the teacher's capacity to honour and inhabit the process of unfolding within the class without moving towards premature explanation or synthesis or moving into a mode of problem solving or conceptualising. The teacher conveys a sense of 'okay-ness' with flowing with things as they are – including the unpredictable, the unexpected, the difficult and the surprising

Acceptance

The teacher embodies a willingness to see things as they actually are in the present moment and offers a way of opening to and being with the reality of things without struggling to change them. The teacher models accepting self, others, and experience with an attitude of friendliness. The teacher is not overly anxious to 'get things right,' tolerates unsatisfactory or difficult issues with ease, and relinquishes personal agendas. They allow participant and personal experience to be as it is. They hold their seat in the face of turbulence, group energy, difficulty etc. They communicate non-reactivity by meeting difficulty in a way that conveys equanimity.

Key feature 5: Natural presence of the teacher – the teacher's behaviour is authentic to their own intrinsic mode of operating

One way to describe this is 'being the person whose story you have lived' (McCown et al., 2010, p.92). The teacher communicates through their own unique, authentic and natural style of being as opposed to contriving a certain style (e.g., perhaps taking on a set of behaviours that are an idea of what an embodied mindfulness teacher 'should' look like).

The teaching finds expression through the natural being of the teacher. The teacher has freedom from the identification parts of personality but inhabits their own individual expression of personhood with ease. They are a vehicle for the teaching rather than there being a strong sense of under or overvaluing their self-hood.

How this happens is as individual as each person is. The teacher is uncontrived and shows up in the classroom space in a natural way as they are. Although this cannot be directly assessed from a teaching observation, there is a sense of natural continuity to the way the teacher presents as 'the teacher' and how they are in other arenas of their life.

DOMAIN 4:
GUIDING MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

The teacher offers guidance that describes accurately what the participant is being invited to do in the practice, and includes all the elements required in that practice.

The teacher's guidance enables participants to relate skilfully to mind wandering (seeing this as a natural mind process, working gently but firmly to cultivate the skill to recognise when the mind has wandered and to bring the attention back). In addition, their guidance suggests the attitudes to bring to oneself and one's experience throughout the practice. The practices offer a balance of spaciousness and precision. Skilful use of language is key to conveying all this.

Key features to be considered when assessing this domain:

1   **Language** – Language is clear, precise, accurate and accessible while conveying spaciousness.

2   **Key learning** - The teacher guides the practice in a way that makes the key learning for each practice available to participants (see checklists for each practice in the manual).

3   **Particular elements** - The teacher considers the particular elements for each practice while guiding (see checklists for each practice in the manual). These include practical issues, and safety and trauma considerations.

Please note

i   The embodiment of mindfulness is a crucial underpinning to practice guidance and should be assessed under **Domain 3** (Embodying mindfulness). The way in which mindfulness is conveyed implicitly through the body qualities of the teacher is also assessed in Domain 3 – embodying. The language used to convey the qualities of mindfulness, however, is assessed here.

ii   This is the only domain that covers a particular 'curriculum element' and is thus structured differently. The key features link to specific learning intentions, and the guiding considerations for the each of the core practices are detailed here in the manual. Guidance notes on feature 1 are offered under 'language' below. Guidance notes for features 2 and 3 are tailored to specific meditations and are given below with a box for each practice on feature 3 (key learning specific to the practice) and feature 3 (elements to consider in guiding the practice).

Incompetent

Guidance is inaccurate and unclear. Key feature(s) of guiding practices are absent. The guidance offers an unsafe holding atmosphere.

Beginner

At least one of the three key features is present at a level that would be desirable for adequate MBI teaching, but significant levels of inconsistency exist across all key features.

Examples include: teacher attempts to offer guidance in an appropriate way, but significant errors, gaps and inconsistencies exist; language is imprecise and does not invite spaciousness; working with mind wandering is not skilfully guided (i.e.,, it is seen as a problem).

Advanced Beginner

At least two of the three key features are present at a competent level, but difficulty and/or inconsistency is clearly evident in others. Adequate care is taken of participants' emotional and physical safety.

Examples include: some guidance offered clearly, accurately and appropriately, but language conveys a sense of striving for results; key learning from practice inconsistently available to participants; elements to consider when guiding each practice are inconsistently adhered to.

Competent

All key features present to a good level of skill with some minor inconsistencies.

Examples include: guidance is generally clear and accurate, but slight lack of precision; sense of spaciousness not conveyed and/or language not always invitational; key learning from practice mostly available to participants; elements to consider when guiding each practice are mostly adhered to.

Proficient

All key features consistently present with a good level of skill.

Examples include: practice guidance is good, conveying both precision and spaciousness; elements to consider in guiding are clearly integrated; key learning for practice is available to participants through the guidance.

Advanced

All key features present to a high skill level.

Examples include: exceptionally skilful guidance with all features consistently present with very good level of skill. Creative and inspiring guidance on working with physical and emotional 'edges' and boundaries. Difficult for reviewer to find further 'learning needs' to feedback.

DETAILED EXPLANATION OF THE FIVE KEY FEATURES OF DOMAIN 4

Guiding of mindfulness practices offers an opportunity to integrate teaching on the cultivation of mindfulness, and space for participants to experience and experiment with the process for themselves.

Given the subtlety of the messages being conveyed and the paradox inherent within these, great delicateness and sensitivity is needed when guiding. The teacher should demonstrate familiarity with the key intentions of mindfulness practice generally and also the specific intentions of each practice (see below for summary of these).

GUIDANCE FOR KEY FEATURE 1:

Language is clear, precise, accurate, audible and accessible while conveying spaciousness

> **General points:**
>
> **Accessibility**, i.e., using everyday/ordinary language and avoiding mindfulness jargon/ esoteric language. Mindfulness guidance is delivered in a rate and rhythm that may be slower than conversational speech yet is not hypnotic or trancelike.
>
> **Using words** belonging to different senses to support the range of experiencing sensations, such as feeling, seeing or hearing them (e.g., use sense words such as 'feeling', 'in the mind's eye', 'listening to the messages from'; some words are general across senses, e.g., 'noticing', 'experiencing', 'sensing').

Within key feature 1 (language guidance) there are three sub-areas relating to guidance, including:

1. Guidance on where to place attention (further detail can be found within the various practices that are listed in the next pages)

The teacher's guidance regarding where to place attention should be as accurate and precise as possible, i.e., clear articulation of what the participant is specifically being invited to do with their attention.

2. Guidance on working with mind wandering

The teacher's guidance should make it clear that mind wandering is a natural part of the process; i.e., our intention is not to keep the attention solely pointed on whatever object of awareness has been chosen, but to become aware of the activities of our mind as we repeatedly invite the attention back to one particular place. So our 'job' is not to stop the mind wandering, but to work in a particular way when we become aware that it has wandered.

The teacher should:

- Acknowledge that the attention has wandered;

- Bring attention back to the object of awareness (with an emphasis on kindness and gentleness but also with firmness);

- Do this again and again (with ease and non-judgement, and kindly recognising when constriction and judgement is present);

- Offer spaces of silence for participants to practice independently with periodical reminders. The length of silence can increase with the experience of the group.

3. Guidance on the attitudinal qualities to cultivate.

It is important to remember that the language used to convey the qualities of mindfulness is assessed here. The way in which mindfulness is conveyed implicitly through the body qualities of the teacher, however, is assessed in Domain 3 (embodying).

When reviewing the teaching be attentive to the presence or absence within practice guidance of the following themes:

- Is there guidance on the spirit to bring to the practice? Does the teacher invite gentleness, lightness of touch, and curiosity about experience? Does the teacher balance gentleness with firmness of intention whilst emphasising self-care?

- Does the teacher encourage non-striving by reminding participants about letting go of needing/wanting to 'do' anything, e.g., 'allowing experience to be as it is'; 'allowing the breath to breathe itself'; and 'simply bringing awareness to the experience of this.'

- Does the teacher avoid using language that might feed into a sense of striving? E.g., words such as 'trying,' 'working,' 'seeing if you can…' can be unhelpful.

- Does the teacher avoid language that indicates the practice will be a certain way? E.g., that the yoga is enjoyable, or that the mind or the body will relax (in general, avoid the use of the word relax, since we are not engaging in practice to relax or get anywhere in particular), or that the practice will lead to peace.

- Does the teacher create a sense of spaciousness? E.g., by balancing silence with guidance, and using language economically.

- Does the teacher use present participles (e.g., attending, bringing awareness,' etc.) to convey a feeling of guiding/ inviting rather than ordering, and to reduce resistance.

- Does the teacher sometimes using 'the' rather than 'your' (e.g., 'the breath' – to encourage participants to be less identified with the body).

GUIDANCE FOR KEY FEATURES 2 & 3:

Key feature 2: the teacher guides the practice in a way which makes the key learning for each practice available to participants

Key feature 3: the particular elements to consider when guiding each practice are appropriately present

Guidance on these two key features are now offered below in relation to each meditation practice.

Raisin/eating meditation

Making key learning available through practice guidance and within the inquiry (Key feature 2):

- The practice supports experiencing the difference between mindful awareness and automatic pilot. If we are on autopilot, we cannot see our moods change, or notice stress rising. The raisin practice can help us realise that there are other things to be seen, that there is more to life than our preferences, preconceptions, deductions, opinions and theories; that slowing down even the most routine activities might transform them; and that paying attention to our experience in this 'curious', interested, and open way may show us aspects of our experience that we had not seen before.

- The practice offers an experience of bringing attention to direct experience, which in turn can reveal new perceptions potentially transforming the way we relate to ordinary events and behaviours.

- The practice reveals that the present is the only time we have to know anything. The way we ate this raisin is very different to habitual ways of eating. Our impulses around food are often unconscious, powerful, and uncontrolled. Mindfulness practice allows us to see this more clearly.

- The practice highlights how the mind wanders. The mind is always making associations from present-moment experience to memories, deeper level understanding, stories, etc., but we are not usually aware of this. Mostly we do not choose where our mind goes. We see how difficult mind states easily take hold when we are unaware. Analysing the past and worrying about the future can be 'second nature' to us.

- Eating is an ordinary activity and so the practice demonstrates that mindfulness meditation is not a specialized or lofty activity—but quite ordinary and available at any moment.

Elements to consider in guiding (Key feature 3):

- Take care with hygiene: use a spoon, a clean bowl, and new box of raisins. Pour out raisins in front of participants. Have kitchen paper to hand.

- Offer the option not to eat raisin, and to explore with other senses.

- Choose to offer participants just one raisin, or two or three. There is the potential to guide the first one interactively as a group by inviting them to call out sensing words, which can give a flavour of what is being asked for; with the next one, you can ask them to eat it in silence with you guiding; the next one can be in silence completely with no guidance (if only one, ask them to eat in silence with you guiding).

- Invite participants to let go of knowing that this is a raisin, and instead to see it 'fresh' as a child first encounters experience.

- Emphasise the attitudes of curiosity, interest, and exploration, as a scientist might investigate.

- Give permission and options to adapt or step out of the practice.

Body Scan

Making key learning available through guidance (Key feature 2):

- Direct experiential knowing of physical sensations;

- Learning to be intentional about how we pay attention;

- Relating skilfully to mind wandering when it occurs (acknowledging and bringing back);

- Discovering new ways to handle difficulties (sleepiness, discomfort, etc.) by taking care of self (making personal choices). Not seeing difficulties as a problem;

- Learning to bring kindly attention to the body, being present to how things are moment-by-moment, without needing to change things, no goals to be achieved, no right way for the body to feel;

- Learning to notice and relate differently to sensations and mental states, including boredom, irritation, impulses, etc.

Elements to consider in guiding (Key feature 3):

- The teacher should adopt a position where they can monitor the room for safety, track participants, be audible, whilst also being in touch with their own body scan practice;

- Begin by offering postural options: lying down, astronaut, sitting or standing. Include options to open eyes, shift position (specially to avoid a sense of being frozen or having to lie still). It may be comforting and protective to have a blanket;

- Start and end by bringing attention to the whole body;

- Pay particular attention to detail of body sensations; give examples of words describing sensations such as warm, cold, heaviness, tingling, numbness, ease or lightness;

- Give options to come back to a neutral anchor/to open the eyes at any time to stabilise attention or to take care of self if there is a sense of overwhelm; remind them of this during the practice;

- Allow the absence of particular feelings or sensations to be just as important as their presence;

- Instruct participants to let go of the last body region before moving awareness to the next, or clearly communicate continuity of awareness as attention is shifted to the next region;

- Be precise in guiding where and how participants place attention, with careful language that also allows choice, e.g., 'if you care to…' 'seeing what it's like to attend now…'.

- Vary instructions between both narrow angle, detailed awareness of a small part of the body, and wider angle awareness of a larger area of the body such as the trunk, or the whole body;

- Periodically through the practice offer guidance on dealing with mind wandering. Acknowledge that thoughts and emotions may be evoked; there's no need to push these away. Simply return to the area of the body that is being explored;

- Include recognition that sensations change: they are coming and going, staying a while, intensifying, dissolving— sometimes subtly, sometimes more strongly;

- Offer guidance that invites participants to move into a direct 'being with' body sensations rather than looking at them from a distance;

- Balance guidance that gives the flavour of being with, allowing and accepting, alongside that which gives a flavour of exploration, curiosity, aliveness, and adventure.

Sitting meditation

(NB form/length of this practice evolves through the sessions/programme in specific ways. Assessing the fidelity of practice form, and the alignment of the practice with the intentions of the session is addressed in Domain 1)

Making key learning available through guidance (Key feature 2):

- Anchoring to the present moment through body sensations, sound, or other specific foci;

- Dealing skilfully with mind-wandering ;

- Learning gentleness, encouraging curiosity, learning acceptance;

- Noticing a mindful 'feel of things' (pleasant/unpleasant/neutral), and reactions to these;

- Noticing aversion, the 'unwanted';

- Continuing the development of flexibility of attention (from body scan): widening/narrowing the lens of attention;

- Mindfulness of the natural flux of experience;

- Cultivating being fully with experience and having an observer stance simultaneously;

- Learning to receive experience as it is, distinct from mental labels, stories about it, etc.;

- Learning to see recurring patterns in the mind and how they develop, play out, etc.;

- Seeing more deeply into the nature of human experience;

- Learning to take care of oneself: e.g., by recognizing overwhelm or 'zoning out'. Responding by changing position, opening eyes, bringing energy with a deeper and more deliberate breath, or stopping/changing the practice.

Elements to consider in guiding (Key feature 3):

Posture

- Give practical information on helpful posture using a chair, stool, cushion to establish the intention of the practice and to facilitate the transition into this period of deliberate cultivation of 'being mode';'

Anchor

- Anchoring in the present moment using a specific aspect of experience. Give guidance on choosing a reliable, accessible, neutral anchor – e.g. feet, hands, touchpoints (hips and seat), breath, or sound. Offer participants many opportunities over the sessions to see the impact of various anchors;

- Use language that encourages direct connection with the anchor rather than thinking about it;

Body sensations

- Transition from the anchor - expand the attention around the sensations of the anchor (or from the ears/sound) to an awareness of sensations in the body as a whole;

- Offer explicit guidance about how/where to place attention;

- Offer clear guidance on options for working with discomfort/pain/intensity that arise from either physical or emotional origins;

Sounds

- Receiving sounds as they come and go; listening to sounds as sounds (e.g. noticing loudness, tone, length, etc.); recognising sounds as events in the mind; and noticing layers of meaning added to the direct experience of sounds;

Thoughts and emotions

- Relating to thoughts similarly to how we relate to sounds –arising and passing away;

- Seeing recurring patterns and how these develop and play out within the mind;

- Using metaphors to help point towards what is being invited here (e.g. seeing thoughts as clouds in the spaciousness of the sky);

- Acknowledging challenge (not setting up a specific idea of how we 'should' see thoughts;

- Using the anchor to return to when the mind becomes unsettled or attention feels lost;

- Expanding attention to include emotions; sensing the physical sensations that are part of the emotion;

Mindfulness of the full range of experience
(i.e., choiceless or open awareness)

- Bringing an open attention to whatever is arising/predominant moment by moment in the breath, body, thoughts, sounds, emotions, etc.;

- Noticing recurring patterns in the body and mind;

- Coming back to the chosen anchor as often as is needed.

Mindful movement

Making the key learning available through guidance (Key feature 2):

- Building on the foundation of the body scan to learn how we can bring awareness to and directly inhabit bodily experience/sensation;

- Experiencing awareness of the body in motion, as it often is in life;

- Relating to the body with friendliness;

- Learning that movements and postures offer an embodiment of life experiences and processes;

- Seeing habitual tendencies play out;

- Working with physical boundaries/intensity in a way that parallels working with emotional experience; experiencing how physical movement can change emotional experience;

- Learning and experiencing working with present moment acceptance, including physical limitations, and learning to relate in new ways to pain - no 'perfect' pose, nothing to strive for; rather is it possible to respond to this body and its needs today, with wonder and gentleness?;

- Learning new ways of taking care of ourselves.

Elements to consider in guiding (Key feature 3):

Ensuring that participants engage in the practices in ways that are safe and respectful to their body is a major consideration in guiding movement practices, including:

- Giving clear and precise guidance on ways of working with physical boundaries at the beginning of the practice;

- Interspersing the practice with reminders about working within safe limits for their body in this moment;

- Offering guidance in particular on:

  » Potential adaptations for postures as they are taught;

  » Reminders to hold postures for the amount of time that is right for each participant regardless of how long the teacher or others hold a posture;

  » Reminders that it is OK not to do a posture and either to do something different, or to sit/lie and possibly to visualise the body doing the posture;

- Encouraging participants to err on the side of caution;

- Encouraging participants to listen to the wisdom of their own body and allow this to override any guidance you may be giving;

- Reminding participants not to be competitive with themselves or others;

Breath guidance:
Helpful guidance regarding the breath, including:

- Encouraging participants to breath fully and freely in whatever way feels most natural as they move;

- Guidance on relaxing into postures and breathing with or into regions of greatest intensity;

Ensuring that guidance is given in ways that invite detailed awareness of moment-by-moment experience, includin:

- Encouraging participants to explore and discover the creative edge between exploring / investigating / discovering and accepting / letting be / being with;

- Giving plenty of space within and between postures to enable detailed noticing;

- Using precise language so that participants can focus inwardly rather needing to look at the teacher.

The three step breathing space (3SBS)

Three step breathing space
– making key learning available through guidance (Key feature 2):

The learning is encapsulated within the three steps of the practice. Each step needs to be clearly conveyed. Prepare by stepping out of automatic pilot, then commence the three steps:

- **Step 1. Awareness** – Recognising and acknowledging all of one's current experience (thoughts, emotions, sensations).

- **Step 2. Gathering** – Bringing the attention to the sensations within an anchor point in a particular place in the body (e.g., breath, feet, hands etc).

- **Step 3. Expanding** - Expanding the attention into the body as a whole: whilst staying in touch with the particular sensations of the anchor, open to the range of experience being perceived across the body.

Elements to consider in guiding (Key feature 3):

Guidance on posture – communicate the effect of coming to an upright and dignified posture. If this is not possible (e.g., when using the additional 3SBS in difficult situations), then start with encouraging participants that simply becoming aware of their posture is helpful.

Be precise in communicating the 3 steps of the practice during guidance.

N.B.

The 3SBS and other practices need to be accompanied by a teaching process that supports participants to practise at home and integrate the process into their everyday lives. This aspect of the teaching is rated in **Domain 5** (Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching).

Examples of how this needs to be attended to in relation to the 3SBS are cited below:

- **Preparing participants to integrate this into their day** – encourage participants to anchor the practice to a specific activity in their day;

- It is useful to guide the practice and then afterwards to explain about the three parts, perhaps using the flip chart;

- **Encouraging participants to use the 3SBS as a natural first step** (e.g., whenever things feel difficult or there is confusion; using the 3SBS during class when strong emotions have been explored, or there is another need to re-ground in present moment experience, can be a good reminder of this);

- **Developing clarity regarding** the application of the 3SBS throughout the MBCT course (see Segal et al., 2013 for details).

DOMAIN 5:

CONVEYING COURSE THEMES THROUGH INTERACTIVE INQUIRY AND DIDACTIC TEACHING
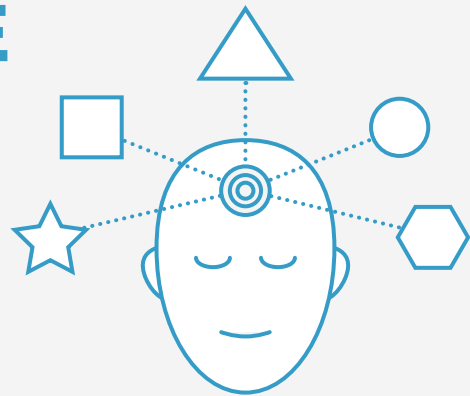
This domain assesses the skill of conveying course themes interactively to participants.

At times, these are explicitly drawn out and underlined by the teacher and at other times these emerge implicitly. The domain includes inquiry, group dialogue, use of stories and poems, facilitating group exercises, orienting participants to session/course themes and didactic teaching.

A large part of each session is taken up by interactive teaching processes, including: reviewing/inquiring into the experience of mindfulness practices during the session and at home; drawing out experience during and after group exercises; and offering didactic teaching in an interactive and participatory manner. This exploratory way of approaching experience illuminates the habitual tendencies and patterns of the human mind and offers training in investigating and working with experience beyond the programme. Participants' difficulties (e.g., avoidance, distress, emotional reactivity) in sessions are crucial opportunities to convey course themes. The way the teacher works in these moments should be given weight in the overall assessment and in this domain in particular.

Key features to be considered when assessing this domain:

1   **Experiential focus** – Supporting participants to notice and describe the different elements of direct experience and their interaction with each other; teaching themes are consistently linked to this direct experience.

2   **Inquiry process layers** - Moving around the layers within the inquiry process (direct experience, reflection on direct experience, and linking both to wider learning) with a predominant focus on process rather than content.

3   **Conveying themes** – The teacher conveys the learning themes through skilful teaching using a range of teaching approaches, including: inquiry; didactic teaching; experiential and group exercises; stories; poems, and action methods, etc.

4   **Fluency** – The teacher brings fluency, confidence and ease to the teaching process.

5   **Enabling learning** - The teaching is effective in enabling learning to happen.

Please note ....

i   Although course themes are conveyed through all elements of the course, this domain only covers the teacher's skill during the **inquiry process**, **didactic teaching** and **facilitation of group exercises** (i.e., not during guiding mindfulness practices).

ii   This domain assesses the skill with which the teacher conveys the teaching themes – the presence of the themes themselves is rated in **Domain 1** (Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum).

iii   Embodying mindfulness is a crucial underpinning to interactive teaching and should be assessed under **Domain 3** (Embodying mindfulness).

iv   Inquiry relies on there being a skilful relational connection between the teacher and participant (**Domain 2** - Relational Skills) and a skilful holding of the group (**Domain 6** - Holding the group learning environment).

Incompetent

Teaching process unclear and inconsistent with principles of mindfulness-based teaching.

Examples include: teacher makes no attempt to elicit specific elements of direct experience; teacher not familiar with material; over reliance on didactic teaching, debate or persuasion; the inquiry process has the potential for causing harm.

Beginner

At least one of the four key features is present at a level that would be desirable for adequate MBI teaching, but there are significant levels of inconsistency across all key features.

Examples include: highly inconsistent attempts to elicit specific aspects of direct experience; teaching process predominantly in one layer (i.e., teacher harvests direct experience, but does not weave it into course teaching themes); teaching process conveys some teaching themes, but considerable inconsistency; teaching style dull, un-engaging and lacking fluidity; teaching approach does not generally bring the teaching to life for participants.

Advanced Beginner

At least two of the four key features are at a competent level, but difficulty and/or inconsistency is clearly evident in other key features; teaching process is adequate but basic. Participants' safety is not compromised; no aspects of the inquiry process are destructive to participants.

Examples include: teacher uses specific aspects of direct experience and integrates it with teaching themes, but there is a lack of fluidity and clarity in communicating themes; lack of familiarity with material; lack of relevancy of material to participants; teaching approaches convey some learning themes but at a basic level.

Competent

All key features present to a good level of skill with some minor inconsistencies.

Examples include: teaching process generally conveys key teaching themes in an understandable and accessible manner; teacher employs a range of teaching methods effectively to bring the learning themes to life; teacher reasonably fluid and familiar with material; there are some inconsistencies or gaps, e.g., teacher does not fully integrate direct experience of participants into the material.

Proficient

All key features consistently present.

Examples include: teacher deeply familiar with the material; participants' direct experience thoroughly integrated into the teaching; teaching is 'alive' and learning is obviously taking place; creative range of teaching approaches are used to highlight learning themes in a compelling way.

Advanced

All key features present to a high skill level.

Examples include: highly skilful and inspiring teaching skills; teacher precisely and sensitively draws out elements of experience; teacher works in an interactive and participatory way with the group to explore experience; range of key teaching themes conveyed in a highly accessible, engaging manner and connected with the personal direct experience of participants and the teacher when appropriate; teacher thoroughly 'at home' and familiar with the material from many angles; teaching feels 'alive' and highly engaging. Difficult for reviewer to find further 'learning needs' to feedback.

Key feature 1: Experiential focus – supporting participants to notice and describe the different elements of direct experience and their interaction with each other; teaching themes are consistently linked to this direct experience.

The teaching process has an experiential focus and supports participants reconnect with their direct experience (with a particular emphasis on sensations in the body). It uses this experiential 'data' as a starting point for exploration and learning.

When the dialogue moves into conceptualisations/abstractions from immediacy of experience/stories about experience, the teacher leads the participants back towards connection with immediate experience.

Participants are given opportunities to become aware of and discriminate between the different elements of direct experience – sensations, thoughts, and emotions – at times retrospectively tracking these as they arose in a mindfulness practice and at other times tracking them now as they arise in the moment.

Style of questioning/dialoguing in mindfulness-based teaching includes:

- Use of open questions, rather than closed questions that only require a "yes" or "no" answer;

- Questions/statements that open space, such as: "Would you be willing to tell me more?";

- Use "how?" or "what?" rather than "why?" questions;

- Avoiding questions/statements that close/fill the space (e.g., yes/no, fixing/solutions, and self stories);

- Using attentive and positive non-verbal cues, without overdoing;

- Alternating questions and statements;

- Opening the space to create and recognise possibilities;

- Sensing when inquiry is appropriate in group discussions (e.g., sometimes a question needs an answer, sometimes inquiry, sometimes nothing but 'thank you' or a smile);

- Maintaining humility – the other person is the expert in their own experience.

Key feature 2: Exploring the different layers within the inquiry process (e.g., direct experience, reflection on direct experience, and linking both to wider learning) with a predominant focus on process rather than content.

How much time is allowed for the actuality of experience and relationship with experience to be explored before introducing broader teaching themes?

The dialogue can be perceived as having three concentric circles and layers of inquiry

Layer 1. **NOTICING**
Direct experiential knowing

Layer 2. **DIALOGUE**
Exploring the effects of bringing awareness to direct experience

Layer 3. **LINKING**
Exploring how this learning relates to ways of being with inner and outer experiences in daily life
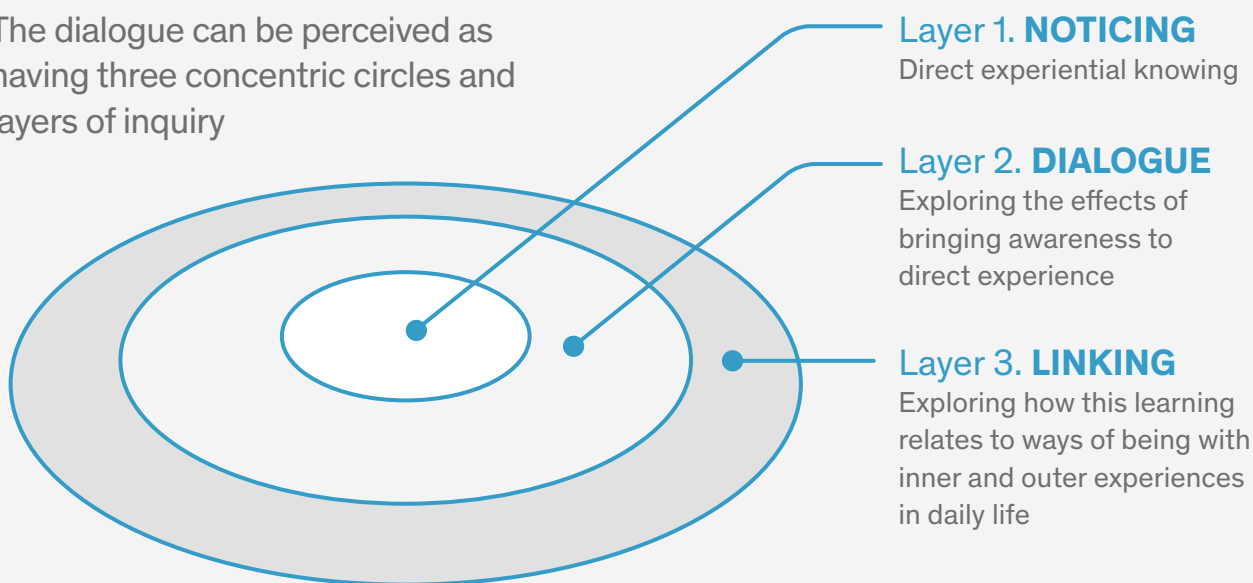
Layer 1: noticing sensations, thoughts, feelings (direct experience within self)

Areas of exploration/questioning include:

- What did you notice?
  (e.g., physical sensations, including sounds, feelings, colours, textures and movement)

- What was your direct experience?

- How did it feel?

- Where were these occurring – specific location or through the whole body?

- Did the sensations change or were they constant?

- What were the emotions/feelings, and thoughts connected to them?

- What thoughts arose about now, the past, the future?

- When your mind wandered, where did it go?

Examples of: **Thoughts** - memories, worries, planning, time, food, etc?

Sensations - restlessness, pain, hot/cold, heavy/light, etc?

Emotions - sad, angry, fearful, happy, secure, loving, etc?

Layer 2: dialoguing about immediate experience
(i.e., placing the direct noticing in a personal context of understanding. Noticing patterns of reactivity to direct experience) e.g.,:

- How did you feel when your mind wandered/when you felt the tightness in your abdomen, etc?

- What did you do when your mind wandered (let it wander, get involved in the thoughts, bring it back – with gentleness, firmness, guilt, annoyance, amusement, judgement, etc.)?

- Explore the sensations of reactions/responses (e.g., what were the sensations of gentleness, guilt, pushing away, holding on, tuning out, opening to, etc?)

- How did bringing awareness to this experience affect it? What's here now? There is a strong possibility the inquiry will be available as a moment-by-moment experience right here, while dialoguing.

- Is this pattern of experience that you describe familiar, and if so, in what ways?
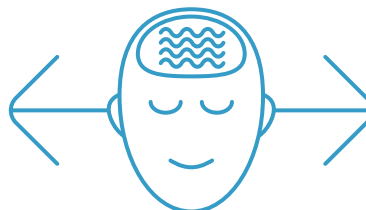
Layer 3: linking them to the aims of the programme
(placing the learning in layers 1 and 2 in a wider context of understanding)

How this happens will depend on the key aims for the MBI. Within MBSR, this linkage process is in relation to the broad application of mindfulness skills to the areas of living life, managing stress, recognizing the common and shared experiences of being human, communicating, making choices about self-care, and so on.

The encouragement is for participants themselves to begin naturally to make the links by applying the learning from the programme to their lives. This is done through integrating the mindfulness-based learning material offered in the programme into their daily lives.

This is true also in MBCT, but there is a greater emphasis within the linkage process on connecting direct experience and learning with an understanding of the particular vulnerability that the programme is adapted for (e.g., relapse prevention in depression, chronic fatigue, etc.). This process is held mainly by the teacher who supports participants to integrate their direct experience with contextual understanding about the particular challenge they are working with.

So linkage is helping participants to illuminate how they see:

- The ways in which their mind becomes 'caught' or stuck through their particular way of relating to experience;

- The ways in which their learning about mindfulness has relevance within the various spheres of their life;

- The ways in which their learning about mindfulness has relevance to the particular vulnerability that they are working with (e.g. susceptibility to depression, chronic fatigue etc. See Chapter 12, Inquiry, in Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2013 on how to do this while staying close to participants' direct experience).

In any inquiry process, it is important that the teacher takes time with each 'circle' and, if the group rushes to discuss or 'talk about,' to allow time for participants to come back to simply describing what they noticed or experienced. There is no need to stick rigidly to a certain 'progression' through the inquiry; it is better for the teacher to see the 'circles' as a map of the territory that might be covered in a range of ways depending on what is emergent within the group. Nor is it necessary to traverse all the layers with each exchange. There is also a way to 'harvest' the entire group for many direct experiences (say after the body scan, in class 2), and then to broaden the inquiry to the whole class, linking to broader themes, as a way to connect to universal, human experiences, and invite curiosity for further practice.

Key feature 3: Conveying learning themes through skilful teaching

The critical area to consider in this key feature is: how effective is the teaching process in conveying the course themes in ways that enable participants to integrate the learning?

How this happens will vary from teacher to teacher, and from group to group, and will likely have nuances depending on culture and language including:

Effective didactic teaching/psychoeducation
Where possible, didactic material is 'woven' into/from lived experience (i.e., the teacher collaborates with participants to link direct observations of experience to learning that is relevant to the participant and to the aims of the programme). When teaching didactically, the teaching: is stimulating; brief; clear; engages all elements of experiencing (thinking, sensing and feeling); and encourages interactive responses from participants' own experience.

Effective instructional teaching
At times it is helpful to offer information and orientation to support engagement with the practices within the session and to prepare for home practice. These are given clearly and concisely - with just enough information to support engagement. Offering too much can feed 'thinking about' rather than 'being with', and can seed expectations rather than supporting participants to approach practices with beginners mind.

Linkage to theory
Jung's well known quote is apt here: 'Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul' (1928). The mindfulness-based teacher knows the underpinning theoretical principles thoroughly so that they can inform direction and emphasis within the teaching process. This means they are readily available for moments of didactic teaching, while maintaining connection to the immediacy of emerging themes within the group.

Experiential engagement
The teaching process is playful, alive, responsive, draws on all ways in which human beings experience – thinking, sensing and feeling – and aims to engage all these elements within participants during the teaching. Although much of the material for exploration within the group is generated by the participants, rather than by the teacher, it is also the teacher's responsibility to bring in carefully chosen material to inform and add context and understanding to the processes that are under exploration. The mindfulness-based teaching process is designed generally to convey the themes implicitly (through an experiential process of personal discovery) rather than explicitly (through a conceptual process of understanding principles and rationales).

Concise, accessible and clear
The teaching crystallises key themes and processes.

Playful, alive and responsive
The teaching is engaging and inspiring; the participants and the teacher are mutually engaged in a creative exploration of the material; it is a highly 'in the moment process' where the teacher is responsive to the material as it arises in the moment rather than working from a plan or script; the teacher supports participants to navigate towards aspects of the material that are highly relevant to the immediacy of participants' experience; the teacher skilfully deflects participants from getting stuck in their stories, and instead keeps the focus on immediate experience. Through examples or activities, the teacher brings the curriculum to life in line with the aims and intentions.

Use of teaching aids
The teacher makes skilful and appropriate use of a flip chart or other teaching aids (the provision of appropriate teaching aids is assessed in Domain 1 (Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum); the use of teaching aids is assessed here). The teacher integrates direct experiential teaching with teaching drawn from other sources (e.g., stories, poetry and quotations, which point to other ways of experiencing).

Key feature 4: Fluency – the teacher conveys ease, familiarity with and confident knowledge of the material.

This key feature includes:

Ease
The teacher is 'at home' within the curriculum, teaching process and material.

Familiarity with the material
The teacher clearly knows what they are teaching and is able to move around flexibly within its territory.

Confidence in the teaching process
The teacher conveys knowledge and experience, which inspires confidence in the process of the teaching. This confidence (which is different from knowing the answers to things) is based not only in a confidence in the process of the teaching, but also in a sense of being comfortable with not knowing what will happen next, and bringing to it an open, curious attitude of 'let's explore this together and see where it takes us'.

Key feature 5: The teaching is effective in enabling learning to happen.

This key feature can best be recognised by the quality and content of the exchanges between participants and the teacher during interactive teaching processes.

How engaged are participants in the learning process? Is there an alive spontaneity to the participants' way of responding to the teacher's invitations to engage? Are participants' inputs aligned with the theme the teacher is intending to investigate? Does the group and the teacher stay 'on task', honing closely to present moment awareness? Are participants willing to bring forth aspects of experience that are painful, difficult or uncomfortable? While silent pauses are an integral part of the dialogue process, is the teacher alert and responsive if silence goes on too long? (by, for example, asking the question in a different way, shifting to another line of inquiry that better engages and includes). As the weeks of the course unfold, is there a sense that participants are beginning to integrate the learning material into their personal process?

NB: There will clearly be variation between participants within a group regarding the level of experiential engagement, learning progress and willingness to share personal material. So caution should be applied in assessing this domain purely on participant response to the teacher. However, it is an important element within the overall assessment of this domain.

DOMAIN 6:

HOLDING THE GROUP LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
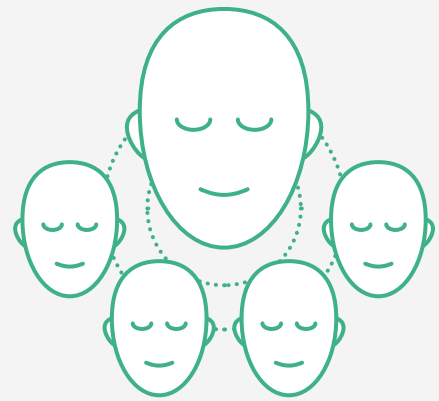
The whole teaching process takes place within the context of a group, which if facilitated effectively becomes a vehicle for connecting participants with the universality of the processes being explored, while also making space for the infinite variety of human beings taking the class.

The teacher creates a 'container,' or learning environment, that 'holds' the group and within which the teaching can effectively take place. The teacher works responsively with group process: through bringing an appropriate leadership style to the teaching; through taking good care of group safety, trust and boundary issues; through employing a teaching style that takes account of the individual within the context of the group, and balancing the needs of both; through using the group process to draw out universal learning themes; and through working with and responding to group development processes by managing the various

phases of group formation, development and ending. The teacher is able to 'tune into,' connect with, and respond appropriately to shifts and changes in group mood and characteristics. In addition, the teacher is tuned to the context of the times and the particular needs of the population, depending on where the MBI is offered. This likely includes trauma, as well as obvious or more hidden differences (nationality, class, education level, gender identity, national or regional social or political impacts, and more). For example, if the class is being offered for a work group, the teacher recognizes potential power issues that may make sharing vulnerable material more challenging and works to balance the need for privacy with opportunities to share more deeply appropriately. During challenging times of social unrest, political uncertainty, or economic turbulence, a teacher may need to both identify and acknowledge the current circumstances, while also holding a strong alignment to practice. This supports steadiness in participants' ability to practice in the most demanding of times.

Key features to be considered when assessing this domain:

1   **Learning container** – Creating and sustaining a rich learning environment made safe through careful management of issues such as ground rules, boundaries and confidentiality, but which is simultaneously a place in which participants can explore and take risks.

2   **Group development** – Clear management of the group development processes over the eight weeks, particularly regarding the management of the group in terms of beginnings, endings and challenges.

3   **Personal to universal learning** – The teacher consistently opens the learning process towards connection with the universality and common humanity of the processes under exploration.

4   **Leadership style** – The teacher offers sustained 'holding,' and demonstrates authority and potency without imposing the teacher's views on participants.

Incompetent

Group learning environment is managed ineffectively and unsafely.

Beginner

At least one of the four key features is present at a level that would be desirable for adequate MBI teaching, but there are significant levels of inconsistency across all key features.

Examples include: Teacher does not adequately attend to group boundaries and safety and lacks skill in managing group stages/process; leadership style ineffective or inappropriate; the movement from personal story to universal learning themes is absent.

Advanced Beginner

At least two of the four key features at a competent level but some difficulty and/or inconsistency clearly evident in others; participants' safety is not compromised; no aspect of the process is unsafe for participants.

Examples include: some inconsistency in managing aspects of group process; communication style during inquiry may be overly focused on the individual to the exclusion of awareness of group process; awareness of normal group development processes may not be clearly integrated into teaching; leadership style appropriate but perhaps lacking in 'potency;' inconsistent 'holding' of the group environment.

Competent

All key features present to a good level of skill with some minor inconsistencies.

Examples include: sensitivity and awareness of group process is generally integrated into the teaching; safety is handled appropriately; learning container is well managed by teacher, enabling participants to engage with the process; individual experience is held within the context of wider learning; leadership approach is clear and generally well held.

Proficient

All key features consistently present.

Examples include: teacher demonstrates well-developed skills working with and facilitating the group learning environment; teacher skilfully includes the group in the field of their awareness, is connected with the issues arising in the group and responds to them appropriately; moves fluidly and respectfully from personal story to universal themes; leadership style is engaging, confident and potent.

Advanced

All key features present to a high skill level.

Examples include: teacher demonstrates excellent group working skills as evidenced by a highly responsive and skilful way of working with group process while meeting the needs of individuals; highly engaging leadership style. Difficult for reviewer to find further 'learning needs' to feedback.

Key feature 1: Learning container – creating and sustaining a rich learning environment made safe through careful management of issues such as ground rules, boundaries and confidentiality, but which is simultaneously a place in which participants can explore and take risks

Given the interactive, participatory and moment-to-moment dynamic of MBI teaching, there is much that is unpredictable and unknown. Each group will be different, a co-creation between the participants and the teacher.

The teacher's role within this is to create the conditions within which the learning can take place. This requires attention to creating both a place of safety and also a place in which participants examine themselves in ways that they may never previously have done. Both aspects of this paradox need to be in place.

Attending to safety

The teacher clearly works with sensitivity to the inevitable vulnerabilities that can arise in participants through being a member of a group. For example, they responds skilfully to expressions of difference and to competition within the group, holding boundaries while demonstrating acceptance and curiosity. They are attuned to and able to manage the basic group issues of inclusion, belonging and control.
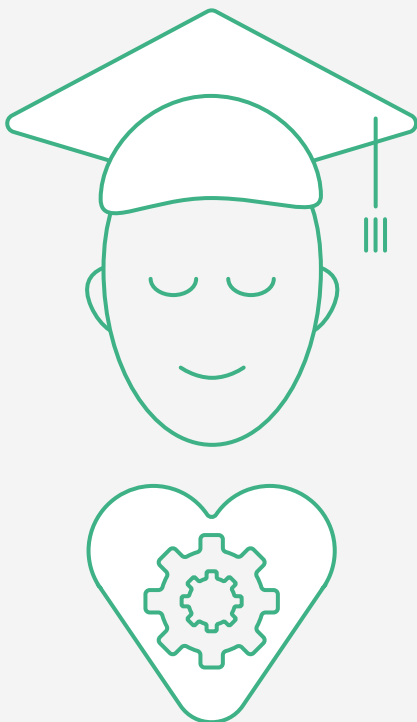
Guidelines for the programme are set early in the Orientation and session 1, and then highlighted through the class to remind and cultivate the ethos of the MBI. These include:

- Group boundaries are established and maintained (e.g., "let me know if you can't come / arrive on time / attend each week");

- Confidentiality issues are comprehensively addressed;

- The intention of the group is clearly conveyed (implicitly and at times explicitly);

- Digressions away from the core intention of the group or away from established norms of MBI teaching processes are promptly responded to so that the working ethos of the group is maintained ;

- Participants are encouraged to adopt towards each other the attitudes that are being cultivated within the group (e.g., respect for each other's contributions, stepping back from giving each other advice);

- Encouragement to express and explore a range of different experiences among group members, including both positive or negative experiences. This cultivates a sense that there is room in the group for all experience to be safely explored;

- In order to managing safety in skilful ways the teacher will need to work to increase their knowledge about and awareness of social, cultural and community contexts that may be implicit: i.e.,, diversity and equity issues, biases, current regional events, as well as the tendency of the conditioned mind to minimize or compare.

Key feature 2: Group development – clear management of group development processes over the eight weeks, particularly the management of beginnings, endings and challenges from within the group

The teacher deliberately works with and responds to group development processes with appropriate management of: beginnings (including establishing safety, ground rules, confidentiality, group norms, etc., both at the beginning and then as appropriate as the group develops); 'storming' (turning towards and working with difficulty in appropriate ways within the group); and endings (deliberately working with ending processes by preparing for the end of the group from session six onwards, allowing space to acknowledge the impact of ending, exploring experiences/concerns relating to the end of the group, and attending to on-going needs).

The teacher demonstrates the ability to deal effectively with challenging participants, including those who dominate the discussion, are combative, or undermine the teaching process (e.g., the teacher: reminds participants of the guidelines; is invitational rather than coercive; avoids defensiveness or emotional reactivity in the face of challenge; and displays genuine curiosity about participant's experiences regardless of the nature of the experience. It may also include engaging in private, outside-the-classroom conversation with individual participants, as needed).

Key feature 3: Personal to universal learning – the teacher consistently opens the learning process towards connection with the universality and common humanity of the processes under exploration.

The teacher deliberately uses the group context, within which the learning happens, to underline the general nature of the human mind. The teacher takes opportunities to normalise experience within the group. At the same time, inquiry involves engaging with an individual within the context of the group.

The teacher needs to balance these processes by drawing out – from the particularities of the individual – the generalities that might relate to participants more broadly. Skilful teaching will involve moving between responding to the individual and relating the learning to the wider group, i.e., a movement from the personal to the universal.

An individual question might take the form of: "What is happening in your body now as you talk?" A group question might take the form of: "What do you all notice in your experience when…?" A movement from individual to group might take the form of: "Did any of you also experience what Sally is describing?"

At times, the teacher will 'harvest' experience across the breadth of the group and, at other times, will explore in a more in-depth way with one participant. The teacher will regularly scan round the group, so that even when inquiring with one individual, the whole group will be included in awareness.

The internal process of the teacher will include bringing a deliberate focus of attention towards the group process. Because much of this will take place internally, it will be observable only on a subtle level or, perhaps, not at all. However, the teacher will be enabled through this internal process to attune to, and then respond, to shifts in group energy and/or the prevailing moods (e.g., restlessness, anxiety) through making choices. These choices might involve moving the group on, shifting focus, inserting a mindfulness practice, and/or actively acknowledging felt experience in the group, etc.

The understanding of 'universal vulnerability' will thread through the teaching so that there is a repeated sense of depersonalising suffering and seeing common patterns. In practice, the teacher might frequently use 'we/us/our' language. For example, they might say, "yes, we can all react like that, can't we," etc.

The teacher may notice and acknowledge the way one person's experience affects others in the group (e.g., distress rippling around the circle) and will be able to pause to support and hold this.

Key feature 4: Leadership style that offers sustained 'holding,' and demonstrates authority and potency without imposing the teacher's views on participants.

The teacher's leadership style conveys a sense of:

- Purposefulness of intention (this is different from striving for particular outcomes)

- Confidence and trust in the process of bringing mindful attention to experience. Trust in this context arises out of the experience the teacher has in this process; through this, they are able also to invite the trust of participants to engage in this learning process over the eight weeks with an open mind.

- Potency – the teacher carries influence and authority in a way that inspires the respect of participants and simultaneously encourages them to look towards their own expertise.

- Authority – although it is important to convey confidence, it is unhelpful to convey a strong sense of expertise, or of always knowing the answers. The approach is one of co-journeying – a sense of mutual exploration – 'let's explore this together.' The teacher and participants can then relate to each other based on what they learn and share. The connection is compassionate – a sense of deep understanding of the challenges that we all face, coupled with a humility to learn about the particularities of specific circumstances. This important sense that the teacher stands side-by-side with the participants within the process of exploration is balanced with the teacher needing to convey confidence and a sense of authority.

A teacher's authority is not hierarchical. It is grounded in a clear sense of being thoroughly 'at home' within this process of learning and of knowing this process well because they have trodden this path, too. The authority is derived from: personal practice; psychological and spiritual development; experience of teaching mindfulness, including knowledge in trauma-sensitive approaches, and awareness of potential biases; and expertise in a professional discipline. When the teacher talks or acts from this material, their real or symbolic authorship of it is evident because both the teacher's person and the knowledge they reveal speaks volumes (McCown et al., 2010). The confidence that this stance instils can free participants to feel contained and safe. It can enable them to trust and open to the process and help them develop a sense that there is something here to lean on while they engage in this learning process. In order for participants to be able to disclose and explore difficult material, they must have trust and confidence in the teacher.

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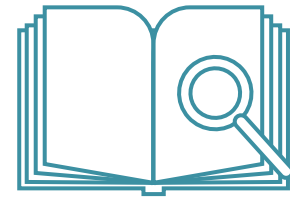
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ASSESSING MINDFULNESS-BASED TEACHING COMPETENCE

Teacher: _____

Date of session: _____   Session number: _____

Assessor: _____

Date of Assessment: _____

Video recording ◯   Live Observation ◯

MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS:
TEACHING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA – SUMMARY SHEET

Compentence scale

1. Incompetent   **2.** Beginner   **3.** Advanced Beginner   **4.** Competent   **5.** Proficient   **6.** Advanced

Domain	Key features (use the following page to offer qualitative feedback)	Competence 1-6 Fill according to scale
1. Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum	Adherence to curriculum	☐
	Responsiveness and flexibility in adhering	☐
	Appropriateness of themes and content	☐
	Organisation of teacher, room and materials	☐
	Session flow and pacing	☐
2. Relational skills	Authenticity and potency	☐
	Connection and acceptance	☐
	Compassion and warmth	☐
	Curiosity and respect	☐
	Mutuality	☐
3. Embodying mindfulness	Present moment focus	☐
	Present moment responsiveness	☐
	Steadiness and alertness	☐
	Attitudinal foundations	☐
	Person of the teacher	☐
4. Guiding mindfulness practices	Language – precise and spacious	☐
	Key learning for each practice available	☐
	Elements to consider when guiding	☐
5. Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching	Experiential focus	☐
	Layers within the inquiry process	☐
	Teaching skills/ conveying learning	☐
	Fluency	☐
	Effectiveness of teaching	☐
6. Holding the group learning environment	Learning container	☐
	Group development	☐
	Common humanity	☐
	Leadership style	☐

MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS:
TEACHING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
– COMMENTARY SHEET

Domain	Teaching strengths	Learning needs
1. Coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum		
2. Relational skills		
3. Embodying mindfulness		
4. Guiding mindfulness practices		
5. Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching		
6. Holding the group learning environment		

MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTIONS: TEACHING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

(MBI:TAC)

In-depth version

First version: 2010
Second version: 2018
Third version: 2021