

Session 4 Teacher Deep Dive

What the Teacher Brings to Mindfulness Trainings

*For mindfulness teachers, like musicians, the performance is mainly about **being** something, rather than doing something. All of your preparations, personal passion, practice, and ups and downs are reflected in the training you provide. The training will continuously raise the question 'What does the process ask of me at this moment?'"*

-Rob Brandsma

Teachers come to the classroom with their whole self, which includes personal history, personality, passions, strengths, weaknesses, areas for growth, and so much more. One common misconception in education is simply a delivery of knowledge, turning students into empty vessels that need to be filled, and the teacher into merely a source of knowledge. We know from much research that learning is a deeply complex, slow, dynamic, and relational practice. It happens between two or more whole selves giving and taking in a shared space.

That said, teachers are empowered to bring forth certain qualities, attitudes, and presence of being that can facilitate trust and impactful learning. **Embodiment** is defined as a tangible or visible expression of an idea, quality, or feeling. Whenever we connect our minds and bodies, bringing into the body the internal experiences of the mind or heart, we are embodied.

Teaching mindfulness, therefore, asks us to embody mindfulness in order to carry or present the values and practices we are helping our students to gain. Our very presence in the room and every interaction with students requires embodiment. How teachers express and relate to *nonjudgment*, the core component of mindfulness practice will be another key to student learning. Students in any learning environment will naturally look to the teacher and wonder, how can it be done? And, how should I do it?

Embodying mindfulness means serving as an example and model to those less experienced than you, but it doesn't mean you are expected to do so flawlessly. Your human imperfections are an important aspect of authentic mindfulness embodiment.

What determines teachers' degree of embodiment is not their perfection, but the ways in which they deal with their imperfections. You cannot offer your group a greater learning moment than letting them sense that, at times, you are also struggling with maintaining a mindful attitude, that you're aware of this, and that it's okay.

- Rob Brandsma

Rob Brandsma, citing Crane et al, lists the following ways a teacher embodies mindfulness during trainings:

- Present-moment focus—expressed through behavior and verbal and nonverbal communication
- Present-moment responsiveness—to internal and external experience
- Calm and vitality—simultaneously conveying steadiness, ease, nonreactivity, and alertness
- Attitudinal foundations—conveying mindfulness practice through the teacher’s way of being
- Person of the teacher—the learning is conveyed through the teacher’s way of being (Brandsma, 211)

Your embodiment of mindfulness may be noticed in many different ways. Remain aware and reflective, without worrying about your every movement, word, or breath. Consider some of the opportunities for you to demonstrate embodiment:

- How you greet students entering a room
- How you consider questions thoughtfully before answering
- How you open and close the door
- Where you choose to sit or stand while guiding formal practices
- The words you choose when offering feedback or assistance
- Your sensitivity to group and individual needs
- How you respond to internal and classroom tension
- How you respond to student resistance, difficulty, or doubt
- How you respond to classroom interruptions or surprises
- Where you place yourself in relation to the students during class
- How you signal the beginning and end of class
- How you acknowledge a passion for mindfulness and teaching
- How you treat yourself after making a mistake