

Prerequisites for Teaching Mindfulness and Meditation, Experienced Teachers from Different Traditions Share their Insights

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Abstract

Objective: Several authors have suggested demands and requirements for teaching mindfulness and meditation. In the scientific literature there is however a lack of evaluation of mindfulness teachers and how to teach mindfulness meditation effectively. This study aims at providing deeper insight of the importance of the teachers in the field of mindfulness and meditation and it investigates how mindfulness and meditation teachers describe the prerequisites for teaching mindfulness and meditation.

Method: The method of Thematic Analysis, TA, was utilized to analyse the data from semi-structured interviews conducted with twelve experienced teachers, from different mindfulness and meditation traditions. The participants are mindfulness and meditation teachers from either within the Buddhist, secular or both Buddhist and secular contexts.

Results: The analysis resulted in three main themes and nine subthemes, such as for example the main theme; Teacher qualification with subthemes; Becoming teacher, Being teacher, Pedagogic skills and Social skills. The results suggest a flexible and pragmatic view on how mindfulness and meditation teaching should be provided. Instead of a fixed set of requirements for the teacher and the student, what makes mindfulness and meditation teaching effective has to do with the ability to recognize the potential in every unique situation with an understanding of the impermanent and interdependent relationship between teacher, student and context.

Conclusion: Being and becoming a teacher is a continuous process and anyone can assume the role of mindfulness and meditation teacher. It is dependent on the students and the context. A formalized education is not a prerequisite but what is required is sufficient compassion and insight. For the teacher's compassion and insight to ripen and for the student to learn, non-ideal conditions and suffering, is required and it is helpful with supportive fellow practitioners, teachers, especially if they themselves practice what they teach and share what they know.

Keywords: Mindfulness; Meditation; Qualitative; Teaching; Thematic analysis; Teacher; Student

Introduction

Teaching mindfulness and meditation

In the scientific literature it is proposed that effective mindfulness teaching is dependent on an experienced teacher [1,2]. But the importance of the mindfulness and meditation teachers has not been investigated thoroughly and the subject they teach, mindfulness and meditation, is viewed upon differently by different authors [3-6].

This present study looks at the theme of teacher qualification with particular interest. It has been emphasized that mindfulness is both an outcome (mindful awareness) and a process (mindful practice) [4]. Mindfulness is to remember to pay attention to what is occurring in one's immediate experience with care and discernment [7,8]. Kabat-Zinn [9] defines mindfulness as being aware in a certain way: Intentionally, in the present moment, and without judging. It refers to a "presence of mind" wherein attention, informed by a sensitive awareness of what is occurring in the present, simply observes what is taking place, whether external events or internal (psychological and somatic) experiences [7,10,11]. Mindfulness is a form of experiential processing [12]. Mindfulness is the awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, accepting, and discerning way to whatever is arising in the present moment [7].

Also the term meditation has been given many different explanations and according to Lutz et al. [6] there is still no consensus of what meditation is and within the community of researchers the opinion of what meditation is differs widely and problems arises when attempts

are made to find common factors in this vast subject of meditation. It is meaningful however to look at the individual traditions and their effects, according to Lutz et al. [6]. Meditation has however been defined as [13] voluntary regulation of attention or Intentional self-regulation of attention by Kabat-Zinn [14]. Meditation in research is often divided into two categories: Open Monitoring (OM) or Focused Attention (FA) [6,15]. It is mostly associated to a kind of practice, especially when the word, meditation is used in the west. But in some cultures and traditions meditation is a specific altered state of consciousness which one can reach through many different styles of practice [16,17]. This study makes no attempt of clarifying the relationship between these terms.

Brief meditation training reduced fatigue, anxiety, and increased mindfulness and brief mindfulness training significantly improved visuo-spatial processing, working memory, and executive functioning which indicate the benefits outside of health care [18]. Levy [19] has studied multitasking on office workers. Those subjected to meditation practice reported lower levels of stress and showed better memory for

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the tasks they had performed; they also switched tasks less often and remained focused on tasks longer.

In the field of clinical application, mindfulness meditation has been proved to decrease stress and mood disturbance for cancer patients, decrease stress and anxiety for care-givers, to have long term positive effects for anxiety patients, lessen rumination for people with long-term mood disorders, it has shown positive effects on the immune system, to modulate pain experiences [20-31]. The health benefits of mindfulness and meditation has been scrutinized in several meta-analysis' with over all conclusions in support of the practice and in the field of neuroscience changes in the brain has been found, deepening the understanding of the mechanisms behind the health effects [3,13,15,26,27,30,32-36]. The qualitative studies that have been carried out, in recent years, have for example focused on the experience of inner light in Vihangam yoga practice [37]. Another, showing differences of the zazen experience between in-experienced and experienced meditators [38]. There are qualitative studies that have concentrated on getting information about participant experiences in MBCT (mindfulness based cognitive therapy) [39-42]. So far however, there is very little research on what aspects of teaching mindfulness and meditation that matters and the role of the teacher is barely touched by the qualitative studies [5].

Historically great emphasis has been put on the importance of a competent teacher in spiritual practices such as meditation [43]. But, in the Buddhist literature we also find teachings that help us continue practice in the absence of a realized master. Such a teaching is the First Reliance in the teachings of the Four Reliances [44]. Here it is pointed out that we learn even from a teacher that does not practice what he teaches. We should rely on the teaching and not the person. In a commentary on this teaching the respected mindfulness teacher and Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh [44] says: *"To me, the relationship between a teacher and a student is based on trust that the teacher has practiced and continues to practice what he teaches. This is teaching by example, by the way we live. Perhaps the ancestral teachers thought it was so rare to find someone who could teach by his or her life's example that if we just wait for someone like that to come along, we might miss the chance to benefit from the teachings that are available now."*

We also find evidence in modern science of the importance of the alliance and relationship between the therapist and the client [45,46]. Conclusions within the field of pedagogic research point out the importance of motivation which is connected to problem solving in everyday life and experiences of inner reward [47,48]. From the educational point of view Wlodkowski [48] further identifies a motivating teacher with features such as being empathic, enthusiastic and intelligible and to have expert knowledge. Features which you expect in someone you put your trust in.

From the therapeutic side it is said that mindfulness based therapists are not only required to have adequate training but also an intensive personal practice in daily life and there is a demand placed on therapists to be acquainted with the teachings before teaching themselves [1,2].

Van Aalderen et al. [5] did a thematically analysed interview study with teachers and students of mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT) about the teachers' role with apparent similarities to this study but also with decisive differences. The Van Aalderen et al.'s [5] study focused more on the role of the teacher and less on the way mindfulness interventions might work. Also in this study the role of the teachers is highlighted but not exclusively and with the intentional focus on how it is connected to the conditions needed for mindfulness and meditation teaching to work. Another difference is that this study is not limited to the scope of MBCT.

Grossman et al. [3] points out the lack of evaluation of therapist training and competence in the research of MBSR. There is a scientific need for determining the most effective ways of teaching mindfulness [4,49]. This present study aims at contributing with knowledge about the significance of the teachers of meditation. It also aims at providing information and understanding on what is needed to teach mindfulness and meditation effectively.

Method

Participants

Twelve teachers of mindfulness and meditation were interviewed. The level of their teaching experience ranged from 7- 40 years. The nationalities of the respondents were Swedish, Finnish, British and Tibetan.

Among the interviewees we can find representatives from the Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions of Buddhism. Outside of the spiritual traditions we find participants within the schooling systems of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) and Breathworks (also known as Mindfulness Based Pain Management, MBPM). Many of them practice and teach within several different traditions. Also within the spiritual traditions several teachers mix the traditions.

Data gathering

The data was collected through interviews in a semi-structured manner meaning that no fixed questionnaire was used but an interview guide helping the researcher start the interview and to stay with the overall subject of teaching mindfulness and meditation effectively.

Procedure

The participants were found through personal acquaintance or internet search. They were then contacted through e-mail with basic information about the research and that their participation is confidential. A time and place of their preference was selected for the interview through e-mail correspondence. The duration of each interview was about one hour. The interviews were transcribed verbatim rendering 84 pages of transcribed data.

Data analysis

The method of thematic analysis, as described by Todd et al. [50], has been utilized. The familiarization with the data was accomplished through conducting the interviews, listening to the interviews and transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data and noting down initial ideas. The entire data set was then divided into 1076 coded elements with codes relevant to the research question (marking and naming the meaning-units line for line. The searching for themes was done through collating codes and then gathering extracts of data relevant to each potential theme. The themes were reviewed, checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis with main themes and subthemes (Figure 1). To define and name each theme is then an on-going process of the analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells. Like for example the data containing information about what educational pathways there are to become a teacher was considered as a subtheme under the main theme Teacher qualification and finally given the name Becoming teacher. When producing the report, the analysis finally takes shape with vivid,

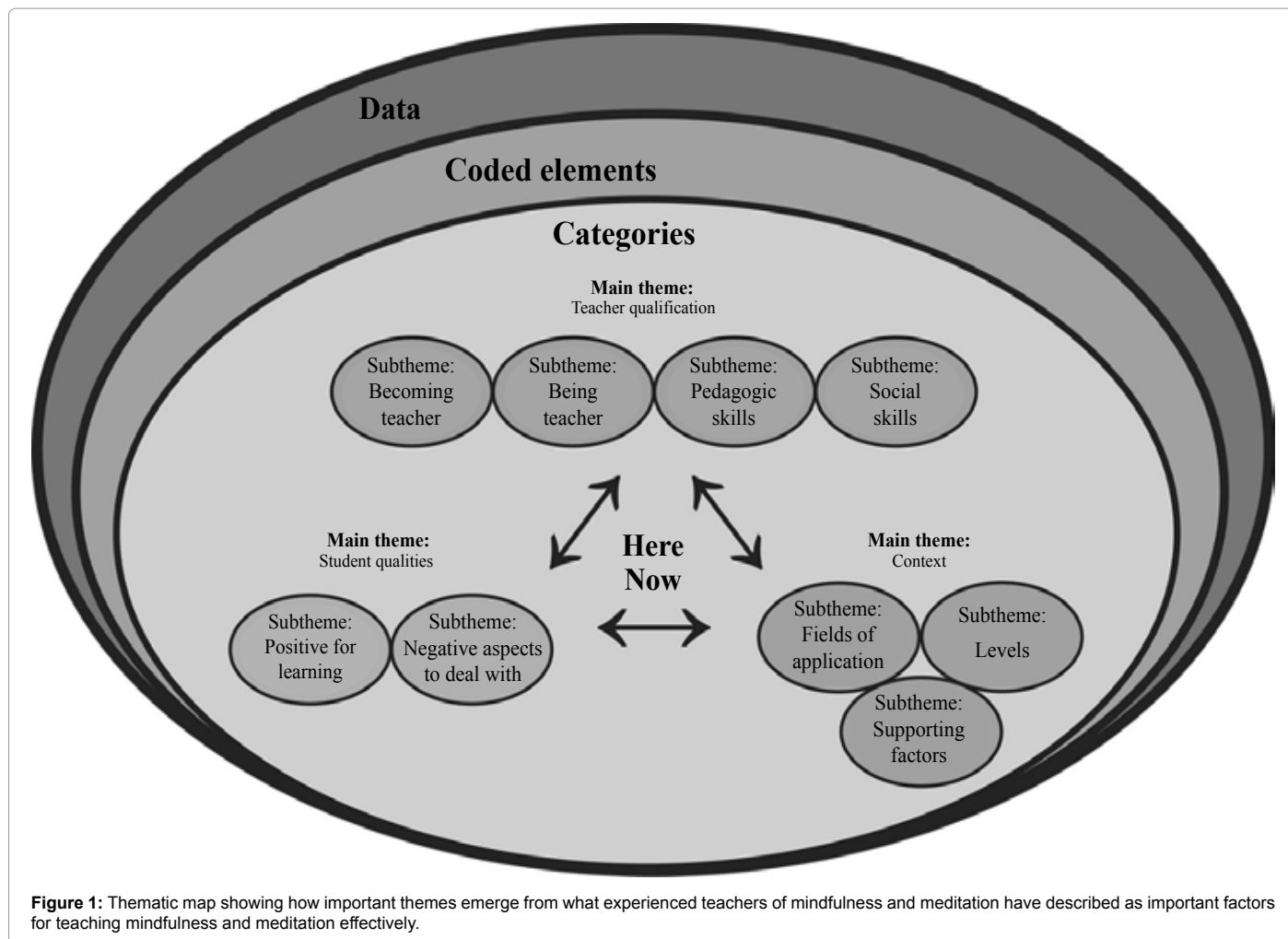


Figure 1: Thematic map showing how important themes emerge from what experienced teachers of mindfulness and meditation have described as important factors for teaching mindfulness and meditation effectively.

Main themes	Subthemes	Short Description
Teacher qualification	Becoming teacher	Effective teachers embody the teaching with compassion and insight
	Being teacher	
	Pedagogic skills	
	Social skills	
Student qualities	Positive for learning	Awareness of dissatisfactions makes the student open and willing to learn
	Negative aspects to deal with	
Context	Fields of application	The teaching level depends on the field of application, student and teacher
	Levels	
	Supporting factors	

Table 1: The three main themes and nine subthemes of the interviews with the teachers.

compelling extract examples relating back to the research question, the data and literature. The selection of the extract “A good teacher certainly practices what he teaches, it is like an axiom for the teacher, a teacher should practice what he teaches”, points very directly to one important condition for teaching effectively.

Ethical considerations

In accord with the Declaration of Helsinki, the method of informed consent was delivered verbally and also a written consent form was signed by all participants [51]. The participants were also informed the interview could be aborted whenever they wanted. The data was approached in a discrete and observational manner. Information that

could lead to indirect or direct identification of persons was omitted. Some quotation details have been altered to prevent the identification of the interviewee. The participants were informed that information about their identity is confidential.

Results

The 1076 coded elements were categorized into 26 categories with three main themes with nine subthemes; **Teacher qualification** with subthemes: *Becoming teacher*, *Being teacher*, *Pedagogic skills* and *Social skills*; **Student qualities** with subthemes: *Positive for learning*, and *Negative aspects to deal with* and **Context** with subthemes: *Fields of application*, *Levels* and *Supporting factors* (Table 1).

Teacher qualification

This main theme summarizes what qualifies someone to teach. To have qualification can be understood as having the ability to teach effectively. It is split into four subthemes, where the first subtheme, *Becoming teacher*, is about what is needed to achieve the qualities of a good teacher, i.e., how to become an effective teacher. The second subtheme, *Being teacher*, focuses on the teachers ability to embody the teaching. The third subtheme, *Pedagogic skills*, deals with qualities needed to transmit the teachings in a good way and the fourth subtheme, *Social skills* shows preferable attitudes in a teacher recommended by the respondents of this study.

Becoming teacher. Regardless of where you are, in your own learning process, you can share what you know at your own level of experience. Overall it can be said that to engage in teaching incorporates insight into the method and compassion for others. When the insight and compassion in the student has reached a mature level he becomes a teacher. For the insight and compassion to reach maturity the respondents emphasize that what is important is the practice itself and the help from more experienced practitioner. When asked to teach or when you feel you can contribute with helpful insights of your own you can take the position as teacher. *"Buddha actually said so...teach at the level of your capacity; tell others what you yourself know...I read this in sutta so it has to be like that otherwise we would not have had so many teachers"*.

When you have fear and hesitate to teach your own teacher and fellow practitioners can be there to encourage you to take that step. If you trust your teacher, you will start teaching. *"When the head monk told me – you can teach, I thought it is really right"*. Maybe your teacher needs to test your knowledge and skills before he feels sure and then give you a piece of paper labelled certificate or diploma to impart the necessary confidence in you. If this is how the teaching career starts the final insight and compassion transmitted to the student from his teacher is what makes the student drop his last doubt and embrace his calling to teach. *"I don't think it need to be formal in that sense, I don't think there need to be a diploma but I do think it's very good if one can get some feedback from experienced teachers or experienced practitioners about one's teaching style if possible"*. Being around the teacher and other practitioners is important.

A teacher and or other fellow practitioners can support your practice, but to get broader and more complete experience you also need to do it alone. You need to practice regularly and continually also between group sessions to accumulate practice experience. In short the practice becomes an all-time practice and another thing which supports this continuous; all the time mindfulness and meditation practice is going on a retreat. To live together with fellow practitioners is an effective way to get valuable inside information of the whole process of teaching. To go on an organized retreat is normally considerably longer than a few hours of group practice. *"And go on retreats is totally invaluable just to get more references of how it really can be to meditate and so on"*.

Being teacher. The teachers emphasized that a teacher should practice themselves and live as they teach and expressions like *"embodiment of mindfulness"* stands out and it means to incorporate the teachings in every aspect of ones being. To live it is arguably the only way to have deep insight into the subject and to be able to teach from one's own experience. If the teacher while teaching also is practicing, he uses not only his words to transmit knowledge but all other behaviours become means to teach. When the student in any other situation comes in contact with and observes the teacher, outside of the official lessons,

the teacher is still teaching through his way of being, acting. *"A good teacher certainly practices what he teaches, it is like an axiom for the teacher, a teacher should practice what he teaches."* What you observe in the teacher confirms that he is the "real deal". You comprehend that he has experience of these practices and it is the results that you witness. You also get a sense of the fact that to be teachers you must continue to practice, i.e., remain a student.

Pedagogic skills. The teachings are delivered for the student to understand and with the benefit of the student in mind. The effective teacher is open to the changing conditions in the present moment and shares experiences from his own life. When insight manifests in the student, when learning is happening, it is actually the only proof needed to say that whatever the teacher did was effective teaching. *"To have a clear intension, idea of where to go and at the same time be flexible and improvise in the moment."* Sharing experiences from one's own life can be an important tool in teaching, it seems, and if the student believe what the teacher shares he can more easily recognize similarities with what he is confronted with in his own life. To be honest and admit that we all have shortcomings opens for a sense of togetherness and also illustrate a humble attitude not putting oneself on a pedestal above others. *"One makes mistakes and those mistakes can be used to illustrate because we are all very much alike."* To share opens for the process of identification, to identify with the teacher will encourage the student to look deeply within himself where he will find and be able to be in touch with the wholesome qualities in himself and also let them show in the way he speaks and acts, how he approaches difficulties and success in his life. This identification leads to insights of direct experience.

Social skills. For the student to come back repeatedly to receive instructions and to pay attention there need to be an attraction to the teacher's way of being, inside of official lessons as well as outside of them. The teacher has a way of being and talking that signals that he cares for the wellbeing of the student. The selfless nature of the teacher is indeed perceived when the teacher is accepting you as you are without any judgmental expressions. *"... What more, warmth, kindness, compassion, empathy and the whole of that area is very important."* *"he could, sort of, bring forth this playfulness and allowing in a good way."*

Student qualities

Before you are a teacher you are a student but as soon as you have a little insight you can consciously contribute with your own discoveries and so teach others. Students are important teachers and the teacher always remains a student. Teachers need to show the students how to be a good student. To be conscious about the students' qualities is arguably something that will support effectiveness of mindfulness and meditation teaching. The main theme Student qualities consists of two subthemes, Positive qualities supporting learning and Negative aspects to deal with, are about which qualities, in the student, supports versus counteracts the effectiveness of learning mindfulness and meditation.

Positive qualities supporting learning. The interviewees declare that a student needs to be willing to learn. If you are to learn something you need to be okay with change, and not hold on to fixed ideas. Unpleasant feelings are what really motivate you to look for change. To want to get rid of them is what defines them. Suffering is an important reason to start the practice. It is the activating, engaging motor driving you to really do something about it. *"Enormously important, it's like it's the whole ..., that's the thing that makes me so very convinced that it is possible ... it's my best merit that I have felt terrible ..."*

The interviews reveal that patience, tolerance and willingness are favourable conditions for learning. The student will benefit from not

expecting a certain kind of change and not let the desire for the change they think is the goal prevents their receptiveness, their openness. That's why patience and acceptance are key factors. *"Tolerant and patient to whatever... is very important. Particularly, mind training you have to be patient."*

Negative aspects to deal with. The areas of ego, self-damnation, suffering and expectations are important factors in the student which can counteract learning and thus something for both the student and teacher to be aware of and approach wisely.

Thoughts are not negative for learning mindfulness and meditation practice but the activity of thinking can prevent the actual practice of being here and now, i.e. being mindful. While looking at thoughts in the here and now no thinking is needed. Listening to the teachers' thoughts about the practice and to share your own is concluded to be valuable. When engaged in thinking however you cannot be fully present. *"The intellect is often a problem when it comes to looking at consciousness. You end up in intellectual processes instead of direct experience."* The urge to compare, evaluate what is experienced in your mind opens for the need to divide the world into independent separate entities. This idea of being disconnected from the rest of the world can open for problems, like discrimination, if you are too attached to it. When ideas of being inferior or superior predominates your thinking they can become serious obstacles in your practice. *"A common error is that you want your ego to become even greater. Now I know this and this and now I can meditate too. Now I know mindfulness as well and I can talk about it with friends... it sort of becomes even more ego."*

The teachers also say that attachment to expectations can have a negative effect in the practice. When stuck in the desire to become something better than you already are, to get something you don't have, you are not able to see what you already have, what you really are. *"What is required is openness and not this will and focus on achievement and demanding and results-orientated."*

Context

The teacher and the student are obviously central parts of the context in the process of teaching mindfulness and meditation but for them to manifest in a beneficial way other contextual conditions must be considered. This is what this main theme is about and it has three subthemes; Fields of application, Levels and Supporting factors.

Fields of application. In essence, to teach mindfulness and meditation effectively, ideally the teacher has a deep understanding of the context and field in which the teaching takes place. The teachers testify that the more you know about your students the easier it will be to find effective practices to meet their needs, to address their specific vulnerabilities. When you know about the different difficulties they are confronted with in their lives you can more easily understand them. *"It was quite easy for me to see how to do a pedagogic approach with pupils or with the children."* A deep knowledge of the mind, also from non-mindfulness meditation sources is stated to be beneficial and to teach students with mind problems a deep knowledge of mindfulness and meditation is reported to be of great advantage. *"I must know not to pressure them too far so that they don't become too sick or something like that. So then it's helpful with my psychologist background."*

Levels. The inherent and accumulated mindfulness and meditations insights give the teacher indications on how to share, how to teach at the right level and it is dependent on the context. For students learning as well as for teachers' teaching it is a process of gradually approaching the teachings. To explain at the best of your ability how you yourself are practicing and have practiced is possible if you are a beginner as well

as if you are an experienced teacher. You can find a way of instructing that is suitable for your own level of experience and preferences and the more experience you have and if the context allows you to listen to and talk to the students you can better consider and adjust to the students' needs. Broadly speaking mindfulness and meditation can be taught as a technique without dialogue between teacher and student or it can be more personally tailored with dialogue. The level depends on where you are in your own process as a teacher, what background the student has and also the other contextual conditions in the moment the teaching takes place. Ultimately to be able to share your knowledge so that it is helpful must have to do with an intuition of how to do it. *"... you know simply to say -this is how you do the practice giving it a try."* The feedback from students is teachings for the teacher to absorb and make use of. The roles are reversed. This dialogical element opens for a more spontaneous, flexible approach in touch with what you intuitively understand to be right in the present moment, not restricted by your expectations of how it should be. It makes the teachings more alive as oppose to teach from memorized manuscripts or manuals. Both the teacher and student become more alert and present. *"...contextualizing it more to help that person and also learning from them."*

Supporting factors. The subject of ethics and the value of going on retreat as well as material conditions are reported as supporting the practice. It really comes back to the condition of the compassion required to teach and learn this method, the compassionate relationship with one's own and others' bodies and minds, in stillness and movement. Aware of the context, the teachers and students act out this compassionate relationship in different ways to find the ideal path to make mindfulness and meditation stronger.

The teachers and students practice to behave ethically, i.e. non-harming, towards themselves and others and being together with other people and experience their ethical practice is an important opportunity for learning. To retreat means to go away and give you a break from the normal stressors of everyday life. So in effect it's going to a location specially selected for practice. *"It is really important to be with and around people who understand what you are doing and are also trying, so it's unbelievably supportive with other people, kind of context when you start practice and go on retreats is totally invaluable just to get more references of how it really can be to meditate and so on."*

To have a location with other people and a teacher present is of importance and when you have selected a suitable place you reserve time for the group practice with commitment to practice regularly. The place must be close enough so that the effort of going there doesn't extinguish the motivation to practice. The teachers further declare that you need to feel welcomed from the people and also from the place. The place is there as a refuge away from the stressors you normally encounter. *"Practical circumstances like a good place to be, relatively undisturbed, a neutral, restful environment with not too many disturbing impressions."*

Effective formal mindfulness and meditation training contains not only still sitting or lying on the floor but also movements and so compassionately embraces all the activities that also occur in daily life. Ideally you have all the right equipment. Stools, chairs, mats, cushions can make a big difference for the sitting practice. *"...but especially to get deeper in sitting meditation there is a huge difference when you learn a more stable and balanced sitting."*

Discussion and Conclusion

A vast subject such as that of mindfulness and meditation certainly

needs to be scrutinized in modern research but one need to bear in mind that it is an on-going process that has always been an integrated part of the mindfulness and meditation practice. To gain deeper and deeper insight is the essence of it. So this as well as future studies must not lead us to believe in a one and only final conclusion because that would contradict its essence and the practice would die. This means that when someone claims that consensus or conclusion has been reached it should be regarded as something temporary. The results and conclusions of this study should be viewed with such openness.

This study suggests that you can start teaching mindfulness and meditation when you feel confident that you have something to share that could help others or when your teacher asks you to teach. From the point of view of social learning, the courage to start teaching mindfulness would have to do with self-efficacy but is expressed in the context of this study as the maturing of insight and compassion coming to fruition. This present study concludes that it is a continuous process to become a teacher and there is no necessity for any formal education or certification. It is however of great benefit to have experience of mediation and mindfulness practice, alone, with others, at home and on retreat and also to have experienced practitioners supervising ones teaching process gradually from basic levels to more advanced. This gradual and continuous process which starts with our inherent human capacity for mindfulness shows that depending on the context (levels, fields of application, etc.) and the individuals who are open to learn, i.e., the students, anyone can assume the teacher role, because a teacher certificate is no final stage nor is it a starting point. But to be able to absorb and nurture the qualities and become a more skilful teacher, other teachers and practitioners can help the student or fellow teacher to balance their level of self-efficacy so that they have enough to dare to take necessary steps but not too much so that, as Galbreath Jernigan [52] puts it, it becomes over-efficaciousness and the motivation to keep on learning is lost. In this present study the teachers share that to be able to teach mindfulness and meditation effectively, ideally the teacher is very experienced in terms of his own practice, which is on-going. If the situation is not ideal however, to teach mindfulness and meditation effectively, where and when ever needed the person with slightly more of the beneficial qualities could assume the position as a teacher and share her direct experience of mindfulness and meditation at the best of her ability.

The results in this study does not support the demand placed on therapists in Crane et al.'s [1] view that mindfulness based therapists are required to have adequate training and an intensive personal practice in daily life but instead encourages teachers to practice and teach from own experience. This would arguably make the availability of mindfulness teaching greater because a person in need would not have to wait for someone considered experienced and educated enough by someone else. Mindfulness is considered an inherent human capacity that can be enhanced through training and practice, which is in line with earlier research [10,11]. A therapist with a client in need of help should not wait to give what he can but instead make use of both his inherent and his, through practice, accumulated mindfulness capacity, regardless of if his practice is intensive or not.

The importance of being teacher, i.e., to live as one teaches, was a result found in this study and can be paralleled with findings in pedagogic research where, according to Campbell [53] the teachers work as moral agents as they aim to develop moral understanding and character among their students, both through the topics they teach and through their own actions and ways of being. In this present study there are descriptions on noticing the teacher's behaviours and movements

logically and what is striking is the congruence of opinions like, "living as he preaches" and "embodiment of mindfulness". With these descriptions from the interviewed teachers, the subtheme Being teacher was formed and in the qualitative MBCT research support is found that it is a highly relevant theme [5]. Effective mindfulness and meditation teaching as interpreted from what the interviewees say in this study, has from a pedagogic viewpoint to do with being teacher which could be seen as synonymous with living as one teaches or embodying the teaching.

From the perspective of student qualities, according to the interpretations in this study, what helps for the teaching to become effective is that the student is willing, motivated, inspired and committed to practice. In this study it is also concluded that the difficulties in life, the suffering together with the skilful teachings help the student to establish sufficient motivation, willingness. The student recognizes desired qualities in the teacher and also notices effects of his own practice, i.e., his direct experience, thus his confidence in the method is strengthened. Patience, curiosity and an open attitude are highlighted as beneficial qualities. This accords with conclusions from the pedagogic field of research that points out the importance of motivation which is connected to problem solving in everyday life and experiences of inner reward [47,48]. Openness has been interpreted as causally and positively linked to knowledge and skill acquisition, hence its relevance to learning. In the research on personality and learning Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham [54] argues that open students would be expected to be intrinsically motivated in their studies, show higher levels of engagement with the subject they study, and enjoy their learning experience more; in essence, high Openness means a "hungry mind" [55]. It seems as openness and motivation are closely linked but to become open for change, i.e. learning, this present study argues that motivation is linked to problems, dissatisfactions, which would make a student open and hungry for new knowledge and understanding to deal with the problems.

This study also addresses other contextual aspects, other than the teacher and student qualities, such as appropriate material circumstances and the fact that to teach mindfulness and meditation effectively a deep knowledge of the field in which you teach is of importance. Of particular interest could however be that the teachers interviewed, confess that there are benefits with instructions to the student on a pure technical level but strongly emphasis the more personal, tailored approach where the dialog between student and teacher opens for deeper exploration of the student's practice. This conforms to findings such as the importance of the alliance and relationship between the therapist and the client [45,46]. The part consisting of the working alliance, which means the joining of a client's reasonable side with a therapist's working or analyzing side, is arguably applicable also as shown in this present study for the mindfulness teacher who has a dialogue with his student but less so for the teacher only giving information and not receiving any, where the joining of the student's insights with those of the teacher would be limited and would arguably lead to a less effective teaching [45]. This is also supported in the primary health care research where it has been shown that a strong partnership between the care manager and the patient has a positive impact on patient health and self-management [56].

Considering the choice of method, TA, used in this study a motivation can be found in Sears and Kraus [57] study which was one of the first studies to ask the critically important question, "Which aspects of mindfulness-based intervention lead to positive outcomes?" because it invites researchers to investigate qualitatively. Malterud

[58] considered qualitative methods appropriate for areas such this because of its explorative power and capabilities of capturing subjective experiences. It could however be argued that the area into which this study makes its inquiries is very vast and complex. It could perhaps have been narrowed down, for example to look only at the conditions required in the teacher. On the other hand, it could be argued that because the method is defined, and not complex it is the right one to use when investigating a vast and complex area. Because of the openness to all conditions relating to teaching mindfulness and meditation it has resulted in what Todd et al. [50] calls “un-anticipated insights”. Many of the results were not anticipated by the researcher, like for instance that many of the interviewees pointed out the non-importance of formalized education. From the qualitative perspective this semantic approach to TA touches the surface of the meaning in the data the interviewed teachers’ share. It would be interesting to approach this subject in a more latent fashion, like in a thematic discourse analysis for example, to get more substance about underpinning theories. Another weakness of this study is that no effort has been made to include quantifiable measures.

For the future it is important not to lock the benefits of mindfulness and meditation teaching into one format so it can be accessible to people in all walks of life and be open to address a wide range issues, both within health care and in other fields. To really make it available, for it to be effective there need to be different possibilities so it becomes accessible also for people that cannot attend an eight week course, promise to practice one hour a day at home or have a very experienced teacher nearby. If we can find some level that is appropriate for the person in need however difficult, however easy it may need to be, to meet his or her needs then we will truly be inclusive, accepting and make this apparently effective practice available.

In this present study twelve experienced teachers have described the ideal conditions for teaching mindfulness and meditation effectively. Paradoxically it is included in the ideal conditions that for the teaching to be effective, unsatisfactory, non-ideal conditions are needed. It is concluded that the difficulties in life, the suffering together with the skilful teachings help the students and teachers to establish sufficient motivation, willingness, compassion and insight to learn and teach the methods of mindfulness and meditation. It is helpful if the teacher appears in a generous, allowing and unselfish manner. It is further concluded that becoming a teacher is a continuous process and there is no necessity for any formal education or certification. Experience of meditation and mindfulness practice and to have experienced practitioners supervising ones teaching process is of great benefit. This study concludes that there is support for sharing one’s experiences of mindfulness and meditation at any level and that anyone in the right context could assume the role of mindfulness and meditation teacher.

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