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# A collective case study of the personal practice and meanings of mindfulness to music educators

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A Collective Case Study of the Personal Practice and Meanings of Mindfulness to Music  
Educators

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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FACULTY COMMITTEE:

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my grandmother, Patricia Funkhouser, and in loving memory of my grandfather, Franklin Funkhouser. The memory of your smiling faces when I told you I wanted to become a music teacher has driven every page of this document and every step of this process. I owe it all to you two.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to thank the three participants who agreed to take part in this study. Taking time out of your busy lives to talk with me about a topic that can be quite personal meant a great deal. Your shared mindfulness practices combined to create meaningful experiences for me as a researcher and as a practitioner of mindfulness myself. I also appreciated your generosity in opening up your homes to me as participants in this project, which is reflective of how kind and open you were to serve as participants in the first place. I have learned a lot from each of you.

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## **PREFACE - A PERSONAL NARRATIVE & BACKGROUND**

During my first year as a graduate student, I experienced a certain amount of culture shock. I had completed my Bachelor of Music degree and then worked for a number of years before making the decision to return to university to pursue a Virginia teaching certificate and a Master of Music in Music Education degree. The juxtaposition of having recently been in the workforce of the “real world” and a return to campus life in which I initially took classes with undergraduate students made for a somewhat jarring transition in my daily life. In this new environment, my informal observations of the undergraduate music education majors led me to perceive that many of them seemed to be in a state of perpetual confusion and occasional disbelief in terms of managing all of the well-known challenges of their rigorous programs of study. My impression was that many of the students I would talk to informally outside of class seemed to be expressing concerns that they were terribly overloaded with credit hours, commitments to ensembles, participation in extracurricular clubs, part-time jobs, practice commitments related to private lessons (with the hours spent in practice rooms with that come along with them), and leadership roles in the many organizations in which they were involved in.

From first impressions and beyond, it appeared to me that the the undergraduate culture surrounding these aforementioned areas of academic and professional related obligations was one of constant fatigue, daily whining and complaining, and a sense of just barely hanging onto sanity. It was difficult to remain as removed from this culture as I would have preferred to due to the large amount of prerequisite classes I was required to take alongside my undergraduate classmates who in most cases were five or six years my

junior. Despite my best efforts to detach myself from this negativity, I could still feel myself slipping into the undergraduates' mindsets.

Similar to my new undergraduate peers, I found myself quickly becoming just as overcommitted, and believe I suffered for my choices in doing so. While I truly enjoyed my coursework and the many activities I had the opportunity to be involved with, I realized more and more how much I disliked the way I felt when I was that overloaded. My mind was foggy, I was not sleeping enough, and I started to resent my activities. My classes and performances felt like chores rather than privileges, and I was in desperate need of self-care.

It did not help when friends and professors would look at me and shake their heads, saying "I don't know how you do it." The truth was, I did not know, either. I tried to set aside time for things like running, going to the movies, and trips home to see my family, but my schedule just kept filling up. During the last few weeks of my fall semester of 2016, I even went through and watched practically every stand-up comedy special available for streaming on Netflix in a desperate attempt to disconnect from stress and bring some lightheartedness into my day. In the end, I still needed something deeper to ground me in this new lifestyle I had chosen.

Enter mindfulness. In the Spring of 2017, I saw an email from a university faculty member from the Department of Psychology who was offering a six-week summer course entitled "Mindfulness and Self Care for Helping Professionals." The description sounded interesting and I had previously done a study in my Research in Music Education course on work/life balance and self-care of graduate music education students with a small sample that included myself and three classmates in my program. I thought

it would be a great opportunity to get out of the Music Building and explore this topic from a psychological perspective. On a personal note, I was hopeful that this class would teach me how to manage my stress. I kept that email in my inbox for several months, never forgetting about it, and signed up once registration opened for the summer.

It's funny to admit now, but before taking this class, I did not know what mindfulness was and I had never formally meditated. I thought the word "mindfulness" in the course description was just a more general term in the broader sense of being "mindful" and taking care of yourself as a helping professional, such as a counselor or a teacher. Once I realized that mindfulness was a legitimate area of study and practice that I was going to be diving into headfirst, I was a bit nervous. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, I was not skeptical about the idea of mindfulness as a way of life—even from the start, I accepted the approach wholeheartedly—I just thought I had my work cut out for me as a complete newcomer.

As it turned out, incorporating mindfulness practices into my life became a more natural and organic a process than I could have ever imagined. Even from my first ever formal seated meditation, mindfulness was something I enjoyed rather than struggled against. Throughout the six-week course, I had the opportunity to experience countless mindful practices for the first time: sitting meditation; walking meditation in labyrinths; guided meditation; mindful eating; mindful arts and crafts activities; reflective journaling; a kirtan musical experience involving guitar, percussion, and sung Sanskrit; and a soundbath with Tibetan singing bowls. The class was transformative, and I have continued many of these practices since completing the class. Simple seated meditation



has been the most constant practice for me and going from having never done it before to doing it most days has done so much good for my mental state.

I have also pulled back from some of my extracurricular activities, and while I am doing *less* now, it seems like the positive outcome and result of limiting my activities has resulted in the increased ability for me to actually do *more*, in a manner of speaking. As part of this transformation, I have found myself being more intentional with how I spend my time each day - less time on Netflix, more time spent expanding my knowledge through listening to podcasts and reading. I go for runs and walks in the local parks several times a week. I have stricter cutoffs for when it's time to set work aside in the evenings and turn my attention to reading a good novel, snuggling with my cat, or calling my mom. I bought a season pass to the local lavender farm and spend time there looking at the animals, walking in the labyrinth, reading, and doing a whole lot of deep breathing, taking in the amazing lavender smell. My mindset really does feel different than it did previously—I do my best to approach everything through a mindful perspective and I think it's done a great deal in terms of my own self-care.

In the summer of 2017, I was fortunate to participate in an opportunity that added a whole new layer to my experience with mindfulness. I was able to travel to a university out of state to participate in a five-day workshop entitled “Mindfulness-Based Wellness & Pedagogy.” This experience was invaluable to me, and solidified how important it was to me to include mindfulness as a part of my impending music teaching career.

About a month after returning from the workshop, I began my first teaching job, serving as the chorus teacher at two local middle schools. The schools both have small music programs, but they are filled with students who love music and are highly

enthusiastic about singing. I am happy to share that my mindfulness practice makes its way into my teaching almost every day in informal ways. I keep a glitter jar in my classroom that students know they can use as a mindfulness tool. Should they be feeling stressed during my class for reasons beyond my control, they can politely ask to use the jar, shake it up, and take several deep breaths as they watch the glitter settle. We engage in a mindful music listening activity once a week that students always look forward to. I frequently get requests from the students for body scans and yoga, which I have also tried in the classroom with my students. My hope is that all of these practices will help both me and my students to become a bit more mindful throughout the school day.

In September 2018, I also embarked on another very important part of my journey with mindfulness. Following the summer workshop, we as participants had the opportunity to commit to a year-long teacher training program that would end in being certified in Mindfulness-Based Wellness and Pedagogy. This would mean that we were certified to teach other educators about how to incorporate mindfulness into their own personal lives and into their classrooms. I eagerly accepted this opportunity, and am currently part of a cohort of music educators from all across the country participating in this training. It involves daily personal mindfulness practice, cohort meetings, individual meetings with our teacher, readings, and the creation and execution of lesson plans that bring mindfulness into the classroom. This certification program has helped to shape a lot of my first year of teaching, and I look forward to completing the program in the summer of 2019 and using my knowledge and experience to bring mindfulness to other music educators.

All of this is not to say that I am a master of mindfulness or a completely zen person every day. I do not pretend to know anywhere close to all I need to know to be fully developed in this practice, and like any other human being, I still get stressed at times and have days when I do not make time for mindfulness. However, what I have found during my mindfulness journey is that more and more often I keep coming back to it, and I can not believe that my increased enthusiasm for and interest in growing my relationship with mindful practices will end anytime soon. Gratitude is an important part of mindfulness, and I feel very grateful that mindfulness found its way into my life when I needed it. The change in my daily life as a result has been significant, and the most exciting part is that my experiences thus far are only the beginning. I now have a lifetime ahead of me to look forward to continuing to live mindfully, growing in my practice, and sharing it with others.

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## ABSTRACT

The practice of mindfulness, defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4), may be an effective form of self-care for music educators suffering from stress. Stressors that music educators may encounter in their professional lives include such issues as role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, the underutilization of skills, resource inadequacy, non-participation, professional isolation, and *Music Performance Anxiety* (Scheib, 2003; Sindberg, 2011; Kenny, Davis, & Oates, 2004; Kenny & Osborne, 2006). The purpose of this collective case study was to explore the personal mindfulness practices of the three music educators who participated in the study and meanings they ascribe to these practices. The research questions guiding this study were as follows: What are participating music educators’ personal mindfulness practices? What meanings do participants ascribe to their personal mindfulness practices? Meanings were categorized as personal, social/relational or professional. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and observations of videos of myself and the participants collaboratively engaging in a mindfulness practice of the participant’s choosing. I transcribed interviews, wrote notes while observing video data, and analyzed data through axial coding of notes and transcriptions. Several themes emerged through this analysis: finding mindfulness through the body, personal practices, and role conflict & finding a sense of balance. This study has implications in the areas of music teacher education, music educators’ professional development, and future research in music education.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Music educators often face stressors in their lives and mindfulness practices may provide a source of relief from those stressors. Mindfulness emphasizes remaining in the present moment and observing it without judgment, which may provide clarity during occupational stress music educators may experience. Recognizing stress and observing it nonjudgmentally may make it easier to handle during those moments, and may even have the potential to reduce stress overall in music educators' day-to-day lives. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of music educators who actively use mindfulness practices in their lives and to explore the personal meanings they ascribe to those practices.

Stressors that music educators may encounter in their professional lives include such issues as role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, the underutilization of skills, resource inadequacy, non-participation, professional isolation, and *Music Performance Anxiety* (Scheib, 2003; Sindberg, 2011; Kenny, Davis, & Oates, 2004; Kenny & Osborne, 2006). In addition to being classroom teachers of an academic subject, music educators are often expected to take on roles such as that of ensemble director, private lesson teacher, musical theater director, fundraiser, advocate, recruiter, and at times psychologist. The roles of husband, wife, parent, or guardian may also be added to that list. The combination of responsibilities related to these roles can result in a high level of stress among music educators. The conflicting nature of all of these roles may lead to a sense of role overload, in which music educators feel that they are "being pulled in too



many different directions” (Scheib, 2003, p. 132). If role overload is occurring, music educators may feel that their skills in teaching music are being underutilized as they are pulled in these different directions to handle administrative tasks that take time away from the actual teaching of music. Role conflict and role overload may lead to a feeling of professional isolation in music educators, as they are unable to participate fully in the social relationships and camaraderie that exist in workplace that lead to a sense of belonging. If music educators perceive their place within the overall structure of a school culture as being marginalized, this isolation may continue to grow.

Music educators need to develop methods of dealing with these stressors to reduce their effects. If a music educator already feels this sense of role overload, they may not feel as if they have time to devote to self-care practices in their daily lives. This is an area that needs further attention, as stressors that continue to go unacknowledged may lead to burnout and compassion fatigue. Mindfulness may be an effective form of self-care for music educators suffering from stress. I will explore this possibility through this study, which is informed by the basic tenets of mindfulness, and more specifically, Mindfulness-Based Programs (MBPS) which have grown in popularity over the past several decades as a method of stress reduction among various clinical and nonclinical populations.

### **What is Mindfulness?**

The practice of mindfulness, while rooted in Buddhism, made its way into secular Western culture over the past 40 years, largely through the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D. is largely responsible for bringing mindfulness into mainstream society and Western medicine. He founded the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of

Kabat-Zinn's definition of mindfulness involves "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally", and is the most widely accepted among followers of the practice (1994, p. 4). In 1979, Kabat-Zinn created the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program that is most often replicated or adapted in research looking to study the effects of mindfulness on a certain population of people.

Shapiro and Carlson (2009) presented the idea of mindfulness in a particularly accessible way when breaking the concept down into *little m* mindfulness and *big M* mindfulness. The term *little m* mindfulness was used to refer to mindful practices. These can be formal practices (e.g., sitting meditation, body scan, walking meditation), or informal practices that signify more of an attitude shift in everyday living (e.g., mindful reading, mindful driving, mindful eating). In their article, Shapiro and Carlson also described three aspects of *little m* mindfulness—intention, attention, and attitude—working together to inform these mindful practices. Setting intentions for why one practices mindfulness, paying specific attention to the present moment, and maintaining an open, accepting attitude throughout will make these practices more meaningful and effective. *Big M* mindfulness was defined as mindful awareness, which while being a goal of *little m* mindful practices, is considered more of a state of mind than a formal or informal practice.

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Massachusetts Medical School in 1979, as well as the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society in 1995. His work in creating the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, alongside decades of research attempting to measure its effects, has led to many adaptations of mindfulness programs designed to impact various populations (Stress Reduction Tapes., 2019).

In the 2009 article, Shapiro and Carlson described mindful awareness as “a way of relating to all experience—positive, negative, and neutral—in an open, receptive way. This awareness might involve freedom from grasping and from wanting anything to be different. It simply knows and accepts what is here, now” (2009, p. 5). Practitioners of mindfulness work to grow both their *little m* mindful practices and *Big M* mindful awareness, which may evolve over time.

### **Purpose**

Therefore, the purpose of this collective case study was to explore the personal mindfulness practices of music educators and meanings they ascribe to these practices. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What are participating music educators' personal mindfulness practices?
2. What meanings do participants ascribe to their personal mindfulness practices?
  - a. What personal meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?
  - b. What social/relational meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?
  - c. What professional meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?

In seeking to explore these questions, I pre-identified three participants who I knew from my personal interactions with them self-identified as both music educators and mindfulness practitioners. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and observations of videos of myself and the participants collaboratively engaging in a

mindfulness practice of the participant's choosing. I transcribed interviews, wrote notes while observing video data, and analyzed data through axial coding of notes and transcriptions.

### **Document Overview**

I begin this study with a review of the related literature on topics related to my research questions. First, I detail the key components of *Mindfulness-Based Programs* (MBPs) and examples of research that has been conducted among various populations using MBPs to achieve a number of different outcomes. I identify a number of potential stressors that may affect music educators. I also examine existing research connecting mindfulness and music within the areas of music listening, music therapy, music performance, and music education.

I then outline the methodological design of this study. Following Creswell's (2013) list of key features needed in case study design, I detail a plan for how I intended to identify participants serving as cases, how I would collect the data, and how I would analyze my findings using axial coding (Saldaña, 2013). Also included along with this information is background information about my intent as researcher that includes information specific to researcher trustworthiness in the methodology chapter.

Following the methodology, I describe each of my cases in detail. I generate data regarding each participant based on the interviews and observations I completed with them and conveyed this data in the findings chapter in this study. I include details about participants' experiences as music educators practicing mindfulness, as well as narrative accounts of the mindfulness practices I co-participated in during the study.

After presenting the findings, I conduct a thematic analysis of the data. There were several similarities and differences among the participants' narratives of their experiences with mindfulness as music educators. The themes discussed include finding mindfulness through the body, personal practices, and role conflict & finding a sense of balance.

I also suggest possible implications of this research study including implications for music teacher education, professional development for music educators, and for future research regarding topics related to music education and mindfulness.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore music educators' personal mindfulness practices and meanings they ascribe to these practices. In the process of conducting such a study, it was important to me as the researcher to uncover what existing literature purported with regard to the effects of mindfulness and to explore examples of how mindfulness practices have been brought into educational and musical contexts over several decades of growth in mindfulness research. Furthermore, it was also useful from my perspective to examine literature that detailed common sources of stress for music educators, with the intent that these may be alleviated through mindfulness practices.

The research literature that exists pertaining to mindfulness generally addresses its positive effects via quantitative studies that are often carried out in clinical contexts. Such studies seek to measure the physical, mental, and emotional effects of *Mindfulness-Based Programs* (MBPs). In this review of literature, I provide an overview of the most commonly used program, *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR) and various studies that have been conducted exploring its effects on clinical and nonclinical (e.g., nurses, teachers) populations. I explore common music educator stressors which indicate that those involved in that field may benefit from a self-care process such as mindfulness. Finally, I discuss the growing body of research that directly connects mindfulness to music. Several studies have explored links between mindfulness and music performance practices and mindfulness and music listening. While reviewing the literature concerning mindfulness practices and their effects, I address the under-researched facets of mindfulness pertinent to the current study.

### **Mindfulness-Based Programs (MBPs)**

Over the past two decades, there has been a rapidly growing interest in researching various effects of mindfulness-based programs (MBPs). The first of these programs to be developed was *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR), created by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979, which has been shown to be effective particularly in clinical populations such as patients dealing with chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, & Burney, 1985; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, Burney, & Sellers, 1987; Randolph, Caldera, Tacone, & Greak, 1999). Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) was developed in 1993 by Zindel V. Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale<sup>2</sup>, who set out to create an effective form of maintenance therapy for patients who had formerly suffered from depression and became aware of Jon Kabat-Zinn's work with mindfulness through their own research (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013). These programs, which have gained the most evidence for their effectiveness through research, can be contextualized as "first-generation MBPs" (Crane et al., 2016, p. 2).

In the years following the creation of these two programs, there has been an emergence of second- and third-wave programs such as *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* (ACT), and *Compassion Focused Therapy* (CFT). These adaptations of first-generation programs such as MBSR and MBCT include adjustments made in order

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<sup>2</sup> In 1992, John Teasdale of the Medical Research Council's Applied Psychology Unit in Cambridge, England, Mark Williams of the University of Bangor, Wales, and Zindel Segal, Head of the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Unit at the Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, set out to create a form of maintenance therapy for depression patients who have recovered from initial depressive episodes, but are still considered at-risk for recurring episodes. Informed by Jon Kabat-Zinn's work with mindfulness as a treatment for patients suffering from chronic pain, this maintenance therapy eventually became Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), an MBP that is still used today (Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2013).

to reach new populations and accomplish different goals. In developing these new programs, it is important to recognize the necessary features that must be present in order for a MBP to maintain its integrity within the body of research on the effectiveness of these interventions. In an editorial published in *Psychological Medicine*, Crane et al. (2016) identified essential elements that a program properly characterized as a MBP must: be informed by a confluence of theories and practices that draw from fields including contemplative traditions, science, medicine, psychology, and education; focus on human experience, particularly with regard to human distress and how to relieve it; encourage a shift in participants' attention to present moment experiences; promote qualities such as self-regulation, compassion, wisdom, and equanimity; and engage the participant in an experiential, inquiry-based learning process that includes sustained, intensive training in mindfulness meditation practice. If a MBP is missing these essential elements, the integrity of the research conducted using these MBPs may be called into question. Crane et al. (2016) commended researchers' efforts to adjust the first-generation MBPs in order to serve new populations, but warned against creating programs that omitted these components.

Much existing research detailing MBPs' effects attempt to measure them through quantitative research methods. Although quantitative studies are necessary for indicating measured levels of effectiveness—particularly in clinical populations—they often contain methodological issues including: small sample sizes (Flook et al., 2013; Gold et al., 2010; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Kristeller & Hallett, 1999; Poulin et al., 2008; ); lack of longitudinal data (Gold et al., 2010; Goldenberg et al., 1994; Kabat-Zinn, 1982;



Kabat-Zinn et al., 1985; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Kristeller & Hallett, 1999; Poulin et al., 2008; Speca et al., 2000; Teasdale et al., 2000); and lack of control group (Gold et al., 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Kristeller & Hallett, 1999).

Quantitative studies about mindfulness also may fail to capture personal meanings that participants ascribe to mindfulness practice in their lives. These meanings can be explored more deeply through qualitative research.

Researchers exploring the positive effects of mindfulness regularly draw on and assess the use of mindfulness based programs (MBPs) created with the intent of using mindfulness to reduce physical and mental symptoms associated with various illnesses. Crane et al. (2016) asserted that when considering the growing amount of research on MBPs, it is important to identify key components of an MBP that distinguish it from other adapted programs whose fidelity/integrity may be in question. MBPs are a distinct set of programs all stemming from the same theoretical framework and engaging in the same basic types of practices. Other programs have emerged in various fields which use elements of mindfulness, but are not true MBPs. It is necessary to outline the distinguishing factors of MBPs so that the integrity of the research on them remains intact.

The essential elements of MBPs are as follows: (1) they draw from contemplative traditions, science, medicine, psychology and education; (2) they focus on the human experience of distress and how to relieve it; (3) they involve focus on the present moment to change participants' relationships with their experiences; (4) they promote

self-regulation of attention, emotion, and behavior, as well as compassion, wisdom, and equanimity; and (5) they involve intensive training (Crane et al., 2016).

Individuals who facilitate MBPs to others should also possess these important characteristics and competencies to ensure their ability to: (1) deliver effective course material including aspects such as as pacing, interpersonal skills, and skill in leading meditation; (2) embody the qualities of mindfulness; (3) continue with appropriate training and ongoing personal practice; and (4) commit to a participatory learning process with their participants (Crane et al., 2016).

Adaptations of MBPs may change the theoretical framework or the context or setting of the program. This is useful when the program seeks to reach a specific population. Yet, all of the elements outlined above need to remain intact in order for it to be considered a true MBP. The most well-known of these mindfulness-based programs is the *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* program (MBSR) created by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Prior to reviewing MBSR-related studies below, I provide a brief introduction to the program.

**Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR).** Kabat-Zinn's *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* program was developed in 1979 at the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Stress Reduction Clinic. MBSR is a group program designed to teach participants mindful practices in the pursuit of mindful awareness. MBSR is an eight- to ten-week course in which participants take part in a two-and-one-half-hour session once a week, one all-day weekend retreat, and forty-five minutes of "homework" six days a week. Course content and homework consists of engaging in formal meditative practices

(e.g., seated meditation, walking meditation, body scan, and yoga) and informal mindfulness practice (e.g., mindful eating). Participants learn how to use mindfulness in stressful situations they may encounter in their daily lives. MBSR represents the merging of two distinct traditions: Western medicine and psychology and the Dharma, a key concept of Buddhism.

Kabat-Zinn (2000), who has a background in Zen Buddhism, wanted to find a way to bring mindfulness “into the world in a way that doesn’t dilute, profane, or distort it, but at the same time is not locked into a culturally and tradition-bound framework” (p. 227). Kabat-Zinn removed overt religious connotation from his MBSR program in order to make it more widely accessible to people who were suffering. “Stress” was a buzz word in America around the time that Kabat-Zinn was debuting his MBP in 1979, and he felt that calling the service it provides *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* created a name that people could intuitively understand. In the decades since its creation, over 24,000 people have participated in MBSR, and it has served as the basis for many adaptations of the program intended to reach various populations (Salmon, Sephton, & Dreeben, 2011). Numerous researchers have investigated adaptations of this program in clinical settings.

Baer (2003) provided a conceptual and empirical review of clinical interventions that incorporate mindfulness training in some way, either as the main form of treatment such as in *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR) and *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy* (MBCT), or as one tool used in other treatments such as *Dialectical Behavior Therapy* (DBT), *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* (ACT), and *Relapse*

*Prevention* (RP). The author highlighted studies showing that mindfulness training has been used by medical researchers in treatment for chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1985; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1987; Randolph et al., 1999), generalized anxiety and panic disorders (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995), binge eating disorder (Kristeller & Hallett, 1999), major depressive disorder (Teasdale et al., 2000), fibromyalgia (Goldenberg et al., 1994; Kaplan, Goldenberg, & Galvin, 1993), psoriasis (Kabat-Zinn et al., 1998), and mood disturbances and stress levels in cancer patients (Carlson, Ursuliak, Goodey, Angen, & Specia, 2001; Specia, Carlson, Goodey, & Angen, 2000). These studies showed positive effects of mindfulness for these populations that included: sustained exposure to their illnesses which helped desensitize participants to their negative effects, cognitive change as participants worked to redirect thoughts associated with their illness, self-management of pain and emotions, relaxation, and acceptance. What these studies failed to capture, however, was anecdotal evidence regarding the personal impact that these mindfulness interventions had on participants' lives. This supports the need for more qualitative research on the effects of mindfulness.

Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, and Walach (2004) compiled a similar overview of research that implemented and examined mindfulness interventions, but they focused on treatments that used the MBSR program specifically or an adaptation of that program. The authors identified sixty-four studies in which researchers attempted to measure the physical and mental effects of mindfulness and reached the same conclusion that Baer

came to — that these studies do point to positive outcomes achieved through mindfulness interventions.

MBSR has also been adapted for nonclinical populations. Poulin, Mackenzie, Soloway, and Karayolas (2008) designed two studies for two different groups of human services professionals to measure the effects of MBSR on stress levels and well-being among those populations. In the first study, they administered a modified version of MBSR that presents the material of the course in four thirty-minute sessions that they called brief MBSR (bMBSR) to nurses and nurse aides ( $n = 16$ ) in a geriatric hospital. Effects of this intervention were measured against participants who took part in a brief *Imagery and Progressive Muscle Relaxation* (bIPMR) program<sup>3</sup> ( $n = 10$ ) and participants who did not participate in any intervention ( $n = 14$ ). Results of the study indicated that the subset of participants who received the bMBSR intervention experienced a significant decrease in emotional exhaustion, while participants who did not receive the bMBSR intervention did not experience any change in this area. This study indicates that even a version of MBSR administered within a truncated timeframe may still result in positive effects for participants as compared to other interventions such as IPMR or no stress-reduction interventions.

In Poulin et al.'s (2008) second study, the researchers administered another modified MBSR course they called *Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education* (MBWE) to undergraduate education students ( $N=44$ ). Twenty-eight participants received the

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<sup>3</sup> The bIPMR program was the same length and duration as the bMBSR program, but focused on bodily interventions such as observing tension in the body, releasing stress through progressive muscle relaxation, and guided imagery exercises.

intervention and sixteen participants served as the control group. MBWE maintained the original eight-week timeline of MBSR, but had a “formal focus on health and wellness promotion” (Poulin et al., 2008, p. 75). Results of the study demonstrated improvements in participants regarding criteria such as mindfulness, satisfaction with life, teaching self-efficacy, and self-rated physical health. The researchers assert that “human service professionals are a critical population for mindfulness training because as they begin to embody this learning, and experience benefits in their own lives, they also bring this education to the people they are working with” (Poulin et al., 2008, p. 79). Teachers are a particular subset of human service professionals that may benefit from mindful practice, and several studies have also adapted mindfulness programs for application useful for educators.

There are several studies in which researchers examined the effects of mindfulness in educators. Gold et al. (2010) conducted a small study including primary school teachers and teaching assistants ( $N = 11$ ) measuring the effectiveness of MBSR on depression, anxiety, and stress levels in those individuals. The researchers found marked improvements in all of these areas following an 8-week MBSR program. Additionally, the researchers asked participants to identify “main problems” and “main goals” before beginning the program such as “trying to do too many things at once” and “improvement in self-esteem and feelings that what I am doing is appropriate and worthwhile” (p. 187). Participants reported after the study that they felt “they had progressed 60% of the way to these goals in less than three months” (p. 187). The researchers felt the more qualitative aspects of their study in the comments made by participants after the MBSR program

revealed the potential for the impact this could have for teachers. One participant commented, "I wish I'd known about it 30 years ago" (p. 187). Gold et al. acknowledged the limitations of the study such as the small sample size and the lack of control group to measure the success of the mindfulness intervention against and recommended further research on the subject.

Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson (2013) commented directly on Gold et al.'s (2009) study and its lack of a control group and sought to amend this methodological issue in their own work. These researchers administered a modified version of MBSR to a group of public elementary school teachers ( $n = 10$ ) and measured the program's effects against a wait-list control group ( $n = 8$ ). Effects were measured in a variety of areas including psychological distress, mindfulness, self-compassion, burnout, teacher classroom behavior, cortisol levels, and neuropsychological and attentional tasks. After the mindfulness training, the researchers found a correlation between an increase in mindfulness for participants, lowered measures of burnout psychological symptoms, and increased attention.

Nonreactivity and awareness—both hallmarks of mindfulness—were reported by the participants to a factor that contributed to these improvements. Participants reported increases in nonreactivity and acting with awareness. The researchers suggested that more studies be conducted with these measures with a larger sample size, and that observing cortisol levels as an objective measure may offer quantitative insight into the effects of mindfulness training. Although both Gold et al.'s (2010) Flook et al.'s (2013) studies possess limitations in both sample size and length of study, findings from these

studies support potentially positive effects of mindfulness-based interventions for teachers.

In addition to examining mindfulness for educators through research studies, a growing number of organizations and programs that have been created for the purpose of being brought into schools to administer mindfulness training to teachers, students, or both. Meiklejohn et al. (2012) outlined these programs and provide an overview of literature documenting the success of studies exploring the effectiveness of such programs.

Regarding teacher training in mindfulness, Meiklejohn et al. (2012) offered up the claim that “K-12 teachers face an array of stressors, yet are provided with few resources with which to alleviate them” (p. 292). The authors outlined three training programs that give teachers the opportunity to learn mindfulness as a means of dealing with stress: *Mindfulness-Based Wellness Education (MBWE)*, *Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE)*, and *Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques (SMART)*. These professional development programs are being piloted in different areas of the country and are presented in various formats, such as an eight-week course, a one or two day workshop, or a five-day retreat. They all focus on giving teachers the knowledge and tools they need to build a personal practice to better handle their daily lives and the stressors in them.

Throughout the United States, there are also programs in a variety of educational settings that place mindfulness more directly into the classroom by teaching educators how to teach mindfulness to their students. Meiklejohn et al. (2012) suggested that



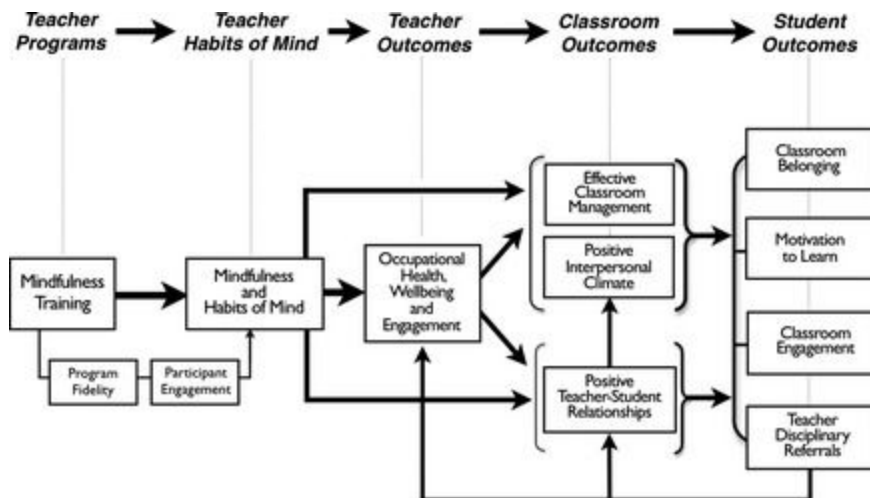
“mindfulness training can enhance students’ capacities in self-regulation of attention and emotions, and buffer the developing brain from the deleterious effects of excess stress” (p. 296). Mindfulness training programs for K-12 students are varied in length and frequency of meetings and can take place in school or after-school settings, as well as in the community, research settings, or outpatient clinics also exist (p. 296). Such programs include the: *Inner Kids Program*, *Inner Resilience Program*, *Learning to BREATHE* program, *Mindfulness in Schools Project*; and other programs such as *Mindful Schools*, *MindUP*, *Sfat Hakeshev* (The Mindfulness Language), *Still Quiet Place*, *Stressed Teens*, and *Wellness Works in Schools*.

The aforementioned programs are targeted at different age groups and may target students, teachers, or both together through their work. Those that offer a combined approach where both teachers and students are taught together deserve particular attention, since this approach “holds promise of creating a wider and more sustainable benefit to a school community than either approach alone might achieve” (p. 304). The researchers note numerous challenges to implementing such programs including a lack of empirical research and changes in policy, budget, priorities, and personnel. To combat this, Meiklejohn et al. (2012) recommend further research on the effectiveness of these mindfulness programs in schools for both teachers and students to support a more widespread distribution of these programs into K-12 settings.

If the kinds of direct mindfulness training for students within the context of the school is not possible due to the constraints Meiklejohn et al. (2012) outlined, Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings (2012) offered considerations for mindfulness training to be

further highlighted within the realm of professional development for teachers. Roeser et al. positioned mindfulness as an additional fourth pillar standing alongside the three areas that are currently prioritized in teachers' professional development: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and developmental knowledge. These prevalent areas of professional development may not explicitly highlight certain dispositional qualities that are prioritized in mindfulness practice, such as "tolerance for uncertainty, attentional focus, cognitive flexibility, and emotion regulation" (p. 170). The authors explained the potential trickle-down effects that mindfulness training for teachers could have on students, as well as teachers.

Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings (2012) argued that if a teacher devotes time and resources spent on professional development to mindfulness training, this can lead to their personal habits of mind improving, which in turn can lead to improved teacher outcomes, such as a sense of improved occupational health and wellbeing in their professional life. If these improvements are made in the professional life of the teacher, the logic model suggests these effects can be felt in the classroom, as well. A more mindful, healthy, engaged teacher may have greater success in classroom management and maintaining personal relationships with students. Within a healthy classroom environment, students could feel an increased sense of belonging, motivation, and engagement, which may lead to less disciplinary referrals from the teacher. These potential effects are exemplified in Figure 1 as a logic model.



*Figure 1.* Logic model of hypothesized mindfulness training effects (Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings, 2012, p. 171).

While the above research is helpful in illustrating potential benefits of mindfulness for both clinical and nonclinical populations, there are several methodological issues common to many of these studies. Studies such as those conducted by Flook et al. (2013), Gold et al. (2010), Kabat-Zinn et al. (1992), Kristeller & Hallett (1999), and Poulin et al. (2008) have small sample sizes and short lengths of study. Data would be stronger if it were gathered based on a larger pool of participants and if researchers took more longitudinal perspective beyond an eight to ten week perspective common to MBSR programs. Out of the studies mentioned above, there are four instances of studies in which there is no control group to measure effects against. Additionally, when there is a wait-listed control group (e.g. Flook et al., 2013; Goldenberg et al., 1994; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1985; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1998; Poulin et al., 2008; Specia et al., 2000; Teasdale et al., 2000; Williams et al., 2000), there is no consistency in the kinds of treatment those groups are receiving as an alternative to

mindfulness training, thus confusing potential comparative findings. There is also very seldom any information regarding the credibility of the mindfulness instructor leading the intervention program. While it may be that the person administering the mindfulness training is well-versed in mindfulness and is certified to teach MBSR, MBCT, or a related program, that information is not always explicitly stated in the research, which left Baer (2003) and Grossman et al. (2004) to question the quality of mindfulness instruction participants in these studies were getting. Additionally, these quantitative studies often fail to explain in detail the aspects of mindfulness that participants may find most meaningful when they attempt to measure personal experiences with mindfulness by numbers rather than the rich description that quantitative research can provide.

The studies reviewed above represent a small body of research emerging on mindfulness and its potential benefits for specific clinical groups as well as for teachers and students. There is little that connects mindfulness specifically to music educators and music making and/or music learning. To consider the benefit these practices could have on this particular subset of teachers, it is useful to identify stressors that are common within the field of music.

### **Music Teachers and Stress**

Music often requires a great effort from both the mind and body working together. While it is relatively common for musicians to receive an education in physical health for musicians focused on elements such as breath support, posture, proper sleep, nutrition and hydration, the field may not devote enough attention to the psychological health of musicians. Cornett-Murtada (2012) suggests that mindfulness might be particularly

helpful to “students of the 21st century who are chronically overstimulated, engaged in multitasking through a variety of media, distracted, exhausted and exhibiting stress-related illnesses at younger and younger ages” (p. 22). While this can certainly be true for students, I would add that this can be an issue for teachers, as well. Teachers are constantly called upon to not only teach their classes, but to also be available to sponsor extracurricular activities, assist students outside of class time, volunteer at school-related function, grow in their professional development through classes and conferences, and keep up-to-date on the latest technologies. Assuming that most teachers have personal lives to maintain, as well, I would argue that teachers often experience this sense of chronic overstimulation and multitasking just as much as their students.

Cornett-Murtada's (2012) philosophy positions mindfulness as a method of paving the way for a new means of integrating the prioritization of physical and mental health in the field of music:

In using contemplative practices such as mindfulness meditation, we are joining the outer world of physical technique and the personality with the inner world of the silent observer. Or, perhaps we are uniting the Western world of competition and achievement (“doing”) with traditional Eastern philosophies of awareness and acceptance (“being”). This sort of integrated teaching could be the very essence of music pedagogy in this new millennium. (p. 27)

Music teachers are a particular subset of educators who may encounter issues in their profession that could cause them stress. In Scheib's (2003) collective case study, she examined role stress in music teachers ( $N = 4$ ) employed at a public high school in the

midwestern U.S. Observation and interviews occurred over the course of one fall semester, and Scheib sought to qualitatively measure six role stressors: role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, underutilization of skills, resource inadequacy, and non-participation. I will use several of these stressors to organize this section, along with professional isolation and *Music Performance Anxiety* (MPA) in order to detail examples of the kinds of stressors music educators face.

**Role Conflict.** Scheib (2003) defines role conflict as “when two or more contradictory role messages (expectations) are sent to the focal person that result in psychological conflict” (p. 125). Music educators can experience role conflict when called upon to act in several different roles at the same time. One music educator may have roles as a teacher, a fundraiser, an event planner, a conductor, an arts advocate in their community, and more. The educators that participated in Scheib’s (2003) study commented on the role conflict they felt between being an educator and a director, which they saw as two different jobs. They found it difficult to balance wanting to give an individualized, meaningful, comprehensive music education to each of their students and wanting to direct a high-achieving large ensemble that produced stellar performances (p. 131-132). Another large source of role conflict mentioned in Scheib’s (2003) study which may be felt by many music educators, is the role conflict between being a music educator and being a spouse or parent. The teachers in the study experienced a level of stress as they felt their role as a teacher was in conflict with perceived and/or desired roles to be filled in their personal lives. The long hours and many demands of being a music educator may make fulfilling family roles difficult in some instances, and this can be a

great cause of stress for these educators. Role conflict was identified as the biggest source of stress according to participants in Scheib's (2003) study.

**Role ambiguity.** In addition to experiencing conflict between different roles a music educator must fulfill, there is also the possibility that their role(s) may be unclear and/or unpredictable, which can create stress for the teacher. While the four participants in Scheib's (2003) study did not experience stress as a result of role ambiguity, the researcher posits that this may have been because none of the participants were new teachers, and thus had developed a level of clarity as to their roles in their school over the years that other music teachers may not have. Newer teachers and/or teachers with smaller music programs may not be clear on expectations for their role as music teacher, which can cause stress.

**Role overload.** Closely related to role conflict, role overload occurs when the "quantity and wide variety of different roles expected of the focal person is overwhelming to the point that no one role can be performed satisfactorily" (Scheib, 2003, p. 125). Returning to the various roles that music educators can have, such as academic classroom teachers of music, ensemble directors, private lesson teachers, musical theatre directors, fundraisers, advocates, recruiters, spouses, and parents, it is reasonable to imagine that teachers becoming overloaded with juggling too many of these roles at once may affect their ability to perform any of them adequately. Role overload was a close second to role conflict as the biggest source of stress in Scheib's (2003) study. Role overload was largely believed to be a result of inadequate staffing and "being pulled in too many different directions" (p. 132).

**Underutilization of skills.** If a music educator is unable to use their abilities and gifts in their role as a teacher, they may feel stress as a result of underutilization of skills. Several teachers in Scheib's (2003) study expressed this sentiment, citing examples such as spending time doing tasks unrelated to teaching like fundraising, setup and cleanup of performance spaces, scheduling, and other administrative tasks as duties that take away from their ability to spend the majority of their time as a music educator actually teaching music (p. 132-133). These demands, which often take up time outside of class and take away from music teachers' planning time can create further stress.

**Resource inadequacy.** Scheib (2003) states that resource inadequacy stress occurs when "the focal person is forced to try to 'make things work' without the necessary tools and resources" (p. 126). Resources could include classroom materials, instruments, rehearsal and performance spaces, and even staff. Participants in Scheib's (2003) study seemed to understand that these issues often arise in the field of music education and, rather than feeling like they were lacking in resources—at least in relation to their expectations entering the field—they felt resource inadequacy related to the pressure of recruitment for their programs. Their feelings of being understaffed in their department made them feel as if they did not have the proper means to grow student enrollment (p. 133-134).

**Nonparticipation.** If a music educator feels as if they do not have an active role in making major decisions in their school regarding their programs, they may experience stress due to nonparticipation. The four participants in Scheib's (2003) study did not report high levels of nonparticipation stress, but this may be due to their seniority in their



school. New teachers may feel this type of stress more than established educators who feel as if they have a major role in their school.

**Isolation.** One source of stress that wasn't covered in Scheib's (2003) article was the focus of Sindberg's (2011) research. She outlined reasons why professional isolation may be more prevalent in music teachers than teachers of other subjects. Sindberg (2011) conducted a phenomenological study in which she interviewed public school music teachers ( $N = 12$ ) in a medium-sized midwestern city. In analyzing and coding data gathered from the interviews, Sindberg (2011) identified several themes that contributed to these teachers' feelings of professional isolation, including *emotional reaction*, *external forces*, *social factors*, and *awareness*.

Regarding *emotional reaction*, Sindberg (2011) found that teachers felt frustration at their lack of connection with teachers of other subjects at their schools. There were also *external forces* at play outside of their control that contributed to isolation such as communication issues in their school, a heavy workload, the physical location of the music room being separated from other classrooms, busy schedules, and perceived lack of value within the school system. *Social factors* such as a lack of camaraderie among colleagues which can often strengthen professional relationships contributes to music teachers' professional isolation. Finally, a growing sense of *awareness* over time as music educators mature in their field and are able to see their place within the overall structure of a school culture or district may lead to a feeling of isolation if that place is perceived as being on the margins (p. 11-19). While some music teachers may be fortunate enough to secure positions in schools where they do not feel these issues that

Sindberg outlines, she argues that more music teachers may feel these things than we realize and that further research could continue to shed light on this topic.

**Music Performance Anxiety.** One final source of stress that can be prevalent in the field of music, affecting performers, music students, and music teachers is *Music Performance Anxiety* (MPA). Kenny, Davis, and Oates (2004) measured levels of MPA in professional musicians to see if they still experienced the phenomenon well into their careers. They collected data from members of the Opera Australia chorus ( $N = 32$ ) to measure occupational stressors and performance anxiety. These factors were shown to be present among the participants, who expressed a sense of stress about their current job and how it related to the future trajectory of their careers. From the study, it seemed as if the chorus artists still experienced high levels of trait anxiety despite their expertise. Even though they are singing in a group, they are expected to perform at a high level like a soloist and have a responsibility to others in the ensemble and the conductor to do well. This exposure and demand for excellence keeps stress levels high even amongst artists who are far along in their careers.

Kenny and Osborne (2006) chose to examine the other end of the spectrum of experience levels and study music performance anxiety in adolescents aged twelve through nineteen ( $N = 381$ ) years of age. Results of this second study show that even at a young age, music performance anxiety still exists for adolescents, and suggests that there may be a correlation between commitment to excellence in music and anxiety, wherein students who are more committed to developing musical skill experience more anxiety. Kenny's various studies show that performance anxiety is an issue woven into musical

performance whether you're an adolescent just starting out or a well-seasoned professional musician.

Diaz (2018) conducted a study in which he explored the occurrence of MPA among collegiate music students and examined the effect that mindfulness may have on MPA. Participants ( $N = 255$ ) completed an 86-item questionnaire regarding their experiences with meditation, performance anxiety, and perfectionism in order for the researcher to examine any possible correlations between these concepts. 48.2% ( $n = 123$ ) of participants reported to have engaged in meditation at some point during the previous six months, and 21.2% ( $n = 54$ ) reported practicing some form of meditation at least once a week. Results showed that these participants who meditated at least once a week scored lower on the portion of the questionnaire that measured MPA.

Two sets of regression analyses examined the relationship between meditation, perfectionism, and MPA in this study. The first set showed that trait mindfulness, or, the presence of mindfulness in participants' everyday lives as more of a way of being than a state to be achieved through meditation, could only account for up to 9% of the variation in how the participants scored when responding to questions about MPA. While this may have suggested that meditation may not influence performance anxiety, this outcome may have been affected by the study's design, which calls on participants to self-report on the scales used to measure meditation practice, anxiety, and perfectionism (p. 161).

The second set of regression analyses examined the relationship between perfectionism and MPA. Diaz found that perfectionism, alongside the aforementioned trait mindfulness, could account for up to 24% of the variation in MPA among

participants. *Socially Prescribed Perfectionism*, or SPP (Hewitt & Flett, 1990) was the largest indicator of potential increased performance anxiety. Results suggested that meditation may specifically be in reducing MPA for people with high levels of perfectionism. The potential link between meditation and perfectionism is a line of inquiry that has not been explored much thus far in mindfulness research (p. 162-163).

Music teachers are called upon to “perform” on a daily basis as they stand in front of classes of students and demonstrate musical skills through teaching. If music teachers have a history of MPA on stage, they may feel some of those effects in the classroom, as well. Their students may also experience signs of MPA before and/or during performances. Having an understanding of *Music Performance Anxiety* and ways to combat the stress that results from it may be a worthwhile skill for music educators.

**Stress in Music Students.** In addition to stressors felt by music educators, there are also qualities in the daily lives of music students that may lead to stress. In order for music educators to create a positive music learning experience for their students with minimal stress, it is important to identify these stressors and consider what steps can be taken to reduce the intensity with which some music students feel these stressors. Sternbach (2008) acknowledges that music students go through all of the same stressors that other young people go through as they grow into adults: academic pressure to get into college; competition among peers; social pressures involving alcohol, drugs, and sex; and social pressures to fit in and find the right circle of friends. However, music students also have additional stressors including the following: long hours spent in practice rooms, lessons, and ensemble rehearsals leaving little time to relax; lack of physical health when

they are forced to choose musical activities over sports; the burden of learning to navigate a proper work/life balance at a young age; the many issues related to performance anxiety; feelings of isolation; and dealing with large amounts of criticism that could come from teachers, parents, judges in competition settings, and from themselves as self-criticism (p. 44). This laundry list of issues music students are faced with suggests that the culture and demands of the field of music education may provide additional stress for music students outside of the general issues that all students are faced with.

### **Mindfulness and Music**

A small but growing number of connections have been made regarding mindfulness practices and the field of music. Steinfeld and Brewer (2015) posited that “any human action can be performed as mindfulness meditation; it just depends on how one applies their mind to that given task” (p. 88). This highlights the idea that a mindfulness framework is applicable to a variety of fields, including music. Several researchers in the field of music have used mindfulness as either a framework or a specific intervention in their studies involving music listening, music therapy, and music performance. I will outline the existing research in these areas below.

**Mindfulness and Music Listening.** Music listening and mindfulness practices have been connected through the work of Diaz (2011). Music listening is a common way that humans interact with music on a daily basis, and Diaz ascribed to the idea that exploring the use of mindfulness within this context was a worthwhile research endeavor. Diaz's study enlisted undergraduate and graduate students ( $N = 132$ ) involved in music at a large southern university to serve as participants in a study that investigated the effects

that mindfulness meditation on participants' attention, aesthetic response, and flow experience during a music listening activity. Participants were randomly sorted into four different groups in which they engaged in one of the following: a mindfulness activity and aesthetic response ( $n = 34$ ); a mindfulness activity and flow response ( $n = 35$ ); an aesthetic response with no mindfulness activity ( $n = 32$ ); or a flow response with no mindfulness activity ( $n = 31$ ). The mindfulness activity used in the study was a fifteen-minute pre-recorded guided meditation that participants in those groups took part in before the music listening activity. The music listening activity involved participants listening to a 10.5 minute excerpt from Puccini's *La Boheme*. Participants' responses to the excerpt were recorded through verbal responses, questionnaires, and the use of *Continuous Response Digital Interface (CRDI)*.<sup>4</sup>

Analysis of participants' self-reported attention indicated that there was a significant increase in attention during the music listening activity for participants who took part in the mindfulness activity. Themes in the verbal responses suggest that participants who took part in the mindfulness activity perceived a change in their attention during the music listening activity. In the discussion, Diaz articulates the difficulty of this kind of work being that there may have been between participants' ascribed meanings for phenomenological descriptions of concepts like "flow" and "aesthetic response." He calls for further research on attentional/cognitive responses to music in addition to emotional responses. He also stated that mindfulness and its effects

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<sup>4</sup> CRDI is a dial that can be adjusted in real time within a "less-more" range, allowing participants to give non-verbal responses with no interruption during the listening activity.

on other areas of music such as practice, conducting, and composition should be explored.

Anderson (2015) also studied mindfulness and music listening, this time using fourth grade students ( $N = 42$ ) as participants in his study. He hypothesized that giving a group of students instructions on completing a listening activity mindfully would increase their listening sensitivity and listening enjoyment. The researcher defined listening sensitivity as “the ability to listen for subtle differences in musical elements and make judgments based on these differences” and listening enjoyment as “pleasure derived from listening to music, as reported by the listener” (p. 50). Pretests and posttests were administered to the students to measure potential growth in the areas during the 10-week experiment.

Participants took part in a music listening activity as part of this research project once a week for the ten weeks. Both the experimental ( $n = 22$ ) and the control ( $n = 20$ ) groups heard the same musical selections, played twice, and received the same listening instructions regarding musical themes, and instrumentation, etc. However, the experimental group also received mindful strategy-based instructions that focused on several characteristics of mindfulness outlined by Anderson (2015): *openness to novelty*, *alertness to distinction*, *sensitivity to different contexts*, *awareness of multiple perspectives*, and *orientation in the present* (p. 52). The data Anderson gathered through his posttest showed a statistically significant difference in both the listening sensitivity and the listening enjoyment of the experimental and control groups, which supported his

hypothesis that mindful instruction positively affected these characteristics in his participants.

**Mindfulness and Music Therapy.** While Music Therapy is a field that is distinct from Music Education, the therapeutic potential in combining mindfulness practices and musicking in Music Therapy settings may also prove useful in Music Education settings. Music educators who apply a therapeutic lens to their teaching as they seek to better their students' lives through music may find practices used in Music Therapy incorporating mindfulness useful in their teaching. Thus, I include a brief discussion of mindfulness and Music Therapy in this review of literature.

Eckhardt and Dinsmore (2012) advocated for an intervention for depression that combines certain mindfulness practices and certain music therapy practices to create what they called *Mindful Music Listening* (MML). This treatment would involve collaboration between therapist and client to identify mindful practices that the client feels comfortable incorporating into their life and identify music that may be useful as a therapeutic means of tapping into emotions that are difficult to express through traditional psychotherapy. In a therapy session using MML, the client would practice whatever form of mindfulness they have identified, which could range from a formal guided meditation to a few calming breaths. The client and therapist would then listen to the predetermined music in silence. Following the mindfulness exercise and the music listening exercise, the client and therapist would discuss the emotions and feelings that arose as a result of those practices. The MML intervention represents an example of how the effects of



mindfulness and the effects of music can be combined to offer a deeper experience than either practice alone.

**Mindfulness and Music Performance.** Music performance is a common practice in the field of music education, and several researchers have explored how mindfulness practices may be used in relation to music performance. Elliott (2010) posited that mindfulness may be a useful tool in creating more positive singing experiences. Mindfulness practice usually begins with focusing on the breath, which is a foundational aspect of proper singing. There is a great deal of multi-tasking that is done in singing. At any given moment, a performer may be thinking about their breath, posture, pitch, tone, rhythm, lyrics, facial affect, and more. This pressure to be thinking of all of these things at once may cause stress, worry, and self-doubt. Elliott suggests beginning singing with attention on the breath, then letting one's mind wander to all the other elements of singing in the particular kind of nonjudgmental way that is characteristic of mindfulness, singing may be a more relaxing and enjoyable experience.

Czajkowski and Greasley (2015) modified Kabat-Zinn's MBSR course to create an eight-week *Mindfulness for Singers* (MfS) course that was administered to eight voice majors and then used questionnaires and interviews after the course to "explore its effects on experiences of learning vocal technique" (p. 215). The researchers predicted that the MfS course would "positively affect experiences of learning singing technique by promoting increased concentration and attentiveness in lessons and developing present moment awareness of the physical sensations of singing" (p. 215). Czajkowski and Greasley examined differences that the introduction of mindfulness concepts and

activities made in students' practice habits, social relationships with their voice teachers, technical effects on tone quality and breath support, pre-performance nerves, post-performance criticism, and their daily life in general.

In all of the addressed areas, participants noted a positive impact of mindfulness on their approach to performance studies. Post-study interviews were also held with the voice teachers of the eight students. They were not aware of which of their students were going through the mindfulness training while it was happening, and were given the opportunity to guess the participants after its completion based on their behavior during lessons over the eight weeks. Six of the eight students were correctly identified. This study gives a direct example of how mindfulness practices can help music students in an educational setting. Similar studies could be carried out with students in different performance studios or those studying classes in music education, music history, music theory and aural training, and more.

Langer, Russell, & Eisenkraft (2009) chose to use instrumental musicians rather than singers in their research, and designed a study for members of a symphony orchestra. They were concerned that when players in symphony orchestras are made to play “fan favorites” over and over throughout the years (e.g., Tchaikovsky’s *Nutcracker Suite* every Christmas) this may lead to “stale and mindless renditions” (p. 125). Based on this concern, they developed two studies that inspected the impact of mindfulness on music performing and listening.

Langer, Russell, & Eisenkraft’s initial (2009) study engaged 60 members of a large university symphony orchestra as performers, and 143 members of a local

community chorus as listeners. The orchestra was assigned the task of playing the finale from Brahms's *Symphony No. 1* twice, as a control performance and an experimental performance. The instructions given for the control performance were to think about the finest performance they had given of this piece and focus on that while playing. The instructions given for the experimental performance were to play in the finest manner they were able and to include subtle new nuances.<sup>5</sup> The players were then asked to rate how much they enjoyed playing each time on a scale of 1-10 and describe what they did differently in the experimental performance. During the second portion of this first study, the listeners listened to the control performance followed by the experimental performance and filled out a questionnaire indicating whether they heard a difference between the two and which they preferred. Results indicated that the performers enjoyed playing with the experimental instructions more, and significantly more than half of the listeners expressed a preference for the experimental performance, as well.

Langer, Russell, & Eisenkraft (2009) then iterated on this first study by conducting a second study in which they adjusted their methodology to account for the possibility of a practice effect on the part of the performers and/or an order effect on the part of the listeners.<sup>6</sup> This time, musicians first played the "Polonaise" from

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<sup>5</sup> Placing these instructions within a mindfulness framework, the experimental instructions indicate a more mindful way of performing, as the performers are focused on the present moment of playing rather than a past performance. Attention to the present moment is one of the hallmarks of mindfulness practice.

<sup>6</sup> Langer, Russell, & Eisenkraft (2009) were worried that performers in their first study indicated a preference for the experimental performance due to a practice effect in which they enjoyed the second performance more than the first due to increased practice time. Similarly, the researchers were worried that listeners indicated a preference for the experimental performance due to an order bias.

Rimsky-Korsakov's *Christmas Eve* and received the control instructions twice. They then played "March of the Toys" from Victor Herbert's *Babes in Toyland*, first receiving the control instructions and then the experimental instructions. The data gathered indicated that the practice effect of playing the pieces multiple times did increase enjoyment for the performers when they played each piece the second time through, but the enjoyment was even more heightened when playing "March of the Toys" in a mindful way.

In this second (2009) study, the listeners were split into two groups and the order that the pieces were played in was switched for the different groups. The listeners indicated an order bias, showing preference for the second piece they heard regardless of whether it was the experimental or the control performance. Based on the findings of both versions of the study, Langer, Russell, & Eisenkraft (2009) suggested that musicians may enjoy performing more when they are attending to the present moment of performance in a mindful way, adding subtle nuance and novelty to pieces that they have played many times.

**Mindfulness and Music Education.** In one of the few examples of research directly linking mindfulness to music education, Falter (2016) provided examples of how mindfulness can be incorporated into the general music classroom on the part of the student and the teacher to improve behavior and focus, as well as deepen musical understanding. Based on the work of Anderson's (2015) aforementioned work in mindful music listening and Shapiro and Walsh's (2003) analysis of meditation research, Falter (2016) presented mindfulness practices as being related to either meditative mindfulness, which is an inner focus on a single subject like the breath, or social-psychological

mindfulness related to serving an external goal. Falter claimed that both have their place in the general music classroom.

Meditative mindful practices could be used as a means of refocusing the classroom when needed. A breathing exercise, during which students take several minutes to breathe deeply and use their breath as a focal point to center themselves, could be an effective way to begin a music class. Such an exercise could also be used during transitional periods of the class to refocus if needed. Another of Falter's examples of meditative mindful strategies is the creation of a "mindful corner" of the classroom where students can go to regain this inner focus if it is lost at any point during class.

Examples of social-psychological mindfulness practices can serve the goal of deepened musical understanding. Concepts like dynamics and tempo lend themselves particularly well to mindful exercises. The author gave examples of guided imagery meditation involving wind, leaves, or rain which could be tied into dynamics or tempo increasing or decreasing.

Aside from practices that can be directly implemented in the classroom to help students, Falter also briefly mentioned the importance of the teacher taking time for mindfulness in their day, as well. The author encouraged teachers to find even two minutes out of their schedule to focus on their breath and return to an open, present state of mind for their students. While this is certainly a worthwhile small practice for busy teachers, the stressors that music educators face, as outlined above, cannot be solved in these "quick fix" exercises. The suggestions offered in this article have merit, but I argue

that music educators still need a larger philosophical shift that cannot be achieved in two hurried minutes in between tasks per day.

### **Openings**

Various adaptations of MBPs have been used by researchers in a range of contexts to attempt to measure their effects on participants. MBSR has been used in many of these studies, but adaptations have continued to emerge in order to better fit specific populations and their needs. Music educators may be a population that could benefit from MBPs, considering the potential for many different stressors in their profession. While there are a small number of studies that have begun exploring mindfulness as it may relate to subtopics of music such as music listening, music therapy, music performance, and music education, a review of the literature indicates that there is a hole in the research related to exploring mindfulness as a self-care practice for music educators. Music teachers could benefit greatly from using mindfulness as a form of self-care. They are helping professionals who have a responsibility to be emotionally available for their students in order to foster the kind of community, compassion, and empathic relationships that can be created in the music classroom. This topic has yet to be explored in depth in the field of music education research.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this collective case study was to explore the personal mindfulness practices of music educators and meanings they ascribe to these practices. The following questions frame the inquiry in this study:

1. What are participating music educators' personal mindfulness practices?
2. What meanings do participants ascribe to their personal mindfulness practices?
  - a. What personal meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?
  - b. What social/relational meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?
  - c. What professional meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?

The emerging body of research on mindfulness practices in general and on musicians and music educators is primarily quantitative, inspecting the physiological, mental, and emotional effects of mindfulness programs such as Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR). Quantitative studies by various researchers (e.g., Carlson et al., 2001; Goldenberg et al., 1994; Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1985; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1987; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1998; Kaplan et al., 1993; Kristeller & Hallett, 1999; Miller et al., 1995; Randolph et al., 1999; Speca et al., 2000; Teasdale et al., 2000; Williams et al., 2000) are useful in that they provide measurable data on the impact of MBSR and related programs from a clinical

perspective. Yet, these studies do not explore individual, subjective experiences of persons practicing mindfulness in a deeper, more personalized way. While quantitative investigations into mindfulness practices have merit in furthering clinical research and the development of replicable programs, quantitative frames might miss insight into the lived experiences of those that practice mindfulness through the rich description that qualitative research can provide. The personal nature of mindfulness practices and mindfulness practitioners' conceptualized meaning of these practices merit attention.

Through my own personal experiences with mindfulness (as detailed in the preface), I have learned that my practice is different every day and that my relationship with my own mindfulness practice is ever-changing and growing and is completely personal to me. I have found the same to be true regarding my relationship with music as a music listener, performer, teacher, and student. The ways in which I interact with music are unique to my own personal experiences and my relationship with music is also ever-changing and growing. These distinct experiences have informed my view that no two people experience mindfulness or music learning the same way, and that true insight into others' lived experiences of mindfulness and music requires a deep and thorough investigation on those experiences.

Allsup (2014) asserted that "the relationship between one's epistemological view . . . must be consistent with the design of one's research" (p. 72). My epistemological claim is that music educators who practice mindfulness do so in ways that are unique to their own personal needs and ascribed meanings of their practice. We can only come to know those practices and meanings through deep and thorough investigation. Thus, a



qualitative study provides the greatest opportunity for this kind of research. Quantitative research on mindfulness is focused on providing generalization. This broader focus minimizes the individual and qualitative experience of those that practice mindfulness. Qualitative research foregoes a notion of *Truth* with a capital “T” for *truths* with a small ‘t’ and an ‘s’” (p. 58) and in this study, I will attend to the small ‘t’ truths of mindfulness practitioners in music education. Through embracing a qualitative framework in this research, I seek to “*empower individuals to share their stories*” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48) about mindfulness and, through my analysis, allow their voices to be heard.

### **Case Study Design**

Case study design provides the methodological framework for inquiry in this study. Stake’s (1995) definition called case study “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Yin (2009) extended the definition of case study to characterize “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). Creswell (2013) highlighted the uniqueness of cases in his description of the intent of case study “to illustrate a unique case, a case that has unusual interest in and of itself and needs to be described and detailed” (p. 98).

Case studies are rooted in the social sciences, closely related to education, and the contextual nature of their design complements the contextual nature of issues regarding teaching and learning (Barrett, 2014). Case study is a methodological framework that is particularly well-suited for the field of music education. Barrett (2014) notes, “aspects of

the lived experience of music teaching and learning are often too nuanced, contextualized, and interdependent to be reduced to discrete variables” (p. 114). Although some critics of case study have raised questions about generalizability, Barrett argues that making generalizations about a large population from an individual case is not the point of case study research. While you may be able to make generalizations from case to case or perhaps make connections regarding the framework used, case studies are meant to be explorations of topics and open questions that expand our knowledge.

Music education—which I define in this study simply as the teaching and learning of music, whether that be in formal scholastic settings or informal community settings—takes place in an infinite number of settings with many different populations. Additionally, no two people’s journey with mindfulness practices will look the same. Rather than making generalizations on the topic, a collective case study exploring several music educators incorporating mindfulness into their personal and professional lives will provide an in-depth look at the contextual lived experiences of these individuals, allowing the reader to consider the effects mindfulness may have on music educators.

Case study designs are numerous, with each design articulated toward a particular unit of study and approach for researchers (Barrett, 2014). For ease in articulating this study’s design, I will use Creswell’s (2013) list of defining features to provide structure to the research method in this study: identification of the case(s); intent of the researcher; in-depth understanding; various approaches to data analysis; rich description of the case(s) alongside potential themes, issues, or specific situations, organization of themes or issues; and concluding suggestions on meaning of the case(s) by the researcher (p.

98-99). Below, I address each of these defining features in relation to this study, along with added sections on participant selection and data generation.

### **Case Identification**

What constitutes a case in a case study is varied and inherently tied to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013). Cases may be a concrete entities (e.g., a group of people or an individual) or more abstract structures (e.g., a community or project). Regardless of what constitutes a case, all cases within a study lie within a specific bounded system. Stake (1978) states, “[w]hat is happening and deemed important within those boundaries . . . is considered vital and usually determines what the study is about” (p. 7). In this case study, the cases are individual music educators. The bounded system in this study is self-reported practice of mindfulness.

Creswell (2013) identifies three different kinds of case study designs: (1) single instrumental case study; (2) the collective or multiple case study; and (3) the intrinsic case study. A collective case study design, wherein “the inquirer selects multiple case studies to illustrate the issue” (p. 99), provides a fruitful structure by which to investigate the ways music educators are using mindfulness in their lives. While any singular case could provide a rich snapshot into this topic, the opportunity to explore several educators in various contexts within the field of music education offers even more insight. As Stake (1995) notes, the goal is not representation of a larger group, as there is a marked difference between case study and sampling research (p. 4). The goal of this study is to present multiple viewpoints regarding music educators who practice mindfulness to deepen understanding of the topic.

**Participant selection.** Participants in this study were three self-identified music educators who also self-reported practicing mindfulness. All participants were at least eighteen years old. They were recruited via purposeful sampling, wherein “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the... central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). I reached out to music educators who I believed to have experience relevant to the study to inquire about their willingness to participate. This method of sampling ensured that participants were carefully chosen with the end goal of yielding results that are relevant, thorough, and interesting for this study and the field of music education. I also used additional snowball sampling, wherein participants were found “through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141).

### **Intent of Researcher**

Creswell (2013) suggests that intent of the researcher in exploring a case is either intrinsic, meaning the case is unique and interesting in and of itself, or instrumental, meaning a specific case is used to represent a larger issue (p. 98). In the current study, my intent is intrinsic. I do not seek to make generalizations to solve a larger problem within the field of music education. Rather, I seek to gain insight into the individual experiences of my participants, and value those experiences in and of themselves. The personal practices of mindfulness and the meaning of these practices to participants may shed light on how specific music educators purposeful respond to contemporary stressors. Although findings may be useful in informing how mindfulness can be incorporated into music

teacher education and music teacher practice, the focus of this study is to highlight the lived experience of participating music educators that practice mindfulness.

### **In-depth Understanding: Data Generation and Analysis**

Case study is also characterized by presenting an in-depth understanding of the case(s) being studied (Creswell, 2013, p. 98). This is done through rich, detailed descriptions of the cases, which work to create a sense of empathy, “conveying to the reader what experience itself would convey” (Stake, 1995, p. 39). Creswell (2013) writes that “we conduct qualitative research when we want to *empower individuals* to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 48).

Case studies are also characterized by observations that take place in natural settings. The practice of mindfulness is best observed within the most natural context as possible due to the highly personal nature of the practice. Case study design encourages the researcher to address the experiences of individuals in rich detail, providing an in-depth look at the cases being studied. In this collective case study in which individual music educators' experiences with mindfulness will be unique and personal to them, the inclusion of in-depth description will convey these experiences in a clearer and deeper way.

**Data collection.** Creswell (2013) urges researchers using case study design to draw from multiple forms of data collection. These forms often include interviews, observations, and audio/visual artifacts, all of which contribute to a thorough understanding of the cases. Using more than one form of data collection contributes to

the researcher's process of triangulation—a process designed to “gain the needed confirmation, to increase credence in the interpretation, [and] to demonstrate commonality of an assertion” (Stake, 1995, p. 112). Data source triangulation is a way of seeing if the case is viewed differently depending on the method of data collection. In this study, I generated individual accounts of practicing mindfulness through semi-structured interviews and observations, conducted during the spring semester of 2019. Below I discuss these multiple forms of data used to provide the ability to triangulate data.

**Interviews.** I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher “provides some structure based on her research interests and interview guide but works flexibly with the guide and allows room for the respondent's more spontaneous descriptions and narratives” (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 1008). Conducting interviews was an important part of my research, as the goal of the project was to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences as music educators who practice mindfulness. The conversations explored in these interviews gave participants opportunities to share those experiences. These interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, during which we discussed participants' mindfulness practices and their job stressors (See Appendix for questions). These interviews were audio recorded for transcription. During these interviews, the participants and I also decided on a mindfulness practice that I could observe the participant practicing.

**Observation.** Following interviews, observations, lasting approximately 30 minutes, took place. Angrosino (2007) defined observation as “the act of noting a

phenomenon in the field setting through the five senses of the observer, often with an instrument, and recording it for scientific purposes” (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 166). I conducted two of these observations in participants' private residences according to their preference, and one was conducted in a teaching setting at the participant's university. The activities observed were a type of mindfulness practice that the participant selected for me to either watch and/or co-participate in. The goal of experiencing these practices firsthand was to give me a better idea of the personal mindfulness practices of my participants.

***Recording and Transcription.*** I audio recorded all interviews using a Zoom H1 recorder with a microSD card for the purpose of transcription. Observations were audio-visually recorded, for the purpose of selective transcription related to discussions of mindfulness and descriptive research memos. Audio-video recordings were made using an iPhone set to Airplane mode accessible only by the researcher via 4-digit passcode and thumbprint security. Immediately following interviews and observations, all data was transferred to an encrypted and password protected file folder accessible only by the researcher and advisor and promptly erased from the microSD card or iPhone. Notes were be taken using pencil and paper during interviews and observations. Physical notes were scanned immediately following generation with digital versions saved to the same encrypted and password protected folder. Following digitization, physical notes were shredded.

All interviews were transcribed within one week of recording. Observation recordings were selectively transcribed and combined with researcher memos. These text sources provided the data that I analyzed in this study.

**Data Analysis.** I analyzed textual data through a process of axial coding (Saldaña, 2013), a series of multiple codings in which I re-coded and re-classified transcribed interviews and observation notes that served as data in this study. During the first readings of data collected, I highlighted data related to participants' articulation of their personal practices of mindfulness and labeled the practices found in the data. During a second reading, I highlighted data related to the meaning that participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices, and labeled them generally (e.g., stress-reducer, empathy building). I reread the data several times to thoroughly identify these codes. I coded each participant's data independently. As I developed codes for both mindfulness practices and meanings the participants ascribe to those practices, I compared and contrasted the codes, folding codes into one another to create more inclusive codes that identified meaningful groupings. I compared participants' codes and further combined codes to develop broad themes.

### **Developing Findings**

Following Creswell's (2013) guidelines for case study research, I developed descriptions of each case, summarizing the practices and meanings articulated by each participant. I articulated themes found in the data for each individual case. Creswell notes that a researcher may identify themes, issues, or specific situations they are looking to explore within their case(s) (p. 99). Specifically related to across-case themes, Creswell



suggests that the researcher may hypothesize about what themes or issues may arise at the beginning of the study, but cannot guarantee that the themes that come out of data collection will be the same as ones hypothesized before interacting with the participants. I avoided generating *a priori* themes, though I may have articulated preconceived themes in my researcher journal to attempt to bracket such preconceptions as to let themes or issues become evident as the research unfolded.

### **Researcher Trustworthiness**

I employed several methods of ensuring researcher trustworthiness in this study. I triangulated data by gather multiple forms of data including interviews, observations, and recordings and transcriptions of interviews and observations in order to create a more thorough depiction of the cases in this study (Creswell, 2013). I conducted member checks by contacting participants to share data and descriptions in order for the participants to offer their opinion on the accuracy of their representation in the study (Yin, 2009). I also utilized the process of peer reviews, allowing trusted readers to read my findings and provide an outside perspective on my method and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Finally, I kept a reflective journal throughout the process of the study as a means of recognizing and identifying my own biases so that I can clarify them in the study for the reader (Creswell, 2013).

### **Starting a Discussion**

Case studies are characterized by a conclusion in which the researcher derives meaning from the data and analysis (Creswell, 2013). In case studies, a researcher is contextually situated in the field as “one who records objectively what is happening but

simultaneously examines its meaning and redirects observation to refine or substantiate those meanings” (Stake, 1995, pp. 8-9). Interpretation is a key component of qualitative research, and the case study researcher interprets data to form “assertions” (Stake, 1995, p.9), or “lessons learned” (Creswell, 2013, p. 99) that are then expressed in the conclusion.

It is my hope that this study can shed a light on mindfulness as a potentially meaningful practice for music educators in both their personal and professional lives. Music educators may experience varying levels of stress and mindfulness provides one example of a practice that could possibly aid in managing that stress. In this study, I make the assertion that the role that mindfulness practices could potentially play in music educators' lives as it relates to stress, wellness, career satisfaction, and/or overall happiness is a topic that may have implications in music teacher education, music educators' professional development, and music education research.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter contains descriptions of the three participants who served as cases in this collective case study. All names are pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Each account contains a description of the participants' background in music education, as well as a description of their personal mindfulness practices. I also detailed interviews and observations of each participant conducted in this study in order to answer the research question regarding what personal, social/relational, and professional meanings participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices.

### **Participant 1 - Emma**

Emma is an elementary music teacher in a rural public school. She has been teaching for 15 years and is also a freelance violinist. She came to practice mindfulness through yoga. Originally becoming involved in bikram yoga at a yoga studio in her town, she switched studios three years into her yoga practice, which allowed her the opportunity to participate in a "40 Day Transformation" program at her new studio. During these 40 days, Emma was introduced to mindfulness practices such as formal sitting meditation, and she has continued to practice these for the past three years.

As an elementary music teacher, one of the biggest stressors that Emma faces is the fact that she teaches over 500 students over the course of her average work week. The sheer volume of students filtering in and out of her classroom makes her feel like it is difficult to form relationships with all of them and meet their varied needs. She has also dealt with stress as a result of not feeling supported by administration. Emma also

expressed the feeling that she found it difficult to leave the stressors of work in the workplace even when she is not physically teaching during the day, saying:

I can never leave it out of my mind. Weeknights, weekends during the school year. I feel like I'm working 24/7 because it's always there. Always on my mind. Or I'm always planning or, you know, reviewing or contemplating or worrying about so-and-so, so it's hard to step away from that.

Current mindfulness practices that Emma incorporates into her life are yoga asana, sitting meditation, and chanting. She has also had experience with walking meditation and took an online mindfulness course last summer. She expressed that she has had varying levels of consistency with each of these practices. During busy times, she will use mindfulness as a response to stress in the middle of a stressful day, taking five minutes for herself to meditate in her classroom. During periods of her life when she feels as if she has more time to devote to mindfulness practices, such as during the summer, she feels she is able to be more consistent with both the frequency and the duration of her practices. She incorporates mindfulness into her classroom teaching in an informal way, reminding her students to remain aware of what's going on in the present moment. Emma also expressed an interest in creating slightly more formal experiences for her students such as activities connecting breath awareness and music listening.

Emma finds mindfulness to be helpful in many aspects of her life. She identified several ways in which her demeanor has changed as a result of incorporating mindfulness into her life:

I am a better communicator with my husband. I tend to be more patient. A little more aware of how I say things. More aware of what is truly important and what is not. I tend to be a little calmer, a little happier, you know, overall, when I'm consistently practicing.

Emma self-identifies as “*really* introverted,” and cited mindfulness as something that has helped her socially. She claimed to feel “a little more comfortable in (her) own skin now” and feels more at ease in social situations, even alone, because she is able to mindfully observe and listen and still feel relaxed doing so.

These personal and social effects Emma perceives as coming from her mindfulness practices have also led to changes in her professional life. With regards to how mindfulness has affected her interactions with students, she exclaimed:

Oh, my gosh, just taking a second before I respond. You know, responding rather than reacting and taking a breath and being like, “Okay, how am I going to handle this frustrating moment right now, or how am I going to deal with this child who's really losing it right now, and how can I do it in a way that's going to help them instead of make the situation worse?”

She also has noticed a change in her relationships with her colleagues, and cited gossip and negativity in the workplace as a stressor that she has attempted to minimize. She expressed interest in forming supportive friendships with colleagues, but mindfulness has led her to a desire to focus on “positive ways to form those connections” versus bonding through frustration or complaining.

Emma also expressed an increased ability to say “no” to things as a byproduct of mindfulness that has affected her professional life. She accepts fewer violin gigs and has cut down on some of the work-related tasks and projects she takes on outside of her normal working hours. While these may have been things she enjoyed, they had the potential to add to her stress and she has recognized that sometimes saying “no” can be the right thing to do.

Emma invited me to observe a seated meditation with her as an active co-participant. I video recorded the observation with her permission so I could fully participate, and then watched the video and took research notes following the experience. We began with nostril breathing, during which one hand manipulates the nostrils to control the air flowing in and out during this breathing exercise. The thumb is placed over the right nostril and you inhale through the left nostril. Then, while the breath is being held, you switch to have your ring finger and pinky finger cover your left nostril and then exhale through the right nostril. You then inhale through the right nostril, and repeat the same process through the opposite side. Emma walked me through the process in a very knowledgeable and inviting manner. I had limited experience with this practice, but her calm and kind demeanor made me feel comfortable enough to try it. We breathed this way for approximately three and one-half minutes.

After those three and one-half minutes, we came out of the meditation practice and chatted for several minutes. I gave her honest feedback of how the practice felt for me. While I observed that I looked relaxed in the video during this practice, I honestly struggled participating in it. My heart rate tends to increase during any practices in which

I have to directly control my breathing rather than breathe normally, and I found this to be the case with this nostril breathing. I was also self-conscious wondering if she was distracted by any slight wheezing or whistling noises my breath was making coming in and out of my nostrils in the very quiet room we were in. We conversed about our shared instinct to potentially shy away from practices that are challenging to us, but acknowledged that those practices are maybe just as important as others that come more easily.

Following the nostril breathing, Emma set a timer using a meditation app on her phone for us to continue our seated meditation. She explained that she sometimes enjoys using chanted mantras as part of her mindfulness practice and would do some chanting to begin the next portion of our practice. The mantra she chose was “Om Namah Shivaya.” Emma explained that while there are many translations of these Sanskrit words, she liked to describe it as either “I bow to God” or “I bow to the divine within,” depending on your religious background. She explained that she enjoys chanting both for the healing power of the vibrations of sound through her body and for the beauty of the Sanskrit language. She very clearly explained that she would chant the mantra three times to begin our meditation and that I was welcome to join in. Having never chanted before, I chose not to chant myself. However, I found myself thoroughly enjoying the experience of hearing Emma chant. Her voice, slowly and softly chanting those words in a way that I found to be quite musical and beautiful, added a new layer to my meditation practice that I had not employed on my own. The chanting only lasted for about 90 seconds, but it transported me into a very serene meditative state. For the next thirteen and a half minutes, the only

things I observed in watching the video of this experience were very slight movements in our bodies as we breathed and sat. There was very little fidgeting, our eyes both remained closed the entire time, and it looked very peaceful, just as it felt.

When Emma's fifteen-minute timer went off, we both slowly opened our eyes. It took me several seconds longer than Emma to come out of the meditation. She patiently waited for me to open my eyes, and smiled and said, "Thanks for sitting with me." I smiled back, responding, "Thank you for letting me."

We spent roughly ten more minutes reflecting on the experience. Emma was curious to hear how I had been feeling during the meditation, so I shared that I had what I considered to be a positive experience, in that I was able to largely maintain focus on my breath throughout the fifteen minutes, rather than have my mind wander in many different—and sometimes stressful—directions, as it has a tendency to do sometimes when I sit in silent meditation. I told Emma that the phrase "I needed this" kept replaying itself in my head while we were sitting. I turned the question back on her and asked what her experience was. She made several sensory observations, such as the temperature of the room we were in and the sounds she was hearing. She also shared that she practiced elements of metta meditation during the experience, which is a loving-kindness practice. She wished health, happiness, and peace for herself as a part of that practice and for me, as well. Emma said she was very aware of having another person's energy in her meditation room where she usually practiced alone and made the conscious decision to resist the urge to wonder if I was cold or comfortable, and instead send that energy to me through the metta practice.



**Participant 2 - Mark**

Mark is a Choral Music Education professor at a mid-sized U.S. university. As part of his teaching responsibilities he works with two large choirs. Before his work at the collegiate level, Mark taught upper school choral music at an independent school that served preK-12th grade. In this role, he was able to teach courses such as Music History, Music Appreciation, and AP Music Theory in addition to all of the choral opportunities he gave his students. After five years teaching at this school, Mark decided he either wanted to go to seminary or work towards a Master's degree in Choral Conducting. His decision to pursue conducting led to his Master's and doctoral work, after which he transitioned into the university job that he now holds.

Mark spoke a lot about his priorities as a choral director in his early years of teaching and how they were at the time and unintended on his part very ego-driven—he would choose the hardest repertoire for his ensembles and their mastery of it was a way to feed his ego, even referring to his singers as a “commodity” that he used to achieve his own goals. It is clear that much has changed about Mark's teaching philosophy since those years. A new commitment to a more holistic approach to musicianship, coupled with deeply rooted influences from past mentors, contributed to Mark's changed philosophy.

Mindfulness, however, came to Mark through yoga. A friend invited him to a yoga class and he agreed, based more so on perceived physical benefits of yoga than anything to do with mindfulness. He found himself not as active as he had previously

been due to his busy schedule, and thought yoga could potentially be something he could physically do to take better care of himself.

Once he began experiencing yoga, Mark really connected with several aspects of the practice. He identified with the importance of the breath as a choral musician, the importance of taking care of your body physically as someone with a desire to be more active, and the importance of the spiritual aspects of yoga as someone who had grown up in the church. In the years since he began practicing yoga, Mark has earned his yoga teacher training certification and now teaches yoga twice a week.

Mark described his professional stressors:

The academy is feast or famine and that's good for me and really bad for me...

We go hard, hard, hard. We have these seasons like right now where things are insane. I had a concert last night, I did a District Chorus last weekend, we're in the middle of audition season. And then we got the summer and, like (snaps) boom, everybody disappears for 16 weeks. So there's no sort of sense of balance at all in any of that. And I feed off the electric energy, but I also have a very hard time dealing with how to balance that, so I would say that's a huge stressor.

Mark relies on yoga as his main source of mindfulness practice. However, speaking more informally, Mark tries to live his life in a more mindful way, finding time to move away from devices and other people and become more comfortable with being alone. He also incorporates mindfulness directly into his teaching during one of his weekly choral rehearsals. He noticed a significant amount of fatigue in a certain number of students who were attending rehearsals with him on Thursday afternoons directly after

another long rehearsal for another choir at the university. Mark introduced meditation, lasting anywhere from three to fifteen minutes, into his lesson plans:

By Thursday afternoon, they are done. They are totally done. And in order to have an effective rehearsal, I needed to find another way in. It was not just about doing a complete warm-up. It was not just about singing them more. It had go another way. And this was all along the same time that I was experiencing all this myself and I thought, "*What if we just... what if I just turn all the lights off and we sit for a little while?*" And then it began, the ensemble was aware of it, and they started to ask for it. And then the Thursday meditation kind of became a thing and now it's part of our culture.

Mark identified several internal shifts he contributes to mindfulness practices that have impacted his life in various ways. He believes himself to be more present and centered, which can help in social situations both in his everyday life and specifically in professional settings where he has to interact with different personalities. He mentioned how helpful taking three to five minutes to focus on his breath in between meetings and classes can be in resetting his focus. He also believes that teaching mindfulness to his students has helped him become more mindful himself.

I was able to observe the Thursday meditation practice that Mark described with his choral ensemble. This was a seated meditation with Mark serving as the guide, talking his students through the process. The thing I was most struck by is how well Mark explained the process of meditation to his students. He framed the experience as something that would be hard work, which is something I found to be effective when

explaining meditation to a younger audience, such as college students. In my experiences with meditation, I have heard anecdotes of novice practitioners getting frustrated when the act of sitting in silence proves to be far more challenging than one would think, so I think it was helpful that Mark acknowledged that this experience can be difficult.

He spent about one minute giving very careful instructions about their posture. He chose words that were careful and clear about how they should be sitting, such as “engaged” and “comfortable, but not too relaxed.” He compared the desired posture to what the students had been taught about a good seated posture for singing—sitting up straight with their backs out of their chairs—creating connections to their musical rehearsal. Mark then instructed them to relax their hands and close their eyes.

After a few moments of breathing, Mark continued speaking to the students about meditation. He explained that there is much talk in the “world of meditation” about being consumed by thought, whether it be thoughts about the past or thoughts about the future. He pointed out our capacity as humans to sometimes fixate on moments that may be ten seconds in the past or ten years in the past, and alternatively ten seconds in the future or ten years in the future. The difficulty that comes with meditation is that it asks us to attempt to do neither, and remain in the present moment.

Mark told his students that the reason we come to the breath as a focal point during meditation is because “it is an active thing used to ground us in here and now.” As the students deepened their focus on their breath, he said, “the mind will wander. When it does, meet it with kindness and bring it back to the breath.” I thought this was such a clear, concise way to explain mindfulness to students who may be new to the practice. I

was really impressed with the way that Mark was able to facilitate a mindful activity. His demeanor, voice, and the specific language he chose to present mindfulness in an accessible way set this activity up to be a success. The students took it seriously, and sat for three additional minutes in silence before Mark ended the meditation.

### **Participant 3 - Charlie**

There are many different facets to Charlie's profession. He is a licensed K-12 music educator, as well as a board certified music therapist, and his work falls somewhere between those two fields in the rural area where he lives. He detailed several different jobs he currently holds, falling into the fields of music education, music therapy, or both. He works with older adults with developmental disorders, hosting groups that work on musical skills like songwriting and drumming. He teaches a class at a university. As part of his work-related activities, he participates in facilitating a songwriting project with a local halfway house for formerly incarcerated men who were nonviolent, nonsexual offenders. He also facilitates drum circles and other activities like guitar lessons for an alternative school in the area, as well as music events for a day support center for older adults. He consistently gets contracted by various entities like churches, schools, and community groups to facilitate drum circles. The final job he is currently holding is to clean banks at night. He joked that this is his favorite job, and when asked why, he responded:

Because I get to go and I don't have to think and I have a to-do list and I have tasks and (pause) because I spend so much of my time listening. I feel like a balloon.

This response alluded to one of Charlie's main stressors, which is feeling the weight of a profession in which he has to do a lot of listening and being present for others:

And so, with it comes a lot of listening to people and holding space for people, and it was hard because what I was noticing as I was trickling out into my social life and so I didn't feel like I was (pause) I don't know... if I wasn't allowing myself but finding spaces to feel vulnerable or relaxed or just take off the hat of teacher... It's super weird for understanding where those boundaries are and aren't and then navigating the world outside of it... and really just practicing how to be an authentic teacher and then being able to shut off.

Charlie seemed less concerned with daily stressors, such as interactions with coworkers or a busy schedule, but found stress in larger ideas that he grapples with, such as noticing shifts in our societal structure and wondering how the life he's worked to create for himself may or may not be affected by any changes in our society as it currently stands. He spoke about being in a state of still figuring out some of the stressors he may encounter professionally, as he's only been working in the fields of music education and music therapy for three or four years.

Charlie came to practice mindfulness by what he calls "laying the foundation" in his early twenties. He's very in tune with himself and describes himself as someone who is able to realize when he's not feeling good, either physically or emotionally. Creating disciplines and doing a lot of reading in his early years of practice allowed for him to know the tools that worked for him to make changes during times when he felt like he wasn't at peace with the way he was feeling in his day-to-day life.

Currently, Charlie employs several daily bodily practices he identifies as mindfulness. He holds several poses from his martial arts practice every single day for about twenty minutes. He utilizes practices that involve moving and dancing. While formal seated meditation is often one of the more popular practices performed by those using mindfulness in their daily lives, Charlie explained that that isn't something he's currently doing. He commented that it's something that may be beneficial for him to do, but he tries not to be hard on himself and reminds himself that he's worked to build plenty of beneficial habits without chastising himself for not adding another.

When speaking about the perceived benefits of his mindfulness practices, Charlie spoke about mindfulness as a "voice in his head" that serves as a reminder of practices and mindsets that will be beneficial to him, while blocking out any other less productive voices that create negative self-talk. He believes his training as a therapist may enable him to step back and view these voices for what they are and actively choose to try to follow the voice advising him to live more mindfully.

Charlie faces stress when his instincts to help people as a therapist kick in when he is navigating personal relationships. He described "bringing his work home" as he became a sounding board for friends and family, and how that was negatively affecting his sense of balance in his life. He credits mindfulness with giving him the ability to take off the metaphorical therapist hat and set clear boundaries between professional and personal situations. Charlie used words like "boundaries," "discernment," "organization," and "being present" when describing his perceived benefits of mindfulness. He even gave a specific example of how mindfulness changed the way he dressed for work, which has

made an impact on his ability to set boundaries in his life. He recounted a story of dressing up for a work event and how it affected him:

It was the first time I had dressed up professionally in a long time. It felt really good. It felt really good. I liked the way I felt doing it. I like the way people talked to me. I liked the way I was treated... And so, the most recent way mindfulness has affected that has been I dress professionally for work now. And what that does is that it gives me a cue of “work, work, work.” And then I have my clothes for “lazy, sociable, relax.”... And that’s been really helpful. I notice the way I feel different. The responses in my students are either different or they’re the same and I feel more confident about it.

Charlie invited me to participate in music making via a loop station, which is something that he considers a mindfulness practice. This was a completely new activity to me, so I went in with a bit of hesitation. The equipment was hooked up to a keyboard and a microphone. I began by sitting back and simply observing him. He spent the first two minutes getting everything set up—testing the microphone, starting several loops, and grabbing headphones from the adjacent room. He then took his place seated on the floor in front of the keyboard. The first loop he recorded was a vocal line where he spoke “we can talk in a high pitch” into the microphone, and then distorted the sound of his own voice so it actually was in a much higher pitch, alongside a simple two-note piano loop. He then removed the vocal loop and added several more instrumental loops, changing the instrument on the keyboard to be an echo-y, slightly distorted guitar sound. This created a kind of ambient sound that I found to be very soothing. From what I observed, it looked



like Charlie was getting into a kind of “groove,” so to speak. He nodded his head along with the beat he was creating, and he let his body sway and move to the music with a kind of energy that indicated to me that he was fully immersed in the musical experience. He continued to add loops with percussion sounds, more vocals, and more instrumental sounds. He would let his fingers glide and dance over the keyboard until he found something he liked, but never waited too long in between adding more loops. I observed this practice for ten minutes, and found there to be a really natural rise and fall to the energy he was giving to the practice.

After approximately eight minutes, I considered the experience to be at its climax—there were too many layers of looped sound to count, Charlie was freely swaying as he sat in front of the keyboard, and the room was full of music. During the last thirty seconds of the ten minute period, Charlie slowly turned off the loops one by one, until it was quiet. He took a long, deep breath and took an extra five to ten seconds to bring himself back to the room before turning and speaking to me. I really found that I was able to be mindful while observing this practice. Although his practice was not something I had experienced before, it felt as if he had created a space for him to be mindful that he had also opened up and extended to me. I was able to completely focus my attention on the music that he was creating and what I was witnessing and experiencing, so I was grateful for this unique mindfulness opportunity.

Following the completion of the loop station mindfulness practice for himself, Charlie invited me to join him for a collaborative experience with the loop station that ended up lasting thirteen minutes. This felt far less mindful from the start, considering I

didn't know how to use the loop station and am not generally comfortable creating my own music on the spot, especially when it's to be heard by someone else in the room. Nevertheless, I chose to participate. He briefly explained how to use the loop station and showed me a few buttons to hit, instructing me, "don't think, just play." He started a two-note loop on the keyboard for me and my trained musician brain immediately asked which two notes they were, thinking I could use them to construct something pleasing to the ear. Charlie immediately told me not to even worry about what the notes are. I began to play around on the keyboard, letting my fingers try out lots of different combinations of notes and rhythms. After about ten seconds of this, Charlie commented, "simple." And I laughed and remarked that I was already overthinking the experience. He replied that it was likely because the starting loop he had given me was "tonal and structured." He then helped me find a short keyboard loop we liked it and recorded it on the loop station and talked me through the buttons once more.

Charlie then took the lead on experimenting on the keyboard again and came up with several loops that I liked to add to the sounds we already had. After four minutes of him giving me help and participating with me, I began to relax and found myself moving to the music and growing slightly braver about trying out things on the keyboard myself. During minutes four through ten of the experience, Charlie and I essentially traded off creating loops and the music really began to take shape.

During minutes ten through thirteen, he encouraged me to play with the different buttons on the actual loop station, which changed the sounds in different ways. I laughed through some of the distorted sounds and definitely enjoyed this type of experience

where it was essentially free play, with no right or wrong sound we were listening for. In the last minute, Charlie instructed, “figure out how to stop it,” and I slowly stopped the sound, loop by loop, until there was one left, which created a gradual fading effect that I enjoyed. I immediately exclaimed, “that was cool!” as soon as the sound stopped, which was far less mindful than the way Charlie came out of the practice, taking several moments to breathe.

Ultimately, I found my active participation in the experience to be far less mindful than observing him take part in it and just experiencing through my ears and eyes. When tasked with actively creating the loops, I found myself feeling too self-conscious about whether what I created on the keyboard would “sound good,” and I was too shy to even attempt to sing into the microphone at all. My unfamiliarity with the equipment made me hesitant to fully explore it, especially in front of its owner, who I did not know very well.

Through my active participation in this practice, I was able to observe how naturally and easily Charlie seems to be able to facilitate mindful experiences. He gently coached me throughout the entire thirteen minutes, while never making me feel like I was doing anything wrong. He encouraged me to let go of whatever reservations I had about whether what I was doing was right or wrong by reminding me that there *was* no right or wrong in an experience such as that one. I found his presence to be supportive in an experience that was definitely out of my comfort zone.

While I certainly felt more mindful just observing him, I found that participating in the experience myself stretched me as a mindful practitioner and opened my eyes to a new type of practice I had not previously considered. Despite my hesitation, I did enjoy

the experience, and thought it was a very unique way to practice informal mindfulness. I believe that if I had opportunities for further practice with the equipment that Charlie had, I would continue to feel more and more comfortable in letting playing with loop stations truly be a mindful experience.

It was clear that Charlie had developed practices that were meaningful and helpful to him. This example of using a loop station as a mindfulness practice felt like an example of Charlie turning a *little m* mindfulness practice, during which he participates in a musical activity in a mindful way into a *Big M* mindfulness practice (e.g., Shapiro & Carlson, 2009), with more intention and formality. When he sat down at the loop station, he was making a conscious switch into a mindfulness practice. He began and ended with breathing, never broke from the practice to talk, and let his attention rest on the experience for the entirety of the time I observed him. It was eye-opening to see an activity that could be a casual task turned into a more formalized *Big M* practice.

## CHAPTER 5: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

In examining the three participants in this study, I identified several themes: finding mindfulness through the body, personal practices, and role conflict & finding a sense of balance. My thematic analysis is organized by my original research questions.

### **What are participating music educators' personal mindfulness practices?**

There were several commonalities between the mindfulness practices of the three participants in this study. Most notably, all participants seemed to feel a strong connection to the bodily aspect of mindfulness, incorporating a physical component into their regular mindfulness practice, such as yoga or martial arts. Yet, I found each participant's practices to be highly personal, and my experiences in observing and co-participating in mindfulness practices participants chose for this study were each quite different from each other.

**Finding mindfulness through the body.** Each participant came to practice mindfulness through building a foundation comprised of physical practices involving a connection to the body. Particularly, Emma's and Mark's stories are quite similar: friends invited each of them to do yoga several years ago, they found the mindfulness aspect of yoga to be something that they found helpful in their everyday lives, and have incorporated it as a regular practice ever since. Charlie did not detail a specific experience that led him to mindfulness. His practices seemed to develop gradually over time through reading, learning, and trying out different practices, including several involving the body such as martial arts, moving, and dancing.

Maintaining a connection to the body seemed to be an important part of mindfulness practice for all three educators. Participants listed yoga, martial arts, movement, and dancing as mindfulness practices they incorporate into their lives. Interestingly, Emma was the only participant who spoke about maintaining a consistent seated meditation practice. Mark's most consistent practice was yoga and Charlie described several movement practices, such as holding stances from his martial arts practice each day, as being important to his mindfulness practice.

It may be purely coincidental that all three music educators consistently practice mindfulness in ways that involve bodily movement. Yet, Mark specifically mentioned the bodily aspect of mindfulness making particular sense to him as a musician. Due to his prior experience working with the body as a singer through training in proper posture and breathing techniques, he may have had more experience in paying attention to and forming a connection with his body. This may have enabled him to connect with mindfulness practices involving the body more easily than with other practices that might focus more heavily on the mind. Emma and Charlie did not specifically mention the bodily connection resonating with them as musicians, but I found it interesting that all three participants were committed to consistent practice involving the body.

**Personal Practices.** While there were similarities among all three participants' practices as they described them to me, the three experiences they chose for me to co-participate in were quite different from each other. They had each found their own methods that they have found effective, and it was interesting to gather examples of several practices that served as examples of mindfulness.

The meditation I observed in Mark's class was the most familiar to me. He led his students through a seated meditation focused on breath awareness and bringing attention to the present moment. There were several minutes of silence in the meditation, but Mark guided the students through it using his own voice. This is the type of meditation that I most often participate in myself during my own personal practice, so I was very comfortable observing this.

The practices Emma chose to share with me were a slight departure from what Mark shared, but still in the same general realm of seated meditation. I actively co-participated in this practice with her and observed both of us via a video recording afterwards. The methods she used (e.g., nostril breathing and the *Sanskrit* chant) were completely new to me. These practices took a bit more explanation before we began, and would likely take time to become comfortable with. She chose nostril breathing and chant as practices that she found personally meaningful and beneficial, combined them to create an experience that was unique to her own mindfulness practice, and then allowed me to take part in it.

Charlie's mindfulness practice was the furthest departure from the other two experiences. I had never experimented with loop stations before, so this was a completely new practice for me as a co-participant. Consequently, I was not as relaxed and mindful as during the other two experiences. Yet, when observing Charlie, I could easily see that this was indeed a very mindful experience for him. Observing the way his fingers glided over the keyboard and the buttons on the loop station and the way he moved and swayed his body—completely lost in the music—gave me the cues that let me know he was fully

tuned in to the practice in that moment. While I do think this kind of practice has a higher barrier of entry than others because of the necessity of having access to equipment and learning how to use it, I think it can be a very effective kind of mindfulness practice if used the way that Charlie used it. The additions of sound and touch may even heighten the meditative experience for some more so than seated meditation done in silence. It was quite a fascinating practice to observe and take part in.

While each of these three practices were unique, there were also several similarities among the experiences. In all three experiences, the participants were able to act as facilitator of the mindfulness practice. While I did not set a goal of exploring participants' skill in facilitating mindfulness activities with others as part of this study, their facilitation skill emerged as a commonality that stood out among all three practices. Each participant guided the experience in a calm, clear way that allowed me to feel comfortable as an observer and co-participant. I believed all three experiences had value for the participants, as well as for myself as an observer and co-participant. Adding these participatory experiences to data gathered through interviews allowed me to highlight just how personal mindfulness practice can be to each individual.

### **What meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?**

The three participants had remarkably similar answers when asked what the word "mindfulness" meant to them. They defined it using words and phrases such as "the practice of bringing yourself to right now," "being present," and "nonjudgmental awareness," similar to Kabat-Zinn's definition which reads "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn,



1994, p. 4). Yet, while all participants agreed that mindfulness had impacted their lives in a variety of ways and gave similar definitions of what mindfulness is, the ways in which their practices impacted their personal, social, and professional lives differed among the three educators.

#### **What personal meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness**

**practices?** When speaking about her personal life, Emma articulated the ways in which she felt that mindfulness had helped her, by speaking about how she had become more patient, calm, happy, and healthy since using mindfulness techniques. She expressed a marked change in her life and work mindset that she attributed to her commitment to mindfulness practice. Mark also mentioned being more present and centered, but to a lesser extent than Emma. Charlie talked a lot about an internal dialogue in his head and seemed to have a strong grasp of his own mental and physical well-being. He felt that mindfulness gives him the tools to be able to take a step back and use the nonjudgmental awareness that it teaches to look at his daily life and “acknowledge when he’s taking a dive.” A lot of my conversation with Charlie felt very metacognitive. He seemed to be very self-aware and has worked hard to create the types of mindfulness practices that will best fit his needs to be healthy and happy in his day-to-day life. It seems he is able to do this because he has also worked hard to identify those needs by continually observing his own mind and body.

#### **What social/relational meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness**

**practices?** Participants had varied responses when asked about how mindfulness has impacted their social lives. Charlie’s metacognition carried over into our conversation

about social life as he spoke about his becoming aware of social patterns that were not healthy for him, such as putting on his “therapist hat” with friends and family. In this way, mindfulness has helped his social life by allowing him to develop this awareness and work to create boundaries and cues to maintain a sense of balance among his varying social and professional roles. Interestingly, Emma and Mark identified ways in which mindfulness had affected their social lives in completely opposite ways. Emma described herself as very introverted, and she attributes a newfound sense of being more comfortable in her own skin to mindfulness. She described being more at ease in social situations, giving the example of finding herself at a party with no one standing next to her to talk to at a particular moment. In these instances, Emma explained that she feels much more at ease to simply observe in the present moment and be comfortable doing so, rather than feeling awkward or uncomfortable. Mark described himself as being extroverted, and believes mindfulness has helped him to feel more at ease being alone. Due to his mindfulness practices, he has found himself able to move away from people, and even from devices which connect him to others, and just be comfortable by himself. For two people like Emma and Mark, whose mindfulness stories have so many similarities, it is interesting to note them using similar methods to achieve completely opposite outcomes.

**What professional meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?** When asked about how mindfulness practices affect their professional lives, all three participants' answers differed in focus. Emma spoke about learning to say “no” to things, such as violin gigs and some after-school activities such as extra musical

ensembles. While these are things she enjoys, she was attempting to correct some of the role conflict she feels, and mindfulness played a role in her ability to realize those stressors and take steps to correct them. Charlie spoke about creating boundaries between work life and home life, and shared the anecdote about dressing professionally for work as a tangible example of a conscious decision that has positively affected his professional life. That decision came about through the awareness he gained about the difference between how he interacted with others and internally felt when dressing in two differing styles in professional settings. Without mindfulness creating that sense of nonjudgmental awareness and inner dialogue in his head, he might not have stopped to observe how he was feeling long enough to make a change that he describes as having been beneficial. Mark's perceived benefits in his professional life due to mindfulness mostly related to how he interacts with others, which ties in to potential personal and social benefits. He finds it easier to take a moment and reset his focus before entering the many different meetings and classes he is faced with in his busy daily schedule, which allows him to better navigate working professionally with many different students and colleagues.

*Role conflict & finding a sense of balance.* The most common theme in discussing participants' personal, social, and professional meanings ascribed to their mindfulness practices was creating a sense of life balance. This leads into a discussion on what I found to be the most common stressor for the three participants in this study—role conflict<sup>7</sup>. While all of these participants self-identify as music educators who practice

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<sup>7</sup> Although the theme of role conflict was present throughout conversations regarding each participant's personal, social, and professional life, I felt that this topic was most relevant to the discussion on participants' professional lives, so I detail it in this section of the thematic analysis.

mindfulness, the differences among what they do for a living are more striking than one might think. In just these three case studies of music educators, the list of roles that they perform vary broadly and include such qualifications and skill sets as: board-certified music therapist; licensed K-12 music educator; university professor; choral director; elementary school teacher; nonprofit employee; freelance violinist; church musician; guitar teacher; songwriting facilitator; drum circle facilitator; contracted music educator for community projects; bank cleaner; husband; wife; family member; and friend. With all of these roles being enacted by only three people, it may be that these participants are feeling a sense of role conflict, wherein “two or more contradictory role messages (expectations) are sent to the focal person that result in psychological conflict” (Scheib, 2003, p. 125). All three participants spoke about a desire to find balance among all of their various roles—specifically between their professional roles and personal roles—which suggested a sense of role conflict among the many roles participants are filling in their everyday lives.

When asked about potential stressors participants faced at work, most expressed difficulty in creating balance, and boundaries, between work and their lives outside of work. Charlie spoke about using his wardrobe as a means of creating cues for “work” and “not work” to better allow him to “turn off” his persona as teacher and therapist. His conflicting roles as teacher, therapist, friend, and family member were creating stress as he sought to find boundaries among these roles. Emma expressed a sense of feeling like she has a hard time truly leaving work behind. She struggles in leaving her role as teacher behind even when she is not actively at work teaching, and has even made efforts to

reduce the amount of professional work she is doing outside of her normal working hours, such as violin gigs and after-school musical activities, in an effort to better balance her different roles. Mark lamented the “feast or famine” nature of his work and his struggle to create balance, as well. All three participants spoke about feeling stress when navigating relationships as a result of their stress and struggle to find balance. The participants hold various roles such as colleague, employee, husband, wife, and friend, and balancing all of those roles on a daily basis is a challenge that all three music educators articulated. This points directly to Scheib’s (2003) identification of role conflict as a stressors that may affect music educators.

A thematic analysis of data gathered in this study shows that mindfulness practices may have helped the three participants create a sense of balance among some of their conflicting roles. Anecdotes gathered through interviews detailed stories of personal changes that have led to feeling more calm and balanced, improvements in navigating social relationships and creating boundaries, and dealing with various professional stressors. For these three music educators, it seems that mindfulness may be a helpful tool that promotes self-care, reduced stress due to role conflict, and a greater sense of balance among the many roles music educators are often called upon to fill.

## CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into music educators' lived experiences practicing mindfulness and explore any perceived benefits they may have gained in various aspects of their lives as a result of mindfulness practice. My research questions were:

1. What are participating music educators' personal mindfulness practices?
2. What meanings do participants ascribe to their personal mindfulness practices?
  - a. What personal meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?
  - b. What social/relational meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?
  - c. What professional meanings do participants ascribe to their mindfulness practices?

In this chapter, I will discuss the implications of the data gathered and thematic analysis in this study. I will detail implications for three different areas: music teacher education, music educators' professional development, and future research related to this topic.

### **Implications for Music Teacher Education**

An analysis of the data gathered through this study indicates that mindfulness may be useful in music teacher education as a method of dealing with stress and finding balance before entering the field as an inservice music educator. As detailed in the preface, I have witnessed firsthand the stress that pre-service music educators can face during their undergraduate years. Sternbach (2008) articulated stressors that music

students face (e.g., performance anxiety, isolation, criticism) that may be present in addition to other stressors not specific to music students (e.g., social and academic pressures). Through my own experiences as a music educator and through conversations with fellow music educators—both formally through this study and informally in other various contexts—I have become aware of the stressors that professionals in the field of music education can be faced with. These stressors have been detailed through previous research (e.g., Scheib, 2003; Sindberg, 2011) and deserve more attention. As stressors specific to music educators become more prevalent both in conversations in the field and in future research, music teacher education programs should include self-care practices as part of the curriculum for pre-service music educators. Cornett-Murtada (2012) suggested that mindfulness may be a useful self-care practice for students, and I think this could be true for pre-service music educators. Just as music teacher education programs seek to lay a foundation for future best practices in curricular settings (e.g., lesson planning, facilitation, differentiation), creating best practices for dealing with stress *before* music teachers enter the field will better prepare them to handle stressors as they arise throughout their careers. While there are many self-care practices that may help manage stress, the literature detailed in this study and the accounts of its participants suggest that mindfulness may be a viable option to explore as a form of self-care.

Mindfulness practices may equip pre-service music educators to handle the possibility of role conflict in their future career. Role conflict emerged as a key stressor for the three participants in this study. Mindfulness practices were a way that this study's participants were able to better manage stress due to role conflict, and these practices

may be useful to pre-service music educators as they prepare for the many roles they may be called upon to fill in their field.

Mindfulness may also allow pre-service music educators to develop a better sense of self-awareness. I was struck by how self-aware the three participants in this study seemed to be when discussing their personal, social, and professional lives. Emma was able to clearly articulate some of her personality traits (e.g., being an introvert) and detail how mindfulness has affected her. Mark spoke about the change between his early teaching philosophy and his current teaching philosophy in a way that exhibited a great deal of self-awareness. Charlie exhibited a strong sense of what his body and mind require in order to feel healthy. I posit that experience with mindfulness practices, during which participants had extended time to nonjudgmentally observe their own thoughts, may have led to this greater sense of self-awareness I observed through this study. Providing tools for increased self-awareness such as mindfulness during music teacher education could help to make pre-service music educators more reflective, responsive, and adaptable music teachers in the future.

Pre-service music educators may also develop empathy through mindfulness practices. The participants in this study exhibited empathy for their students through their responses to interview questions. All three articulated a struggle to find balance in their lives, and based on the data, I would hypothesize that one reason the three participants may feel this way is because of the amount of empathy they are able to feel for their students. Mark articulated very clearly the period in his early career where he was treating students more as commodities than as people, and mindfulness was part of a



marked shift where he was better able to empathize with students and enact a more holistic teaching philosophy that values the body, the spirit, and the mind in addition to a student's musical talents. Emma also exhibited empathy, but addressed some feelings of tension, stating:

[I want] to build relationships with [my students], but I sometimes feel like a factory. They're in and out and in and out. Class sizes are large. It's tough to feel like I'm meeting the needs of all the different types of children that I have and all of their personalities and all of their ways of learning and all of the things that they're dealing with outside of school. I want to foremost create—or help create—good people, you know, for the world. That they're going to grow up and be successful citizens and happy, joyful people. And then teach music secondary.

The care that these educators take in interacting with their students is something that should be encouraged in music teacher education. Emma, Mark, and Charlie are able to better model balance, empathy, and care in social relationships to their students as a result of mindfulness practices. Music teacher educators who wish to exemplify these traits for their students could find mindfulness helpful in accessing these qualities. The social relationships developed between teachers and students can be powerful for both parties, and the ability to empathize with students may be a potential result of mindfulness practice.

### **Implications for Music Educator Professional Development**

The data gathered for this study indicated that participants' mindfulness practices impacted their personal, social, and professional lives in various ways. While this finding

has many implications for music teacher education, there are also opportunities for inservice music educators to benefit from mindfulness training by participating in professional development opportunities regarding mindfulness practices. Participants in this study used mindfulness in their classroom as both a personal tool and an instructional tool. Mark and Charlie shared that they explicitly use mindfulness practices in their classroom as part of their instruction and find it to be beneficial. Emma stated that mindfulness is incorporated into her teaching in a more subtle way, influencing small changes in her affect as a teacher, such as taking a moment to breathe before responding to a student. Making mindfulness a more prevalent option for music educators' professional development could have many benefits, as detailed by Roeser, Skinner, Beers, & Jennings (2012). For music teachers in the field who may be experiencing some of the stressors detailed in this study, mindfulness may prove to be a tool to aid in handling stress. This study indicated that mindfulness may have helped manage stress caused by role conflict for the three participants. Role conflict is a stressor that may affect far more music educators than the three teachers involved with this study.

More professional development opportunities regarding mindfulness may also help music educators develop new classroom strategies they may find beneficial. Mindfulness can be incorporated into one's teaching philosophy and classroom management style to create an atmosphere for students of any age that encourages music students to pay attention to the present moment and act with nonjudgmental awareness while in music class. This may lead to positive changes in the culture of a musical ensemble or class. Music educators could benefit from training in mindfulness practices

as professional development so they are better equipped to facilitate mindfulness activities—or musical activities presented in a mindful way—properly to ensure a positive experience for both teachers and students. Previous research suggests that mindfulness may impact music listening and music performance activities, which could have direct implications for content instruction in a music education setting (e.g., Anderson, 2015; Czajkowski & Greasley, 2015; Diaz, 2011; Elliott, 2010; Langer & Eisenkraft, 2009). Falter (2016) also suggested formal and informal ways of incorporating mindfulness into the classroom. Professional development opportunities using existing programs such as those detailed by Meiklejohn (2012) should be further explored in the field of music education. While mindfulness practices can be personalized to best fit the needs of each individual practitioner—as exemplified by Emma, Mark, and Charlie—programs designed for teachers as part of professional development could create a foundational knowledge of the tenets and practices of mindfulness that educators could customize to fit their needs during personal practice.

### **Implications for Future Research**

While the participants in this study represent three distinct stories about music education in differing contexts, as well as differing examples of mindfulness practice, we are not able to draw larger conclusions on the effects of mindfulness on music education as a result of this study. There are far more than three stories regarding this topic in the field of music education, and further research could examine more of these stories from backgrounds that differ from those of the three participants in this study to create a more well-rounded view of the topic. These stories could be examined from a qualitative

standpoint, with researchers conducting more case study research or constructing a narrative research study, a phenomenology, or an ethnography related to this topic. Larger quantitative studies could also be conducted to generate data on how mindfulness practices impact music educators. A mixed methods approach could also be useful (e.g. a survey used to gather data among a large population of music educators alongside several interviews providing more personal details to support results of the survey) in exploring this topic. While several quantitative studies have been published on the effects of mindfulness training on human services professionals including some samples of teachers (e.g., Flook et al, 2013; Gold et al., 2010; Poulin, Mackenzie, Soloway, & Karayolas, 2008), more studies could be conducted exploring the effects of mindfulness on educators teaching music, specifically.

Additionally, there are several other strands of related research scholars could explore outside of the main objectives of this study. Future research could delve into the subject of stress in music educators: where it comes from, what methods music educators are currently using to combat stress and burnout, and perhaps even create studies where mindfulness is explored as a tool to reduce stress specifically for music educators. While role conflict emerged from the data as a key stressor for the participants in this study, there may be other music educators experiencing different stressors (Kenny, Davis & Oates, 2004; Kenny & Osborne, 2006; Scheib, 2003; Sindberg, 2011). Further attention to these stressors would be beneficial for the field of music education.

Also, future research could explore mindfulness as an approach to lesson planning, asking questions such as: How do mindfulness practices that focus on the

present affect the act of longitudinally planning future lessons for students? Future research could also delve into how direct mindfulness instruction impacts the classroom. Does mindfulness impact students' academic success? Does mindfulness impact classroom management for teachers? Does mindfulness impact the classroom culture among a group of students?

Finally, future research could explore mindfulness as a research tool: How does one research mindfully? Throughout the research process, I made a conscious effort as researcher to maintain a sense of mindfulness as I worked on this study. I worked in quiet settings where I could focus on the present moment and the work at hand rather than potential distractions. I tried to maintain a nonjudgmental awareness of how I was feeling as a researcher in order to experience the research process in a way that was as healthy for me as possible. This type of reflection could make for an interesting future study regarding the process of completing research.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The three participants in this study, while all self-identified music educators practicing mindfulness, represent three very different stories. While they work in the same field, they all work in different settings and face different stressors. Although there was some overlap, they each told very different stories about everything from day-to-day stressors to larger existential stressors that affect them in their lives. They also each told different stories of how they came to practice mindfulness. While two of the participants' stories were similar in that they were introduced to mindfulness through yoga, their experiences since then with mindfulness have continued to develop and diverge as they

have cultivated personal practices over time. Finally, their perceived effects of how mindfulness affects their lives were all different, as well. I was struck by how three participants working in the same profession and incorporating similar mindfulness practices into their lives could have such different stories.

This study has implications in the areas of music teacher education, music educators' professional development, and future research in this field. Introducing mindfulness as a self-care tool for pre-service music teachers during music teacher education may impact future educators' personal, social, and professional lives in ways similar to those detailed in this study. Inservice music educators could also benefit from instruction in mindfulness practice in similar ways. This instruction could be administered to current music teachers as professional development. There are also many implications for future qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research regarding this topic, as well as the adjacent topics of stress among music teachers, mindfulness and lesson planning, mindfulness in the classroom, and the act of mindful research.

While these three stories are not nearly enough to make large claims answering the questions of what kinds of stressors music educators face and how mindfulness may benefit music educators in various aspects of their lives, I do think they provide an interesting snapshot of those topics. The shared mindfulness experiences of Emma, Mark and Charlie may resonate with other music educators who find themselves trying to find balance and lead happy and healthy lives in various settings. My hope is that this document opens up ways for music teachers to encounter mindfulness in the same way that these three participants aspire to.

## APPENDIX A

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jennifer Hoye from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to explore the personal mindfulness practices of music educators and the meaning they ascribe to these practices. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of her master's thesis.

#### Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of an interview that will be administered to individual participants in a location chosen by the participants. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to the personal mindfulness practices of music educators and the meanings they ascribe to these practices. Participants will also be audio recorded using a Zoom H1 recorder with a microSD card and an iPhone set to Airplane mode accessible only by the researcher via 4-digit passcode and thumbprint security for the purpose of transcription.

#### Time Required

Participation in this study will require 30-60 minutes of your time. It is possible that the researcher will ask for a follow-up interview for clarification. You have the right to deny a follow-up interview.

#### Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

#### Benefits

There are no direct benefits to participants of this study. Overall perceived benefits include an opportunity for participants to share their practices and meanings of mindfulness with others. This may also influence future teacher education practices.

#### Confidentiality

The results of this research will be written in the researcher's master's thesis. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish

non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers will be destroyed via shredding. All recordings and transcriptions on the researcher's computer will stay on the password protected computer and in password encrypted folders. No audio or video will be shared with anyone but the researcher unless the participant gives permission.

### **Participation & Withdrawal**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

### **Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Jennifer Hoye  
School of Music  
James Madison University  
hoyejm@dukes.jmu.edu

Jesse Rathgeber  
School of Music  
James Madison University  
630-267-3536  
rathgejc@jmu.edu

### **Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject**

Dr. David Cockley  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
James Madison University  
(540) 568-2834  
cocklede@jmu.edu

### **Giving of Consent**

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

I give consent to be audio and video taped during my interview. \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)



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Name of Participant (Printed)

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Name of Participant (Signed)

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Date

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Name of Researcher (Signed)

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Date

**APPENDIX B****INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What do you do for a living?
2. Are there stressors you face in your professional life?
  - a. If so, can you talk a bit about what those stressors are?
3. What does the word “mindfulness” mean to you?
4. What kinds of mindfulness practices do you incorporate into your life?
5. How did you come to practice mindfulness?
6. What role does mindfulness play in your life?
  - a. In what ways does mindfulness practice impact your personal life?
  - b. In what ways does mindfulness practice impact your social life?
  - c. In what ways does mindfulness practice impact your professional life?
7. What mindfulness practice would you like for me to observe or co-participate in as part of this study?

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