A Space for Embodied Mutual Inquiry: A Framework for Supervision for Mindfulness-based Teachers

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I certify that all the material in this dissertation which is not my own work has been identified and that no material is included for which a degree has previously been conferred upon me.

Signed
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Abstract

Over recent decades there has been a growth in mindfulness-based approaches in the West being offered in a broad range of settings. This growth has meant an increase in the numbers of mindfulness-based teachers and those training to teach. Supervision is an important element of good training and teaching, hence deemed necessary at all levels. The increase in teachers has grown quicker than the availability of supervisors, creating a bottleneck in the provision of good quality supervision. There is a wealth of literature describing supervision in a range of clinical approaches, but a sparse amount of literature specifically related to mindfulness-based supervision. This raises interesting questions as to how to support this growing body of mindfulness-based teachers and what the distinctive features of supervision are for this approach. In this dissertation I aim to articulate the nature of this supervision and its distinctive features. I will provide a framework to support a description, based on existing knowledge and experience. It is hoped this may be a useful basis for further dialogue and understanding, aiding an increase in the availability of competent supervision in order for this promising approach to expand without compromising its integrity and efficacy.

Introduction

Supervision has played a crucial part in my development as a mindfulness-based teacher and trainer. Over the last couple of years, with the upsurge in interest in mindfulness-based approaches, more people are undertaking training routes to teach, with the need for supervision throughout the training process and beyond. As a new trainer and supervisor I looked to my own experience of supervision and to that of those who had been in this field for some time for guidance. There seemed a clear and grounded understanding within the UK as to the nature of this supervision, but no clear articulation to the world. The literature within the mindfulness-based field has grown enormously around research, teaching, training and assessment, allowing for greater understanding. The time seems ripe now to begin that articulation around supervision as an essential part of developing a larger body of competent supervisors.

This dissertation will look briefly at the background of mindfulness-based approaches and then the current contexts. The resources that informed this work are outlined, the main influences being my own experience, of being supervised and supervising, and a series of interviews with experienced supervisors. A description of the functions and developmental stages of supervision is presented before moving to a new framework. The framework has evolved from my understanding and dialogue with peers. It uses a diagram to show different layers within the supervision process, illustrating the unique features of this particular form of supervision. Further detail about these layers is then discussed, using quotes and examples from the interviews. Relevant quotes are included anonymously, using a random selection of names. It is early days for mindfulness-based approaches so some of the growing edges within supervision are identified before drawing conclusions.
Background

Mindfulness

Mindfulness originates from the Buddhist tradition although is found in other contemplative traditions. It has been described as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally “(Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4) or “the willingness and capacity to be equally present with all events and experiences with discernment, curiosity and kindness” (Feldman, 2012, para. 1). Practising mindfulness allows for a direct observation of the nature of thoughts, emotions and body sensations with curiosity and seeing the ways these patterns lead to happiness or suffering. There can then be a seeing of the layers we build in our life, of frequently wanting our experience to be other than it is. By being in the present moment and cultivating kindness there is more opportunity to wake up and disentangle from these habitual patterns, offering a wider perspective and choice.

Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

There has been a flourishing interest in mindfulness in the West. Some approaches use mindfulness to inform therapeutic work and others are more specifically mindfulness-based. For the purposes of this dissertation I will be referring to supervision of the two main specific mindfulness-based approaches used in secular settings, MBSR and MBCT. Within the UK context there are now at least three University centres offering training in MBSR and/or MBCT. MBSR/MBCT classes can be found within many settings including healthcare, medicine, schools, and for the
general public. MBSR was the first of these approaches and MBCT grew out of its core foundations. MBSR was originally developed to reduce stress in patients with chronic pain and health problems (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Regular meditation and other practices help patients to have a more present moment focus, a greater awareness of thoughts, emotions and body sensations and to develop a particular non-judgemental stance. From this point of awareness patients can make choices about ways of responding to their experiences and ways of taking care of themselves. A meta-analytical review of mindfulness-based approaches concluded that the approaches yield at least medium-sized effects, with some effect sizes falling within the larger range (Baer, 2003). These results have been found across a broad range of population types, ages and social groups (Baer, 2003; Brown, Ryan and Cresswell, 2007; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt and Walach, 2004). Hofmann, Sawyer, Witt, and Oh (2010) conducted a meta-analysis based on 39 studies delivering mindfulness-based therapy for a range of conditions. Effect sizes suggest moderate effect for improving anxiety and mood symptoms.

MBCT was developed as a group intervention for patients with a history of at least three episodes of depression to help prevent relapse (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002). In a recent systematic review and meta-analysis, Piet and Hougaard (2011) review data from six randomised controlled trials. From this data they conclude that the results indicate that MBCT is an effective treatment for those with recurrent depression in remission, where there have been three or more episodes of depression. In comparisons with antidepressants, MBCT provides effects comparable to staying on a maintenance dose of antidepressants (Kuyken et al., 2008). MBCT has been recommended by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2009) as a treatment of choice for recurrent depression and identified as a key priority for implementation. In 2010, The Mental Health Foundation commissioned surveys of
service users and GPs. The report that followed identified key recommendations including the expansion of further training opportunities in mindfulness-based approaches, pointing to the growing need for extra training and supervision.

**Training and supervision**

There is a commitment amongst key training organisations within the UK to provide rigorous training which maintains the integrity of mindfulness-based teaching. Supervision forms an important part in developing and maintaining competence. Crane et al. (2010) describe how from basic teacher training through to continuing professional development, supervision is an integral part of all of these phases.

To date there is not a professional mindfulness association or accrediting body but some of the key training organisations are coming together to form guiding principles. The UK Network for Mindfulness-based Teacher Training Organisations comprises of representatives from all the main training organisations in MBSR/MBCT and derivatives within the UK. It is a group that meets annually. A recent priority has been to set out guidelines to promote good practice in response to the upsurge in those wanting to teach MBSR/MBCT. They were set out in 2010 and revised in 2011. The ongoing good practice guideline around supervision is for teachers to engage in:

Regular supervision with an experienced mindfulness-based teacher, including:

1. Opportunity to reflect on/inquire into personal process in relation to personal mindfulness practice and mindfulness-based teaching practice.

2. Receiving periodic feedback on teaching through video recordings, supervisor sitting in on teaching sessions or co-teaching with reciprocal feedback.
(UK Network of Mindfulness-based Teacher Training Organisations, 2011).

In a similar way, The Centre for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, has also outlined engagement in supervision in MBSR with a certified teacher trainer as one of the standards of practice for those training teachers to deliver MBSR (Kabat-Zinn et al., 2011). In the NICE depression guideline (NICE, 2009) under effective delivery of interventions for depression, again we see the recommendation that all practitioners should receive regular high-quality supervision.

One of the challenges is how supervision is delivered. In a recent survey of MBCT teachers (Crane & Kuyken, 2012) the chasm can be seen between standards set for training and supervision and the reality of 66% reporting no ongoing support in the form of continuing education or supervision, probably due to time and financial constraints. However there was a strong theme from participants in the workshop and survey that mindfulness practice and teaching need to be seen as a long term investment.

Within the UK training organisations and research projects there has been a strong history of supervision being an integral part of the training and ongoing teaching process for MBSR/MBCT teachers. Some of the learning and structures from supervision within other therapeutic contexts has provided scaffolding for its own unique character to then evolve. Early teachers learned through their own experience of supervision and passed on this learning. There seems to be many strong parallels of supervision following the model of the therapy as seen within other therapeutic contexts.
Parallels between therapy and supervision

There are many examples of supervision closely following the principles, structure and process of the particular therapy, paralleling the therapy itself. It is beyond the scope here to go into full details of the nuances of the therapies but it seems pertinent to point to some examples.

In Cognitive Therapy (Padesky, 1996) where supervisor and supervisee establish a problem list, set goals, work collaboratively to conceptualise blocks and work out strategies to work on supervision questions. Similarly, the supervision session has an agenda, new skills are taught, guided discovery is employed and homework assigned. The actual teaching methods include Socratic questioning, behavioural experiments and case conceptualisation.

In Dialectical Behaviour Therapy supervision is an essential part of therapy (Fruzzetti, Waltz, & Linehan, 1997). The supervision team manages, shapes, supports and balances the therapist to facilitate the managing, shaping, supporting and balancing of the patient. The supervision follows the same natural progression through stages from pre-supervision, to skills acquisition, to skills teaching and skill application. A group setting is used regularly in supervision and therapy. Other parallels are ongoing assessment and monitoring of progress, balancing problem solving and other change related strategies with acceptance and validation, balancing communication styles, and empowering,

In Gestalt Therapy supervision the principles of therapy are closely followed. Gestalt Therapy is an existential therapy. Yontef (1997) explains how both the therapy and supervision use phenomenological focussing and experimentation to clarify experience. Special attention is given to an awareness of the awareness process, its
limitations and here and now contact. The dialogic relationship is fundamental with the patient and a modified form is used in supervision.

Although in these examples the supervision resembles the therapy, the supervision does not become therapy. The difference is in the focus which in supervision comes back to improving the service to the patient. So any growth of the supervisee is ultimately for this purpose.

**Informing resources**

As the supervision resembles the therapy so closely much of the literature and resources for mindfulness practice and teaching are also relevant for supervision.

There is a vast amount of literature on supervision from other therapeutic fields containing many definitions, descriptions and models of supervision. Some of this literature provided a useful reference point for looking at core structures, frameworks and elements of supervision generally (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992; Carroll, 1996; Hawkins & Shohet, 2010; Hess, 1987; Scaife, 2010; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987; Watkins, 1997).

There is a small selection of literature about mindfulness supervision within other therapeutic fields (Andersson, King, & Lalande, 2010; Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Wyatt, 2011). There are also two relevant books about passionate supervision which each include a chapter about mindfulness supervision, and have a general theme of presence and being in the moment (Shohet, 2008, 2011).
The Centre for Mindfulness Practice and Research at Bangor University has been developing their understanding of supervision for MBSR/MBCT teachers. Mardula and Cooper (2011), define mindfulness-based supervision:

A regular space that is contracted between supervisor and supervisee, which enables reflection on the supervisee’s mindful teaching practice and how this interfaces with their personal mindfulness practice and their life. The process is dedicated to developing and deepening the growth, understanding and effectiveness of the supervisee’s application of mindfulness, both personally and in their working life.

The particular components of mindfulness and its interface with teaching, personal practice and life are central to teaching MBSR/MBCT in an embodied way, and form the heart of supervision.

From the outset it seemed clear that one of the most useful sources of information would be experienced supervisors who had been receiving and giving supervision for a number of years. To have a broad cross section, taking in the UK perspective and a flavour from other parts of the world, eight supervisors were contacted, five from within the UK and three international (Australia, Netherlands and USA). All of them generously agreed to being interviewed on the phone for one hour to speak about their understanding and experience around supervision. Along with my experience these dialogues form the main body of what is presented in this dissertation. The supervisors worked in organisations training and supervising MBSR/MBCT teachers. They all had long standing personal mindfulness practice and had been teaching MBSR/MBCT for some years. Their knowledge and supervisory skills were built on these foundations as well as many other influences. A significant influence had been their experiences from supervision.
It feels as if the people who have been my supervisors have been my teachers. They have certainly been strong mentors to me, significant figures, passing down a lineage of understanding and it feels that that relational connection to significant people who are our seniors is a really important part of the integrity.

(Diane, 2012)

Some of the key influences presented were: being on the receiving end of critical feedback that was upsetting and undermining versus feedback that felt like a gift; being on the receiving end of being told what to do and how to do it versus a creative exploration; genuine inquiry processes, spaciousness, warmth, support, interest and friendliness; being able to talk from your heart not just your mind, collegiate honesty that supervisors struggle as well, and very direct questioning versus a more compassionate interest.

**Functions of supervision**

There are many reasons why supervision is important and a range of functions. Supervision is often a balance of these functions with some being more prominent than others within different roles and contexts. There is a balance of supporting teachers with the more ‘doing’ mode of planning, developing the curriculum and conceptualising whilst sustaining a wider perspective exploring from experience and cultivating a more ‘being’ mode. The primary reason for engaging in this process is a duty of care for people in the class.
I have used the three categories of functions of supervision as proposed by Inskipp and Proctor (1993) to give a framework, and looked at key functions in each of these categories (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Functions of supervision for MBSR/MBCT teachers**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Key Functions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Formative (Educational)</td>
<td>To stimulate curiosity and understanding of clients, the group, the self (teacher) – keeping alive a sense of inquiry to the whole process</td>
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| The focus is on the supervisees learning and development | To develop and enhance skills in core competencies  
To deepen knowledge and understanding of concepts and theory and link with teaching  
To feedback on strengths and learning edges which can then be incorporated into teaching  
To promote reflective practice for learning to take place allowing for choice points/different options |
| Normative (Administrative/Management) | Assessment and evaluation  
Promoting an ethical and safe practice to maintain standards and duty of care  
To be true to what is being taught – enabling mindfulness to be used for good in people lives  
A sense of responsibility for the supervisee and the people they are teaching  
To do no harm  
Challenging misunderstandings or poor practice |
| Restorative (Supportive)     | Establish a good working relationship which is safe, supportive and nourishing – a place to unpack the impact of the work, overcome obstacles to learning, be creative, and receive guidance in times of need  
To support being human, compassionate  
Supporting the development and deepening of ongoing personal mindfulness practice and its interface with teaching and everyday life.  
To be in the present moment |
The context of teaching may also require some of the functions to be more prominent. For example, within an assessed training context or clinical research trial assessment and feedback may play a greater role, some organisations show little care so the supportive functions may be uppermost.

**Table 2** Summary of the key characteristics of supervision at different developmental levels

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Stage</th>
<th>Characteristics of supervisee</th>
<th>Characteristics of supervision sessions</th>
<th>Supervisor role</th>
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<tr>
<td>Beginner, Advanced</td>
<td>Lacking in confidence/occasionally over confident</td>
<td>Clearly structured</td>
<td>Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner and moving in to Competent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Practical skills based Content and curriculum based Developing understandings of underlying intentions</td>
<td>Positive feedback Support Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>Lack of confidence may still be present in certain aspects of teaching</td>
<td>Embedding of new skills Freedom to learn from mistakes Exploration of relational aspects</td>
<td>Holding Ability to move between a more structured approach and a more collegial approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient/Advanced</td>
<td>Increased confidence Greater insight</td>
<td>More reflective More exploratory Challenging of teaching and practice Broader themes</td>
<td>More collegial May be peer-based</td>
</tr>
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Developmental theories have been applied to supervision to help explain what might happen in supervision and how the supervisor may be helpful to the supervisee in
different ways at different stages (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987). I have proposed three stages of development for mindfulness-based teachers (see Table 2), aligned to the stages in The Bangor, Exeter and Oxford Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Teaching Assessment Criteria (MBI-TAC) (Crane et al., 2011). It is helpful for us to hold these stages in mind so the supervisor can match supervision to the right level for the supervisees, but the reality is that we are not always in one stage and may pass through the stages again at different times or move between them.

**Framework for supervision of MBSR/MBCT teachers**

So having set out the context for supervision for mindfulness-based teachers I now turn towards the framework and detailed description. Supervision follows closely the principles of the actual teaching of MBSR/MBCT and draws upon other supervisory processes. It also has its own particular features and distinctiveness. It is a complex process, drawing together many aspects of the supervisees training, teaching skills and practice, often beginning as an essential part of training to become a teacher and continues as a lifelong process. To illustrate this complex process I have developed a framework showing the different layers that combine together to form these distinctive features (see Fig 1).

This framework can be applied to supervision at all developmental levels and different settings and it takes into account all the varied functions and intentions of supervision. I have used a series of circles to denote the different layers of supervision. The outer circle is the essence of mindfulness-based teaching and supervision on which everything is grounded. The middle circles represent what may be brought into supervision and where the learning is often taken. The inner circle represents the supervision space, this
unique contracted space where there is time dedicated to inquire and explore allowing for an integration to take place.

**Fig 1** Framework showing the distinctive features of supervision for mindfulness-based teachers

Further explanation of the different circles within the diagram continues with examples from the supervisor interviews to illustrate. This framework offers a
description based on current understanding, as this is an ever-changing and evolving process so the framework may adapt and change.

The Outer Circle - Container of Mindfulness

Everything that happens within and around the supervision is held within this container of mindfulness. Crane et al., (2010) write “the essential premise here is that the whole of the teaching (and training) process is mindfulness-based” (p. 79). This could be extended to include the supervision process. The supervisor plays an important role in holding this intention and embodying the supervision within this container, helping new teachers to become part of the culture of mindfulness. The particular characteristics of this circle may be divided into:

Embodied presence.

A sense of being in the present moment, grounded and embodying the fundamental seven attitudinal qualities conveyed by Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) of non-judging (awareness of experience as it is, seeing with kindness when we are adding interpretation and judgement and stepping back), patience (allowing time for experience to unfold at its own pace), beginners mind (keeping a freshness and aliveness to the present moment and all that it brings), trust (developing a trust in the validity of our own experience and intuition), non-striving (moving in to “non-doing”, letting things be as they are), acceptance (being with the reality in a compassionate way) and letting go (staying present, letting go of unhelpful habits).

Supervision is imbued with curiosity and a willingness to be fully present to whatever arises. The way the teacher embodies the spirit and essence of the practices is
a key ingredient of mindfulness-based classes (Crane et al., 2010). The teacher communicates this potential through their own sense of being. The supervisor is modelling embodiment and encouraging the supervisee to speak, listen, think, reflect, sit, feel, write and hold their body from this present moment connection. This has the potential to move from the more conceptual to a live, more ‘felt’ experience, deeply exploring what it is to be human.

Integrity.

A commitment to maintaining integrity of the teaching, the programmes and the teachers can be somewhat challenging in the midst of a ‘doing’ culture. There may be pressures that push towards a dilution in integrity.

Crane et al. (2012) write about three different components of treatment integrity: competence (the extent to which the approach is carried out as intended); adherence (application of the appropriate ‘ingredients’); and differentiation (how the approach can be distinguished from other approaches). The MBI-TAC (Crane et al., 2011) provides a structure and framework for teachers, trainers and supervisors particularly around competence and covering the teaching, programme and the teacher, forming a basis for understanding, articulating, and discussing issues around integrity.

This integrity of the teacher is vital to teaching. McCown, Reibel, and Micozzi (2010) describe this important aspect “the person of the teacher “(p.91 -101), in what they note as the shortest and most important chapter in their book. There is an interesting balance of teaching/supervising in a professional way but also a very human way. This is maybe quite a different emphasis to other therapeutic approaches and brings an edge of how we maintain a professional integrity and be there as human beings. Teachers are often teaching in results orientated contexts, so finding ways to
support a being mode, moving from striving and fixing. This being human allows a staying open and connected and is at the core of this work. Supervision is a place where both supervisor and supervisee can be authentic.

There is also the integrity around acknowledging and staying true to the underlying philosophy of mindfulness practice which is based on the 2,600 year old tradition of Buddhism, and the MBSR and MBCT programmes that developed from a deep understanding of this foundational base. Mindfulness within secular settings such as healthcare is still a new field. As mindfulness-based interventions grow and develop some interesting challenges arise around holding the essential essence of these programmes and adapting for different populations and contexts. Supervision forms part of the process of shaping and monitoring future directions as stated in one of the interviews, “In the back of my mind is always for the mindfulness field to preserve the integrity of it” (Julia, 2012). Supervisors share some of the responsibility around maintaining these integrities.

Good practice adherence is an important aspect of supervision and needs to be built in. There is a need to challenge practice that is poor or unethical on all levels. This can be a tricky edge for many supervisors. Throughout supervision there is an encouragement for supervisees to inquire into and challenge their teaching, assumptions and understandings, looking at their experience with a fresh perspective. There may be times where supervisors are firmly directive about poor practice, communicating in a clear and open way in an atmosphere of compassion allowing the supervisee to grow from this learning as seen in this example:

I had a case recently of a new supervisee who wanted to do 5 courses all at once and instead of my saying absolutely “NO it’s impossible” I said, “well
can we maybe take it down to 3” and really monitored with him what was going on within his body whilst he was doing that. And he was shattered. So it was more a sense of OK so maybe now you can see why this is a lot more complex and difficult than you thought. But then later on in his learning he decided he was able to take people on in to his mixed classes that he was not actually capable of working with (like people recently bereaved) and so I did put my foot down and say “no this is not ethically good.” And we had interesting tussles around it. In the end we worked it out quite nicely. So it’s that kind of playing with it rather than saying this is what you can and cannot do. (Julia, 2012)

There are a range of ethical processes that the supervisor cannot monitor so the contracting process needs to make sure these are taken care of e.g. those working in NHS settings we have clinical responsibility resting elsewhere.

**Compassion.**

Compassion is an important underlying principle of teaching in MBSR/MBCT. We see from Kuyken et al. (2010) that when people who have had 3 or more episodes of depression and have engaged in an MBCT course that when they are able to be more self-compassionate at times of low mood, this breaks the link between reactivity and poorer outcomes a year later. If this proposed mechanism of change is important as a way of shifting patterns for participants it seems important to cultivate compassion within training and supervision. From a place of self-compassion we can then begin to extend compassion to others.

Kirstin Neff (2003) offers us three elements to self-compassion: self-kindness described as being kind to oneself in instances of pain or failure, common humanity as
perceiving one’s experience as part of the larger human experience and mindfulness as holding painful thoughts in balanced awareness. In supervision we have the participant(s), supervisee and supervisor all of whom experience suffering in some form or other. We can begin to cultivate meeting that pain with self-kindness, seeing it as part of the human experience and holding it in a steady awareness. The supervisor holds kindness, common humanity and mindfulness in the sessions, having a structure that allows space for the heart to open.

As a teacher, meeting challenges can push towards familiar places of wanting to avoid, defend, fix, judge, blame. Reflection is a powerful tool so without compassion there is a danger that the judgemental voice of the inner critic can become very loud, moving supervision to more of an inquisition. Compassion helps to drop the fear of getting it wrong. Compassion can guide away from these judging patterns opening up a more creative and balanced space to see the world. We can begin to see “a thought as thought, an emotion as emotion, a habit as a habit and begin to take the ‘I’ out of the process” (Feldman & Kuyken, 2011, p. 153).

Care must be taken to fully understand compassion and not misinterpret it as the need to be warm and supportive in a way that continually creates comfort, as compassion has a challenging edge to it as well. Several supervisors spoke of this important edge:

There is something that irritates me, that if you are a mindfulness teacher/supervisor you have to be lovely, warm and cuddly and compassionate.
You know I can be and I am not. We do have a responsibility around holding, to be fierce and confront. We are holding the integrity here. (Emily, 2012)
Holding this line is important and we shouldn’t be afraid of doing that. I think there is a whole thing around the compassion thing that can really turn in to that idea of idiot compassion. Not being absolutely clear and firm when you need to be. It’s great to be able to comment on progress and encourage progress but still be able to be really honest and frank. (Lucy, 2012)

The cultivation of compassion to suffering is an essential part of embodied teaching. With many mindfulness-based programmes compassion practices are not taught explicitly but are woven into the teaching on many levels, the teaching is embodied and imbued with compassion. This key ingredient needs to be in the mix in supervision on a deep level, coming from practice and embodiment, not just in the form of how do I teach compassion to my participants? Compassion has many different threads including kindness, empathy, generosity and acceptance as well as courage, tolerance and equanimity.

**The Middle circles – What comes in to the supervision space?**

The content and themes of what is brought to supervision are so varied but primarily fall in to the categories identified in the middle circles (see Fig 1). Developmental phases play a strong part in determining what supervisees choose to bring. This is particularly evident with newer teachers where the teachings of skills come high on their agenda, with people really wanting to make sense of the programmes, the nuts ‘n’ bolts of teaching. As part of maintaining integrity teachers often come to supervision wanting to build their competence in particular areas of teaching. Feedback from the supervisor may be part of the session.
Supervisees are often bringing in places where there are more emotional charges and challenges or places where there is confusion and lack of confidence. These edges create tension and equally there is a possibility of creativity and playfulness. In many instances the content and themes develop through the inquiry process, not always staying with the immediate content. The form may vary as to how things come in to the space with verbal report; written reflection; practice; use of DVD’s/audiotape; or live teaching.

The use of DVD within supervision seems to be growing. It can feel quite a somewhat excruciating process to begin with for supervisees and yet holds many possibilities. One of the major advantages is that of really being able to see the teaching and the teacher. Without it there is a reliance on reporting from the supervisee which is inevitably clouded by subjective perception. Body posture and gestures can come to light such as the crossing of legs, fidgeting with papers, eye contact or lack of, grimaces, and contractions, that all provide information for fascinating inquiries. There is so much that isn’t seen so cannot be incorporated in to the supervision and “we don’t know what we don’t know” as the quotes below illustrate:

I can think of somebody I saw recently who has a great pile of notes with her when she is teaching, which she keeps looking at, and she hadn’t told me she was looking at them. It turned out it hadn’t even occurred to her that it wasn’t a good idea. And I was saying you need to let go of your notes. And when she did it made a huge difference. (Emily, 2012)

My first experience was very challenging because, you know she was far more critical of it than I expected, and I didn’t know half the things I could have been doing better. It was extremely useful. (Rachael, 2012)
Many teachers lack confidence so seeing them on DVD allows the supervisor to support what went well “supporting people’s confidence that they didn’t make a dogs dinner out of it” (Rachael, 2012).

There is a balance needed as well between the content and detail and the deeper connection to people’s process. A DVD or live teaching doesn’t tell us about the personal process of the teacher and it is often hard on DVD to sense what is happening in the room with the participants and group members.

Live teaching may be through co-teaching or teaching within the supervision session, with the supervisee leading a practice or occasionally the supervisor. There is an opportunity to practice in a very alive way and move in to inquiry and then reflection on the process.

Alongside the more skills based learning there is the importance of learning through one’s own mindfulness practice on a continuing basis. By having practice as a focus it also allows us to keep a connection with the traditions that give rise to this work. Woods (2010) describes how within mindfulness-based supervision we have two strands, one of supervision of teaching and another for sustaining and deepening personal mindfulness practice. These two strands are interlinked. For some teachers this may mean two different processes for supervision but there is often a degree of crossover. There seems to be a movement towards these two aspects merging further within supervision.

Table 3 outlines the middle circles giving some examples and illustrations from the supervisor interviews.
Table 3 Middle circle examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Middle Circles</th>
<th>Examples of what might be brought to supervision</th>
<th>Interview example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching skills.</td>
<td>The curriculum, leading of practices, making CDs, timing, conveying teaching, handouts, resources, all the preliminaries before even beginning to run a course, feedback on teaching</td>
<td>The person I can think of was having tremendous difficulty not getting everything upside down and back to front. So it was to practice the order, the sequence of the guidance. And to do it in a place that felt quite safe rather than the anxiety of the class. (Sally, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory/Understanding</td>
<td>Theory from MBSR/MBCT, broader understandings of mindfulness or Buddhist understandings.</td>
<td>They said “what’s the intention behind doing body work again in MBCT?” And when you get questions of that order it’s a reminder that that is where this person is at and they need a real kind of emersion in the course and what all its different components are. But with some inquiry of what do you feel when you do the movement practice. (Lucy, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants/The group</td>
<td>The more relational aspects of teaching, the individuals in the class, the group process, and co-teachers, often aspects of the inquiry, individuals that are feeling more challenging to teachers</td>
<td>I was supervising somebody on Friday and one of the participants was taking him off on a very intellectual stream and the question was how to come back from that, how to not just let it burble on but how to bring the focus back to the present moment. (Sally, 2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Practice/Process</td>
<td>Particular issues/struggles in relation to practice, reflections on practice, overwork, busyness, confidence issues</td>
<td>Sometimes I am helping to evolve practice-giving pointers, working with distraction or the inner critic, or if people haven’t been meditating for that long and are much newer to the whole thing, I have suggested particular approaches that might be helpful for one’s own practice but with a view of it supporting teaching. (Rachael, 2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to bear in mind how diverse these circles are. The key element is how supervisors/supervisees are drawing on the foundations of the outer circle and the distinctive features of the inner circle as these issues are brought to and from supervision, rather than the specific content.

The Inner Circle - Supervision space

This inner circle is the contracted space of supervision, the place where issues are brought, explored, integrated and taken back to teaching, practice and life. A description of the structure holding this space follows and then moving to the distinctive features.

Structure.

Much like other supervisions the space is created with the help of various structures. It is a held space with an overarching contract, a creation of a safe space, “a playpen”. These contracts will involve the supervisor, supervisee and other relevant parties. The contract may include practical issues such as time and length of sessions and duration, payment, method of supervision, recording and storage of notes, review process. But also importantly clarification about confidentiality needs of the supervisee, expectations, accountability and roles. This process involves collaboration and is the first step in creating a good working alliance (Bordin, 1983). For people new to supervision it may take longer to set up what supervision is about and how the time could be used.

There is an agenda for each session which is an interesting piece in itself and where some of the work of supervision begins. Supervisors and supervisees have some
different preferences and styles around the contents of the session, emailing beforehand or setting it at the beginning of the session. However, what seems important is a pre-supervision process for the supervisee/supervisor to have given the session some reflection beforehand. This reflection may come from a felt sense of what is arising in relation to practice and teaching, maybe sitting for a while to see what is uppermost, “allowing for an aliveness of what supervisees are bringing, what they are challenged by, struggling with, fired by or whatever”(Diane, 2012). There may be a need to negotiate what is on the agenda and prioritise to give space for each issue. In the main supervisees bring the agenda items but there will be times a supervisor does, for example wanting to follow through something from a previous session, concerns about some aspect of teaching.

Then there will be a session format. There may be an agreed model for this but it will also require flexibility in order to enable the ability to be responsive to the moment. The form needs to support the underlying intentions not become the intentions. The sessions may include for example a period of practice (strengthening the container of mindfulness either in the session or beforehand), agenda setting, a review from last session, space to inquire and reflect, pulling out the learning, things to take forward, summarising the session.

Supervision may be a one-to-one session, often the most popular format, making use of the telephone or Skype as experienced supervisors are not readily available geographically; group (small or peer) or co-supervision for more experienced teachers.

These structures may give scaffolding to the process but it is important that supervisees and supervisor find ways of bringing their whole being to this process. In the same way that we create favourable conditions for mindfulness practice in the
groups that we facilitate, this is mirrored in supervision through verbal and non-verbal communication.

It is also important to maintain freshness around supervision, not getting stuck with one formula. There may be a need for different supervisors at different times, with built in review periods to shake it up. Keeping clean boundaries can be very helpful, much as there will be an element of friendliness in supervision that is not what we are primarily engaged in.

**Distinctive features.**

The distinctive features are found within the outer circle, and then this inner circle where all that is brought is held and explored in quite a particular way, allowing the supervisee and supervisor to integrate and take these new discoveries back in to teaching, practice and life. Much of what happens in this space is centred on mindfulness, embodied presence, compassion and deep curiosity nurtured through inquiry. This quote from a supervisor illustrates these features.

> And what I like to know is what’s going on inside people while they are teaching. And whether they have a very strong sense of the practice of mindfulness itself as the basis for the teaching. Instead of it being form orientated it is more of essence orientated. The essence of paying attention and being really present. (Charlotte, 2012)

> This process is a co-creation with both parties bringing their whole presence. All the essence we would bring to mindfulness practice and teaching comes to the supervision. “With mindfulness supervision we can’t have too much mindfulness and many things conspire against it” (Rachael, 2012). The supervision itself is a
mindfulness practice for all parties, providing a rich and nourishing environment to explore mindfulness.

**Inquiry.**

“Ideally the whole supervision is a kind of mutual inquiry into the group and what happened, why and what went well” (Rachael, 2012). There is a mutual process of exploring, reflecting, and getting curious about all aspects of teaching. “And I strongly believe that we can’t do that on our own. That inquiry needs nourishment. It’s a relational exploration” (Diane, 2012). Doing this with others supports a steadiness of practice and attention, dialogue to unravel, another view opening up our blind spots, and the opportunity of guidance from another.

A key vehicle for learning within MBSR/MBCT classes is the inquiry process (Crane, 2009; McCown et al., 2010) and this is the same for supervision. Inquiry is an interactive way of verbalising our curiosity about our experience and in doing so having space for that curiosity to develop as we form and hear our words, feel into our bodies, hear and feel the impact of others and their words. We are exploring experience from our “being” mind. A simple example from a supervisor is beginning the session with a breathing space and a possible inquiry along the lines of: “What is going on with your body now? And how are you working with this? How do you work with this in your teaching?” (Julia, 2012), showing how the inquiry opens out through layers: beginning from direct experience, to dialogue and opens out to linking with teaching (Crane, 2009).

In the inquiry of supervision, in the same way as in classes, time can be taken to draw out the experience and learning, not clamping down quickly with the ‘supervision point’. Other words to describe this may be investigation, exploration, questioning,
reflecting, spaciousness, dialogue. “So this real burrowing into something that caught their attention, and getting curious about it together would really draw me in to curiosity. Inviting and questioning, being together in the not knowing” (Charlotte, 2012).

This can be a challenge within supervision. In a session for MBSR/MBCT there is at least 2 hours weekly for 8 weeks whereas in supervision, 30-60 minutes weekly, fortnightly, monthly, sometimes less. There can be a temptation to fill the space, to give supervisees their monies worth. It can be easy for supervision to become filled with the content of what happened in supervision which may have its uses but is not what we are primarily engaged in. There is a move away from descriptions to investigating and becoming curious.

Even with newer teachers wanting to learn the nuts ‘n’ bolts a collaborative, inquiring approach is still maintained. Why are we doing this? What is the intention? What is your feeling about it? What is happening in the classroom for you? How are you noticing your interactions with people? Where do you get most anxious? Where do you settle in to the present moment? What supports you?

When giving and receiving feedback this can be looked at together, maintaining contact with the moment, and being clear and offering guidance on teaching strengths and edges, suggestion of different ways, new possibilities. The MBI-TAC (Crane et al., 2011) could be a possible framework for this guidance. It offers six domains present in teaching: (a) coverage, pacing and organisation of session curriculum, (b) relational skills, (c) embodiment of mindfulness, (d) guiding mindfulness practices, (e) conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching, (f) facilitation of group learning environment.
Present moment process.

As part of the inquiry process there is a definite intention to keep coming back to the here and now, to direct experience and using mindfulness practice to support that. Supervisors may incorporate ways to pause and step out of automatic pilot, finding ways to feel grounded, using a contact with the feet on the floor, bottom on the chair and the sensations of the breath.

The supervisor is modelling this embodied presence and coming back to process and practice, and moving at times to more direct guidance. The supervisor holds this delicate balance, playing with when to move more towards one direction or the other. By practising this way of being present in supervision, supervisees learn how to be with another in the present moment through dialogue, listening, speaking, awareness of their inner landscape, trusting the process of mindfulness, and feeling in to what resonates so this becomes more intuitive in the midst of teaching classes.

As supervisees talk about some aspect of teaching there is always the possibility of exploring the inner landscape of their experience as they recall and recount situations, moving from the attention on the story to what is underneath it. There may be times where supervisors share present moment noticing from their experience, checking out to see if there is a connection. Both parties are actively involved in this inquiry and learning together.

There is an orientation to mindfulness and the attitudinal qualities. Depending on background supervisees may revert to therapy, fixing, teaching, or other habitual patterns so helping to find a different way of being with the participants in their classes, relearning how to be with people.
You are not trying to fix them, you are not trying to draw out the narratives of their problem, you are being with them to keep helping them to look at what is actually happening in the present moment. (Charlotte, 2012)

And for some supervisees this is a difficult process, the automatic pull back to habitual styles is strong:

I find I might encourage them to what’s underneath but somehow it just keeps flipping back. I will bring in a pause or a breathing space. I will specifically say just pause now and drop in your experience and just notice. I have a supervisee in mind at the moment and I have got an image of a rubber band which just keeps pinging back, but that’s the intention to keep redirecting our attention to underlying process. (Diane, 2012)

**Integration and linking.**

Inquiry and reflections on mindfulness and teaching in the present moment allow for a deeper connection with experience, moving to a place of seeing with fresh eyes, maybe accessing the felt sense in the body. Gendlin, 2003, describes this ‘felt sense’ in his work on focussing: coming to the body, allowing the felt sense to appear and welcoming it. By really getting to know from the experience, decisions and actions can arise from that truthful, connected, authentic place. Ryan (2008) describes the passion of mindfulness supervision, a quality of looking, how we wake up a creative space and reconnect with innate qualities that are often already there but we miss.

From the place of seeing and feeling afresh, having further clarity links and connections can be made. So returning to focussing from the felt sense in the body words/images emerge, this can be helpful in supervision for discovering a more intuitive
body feeling, adding to cognitive understandings, offering another link in the overall picture. Supervisors are helping supervisees to make connections, see patterns, at times shaking old patterns loose, affirming when that is happening. There may be little things that just begin to open the door. Supervisors are often holding the bigger picture, taking a wider view and moving up close to specific detail.

There is this rich mix of what is known prior to the session, what is discovered in the session, the new seeing, the connections that are made by this co-creation between supervisor and supervisee. This integration moves towards an embodied learning, feeling in to those insights and living them allowing for meaningful engagement. This learning feeds back in to teaching, understandings, classes, personal practice and life, constantly nourishing. And all of this is held with a sense of not knowing, we get to know in supervision and also see there is much that remains unknown.

Table 4 shows an example of an inquiry within a peer supervision illustrating particularly what was happening within the supervision space, moving from direct experience through to a wider context of understanding and taking back to teaching.
Table 4 Example from a peer group supervision session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Link with the framework</th>
<th>Experience in the supervision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outer circle</strong></td>
<td>Mindfulness container held by the group. There was a short practice to start the session to orientate to a sense of being. Linking to mindfulness, embodiment and compassion continues throughout the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle circle</strong></td>
<td>A participant had missed a couple of sessions and didn’t seem very engaged. The supervisee noticed they were not very actively following this up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inner circle</strong></td>
<td>In the supervision as speaking a noticing of a feeling, a contraction in the body around the abdomen, a feeling of harshness and irritation, giving up on the participant, almost feeling it would be easier if they left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(present moment experience)</td>
<td>Contemplated the question as to what might be happening for this participant underneath what is presented, a sense of their vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inner circle</strong></td>
<td>Supervisees noticing body sensations softening and opening, more space in the body and mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Inquiry, reflection and dialogue with peers)</td>
<td>Seeing dissatisfaction/suffering for the participant and self. Seeing and feeling the lack of compassion and the possibility of opening in a different way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inner circle</strong></td>
<td>Making a decision to phone the participant, coming from an open compassionate stance. This decision coming from a bodily felt sense, feeling congruent with the exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(maintaining present moment awareness)</td>
<td>Making a decision to phone the participant, coming from an open compassionate stance. This decision coming from a bodily felt sense, feeling congruent with the exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inner circle</strong></td>
<td>The supervisee’s ability to soften towards this participant continued and they did complete the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Seeing from a fresh perspective, making links)</td>
<td>The supervisee’s ability to soften towards this participant continued and they did complete the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inner circle</strong></td>
<td>(Integration and action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taking the learning out in to teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Continuing to integrate learning)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. This example is from the authors own experience in a peer supervision session*
A further example (see Fig 2) illustrates the general issue of ‘wobbles’ being brought to supervision. Within the framework described, this issue is held in the container of mindfulness and the supervision space gives time for reflection and inquiry as discussed in the previous sections. This is a theme that is likely to come to the space again and again and each time the learning then gets integrated back to teaching, personal practice, and strengthens understanding and practice in the midst of teaching.

**Fig. 2 Teaching from ‘wobbles’**

An enormous amount of what I do is helping people to ground themselves and teach from their wobbles rather than trying to get rid of them. It is a practice that
has to be developed over time. I don’t just say it and they do it. We do it in the supervision session, we FOF BOC ((Feet on floor, Bum on chair) a lot (.B, 2011). And I encourage them to use that in their teaching, with any opportunity to teach from that wobble. Can I create an environment where we can play with that in supervision? And hopefully that can then be taken out in to their work with their clients whoever they are. (Julia, 2012)

The ripples back to teaching

It is hard to know how supervision translates back to teaching, but based on supervisors own experience and what they have heard and seen from supervisees there seems to be a great appreciation for the supervision space.

For a supervisee who is less experienced the link with the teaching might be more direct. People report back on ways they have experimented with teaching differently following supervision. Supervisors see and hear these changes on DVD in the way people sit, the language they use, the clarity of their teaching. People also described feeling supported, more confident in their teaching and their own practice supporting them, not feeling so stressed, pressured or burnt-out.

One person who was running a group in a setting where they didn’t really care whether she ran the group or not, just having someone to talk to who really believed in what she was doing, what was going well. Where basically I just felt that that in itself supported the teaching. In the NHS people can feel a bit beleaguered. (Rachael, 2012)
Others have described something along the lines of hearing the voice of the teacher in their head – “not a judge but a kind of supporter coming in to the room with you so you know you are not alone” (Charlotte, 2012). Others report being more excited and stimulated about teaching, maybe helping to reconnect with a beginner’s mind, being in the present moment, and staying fresh and alive to teaching.

**Evolution and future directions**

“It has influenced the way I teach and I think my teaching has influenced the way I supervise” (Julia, 2012).

And so this evolution and integration of training, teaching, practice and supervision continues. Although future directions cannot be predicted there are growing edges highlighted from these explorations with supervisors:

**Use of the MBI-TAC** - Over the last 4 years, Bangor, Oxford and Exeter Universities have been working together to develop a system for assessing mindfulness-based teaching competencies, the MBI-TAC (Crane et al., 2011). As well as offering a system for assessing competencies this also offers a framework for reference within the supervision.

**Feedback and exploration through DVD’s or Live teaching.** The growing use of DVD is possibly coming out of the culture of the training organisations using these methods as part of the training and assessment process and research trials. Most supervisors reported using or wishing to use DVD’s more.
“Without them there is a big possibility of missing something, quite shockingly so” (Julia, 2012).

Practical issues are a consideration. There is a need for equipment, some degree of technical knowledge, consent from participants, and possibly the biggest obstacle is the time (and therefore cost) for viewing. A compromise around the time issue is for supervisees to be selective around which parts of the DVD to ask supervisors to view/or view together in supervision. A 3-5 minute clip can provide a lot of material for exploration.

**More attention to personal practice** - There are some differing views around how much attention to bring to personal practice. There is certainly an agreement to bring inquiry to how practice affects and links with teaching. Several supervisors reported wondering about bringing it more explicitly to supervision. It can feel a sensitive area to broach with supervisees and not always an area of expertise for supervisors. And there may be other ways of supporting personal practice, signposting supervisees to these resources. If teachers are receiving mentoring through another source around their practice it maybe that the supervisor doesn’t probe but still looks at the way practice links with teaching.

**Group supervision** - The group environment may provide richness in terms of different comments and different ways of doing things. Although there may be less space for each individual we all learn from each other. There is a strong element of being in this together, seeing the common humanity. There are maybe some ways it mirrors the learning environment within which we teach MBSR/MBCT, highlighting issues around being in a group and the dynamics.
Conclusions

It is hoped that this dissertation presents a description of supervision for mindfulness-based teachers. This is a complex and fascinating process, nourishing the work in which mindfulness-based teachers are engaged. Whilst conducting the interviews there was a very live sense of inquiry about what supervision is and is not and the way it is an organic process continuing to evolve. In putting this description into a form of words I hope to stimulate further inquiry into the nature of supervision for mindfulness-based teachers, within the UK and across the international context where there may be some differences.

There are some challenges in ensuring that there are enough supervisors able to take on this role and address the current bottleneck. The role of Supervisor is a complex one, often holding a lot of responsibility. It is important that supervisors feel adequately trained, skilled and prepared for this role. Once they are trained, there is a growing need for to support supervisors.

Another challenge in accessing supervision may well be around funding of supervision. Asking what the value of supervision is and the part it plays in supporting the integrity of teaching and finding ways to articulate that value. There is a need to build this cost into the running of classes and the setting up of services.

Many teachers come to teach MBSR/MBCT with a heartfelt intention to engage in a way of life and livelihood that has meaning and supports their own well-being as well as that of others. Supervision may be one aspect of nurturing this meaning, giving some attention to the ‘work’ self and its connection with the whole person and others.
In summary supervision for MBSR/MBCT teachers is a place to: get curious, reflect, ponder, engage in a dialogue about mindfulness the past and present, awaken to the present moment, see and feel afresh, hold integrity, be with another, experience warmth, compassion and friendship, be supported, be challenged, be human, find clarity, make connections, make sense and meaning in a way that benefits others.

ENJOY.

Acknowledgements

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