Daniel Siegel has drawn useful and detailed comparisons between meditative and educational mindfulness; one interesting proposal he suggests is that both forms of mindfulness put the self at the center of experience. In Chapter 11, we note that Langer’s *On Becoming an Artist* suggests more. The mindful approach encourages one to let go of the defensive self that engages in social comparisons and unhelpful evaluations, and to embrace an authentic, experiencing self. This suggests a “low-egoic” quality of experience noted by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi in his concept of flow and by Mark Leary in his exploration of the mixed blessing of the evolutionary development of the self. Leary notes that with the human species’ evolution of a “self” there arose continuous self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-judgment, which can interfere with the ability to engage in and enjoy the present moment of experience. He notes that some theorists suggest that low-egoic experiences facilitate well being, compassion, and altruism.¹

Mindful awareness may offer a window into such low-egoic experience, which differs in quality from the ordinary experience of self. Mindfulness meditation offers the sense of a core, grounded self beneath layers of constructed or narrative identity.² Siegel at first suggests he is not sure that mindful learning points learners to an experience of the core, non-constructed self.³ However, it would seem that any activity that encourages creative engagement, in which learners experience their authentic selves without judging, narrating, or comparing, would encourage the experience of core self. And Siegel does go on to suggest that learning in a way that dissolves false certainty is a parallel process to experience of the core self: “as we release our brains’ natural tendency to lock onto clear and unchanging definitions of the world in the case of facts and of our selves in terms of personal identity, we embrace the fluid reality of the world and ourselves.”⁴

Siegel articulates a clear preference for introspective processes of meditation as avenues to the experience of core self; he suggests that in mindful learning “the focus being external, there may be just a
hint of the conscious sense of ipseity [the core sense of “I”], as mindful learning wakes people up from the prior bombardment of mindless learning.” However, we can note that Zen meditation, Buddhist walking meditation, and the practice of karma yoga offer a similar focus on meditation in action, cultivating focused awareness while engaged in the activities of every day life. The goal is to experience one’s authentic core self even while engaged in the outward world. Thus, both introspective mindfulness and mindful learning allow creative uncertainty and encourage one to see the world in new ways.

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ii This sense of a core self and constructed self may have a parallel in the opening anecdote of Zhuangzi’s chapter 2 “On Making all Things Equal.” One sage muses that he had just now lost his (constructed) self. However there is also debate about whether Zhuangzi maintains the notion of a “true self” to which we return, behind the myriad feelings that we observe coming and going. See Chris Jochim, “Just Say No to “No-Self” in Zhuangzi,” in Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi, ed. Roger Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998): 35-74, at 55-56.

iii Siegel, 244.

iv Siegel, 244.

v Siegel, 244