

Chapter 2

Guidance: Refining the Details

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Introduction to Theory and Practice

Providing guidance is one of the key pedagogical skills and actions of the teacher in the Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs), along with stewardship, homiletics, and inquiry. These skills are interrelated and each includes and influences the others. Guided meditation, both “live” in class and through recordings, plays a crucial role in the cultivation of mindfulness, a way of being in the world in relationship to self, to others, and to the flow of experience moment by moment.

Guidance is using spoken language and all of the corporeal (“body language”) possibilities for communicating in a way to catalyze the pedagogy of mindfulness in the classroom. While the forms of language and other communications differ from teacher to teacher, and context to context, there are some general considerations and guidelines that are helpful to consider. Some of these considerations are more theoretical (for instance, the function of guidance) and some are more practical (say, specific uses

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of language, or vocal tone and volume). Ultimately, the theoretical and the practical understanding and implementation go hand in hand.

In this chapter, we discuss the function of guidance in the MBIs, situating it within a discussion of the concept of co-creation, and describe how the skill can be cultivated. We examine four practical dimensions of guidance, and present a full script for the example of seated yoga practice through which we examine the details.

The Function of Guidance in the MBIs

The intention or function of the guided meditations in the MBIs is to cultivate mindfulness. While there are many ways to talk about mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn's influential definition (e.g., 1990) describes mindfulness as the awareness that develops from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally. Shapiro and colleagues elaborated on this definition to posit three axioms of mindfulness that are engaged simultaneously in the process of cultivating mindfulness: intention, attention, and attitude (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006). Guided meditation can catalyze and cultivate all three.

This kind of catalyzing and cultivating is not “just one more method or technique, akin to other familiar techniques and strategies we may find instrumental and effective in one field or another” (Kabat-Zinn, 2010, p. xi). Rather, mindfulness is “a way of being, of seeing, of tapping into the full dimensionality of our humanity, and this way has a critical *non-instrumental* essence inherent in it” (2010, p. xi). It is important to remember that guidance has this non-instrumental essence. Guidance is not about leading towards some preconceived, idealized state. Rather, it facilitates an intentional turning towards and being with/in the present moment flow of ordinary experience, with an attitude of openness, nonjudgment, non-striving, curiosity, and kindness.

There is a particular premise in the pedagogy of the MBIs right from the start. With ubiquitous reassurance that there is “more right with them than there is wrong,” participants are directed *away* from acquiescence to the dominant culture of diagnosis, and *towards* taking a new, active role in their own health and well-being. It is assumed that they already have the necessary resources to cultivate mindfulness. Further, teachers often state at the outset that no one in the class needs to be “fixed,” because they are not broken. In fact, it easily becomes apparent that participants and teacher alike are “in the same boat,” when it comes to the sorrows and joys of being human. It is implied that the teacher is not an expert (although she knows the curriculum and acts as a steward), and that what happens in class is co-created, moment by moment. Opening remarks also suggest that we cannot know how things will unfold from moment to moment, in the class or with each participant. Thus, a certain kind of fearlessness is required—a willingness to not know.

This theoretical basis of mindfulness practice in the MBIs is manifested through the teacher's guidance of meditation and other practices. Language choices, vocal tone and volume, gestures, postures, and the ineffable nuances of the teacher's own mindfulness practice are all influential. Rather than just imparting information or knowledge, we could say that guidance *catalyzes* mindfulness as a way of being, seeing, and sensing.

The Context of Guidance

We suggest that guided meditation is a relational act; an act of co-creation. Although the teacher is guiding, and participants are responding in silence, it is the relationship among them that informs and influences everyone, including the teacher. Because it impacts the practicalities of guidance, it is worth exploring the notion of co-creation in the MBIs. A clear evocation of co-creation comes in Gergen's (2009) description of *confluence*. In the dominant discourse of individualism, participants in a class or dyad are seen as autonomous individuals first, bound up in their chosen identities and only (perhaps even grudgingly) accountable to others. In contrast to that discourse, Gergen's concept of confluence sees participants as relational beings first, with identities shaped in each instant by the unfolding of the shared activities.

For example, in an MBI class, when the curriculum calls for the practice of sitting meditation, participants mutually define meditators who sit quietly and a teacher who "guides" with her voice. Participants know what to do (who they are) in that moment. Then, when the confluence that is formal meditation practice ends, the meditators may be redefined as dyad partners that speak aloud to each other, or as part of the entire group in dialogue. Relationship defines who we are and what we do in any situation (McCown, 2015). This approach defines the activities of teaching and learning mindfulness as an ongoing co-creation, involving and affecting all participants. Each instance of co-creation is unique, arising in the moment, and therefore unrepeatable (McCown, 2013).

Another definition of co-creation is that we are all in a shared space of continually flowing streams of experience, occurring within us and among us. In the view of Shotter (2012, p. 4), expanding the boundaries of social construction, we are sensitive and responsive to the flow of information with others:

Ephemeral though they may be, the particular sensings [sic] and feelings that we can pick out of the stream are not only crucial in our shaping and guiding our behavior, as we move around within our surroundings, but the ways in which we make sense of them—i.e., orient towards them—are basic to "who" and "what" we take ourselves to be.

As MBI teachers guiding meditation in class, we can be considered as using what Shotter describes as "the spontaneous responsiveness of our living bodies, and our inner sensing of the situation in which we are immersed at the very moment of opening our mouths to speak" (2012, p. 4). This description provides a way of viewing guided meditation as a shared activity, an exchange among all the participants.

Shotter also describes the notion of "joint action" through which we are co-constructing each other as relational beings, within the continuous, chaotic flow of moment-by-moment experiences in which we are embedded. One feature of joint action is that it does not derive from the intentions of particular participants but rather *in the exchanges between and among them*. What arises, then, is not anything that could have been predicted. This unpredictability is extremely relevant in the context of the MBIs. Understandings of confluence, shared space, co-creation, and joint-action provide useful ways of seeing the MBI class. Something happens in this coming together, being together, often in silence, during guided meditations,

discussions, and dialogue. The world of the participants (including the teacher) changes with each silence, each word, each motion, and each feeling. Shotter (2011, p. 58, emphasis added) describes it thus:

But more than simply responding to each other in a sequential manner—that is, instead of one person first acting individually and independently of another, and then the second also by acting individually and independently of the first in his/her reply—the fact is that in such a sphere of spontaneously responsive dialogically structured activity as this, *we all act jointly as a collective-we*.

One way in which guided meditations lead to the co-creation of a “collective-we” is through both interpersonal and intrapersonal resonance, perhaps leading to a sense of “wholeness” that plays a powerful role in the development of new ontological possibilities, i.e., new ways of being.

Four Dimensions of Guidance

The ever-changing context of the shared space of the classroom is important in shaping guidance. It should go without saying (but is worth saying) that one must consider context, whether teaching in Philadelphia, Israel, or Korea; to children or elders; or to specific clinical populations. As we often say to new teachers honing their skills in guidance, context is everything. Context includes not only the “who” and “where” but also “when.” Thus, the use of language (and silence) will be different in guiding a practice during the first class, than when guiding that same practice 6 or 7 weeks later.

Accordingly, it is not practical to establish rules of thumb for guidance. Likewise, it is counterproductive to develop a formulaic script for a guided meditation that would be suitable for every who, where, and when. There are, however, many common considerations worth calling out. McCown, Reibel, and Micozzi (2017), have described four interdependent dimensions that a teacher needs to be familiar with for effective guidance. Let’s consider, in order, embodying, orienting, languaging, and allowing.

Embodying

This dimension is the most critical for guidance—the connection of the teacher to her own practice while she is speaking. Without embodying, there can be no connection. Guiding a meditation is not just using words to instruct others. Rather, as implied in the role of a “guide,” the teacher is engaged with the practice. She is “dropped in” to her own moment-to-moment experience and speaks from that perspective.

The verbal constructions of guidance are rooted in the teacher’s personal understanding of the practice and her moment-to-moment experience of the confluence or shared space. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to effectively use language to catalyze mindfulness without simultaneously embodying the practice. However, the

teacher cannot be so deeply “dropped in” to her personal experience that she is unaware of what may be happening for other participants. More concretely, she cannot be practicing with her eyes closed the whole time she is guiding. She may not notice the condition of the other participants—shifts of affect, body movements, even leaving the room. All of this important information shapes guidance. Further, it is worth noting that a change in volume and vocal tone as the teacher drops in is a natural effect of embodying the practice. The teacher needs to monitor this effect, to make sure that she continues to project enough volume to be heard, while also allowing her more relaxed vocal tone to become part of the guidance.

Orienting

In one sense, the orientation of all guided meditations is towards the flow of experience in the present moment. Here, again, Shotter brings insight (2012, p. 13):

...while some of the communications directed towards us can change us simply in our *knowledge*, others—that influence our *orientations*—can change us in our very ways of *being in the world*, in how we express ourselves as *being* in our *ways* of orienting or relating to the others and other-nesses around us.

This orientation, this way of being in the world, can lead towards an open, accepting awareness of whatever is arising, rather than identifying with particular concepts or thoughts about what is happening. The guidance of a meditation practice can facilitate such shifts in consciousness.

It might appear that using a narrative or an organizing concept when guiding a meditation would not support the practice of moment-to-moment awareness. However, in the early classes, it is helpful for participants to sense coherence and direction as they attempt to follow a practice that is so different from their typical experience in the world. Therefore, the teacher may find or adopt an organizing principle. Some practices have an inherent narrative trajectory, such as the body scan, in which we move our attention and experience sensations in and through the body sequentially. Practices of mindful movement also suggest an orderly progress through sequencing of movements. Even sitting meditations—particularly the “expanding awareness” practice of the MBIs—can have a narrative arc, as participants expand attention from the breath to the body, to sound, thoughts, emotions, and finally to choiceless awareness.

On the other hand, a sitting meditation with awareness of the breath, or the practice of open awareness, may seem amorphous to participants at first. The teacher can, nevertheless offer coherence and direction without resorting to narrative. There are at least three strategies that can help teachers guide such meditations in ways that allow participants freedom to explore.

First, the teacher can introduce a simple refrain, a recurring verbal construction that offers some stability in the flow of experience. For example, in choiceless awareness meditation, the repeated question “what are you aware of in the present moment?” can bring participants to their direct experience.

Second, the teacher can introduce and then elaborate a concept, which may blossom in meaning as the practice progresses. For example, in an awareness of breath meditation, the teacher could introduce the principle of nonjudgment and kindness towards oneself, and guide by elaborating the practice of cultivating a caring and kind response to one's mind wandering. Participants are then prompted in an ongoing way to come back gently to the breath, without struggle or self-blame, when their minds wander. The teacher might even weave an elaboration of a second, supportive concept—for example, that the tendency of the mind to wander is not personal. When the participant is aware that her mind is lost in thought, in that moment of noticing, she is already present.

Third, the teacher may ground the practice by incorporating mention of the moment-to-moment events in the environment into the guidance as it progresses. By calling out a momentary event in the environment without predetermining how participants will experience it, the teacher can support an open, curious awareness in the group. In the context of an urban setting or perhaps a large institution, street level sounds (sirens, trash-trucks, jackhammers) or hallway happenings, or even the undependability of heating and air-conditioning, can be noted and offered to the group. Something like, “perhaps noticing what’s happening within you as the sound of the siren continues.”

These basic strategies can be combined creatively to improve guidance for any specific practice, for any “who, what, when, and where” of a class.

Languageing

What choice of language, what tone or modulation of voice facilitates the cultivation of mindfulness? It is crucial that teachers consider this dimension. In order to support participants’ understanding and practice of mindfulness the language used in guiding needs to be invitational rather than directive. In order to be allowing of whatever participants encounter, guidance needs to be inclusive, i.e., including the different possibilities of experiencing all that arises moment by moment.

An important feature of the MBI style of guidance is language intended to reduce the resistance of participants. There are at least three ways in which a teacher can invite participants to practice, rather than directing them. A discursive analysis of a Kabat-Zinn audio recording of the body scan practice for MBSR by Dreeben, Mamberg, and Salmon (2013), identifies three features of language use that are of interest here. What they call “inclusivity” involves use of the first person plural in guidance, rather than second person, implying that all in the group are participating together. Something like “now, *let’s* let the focus of *our* attention....” What they call “process over ownership” involves, among other ways of speaking, using the definitive article, rather than first or second person possessive. That is, “Raising *the* left leg,” not “*your* left leg,” suggesting that the action is already underway and participants may join in, or not. Bringing us to the third feature, which Dreeben et al., call “Action without agency.” This feature involves the inevitability represented by the

present participle, combined with constructions that diminish the call for doing. It sounds something like “If you’re ready, *just raising* the left leg and *perhaps noticing*...” For participants, the impression might be that these actions are taking place right now in the room, and that they are free to notice and choose to join in—or not.

Context, as we noted earlier, is all important. For instance, there are languages in which there is no present participle. In such cases, the teacher will use appropriate constructions that invite rather than direct or command, that are process oriented rather than goal oriented, and that highlight the cultivation of awareness of whatever is happening rather than giving the impression that anything in particular must happen. Even the choice of a definitive article rather than a possessive pronoun can depend on the context. Early in a course, the participants are less likely to be in touch with their bodies, so for a time using the possessive article “raising *your* left leg...” may actually be beneficial. The participant may come to realize through guided practice that she indeed has a left leg, and, over time, can come to inhabit her body. Rather than thinking of one approach to language as being better than another, it is useful to consider the effect of what is chosen in any given context—perhaps even choosing to go back and forth to find a balance. As Kabat-Zinn (2004) advises, too much use of the present participle can become distracting, while too much distancing through the definitive article may result in a “she’s not talking to me” reaction. A possible rule of thumb, then, is “Do not hold to rules too tightly.”

Allowing

It is all too easy to see this dimension of allowing as being a specific form of languaging. However, it is most clearly seen as a function of the confluence. On a concrete level, the teacher senses whatever arises in the environment—say, hallway sounds of whispered conversations or noisy groups, or squeaky cart wheels—and uses language to guide participants closer to their experience. As the teacher adds detail and specificity participants may find it easier to maintain a connection to the practice. Yet, such guidance still allows each participant to have their own unique experience. And, of course, the teacher’s way of being helps to allow an infinite range of possibilities for participants. Ideally, each feels free to have his or her own experience of the moment.

Teachers are challenged to find balance between incorporating specificity and allowing each participant to have their own experience. This balance can be accomplished by offering a range of choices and by couching suggestions in tentative phrases, such as “perhaps you are noticing warmth or coolness.” Guiding a body scan, when asking participants to bring their attention to the forehead, for example, the teacher may say: “noticing any tightness or softness in the muscles... perhaps there’s tingling, or pressure, or numbness. You may be noticing the sensation of air moving in the room... or maybe there’s no sensation available to feel... and that is okay... that’s simply your experience in this moment.” Using language in this way offers permission for whatever arises, encouragement for exploration beyond habitual responses, and unconditional acceptance of any outcome.

Another feature of language that can be helpful is the interrogative. In guidance, questions do not direct participants to find answers, but rather to catalyze their attention and curiosity. A question such as “can you feel the floor beneath you?” does not so much pull participants into their head as it orients them closer to the direct experience of contact with the floor. A question such as “what is the quality of the breath in this moment? ... perhaps long or short, smooth or jagged?” has as many answers as there are listeners, and can often lead to a deepening of attention. Skillful languaging can help participants sense into their moment-by-moment streams of experience, rather than staying at a conceptual level of what they think is or should be happening. It points towards the “flowing, indeterminate, still developing reality.”

Yet another potentially flexible way of considering language use that fosters allowing comes from the work of the sociologist Richard Sennett, who in working across two books, *The Craftsman* (2009) and *Together* (2012), approaches an understanding of the very real practices that humans use to foster cooperation. The approaches he notes are used by craftspersons confronted with resistance of their material, and the analogous practices of diplomats working with difficult relations. These approaches can contribute to the work of guiding meditation:

Applying minimum force is the most effective way to work with resistance. Just as in working with a wood knot, so in a surgical procedure: the less aggressive the effort, the more sensitivity. Vesalius urged the surgeon, feeling the liver more resistant to the scalpel than surrounding tissues, to “stay his hand,” to probe tentatively and delicately before cutting further: In practicing music, when confronted by a sour note or a hand-shift gone wrong, the performer gets nowhere by forcing. The mistake has to be treated as an interesting fact; then, the problem will eventually be unlocked (2012, p. 210).

The concept of minimum force may be used to shape the languaging and allowing dimensions of guidance. In applying minimum force to dialogical or collaborative situations, such as the MBI classroom, there are three distinctive insights that Sennett (2013) offers from diplomatic practice, which deserve serious consideration as rules of thumb. First, one may refrain from insisting on one’s own ideas and take on another’s view of the situation. From whose position are we guiding? Second, one may deploy the *subjunctive mood* in one’s language; the “what if...” and “perhaps...” way of talking that opens possibilities for dialogue—that is, as an unfinished dialogue experienced by the participant. Third, is that technique known as *sprezzatura*, recommended by Baldassare Castiglione, in that sixteenth century Italian diplomat’s *Book of the Courtier*. Sprezzatura is a lightness of touch, a nonchalance that makes it difficult for others to find offense in what one says. In the MBI classroom, such lightness, such a sense of humor is a powerful unguent. This is not comedy; it is the generation of a welcoming and informal atmosphere. Lightness of touch, use of minimum force, opening to the boundless possibilities—all are invaluable when confronting what is often difficult in the classroom, such as physical and emotional pain, loss and longing, grief and sorrow. It can be incorporated in guidance, through both the choice of language and the tone and modulation of voice. In the co-created space,

as we open to the confluence of whatever is arising from moment-to-moment, we may often find a deep joining together when we can laugh and cry at the same time!

Guidance as a Craft

In *The Craftsman* (2009), Sennett notes that “nearly anyone can become a good craftsman.” There is assumption that craft abilities are innate and widely distributed, and that when properly stimulated and trained, they allow craftsmen to become knowledgeable public persons. They know how to negotiate between autonomy and authority (as a teacher must in delivering a workshop); how to work not against resistant forces but with them (as did the engineers who first drilled tunnels beneath the Thames); how to complete their tasks using “minimum force” (as do all chefs who must chop vegetables); how to meet people and things with sympathetic imagination (as does the glassblower whose “corporeal anticipation” lets her stay one step ahead of the molten glass); and above all they know how to play. It is in play that we find “the origin of the dialogue the craftsman conducts with materials like clay and glass.” All of these concepts are wonderfully applicable to developing the craft of guiding meditation as well as to the teacher’s own development.

Sennett notes how the use of minimum force applies to mastering the tools one has—whether to drive a nail, bow a cello, or begin a meditation session. In applying the idea of minimum force to the teacher’s honing of her skill in guiding meditation, she can playfully see mistakes (e.g., misspeaking during a “live” guidance for instance) as simply interesting facts to be explored, rather than something to be overcome. Reducing aggression towards oneself as a teacher not only helps the teacher herself but will profoundly shift the environment in the classroom as well. Thinking of guiding meditation as playing, rather than as work to be accomplished, can bring a sense of non-striving, curiosity, and friendliness into the shared space of confluence.

A craft or a skill is developed over time with practice. The subtleties of hammering or bowing cannot be learned conceptually or theoretically but only through enactment. This reality is equally true of guidance. In guiding a meditation, a teacher is not just imparting information but is catalyzing the pedagogy of mindfulness. Skillfulness is required. A teacher would need to be thoroughly familiar with the various meditations she needs to guide, so she would need to have practiced them intensely herself. She would want to experience the guidance of other skilled teachers, so she would attend classes by others and review others’ recordings. She would even create scripts for the practices, and rehearse with them many times—ideally in situations where she may get feedback from peers (other teachers in training) and her own teachers. Eventually, when she is ready to guide “live” in a classroom with participants, she would let go of the script—because now she has the depth of skill required to improvise.

Developing and deepening the skill of guiding happens in the actual doing of it; that is, one gets better at guiding meditations by guiding them. The ecological anthropologist, Ingold (2008), suggests that we do not learn by bringing knowledge from “outside” to “inside” us, but rather that we “grow into” knowledge. As he describes, “the minds of novices are not so much ‘filled up’ with the stuff of culture, as ‘tuned up’ to the particular circumstances of the environment” (2008, p. 117). He refers to this status not as learning or education, but as “*enskillment*,” and provides the example of a child learning to make an omelette. There is no one right way to crack a given egg because each egg is different. The child learns the feel for it from hands that are skilled being placed on or over hers. What is more, this process happens in a particular kitchen, with particular bowls and pans. The knowledge is in the system, not inside the child. Ingold notes that “you only get an omelette from a cook-in-the-kitchen” (2008, p. 116). Similarly, a meditation teacher goes through this (ongoing) process of *enskillment*. She senses into it and gets a feel for what is required in any given context, over and over. First, with the help of teachers (in person or through teachings), and then on her own.

Applying Craftsmanship

In this section, we explore the specific practical applications of the four dimensions of guidance by commenting upon a sample script for a selected formal practice. We chose a seated yoga script for three reasons.

First, it offers many opportunities for elaboration of the four dimensions with very concrete examples.

Second, the practice itself has broad application—with populations such as elders (Chap. 10), people with disabilities (Chap. 10), employees in office settings, and in any MBI program where classroom space is cramped—yet is rarely presented as a script from which teachers may learn.

Third, in our experience, MBI teachers in training often feel challenged when guiding yoga, and a detailed treatment may be of use. The challenge sometimes arises because the aspiring teacher has no prior background in yoga, and is hesitant to guide such a seemingly complex practice. In this case, the best route to learning yoga is to practice with and learn from more experienced MBI teachers. This is the most direct way towards a clear understanding of what is required in the classroom. Alternatively, the challenge sometimes arises because the aspiring teacher actually has a background in teaching yoga, but has taught in a different style and for different reasons. In this case, a process of “unlearning” may be necessary. For instance, yoga teachers usually are trained to demonstrate the pose as an ideal and then to walk around the class, evaluating their students, sometimes stopping to make physical adjustments to a student’s posture. This can imply a goal to strive for, and can instill a sense of self-judgment. To the contrary, in the MBIs, the teacher practices along with the participants, guiding from her own embodied experience of the practice and the sense of the confluence.

What Kabat-Zinn has written about the yoga practice in MBSR is true for both teachers and participants (2003):

Mindful yoga is a lifetime engagement—not to get somewhere else, but to be where and as we are in this very moment, with this very breath, whether the experience is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Our body will change a lot as we practice, and so will our minds and our hearts and our views. Hopefully, whether a beginner or an old-timer, we are always reminding ourselves in our practice of the value of keeping this beginner’s mind.

The intention of mindful yoga practice, then, is to cultivate awareness, rather than to “perform” yoga postures.

There are statements or ideas specific to movement practices that are worth discussing before the script for the practice proper begins. Participants should be reminded to pay attention to the experience of their bodies, to honor any limitations encountered in the moment, and to rely on their body’s natural wisdom when it is sensible to adapt the teacher’s instructions. They should also be aware that, if they need to refrain from any postures, they can still choose to vividly imagine the body making the movements—not to fill time, but rather as a highly effective alternative physical practice. They may be assured that studies suggest that imagining physical movements can improve motor performance (e.g., Gentili, Han, Schweighofer, & Papaxanthis, 2010).

It is also worth considering the content of the practice. In the MBIs, movement practices are offered as an unfolding exploration of the body. A limited number of yoga poses are taught, so that participants will develop familiarity and ease, and because they are chosen to be accessible to those with physically limiting medical conditions.

The sequence of poses in mindful yoga offers a natural narrative or orientation, which becomes more evident with repetition. It is important for the teacher to decide in advance how she will sequence the movements. (However, sometimes the confluence of the shared space may require her to be flexible.) Will she start at the feet and move upwards? Or start at the region of the face and neck and move downwards? It is not so much that there is a right or wrong way to sequence, but rather that the sequence of poses will influence how participants experience sensations in the body.

When sequencing postures that stretch one side of the body at a time, it is important to work symmetrically—for instance, stretching to the right with the arms raised, and next stretching in the same way to the left.

Poses may be chosen and sequenced for optimum participant engagement, with attention to orienting to the present moment, orienting to gravity, sequencing of poses (to include both sides of the body), duration of poses, and duration of rest between poses—including a final rest pose. For a developing teacher, it may be instructive to read the script and track the flow of postures from the top to the bottom of the body. In fact, it may be of value to do the practice, as sequencing is a subtle skill that may be more accessible to embodied understanding.

The following script for seated yoga offers guidance through words only in the left-hand column, while in the right-hand column we offer comments to clarify and to expand into the deeper dimensions of embodying, orienting, languaging, and allowing.

A Script for Seated Yoga Practice

<p>We are going to be practicing mindful yoga in our chairs. As in other mindfulness practices, with mindful yoga we are cultivating awareness, specifically bringing a curious, kind attention to sensations in the body, moment to moment, as we move into and out of poses</p> <p>There are no ideal movements we are trying to perform, no right or wrong way to do this. We are not trying to get anywhere. Rather, we are learning to be exactly where and how we are right now</p> <p>While the center of our attention is on sensations in the body, there is nothing you have to exclude or push away; you can make space for whatever arises in your awareness</p>	<p>Languaging: It is helpful for the teacher to start with an introduction, orienting participants to present moment experience, while creating a sense of safety by letting participants know what it is they are going to be doing</p>
<p>Starting by sitting upright in the chair and placing both feet on the floor if you are able to. First, simply notice how it feels in the body, as much as possible letting go of judgment and just observing. Feeling the contact of the body with the chair, the feet with the floor. Allowing the chair and floor to support your weight, feeling gravity holding you here</p>	<p>Orienting: using gravity to ground participants in their chairs</p>
<p>Being curious about the sensations where the body is making contact, maybe noticing pressure, hardness or softness ... bringing attention to the soles of the feet, thighs, and buttocks ... If you care to, inviting muscles to soften a bit ... noticing that they may soften, or not ... simply noticing—as much as possible without expectation or judgment...</p>	<p>Allowing: any experience is acceptable, and change may be noticed—or not</p>
<p>From this stable base of the body, feeling the torso lengthening up without any straining or striving ... Allowing the spine to find its natural extension, all the way from the tailbone to the base of the skull ... Inviting the shoulders to drop as you let the hands rest on your thighs or wherever you find it comfortable</p> <p>How much effort is required to maintain this seated mountain pose?</p>	<p>Orienting: naming specific body parts (<i>the tailbone to the base of the skull</i>)</p> <p>Allowing: offering alternatives (<i>or wherever you find it comfortable</i>)</p> <p>Languaging: a question that brings attention into the body</p>
<p>Perhaps inviting jaw to drop a bit ... the shoulders to fall away from the ears ... and the belly to soften We're inviting the body to move towards rest without demanding that anything has to change. Letting the breath flow freely ... and feeling into the sensations of breathing</p>	<p>Orienting: the sequence of movement is downward through the body</p>

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Now, on your next out-breath, bringing the chin down <i>towards</i> the chest ... making this movement as the shoulders are dropped down ... breathing and feeling the stretch	Languaging: <i>towards</i> reinforces the idea that there is no right way, no goal
Remember that you can adapt any instructions that I give, and come out of a pose whenever you need to without having to wait for me to say so (Pause)	Allowing: encouraging participants to give themselves permission to be as they are and to make their own choices; giving plenty of time for exploration Embodying: the teacher's ability to sense into her own body as well as to be aware of what is happening in the shared space will influence the length of the pause in each pose
When you are ready, slowly bringing the head back up as if you were placing each cervical vertebra on top on the one below, and letting the head rest on top ... Maybe feeling into the entire body here ... how is it with you now? (Pause)	Languaging: preferring observation over action, encouraging sensing in the body
<p>Slowly moving the chin up slightly upwards towards the ceiling ... perhaps feeling the stretch in the front of the neck and along the jaw as you breathe ... (Pause)</p> <p>And when it's right for you, slowly bringing the chin down so that the head is once again centered ... feeling any sensations, maybe in the region of the neck and the face ... (Pause)</p> <p>If at any time you notice that the mind has wandered, remembering that mind wandering is not a problem—that's just what the mind does! Each time you notice that you've wandered is a moment of mindfulness ... so you can simply acknowledge it and come back—maybe even with a smile—to feeling sensations in the body...</p>	Languaging: <i>towards</i> and <i>perhaps</i> offer freedom Allowing: giving participants time for experience Allowing: encouraging the use of "minimum force"; the teacher's humor and kindness reinforces this principle
<p>When you are ready, breathing in ... and as you breathe out, bringing the right ear towards the right shoulder, inviting both shoulders to stay relaxed ... Breathing and feeling sensations in the body ... then, slowly bringing the head back up to center ... pausing here for a few breaths (Pause)</p> <p>Breathing in ... and as you breathe out, bringing the left ear <i>towards</i> the left shoulder ... Are the shoulders are trying to get involved? Can they drop back down? Just breathing here ... noticing sensations ... Remember, there is no need to force or strain in any way ... if you find that straining is happening, is it possible to find some ease? (Pause)</p> <p>Bringing the head back up ... and just noticing how it feels throughout the body, as you sit here in seated mountain pose ... (Pause)</p>	Orienting: having just moved the neck forward and back, now exploring movement from side to side Embodying: through self-awareness and awareness of the group, holding poses for a suitable amount of time—not too long, but long enough for participants to feel sensations and allow a stretching of the muscles Allowing: whatever is happening may be experienced in the pause

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<p>When you choose, taking a breath in ... and as you breathe out, turning your head to look over the right shoulder ... inviting neck and shoulders to stay as relaxed as possible ... There is nowhere to be but here and nothing to do but this ... Just breathing and feeling sensations in the body ... (Pause)</p> <p>Now, when you breathe in, slowly bringing the head back to center ... Pausing here to notice what you notice ... Perhaps there's impatience or a sense of "I know what we're doing next" ... Maybe you can see if it's possible to just be here, now ... (Pause)</p> <p>When you're ready, breathing in ... and as you exhale, turning your head to look over your left shoulder ... Softening into the pose ... breathing and feeling sensations ... (Pause for roughly the same length of time as before)</p> <p>Now, slowly bringing the head back to center, staying with those sensations ... breathing in through the nose, opening the mouth, and letting the air out with a gentle sigh ... Sensing the entire body ... what's here for you now? (Pause)</p>	<p>Orienting: having bent the cervical spine side to side, now exploring a twist in this same region</p> <p>Allowing: reminding participants that there is no goal to reach, no way of being that is preferred</p> <p>Languaging: using the subjunctive mode: <i>perhaps, maybe, see if it's possible</i></p> <p>Languaging: <i>when you're ready</i> suggests that the group is engaging again, and that individuals nevertheless have choices</p>
<p>Whenever you notice that the mind has been lost in the virtual world of thinking, you are no longer lost ... That noticing means you're already present ... so you can simply continue bringing your attention to sensations in the body ...</p> <p>Bringing attention to the shoulders, now. Moving the shoulders forward ... up ... back ... and down ... and continuing to move the shoulders in this circular fashion, without any straining ... The movement can be as big or as little as feels right for you ... and you can move at your own pace ...</p> <p>Really feeling into the shoulder joints as you make this movement ... If you care to, using the out-breath to help relieve any strain ... And, now, reversing the direction of the movement, and noticing sensations as you move in this new direction ... (Pause)</p>	<p>Orienting: reminding participants again to bring a quality of nonjudgment and a light touch</p> <p>Orienting: moving from the neck to the region of the shoulders; calling out that the movement is circular; making sure to engage both sides</p> <p>Allowing: <i>as feels right for you, at your own pace</i></p> <p>Orienting: giving time for participants to move and feel the sensations of movement</p>
<p>Coming back into stillness ... and just resting now in the seated mountain pose, rooted and uplifted ... shoulders dropped, arms just resting by the side of the body, hands on the thighs or lap ...</p>	<p>Embodying: sensing the time needed in between poses to rest and feel sensations</p>

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<p>When it seems right, without any straining, allowing the spine to be elongated Bringing attention to the torso ... aware of the back and front of the body ... aware of the sides of the body...</p> <p>Now, becoming aware of the arms, and, as you inhale slowly, lifting them out to the sides and bringing them upwards ... noticing sensations moment by moment—perhaps the resistance of gravity as the arms move ... Maybe they come all the way up alongside the ears, maybe they don't ... so just adapting in any way you need to...</p> <p>If the arms are up by the ears, turning the palms so that they face each other ... however they are, inviting the shoulders to relax ... and stretching through the fingertips. Is it possible to feel the stretch all the way from the hips to the fingertips? What are you noticing about how you are? Seeing if there may be a sense of ease even as you stretch in this pose, tuning in to the sensations in the body Perhaps the muscles of the face, neck, and shoulders soften as the breath flows ... or perhaps not ... Just knowing what you are feeling in the body (Pause)</p>	<p>Orienting: having brought attention and movement to neck and shoulders, now bringing attention and movement to spine and torso, including arms</p> <p>Note: if there isn't room between participants, having them bring the arms forward and up</p> <p>Allowing: use of subjunctive mood, so that this is exploration, not striving</p> <p>Orienting: reminding participants to let the breath flow; this is important because holding the breath seems to be a default mode, particularly for beginners</p> <p>Allowing: in the subjunctive mood; keeping it light and gentle</p>
<p>With your next exhalation, slowly bringing the arms back down ... paying attention to sensations as you negotiate with gravity ... (Pause)</p> <p>Feeling the body as you sit here in mountain pose ... During mindful yoga, we are letting the sensations in the body be at the center of the attention ... but there is nothing to push away ... sensations, thoughts, and emotions come and go ... we are simply noticing and making room for it all ... (Pause)</p>	<p>Orienting: the returning motions of a pose are as important as the movements to assume it; there is much to be explored in moments that are often discounted</p> <p>Allowing: reminder that whatever is in present moment experience is allowed</p> <p>Embodying: the pause here is regulated by self-awareness and sense of the confluence</p>

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<p>Now, as you inhale, bringing the right arm up, if possible, alongside the ear, and turning the palm to face the left ... dropping the shoulders as you breathe out ... and on another in-breath stretching upwards ... and on your out-breath gently bending to the left ... can you soften where you don't need tension right now? Maybe checking the muscles of the face, neck, and shoulders ... and just breathing and feeling this stretch...</p> <p>If you notice that you're pushing, see if it's possible to ease off a bit ... (Pause)</p> <p>Now, as you inhale, slowly coming back to center, feeling the motions of the body ... and on your next out-breath bringing the right arm back down, and tracking those sensations ... (Pause)</p> <p>Resting here in seated mountain pose Noticing whatever sensations are here in the body. Perhaps there is tingling, pulsing, throbbing, or some other sensation ... (Pause)</p> <p>Now, when you are ready, taking a breath in and lifting the left arm up, and turning the palm to face towards the right ... on the out-breath, perhaps the shoulders can drop down ... and on the in-breath, stretching through the left fingertips ... and on the out-breath, gently bending towards the right ... feeling the left side of the torso lengthening ... Can you feel the sensations of stretching on the left, as well as sensations on the right side of the body? Perhaps you can find areas that don't need to be working, and allow them to soften ... (Pause)</p> <p>As you inhale, slowly sensing your way back to center ... and as you exhale, being in touch as the left arm comes back down...</p> <p>Pausing here and simply noticing sensations, including sensations of the breath moving the body ... (Pause)</p>	<p>Note: this next movement could be done with both arms up, moving once towards the right and then towards the left, or using one arm up at a time; context can help determine which to use</p> <p>Orienting: attending to both directions of the pose; it's all worthy of notice</p> <p>Languaging: offering possible sensations</p> <p>Orienting: symmetrical movements</p> <p>Embodying: pauses are always regulated by self-awareness and sense of the confluence</p>
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<p>We are going to move now into some gentle twists... So, bringing your right hand behind you—you can choose to place it on arm of the chair, or on the seat behind you, or just grab hold of the side of the chair or wherever it feels right for you... Paying attention to the right shoulder... can it stay dropped down?</p> <p>Now, bringing the left hand to the outside of the right knee or thigh... still facing forward—you can look at my version of this pose, if the instructions seem confusing... as you inhale, lengthen through the spine... and as you exhale, slowly start to twist the torso towards the right, beginning from the base of the spine... just breathing and twisting... continuing to feel the twist move up the spine, perhaps even turning your head to look over your right shoulder... (Pause)</p> <p>How is it with you now? What is it like in the region of the face, neck, and shoulders? Is there tightness or softness? There's no way it should be, but it is interesting to know...</p> <p>On your next out-breath slowly bringing your head back to center, feeling how it is to unwind the body... and when you're unwound, just sitting and breathing... knowing how it is... (Pause)</p>	<p>Orienting: having practiced lateral bends, moving now into twisting movement of the spine</p> <p>Embodying: <i>you can look at my version of this pose—the teacher is not an ideal model, but a helpful reference point</i></p> <p>Orienting: attending to the entire movement of the pose; sensing what it is to come out of the stretch, to come to center, and only then taking the pause</p>
<p>Now, let's do the other side.... bringing the left hand behind you and placing it wherever it feels right for you in this moment... Keeping that left shoulder dropped down and placing the right hand to the outside of the left knee or thigh, still facing forward—just look at me for the basic idea... Now, without rushing or forcing anything, breathing out slowly, and starting to twist the towards the left... starting at the base of the spine... and on each in-breath pausing to lengthen the spine, while on each out-breath, continuing to feel the twist move up the spine... perhaps even turning the head to look over the left shoulder... (Pause)</p> <p>Breathing here as you feel the sensations of twisting... What happens if you are able to soften and relax a bit more into the pose? (Pause)</p> <p>On your next out-breath, slowly bringing your head back to center, unwinding through the body and just feeling the sensations... when you come to center, noticing how it is as you sit here and breathe... (Pause)</p>	<p>Orienting: using the pose symmetrically</p> <p>Embodying: using the teacher as a guide not an ideal</p> <p>Languageing: the subjunctive mood, in a question, to encourage exploration without judgment</p> <p>Embodying: pauses are always regulated by self-awareness and sense of the confluence; perhaps here participants may be ready for a longer pause</p>

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<p>Now bringing your attention to the hips and pelvis ... feeling the buttocks and how they make contact with the chair ... sensing into the legs and feet As much as possible, letting go of judgment, and simply bringing a curious, kind attention to sensations...</p> <p>Perhaps lifting the toes and wiggling them around a bit ... and as you place the toes back on the floor feeling the sensation of contact that the feet make with the floor ... Pressing into the balls of the feet, and letting the heels come off the floor ... and then bringing the heels down and letting the front of the foot come off the floor ... and returning the feet firmly to the floor Now, if it feels right, raising your right leg up, extending the leg as much as is comfortable ... flexing the foot, stretching through the ball of the foot, while keeping the toes relaxed ... And moving back and forth—flexing and pointing the foot and feeling into the sensations here, perhaps in the ankle joint. You may notice the muscles in the back of the leg more as you reach through the heel and the front of the leg more as you reach through the ball of the foot ... (Pause)</p> <p>Now rotating the foot in one direction... ...and then the other ... staying with the sensations of the foot, ankle, and leg ... Coming to quiet, and then bringing the sole of the foot back to the floor ... (Pause)</p> <p>Sensing the body as a whole sitting here. What sensations are you aware of right now? [Repeating this set of instructions for the left foot...]</p>	<p>Orienting: bringing attention and movement to the region of the hips, pelvis, buttocks</p> <p>Orienting: bringing attention and movement from the feet upwards through the legs</p> <p>Embodying: calling out specific possibilities, based on the teacher's experience in the moment</p> <p>Orienting: ensuring symmetry</p>
<p>Now, coming back to seated mountain pose If you care to, taking the right foot off the floor and placing it across the left thigh just above the knee, flexing the right foot and gently encouraging the right knee to move downwards. Breathing and feeling sensations...</p> <p>Remember, you can adapt any instructions that are given, and if you are refraining from a movement you can imagine the body making the movement...</p> <p>[Repeat on other side]</p>	<p>Embodying: a teacher who is sensitive to the shared space will see if participants are struggling, or if someone is not doing a movement, and can then include such possibilities in the guidance</p> <p>Orienting: symmetry</p>

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<p>Coming back to a seated mountain pose, feeling the body as a whole. Taking a breath in and as you exhale, shifting the weight forward, bringing the chest forward towards the thighs, keeping the spine long as we bend forward. Coming only as far forward as is comfortable for you. If you need to, you can rest your forearms on your legs or let them hang alongside the legs ... if it is comfortable, allowing the head to move towards the floor, following gravity...</p> <p>Breathing here ... perhaps feeling the breath in the back of the body ... (Pause)</p> <p>As you're ready, slowly rolling back up, noticing how that movement feels, moment by moment ... (Pause)</p>	<p>Orienting: concluding the sequence of movements with a forward bend</p> <p>Allowing: offering alternatives</p>
<p>Coming back, now, into the seated mountain pose ... rooted and uplifted ... and inviting the body to be as relaxed as possible in this pose. Just resting now, and feeling sensations throughout the entire body ... (Pause)</p>	<p>Orienting: returning to the starting posture</p> <p>Allowing: opening to sensations without judgment</p> <p>Embodying: pauses are always regulated by self-awareness and sense of the confluence; each class will need its own time before moving on after a practice is done</p>

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have tried to make clear the full investment of the teacher that is required in the skill set of guidance. The necessary and thorough discussion of language use, together with the presentation of a complete script may seem to locate the guidance skillset in a cognitive realm of definitions, connotations, phraseology, and other analyzable and potentially controllable features. However, we have strongly suggested that other realms of skill, of perhaps even greater complexity and less open to direct control, are just as important in catalyzing and cultivating mindfulness in the group. It is mindfulness, co-created, that offers the depth, safety, and power of a shared space in which participants and teacher alike may be transformed—endowed with new potentials.

Languaging certainly does matter. There are concepts, techniques, and even words and phrases which a teacher can use skillfully to help cultivate mindfulness. The other three dimensions are far less transparent. Orienting, embodying, and allowing involve the full being of the teacher. Even the best descriptions of all of them together will certainly fail to describe the qualities of an effective teacher guiding mindfulness practice. Yet, before we close, it may be useful to sketch out the possibilities of each.

Orienting has its evident techniques—for example, a narrative arc, or a refrain, as we’ve noted—but its roots lie in a deeper place. We suggest that the skill of orienting is ultimately affective—it comes from *caring*. Through guidance, the teacher offers each practice in a way that balances the gentleness and comfort of being led along a trail that the guide knows well against the insights and possibilities that arise in moments of being lost and vulnerable. Such balance and such caring require courage—and a total commitment to learning every inch of the territory to be traversed.

Embodying is the skill that most exposes the teacher. As the concept of confluence suggests, each participant—with the teacher the most visible—is continually responding to whatever is happening in the room in the moment. Therefore, the teacher is also the most likely source of others’ responses, particularly in the early classes. There is no way out, nowhere to hide, and no time for the teacher to perfect herself. Mindfulness is a co-creation by definition, not by choice. This feature is challenging and yet possibly transformative. For example, as a class “drops in” to a formal mindfulness practice, physiological changes take place. The teacher’s expression and posture may shift to reflect greater relaxation, while her vocal qualities of tone and volume may do likewise. Guidance offered in such an embodied situation (when the teacher can maintain volume!) may catalyze and transform the shared practice of the group.

Allowing is a culmination of the guidance skills. Language, as it affects the cognitive realm, can make the practice more psychologically available to participants. Orienting draws participants in, through navigation with a caring affect. And embodiment catalyzes the key move of the pedagogy, the capacity for participants and teacher to be with and in their experiences of the moment. That, of course, is the allowing of which we speak. There is no technique to master. There is only the practice to enter. And—this cannot be said often enough—the practice teaches the teacher and participants alike.

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