

JEDI CD Final Report
Jennifer von Ammon
August 17, 2023

As part of my JEDI curriculum development for WR 121, I participated in a six-module training in diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility through the Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Certification Program (MMTCP) with Jack Kornfield and Tara Brach, creators of the two-year Sounds True program.

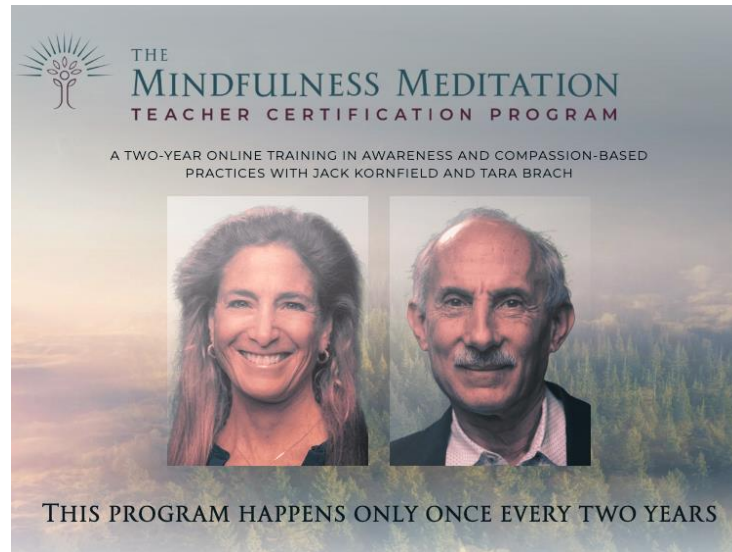


Figure 1 Website for MMTCP <https://bit.ly/mmtcp3jack>

Our meetings took place over the course of six months, and during this time, I met with a small cohort of fellow trainees for modules. Topics included:

- the invention of whiteness
- white privilege
- micro-aggressions
- inclusive facilitation

We also read Ruth King's *Mindful of Race* and learned how to "call in" white people as opposed to calling "out." King's book included topics such as the dynamics of oppression, key mindfulness tools to understand and engage with racial tension, embracing discomfort, and others.

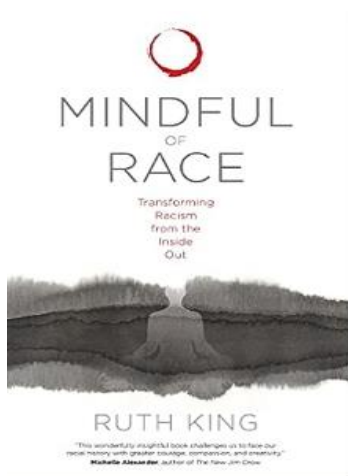


Figure 2 Ruth King, *Mindful of Race* (Sounds True, 2018)

Over the course of working on these modules—alone and in community with my cohort--, I explored the ways I could revise my WR 121 course to integrate greater awareness of issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. A guiding document for this work was the [East Bay Meditation Center's Agreements for Multicultural Interactions](#). This document includes nine principles for compassionate interactions and positive social interchange. The first infusion of these principles in my course involved creation of [a forum](#) in which I asked students to reflect on the agreements and consider which practices they found meaningful as we prepared to interact with one another. The [agreement](#) provides a framework for the ways students and faculty can increase awareness and learn to communicate more respectfully.

Some of the agreements, such as “Move up/Move back” were more challenging to integrate in an online setting. For instance, in [Module 2](#), I invited students who seemed to control the conversation in Module 1 to take more of a “back seat,” allowing their less active peers to engage first. (To receive credit, everyone must participate at some point so this was an exercise in pausing and listening as well as responding.) I found that even this small adjustment from me enhanced the online environment of inclusiveness for students who may feel shy or for many reasons find it difficult to enter a crowded conversational space. This encouraged them to jump in and share their experience.

Several other infusions from the “Agreements for Multicultural Interactions” are now integral to my course. For instance, I now carefully introduce and encourage students to practice “both/and” when writing. This principle involves students using “and” rather than “but” in response to another peer’s post. This helps cultivate an atmosphere in this online class where diverse views are not only tolerated but encouraged.

One of the ways to invite racial diversity and awareness in the classroom is to bring in voices from a range of communities. So, in WR 121, I assign Leslie Marmon Silko's "Lullaby," a short story which explores indigenous traditions, including oral culture and the ways white culture has historically oppressed and dominated Native American culture. Perhaps more difficult than practicing "both/and" is helping students to understand the difference between "intent vs. impact." A critical skill we can teach our students is to help them to step outside of their singular experience (the focus on "intent") and their own feelings of guilt or fear of blame and to make room for hearing and integrating others' experiences. To this end, in [Module 4](#), we read and discussed "Lullaby," and through careful close reading and discussion students practiced understanding the *impact* of historical policies that oppressed Native Americans by empathizing with characters in the story. Such impact, they could see, was completely independent of any feeling of good intent that students may have, and holding these contradictory conditions in their mind provided practice in developing their own deeper understanding of what it means to be inclusive.

Throughout my redevelopment of this class, I have reflected on how important inclusive language is in online courses. For instance, even in my own responses to student forum posts, I find that I can reinforce inclusive language by quietly correcting an overuse of the pronoun "we." The term "we" is a particularly powerful and loaded word and is an assumption on the part of the speaker. Using "we" can indicate I think my perception is the norm, yet the pronoun "we" surely doesn't include all individuals in the class.

Similarly, I've changed all pronouns on my class documents to "they", not making assumptions about students' gender identities. In that vein, I am careful not to ask or require students to declare their pronouns. True inclusiveness involves respecting that our students are working through various issues of identity and will share their gender identity and pronouns on their own terms and to whom they wish. In the face of rapid social change, being patient with the nuances involved in supporting gender fluidity is part of the difficulty of understanding intent vs. impact.

I have found in an online class, it can be more challenging to recognize and respond to neurodiverse ways of being. Still, holding the [Agreements for Multicultural Interactions](#) in mind, keeps me alert to potential confusing triggers. For instance, the term "neurodiversity" itself refers to a range of traits and behaviors, from internal processes that no one can see to behaviors that depart from societal standards—or even course requirements. I'm very careful in my instructions to set clear boundaries and time limits (e.g. word count, typical time frame) as well as explicit instructions so that students are not spurred to excessive work by vague, general forum instructions.

When tensions may arise, which they will, we can realize we don't have to do things perfectly. A final principal from the six-week JEDI certification is the practice of the sequence, "Pause-Relax-Open," which has its roots in Buddhist practices. The [sacred pause meditation by Tara Brach](#) can help illustrate this practice. When my students get overwhelmed, I encourage them to *pause* by taking a breath. Then, they can *relax* by feeling the ground beneath them. And finally, they can *open* to the experience, even if it's challenging. Then we can return to the conversation or work at hand. Such practices over time develop new neural pathways and new responses to tension or overwhelming conflict.

As instructors who are committed to the principles of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, we can engage with this practice of "Pause-Relax-Open," steadying ourselves and staying present for students. I'm grateful for this curriculum development project and the opportunity to make visible many of the challenges of creating a truly inclusive online class, a space in which it's often difficult to get to know our students. I feel I've made real progress and will adapt all of these strategies for inclusion in all of my classes.