

Skills and qualities of a Trainer

IGDJ Teacher Training





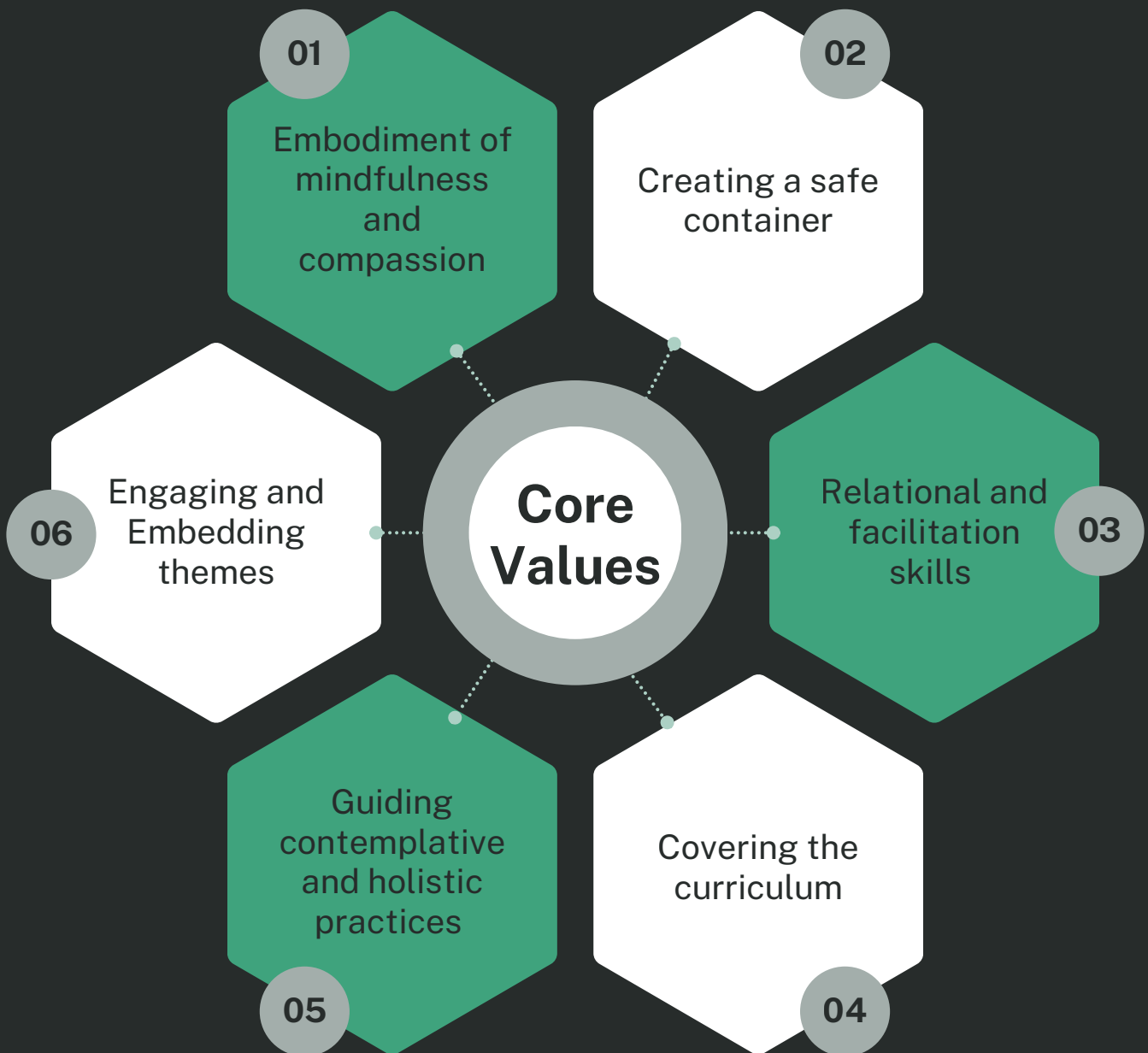
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Introduction

Our approach in Inner Green Deal Journey (Mindfulness-Based Sustainable Transformation- IGDJ) is holistic, rooted in compassion for all beings and the more-than-human world, and aiming at healing perceived separation between mind and body, human beings and nature, inner values and outer actions. In this document, you will find the core values and skills are considered important by many researchers in the field of mindfulness to be essential components of all mindfulness-based approaches:



Context and Core Values

Climate change and our current polycrisis is a sensitive topic which can create strongly polarized views, and a wide range of emotional reactions. This means that teaching this programme can present particular challenges for the trainer. The aim of the teacher is not to develop activists or create further polarization. It is important to create a safe container for all viewpoints and to bring an attitude of openness, invitation and welcoming to all participants, embracing other opinions and points of view.

Our approach in Inner Green Deal Journey (IGDJ) is holistic, rooted in compassion for all beings and the more-than-human world, and aiming at healing perceived separation between mind and body, human beings and nature, inner values and outer actions. The core values we aim to embody are Compassion, Courage, Curiosity, Equity, Hope and Openness. These attitudes underpin all the skills and qualities described below.

Several of these core values are considered by many researchers in the field of mindfulness to be essential components of all mindfulness-based approaches:

‘Mindfulness is an innate human capacity that enables people to intentionally focus on what they experience in the moment with an attitude of openness, curiosity and care.’^[1]

Attitudes of openness and curiosity are particularly important in the highly emotive field of climate change and sustainability. Compassion is another core value that many consider to be essential to true mindfulness if it is not to become simply attention training. In the context of IGDJ we explicitly emphasize the cultivation of compassion, not only towards other human beings but towards the planet as a whole. Other core values like courage and hope are essential in the context of sustainability to enable movement beyond eco-anxiety and grief towards engagement and systems action. Equity – the quality of being fair and impartial – is key to ensuring all participants feel safe to engage, whatever their views in this often-polarized context.

[1] <https://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org/what-ismindfulness>

The skills and qualities of an IGDJ trainer outlined here are based on the Mindfulness-based interventions Teaching Assessment Criteria (MBI: TAC) developed by leading universities in the field of mindfulness training (Bangor, Oxford, Exeter, Liverpool John Moores, Brown, Warwick, East Coast Mindfulness). [2] We have adapted their 'six domains of competence' to the specific aims and needs of the IGDJ programme, which is based on the framework of Prof. Christine Wamsler from Lund University, a leading researcher in the field of the inner dimensions of sustainability.

Our understanding of these needs is informed by the research study *'Revolutionising sustainability leadership and education: addressing the human dimension to support flourishing, culture and system transformation'* [3]. This paper identifies four key elements to ensure transformation:

- Comprehensive understanding of today's polycrisis and our role in it:
- Integrative methods for exploring inner dimensions and nurturing transformative capacities
- Practical guidance on how to design and implement measures that link individual, culture and systems change
- Quality education through the consideration of differences, ethics, adequate facilitation, monitoring and evaluation.

The IGDJ program has been designed to include these elements in terms of the vision, content, and structure. But it is up to the trainers, within this general framing, to create the conditions which enable learning, inner development, connection, inspiration and systems action. If trainers develop and manifest the skills and qualities below, the course will flourish and reach its full transformative potential.

This document aims to set out an overall framework for our intentions as IGDJ trainers, which can then inform how we behave. It also sets out more detailed criteria by which IGDJ teaching can be assessed for quality, and for adherence to the content, structure and objectives of the programme. Each domain outlined below includes some general comments to provide context, followed by a list of 'key features.' These are observable behaviours to be used as the basis for constructive feedback. They consist of skills and qualities which are essential to all Mindfulness-based Interventions, along with additional elements important to the IGDJ context. We encourage trainee teachers not to feel intimidated: many of these features will arise naturally when the heart and mind are set in the right direction.

[2] <https://mbitac.bangor.ac.uk/mbitac-tool.php.en>

[3] Wamsler C, Gustav Osberg G, Janss J, Stephan L (2024) Revolutionising sustainability leadership and education: addressing the human dimension to support flourishing, culture and system transformation. Climatic Change 177:4

Embodying mindfulness involves the teacher sustaining connection and responsiveness to what is arising moment by moment and bringing the core attitudinal foundations of mindfulness practice to this. These attitudes are non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance, and letting go, generosity and gratitude.

Compassion combines empathy with a wish to alleviate suffering - involving self-compassion, emotional regulation, a feeling of a shared, common humanity, human-nature connectedness and associated action-taking. It is the place from which the teacher acts, moving from 'ego' to 'eco', which means letting go of ego. Compassion is an expression of our human nature, and of our oneness with Nature.

Mindfulness and compassion are mutually supportive and can be considered inseparable. Mindful awareness helps us to move beyond our ego-centric viewpoint and open ourselves to interconnectedness. Compassion ensures our mindful presence is more than a form of attention training but is infused with the full warmth of our hearts.

Key features:

- Focus – Present moment focus expressed through behaviour and non-verbal communication.
- Responsiveness –working with what is emerging in the moment with spaciousness and ease.
- Steadiness and vitality – the teacher conveys calm, ease, non-reactivity and alertness.
- Allowing –bringing forth qualities of non-judging, patience, trusting, accepting and non-striving.
- Natural presence – the teacher's behaviour is natural and authentic to themselves
- Compassion – the teacher expresses care towards participants and other human and non-human inhabitants of the planet and Nature in general.

The teacher creates a ‘container,’ or learning environment within which the teaching and group learning can effectively take place. The teacher takes good care of group safety, trust and boundary issues, and balances the needs of the individual and group. They are tuned to the context of the times and the particular needs of the participants, depending on where the course is offered.

They are inclusive of participants with different needs and backgrounds e.g. nationality, culture, seniority, gender identity, neuro-divergence, experience of trauma or mental health issues, confidence to speak, technical difficulties, mindfulness experience, sustainability experience, views and emotions about the polycrisis. The teacher recognizes any potential power issues that may make sharing vulnerable material more challenging and works to balance the need for privacy with opportunities to share appropriately.

Key features:

- Learning container – Creating and sustaining a learning environment made safe through careful management of issues such as ground rules, boundaries and confidentiality, but which is simultaneously a place in which participants can explore and take risks and nurture transformative capacities. Group development – Management of the group development over the duration of the course, particularly in terms of beginnings, endings and challenges.
- Personal to universal learning – The teacher consistently opens the learning process towards connection with the universality and common humanity of personal experiences
- Leadership style – The teacher offers sustained ‘holding,’ and demonstrates authority and potency without imposing their views on participants. They trust the wisdom of the participants and enable connections within the group.
- Equity – the teacher treats all participants fairly and impartially, whatever their background, experience, opinions or views.

The qualities that the teacher brings to participants mirror the qualities that participants are learning to bring to themselves. Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention to experience in a particular way: on purpose (focused when relating to participants in the sessions); in the present moment (intention to be whole heartedly present with participants); and nonjudgmentally (a spirit of interest, deep respect and acceptance to participants) (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Climate change and related issues can be strongly polarizing as well as provoking emotional reactions ranging from anger and grief to denial. The aim of the teacher is not to develop activists or create further polarization. It is important to bring an attitude of openness and invitation to each interaction, listening deeply to all points of view without judgement.

Key features:

- Authenticity and potency – Relating in a way which seems genuine, honest and confident.
- Connection and acceptance – Actively connecting with participants and their present moment experience and conveying back an accurate and empathic understanding of this.
- Compassion and warmth – Conveying awareness, sensitivity, appreciation and openness to participants' experience.
- Curiosity and respect – Conveying genuine interest in each participant and their experience while respecting each participant's vulnerabilities, boundaries and need for privacy. This includes respect and openness towards all points of view in relation to today's polycrisis. Inviting others to show up, even if they have different points of view.
- Open facilitation – Encouraging and enabling generative listening
- Mutuality – Engaging with the participants in a mutual and collaborative working relationship.

This involves creating a skillful balance between the needs of the individual, the group and the requirements of teaching the course. The session is both well 'time managed' in relation to the curriculum and well-paced with a sense of spaciousness, steadiness and lack of time pressure. Digressions are steered back into the session curriculum with tact and ease.

Research has shown that for a programme like IGDJ to be effective, it requires participants to gain a holistic understanding of the nature of today's polycrisis and our role in it. It also needs to provide practical guidance and examples of how to link individual, culture and systems change. The teacher needs to balance time for practice, discussion and reflection with time to present key elements of the curriculum content.

The teacher themselves needs to engage in continuous study of the latest research in relation to climate crisis, systems thinking, and other themes key to the programme.

Key features:

- Adherence – The teacher adheres to the form of the programme, and covers the themes and curriculum content.
- Responsiveness and flexibility – in adhering to the session curriculum.
- Organisation – Level of organisation of the teacher, environment and materials.
- Session flow – The degree to which the session flows and is appropriately paced.
- Knowledge and understanding – the teacher masters the subject content and is constantly updating their knowledge of the latest research and methods.

The IGDJ programme presents a mix of contemplative practices that support holistic learning and reconnection through developing the same core values that the teacher embodies (e.g., compassion, courage, curiosity) along with related qualities (e.g. gratitude, which is a key to unlocking our capacity for hope). These practices have been adapted to the context of sustainability and human-nature reconnection. So for example, the compassion practice within IGDJ is expanded to include extending compassion to non-human inhabitants of the planet. The walking practices focus on re-establishing our connection and integration with nature.

The teacher pays attention to the specific qualities and nuances of the IGDJ practices, using the language provided or their own language while retaining the spirit and specificity of the practices. Their guidance suggests the attitudes to bring to oneself and one's experience throughout the practice. The practices offer a balance of spaciousness and precision. Skillful use of language is key to conveying all this.

The teacher establishes and maintains their own regular mindfulness practice, integrating the IGDJ practices that are used in their teaching.

Key features:

- Language – Language is clear, precise, accurate and accessible while conveying spaciousness.
- Key learning - The teacher guides the practice in a way that makes the key learning for each practice available to participants (e.g., anchoring to the present moment through breath or other focus, direct experiential knowing of physical sensations).
- Particular elements - The teacher conveys the particular elements for each practice while guiding (see guided practices in the manual). These include elements such as posture set-up, what to do with thoughts and emotions, attitudes to be cultivated.
- Trauma sensitivity – the teacher is sensitive to the potential presence of trauma in the group and offers adaptations and options accordingly.
- Personal practice – the teacher has an established mindfulness practice and deepens their experience of the IGDJ practices, integrating them into daily life.

Participants involvement is activated in a way that enables them to understand and engage with themes, and for ideas and questions to resonate beyond the session. This includes skilful use of group dialogue, reviewing/inquiring into the experience of practices during the session and at home, use of stories, facilitating group exercises, orienting participants to session/course themes and didactic teaching. Participants' difficulties (e.g. avoidance, stress, emotional reactivity) are crucial opportunities to convey course themes.

Key features:

- Experiential focus – Supporting participants to notice and describe their direct experience of practice (both formal practice and daily life); teaching themes are linked to this experience.
- Conveying themes –Conveying the learning themes through a range of teaching approaches, including discussion, didactic teaching, experiential and group exercises, stories
- Providing context and understanding – using a mix of methods to support a comprehensive understanding of the nature of today's sustainability crises in a complex, constantly changing world, and the participants' role in it
- Providing practical guidance - pointing participants towards resources and guidance on how to design and implement measures that link individual, culture and systems change
- Fluency – The teacher brings fluency, confidence and ease to the teaching process.
- Enabling learning - The teaching is effective in enabling learning to happen.
- Push vs pull – a good balance of conveying key ideas ('push') and drawing them out from participants ('pull').