

***DIALOGICAL AND EASTERN PERSPECTIVES ON THE SELF IN PRACTICE:
TEACHING MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION
IN PHILADELPHIA AND SEOUL***

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Abstract. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is an eight-week, group-based course that employs mindfulness meditation and other potentially self-reflective activities to help participants reduce stress and improve wellbeing. While acknowledging debts to various traditions of Buddhism and other “Eastern” philosophies and practices, MBSR presents itself as a secular practice and avoids any *explicit* statements about theories of the self. However, the teacher’s seat in an MBSR course offers a view of the *implicit* conceptions of the self with which participants are engaged, often unreflectively, and presses teachers to undertake their own reflections on such conceptions, as well as on their own working theory or theories of the self. The authors, who are highly trained and experienced MBSR teachers in two very different cultural contexts, in Philadelphia and Seoul, propose to use the privileged view from their teachers’ seats to observe and reflect on the theories of self that are at play in their MBSR classes. Through an exchange of letters describing their own practical experiences and theoretical commitments, the authors compare and contrast the conceptions of self that are at play in their classrooms and the theories underlying their pedagogical approaches. This epistolary dialogue explores in an open-ended fashion the practical utility of views of self from Buddhist traditions, with particular reference to Zen; from Hermans’s “dialogical self,” and from Gergen’s “relational being,” among others, inviting readers to their own reflections and conclusions.

There is a telling irony in the use of the idea, even of the word, “self” in the pedagogy of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), and, indeed, in any of the mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs). Although the practices and the contents of these curricula are highly self-reflective and often lead participants to revise their self-perception, the topic of “the self” is not engaged theoretically or intellectually. Teachers rarely introduce the word when speaking with participants. However, when participants

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introduce it, teachers will then engage—with an openness that allows the participants to make their own observations, their own meanings, and to come to their own understandings of their in-the-moment experience. Referring specifically to shifts in self-perception, Saki Santorelli, the executive director of Center for Mindfulness at University of Massachusetts Medical School, states: “My colleagues and I don’t ever lecture about this or say this to people. *They* say it to us. They say things like, ‘Who am I if I am now observing these things?’” (Horrigan, 2007, p. 140).

This reluctance to theorize or intellectualize about the “self” comes primarily from the stance of mindfulness pedagogy that participants’ direct explorations of present moment experience offer more potential for transformation than any teacher-supplied explanation (McCown, Reibel & Micozzi, 2010). It also reflects diffidence towards the language and resources of such explanations, particularly in the context of teaching. The seemingly obvious temptation of drawing on Buddhist ideas about the self, or on ideas from other spiritual traditions, would compromise the distinctively secular presentation of the MBIs that has helped them to achieve acceptance within the medical and mental healthcare establishment. In another direction, drawing on psychology for exposition and explanation actually reveals a dearth of resources, as “self” in contemporary academic psychology is a vague and ambiguous term spread across a wide variety of potential conceptual frameworks (Stam, 2002).

Within such a context, then, it is fitting for two MBSR teachers to describe how they attend to the idea of self in encounters with participants. The authors’ locations in a major city on the East coast of the United States and a major city in South Korea may help to identify differences in implicit ideas about the self, West and East. Our process is simple. I, Don McCown, write about my experience and perspective from my seat in Philadelphia, and Heyoung Ahn responds, comparing and contrasting, from his seat in Seoul. There are three exchanges, before a final reflection. The first explores how “the self” works in the classroom. That is, how we work with the *implicit* ideas that the participants, in our different cultural contexts, hold about the self. The second reflects on the *explicit* theories that we as teachers may use, in an unspoken fashion, as we track what is happening with participants. Third, perhaps the most challenging, is a reflexive contemplation on “who is it that is teaching,” and how our understanding of that question shapes our work. We close by capturing insights about the self, West and East.

The First Exchange: Implicit Theories of Self

Dear Heyoung: In this first letter, I want to describe, without theory or intellectualizing, what happens around the idea of self in my classroom, by giving an account of a moment of practice at the very start of an MBSR course.

After the preliminaries and discussion of logistics, I ask folks to come to quiet for a few minutes and contemplate the question, “What brings you here?” Then, I ask them if they would like to introduce themselves and share any answer to the question

that they wish. There is no requirement to say anything beyond their name, but nearly everyone has something to say. Much of what gets said is told as a story — of an ongoing illness or an unresolved situation — often sprinkled with apologies for going on too long or getting caught up in detail. When it is not a story, it is a statement of some diagnosis or classification — a label to which they have been reduced, an intense reification.

These two domains of exhausting narratives and restricting labels, it seems to me, predominate in the implicit ideas of the self with which participants have arrived in the classroom. We could certainly chalk this up to the highly individualistic culture in which most have been steeped. I'll consider just a few of the many possible dimensions of the culture that demonstrate the power that produces participants' identities — I'm referencing Foucault (1980), Gergen (2009), and Rose (1990), in what follows. Let's start with the long view of history, the ideas of the soul and of sin, which developed in the Western church of the middle ages into an individual self that must report its intentions to an authority for evaluation and reform, and that in the Protestant reformation becomes an internalizing of authority and technique—self-scrutiny and self-evaluation. Many of my participants are heirs to, if not practitioners of, these ways of constituting a self. I wonder, Heyoung, if perhaps you have a reflection on differences or similarities in the long historical/religious background in Korea.

Now, let's consider two other constructing and constricting points: consumerism and evaluation. Americans are consumers, choosing romantic partners, colleges, careers, cars, and candies—each choice acting as a label of who we are. Our obsessive engagement with social media might be seen as a continual grooming or curating of a self. On the other side, we are constantly under evaluation, scrutinized by others and self in relationships, in school, at work—anxious to know how we measure up. Add to this, for my participants, the clinical observation and testing resulting in impersonal diagnostic labels that characterize their encounters with the medical and mental health system. In the process, they are asked to infinitely rehearse their story of what's wrong, to be told what's broken, and, in many cases, what can't be fixed. They come to know their diagnoses as who they are. Through what Ian Hacking (2000) describes as looping effects, they are subtly instructed in how to act, how to speak of themselves, and what stories to tell about the past or future, given the identity that their diagnosis (or diagnoses!) defines.

What I'm pointing to is that for a great many participants the self is something bound up tight: trapped in a narrative or a label, or a narrative about a label. As I listen to speaker after speaker, I perceive a contraction in my body, in the solar plexus, the gut. I'd probably say, unguardedly, that it's a contraction of my own self. This is not mild metaphor; this is familiar experience. I have learned to be with/in it, to let it breathe and possibly expand, through mindfulness practice. I exchange the unrelenting character of these narratives for the present moment's depth and richness. I become

present to something beyond the fear and the pain pent up in the stories: the actuality and potential of these faces, these eyes, these beings around me. As well, I relieve the claustrophobic contraction of my own label (teacher) by expanding beyond it, by finding more space inside my body. These moves are much of what I use to meet the participants' litany of suffering. It looks and sounds something like this:

As the introductions go around the circle, we get to "I'm Maria, and I don't think I can do this."

"What's this," I ask.

"This course... being quiet and meditating and stopping my thinking... I've never been able to manage that. My mind is racing all the time, like now. I'm always full of worries, so every time I try to stop and be quiet like I know you're supposed to, it just gets that much louder in my head. And so I can't sit still. At home, I'd already be up and doing something, washing dishes, doing laundry, something to distract me. That's the only thing that works..."

"So Maria," I interrupt, "That's not what I'm seeing in the present moment. I'm seeing someone who is focused and engaged and sitting in one place."

"I guess," she says.

I ask, "Can you put the story you're telling on hold for a moment, and simply check in with what it's like for you right now?" Then, looking around the group, I say, "This is something you all can try, too. Maybe there's a way that you can explore this idea for yourself."

Turning back to Maria, I suggest, "Maybe checking in to how it is now—in this moment. Just knowing that you're sitting here, feeling your feet on the floor, and feeling the chair holding you... Maybe closing your eyes, if that's comfortable..." A long ten seconds of quiet, and then, "Taking a little while with it... Noticing your body and where it's touching down." Another longer pause, and then, "So how is it with you right now, Maria? In this moment, without your story?"

"Right now, it's not too bad... It's OK. I know I'm still in the chair, and my mind feels less racy," she says.

"So, maybe the thought 'I can never be still' is just a thought, a part of a story that's not true in this moment?"

Maria says, "I guess so."

"It's a possibility," I say, and turn to the rest of the group. "Do you see this difference Maria is noticing, between a story about what's happening in the moment and what you can find out is happening when you pay attention?" Lots of hands.

“That’s a way of thinking about mindfulness. It’s always available, even when your mind is racing... Thanks, Maria, for being willing to do this.”

And so, Heyoung, that’s what it looks like from my seat in the circle. Participants are bound up tight within their story or their label, and attention to their awareness in the present moment relieves their restrictions, somehow. I see these folks as suffering in a way from our culture’s emphasis on being independent, on being a powerful individual, at all times. They need a space in which they can let go of the restrictions placed upon them, and, as much as possible, be with and in their experience of the moment, whether it is aversive or pleasant. The MBSR class, somehow, creates a space in which that key move is supported. At least, that’s part of my theorizing about it. That’s where I would like to go next; you’ll hear more from me soon. Meanwhile, I’m wondering what it’s like in your opening classes. What implicit conceptions of the self are at play with your participants? Maybe it’s the same as in Philadelphia, or maybe you can focus the differences for me. I look forward to hearing from you.

* * * * *

Dear Don: In general, my classes are different from one to another, so it is not easy to describe my first class in one perspective. Some individuals are very expressive while others remain silent, reserved. Some classes are more active and lively and others are less so. But generally speaking my first class, especially right before and in the first part of it, the whole class seems a little “quiet,” because participants are “waiting to see what is expected of them” and a sense of tension can be felt in the room. If I ask them to go around and introduce themselves, everyone can do so. Some people are more active and confident, but some look more shy, and anxious. My ‘teacher self’ says that I need to do something that will help establish a good comfortable classroom atmosphere, because I know from my experience that if the first few hours of class do not provide participants with impression that the whole class is not only safe but also rewarding, it will negatively influence the following class sessions, probably causing more dropout rate or less engagement of the participants. This is when I suggest to them that we will “do something together” (Ahn, in press), before I move to introduction going around, which is more personal). Here is a thumbnail sketch of the game. The class divides into two teams. I provide one target for each team. To make the game more fun, participants are asked to decide what will be the reward for the winning team. Usually they end up choosing to receive massage from the losing team. Each person start throwing a rubber band towards their assigned target. At the end of the game, the team having more bands located closer to the center of their target will become the winner.

The Rubber Band Throwing Game has some benefits including helping participants feel more connected, less anxious, thus giving them impression that this is a safe place. During the game, people get more relaxed and learn to make themselves more at home. They can even develop a sense of belonging to the class. And this more

inquiry by the teacher, they can get a better understanding of what they will learn, which is about mindfulness, paying attention to what's going on in their body and mind, and the situation.

The main reason I do this game before introduction of each participant (sometimes I minimize or even omit the individual introduction) is that people in the first class especially seem not so willing to express themselves. Even after the game some people look hesitant to talk about themselves.

I love what you are doing with Maria. There is lots of deep exchange, and inquiry.

I do not think Maria's case is common in my class, in the sense that during the introduction, "I'm Maria, and I don't think I can do this." There may be some people in my class who feel the same way with Maria. But it is one thing they feel personally and another to say it to all class members. In a collectivist culture, it would be harder for participants to reveal their opinion with transparency. It is especially so when an individual has something to say which is different from the group's or group leader's opinion. On occasions, the teacher here needs to "read between the lines," because indirect ways of saying things are not uncommon in this culture. The Korean language is said to be the "reader-responsible language" while English is the "author responsible language." There must be someone who is worried about whether they can complete the MBSR class, due to their health condition, busy schedule, their uncomfortable feeling about "meditation," or other concerns. But many of them will wait to the last minute to express their opinions and feelings to the whole class. Even if some people are more expressive than others, I think having a long teacher-led inquiry as you described is more common in the USA than here. As a teacher, I often feel that not a few of my participants expect me to offer a "solution" or "authoritative answer," rather than "asking for inquiry." This does not mean that they do not like a friendly and less authoritative atmosphere. More detailed inquiry though the language in the presence of others and with a teacher can be difficult for some people who were raised in this collectivistic culture.

I am not sure, but I seem to be leading my first class with a more focus on the collectivistic, more interdependent dimension. I do exchange with my participants individually, but end every inquiry with "universalizing," making an individual story more universal. I hope I do not ignore or lose the detailed meaning and nuance of an individual participant in the process, but who knows? By proceeding with the Rubber Band Game before the introduction, and sometimes even minimizing time for introduction, I emphasize emotional dimension, such as tension reduction and a sense of belonging and safety over the intellectual articulation of telling who I am. Without this preliminary activity, introductory going around, which I believe necessary, could

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engage participants in their personal stories thus increasing individual anxiety and the classroom tension.

I have an educated guess that there seems to be lots of similarity between our classes. And I have a vague hunch that there are different senses of self involved, dependent vs. independent self.

I remember one dialog between a female participant and me right after a sitting meditation in Class 4.

I ask the question, *“Any volunteer to share their experience?”*

One woman, named Sooyeon, responds, “During the sitting, I heard my stomach growling. I wanted to remain undisturbed. But I was drawn into a torrent of thoughts for the life of me, ‘Why I can’t remain at peace.’ I struggled to be out of those thoughts to no avail. Two kinds of thoughts came to me: One, a thought about shame, ‘Other people will laugh at me.’ The other thought, ‘I should not cause harm or inconvenience to others.’ These thoughts dominated and I became helpless, being preoccupied with those thoughts.”

So I ask, “Sooyeon, did you notice what happened to your body and mind?”

She responds, “I tried a couple of times, but the thoughts were very powerful... What I remember clearly is that I tried removing those thoughts, but that didn’t work. I was just full of a strong sense of shame and sorry.”

I turn to the whole class to ask, “How many of you will feel shame if you have your stomach growling during the class meditation?” More than two-thirds of the class raises hands. Sooyeon takes this in, and I say to her, “It’s interesting to know some feel shameful and others don’t. What made you feel different?”

There is some silence, and Sooyeon says, “I had a physically handicapped elder brother. When I heard the growling, suddenly thoughts about my elder brother occurred to me. I have suffered a sense of shame since my childhood when I was often ridiculed by my friends for my elder brother. I became highly sensitive and tense regarding the body since then, my whole life was spent struggling not to be ridiculed and not causing harm to others.”

“That must have been a hard experience,” I say. “People have different lives and reasons to respond differently. Some felt a shame and others didn’t. How did you notice a feeling of shame occurred to you?”

“I think the thoughts about my brother came to me automatically when my stomach started growling. Those thoughts led to many other thoughts surrounding my shameful experience associated with my friends’ making fun of me about my brother’s disability.”

With curiosity, I wonder aloud, "What would have happened if you heard the growling sound as it is, without being carried away with thoughts about your brother?"

Wondering herself, Sooyeon asks, "Do you mean I can get away from the thoughts?"

"Let us explore further," I suggest. "Can you bring your attention to your bodily sensation and see what happens now?"

After a long pause, she says, "Part of my body is still tense... but the intensity of the feeling has noticeably decreased." Another long pause, and she says, "Now I find that most of my thoughts I had during the sitting have gone. I feel better. I remember that my whole life was filled with tension and resistance because of that childhood experience. I struggled to avoid anything related to my body. I was conditioned to believe that anything related to the body is a shameful experience. Now I have a sense that my feeling has some connection with my thought about my brother, which automatically occurred to me against my will."

"Yes, you're right," I tell her. "Thoughts arise and pass away on their own. The important thing is you become aware of your thoughts as they are, right when they occur. For the past few weeks we learned to pay attention to our body when we experience pleasant and unpleasant events. Will you be able to pay attention to your body and mind in that moment of intense feeling?"

Sooyeon says, "Well, it will be difficult, but I think I can try."

I say, "We can see all sounds are natural phenomenon. That means that the stomach makes growling sound according to the law of nature. It is just a sound. It is not a 'shameful' experience. We can learn to see that feelings are just feelings, and bodies are just bodies. The natural sound can become 'shameful', 'embarrassed,' 'proud,' or 'angry,' when thoughts intervene. The growling sound you experienced triggered your painful memory associated with your brother and proliferated thoughts and emotions in your mind."

I continue, "You also said that you felt a sense of sorry. Could you tell us more about that?"

"I felt a strong sense of sorry because I was afraid that sound would interfere with everyone's meditation. I did not want to cause any inconvenience or trouble."

"I understand," I say, and turn to the others in the class. "Would anyone feel the same way?" More than half of them raise their hands. "Well, many of you share that feeling. It's a good thing to try causing no trouble to others. But your stomach growling sound is beyond your control, a natural phenomenon. What will happen when you pay attention to the sound as it is, not adding any thought to that sound?"

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Sooyeon says, "I didn't think about that. But I now realize that I was strongly conditioned by my childhood experience to react in a harmful way, thus repeating the same patterns in my mind. It dawns on me that I can do better at my mediation from now on."

I think this kind of story happens sometimes in my class. Don, I am curious to know if the similar thing happens in your class as well. The stomach growling is a natural phenomenon, but different cultures attach different meaning to it. And the way we respond to this sound could differ from one person to another even in the same culture. For the sake of generalization, the following table, drawn from the work of Gudykunst and Kim (1992, p. 70), can be helpful in illustrating the cultural differences between our two countries.

Table 1 *Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures*

Individualistic	Collectivistic
Emphasis on individual's goals	Emphasis on in-group's goal
Self-realization	Fitting into the in-group
Little difference between in-group and out-group communication	Large difference between in-group and out-group communication
Independent self construal	Interdependent self construal
"I" identity	"We" identity
Saying what you are thinking	Avoiding confrontations in in-group
Low-context communication that is direct, precise, and absolute	High-context communication that is indirect, imprecise, and probabilistic

Among those characteristics, "independent self-construal" vs. "interdependent self-construal" and "I identity" vs. "We identity" seem relevant to the story cited above.

Sooyeon noticed she felt a sense of shame and sorry when she had her stomach growling. She came to understand that she had reacted with shame as far as the body experience is concerned since her childhood experience associated with her brother's disability. After long years of suffering arising from her conditioning, she began to learn through meditation that she was adding to her experience (in this case stomach growling, which is natural phenomenon) through her unbridled thoughts. Her habit of experiencing shame regarding the body experience was personally conditioned by her brother's disability.

She also felt a sense of sorry due to her stomach growling. She said she didn't want to cause any harm or trouble to the class. I am not sure there are many people like her in your class in the USA. It seems that she has been highly conscious of other people—her brother, her friends in childhood, and the whole class cited above. The unpleasant experience of being ridiculed by friends became her trauma, and she became reactive to any physical phenomenon until she realized that the body is just a body, a natural phenomenon. What will happen when she realizes that her brother's disability could not become her problem, that is, her shame? It seems to me that her culture—interdependent self and we identity—plays a big role in her feeling of shame and sorry. For example, in a collectivist culture where each member shares a “we” identity, a child's failure of a college entrance exam could be considered a shame to all members of the family. An individual's values and goals are important, but those of the group are no less important. In this kind of culture, Sooyeon's feeling of shame and sorry can still be interpreted as the norm rather than the exception.

Now, in Korea, the I/We divide differs from one person to another. Although many of my participants will share the influence of the collectivistic characteristics, some of them will show typical individualistic cultural characteristics. In general, my participants will show a tendency to be more group-oriented, more conscious of the class atmosphere (i.e., relationships or opinions of others), more hesitant to stand out or to express their opinion when it is likely to clash with opinions of others than their individualistic-culture counterparts.

To answer your question about the historical and religious forces at work in constructing the Korean ways of being, I would put it this way. Confucianism and Buddhism exerted primary influences on traditional Korean social patterns. Before that, Shamanism was a great influence, and Christianity is the newest one. Throughout history, and especially during the Choson Kingdom era (from 1392 to 1910), Confucianism took deep root in Korean minds, emphasizing the value of social harmony and hierarchy. The relationships between superiors (in terms of power, wealth, gender, or family, for example) were highly stratified, and people were supposed to behave accordingly. In this collectivist and hierarchical society, Koreans learned to behave in accordance with the expectations of others in society rather than individual preferences—their behaviors are field-dependent.

Participants here have a self which “includes” important others. They have to consider others all the time, because the society values harmony with others. For example, a mother's self would include parents, parents in law, husband, husband's brothers and sisters, and, especially, her children. The mother will easily sacrifice herself in the service of her close family members. Because of her “inclusive self” her life is full of others' lives, while hiding her personal needs, desires or goals, regardless of her intention (Moon Park, 2011). Such other-oriented world-views and lifestyles can be both virtues and vices. When things go well, they can serve the person and others at

the same time; yet, they can also do irreversible harm to the person. In this kind of culture, individuals tend to read others' faces before they talk, often impeding their capacity to express their opinions or feelings freely.

In a collectivist culture, people are expected to live not as individuals but as a part of the groups to which they belong. Their self expands and shrinks in accordance with the group they are in. They subject their goals to those of the groups. They have a sense of common destiny with the group. Personal values cannot be defined in isolation of the person who speaks of it. The relationship defines everything: Koreans have a collectivist self. They do not think of "I" as the center of what they do, they think from the perspective of "we." Their concern is how well they fit within the group they belong to.

However, it would be a mistake to take it for granted that this collectivist tendency is the only norm in modern-day Korea. Rising above the total devastation caused by the Korean War, South Korea has become one of the twelve strongest economic powers in the world. Korean-pops and dramas are greeted with open hands anywhere on the globe. Koreans have evolved a different culture and language, and have now become more dynamic in the midst of ongoing globalization. The collectivist self and the individual self exist at the same time and even in the same person, in numerous degrees and ways.

The Second Exchange: Pedagogical Practice

Dear Heyoung: Your response is intriguing to me, and, in fact, makes me realize how little I really know about the differences between the participants in our classes, although we both teach from the same curricular frame of MBSR. Just as one example that captured me, your participants are loath to speak of their personal stories at first, yet I know from talks with you that they are very willing to interact closely physically and even to be touched by others (the prize for winning the game is a massage!). My groups are shaped in the opposite way, in that it would be very difficult to get folks to be physically close, while many are willing to tell their story quite early in the course. This all makes me wonder about the relationships of participants to their bodies.

The MBSR curriculum emphasizes bringing participants to embodied experience in the first few classes, starting with the body scan practice and other explorations of sensory, proprioceptive, and interoceptive experiences. This approach is revealing for many of my participants, who find that they are distanced from their bodies. The inquiry with Maria in my last letter, and yours with Sooyeon, shows how the body can become a site in which thoughts and emotions can be explored and deconstructed by bringing attention to the experience of the present moment, particularly at an embodied, sensory level. After all, one can only feel the body in the present moment—so the body is the gateway to mindfulness (as its position as the first

of the four “foundations of mindfulness,” presented in an early Buddhist text, the *Satipatthana Sutta* (e.g., Analayo, 2003), would suggest.

So, in some sense, our classes and teaching meet in the immediacy of bodily experience. What is important to me in these situations is that such moments of inquiry are part of a process of generating a space that becomes a resource for the teacher and participant for exploration and deconstruction of experience in a spoken inquiry dialogue, and also for the simultaneous use of all the gathered participants in the possible unspoken “internal” dialogues generated by their attention to their own moment-to-moment experience. As I will attempt to describe later in this letter, and in the next one, this space has a special character. It is not mediated entirely, or even predominantly, by language. It includes, in our examples, not only me and Maria or you and Sooyeon, but also includes the silence and the embodied presence of the others in the class. We may say then that both mindfulness and the space in which it is cultivated are co-created, to use Gergen’s phrase (e.g., 2009). In fact, the two may be identical.

What I most want to do in this letter is to try to talk more theoretically—to intellectualize a bit, as promised—about how mindfulness helps to relieve the highly constricted sense of the reified self that is a story or label. There’s a pinch that both Maria and Sooyeon felt. There’s a self-consciousness for both the independent and collectivist self. The possibility of relief is found in the co-creation of mindfulness through teaching and learning—within a particularly constituted space.

What the teacher works from is an idea that there is, somehow, more to the self (however constituted) than what the participant perceives in the moment. And, this seems to be played out successfully by bringing attention to, and maintaining it on, the experience of the present moment in a friendly way, which is the key move of the pedagogy.

I have considered the pedagogical process with colleagues here in the U.S., and described it in a way that has been useful for the practice of MBI teachers (McCown et al., 2010). Our intention was to be practical, to assume the implicit ideas of the self that are already available in the classroom, and work with them. Now, in this letter, I have a chance to revisit that original description, and to apply a greater repertoire of theoretical resources.

My colleagues and I derived five teaching intentions from MBSR, and proposed them as a meta-structure of the MBIs (McCown et al., 2010). This structure includes three intentions that are emphasized from the very start of the class: “experiencing new possibilities,” “discovering embodiment,” and “growing compassion” (considered first as compassion for the self and later, perhaps, as compassion for others). The other two intentions, “cultivating observation” and “moving toward acceptance,” take a little more time to ripen, and they comprise the key move in relieving the constriction of self:

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It is the “turning towards the symptoms” at the historical root of the MBIs. It is the being with/in of experience that is the central invitation to participants. It is the transformation through which participants find that they are “big enough” and “have enough space” within them—within awareness—to hold whatever is arising in the moment. (McCown, et al., 2010, p. 179)

This is the move made by both Maria and Sooyeon, in their dialogues with us. They began to pay attention to their experience in the present moment, and to find a friendly way to let the uncomfortable feelings be there. This is what participants practice in class, whether in meditation, direct dialogue with the teacher, or in the “inner” dialogue that takes place while attending to someone else’s spoken dialogue with the teacher. My colleagues and I have described this move in a series of symbolic drawings that make use of a spatial metaphor for awareness (McCown et al., 2010). This metaphor is valuable in clinical encounters, because the space can be interpreted on a corporeal level as tension accompanying the anxiety generated by unwanted thoughts or sensations, and on a cognitive or emotional level as the diminishment of potential futures through restricting stories and labels. Of course, in looking at these drawings, it must be noted that a circle is bounded, while awareness is unbounded.

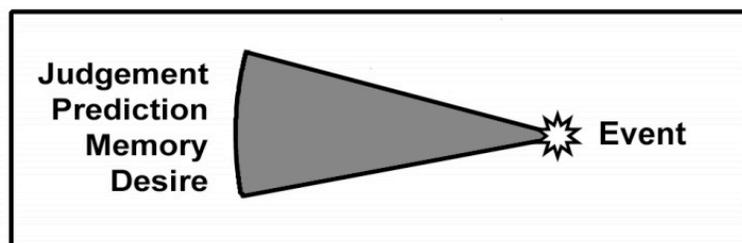


Figure 1. Perceiving, say, a thought or a pain, the participant identifies with it and judges it — its future, its past, and its desirability. His attention constricts around it, leaving but a tiny slice of the fullness of awareness. This happens not only with unpleasant experiences, but also with pleasant and neutral experiences, although the constriction then may be less evident.

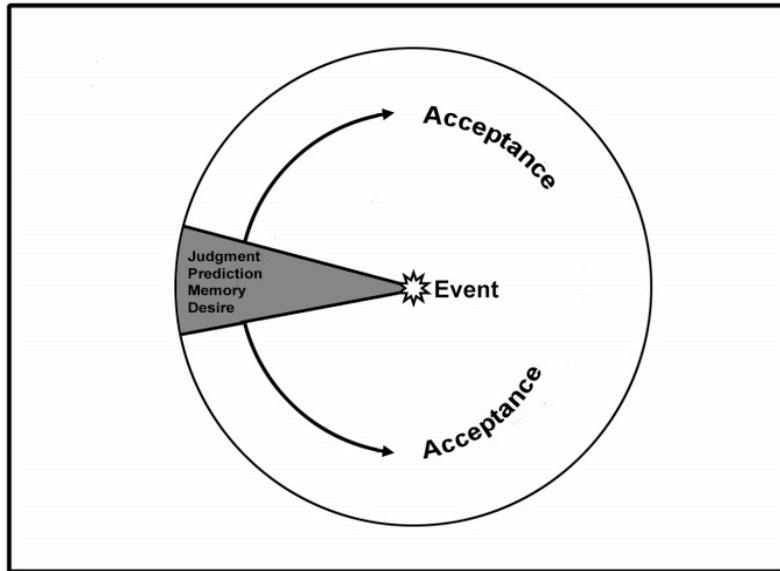


Figure 2: When the participant can observe that he is restricted around the event, awareness can expand. It is as if the restricted self locates another self that has a wider view. There is relief in this; often it is physical relief.

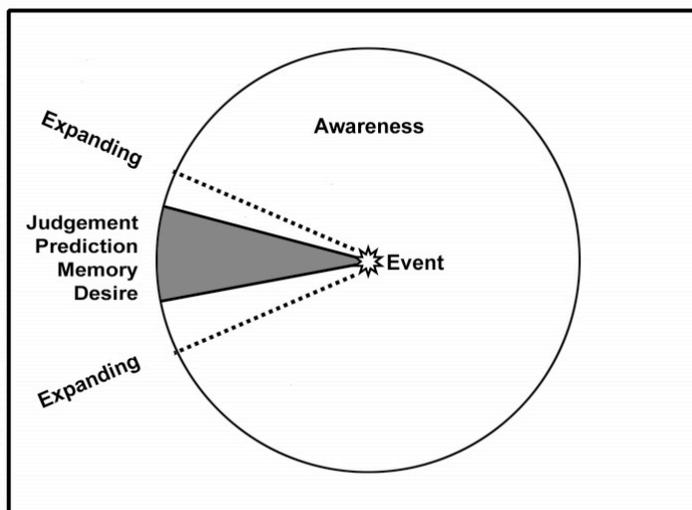


Figure 3: The possibility of observing the restricted self may lead to an easing of the limitations imposed by judgment—future, past, and desirability. This could be thought of as acceptance.

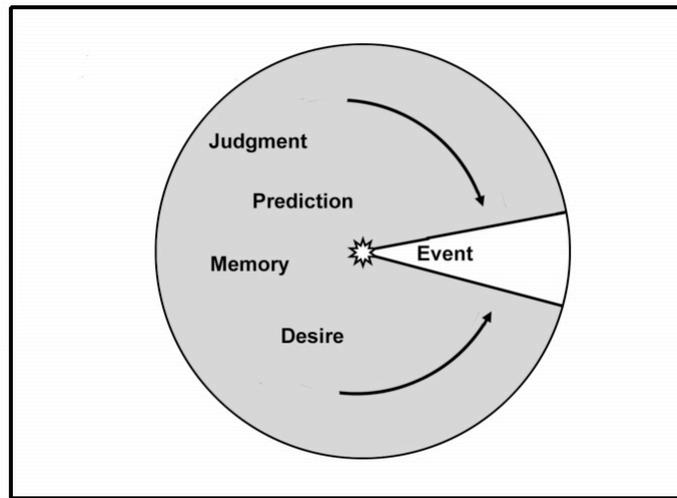


Figure 4: As the limitations are eased and awareness expands, possibilities find space to come into being. And body tension turns to ease.

What is important to me in attempting to use dialogical self theory as a resource for a re-description of this key move, is to maintain connection to the body and simultaneously to avoid defining the move as happening “inside” a reified, bounded self. As I think ahead, my next letter will describe my understanding of my “teacher self,” which I can only conceive in relational, interdependent, unbounded terms.

Dialogical self theory is a resource in three ways for my re-description of the key move of the MBIs.

First, the spatializing of the self that Hermans (1992, 2004) describes provides models of spaces that can fit with participants’ experiences and their inchoate understanding of self. Hermans uses Jaynes’s (1976) notion that the self is spatially organized around an *I* and a *Me*—a knower and known, subject and object, author and actor. For me, this allows a description of the key move of the MBIs. That which is identified with the “event” could be called the *Me*, constricted by judgment. In Figure 2, the *I* that notices and knows the constriction of *Me* is in a larger, expanded space. In Figure 3, the larger context allows an easing of judgment, and, one might say a softening of the *Me*. By the time of Figure 4, the *I*, which would be better identified now by its alias “the knower”—or, best of all, “the knowing”—is a far less restricted awareness. With this knowing, so it would seem, begins the relief of constriction that our participants felt as they turned towards and stayed with/in their distressing feelings.

Further, the spatiality of dialogical self theory is not simply a metaphorical mind-space, it is also a literal space that includes people and things, community and nature—the other. This offers “room” for the kind of relationality that I hope to explore in this and my next letter—culminating in the full description of the space that is co-created in the pedagogy of mindfulness.

Second, I am very much drawn to Cooper’s (2004) adaptation of Buber’s I-Thou mode of interpersonal relating to describe *intrapersonal* relating. This allows a rich, holistic re-description of the key move in the MBIs. Buber’s contrast is I-It to I-Thou, while Cooper has shifted the terms to intrapersonal space, and contrasts I-Me to I-I. In the I-Me relation, much as in Figure 1, the Me that is identified with the event of a story or a pain, say, is judged, excluded, wished-away, disowned by the I that notices. The Me, which is actually another I-position, is not engaged or known in an intimate way by the dominating I. Cooper notes that the encounter does not take place in the present, but rather in the past or future that shape speculative ideas about the Me. These are generalized ideas rather than the uniqueness of the actual, in the moment, experience. Thus, the key move, the dropping of the story or label and turning towards what is happening in the present moment, reveals the Me as another I, and the relation becomes I-I — not an over-rationalized monologue about experience, but a holistic dialogue that is with and in (with/in) experience, open to specifics, to emotion, to intuition, and to embodied understanding. This then is the motion of the key move: from a place of judgment, prediction, memory, and desire (as in Figure 1) toward a situation in which possibilities may be discovered and explored (as in Figure 4). Such a description, I think, highlights the sense of friendliness that is imbued in the practice, going beyond mere “nonjudgment” and carrying the relation into the realm of the sacred. It suggests, as well, that the I-I dialogue may be embodied and silent, rather than negotiated in language—two equals coming together and discovering a spiritual connection in which both can dwell with ease, as Buber describes in his essay, “Dialogue,” from *Between Man and Man* (1947). In Buber’s tale, two people are seated together while traveling; they are strangers and do not converse. The one is calm, present in the moment, and rests in postures that communicate ease, nonreactivity, and openness to whatever happens. The other is reserved, restricted, closed to even his own experience. Yet something happens between them:

And now — let us imagine that this is one of the hours which succeed in bursting asunder the seven iron bands about our heart — imperceptibly the spell is lifted. But even now the man does not speak a word, does not stir a finger. Yet he does something. The lifting of the spell has happened to him — no matter from where — without his doing. But this is what he does now; he releases in himself a reserve over which only he himself has power. Unreservedly communication streams from him, and the silence bears it to his neighbour (p. 4).

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Implicit in this moment of the story is the sense of an *exchange*; the *other* has come to know a new way of going on in the world, and it is not coincidental that *the one* is present.

Indeed it was intended for him, and he receives it unreservedly as he receives all genuine destiny that meets him. He will be able to tell no one, not even himself, what he has experienced. What does he now “know” of the other? No more knowing is needed. For where unreserve has ruled, even wordlessly, between men, the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally (p. 5).

Here, again, is the sensation of relief, the release of constriction or restriction that characterizes the key move of mindfulness pedagogy. Both the *one* and the *other* have come to a new, non-cognitive knowing. Both have been changed in a way that is only possible together. And, in my teaching experience, such a tale can be recounted from group encounters—whole classes come to know a new way to be, to have different potentials for responding to the experience of the moment, as I shall describe further in my next letter.

Both Cooper’s adaptation and Buber’s original ideas appeal to me as a teacher, as they provide a frame for tracking the unfolding of the experience of the moment in the classroom. These ideas are ultimately simple, friendly, and based in embodied experience. They do not call for engaging high levels of cognitive resources, as, perhaps, some of the more representative expressions of dialogical self theory may be considered to do. In fact, these ideas can be held by a teacher without ever being made explicit to participants. They are a description of, not a prescription for, possibilities of transformation.

Certainly, the full panoply of concepts of DST could be brought to play in analysis of the process of the pedagogy of mindfulness. This is not in question, and the value of such uses, as demonstrated, for example, in Marnberg and Bassarear (this issue), cannot be denied. My search in these letters, however, is for theoretical concepts that can be used by the teacher, in the moment, to understand the unique conditions of the MBSR classroom. I would plead here for an MBSR class as a special case, with limiting and defining characteristics that bar use of many concepts. Consider: classes are two-and-a-half-hours weekly, for eight weeks, plus one seven-hour silent retreat, and delivered as a group intervention (of up to 30, possibly even more, participants), which suggests that there is very little occasion for individual contact with the teacher, and thus little time to work with concepts other than those of mindfulness pedagogy. The emphasis in the classes is on the central move of turning towards and being with/in the experience of the present moment, as described above, which suggests the need to create a space that is conducive to it. I will offer a detailed description and a diagram of this space in my next letter. Meanwhile, the essential conditions would include sustained attention to the sensations of the body to maintain contact with the present

moment, a letting go of stories and labels to reduce emotional reactivity, a willingness to not know (that is, to not close down possibilities of new meanings emerging), and, of course, a stance of hospitality or friendliness towards ongoing experience. All of this limits possible useful concepts. I find that DST, however, does offer some candidates, as it is a “bridging theory” through which divergent research and practice traditions may meet (Hermans & Gieser, 2010).

Mamberg and Bassarear (this issue) offer analysis of MBSR participant self-narratives, showing how participants adopted an “MBSR voice” that includes the essential conditions of the classroom, which can be seen as a “meta-position” in DST. Through this meta-position, then, the reified self (the pinch, so to speak) may be loosened in “inner” dialogue, or even in spoken dialogue with the teacher, and a new, higher-level view may then allow an encompassing reflection on the I-positions comprising the constricting conceptions of the self.

Heyoung, this is very much evident in your inquiry with Sooyeon, as it is in my inquiry with Maria. We offer new perspectives that may be seen as meta-positions. When Maria says that she is distracted and can’t sit still, she is speaking from a story and not from present moment experience. I give her an immediate and more distanced perspective—my own: “That’s not what I’m seeing in the present moment. I’m seeing someone who is focused and engaged and sitting in one place.” It is also significant, for me, that this new perspective was not simply made of words. My vocal tone, facial expression, gestures, and body posture were friendly, as was my invitation to the others in the class to join us by engaging in their own silent inquiries. A space was created that was not simply in dialogue between Maria and me, but, rather, encompassed the group. Further, I’d like to suggest, it made the potential view of Maria’s meta-position (and perhaps that of others) quite wide—a “helicopter view” as Hermans and Geiser style it (2012, p. 15).

So, I’ve identified my third resource from DST. Meta-positions are workable as a concept for the MBSR teacher in the moment in the classroom, particularly because, as Mamberg and Bassarear (this issue) show, the encompassing view is directed and softened by the quality of friendliness that is central to the space established through the co-creation of the space of mindfulness pedagogy. Here DST helps to reveal the importance of the stress on friendliness or self-compassion in the pedagogy. As Mamberg and Bassarear (this issue) suggest, meta-position might be seen, in this context, as a developmental antecedent to “depositioning,” which is characterized by a greater connection to awareness. As Hermans and Gieser describe it,

...we feel *expanded* beyond ordinary boundaries while feeling most *close* to ourselves. Such moments of immediate and deep encounter with something beyond our usual self-definition are not possible by any form of mediated turn-taking. It is more like Buber’s *I-thou* connection (2012, p. 20; italics in original).

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In this, the role of DST as bridging theory is again revealed, connecting depositioning to the co-created space of mindfulness. As well, the concept of depositioning allows “the exploration of more collective versions of the self as they are prominent in all those cultures ... that celebrate we-experiences ... that make people feel part of a more encompassing whole” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 174). Heyoung, this would seem to be quite germane to your classes, and, given the emphasis on building connection to the group in the pedagogy, is a counter-move to the individualism assumed in my classes.

I hope I’ve offered some descriptions that are helpful for thinking about the similarities and differences of our participants’ inherent senses of self, and our similarities or differences of theorizing about it as well. As you may have noticed, I gravitate in my teaching towards language and ideas that are simple and intuitive, playing on the inherent understandings of the self already in the classroom. I do not engage in speculation about the self, or initiate the use of language of self or selves in talking with participants. I very much steer clear of allusions to “no self” or “oneness” or other terms that might be construed as “Buddhist” or “Eastern,” or even “religious.” I don’t feel that “no self” or “oneness” are discourses that are even truly available to me in the classroom, given my participants’ largely American, Judeo-Christian backgrounds. Yet I do find that being with/in experience, friendliness, and acceptance are concepts that resonate. I wonder how it is for you, and what forms of language and framing concepts are available for your use in your classes?

* * * * *

Dear Don: I agree with you when you said that “Participants are bound up tight within their story or their label, and attention to their awareness in the present moment shifts their restrictions, somehow.” That’s exactly how I experience my MBSR class here as well. However, the reason that my participants are suffering could be largely different from your folks who are suffering in a way from your culture’s emphasis on being independent, on being a powerful individual at all times. I suppose that my participants suffer not because of their culture’s emphasis on being independent, on being a powerful individual, but because of the pervasive, boundless, competition that threatens their collectivist, inclusive selves, inherently containing an individual self within. Yes, I read somewhere Korean college students have almost the individual (or subjective) self of their American counterparts, compared to Japanese students who have more collectivistic or objective selves. My observation is that Koreans seem to culturally inherit collectivistic selves and/or individual tendency at the same time. In today’s society of competition, many of them are torn apart between their “we self” (desiring harmony with others and meeting others expectations) and “I self” (maximizing personal benefits).

This is the implicit conception of the self that I believe is at play in my class. The individual wants a new luxury house, car, fame—desiring better and more continuously. But the social norms, expectations, and values are largely collectivistic, often opposing or in conflict with the individualistic ones. On the one hand they include many “important others” within their self; they feel the strong need to take good care of them. In reality, the others close to them can be sources of both their happiness and misery. Modern society seduces their individualistic needs and preferences to the maximum level.

Traditionally, Korea has developed a variety of contemplative practices like meditation, martial arts, and religious observances. So one might infer that such notions/traditions as meditation, non-doing, Buddhism, and Tao relatively pervade this nation. This inference is only partially true. Culturally and linguistically, Koreans may have been exposed to this kind of trans-rational or non-Western heritage. However, this does not mean that teaching meditation, especially insight meditation, is no less difficult here than in other parts of the world. Oftentimes, people’s opinion and attitude towards mindfulness differ from one to another. People tend to think of mindfulness as a religious practice, or a technique for relaxation, expelling all thoughts, mindreading, or magic like levitation.

In this environment, my MBSR teaching is offered on the following two assumptions: My first assumption is that teaching MBSR is intrinsically not different from culture to culture, because its theme is about becoming a human being, awake, alive, and finding out how to be awakened to who we really are, not about a specific knowledge or skill. My second assumption is that humans share similar basic instincts and dispositions such as pursuing likes and running away from dislikes, regardless of what kinds of cultures they are born in. Though they learn to think and behave differently as they grow, influenced by their own assimilation into their own culture and society, the way their mind works—i.e., pursuing likes, avoiding dislikes, being easily carried away by thought—and how they suffer accordingly do not seem to make a great difference between people with different cultures.

Like you, I do not use words such as no-mind, non-self in my classroom unless they are raised by a participant. I do not explain or lecture either. I use the metaphor of the vast sky and the cloud, and of a person looking down the river from the bank. Just like the vast sky, awareness can hold everyone and everything without being identified with what’s unfolding in each moment. Within that awareness, we are one: no teacher, no student, no patient, no healthy people. No one is separate. Nothing to do, nothing to attain, nowhere to go: all we need to do is to take good care of this moment.

Perhaps the spatializing in dialogical self theory (Hermans, 1992) is, as you say, a Western resource for this description. There is often a sense of contraction, maybe even of crowding of the self in the suffering of MBSR participants. This tightness and

crowding can be relieved as they touch into the space of the larger awareness that is pointed to in the mindfulness practice. I believe that as you have emphasized so far, the essential part of MBSR pedagogy is to kindly encourage participants to move away from their tendency to intellectualize or cling to their narrative selves, and to live instead in direct experience, thus “depositioning the self” and rising above limited, reified self to experience vast new possibilities.

The Third Exchange: The Self of the MBSR Teacher

Dear Heyoung: Now is the time for me to answer that intimidating question, “Who am I as a teacher?” I can only answer this with a long preamble, to describe how I think about the pedagogy of mindfulness. As was no doubt clear from my last letter, I see the central work of the MBI class as finding a way of being with/in the experience of the moment, however inviting or forbidding that moment may be. The class is about learning to do that together; the class is always focused on that key move. Our undertaking is not so much the “practice of mindfulness” as it is a “practice of the pedagogy.” I’ve described this distinction at length in my book, *The Ethical Space of Mindfulness in Clinical Practice* (McCown, 2013). In a nutshell version, I would say that as a *group* we create a *space* in which we *steep* and come away at last with new *potentials* for being that also become available in situations that are different from the group. There are, then, the above four italicized concepts that need to be defined and considered before I move to “Who am I?”

Group: In attending to the key move of the pedagogy, an MBSR group can be seen to create a space where a constricted, reified self can expand. In this mode, the group is not simply gathered individuals who learn a mindfulness (epitomized as formal meditation) to be practiced independently away from the class. Yet this is how the undertaking is conceived in the dominant research approaches, and it compels concerns about maintaining fidelity to the curriculum and participant compliance with home practice. In contrast, my colleagues and I (McCown, et al., 2010; McCown, 2013, 2014) have adopted a social constructionist view (e.g., Gergen, 1999, 2009), in which relationship defines who we are in the group and what we do in any situation. The activities of teaching and learning mindfulness are an ongoing co-creation that involves and affects everyone. Every class is a co-creation in the moment, and is therefore unique and unrepeatable. These characteristics compel different concerns, such as the quality of the space and the aesthetic value of the classroom experience. I’ll discuss these further, below.

The realm of the relational in the MBIs is relatively unexplored and certainly under-researched. A single quantitative study, by Imel, Baldwin, Bonus & MacCoon (2008), with a substantial sample size (606 participants in 59 groups) and control for pretreatment symptom severity and teacher effects, remains the principal indicator for this way of considering the pedagogy. The study suggests a relatively large impact, with

the effect of the group accounting for seven percent of the variability in outcome. For perspective, the fabled therapeutic alliance in psychotherapy, the most significant predictor of outcomes, accounts for about five percent of variability (Horvath & Bedi, 2002). Imel et al., (2008) noted that

MBSR does not appear to simply be an individual intervention delivered in a group setting, but rather its methods and effects occur at the individual and group levels. Thus, group variables are not merely a statistical nuisance to be controlled in the hopes of detecting the direct effects of meditation techniques, but important treatment variables worthy of clinical attention and empirical investigation (p. 742).

However, such is the hold of the individualist orientation among MBI researchers that these insights have not been pursued further.

Qualitative studies, although sparse in the literature on the MBIs, also suggest the value of group relations to positive *individual* outcomes; Cormack (2012), reviewing 17 studies, identifies four group effects—(1) providing a supportive and normalizing environment, (2) motivating and supporting meditation practice, (3) providing a sense of belonging and community, and (4) supporting the learning of mindfulness. Note that the perspective of the studies is distinctly individualist—what the group offers the individual. It is possible to describe the activity of a group in a contrary fashion, as Gergen (2009) does, avoiding the individualist position and thereby shining new light on the pedagogy.

Gergen's (2009) description of "confluence" is a clear evocation of co-creation, in which the activity of the moment defines participants as relational beings, rather than bounded individuals. For example, when the curriculum calls for learning sitting meditation, participants mutually define both meditators who sit quietly and a teacher who "guides" the practice. Participants know what to do in that moment ("know who they are" would be a poor way of expressing this). Then, when the confluence that is formal meditation practice ends, the meditators are mutually redefined as dyad partners that speak aloud to each other. A further shift of activity, as the group gathers for general dialogue, mutually defines students who speak and listen, and a teacher who listens and inquires into students' experiences in the moment. These shifting ways of being are neither forced on participants from outside nor compelled by inner pressures. What happens next in the class is moderated by the relationships within the confluence, and need not be interpreted with terms such as intention, choice, or cause and effect. So this, for me, is the co-created group of teaching. This moment-by-moment mutual definition with its flowing structure and open possibilities informs my pedagogy. (Heyoung, here is a very interesting point for me—the English language, with its long historical bias towards individualism, does not have resources to express the unbounded constitution of a confluence; I hope that you can translate my constricting/restricting

words through your more interdependent understanding, so that when I say “participant” you understand that I’m speaking of relationships within a confluence. I’m wondering if you have greater linguistic resources for such ideas, and, if so, does that affect your teaching?)

Space: Just as a baseball game is a confluence potentiated by the rules and the stadium (including the spectators), an MBSR confluence is potentiated by the curriculum and the room (attended to by the teacher). All the relationships mutually define the participants, the unfolding of the action, and the quality of the space—how it is experienced ethically and affectively. It is this quality of space that I’d like to explore with you now, through three modes of description—neurophysiological, philosophical, and aesthetic.

1. A neurophysiological description: Although it may be reductionist and is easily interpreted as individualist, I’ve nonetheless found this description helpful in theorizing about MBSR pedagogy. It is one way to explain why participants value the sense of support of the class, often find practice with others to be easier than at home, and can feel “close” to people with whom they’ve spent less than 30 hours over eight weeks—and whose names they may not even know.

This description starts with the mirror neurons in our brains that allow us literally to feel in our bodies the movements and even the intentions of those who are with us (Gallese, Fadiga, Fogassi, & Rizzolati, 1996; Gallese & Goldman, 1998). One description may be that a “resonance circuit” in the brain brings us together (Siegel, 2007): We become aware of an action or expression in another, and the mirror neuron system “tries it on.” Next, the superior temporal cortex predicts how it would feel. That information goes through the insula to the limbic system, which establishes the emotional tone and sends the information back through the insula to the prefrontal cortex for conscious interpretation. We know the others’ feelings and intentions; this circuit attunes us to each other, as in the bonding of infant and caregiver, of lovers, of family, and outward into social circles.

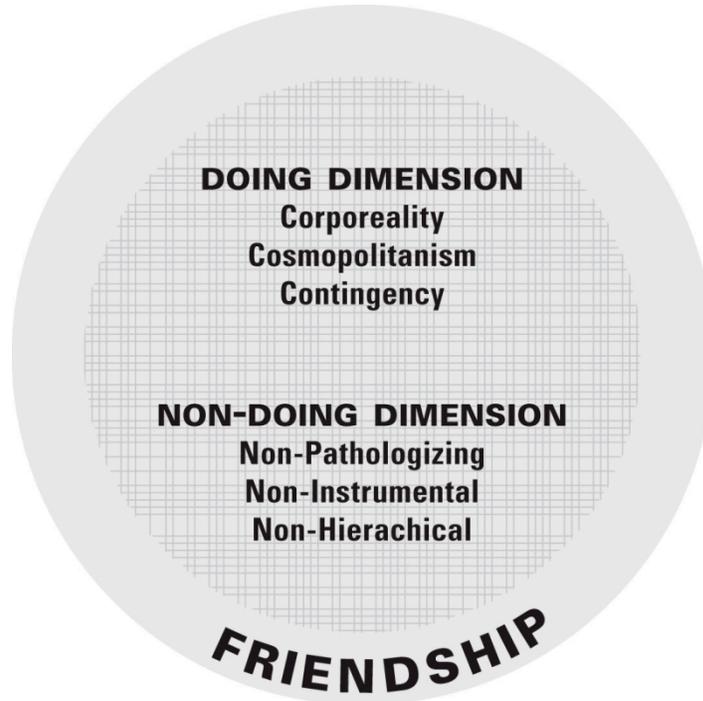
This helps to describe a typical pedagogical situation—there’s a potential for attunement to self and other. The effect of mindfulness practice is highly significant in this situation. It works like this: As each participant meditates, the activity in his or her prefrontal cortex has the potential to calm the limbic system, thereby reducing negative reactivity to the experience of the moment (Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, & Lieberman, 2007; Lieberman, Eisenberger, Crockett, Tom, Pfeifer, & Way, 2007). Now, consider the entire class as it practices: Some of the participants are resonating with themselves, feeling peaceful or relaxed, which shows in their postures and expressions. As the session ends and participants—whether they are “peaceful” or not—begin to look around the room, their mirror neurons react to those around them. The whole group has a chance to “try on” peace and relaxation and resonate together, which can change the

quality of the confluence. Porges’s polyvagal theory (1995, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2009) suggests that our bodies unconsciously react to threat in the environment — the freeze or fight/flight reaction — and also react to awareness of *safety*. He notes that we become prepared or available for social engagement. That is, when we feel safe (as with a group of peaceful meditators), there is a response in which fight or flight is suppressed, heart rate slows, and we are prepared for better communication—the eyes open further to exchange glances, the eardrums tune to the frequency of the human voice, the muscles of the face and neck gain tone for finely shaded expressions and gestures, while the larynx and pharynx are set for articulate speech. To precipitate bonding, there is a release of the “love hormone” oxytocin, encouraging approach and embrace.

Through the practice of mindfulness pedagogy, the group may co-create a “safe” space—peaceful faces, postures, voices, and gestures—helping even those who are struggling for emotional balance to move towards the “social engagement” response. In a sense, that response circulates in the group as through a resonance circuit, making it more possible for participants to be with/in the experience of the moment. Maybe it is possible that the phenomenology of this experience, to invoke Buber, is of the bursting asunder of the seven iron bands around the heart—that is, of relief from the restriction of a restricted sense of self.

2. A philosophical description: From another angle, the MBI co-created space may be seen as an *ethical space* (McCown, 2013). Gergen (2009) would consider the confluence of the class to be a first-order morality, that is, an unspoken agreement from which participants will not veer, as to do so would be to step outside the confluence. We recognize such moralities implicitly. For a class participant to get up and sing and tap-dance during a meditation session would simply not happen—the ethical space would collapse.

The ethical space is potentiated by the curriculum and pedagogy. There are things that an MBSR class does that are important and unique. Likewise, there are things that it does not do that also are unique. Perhaps most important is that there is a quality with which it is all done that is essential to the MBIs. The diagram below (McCown, 2013, p. 171) may help to clarify the relationships of the seven qualities of the ethical space.



The Ethical Space of Mindfulness in Clinical Practice: This model is built of seven qualities considered as three dimensions, with the non-doing dimension represented by horizontal lines, the doing dimension by the vertical lines, and the quality of friendship as a the dimension suffusing (filling in) the entire space. These seven qualities distinguish a mindfulness-based class from typical clinical or educational (health education or psychoeducation) interventions.

Starting with what we do: We attend to corporeality, contingency, and cosmopolitanism. Corporeality is the pedagogical principle of continually referencing the experience of the body—what is felt in the moment. Body sensations are only available in the present, so this focus helps keeps the class working with the key move of being with/in the experience of the moment. Also, this focus deconstructs emotions, as the question becomes, say, “Exactly what is this feeling of sadness like?” and the answers keep changing. Likewise, thoughts and stories lose their power as they are traded for the experience of the moment. Contingency, of course, is the change that we notice in these situations, In fact, an MBI class begins with the expectation of change—that is the constant. Then, cosmopolitanism is the way that meaning is made. The “teacher” in the MBI confluence does not interpret or define an experience; meaning arises within the activity itself, which is often a questioning dialogue. As described back in the introduction, ideas about “self” are never imposed, and remain open for dialogue. There are questions, but no final answers. There is freedom and a sense that everyone and everything belongs.

Then there is what we don't do: There is no pathologizing, no invoking of hierarchy, and no instrumental use of mindfulness. All three of these non-events can be related to Jon Kabat-Zinn's (1990) statement that has become a standard at the opening of many classes, "...if you are breathing, there is more right with you than wrong with you." This plays out in the classroom as a rule for teacher and participants of "no fixing" of others. Non-pathologizing is the premise that no one is broken. Non-hierarchical means that there are no experts who can know another's experience and therefore fix them; all are with/in not knowing. And non-instrumental is a way of saying that mindfulness does not do any fixing. There is no sense that if you'll just practice more or better, it will finally *work*, and you will be OK. Rather, you may realize that there is OK-ness with/in the moment, however aversive the experience, and you may find a way to go on.

So, the ethical space has a dimension of doing, another of non-doing, and, as a third dimension, a single quality of friendship, friendliness—the attitude with which the class meets the experience of the moment. In the MBIs this may also be referred to as hospitality, or welcoming, or even gratitude—all tropes drawn from the singular "scripture" of MBSR, Rumi's poem "The Guest House," which admonishes, "The dark thought, the shame, the malice, / meet them at the door laughing, / and invite them in. // Be grateful for whatever comes...." (Barks, 1995, p. 109). This quality of friendliness pervades the ethical space, facilitating the being with/in of experience in the moment, over time.

The ethical space of mindfulness, then, shapes my teaching: when the class is doing (and not doing) these things, we are practicing the pedagogy of mindfulness together. The ideal is to maintain the ethical space as much as possible, steeping or soaking in it, so that the pedagogy becomes a possibility for responding, both in the classroom and in other situations, with other participants. It is learning in the sense of gaining "know-how," and is inherent in the co-creation, as explained in the section on "potentials," below.

3. An aesthetic description: The space that is co-created by teacher and participants and the work that can be done within it are both powerful, in an affective way. Participants may find that they are able to approach and be with/in aversive experiences of physical and emotional pain and suffering. All involved may find that they are moved—even to tears at times—by what occurs, spoken and unspoken. We might think of the quality as an aesthetic one: the sublime (McCown, in press).

Certainly, there are many possible definitions of the sublime. For the purposes of this letter, Edmund Burke's (1759/1999) historically influential view of the sublime may be most instructive. His definition makes "terror" a central idea. The experience of overwhelming natural phenomena, such as storms at sea or ascents of mountains, is inexpressible, taking one beyond the rational, beyond oneself. The sense of self is

diminished, and one is more open to the experience. In mindfulness pedagogy, those moments when participants confront more of the fullness and contingency of human existence—the possibilities of death and madness, to name the extremes—might be dubbed sublime. Even small encounters with anxiety, such as with Maria, or deeper ones, as with Sooyeon, may serve to open other participants to their own experiences of anxiety. Along with this opening may arise, as well, a contradictory or paradoxical sense of pleasure, which, Burke suggests, is possible when there is space for observation. The ability to observe that which imbues a sense of terror is not merely a requirement for experience of the sublime, it is also that key move of the pedagogy of mindfulness—the turning towards and being with/in the experience. Mindfulness, then, makes the experience of the sublime possible for the participants of a group or a therapeutic dyad.

The concept of the sublime has particular value for the MBSR teacher; when it is part of the experience of a session, it may be considered an indication that the ethical space has been co-created, and that participants are steeping in it—being endowed with potentials for living in more profound and authentic ways.

The experience of the sublime is in contrast to the beautiful, which is what brings us closer together through our agreement on the pleasure of the experience. The sublime, of course, also brings us together, but through terror—as if the gathered participants all faced a fearful prospect. When the currency, so to speak, of the experiences of the participants is restricted to the beautiful, then the ethical space and the possibility of steeping in it, is likewise restricted.

Steeping engenders Potentials: Steeping in the ethical space for a prolonged period offers a possibility of transformation—gaining a different way of being, which may then have value in other contexts. Gergen (2009) describes this as developing a *potential* that becomes part of one’s *multi-being*—one of many modes of being that are shaped within particular relationships (mutually-defining confluences) that then become available in other situations. Teachers and participants in MBSR, defined in the confluence of the ethical space, develop a *potential* to be with/in the experience of the moment. This is a potential that can then be evoked in other situations. Potentials are gained by steeping in the relationships that express them, again and again, as an MBSR confluence (class) does.

A useful perspective on such learning comes from the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2008). He prefers the term *enskillment* to learning, as in the process of gaining the skill of, say, making an omelette. There’s no one right way to crack an egg, as each one is unique. You learn the feel for it from someone who can do it well, their hand over yours. And you gain the skill in the context of a particular kitchen, with particular bowls, pans, and implements. Ingold insists that knowledge doesn’t travel into you from outside, but that you grow into it through activity in relationship. The skill belongs to

the whole system—the relationships and the actual space in which it all occurs: “You only get an omelette from a cook-in-the-kitchen,” as he puts it (p.116). Omelette-making, then, is a potential of multi-being, just as is the MBI key move of being with/in the moment of an aversive experience.

The MBIs transform participants and teachers through new potentials that are incorporated in their multi-being. This suggests that the formation of teachers happens not by learning theories or techniques, not by following modeling by the teacher, nor by individual daily practice of meditation, but rather by steeping in the confluence of the ethical space and growing into the potential. Teachers, then, need to steep; they need opportunities to grow, in relationships, into the potential of the curriculum and the key move of being with/in the moment. It is being in many MBI classes as both participant and teacher that ensures competence in teaching and fidelity to the curriculum.

This is how I understand my own training and, therefore my “teacher self.” Somewhere in my multi-being are potentials for relating in ways that might be identified as corporeality, contingency, and cosmopolitanism; as well, there are potentials for relating in non-pathologizing, non-hierarchical, and non-instrumental ways; and, finally, potentials for friendship. These potentials grow and change as I continue to teach—moment to moment in the classroom and through year after year of classes. There is nothing ready, prepared, or cooked. The potentials, it seems, are available to be grown into in the instant. The response to one participant or to all at once is unmediated. There is no debate, dialogue, or choice that I make as a teacher in the moment. As a colleague expresses it: “I don’t know where it comes from, but it comes.” The best description I know is from the painter Philip Guston, as described by his daughter, Musa Mayer (1988, p. 80):

During the difficult times of the 1970s, when the artworld was busy being shocked and offended by my father’s late, figurative work, his shows at the David McKee Gallery were always well attended by young painters and painting students. After the long-standing disappointment of no sales and negative reviews—which persisted for a decade, until shortly before his death—it was heartening for him to see the interest of the younger generation in these strange new images.

Some powerful force had moved through him, he often told these young painters. That was how he had come to see it in those last years. My father refused to claim ownership of this force; he approached it with great humility and trepidation. What he had learned by the end of his life was how to position himself, he told his students, how to make of himself a vessel for what moved through him. “I never feel myself to be more than a trusting accomplice,” he said.

There are two ideas here that help explain what I am experiencing in the pedagogical moment. First is the idea that I have learned “how to position” myself. This is both literal and figurative. The way that I sit, in my chair or on the floor, oriented to the group and to my interlocutor, in a posture that is relaxed and attentive, is congruent with the confluence. My physical disposition makes evident an emotional disposition—the potential of being with/in the experience. This is not metaphor, but rather reflects embodied experience. Now, here is the second idea: I allow all the potentials of multi-being, the years of steeping in the ethical space, to “move through” the vessel that I am. The responses that I make in the confluence simply flow, it seems. When tension enters the confluence, potentials are reduced in the teacher and participants. If I then scramble for precedents, theories, or modeling by my own teachers, instead of responding unpremeditatedly, something will be lost. Whatever I may say or do that comes from weighing thought will fall like lead and disturb or even disrupt the class. Much work will be required of all in the confluence to achieve that flowing disposition again.

How does this unmediated responsiveness relate to ideas of multi-being or dialogical self? It is instructive to invoke Buber and Cooper once more. What is at work in these moments of freedom in the confluence is the silent dialogue that Buber describes between the *one* and the *other*, which may be considered as I-thou, or I-I, as Cooper (1994) has it. For me, this might be I-I-I-I-etc., as all the continually growing potentials of my teacher self are relating to each other in total ease within the MBSR confluence. The hour of the bursting asunder of the iron bands about the heart is the hour of my teaching, in which what Buber calls unreserve—best described as freedom—flows.

There is also a use for de-positioning as a description here, again, in which I can simply repeat and continue the quotation from Hermans and Geiser begun in my second letter:

...we feel *expanded* beyond ordinary boundaries while feeling most *close* to ourselves. Such moments of immediate and deep encounter with something beyond our usual self-definition are not possible by any form of mediated turn-taking. It is more like Buber’s *I-thou* connection. As far as the word ‘turn’ is applicable, the turns are falling together in an immediate encounter with an expanded reality. (2012, p. 20; italics in original).

Turns, then, may be seen as potentials, or as I-positions derived from meditative experience and MBSR teacher training, or as meditation-and-training-derived voices and meta-positions, as Marnberg and Bassarear (this issue) would suggest. These turns, however they are defined, fall together to help me meet participants where they are. The value of DST as a bridging theory among concepts of relational being, DST, and mindfulness pedagogy is evident here once again.

* * * * *

Dear Don: I really like your wonderful description of a “practice of the pedagogy” as a group, where we create a space in which we steep and come away with new potentials for being that also become available in situations that are different from the group. Though teaching in a different environment, I am in total agreement with your practice model.

Although I do not know if adding my opinion will be like “painting the lily,” or putting “icing on the cake,” let me add something for our discussion. At this point, I am not certain how well they will fit into our dialogue. I will deal with the four concepts you mentioned without mentioning one after the other.

You are absolutely right in saying that our class activities are an “ongoing co-creation that involves and affects everyone.”

Your description of “relationships within a confluence” resonates with me deeply.

It is my guess that the similar thing happens in my class as well. The Korean language is often called the reader-responsible language in contrast with the author-responsible language like English. This means that the reader, or listener, is responsible for the exact interpretation of the meaning, regardless of what is written or spoken. Korean is known as a language that has a highly sophisticated system of adjectives and adverbs with less frequent use of noun or nominalization than English. It is also common for a husband to call his wife, “our wife,” instead of my wife. The English word elevator is called “sungangi,” literally meaning a machine for an elevator and descender. Very often subjects are omitted in writing and Korean has one word describing 2 and 3, 3 and 4, 4 and 5, 5 and 6, 6 and 7, etc. For Koreans the idea of room serves many different functions including a bedroom, a dining room, a living room, a study, a meeting room, and more. Koreans are used to fuzzy logic, instead of cold logic.

At this point, your speaking of “relationships within a confluence” evokes a Korean word in me, *Ahwoollim*, a meeting of more than two different persons or things that become harmonious (Daum Korean Dictionary). Wherever they are from, however different they were, now they deeply resonate with each other, losing their ordinary self-boundaries. Another Korean word *Shinmyong* describes a powerful emotional experience that originates from an individual or occurs within a group. It is an ecstatic state of aliveness and mutual sense of becoming one another, as if a shaman received a divine power. It literally means a state when a divine force becomes brightened. It also means a mind state that is full of a vital life force when something bottled inside is completely released. In 2002, when South Korea entered into the quarterfinal, the whole

nation fell into this state of *Shinmyong*, a kind of collective sense of oneness, an ecstatic orgy. *Shinmyong* is often regarded as a key word that characterizes the core of Korean culture.

In this state of collective rapture and bliss, participants' sense of suppressed feeling and energy are released and steamed away, making them feel reconnected and stepped out of their constricted self and restored of their own true identities. This happens when, or is a result of a complete release of *Han*—the lingering resentment caused by social oppression and the irreversible big mistakes one makes.

From the pedagogical perspective, it is very important for the teacher to skillfully read and tune into the group's overall mood state as well as the individuals, because failing to do so would impede the atmosphere of *Ahwoollim* and *Shinmyong*, which are the sources for all positive mental and behavioral states for Korean people. This is why I engage my first-week class in a Rubber-Band Game, which is designed to break the ice and give them a sense of relaxation, playfulness, and sense of belonging, in which the class enjoys the losing team offering massages to the winning team. There are other activities, such as mindful and playful moving around in pairs or in groups, as the class progresses within the limit of not sacrificing the curriculum. According to Kegan (1994), a holding environment is the surrounding context that can be shaped as supportive and challenging in ways that can help learners make sense of their experiences in qualitatively different ways. He contends that a good holding environment serves three functions of holding well, letting go, and sticking around (Drago-Severson, 2004, p. 35). As for me, the idea, *Ahwoollim*, and/or *Shinmyong* can serve a good holding environment for personal and social transformation both for me and my participants.

The notion of dialogical self sounds very pervasive and powerful to me. It seems to be a good medicine for transcending limitations of Western individualism and rationalism. In adult education, Jack Mezirow (2000) proposes the concept of transformative learning as “transforming a problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable in our adult life by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified” (p. 20). He believes that transformative learning can be achieved through two primary methods of rational discourse and critical reflection. His theory has been criticized for having an exclusive focus on rationality (Clark & Wilson, 1991), for his exclusive focus on the individual (Collard & Law, 1989; Marsick & Finger, 1994), for his failure to recognize power relations (Hart, 1990), and for overlooking the more subjective elements of relationships, such as friendship and trust (Taylor, 1997).

I (Ahn, 2006) summarized the differences between Mezirow's transformative learning and mindfulness meditation as follows: (1) Transformative learning stresses critical awareness of assumptions, while mindfulness practice focuses on mindfulness of bodily sensations, feelings, thoughts, and mental objects; (2) the primary domain or

level of learning in transformative learning is psychological (the realm of the mind), whereas mindfulness practice operates on more expanded levels of the physical (body), the psychological (mind), and the spiritual (spirit); (3) the aim of transformative learning is helping adults to become a more autonomous learner, that is, “strengthening the self,” whereas mindfulness practice aims for the nondual unity of the separated self into the intrinsic wholeness of the self and the universe, that is, “liberating from the delusion of the separate self” (pp. 219-220).

It is clear that learning to be mindfully aware is a very powerful source of transformative learning. Informational learning cannot free us from our established habits of mind. In order for transformation to happen, the teacher needs to create a holding environment in which learners can be appropriately supported and challenged. Here is my favorite line from Kegan, a constructive-developmental transformative learning theorist. He contends:

“...what we take as subject and what we take as object are not necessarily fixed for us. They are not permanent. They can change. In fact, transforming our epistemologies, liberating ourselves from that in which we were embedded, making what was subject into object so that we can “have it” rather than “be had” by it—this is the most powerful way I know to conceptualize the growth of the mind. It is a way of conceptualizing the growth of the mind that is as faithful to the self-psychology of the West as to the “wisdom literature” of the East” (Kegan, 1994, p. 34).

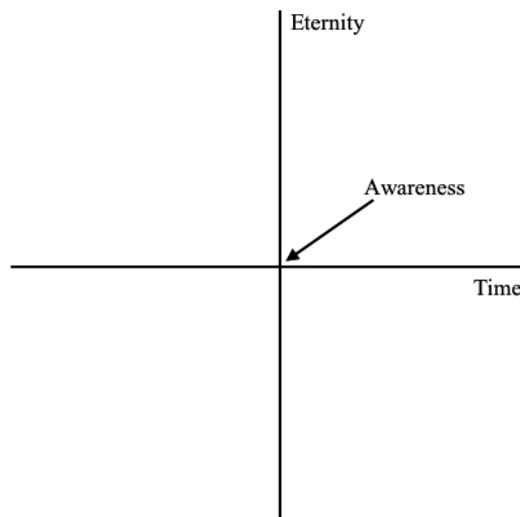


Figure 5. Translation vs. Transformation

Figure 5 is a snapshot of the analogy for my “teacher self.” The horizontal represents the world of mind. Mind usually moves in time. This is the world of ordinary people who move through from point A to point B. Informative learning occurs on this line. People learn along this line from gaining information and skills.

The vertical symbolizes the world of no-mind. There is no time. Time stops here.

This is the world of height or depth of interiority. A learner is not the do-er, she just becomes a channel through which everything unfolds in the timeless moment. she is just a medium; the point where the horizontal and the vertical meet is awareness, which is a vast, pure space where all the opposites such as past and future, man and woman, inside and outside become one in harmony. There, things are not separate from each other. Everything is interlinked, interconnected. I believe that the famous Zen Patriarch Lin-Chi’s remark is a perfect fit for this level of knowing, being and unknowing: “Here in this lump of red flesh, there is True Person with no rank.” In the words of Krishnamurti (2000, p. 132), “It is not that there is a superior entity which is aware that the observed is the observed, but this awareness has revealed the observer as the observed. Not, who is aware!”

Ken Wilber (1998) calls this horizontal movement “translation.” In his view, it functions as creating meaning for the self. He calls the vertical movement “transformation,” which serves for transcending the self. He contends: “With typical translation, the self (or subject) is given a new way to think about the world (or objects) while with radical transformation, the self itself is inquired into, looked into, grabbed by its throat and literally throttled to death” (1998, p. 140). It is important to note that one is not more important than the other. In Wilber’s words, “both of these functions are incredibly important and altogether indispensable” (p. 142).

It seems right in the merging space where the horizontal and the vertical movement meet that a new man is born. This is probably a space where destruction and creativity occur. Here a teacher self plays a role of a mother hen, who broods the eggs for weeks and beaks the eggshell from outside at the same time when the chicken is ready to beak from inside. The Korean word *Zooltahkdongshi* means that the hen and chicken beak together from inside and outside respectively, the teacher should provide a holding environment and should not miss the chance for the right teachable/learning moment. This very moment happens easily when the teacher has the vast space freed from his own conditioning. This space can be made more accessible from a position of “depositioning,” “I-Thou,” “I-I,” and “I-I-I-I,” which I will call “all-inclusive self” or “a position of no/all self.”

As far as I am concerned, I feel more comfortable with the notion of “inclusive or interdependent self” than that of independent self. I feel relatively comfortable with the notion of dialogical self as well. However, if asked to choose one over the other, I would be most at home with a sense of no-self, which I believe is the ultimate version of “inclusive self.” When we are freed from the iron grip of the reified self and go beyond the individual mind we will realize that we have never been away from pure awareness, even in the midst of our suffering, which constantly creates the vast space where there is never-ending potential for our self and the world.

When I was studying in the US, more than 10 years ago, I was very much impressed—both in graduate school and during MBSR training in the University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness (CFM)—by the fact that my American teachers in academia and the meditation community use the power of critical reflection in a skillful manner. I believe that critical reflection, including Donald Schon’s (1983) theories-in-action, which is deeply rooted in rationality, is the hallmark of Western civilization. Inquiry or dialogue as used in MBSR is, as Jon Kabat-Zinn (2013, p. 289) states, “the salient feature of MBSR,” drawing on Soto and Rinzai Zen approaches, including the use and value of *koans* (paradoxical questions) and *Dharma combat* (*challenging dialogue*) exchanges between teacher and student. It follows that MBSR’s inquiry owes some part at least to Zen. If critical reflection owes more to the heritage of Western science, MBSR inquiry can be called the brainchild or “heartchild” Zen and Western-style rationality.

Reading *The Embodied Mind* by Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1993), I see the possibility for reflection, which is intrinsically rational, to become a more powerful tool for authentic transformation for the whole person:

What we are suggesting is a change in the nature of reflection from an abstract, disembodied activity to an embodied (mindful), open-ended reflection. By *embodied*, we mean reflection in which body and mind have been brought together. What this formulation intends to convey is that reflection is not just *on* experience, but reflection *is* a form of experience itself—and that reflective form of experience can be performed with mindfulness/awareness. When reflection is done in that way, it can cut the chain of habitual thought patterns and preconceptions such that it can be an open-ended reflection, open to possibilities other than those contained in one’s current representations of the life space. We call this form of reflection *mindful, open-ended reflection* (p. 27).

If a teacher is capable of mindful, open-ended reflection, or inquiry in the real sense, he will embody wisdom and love that come out of his daily mindfulness practice and his center of being. He is not just adding to *what* his student knows (informative learning), he is committed to changing *how* she knows (transformative learning). When reflection is practiced in tandem with mindfulness and vice versa, the potential for

learning, growth, and healing, may be available. The capacity for inquiry must be one of the most difficult teacher skills, and I believe that this is the crucial hallmark of a skillful MBSR teacher. As MBSR is grounded in essential dharma, intrinsic in non-duality and the middle way, bringing attention to our individual intrinsic wholeness throughout the class is of paramount importance. Kabat-Zinn (2013, p. 297) states:

Our job is to take care of the territory of direct experience in the present moment and the learning that comes out of it. This suggests that the instructor is continually engaged in mapping the territory inwardly through intimate first-person contact and discernment, moment by moment, all the while keeping the formal dharma maps of the territory in mind... some of this will naturally be thought-based, but a good deal of it will be more intuition-based, more embodied, more coming out of the spaciousness of *not knowing* rather than out of a solely conceptual knowing. This can be quite challenging unless the formal dharma maps are deeply engrained in one's being through practice, not merely cerebral and cognitive.

Conclusion

This exchange of letters about the pedagogical, scholarly, and personal insights on the inherent and theoretical ideas of “the self” that are revealed in mindfulness-based stress reduction classes demonstrates more consonance than divergence, despite the two correspondents' quite different cultural situations. While it is true that both teach a curriculum in which they were trained in the United States, the connections that are most noteworthy in this written exchange arise within areas of considerable cultural contrast. These connections are five in number. Individually, each could be fruitfully discussed at length (and in depth) in focused future dialogues. The first is the constriction or “pinch” of consciousness that often drives participants into the MBSR class. Second is the spatiality of the body as a site for critical inquiry and even the deconstruction of emotion. Third is the togetherness of the gathered participants, which helps to soften any sense of isolated selfhood. Fourth is the transformation of potentials of participants as they “steep” in the practice of the class. And fifth is the self of the teacher as an analog to the togetherness of the group. The short descriptions below are meant to bookmark these ideas for further exploration.

Constriction: The two inquiry dialogues, between Don and Maria and Heyoung and Sooyeon, reveal the “pinch” of the inherent sense of self of the participant. Yet the pinch for each has a very different flavor that appears to be cultural. Maria is constricted by seeing herself as an individual with deficits she can't begin to address; the monologue within herself is about the skills and abilities that she lacks inside. Sooyeon, on the other hand, is constricted by crowding. Her disabled brother, the other members of her family, and the other members of the class are all present and pressing on her experience of her embodied process in the moment. In both cultures, the individualist

and the collectivist, participants can be reduced to narrow views of the inherent sense of self. (It is necessary to note here the danger, in individualist contexts, of reducing the others in the collectivist situation to representations “inside” the participant and thereby ignore their full dimensionality in the world. This would be a damaging mode of thought.)

Spatiality: Both Maria and Sooyeon found relief from the pinch of self-consciousness by being asked to turn towards the experience of that feeling within the body, and the sense of space within the body. This could be seen from a Western perspective as reflecting the spatial organization of self, described by Jaynes (1976) and elaborated in dialogical self theory by Hermans (1992). The possibilities afforded by an unrestricted sense of space are often expressed within MBSR in statements by participants such as “I feel bigger somehow,” and “I have some distance from that feeling.” In Zen, and, indeed, in the language of MBSR teachers West and East, this may be expressed in metaphors, such as the vast sky through which clouds move unimpeded, or the view down the river from the bank. Non-metaphorically, this space is the ethical space of mindfulness that is co-created by the gathered class and that includes not merely the participants, but also the physical space of the gathering. The very situation in which participants find themselves expands possibilities for allowing and accepting the experience of the moment.

It is worth noting here that a number of parallels may be drawn from the concept of ethical space to the concept of *ma*, a description of dialogical space current in DST (e.g., Morioka, 2012, and this issue); however, the two concepts share few theoretical background resources—aside from the phenomenological experience of the space itself. It would be a valuable exercise (although well beyond the scope of this article) to put these concepts in dialogue and see how each may benefit the other.

However it may be defined, space is experienced in the moment through sensation in the body, and may be traced to a physiological shift in autonomic nervous system arousal from the fight or flight of sympathetic activation to the rest and repair of parasympathetic activation. This was encountered both by Maria and Sooyeon as they turned away from stories and towards sensations of constriction and allowed those sensations to be the way they were.

There is an interesting contrast in the Philadelphia participants’ reluctance to touch each others’ bodies but willingness to explore intimate stories of the self out loud in the classroom, compared with Seoul participants’ interest in massages by other participants as the prize for winning a game but reluctance to express their own intimate stories. This seems a rich area for further dialogue about the contribution of embodied experience to any constitution of the self.

Togetherness: In the West, we are just now fumbling towards some vocabulary for describing a sense of being with others in which we are not atomized individuals but

a fluid part of the group and its ever-changing actions. Gergen's (2009) term *confluence* suggests this, yet he notes that English vocabulary is so laden with connotations of individuality that we must continually remind ourselves that individual-to-individual is not the only possible experience or description of experience with others. It is exciting for MBSR pedagogical theory (in English) to become acquainted with the Korean vocabulary, with such terms as *Ahwoollim* and *Shinmyong*, and the different structure and syntax, which support the insights that humans are relational beings. *Ahwoollim* suggests that when more than two different persons or things meet—wherever they are from, however different they are—they may come to deeply resonate with each other, losing their ordinary self-boundaries. *Shinmyong* captures the affective tone of the gathering, suggesting a powerful emotional experience, an ecstatic state of aliveness and mutual sense of becoming one another. Both terms are a contribution to MBSR thought, taking us beyond the atomistic, individualistic mode enforced by the dominant academic and medical research paradigm. With such expanded resources of language, it may be possible to build a mode of expression within MBSR that can capture the experience of the pedagogy in its most profound moments.

Potentials: West or East, the idea that what happens in the ethical space of the MBSR class is a non-cognitive transformation of the participants rather than an addition of cognitive, intellectual information seems valuable. The description of the participants and teacher “steeping” in the co-created mindfulness of the classroom and coming away with “potentials” of new ways of being in that situation that may later be activated in other situations supports the idea of transformation, and forwards a pedagogical theory that emphasizes a more inclusive sense of other and self. This also melds the Zen critique of our habitual, conceptual view of the world (e.g., Suzuki, 1994) with the potential dismantling of given, oppressive social and cultural structures found in liberatory forms of education in the West (e.g., Mezirow, 2000). Perhaps this is demonstrated at a common, practical level in the two teachers’ descriptions of their experience of the pedagogical process.

In DST, potentials might be seen as new I-positions, or, specifically in MBSR, as a new voice reflecting a meta-position, as Mamberg and Basserear (this issue) suggest. Again, here is an opportunity for research and theorizing that could make a valuable contribution across the bridges from DST into relational being and MBSR pedagogy.

The “self of the teacher”: As described in the preceding autobiographical reflections the teachers’ selves may be considered analogous to the descriptions presented for the co-created sense of the group. For Don, this may be clearest in the I-I-I-etc., construction using Cooper (2004) and Buber (1947) as resources. In this description, the many possible self-positions are absorbed in silent dialogue without conflict; they are fully accepted and readily available as required in the process of the pedagogy of mindfulness. It is intriguing that Heyoung is comfortable with dialogical

self theory, and suggests that at an extreme position of acceptance and availability his preferred description is the inclusive self (including others, perhaps in the embodied mode we have suggested), and that the inclusive self is ultimately the no self of Zen. Might it be that acceptance of self and other is manifested in availability, and that such a way of being is a “potential” endowed by the practice of the pedagogy? Here, once more, is an opportunity for research and theorizing with DST and the other relevant concepts to better understand what (or who) is available and how that is so. Perhaps, as the ideas of a reviewer of a prior draft of this article (to whom we are most grateful) suggest, Heyoung and Don might make inventories of the I-positions, voices, and meta-positions that are in their repertoires as teachers, to better understand what is at play in the classroom, and how it manifests in moments of encounter to meet participants where they are.

To help explore further the availability of the teacher’s potentials, it may be appropriate to reach back in time to other “Zen and the West” kinds of images. Marie-Louise von Franz (von Franz & Hillman, 1971) in describing the person who has integrated the four functions of Jung’s personality typology, paints a useful picture. She offers a Zen Master standing at the door of his house and meeting any person who comes with just what is necessary. He uses what is necessary and available to accomplish what is required, but is not identified with it, and lets it go when the encounter is complete. This freedom to move among functions is analogous to an MBSR teacher’s turns from potential to potential without preference or investment; in Philadelphia or Seoul it is the same. Perhaps the last word could rest with Lin-Chi: “Here in this lump of red flesh, there is True Being with no rank”— at least for that moment, in that class!

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