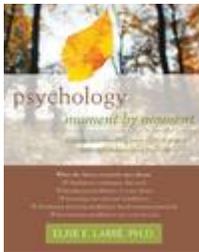


A Workbook to Teach Mindfulness to Teachers?

A review of



Psychology Moment by Moment: A Guide to Enhancing Your Clinical Practice With Mindfulness and Meditation

by Elise E. Labbé

Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2011. 178 pp. ISBN 978-1-57224-895-3.

\$49.95, paperback



Reviewed by

[Roger Thomson](#)

In *Psychology Moment by Moment: A Guide to Enhancing Your Clinical Practice With Mindfulness and Meditation*, Elise Labbé, a professor at the University of South Alabama, offers therapists a primer on mindfulness that she hopes will enable them to integrate mindfulness interventions into their clinical practice. This New Harbinger publication provides therapists who are unfamiliar with mindfulness-based stress reduction a good overview of the mindfulness exercises used in this approach.

The author states that “the focus of this book is on ‘classic’ mindfulness” (p. 2), a term she uses to refer to the style of mindfulness intervention that emerged some 30 years ago with Jon Kabat-Zinn’s mindfulness-based stress reduction (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). She also presents protocols used with binge-eating disorders in mindfulness-based eating awareness training (Kristeller, Baer, & Quillian-Wolever, 2006) and with couples in mindfulness-based

relationship enhancement (Carson, Carson, Gil, & Baucom, 2004). Both of these approaches draw heavily on the mindfulness-based stress reduction method and understanding.

The author does a good job of outlining the basic techniques used in these formats, and she presents scripts for therapists to use in guiding most of the important meditations and exercises. Labbé offers brief discussions of the history, nature, and modern conceptualizations of mindfulness, and points out the problems of measurement and operational definition that the field currently faces. She also makes suggestions about how therapists can develop and market their mindfulness-based practices.

One of the shortcomings of this work is inherent in nearly all workbooks: They cannot be very thorough or critical. In only 22 pages, for example, the author details mindfulness protocols for five specific problem areas: chronic illness, pain and stress, anxiety disorders, depression, and eating disorders. Unfortunately, the material presented in each section is largely repetitive. Scripts for how to describe mindfulness, how to encourage patients to fill out evaluation forms, and how to give feedback to patients about their symptoms are repeated with little or no variation in each protocol. I do not believe that it would be possible for an inexperienced practitioner to attempt a mindfulness-based treatment with the information Labbé provides.

By design, this book is limited to a presentation of the viewpoint and techniques of mindfulness-based stress reduction. The author says that it would be confusing for a beginner to be exposed to the range of mindfulness-based interventions in practice today. Thus, there is no contribution from acceptance and commitment therapy, and the comparison of mindfulness-based stress reduction and dialectical behavior therapy is completed in half a page. The decision to omit a wider range of theory and technique gives a certain homogeneity to the discussions. One feels that one is skimming the surface, an unintended consequence of the author's efforts to make her subject more accessible.

In contrast to the opinions expressed in other works (e.g., Crane et al., 2012), Labbé seems to believe that reading her book will be adequate training in mindfulness for therapists. However, she presents only a short chapter about how therapists can train in mindfulness. Although she acknowledges that the standards of the field are that a therapist should have a well-established mindfulness practice before offering instruction to others, her encouragement to integrate these techniques into therapy seems to weaken this recommendation.

The techniques and meditations described in this workbook are not particularly controversial and are not likely to be directly harmful to anyone, even if not done very skillfully. The difficulty with this book, in my view, is that mindfulness teachers cannot actually be taught by the workbook method that Labbé offers. "Classical" mindfulness is conveyed only by warm hand to warm hand, when someone who actually has immersed him- or herself into the practice demonstrates and embodies it. Not even the most complete manual can alleviate the need for personal instruction and practice, especially for a

prospective teacher. Reading about what mindfulness practitioners do is very different from being taught by an actual practitioner.

So it is difficult to discern the audience that would benefit most from this workbook. By itself, it is not enough to help the mindfulness-naïve clinician take on a personal mindfulness practice and begin to incorporate mindfulness into psychotherapy. There are more nuanced and complete books on the topic of mindfulness training for clinicians (McCown, Reibel, & Micozzi, 2010), and there are workbooks that guide the reader more thoroughly in the mindfulness-based stress reduction system (e.g., Stahl & Goldstein, 2010). Labbé's work can be a good source of meditation scripts for clinicians who have already established their personal mindfulness practice, but it overreaches as a guide to mindfulness-based therapy.

Finally, I hope that the author's use of the term *classic mindfulness* to describe mindfulness-based stress reduction's methodology is not indicative of a general level of insularity in the field today. From a commonsense perspective, *classic mindfulness* can refer only to the 2,500 year old Buddhist tradition of *satipatthana*, or mindful presence.

If we consider mindfulness-based stress reduction to be somehow "classical" or foundational, we will forever limit our appreciation of the subtle and complexly integrated activity of mindfulness as it has been practiced for millennia. Narrowing our perspective in this way, we will never consider fundamental questions (e.g., "Is mindfulness-based stress reduction the optimal method of teaching mindfulness?"). All of our mindfulness therapies are simply a first approximation in the development of a secularized mindfulness pedagogy, and we risk seriously limiting our ability to harvest the benefits of mindfulness by considering them to be the benchmark for mindfulness. One of the qualities of mindfulness is the unflagging curiosity of "beginner's mind," and we would do well to sustain that quality in our scientific and clinical investigations.

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