

MINDFUL HEROES

stories of journeys that changed lives



Edited by

Terry Barrett, Vin Harris and Graeme Nixon

Everyone loves a good story. This book tells the stories of a constellation of Mindful Heroes: ordinary people just like us, who followed the path of mindfulness and went on an inner journey that would change their world.

They engaged with an in-depth study and courageous exploration of mindfulness practice. Having experienced for themselves the benefits of mindful awareness, compassion and insight, they then wanted to give others the opportunity to discover their own potential. These 26 Mindful Heroes from 10 countries creatively applied mindfulness to a variety of settings across Education, Health, Business, Sport, Creative Arts and Community work. Now they share the moving stories of their personal and professional journeys of transformation with you.

"As the old saying goes, 'It is not what happens on the cushion, it is what we take out into the world.' Mindful Heroes exemplifies this notion, exploring the lives of those who have not only experienced the personal benefits of meditation, but those who have gone on to make it their passion and purpose in life, planting the seeds of awareness and compassion for the benefit of us all."

Andy Puddicombe author of *The Headspace Guide to Mindfulness & Meditation: 10 minutes can make the difference*. Co-Founder <http://www.headspace.com>

"This is a wonderful book. It reminds us that we are all heroes, due to the power of our own minds. The living examples presented in these pages help to make the mindful path accessible and relatable. I am so happy that works like this are emerging, bringing mindfulness into the heart of our modern culture."

Gelong Thubten Buddhist monk, mindfulness teacher and author of *A Monk's Guide to Happiness*. <http://www.gelonthubten.com>

"This book is an inspiration as we follow the journeys of heroic people who integrated mindfulness into their way of life in a creative and transformative way."

Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy is founder of the Sanctuary Meditation Centre and Focus Ireland and the author of several bestselling books on spirituality including *Awakening Inner Peace, Mindful Meditations for Everyday and Gardening the Soul*. <http://www.sanctuary.ie/>

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MINDFUL HEROES: STORIES OF JOURNEYS THAT CHANGED LIVES

Edited by Terry Barrett, Vin Harris and Graeme Nixon

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Terry Barrett, Vin Harris and Graeme Nixon (Editors).

DEDICATION

We dedicate this book that it may inspire individuals and groups to develop their mindfulness and compassion. The royalties of this book are going to the Everyone Project which supports groups who may not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in mindfulness courses.
www.everyoneproject.org

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MINDFUL LEARNING AND COACHING IN ALPINE SKIING



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INTRODUCTION - THE MYSTERY OF MASTERY

From a young age I became curious about the acquisition of physical skills. I wondered what it was that caused the body to be able to perform some tasks and not others. How some technical skills were easily picked up and 'grooved' whilst others remained elusive? Most people who participate in sports will have memories of their early learning and here's one of mine which remains vivid:

I failed on the first attempts and was frustrated at this especially as I had taken the beginning step by step breaking down the game of foot hoopla hoop into manageable parts, gradually and painstakingly connecting them into a resemblance of the whole skill. But success eluded me and I left the hoopla hoop motionless on the ground turning away dejected. Later on, I was leaving that place and was thinking about very little, instead I was savouring the cool breeze and sounds of birds in the trees which lined the pathway to the ski centre. Without thinking and with no expectations I stepped into the hoop which had been discarded earlier, flicked the edge up to my ankle and swinging my foot and lower leg in a large circular motion. I felt the air brush over my leg, the pressure of the hoop on my ankle. The balance achieved from the standing leg, I moved surely bringing the leg wide and swinging in towards the standing leg which I confidently hopped enabling the hoop to pass under me. I repeated the cycle each time with perfect balance and timing.

Pause and Reflect

Everyone has had learning breakthroughs. Reflect on some of yours.
What do you feel was at play in my example here?

In sporting circles, the term 'belief' is common parlance. What is less usual is talk of 'belief in what?' Believing in one's self is a frequent mantra in positive psychology and invariably falls short in eradicating limiting beliefs and performance inhibitors because it points you to look in the wrong direction. Instead, look into the dream itself and feel what it's like to experience it, become mindfully aware of the experience of achieving the goal. Learning and performance is enhanced when we 'can get ourselves out of the way'. The mindfulness faculty thrives in a context of equanimity - it's not the absence of emotions and thoughts which is our goal, it's our relationship with them which matters. Getting yourself out of the way limits the damage which we can exert on ourselves, dissolves learning blocks and clears the way for learning mindfully.



Figure1: Mastery or Madness. Photo © John Arnold 2014

MY JOURNEY

As a coach, teacher and mentor, mindfulness has re-energised my work in sports, life coaching and personal development. It has driven me to change my perspective on learning and developing performance both in sports and the workplace. From a personal viewpoint a daily meditation practice and everyday mindfulness has helped me to cope with stress, loss and improved the way I relate with others.

The majority of my time during the first fifteen years of my career was spent coaching club, regional and national squad ski racers. This work was carried out in Scotland, New Zealand, America and the European Alps, I travelled extensively and was influenced by coaches of various nationalities with different perspectives. For many years I was a ski coach educator running training courses in Scotland and in the Alps. Whilst I was driven by my love of skiing and the mountains, I noticed my curiosity moved more towards the person, athlete and coach, how they learnt and improved performance. With this interest I trained as a life coach and began work in this area as well as ski coaching.

The journey into formal mindfulness studies was an obvious one for me, I had been visiting Samye Ling Monastery on a casual basis for a number of years. The Buddhist teachings and framework for a happier and less suffering life, the advancement of potential and discipline of mental training all appealed to me on a personal and professional level. I continue to deepen my understanding of mindful learning and coaching through coaching skiers in the winter, organising hiking, biking and yoga holidays in the summer and spiritual mountain retreats in the autumn.

POTENTIALITY AND PATHOLOGY

In the early days of my career as a coach and performer my focus was realising athletic capabilities. It was all about realising potential, improving performance and achieving increasing higher levels of personal bests. The context was technical prowess and advancement was measured in the time it took to descend snow covered slopes. As a performer I aspired to higher levels of technical precision following set predetermined rules of the game. I watched, listened and learned from the experts of the time, aspiring to becoming 'better'. I have learned that inherent in the pursuit of better-ness there is often a sense of not being good enough. This self-perception is prevalent in participants of sports at all levels and manifests itself in the learner as striving to be something different from

what they are in the present. This 'performance dissonance' as I call it sometimes becomes a block to improving, the learner is just too full of self-limiting beliefs, unable to appreciate their present strengths and capabilities.

As my coaching career became measured in decades rather than years, I noticed a marked shift in the ways I thought about human potential, my scope broadened from the technical, tactical, mental and physical components of sport to the emotional, perceptual and relational. In the snow-covered mountains the only constant is change and I saw how this was reflected in the inner landscape of those I was coaching. I've seen some bizarre behaviours from students on the mountain as they are emotionally challenged and I began to recognise the parallels to everyday life; in my everyday life, I was seeing my pathology obscuring my own potential and the conflict between both was in full view to me, I needed to be a warrior. I needed to get myself out of my own way.

The MSc Studies in Mindfulness, a blend of personal practice, academic study and professional enquiry was perfect. As a coach aspiring to create mindful learning experiences for my students its essential that I am mindful myself and have a depth of personal meditation practice and underpinning knowledge from which to draw. Embodiment of mindfulness in the professional context will only be possible when one's personal practice is disciplined, regular and on-going. Embodiment leads us to getting ourselves out of the way.

Pause and Reflect

What does embodiment mean for you?
Is it a feeling, an emotion and / or mental state?
How do you recognise embodiment in yourself?

MINDFUL LEARNING

To understand mindful learning, we have to look into the whole picture, a holistic view of the learning dynamic. One of the key issues in mindful learning, which is often overlooked, is the learner's motivation for learning. This will shape the learner's readiness for mindful learning so understanding the learner's motivation and needs is crucial. Secondly is the environment, what is the playground and is it suitable for the learners needs? In Alpine Skiing, an open skill, we are fortunate to have whole mountains, the terrain and snow conditions and weather as variables which can be exploited for the learner's benefit. Thirdly is the coach's skill set and expertise in both the specific sport and in mindfulness. A deep understanding of the sport's technical principles, bio-mechanics, physiology and equipment is essential and in combination with the coaches accurate understanding of mindfulness will make creating mindful learning experiences more possible. What I am saying here is that we always begin with the learner - begin from where the learner is, rather than for example, the coach's own agenda or a teaching strategy. In this sense beginning where the learner is in the present moment, rather than where they want to be in the future, is similar to when we are teaching mindfulness or guiding meditations.

ACTIONS FLOW FROM ENERGY

The starting point then is for the coach to understand what motivates the learner to learn? What have been the sequence of events, choices and decisions which brings the learner to seek out and sustain learning? Where is their energy for learning? One of the questions I ask my students on meeting them is why are you here? The responses are fascinating and provide me with valuable information to decide on approach, content, environment, pacing and many other elements of the coaching and learning process.

Some skiers come to coaching sessions for entirely extrinsic reasons, partner pressure being a favourite and occasionally they don't even like the idea of being on a slippery mountain slope in the cold. My approach with these skiers is quite different to skiers who, for example, are there because they find skiing exhilarating, exciting and they love the winter mountain environment. I find out where their energy is in their body. Frequently their energy is in their head, intellectualising the game of skiing and trying to figure out techniques. These are the heady skiers and most are far from being connected with their bodies and what their body is experiencing, something which of course is essential in mindful learning.

In broad terms learner's motivation is both intrinsic and extrinsic, its rarely one or the other. It would be natural to say the learners with intrinsic motivation progress more quickly and enjoy the experiences more so than extrinsic motivated learners, but I don't believe this to necessarily be the case. The power of wanting to please another can be strong in some people and see them through many hardships. With learners like this I believe mindful learning can bring the learner into their body and if the environment is well suited, the learner begins to feel the joy of sliding. As competence increases their ability to manoeuvre themselves down the mountain provides a sense of control and this, for learners in skiing, is a hugely motivating factor, largely because it generates a sense of comfort, confidence and competence.

I have noticed learner motivations often match one or more of the following:

- Pleasing a significant other or others.
- Attaining a skiing grade.
- Performing the perfect technique.
- Feeling the experience of skiing and of being in the environment.

I am not placing a value on any of the four sources of motivation as whatever brings people to the wonderful experience of skiing is welcomed. I have noticed though that where motivation is related to feeling the experience, learners enjoy themselves more, are open to learning mindfully and often less critical of themselves, that is, more self-compassionate. Where learners have more extrinsic motivations, as in the first three above, learning mindfully can help them to enjoy the learning journey by focussing on their experiences rather than external moderators and performance criteria

Pause and Reflect

How do you recognise your motivations for learning?
Are they different depending on the subject?
Which have you found to be the most effective?

THERE'S ALWAYS A BIGGER PICTURE

I have noticed that learners in mindful learning have a very different experience to those being taught through more traditional learning methods. I coach in many different styles and approaches and I am able to do this because of my mindfulness practice and my knowledge of a broad range of coaching styles. In mindful learning learners are more able to assimilate their learning experiences and they seem to have deeper meaning, one which impacts them as a human being rather than only in improving performance. I often wonder why this is. According to Langer (2000) mindfulness in the learning arena could be defined as the process of making novel distinctions where attentional capabilities, greater sensitivity to one's environment, and the creation of new categories for structuring perception come to the fore and are developed. This process brings the learner closer to and in tune with their own experiences, their physical and emotional being as they are performing. The resulting openness to knowing themselves deeper during performance heightens the learner's state of present moment 'wakefulness' and naturally spills over into knowing themselves deeper. The learner is observing themselves much closer than in traditional learning methods where the learner is striving to replicate movements and techniques.

I have found that learning mindfully takes the learner into subjective experiences in such a way that present moment body and mind functions and feelings are illuminated. With this awareness the learner can more easily discern between self-reactive impulses, for example, upper body leaning into the mountain (not preferred) and making modification to performance on purpose, for example, leaning away from the mountain (preferred). As the learner becomes more aware of self-reaction and of self-purpose, they experience a greater sense of control of their speed and direction which increases comfort and confidence levels, thereby making their experience a more enjoyable one.

Underpinning mindful learning is how the conscious mind perceives and processes experience and how mindfulness promotes less reactivity to events that can provoke emotional distress and more efficient regulation of that distress when it occurs (Brown, 2009). Within the learning journey, individuals experience varying degrees of stress often increased by their perceptions of their learning and of their environment (a big one in skiing) and when the object of stress is the learning journey itself, mindfulness seems to be able to play a role in helping individuals notice their distress, cope with it and engage more fully. In these moments of stress, I guide learners through a similar process as when guiding meditations and teaching some of the fundamentals of mindfulness. That is essentially comprehending the bigger picture of their own experience by creating internal safe space where the symptoms of stress can be witnessed and held in neutrality, in the absence of engagement with them. I have found that this procedure is more readily accepted on the mountain by those who are daily meditators and this comes as no surprise as they have already learnt on the cushion to recognise their internal landscape and to let it exist in compassion.

Pause and Reflect

How much do you recognise the reflective learner in yourself?
What is your capacity to see the bigger internal picture when stress is present?



Figure 2: The bigger picture. Photo © John Arnold 2018

ATTITUDE AT ALTITUDE

This is where the rubber meets the tarmac, where the skis meet the snow. In mindful learning there are characteristics which must be evident, if they're not then it's not learning mindfully. Attitudes shape behaviour and this is so true in the learning dynamic of mindfulness. There are certain characteristics inherent in mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn's 'Attitudinal Foundations' of mindfulness (1991) and Ellen Langer's 'six themes of mindfulness' (1989) are examples. With these in mind and from my own coaching experiences and research, my view is that mindful learning must have some or all of the following characteristics.

Awareness: Gaining a deepening awareness of self and present moment experience is the beginning of playing sport with purpose. As it is a precursor to living life with purpose. With awareness of body and emotions the learner more easily perceives self-reactive impulses, their emotions, mindset, the environment and how they are relating to it. The learner understands what is happening as it happens and has the potential to modify techniques and change tactics as they are performing, thereby increasing likelihood of control.

Curiosity: In mindful learning we encourage learners to become curious about their experiences. How they feel physically, emotionally, psychologically and relationally and what present moment sensations they are experiencing. Delving further into what is happening when it's happening. Good coaches achieve this through creating a safe environment (inside and out), effective questioning, reflective episodes and peer sharing.

Novelty: A recurring theme in mindful learning is reference to the notions of novelty-seeking and novelty-producing (Langer 2000; Kee & Wang, 2008; Bain, 1995). The learner's openness to experiences is characteristic in mindful-learning, as is the sense of inquiry, acceptance, flexibility, engagement and non-judgmental experience of performance.

Acceptance: This doesn't mean resignation, rather it's about acknowledging present moment experience, rather than denying it. Acceptance first, change comes later, through exercising non-attachment. We don't need to try and hold on to pleasant experiences any more than pushing away unpleasant ones.

Perspective: This is about perceiving more than one view, creating new categories and welcoming new information simultaneously. The resulting openness to new information and awareness of creative problem-solving brings a subjective 'feel' to the learning dynamic, one where there is a heightened state of present moment 'wakefulness' to the possibilities inherent in learning. The process of peers sharing experiences about their performances encourages seeing things in different ways; recognition that one's way of doing something or seeing it from a particular view, is not the only way. As the learner reflects further, realisations of how and why performance is happening occurs, thereby creating new categories.

Context: When the learner realises and appreciates the value of the performance context much irrelevant information is filtered and the learner is able to focus on what influences their current performance. Context awareness is developed through a realisation of the changing nature of the environment and how technical, physical, tactical and mental components need to align to produce optimal performance. In Alpine Skiing, through the open mountain environment, which is constantly changing, realising the performance context is invaluable and therefore we spend time noting the snow conditions, changing light and varying terrain.

Non-valuing: This sits in what Kabat-Zinn refers to as non-judging, observing whatever you are experiencing in the absence of classifying it into good or bad, like or dislike, that is, not placing it into a value context. If subjective knowledge is to have an impact on the quality of learning experience then the learner will benefit from having the capabilities to bring awareness into current moment experience in the absence of evaluative judgments, elements which are inherent in mindfulness, thus making mindfulness a meaningful approach to subjective knowledge (Bain, 1995).

Non-striving: How do we not strive during learning? Surely the learning process is about developing

performance? Well yes and no. Having detailed performance outcomes often causes striving, to be something that one is currently not. I'm an advocate of having the destination in mind whilst being flexible with how one gets there. The main benefit of knowing the destination is that when you arrive it's recognised. What many learners do when setting outcome goals is mistake them for the journey and therefore focus on the wrong things. Non-striving is achieved by having a gentle notion of the destination and then almost forgetting it, thus enabling the learning experience to be fully realised.

Pause and Reflect

Which of these attitudes resonate with you?
Are you more inclined to some and not others?
Which ones hold more of a challenge for you?

THE MINDFUL COACH

When teaching mindfully, but not teaching 'mindfulness', the challenge is to teach from a mindful teaching framework and be grounded in the underpinning principles of mindfulness. Mindful coaches prepare their 'being' from which their 'doing' arises. The practitioner's personal mindfulness practice and the embodiment of mindfulness are identified as the foundation for mindful professional practice (Siegel, 2010). Qualities and skills in mindfulness are placed with equal weighting alongside the body of knowledge relating to sports specific performance and teaching / coaching skills. When coaching mindful skiing I frequently pause (chairlift rides are a good time for this) and consider the teaching framework I operate from when teaching mindfulness and guiding meditations and attempt to use this framework to guide me in my coaching approach with skiers.

The coach often uses a broad range of teaching styles, each designed to elicit specific learning experiences and outcomes, in order to create the learning experience. A teaching strategy model which I have found a helpful is Mosston's Spectrum of Teaching Styles. The process highlights the direct relationship, cause and effect, between the teacher behaviour and learner experience. According to the model the teacher consciously decides who (teacher or learner) makes what decisions and when (before, during or after the session). When the teaching-learning process is viewed as a spectrum of decision making where every teaching action is considered in the context of, by whom and when a decision is made, the teacher's behaviour can be matched accordingly to the learner's behaviour and in doing so the learning style can be shaped (Mosston, 2001).

The skillful application of teaching styles, a deep understanding of mindfulness and a personal mindfulness practice are all essential for the mindful coach. They have equal weighting with the sport's specific technical skills and underpinning knowledge. From the mindfulness perspective I keep four things in mind when coaching mindful skiing, Embodiment, Mind-Sight, Equanimity and Compassion.

Embodiment: The commitment to a personal practice of mindfulness is crucial. Daniel Siegel remarks, 'As they say at the beginning of a flight, we need to put our own oxygen mask on first before we can help those around us' (Siegel, 2010, p.xv). The embodiment of mindfulness is nurtured by, amongst other things, the coach engaging in daily mindful meditation practice and on-going mindfulness practices in daily life. These are described in the Good Practice Guidance for Teaching Mindfulness-Based Courses, UK Network of Mindfulness-Based Teacher Trainers (January 2010) where the embodiment of mindfulness is identified as one of the six domains of competence.

The coaches internal frame of being is sustained through levels of awareness which support the present moment recognition of sensing, observing, conceptualising and knowing, in self, others and within the interpersonal relationship between teacher and learner. The state of flow in the coaching / learning process which I experience is more frequent on those occasions when I have prepared myself for the coaching sessions. In my early morning sitting I clear the decks, let go of my coaching agenda

and bring to mind my students, their needs, fears and perspectives. Deepening embodiment helps me to, 'get myself out of the way' and as a result I am more present and available for my students.

Mind-Sight - Being with ourselves: Mind-Sight refers to a 'knowing' of one's deeper internal subliminal prejudices at base consciousness, which influence one's surface thinking and behaviour. To be in this place effectively the coach is fully aware of their own internal dialogue as is the case when the coach is working from a mindful embodiment. Mind-sight involves not only sensing the present, but deeply knowing the past so that we are not imprisoned by the unexamined elements of our experience that restrict us in the future (Siegel, 2010).

Equanimity: The mindful coach will see the learner as an equal partner in the coaching / learning transaction. Being with the learner and operating from what the learner needs is paramount. The coach will not see themselves as the fountain of all knowledge but instead skilled in creating the conditions whereby the learner self-realises - the mindful coach may even aim to make themselves redundant. This process is gained through maintaining a coach / learner relationship where mutual trust, tolerance, empathy, understanding, and appreciation flourishes. Coaching is likely to arise from 'who' the coach is being, rather than 'what' the coach knows. The coach is able to separate the learner from the learner's performance and has an understanding of the challenges and stressors which the learner is experiencing.

Compassion: Manifests in so many varied forms within the learning / teaching dynamic. Compassion in this context is so powerful and worth investigating fully. Where both the learner and coach exercise self-compassion the learning journey will be changed for ever. From my experience the challenge for the mindful coach is to instil in the learner self-compassion, or as Hassed & Chambers (2014) point out, adhering to the golden rule of treating others as we would ourselves. However, in the learning dynamic it seems to be about treating ourselves as we would others. I spend much time with skiers helping them to be kinder to themselves in analysis of their performance. This is not about positivity, instead it's about how we relate to our own performance with kindness and generosity.

Pause and Reflect

How would you describe your style of coaching?
What are your underpinning beliefs about you as a coach?

THE RESEARCH - WHY MINDFUL LEARNING?

Through my early experiences of learning to ski, ski racing and studying sports coaching I realised there was a whole range of types of learning and coaching that were very different to the methods often used in sport at that time (early 1980's). In my coaching throughout the 1990's and 2000's I used various approaches and undertook many forms of coach training, not only in sports but also in life coaching. At this time, I also became interested in Buddhism, particularly the mind training and as I learnt more, I realised the potential benefits of applying some of the Buddhist teachings to learning and developing performance in sport.

It was ten years later when I had the opportunity to formally explore further, during the pilot study which preambles the larger MSc research piece. I eventually had a scenario and resources with which I could carry out some meaningful experimentation. The pilot study, for me, was a significant professional milestone in my MSc Studies in Mindfulness.

I had the unending support of Andrew Maile from Edinburgh University Sports Department to whom I am very grateful. He and his colleagues welcomed me to the Universities Outdoor Centre, Woodlands, at Kingussie in the Spey Valley, Scotland. A very familiar place, having worked there on University ski programmes many times before. With the Physical Education students as the learners

and Andy's mentoring, I explored the application of mindfulness principles to the coaching / learning dynamic in Alpine Skiing.

The underpinning reason why I choose mindful learning for my research topic was really very simple - I had believed for a long time that there were other valid ways of coaching and learning than the traditional methods. Having explored many learning theories and coaching methods in my career I always had a feeling that these models and processes could get closer to the learner. I was often left thinking about where the learner is in the process. Mindfulness seemed to answer this not just in concepts but also in action. In mindfulness 'we begin from where we are' and one of the teacher's roles is to help the learner realise where they are now. I had the need to see if this would work in learning sports, namely Alpine Skiing, because that's the sport I know well.

Traditional methods of learning sports have been predominated with teacher centred approaches where the learner attempts to copy what is shown and practices whilst feedback is provided by the coach. The methods are characterised by command, teacher-led and with a focus on the exchange of knowledge from teacher to learner.

In this teaching-learning model, known as EDICT (explain, demonstrate, imitate, correct, test / trial) there is an underpinning assumption that the teacher knows everything and all performance development will originate from them. Learning is characterised by replicating the model performance of the coach, a reliance on external feedback, fault analysis and correction, from the coach. In Mindfulness I found what I consider to be some interesting alternatives to the traditional model, one which essentially shifts the teaching / learning dynamic to the opposite end of the continuum to traditional methods. It moves the learning from command to self-exploration and from replication to reflection and learner creation.

Pause and Reflect

In your own coaching which approach is predominant, command or guided discovery?
Perhaps there is a blend depending on the learner.

BEYOND COMMAND

Away from command towards self-exploration learners are guided into deeper levels of self-awareness through body scanning techniques, breathing exercises, experimentation and problem solving. In these approaches the learner constructs their own performance guided by the coach. They value the past experiences of the learner and recognise their current levels of competence. Learners are part of the knowledge production process enabling them to formulate questions and make decisions about their own performance. These approaches are student-centred and lead to the production of performance rather than replication, and in doing so raise the levels of responsibility for their own learning significantly:

In physical education, constructivist approaches invite students to begin the learning experience with their previous learning experiences intact. They are encouraged to engage with content intellectually and kinaesthetically and to actively participate in solving problems, discovering solutions, and experimenting with techniques and tactics (Singleton, 2009, p. 332).

I begin most sessions with a period of practice, questioning and collaboration, rather than formal performance analysis and fault detection, which often feels like a test to the learner. I encourage learners to interact with each other and to use their current performance and prior knowledge as the primary source of reference for future performances (rather than a 'fault' in performance being the starting place). When I am coaching mindful skiing, I am continuously gathering information and guiding learners towards self-knowledge and not necessarily directing them to predetermined

ends. My aim in applying constructivist approaches to the research in mindful learning is in the back drop it creates for developing awareness, enabling inquiry and to hold all the other characteristics of mindful learning. Through my research I needed to understand the constructivist strategy and spent time deciding which coaching behaviour has integrity to this approach.

I also looked at how standard models of education compared with reflective models as the latter sits with mindful learning comfortably. I used the Reflective Paradigm model as put forward by Lipman (1991) and Schon (1991) who discern the move to more person-centred, dialogic and democratic educational approaches, where education is seen as inquiry. Lipman (1991, pp.13-14) draws a comparison between these two paradigms of educational practice which I found helpful:

Standard Paradigm	Reflective Paradigm
1. Education = transmission of knowledge to those who don't know from those who do.	1. Education = outcome of participation in a teacher guided community of inquiry where the goal is good judgement.
2. Our knowledge of the world is unambiguous, un-mysterious and unequivocal.	2. Students are stirred to think about the world when it is revealed that our knowledge of it is ambiguous and mysterious.
3. Knowledge is spread over non-overlapping subjects.	3. Subjects/disciplines overlap and are not exhaustive.
4. The teacher has an authoritative role.	4. The teacher is fallible.
5. An educated mind is a well-stocked mind.	5. The goal is not acquisition of information but to grasp the relationships between subjects.

Figure 3: Lipman's Standard and Reflective Paradigms

The Reflective Paradigm and Constructivist Approach provided me with a framework which lends itself to integrating mindfulness into the learning / coaching dynamic. I hope by sharing this here, albeit briefly, you gain a sense of my perspective on learning which opens the potential to apply mindfulness practices and principles to learning.

CASE STUDY

With the Research completed (Arnold, MSc Research, Mindful Learning in Sport, 2013) and after many hours of shifting through the participant responses to questionnaires and focus group interviews, the participants learning experiences emerged into words. I'll share some of the quotes with you and describe the main three themes which came through very clearly. I begin with a participant quote given in response to the broad, open ended question I put to participants asking them to describe the coaching and learning:

I was finding out things about my performance from and for myself by recognising what was noticed through feeling bodily sensations as I was performing, I was discovering what my own performance felt like. The coaching approach meant that my learning was totally an internal process with no external / outcome goal whatsoever. I was focused on the experience of my own performance, the focus was not on 'how to' but rather on 'what's happening' during performance, feeling it during the how, so that the 'how' became known to me - we noticed it ourselves.

THE THEMES

I like this quote because it points towards three of the themes which emerged from the study:

1. An increase in self-awareness – not only of the limb movements and muscle tensions but also of the forces generated through skiing which the body feels.
2. An increase in understanding – making sense of sensory information is crucial if the raised self-awareness is to be put to good use. Knowing the cause and the effect within performance.
3. An increase in the ability to modify and adjust the performance at the time it is happening – this points to a higher state of self-regulation during performance, which is a quality of all top performers in any sport.

Participants also reported a heightened awareness of their mental states, mind-set, emotions and how they were feeling about themselves within the learning context. This was really interesting for me because I believe performance is greatly influenced by our being and far too much sports instruction focuses on the doing. It became clear to me that most, if not all, participants experienced some level of heightened awareness of what was happening in terms of body movements (technique), muscular exertion (physical) and emotional state (psychological). They were able to identify what it was, they were feeling and what was happening with their performance as it was happening. Here's some more quotes along these lines:

Enlightening, it has helped me focus more on my own skiing and how it 'feels' and not to rely on feedback from outside me on what it looks like. I have incorporated this into my own teaching.

I was finding out things about my performance from and for myself. Through feeling bodily sensations as I was performing, I was discovering what my own performance felt like.

One of the things participants valued most was the time spent on practicing in an atmosphere of unconditional, non-judgement from the coach, peers and themselves. The later of those three was very reassuring to hear as it pointed towards my ability to create a compassionate flavour to the learning, self-compassion being manifested through the absence of self-critical judgement. Another thing which struck me was that participants felt that they could think outside the box, they had permission to create, experiment and explore without fear of the coach telling them it was right or wrong. Many said that time for reflection was very valuable as it gave them opportunity to see and feel deeper into their performance.



Figure 4: Hear, Feel and See. Photo © Deepak 2018

In a sport such as Alpine Skiing the use of the senses is something good coaches encourage. Clearly the kinaesthetic, tactile knowing of where the body is at any point in time and the muscular effort being applied is something that many sports people can identify with. In Alpine Skiing we guide skiers to hear the sound of the skis over the snow and learn from that information by distinguishing what the action of the skis is against the snow. I often analyse performance from the sound of the skis as they make very different noises depending on what the skis are doing and from this, I know what the body must be doing. Here's some quotes which mention the non-judgemental flavour of the learning:

Very empowering process; focused my attention inwardly; raised my consciousness of my own performance; did not compare my performance with my peers because through the coaching approach it was not comparable, all working on our own inner stuff.

Connections were being made between the performance itself and the ways in which the performance was being achieved. This is pointing towards context, which in skiing is influenced greatly by the environment, that is, the terrain, snow conditions, weather, equipment. As I've mentioned before Alpine Skiing in the mountains (rather than an indoor snow slope) is a highly open skill, which means there are many variables. On the learning, in which participants immersed themselves, many recognised the collaborative, reflective and self-inquiring nature of the learning and liked it:

I found the coaching approaches very human, it was very different, quiet, relaxed and sociable; quite unlike my rugby coaching experiences where the coach would become exasperated if you weren't doing what they wanted.

Coaching felt like guidance rather than teaching; focused on enabling my self-awareness of what was happening to me, rather than thinking about technique and watching a demonstration and trying to figure out what to do.

It was a new concept to me as I have always applied thought and logic to my learning experiences; I am a thinker; to become aware of feelings of performance was a very different approach for me and very positive and a faster means to learning and improving for me than other more traditional methods.

THE CHALLENGES

Some participants revelled in the learning journey absorbed in practice and gaining a sense of freedom through the absence of value judgments and being encouraged to let go of self-criticism:

How subtle it was; how the use of self-observation influenced and allowed development; how relaxed and intuitive the learning experience was.

There were challenges for some. The fact that most feedback on performance is intrinsic led some learners to believe they were not being taught. Furthermore the coaches questioning, prompting deeper reflections on their own performance, was met with scepticism particularly by those who are used to 'command' coaches. Those learners were trying to figure out the 'correct' answer. Underpinning all of this perhaps, is the principle of responsibility for one's own learning. Over prescriptive learning can develop the sense that improvements in performance are something which is done to the learner, rather than change coming from within.

Two quotes provide a clue about the ways in which some participants expressed the challenges:

Initially frustrating then enjoyed the freedom to experiment within the given boundaries.

Very enjoyable, a bit unsettling psychologically.

Interestingly there are some similarities between the perceived challenges and, 'The Triple Tensions of Mindful Teaching' (Macdonald & Shirley, 2009) which provide purpose, direction and cohesion to mindful teaching as a set of pedagogical principles and practices:

The first tension of mindful teaching is the tension between contemplation and action. To be mindful, one must take time to become attuned to and reflective about what is transpiring (Macdonald & Shirley, 2009, p. 68).

The challenge to some learners was spending time reflecting and sharing compared to time spent on doing the performance and practicing. Although the time spent on doing and practicing was far more, the periods of self-inquiry and reviewing were an unwelcome distraction for some.

As the sessions progressed, there was 12 hours of coaching in total for each participant, most readjusted their learning expectations. They became to realise how an increase in self-awareness led to an increase in skill and also how the overall process was more enjoyable and empowering. The final quote here is one of my favourites as it expresses a feeling about the learning journey and performances along the way:

Highly enjoyable and liberating; I started to quieten my own judging mind and experienced improvements in my performance as a consequence; it was fun and felt like a journey and I didn't know where it would end which was great because there was improvement.

CONCLUSIONS

What I have discussed is how learners experience mindful learning and how coaching through mindful methods can be achieved. What you take from this chapter and how much you apply to your own coaching and learning is, of course, your choice. You may be motivated to look into this topic in more detail, follow up on the references and read more widely. If this is the case with just one reader then my job here will be done.

The wonder for me of mindful learning is how these methods of learning increase enjoyment and make participation more fulfilling and joyful. Whether they offer a fast track to higher levels of performance is not important to me. My aim in coaching and leading people in outdoor natural environments is that their happiness increases and suffering decreases. Helping people to put their learning in perspective, particularly learning sports, is a quest of mine, as is having people not take themselves so seriously as learners. This lightness helps people to relax into their learning causing mind and body to be more at ease and in this state, performance will flow more naturally.

For coaches, mindfulness has much to offer, improving how they relate with their students / athletes and more able to attend to their learners needs without interference from their own agenda. I know many coaches are driven by the need to help others and I think mindfulness leads coaches to realise they cannot help others, only help others, to help themselves.

FURTHER RESOURCES

My research can be viewed in full and downloaded from the Mindful Mountains web site. I welcome hearing from any coaches or educators who are interested in learning mindfully, skiing and mindfulness and the place for mindfulness in sport generally. Please contact me through the web site contact page where you can also view and download the full MSc Research Thesis, Mindful Learning in Sport 2013, John Arnold, <http://www.mindfulmountains.com>
Further information on Muska Mosston's work see here: <https://www.spectrumofteachingstyles.org/>

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