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Insight and Wisdom Assignment
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Embodying Insight in Resonance of Being

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ABSTRACT

Part One of this paper explores the process of integration within the person as a whole, or so called ‘intra-personal integration’, which is fundamental for real healing to take place and to fully embody our humanness in the here-and-now. To give insight into the inner workings of the internal environment the insight model by Rob Nairn (Mindfulness Association, 2011) is used in relation to the emerging understandings in social neurobiology as described by Daniel Siegel (2011) and personal insight meditation practice by the author. The aim is to give insight into the complexity of internal human experiences and what it takes to liberate the innate drive toward integration, and finally transformation.

Part Two of this paper explores the process of inquiry in teaching mindfulness, which enables participants to access the deeper world inside and enriches the flow of energy and information in and between members of the group. By orienting the exploration towards ‘nowness’ intersubjective resonance takes place that is ‘snagging the brain’, stimulating neural activation and growth, which promotes intra- and interpersonal integration. Systems theory based “functional subgrouping” is discussed as a valuable tool for mindful group inquiry. Part two ends with exploring the qualities of a mindfulness teacher in facilitating the co-creation of mindfulness among teacher and participant, and how to optimize a sense of freedom and belonging to serve the river of integration towards harmony and well-being.

Keywords: intra- and interpersonal integration, neural resonance circuits, surface mind, subliminal reflex, intersubjective resonance, mindfulness, insight training, functional subgrouping, social brain, teaching.....

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes we can't look through the water of the pond, because the wind ruffles the surface and mud gets stirred up. By leaving the disturbance alone the water becomes clear by itself. The same is true for our mind. When we ‘rest’ in meditation we learn to leave all the activity of the mind alone. Then natural clarity and peace will arise since it is the true nature of our mind.

Presence in the context of the mindfulness tradition is described by Nairn (Mindfulness Association, 2009-2010) as ‘knowing what is happening while it is happening, without preference’. Being mindful is in itself a very powerful faculty that allows access our inner potential as human beings. At the same time it is also true that we rarely use this inherent ability, let alone actualize our full potential. Even if we have the aspiration and skills to be present or mindful, how come we often fail in achieving this goal? To answer this question we need insight into the workings of our own

internal environment. This requires the courage and heart to stay present long enough with whatever comes up in our consciousness to clearly see and recognize what is taking place.

This is easier said than done. Our human mind is more complex than we think it is, and we are usually so afraid of exploring our inner landscape that we tend to defend ourselves against it. We prefer to hang on to a more superficial dynamic of the mind, the so called 'surface mind'. This is the mind we 'use' every day and that lives in a constructed reality of images, concepts, and rationalities. As a result we are cut off from our own resources and use a frame of reference that often doesn't make sense in the current reality. This creates unnecessary suffering and a very limited perspective on who we are and our true potential.

To heal the superficial splits we make in ourselves and between each other we need to reconnect with the unconscious forces that influence our lives continuously without us knowing. Through recognising and integrating suppressed or unconscious parts of ourselves we can free ourselves from delusion and wake up to reality and the richness of our interconnected beingness.

The 'triangle of well-being' by Daniel Siegel (2011), which is based on the fundamental principles of mind, brain and relationships, is used to give insight into how we can learn to collaborate with the innate drive to heal and to live our life to the fullest. Latest research from social neurobiology suggests that we can learn to shape the patterns of our own unique mind, that direct the flow of energy and information inside us, and alter our mind, brain and relationships in ways that create well-being.

The conceptual maps of Nairn and Siegel are used to explore the complexity of my own inner landscape, to discern the different forces that are at play within me and how to free the natural inner drive to move towards integration.

PART ONE

1.1 The Surface Mind

The concept of 'surface mind', as Nairn (Mindfulness Association, 2011) uses it, is also adequately described by Agazarian (2001) when she talks about the 'thoughts-generated self-consciousness' versus an 'experience-generated consciousness of self'. When the first of these two is active (the surface mind) we're mainly busy *explaining* our experiences; by interpretations based on memory (past), on wishes and fears (present) or on negative and positive predictions (future). While with the 'experience-generated consciousness of self' we're *exploring* our experiences; by using our emotional intelligence and intuition (past), by testing the reality with our common sense (present), and being curious about the unknown (future).

The surface mind is clearly not at ease with the internal environment, and covers up feelings, emotions and impulses that are uncomfortable. The surface mind is so called locked up and cut off from its own resources. It can't get access to its own information and energy system and instead lives in a shallow energy level with often a deluded perspective on reality.

27th of December 2011, Portugal

I am for a short holiday in Portugal and it is beautiful weather outside. A part of me wants to go out and enjoy the day. Instead I am inside and feel trapped by the assignment I need to write. It reminds me of when I was a child and needed to do homework while I wanted to go out and play. If I can't do what I like, I feel kind of trapped, a loss of freedom. Freedom to my surface mind is doing what I like, whenever I like it. Having no pressure, no deadlines, no obligations, no fixed agenda or schedule...I think it is the wish to just be, without any agenda and carefree. Now there are all these projects I have with my life and with myself as a person; how I should feel, behave, think, act, write etcetera. I can't seem to be able to

leave myself alone. Although I know this is a fruitless state of mind I can't seem to get out of it. As a reaction I become self-critical and feel really bored and disappointed with myself.

Although the surface mind is the part of us that likes to think it is in control and can fix things, it is at the same time largely controlled by forces of the internal environment, says Nairn (Mindfulness Association, 2011). To get real with ourselves, and reality as such, we'll need to explore what is there below the surface.

1.2 The Unconscious Mind

There is a huge part of us about which we know nothing. It is what Freud and Jung call the unconscious. We tend to live in just a small part of our consciousness, while there is this vast unknown sea inside; a rich and turbulent place from which arise thoughts, feelings, memories and dreams, hopes and wishes and different mind states. Now and then this inner sea seems to crash in on us. These are moments when we feel overwhelmed by sensations or emotions (pleasant or unpleasant), threatening to drag us down below to the dark depths of our being and make us feel as if we are drowning. Because we don't "see" these deeper dynamics, we fail to recognise their presence and power. As a result we can be swept away by mental processes, feeling trapped in reactive emotional loops and ingrained behaviours and habitual responses.

21st of November 2011

This afternoon there was this anxiety in me, a kind of fear floating in and around me, a nervousness that I couldn't place. It was two hours before the mindfulness training at the University of Applied Sciences in Amsterdam. I think I was just scared to be with the group again, no specific reason. Maybe because I feel vulnerable the last few days. I have been extremely tired, dizzy and it felt as if my body left me, I lost control over it. Very scary in the beginning, now I get used to it, but I am a bit worried what it is about. Am I slightly burned-out? Is the stress of last year when my father died coming to the surface? Or does it have to do with moving into a new layer in my work? I feel I am more present, more open and more clear and courageous in dealing with what comes up in me and within participants of the mindfulness group. I feel I connect on a more profound level with the group. It could be that my physiological system still has to get used to this new kind of disclosure and unconsciously responds to the situation as if there is a real threat

1.3 Subliminal reflex

Just beyond the normal range of surface mind activity, which is characterized by intellectual, rational and logical modes, there is a more subtle level of thinking activity that has to do with attitudes, expectations, assumptions and so on. The problem with this subliminal stratum is that we easily buy into these subtle messages. This tendency is called 'the subliminal reflex' by Nairn (Mindfulness Association, 2011). We fail to recognise these messages just as thoughts, and therefore we lose our discriminative awareness and freedom of choice.

October 2011

During my supervision session with Roelof Langman I discovered that I actually think I have to be without fear when I facilitate a group. I completely forgot that it is quite human to experience fear when taking up the role of facilitator. Somehow I believe I have to be beyond it. When I do feel fear I get frustrated with myself, and easily fall into self-attacking and a kind of hopelessness about my own development. Although my surface mind tries to cover up the fear in front of the group, internally I know that I fail in living up to my own standards and feel ashamed about my own performance. I am afraid that people in the group might think I am not competent enough as a facilitator and I project my own critical and judgemental mind onto them.

This is just an example of how these messages of the subliminal reflex arrive with the force of complete authority and keep us trapped in untrue beliefs about ourselves and others. Only when we develop an awareness of this subliminal stratum, which is related to our conditioned reflexes, will we be able to see through the veils of inner deception.

With insight training we become more aware of gross thoughts (surface mind) and more subtle thoughts (subliminal stratum) and learn to recognise them for what they are, just thoughts. If thoughts are not engaged we 'see' that they are self-arising (they arise involuntary), self-displaying and self-dissolving. By not getting caught up in the storyline of thoughts we're opening up avenues of communication with the deeper world inside. We discover that the unconscious forces have a constant drive by themselves toward healing and integration, restoring imbalances within our personal system. By aligning ourselves with the laws of the unconscious we can truly solve deeper emotional problems, and retrieve and integrate lost parts of ourselves.

End of November 2011

Deep inside I feel there are a lot of processes going on. A new wave of grief over my father, moments of incredible tenderness and feeling connected with such vast reality. During a short Zen retreat last week I experienced in my meditation that I was dancing on a huge ocean of suffering with such joy and a lightness of being. Normally I would separate suffering from joy like two different elements that can't go together. But now they seemed to need each other to exist; because there was joy I could be present with the suffering and the other way around.

Since a few weeks ago from deep down inside an eight year old girl has come back into my life. This girl is very alive and full of desire. I love her being around so much, though containing her is not always easy. What really moves me is how she spreads her arms wide open and naturally reaches out to the whole world, wanting to embrace everything and everyone with her whole heart, truly wanting everyone to be happy.

I realize how often I suppress or deny heartfelt desires and wishes if they seem naive or can't be fulfilled. I give up on them, in order not to feel the pain of how things are. Yet being directly with the limitless desire itself is beautiful; it is vibrant warm energy flowing freely outwards to the world around me. It only becomes a problem if I think I need to 'do' something with it.

I don't want to lose again this frank girl inside of me. I have held myself back long enough, suppressing lots of feelings in order to stay in control, to fit in, to escape from danger, to prevent mistakes, to be good and appreciated, to be a nice girl, to.....

My voice is also changing recently, more low, more full. I literally feel more gravity in me, more body. A new kind of strength emerges; an inner solid feeling of staying with reality, less worried, more curious and really looking outwardly, really wanting to see the other, to understand the other. That is such a great feeling of aliveness, fearlessness and connection. It makes me happy.

1.4 Blocks to integration

Integrating lost or unconscious parts of ourselves is essential for our health, growth and well-being and for real change to take place. When we trust that there is an innate drive toward integration, we don't need to create change, but rather we need to learn how to facilitate or collaborate with the already existing innate drive to heal, according to Siegel (2011). This is not an easy thing to do since our surface mind, with which we identify most of the time, is completely unaware of the unconscious. And when parts of the unconscious unexpectedly come into our stream of awareness we are often so overwhelmed or scared by this raw material that it quickly becomes sanitized and framed by an inner subliminal reflex. Or we suppress it again with our surface mind since it doesn't

like feelings or sensations it can't control or fix. This is why it so incredibly difficult to just rest within meditation, to let our neurotic mind just rest in peace; the natural state of the mind;

Resting meditation, 30th of August 2011

Being with the unknown, realizing I don't know who I am or how my life will evolve, is very opening to the present moment. I see how my mind from habitual patterning continuously checks if I am okay, if my life is going okay. Then very quickly I find something to worry about, thinking it is not okay as it is.

Going back to the body sensations is very helpful to drop out of the thinking mind. Yet there is a fear of nothing happening. I think I need to (re)direct my life all the time, can't believe that it will happen by itself. Is this redirecting tendency not completely based on the EPS ('egocentric preference system' term introduced by Nairn), trying to avoid what I fear might be true?!

27th of September 2011

True resting in my meditation gives the direct experience of a wholeness and vitality vibrating in the space in and around me. It is an incredible enjoyable sensation, and the moment I realize this I tend to contract again. Can I allow it without holding on to it, without looking for it the next time...

All these conditioned reflexes prevent us from being with the direct experience of what is happening moment by moment, which is needed to recognize what is happening in order to wake up to our fullest human potential. How to open up avenues of communication with the deeper world inside and free this natural drive within us toward integration, towards healing and growth?

1.5 Triangle of well-being

Daniel Siegel (2011), a clinical professor of psychiatry who lives in the USA and is well known for his innovative integration of brain science with the practice of psychotherapy, introduced the 'triangle of well-being' to frame a new approach to well-being. Mind, Brain and Relationships are the three irreducible anchor points of our human experience, says Siegel. To explore these fundamental principles and their inner drive toward healing Siegel defines the human mind as 'a relational and embodied process that regulates the flow of energy and information' (2011, p.52). *Energy* stands for the capacity to carry out an action (whether it is moving our body or thinking a thought) and *information* is anything that symbolizes something other than itself (for example a stone in itself is not information, it's our mind that creates information when we collect data from the stone). The mind is *embodied* since the regulation of the flow of information and energy happens partly in the body. The brain is defined as the mechanism by which energy and information flow throughout the body (the nervous system that monitors and influences energy and information flowing through our heart for example, shaping also the activity of our immune system). And finally, the mind is relational and created within relationships – including the relationship we have with ourselves. Relationships are the ways we share the flow of energy and information with one another through patterns of communication.

The powerful finding is that we can learn to shape the patterns of our own unique mind, that direct the flow of energy and information inside us, and alter our mind, brain and relationships in ways that create well-being. 'With a mind that is resilient and coherent, the brain is integrated, and relationships empathic.' (Siegel, 2010, p.483)

14th of December 2011, board meeting SCT

During the board meeting with the SCT task group this week, of which I am a board member, I could see my own implicit memory template at work. A strong feeling of

competition comes up in me while relating with the other group members (a familiar script to when I was a child with my sisters) and as a subliminal reflex I think I can't beat them and I somehow give up on the whole game. Energetically I withdraw, give others the stage, make sometimes a little joke that is completely out of context, and lose my membership role by getting absorbed in my personal story. I shrug my shoulders when I want to say something in the group; a gesture with which I already throw myself away before I have even said something. Then when it comes to making decisions as a group I tend to obstruct (unconsciously) the closure of the decision by having still a question or some kind of objection. I seem to enjoy that moment of power, when everyone is looking at me, and where I feel that my vote counts; I actually can influence the group and the course of decision making!

At some point though I could suddenly catch myself within this script during the board meeting, like waking up, and knowing that I am stuck in an old role. By seeing it I brought the old memory into explicit awareness and this enabled me to reconnect again with the board members. To become even more present it was helpful to also share my insight with one member during the break. It was a relief not to engage with it anymore.

Underneath the three principles of mind, brain and relationships are discussed in relation to the above example of the board meeting

Mindsight

In order to reshape and redirect our inner experiences so that we have more freedom of choice and can influence our future we need what Siegel (2011) calls 'mindsight' (relates to mind). It refers to our unique human ability to focus our attention on our internal world and see what is inside, to accept it, and, finally to transform it. Mindsight gives us the potential to free ourselves from patterns of mind that are in the way of living our lives to the fullest. Without mindsight we are a kind of blind; our awareness 'believes' what it perceives, and therefore we are unable to discern that our justified beliefs, emotional reactions and behavioural responses are just activities of the mind. Mindsight is like a very special lens that gives us the capacity to perceive the mind with greater clarity and empathy and can be cultivated through the practical skills of mindfulness. In the above example of the board meeting mindsight happened when I caught myself in an old script. It's like being in a dark room and suddenly the light is switched on.

Brain development; implicit, explicit and autobiographical memory

'As complex systems, our brains are self-organizing and seek to continually link differentiated brain circuits into a coherent whole, moving from simplicity to complexity, and faltering only when there are constraints that block this natural movement.' Siegel (1999, cited by Badenoch, B. and Cox, P., 2010, p.474)

Understanding how our brain works helps people to see how much potential there is for change. Neuroscience has shown that the psychical structure of our brain changes through developing the reflective skills of mindsight, (activating the circuits that create resilience and well-being and that underlie empathy and compassion as well, Siegel, 2011) and that we can keep creating these new neural connections throughout our lives.

Looking at brain development at the beginning of our lives gives insight into how integration of different types of memory takes place, why the present mind can be 'hijacked by the past' without us knowing it, and what blocks the inner drive towards integration.

Understanding these different types of memory enables us to recognize patterns of implicit memory in the movement or sensations of the body, the upwelling of emotions and perceptions in order 'to see through them' and realize it is not the current reality.

Implicit memory templates:

The neural shaping of our brain, the very foundation of our sense of self, is built upon the intimate exchanges between the infant and her caregivers. When the same kind of experiences are repeated within this exchange during the first 12 – 18 months, they become engrained expectations of how the relational world works. Yet these implicit memory templates will remain largely below the level of conscious awareness, because these early memories don't have a time stamp like 'I remember...'. As a result we simply experience them as the truth when these implicit memories are activated later in life. In adulthood these core, unseen mental models influence and shape our relationships of all sorts. 'This leads to a painful circle in which what we implicitly "know" is continually confirmed by how we perceive what is happening and how our behaviour shapes situations into the expected form.' (Badenoch and Cox, 2010, p.467) This insight is extremely important to understand the power of the unconscious and how we completely lose sight of the current reality.

Explicit and autobiographical memory

Moving into our second year of life the amygdala (part of the developing limbic area of the brain and central to implicit memory) links with the hippocampus (central to explicit memory) to gather pieces of implicit memory into another form of remembering called explicit memory. Now we are able to place a time stamp on our experience; we can know 'this happened yesterday'. Shortly after that the limbic regions begin 'to link with the prefrontal cortex, first in the right hemisphere with the felt sense of our self in our history, and then in the left hemisphere where our story finds words and we can say, "I remember when..."'. (Badenoch and Cox, 2010, p.467) This is called autobiographical memory, and only functions consistently and efficiently from age 4 -5 years on.

Integration between implicit and explicit memory can however be interfered with at any stage of life due to certain events, especially traumatic ones and poor attachment in early childhood according to Schore (2003a, cited by Badenoch and Cox, 2010)) Stress chemicals in the body and the mind's tendency to dissociate under extreme stress keeps the implicit layer of memory in place, i.e. it stays dis-integrated from explicit and autobiographical awareness. Now we are left at the mercy of our implicit memories, and although it may have once been true, it is not the present reality.

Relationships

Relationships as the third principle to the triangle of well-being refers to how 'well-being emerges when we create connections in our lives – when we learn to use mindsight to help the brain achieve and maintain *integration*, a process by which separate elements are linked together into a working whole.' (Siegel, 2011, p. xv)

In the above example of the board meeting I could hold my implicit struggles, that were triggered in that specific context, within a kind awareness. I could feel a warm tenderness towards this old script of mine, staying open, curious and a kind of playful with it. Understanding that once this coping strategy helped me to survive and keep a sense of safety in a threatening environment increases my empathy and compassion for that part of myself. This process is called by Badenoch (Badenoch and Cox, 2010) 'intra-personal integration', which means that one part of our mind observes and cares for another part of our mind. It is an example of how compassion has to do with engaging in perspective taking (Nevejan, 2011b).

It is this kind of accepting attitude that unravels the knot of old fixed roles and scripts, like waking up to a new reality without having to suppress or delete any part of myself. The conditioned reflexes become a gateway to my own authentic presence through the skill of mindsight. By freeing myself from the old perceptual frame of reference I am also able to resonate more clearly with the other members of the group, being less under the sway of my projections from the past onto them.

1.6 Vertical and horizontal integration to build resilience, well-being and connection

Neurological research contributes to a better understanding of how human beings achieve well-being.

‘When a dissociated implicit memory (comprised of body and partial limbic connections) comes out of isolation into awareness, and is first embraced by the hippocampus (where explicit memories are made), and then by the integrative fibers of the middle prefrontal cortex(insight, empathy, and regulation), vertical integration occurs’ (Badenoch and Cox, 2010, p. 478).

By being aware of my body’s reactions during the board meeting, like shrugging my shoulders when I say something, followed by my access to memories of an old painful script with my sisters, and my subsequent ability to regulate the intensity of my response *vertical integration* took place within me. Badenoch and Cox explain how repeated experiences of such regulation as the above example will build the capacity of self-regulation, and establishes a calmer baseline for the autonomic nervous system. In this way we can become more resilient in dealing with stressful situations.

Experiencing such a regulated state, like during the board meeting, brings forth the next natural development where I can add my new understanding of the meaning and impact of such experiences to my life narrative. This process is called within brain science the *horizontal integration* of the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere. This happened when I understood how the threatening competitive tension with my sisters had altered my relationship with the board members (right hemisphere, where the visceral and emotional experience of our developing narrative lives), and I could give words to it and explicitly share this insight with one of the board members during the break (the left hemisphere; logic, spoken and written language, literal thinking).

It is my experience that through uncovering and then integrating parts of my life story it gives my life a unique and meaningful shape and gives a sense of well-being and connection with others, which is also argued by Badenoch and Cox.

1.8 The river of integration

Integration enables us to be flexible and free. For example if the linkage between the left and right brain is blocked, one side may dominate, and then we lose the creativity, richness and complexity that results from both working together. Siegel (2011) uses the mathematics of complex systems to come to a clear definition of well-being ‘a system that moves towards complexity is the most stable and adaptive’ (p.69). When our minds move away from integration, away from complexity, we can become imprisoned in behavioural ruts, living in rigidity and/or chaos. These behavioural ruts is what Guy Corneau calls ‘complexes’ (1991, cited by Mindfulness Association, 2011)) which are reactive patterns of thinking and behaving caused by conditioning factors. When overwhelmed by them we lose perspective and see one side of the story. If these complexes remain autonomous, i.e. if these often unresolved implicit memories don’t become integrated through mindsight, they take over and force us to repeat the same patterns endlessly, says Corneau.

2.2 Inquiry

Three layers

In the mindfulness training inquiry or investigative dialogue after each practice is an important part of the training. It encourages participants to notice their direct experience and to empathically reflect on it. They learn how to explore their inner experience by articulating and describing direct observations of body sensations, thoughts and emotions and their interconnections. According to Williams (Williams, M, Crane, C, et al, 2007) this is part of the first layer of inquiry. The second layer is about exploring the direct 'noticing' within a personal context of understanding. Having a dialogue about the experience supports recognising habitual ways of relating to aspects of experience (for example I became judgmental to myself when my mind wandered again) and to explore what happens if one brings mindfulness to these experiences; this challenges embodiment of the attitudinal foundations of mindfulness. The third layer of inquiry is about placing the learnings of layer 1 and 2 in a wider context of understanding by linking the observations and discoveries to the aims of the programme.

Underlying principles

An important underlying principle of inquiry in teaching mindfulness is that the one who inquires into her/his experience is the expert in the field of her/his experience, and the teacher is only facilitating the exploration where needed. Another important principle is that nothing has to be fixed or repaired, although it is the favourite activity of the surface mind (and the teacher usually!). Inquiry is about learning to get to know ourselves and how to collaborate with our own inner drive towards integration, healing and growth.

7th of October 2011, compassion training facilitated by Nevejan

After the exercise of 'setting intention' some wonderful insights were shared. Diane said she first set her intention with her cognitive mind, but with the exercise she was able to open up more and trust emergence instead of looking for the answer. Then something much more encompassing as intention welled up in her and really resonated in her body. She felt more spacious and open. A few people could feel the intention resonating in their body.

I realize again that if we let the answers come to us from the being mode there is a deeper meaning and resonance possible in our whole being. We can be surprised what comes up from the openness of not knowing. Trust emergence!

2.3 Resonance

Inquiry places a lot of emphasis on the present moment and enables one to access and resonate with different layers in oneself, which enriches the flow of energy and information and its integration within the person as a whole. The time-duration model of neuroscientist Francisco Varela (1999, cited by Ladden, 2007) is used to offer a concept of what we mean by 'now'. The interpersonal neural resonance circuits model as described by Siegel (2011) helps to understand how inquiry is 'snagging the brain' (acronym by Siegel; Stimulating Neural Activation and Growth, 2011, p.517) and can become a conceptual and technical tool in mindfulness training.

Time-duration model

For resonance to occur it requires an orientation to "now". The time duration model developed by Varela helps to conceptually define what we mean by "now". The model posits three periods of duration with the help of an EEG brain scan. Very briefly the first period occurs in such small time frames of milliseconds that this level is outside of our awareness. The second level consists of assemblies of neuronal firings that merge into cognitive events that lasts from .5 to 5 seconds. This second level scale is the strict reference of present-time consciousness, since the elementary events

at the first level become synchronized and then manifest as a moment of experience. The third level scale is where descriptive narrative takes place and where self identity is formed.

To use the above example from the compassion training; resonance happened when Diane could drop out of the third level scale, where she tended to get caught up in a storyline, and sense directly into her body's flow of energy and information (second level scale). So shifting the focus from thoughts to direct awareness of the body enabled Diane to stay in present-time awareness.

Using the first and second layer of inquiry are helpful to keep orienting ourselves to the "now", which promotes resonance with the rich flow of energy and information of present-time experience.

2.4 Resonance circuits

Attuned connection with the body

Sensing our own internal body's state is not only a powerful source of knowledge for ourselves, it also opens the fundamental pathway for resonating with others. Siegel (2011) explains how there is a brain reason for the fact that people who are more aware of their bodies have been found to be more empathic. It starts with realizing that we feel others' feelings by actually feeling our own; for example we notice the sadness or anger welling up from the body when our loved one is hurt. All of our subcortical data – the heart rate, rhythm of breathing, muscle tension or emotions inform the cortex about our state of mind. This means that being aware of the other person's state of mind depends on how well we know our own. This fact not only emphasizes how important it is to inquire into direct bodily experiences, but also places it in a wider context by realizing that attunement to our body forms the ground to connect empathically with others. Though in reality we often find it hard to listen to our bodies and tend to deny or suppress physical sensations, from a neural perspective we can't even successfully ignore or suppress the physical information and energy flow that is brought up by the insula, which colours our cortical awareness, shaping how we reason and make decisions. Becoming open to the energy and information flow from the body by inquiring into those experiences, helps us to understand who we are, and to make heartfelt connections with others.

Attuned connection with one another

We also come to know our own minds through our interactions with others. Siegel (2011) uses specific brain cells, the so called 'mirror neurons', to give insight into another resonance circuit to underline how humans are inherently relational and how relationships are woven into the fabric of our interior world. Mirror neurons 'connect individuals to each other by registering perceived behaviours, emotions, and intentions of others "as if" one were enacting or experiencing them oneself' says Iacoboni (2008, cited by Schermer, 2010, p.488). This precognitive 'instant recognition' inherent in mirror neurons shows the neural reality of our interconnectedness. Mirror neurons demonstrate the social nature of our brain. From birth humans make maps of the internal state – the intentional stance – of other people through attuned connection with one another. We first develop an internal image of each other's being, what Siegel (2007, cited by Badenoch and Cox, 2010) calls an ISO (internal state of the other) which then gradually develops into a NOTO (a narrative of the other), giving us a sense of the other's on-going internal presence. And it is these resonant experiences that lie at the root of our capacity for empathy, according to Iacoboni (2009, cited by Badenoch and Cox, 2010).

December 2011, compassion training facilitated by Nevejan

Participant; "When I looked at Sandra, who shared her anxiety and sadness about maybe having Multiple Sclerosis (MS) with the whole group, I could feel her emotion in my own belly. Usually I go into my head and get caught up in all kinds of thought, but now I could just feel her sadness and fear within me and it was the most significant experience of the whole compassion training; that I could stay with her and feel what she is feeling."

Implications for mindfulness training in groups

‘Recognising and mirroring imply the potential to compare responses, imitate, and learn from one another’ (Schermer, 2010, p. 492). One implication of these resonance circuits for mindfulness training is that the facilitator’s holding capacity and the group’s mindful awareness of their inner worlds can create such a safe space, that if someone is in the midst of an unfolding implicit memory (and therefore not attuned to the current reality) she/he might be able to use resonance with that calm inner state of the group as a way to regulate the intensity of the memory. The group-as-a-whole can become a support for the member involved to reconnect with the here-and-now, which fosters intrapersonal integration of implicit memory into explicit awareness. Offering some understanding of brain processes can give enough of a ‘helicopter’ view, to both individuals and the group-as-a-whole, to observe the body and nervous system as they begin to disregulate when implicit memories emerge. Seeing these kind of struggles as neurobiological issues also helps not to take them too personally.

This section one of part two ends with suggesting that ‘functional subgrouping’ can be a very valuable tool for promoting inquiry within mindfulness groups by first joining each other on similar experiences, before exploring the differences.

2.5 Functional subgrouping

There is a basic tendency in the human mind - and human groups - to dichotomize, to choose sides and create conflict between two views (Ladden, 2007). Our nervous system perceives this very quickly as a threat, which causes our social engagement system to close down. As a result we lose access to both our own and the groups’ source of energy and information and the process of discrimination and integration gets stuck. How to reverse this reactive tendency to split that artificially separates self and other? Especially so when the aim with mindfulness-based inquiry is to share and explore common vulnerabilities that are experienced by all human beings, and recognise universal tendencies and patterns of mind.

Groups need to learn to recognise and integrate differences in order to survive, to develop and transform according to the theory of living human systems (Agazarian, 2011). Functional subgrouping, which is a tool of Systems-Centered Training and also mentioned by McCown (McCown, D., Reibel, D. et al., 2010) in his guide on teaching mindfulness, invites members of the group to bring in their experience and join others with similar experience, before exploring differences, which subverts the tendency to dichotomize.

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I was deeply touched again about the quality of sharing by the group. After the exercise of ‘aspiring, dissolving and equalizing’ I first had them share in pairs their experiences. Then after that I suggested we explore in the big group what kind of insights, learnings and discoveries they got from the practice. I suggested the structure of subgrouping again; joining each other on similarities and adding your own experience, building together the exploration of a theme or issue that comes up. If one side was enough explored in a subgroup then we would make space for different experiences to integrate within the big group-as-a-whole. The first subgroup explored the pain in their heart if you open up to the suffering of others. The following subgroup explored how they discovered more similarities between the friend, neutral person and the enemy than they expected. This gave rise to a different subgroup that faced a lot of anger in looking at the enemy and a resistance to let go of it. It explored feelings of hatred and self-righteousness in a very open and explorative way. Especially this subgroup I think took a lot of risk in disclosing these very human negative feelings we have at times in relationship to people.

It was a very rich sharing where a lot of information got into the big group-as-a-whole.

What is very good about subgrouping is that you as a facilitator are really not directing the

inquiry, not taking a leadership position, but really help to let the group work themselves and find out their own wisdom.

Using functional subgrouping for the process of inquiry in mindfulness-based groups fosters being with what emerges in the moment (second level scale Varela), and stimulates a rich exploration into what is present in the group. Because functional subgrouping creates an environment in which it is safe to bring in differences members of the group are able to keep their own boundaries open to the flow of information and energy within themselves, the subgroups and the group-as-a-whole. In this process every level of the system is transformed. Functional subgrouping contains ‘the artificial splits between self and other, and facilitates the emergence of apprehensive or intuitive knowledge in the “strict present” where we find ourselves.’ (Ladden, 2007, p.11) This kind of attunement to one another also stimulates neural activation and growth and leads to intra- and interpersonal integration on many physiological and psychological levels.

Section two: qualities of a mindfulness teacher

Looking at the process of integration and its importance for real growth and change to take place teaching mindfulness in groups becomes a real opportunity to facilitate intra- and interpersonal integration. Within this context what qualities does a mindfulness teacher need to embody to create such a learning environment.

2.6 Co-creation

Working with mindfulness is not group therapy (non-pathologizing) or classroom teaching (nonhierarchical), but is rooted in the co-creation of mindfulness among teacher and participants. Although there is a difference in role between facilitator and participant, everyone involved contributes to the process, shares the same intention to explore his or her direct experience, can give or receive support in the group in this process and is responsible for maintaining a mindful learning climate. To take up one's role as a mindfulness teacher within the perspective of co-creation really asks something from the ‘person’ of the teacher and his or her skills. Three of the six competences of the teacher rating scale for mindfulness-based teachers by Crane (Crane, R.S., Kuyken, W. et al., 2010) that relate to stimulating intersubjective resonance will be explored from a neural perspective to define what qualities are needed to teach mindfulness. They are management of group processes, relational skills and embodiment of mindfulness

2.7 Stewardship of the three treasures

Management of group processes is an important skill for intersubjective resonance to take place that lays the ground for integration and transformation on all systems levels. Because all the ‘group-work-skills’ in teaching mindfulness are rooted in co-creation McCown (McCown, D., Reibel, D. et al., 2010) uses the term *stewardship* to capture the most basic sense of the teacher's duties in the group.

In short this implies holding the space in which participants can work with an inner sense of humility and service. Stewardship also implies holding treasures of great value in trust for the participants as they grow into the ability to care for those treasures by themselves. There are three treasures that reflect the distinctive features of mindfulness-based groups according to McCown; freedom, belonging, and resonance. Freedom relates to staying truthful to yourself, while belonging is acknowledging the interconnectedness with others by seeing the shared humanness. This ability to differentiate and link are exactly the elements needed to create intra- and interpersonal integration which will lead, as we saw in part one, into the FACES of mental health.

Management of group processes asks for an integrated embodiment of freedom and belonging within the mindfulness teacher as a person, being able to respond to group development processes

with “non-reactiveness”. The mindfulness teacher needs a lot of courage and empathic attunement with his/ her own and others internal environment to steward the group-as-a-whole to firmly establish mindfulness and intersubjective resonance.

2.7 Embodiment

Kabat-Zinn (cited by Crane, R.S., Kuyken, W. et al., 2010, p. 76) and with him many others in the professional field of mindfulness emphasize how the teacher`s embodiment of mindfulness is ‘key to the ‘therapeutic ingredients’ of MBCT/MBSR and the personal mindfulness practice that supports this.’ Crane interestingly mentions how this represents a shift in emphasis from other CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) approaches, where they strongly emphasize the therapist developing skills and expertise, but have less focus on his or her personal practice as an essential aspect of the therapeutic encounter. This is remarkable since many studies on the effectiveness of psychotherapy show that the therapeutic relationship, an attunement to self and other in the here and now, is the most dominant determinant for positive outcomes with patients, regardless the individual approach or clinical technique (Norcross, Beutler en Levant, 2005 cited by Siegel, 2011a).

By embodying mindfulness through personal practice the teacher will mirror the ‘being-mode’ that participants are invited to experiment with, which is an engagement with an acceptance-based style of experiencing. This means stepping out of the thinking, problem solving, analytic ‘doing-mode’ by which we can keep in place psychological distress through avoidant or ruminative patterns of mind (Williams 2008, cited by Crane et al., 2010).

We know from the neural findings on resonance circuits that in order to have an empathic relationship with others, and to truly understand ‘where they are coming from’, we need to know ourselves by empathically attuning to our own internal environment. This insight offers a neural reason for regular practice of mindfulness, which develops this ability.

If we are looking at mirror neurons, enabling us to instantly recognise intention pre-verbally from one another, the teacher`s intention and motivation is also of great importance. It creates the map for resonance to take place since it will colour the teachers tone of voice and behaviour, and participants will react more quickly to the non-verbal intention than to the content of what is being said.

A mindful teacher is also able to anchor the attention to what is happening in the here-and-now, modelling the second level scale by Varela of present-time consciousness, which is exactly the level where intersubjective resonance can occur within the group. Now the energetic qualities of the present, like an inherent ‘wholeness’ or creative vitality of being alive, become available for the group-as-a-whole. One learns *to be with* one another and feel towards self and others instead of thinking about feeling, which can lead to descriptive narrative (third level scale Varela) and loss of resonance and empathic connection. Present-time consciousness is needed in order for intra- and interpersonal integration to take place. Insight into our neural interconnectedness and resonance circuits lays another ground for embodying mindfulness while teaching it.

The characteristics of embodied mindfulness are clearly listed by the seven attitudinal qualities of mindfulness by Kabat-Zinn (2005). Looking from the neural perspective and possibility for resonance and integration within mindful groups the following is important: regular practice of mindfulness, right intention and motivation, present-time consciousness to keep orienting towards ‘nowness’, and being authentic in relating with oneself and others. This relating needs to have the warmth and genuineness of friendship and empathy where one is able ‘to meet people where they are’, a willingness to allow the relationship to unfold in a fresh and uncontrived way. This creates the condition for a free flow of energy and information in and between people and supports the process of integration, and finally transformation.

Conclusion

Interpersonal resonance requires that we remain differentiated while also staying linked or connected with others. When co-created intersubjective resonance happens within a group it helps to optimize the freedom and belonging of each of the participants, which fosters intra- and interpersonal integration. At the same time this process can raise a lot of anxiety; the fear of being rejected if you show your 'real face', or the fear of losing your own freedom by the demand for restraint in belonging to a group. Anxiety is one of the main restraining forces to intersubjective resonance since threat closes our boundaries, which results in reactive flight or fight behaviour. The mindfulness teacher needs to be able to reduce anxiety within the group, and keep the tensions of belonging active in the group in order for participants to find ways to integrate freedom and belonging within themselves and with one another.

I agree when Ladden (2007) mentions that group context makes the processes of exploring and understanding our complex human experiences more empathic and in many ways easier compared to when we do this kind of work on our own. One could question if that is even possible given the social nature of our brain. This is one of the reasons why it is so important to teach and learn mindfulness practice within the context of an on-going group.

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Appendix 1

Hopi Elders Prophecy

*To my fellow swimmers:
here is a river flowing now very fast.
It is so great and swift,
that there are those who will be afraid,
who will try to hold on to the shore,
they are being torn apart and will suffer greatly.
Know that the river has its destination.
The elders say we must let go of the shore,
push off into the middle of the river,
and keep our heads above water.
And I say see who is there with you and celebrate.
At this time in history we are to take nothing personally,
least of all ourselves, for the moment we do,
our spiritual growth and journey come to a halt.
The time of the lone wolf is over.
Gather yourselves.
Banish the word struggle from your attitude and vocabulary.
All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.
For we are the ones we have been waiting for.*

(Available: <http://www.matrixmasters.com/takecharge/hopi-prophecy.html>
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